

28th Feburary 2021 10 am Ways We Drift Away From God's Teaching On Contentious Subjects

Service led by Denise Coomber, including interview with Bekah about God at Work, and Bible readings. Talk by Revd. Andrew Attwood, Intercessions by Jeremy.

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Welcome

[Denise:] Morning Everybody! [Andrew:] Hello Denise! hello Bekah! [Bekah:] Hi!
[Denise:] It's great to see you all the way from up there in the dark North!
[Andrew:] It's not the dark North. It's God's Own Country.
[Denise:] Are you all well?
[Andrew:] Yeah, I'm really enjoying the sunshine again. I don't know what the weather's like for this coming week, but today is a walking day.
[Denise:] I'm going to switch you off so that I can lead the service, so I'll see you guys later.

Notices

So welcome everybody else to this morning's service, and I'm going to start with notices, because that gets them out of the way. So I said that I put the news sheet on my website so if you want to see that, then please click the right button on there.

Michelle (I was talking to Michelle earlier, who is the tech person for today - thank you very much Michelle [...]), but she was wearing a sweatshirt which says 'the church has left the building', and the church is a building, but we are the church, in true terms. So, there's a message in the new sheet about how we can interact with our community, and maybe passing on messages of encouragement and blessing to our neighbours, or decorating our windows with art, like we did for the rainbows and all those other things. So there's lots of ideas about how you can do that in the news sheet, as well as it telling you all about the services and everything that's happening - online mainly - so we have an evening service this evening which is an [in-depth teaching service] and we also have a midweek Bible study at twelve o'clock on Wednesdays. So you're very welcome to join in any of those things. Please use our YouTube channel for that, and also Knights Meadow is on their Zoom. And we're going to have a short video now from the wardens.

Deacons: an appeal

[Andrew Attwood:] Hi. I wanted to talk to the church about the ministry of deacons. Just to remind you, in Acts 6, verses 1 to 4, it says this:

1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not

be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, choose seven from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'

So you see, the early church recognised that there were certain practical roles that were necessary for the smooth running of community life. And the people chosen were full of the Spirit and wisdom, they were prized for their faith and their usefulness. This word 'deacon' means 'servant'. It's another Christ-like quality that we're all called to grow in. Now such deacons or servants are like oil. They keep us moving forward, often active behind the scenes, but hugely valued by God and the church. Now, the PCC is a group of Christian people with a range of gifts and abilities, but presently, we are looking for some new faces to be link people, a link person for particular areas of service. A link person would help liaise between particular aspects of church life and the PCC. We're going to share details about such roles over these next few weeks.

So I just wanted to finish by saying this: have you ever wondered how you can help our church? Can I encourage you to ask God, "Are you calling me to serve in this way, Lord?" Can I ask you to be open to the voice of the Spirit? And if you love our church and wish to be more useful, like the first deacons in Acts 6, please do get in touch with myself or one of the wardens. Thank you for listening.

[Roger Homes:] Well, good morning everybody. Andrew's just asked me if I would do a brief video looking at recruiting somebody to the PCC to oversee the children's work. And before I talk about some of the qualities that are needed for that particular job role, I just wanted to thank all those people who are working with the kids, even during the pandemic, at this particular time.

So what sort of qualities are we looking for in somebody to take on that role of PCC link for children's work? I think first and foremost, you need to have a passion for kids, and also for seeing children impacted by the Gospel. I think the person would need to be somebody that oversees the children's work and also across the different age categories as well, to be able to present reports and proposals to the PCC on behalf of children's work, and to pray for and work with the teachers and anyone else that is supporting them, obviously be responsible for bringing any concerns that may be happening in the children's work to the PCC, and also to liaise with the COGS leaders and the leaders of toddlers' group and youth ministry as well. And finally they may have a role to play in helping to market children's work to families, new families to church, or maybe people from outside the church as well.

So if that interests you, that would be great. Obviously there will be a procedure for getting in touch about that. And so I hope that's helpful anyway. Bye bye.

Activity: What does Wilderness mean to you?

[Denise:] Thank you for those messages and so I'm just going to pray because we haven't prayed yet, so let's pray.

Father God, thank You for the signs of nature and life all around us. Thank You for the sunshine, thank You for this new day. We pray that You'll bless us as we continue to worship You and that Your Spirit will challenge us to be the people that You've designed us to be. So please help us to listen to You, and if You call us to serve in Your community, keep reminding us what You've called us to do until we do it.

And there's a scripture, Psalm 37 verses three and four.

- 3 Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
- 4 Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

So as ever, we're going to have a bit of an icebreaker, and there's nothing that you have to make or anything, I just want you to think, and we're entering into Lent, so I was just going to try and help you to think what 'wilderness' was. So I did this at Knights Meadow last week. So if your house was on fire and you could save one thing, what would it be? Or another way of looking at it is, what has the COVID pandemic taken away from you? So let's just have a couple of moments to think about that.

So for some of you, it would be giving up cheese and chocolate or you've started doing something, like doing a daily Bible reading or something like that, but the COVID pandemic has taken away so much from quite a lot of people: their jobs, sometimes it's taken away loved ones, you can't hug people. And so we're in a bit of a wilderness situation. So what does the word 'wilderness' mean to you? Is it a place where everything else has gone? There's nothing growing. There's no distractions, so perhaps wilderness is a good thing. And we need to think about what the pandemic has been good for. It's taken away our distractions, so perhaps we can spend more time with God. We have more time to do the things that He wanted us to do. We have more time to listen to Him. And when everything else is taken away we have to be more reliant on Him. He's the one who provides for us. So as we enter into Lent, let's just think about some of those things.

Father God, thank You, that You give us so much. Thank You that You provide for us, even though sometimes we don't remember to say thank You. And Lord, as we enter into Lent, I pray that You'll help us to spend more time with You, and less watching murder documentaries on the TV or whatever. Lord, I pray that we won't waste our time but that it'll be productive in Your service. Amen.

Interview with Bekah: God at Work

And now we're going to have an interview with somebody who used to come to our church, but doesn't at the moment. Hey Bekah!
[Bekah:] Hello.

[Denise:] Now this is Bekah, who is my daughter. So I'm not going to ask her why she is linked to the church or anything: she was brought up here at Knights Meadow, and we went to America for a bit, but then she came back. But anyway, Bekah, you're a deacon, we've just been hearing about deacons. And so, tell us where you are, what you do up there, how you came to live there, what it's like up there?

[Bekah:] Well up there, as you suggest, I'm in the north. I am a deacon at a church in Durham, which is where I went to uni, and then stayed, so I, my role as a deacon is to oversee the ministry of students and 20s, so, young graduates really, and I'm married to John who used to do that with me but now runs a winter night shelter in Durham as well.

[Denise:] Wooh! So what will you be doing at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning? is the big question.

[Bekah:] Yeah, I had a think about that. It's actually not different, really. Most of my Monday morning, because Sunday's a very busy day, is spent resting, and spending time with God. I've recently started for Lent, I tried to think of something to take up, rather than give up, so I think fasting is a good thing to do as well. But I took up meditating. And often, when we hear meditating, the kind of non-Christian meditation looks a lot like emptying your mind of things. And so what I've taken up is meditating on Scripture, and there's a thing on

Spotify which is called Be Still and it's just like 10 minutes of meditating on God so filling your mind with good things rather than emptying it of other things. And so I'll probably be doing that tomorrow morning at 10am.

[Denise:] So that's taken me a bit by surprise. I thought you were going to say you were doing something in the community, but anyway. So how would you normally, if you were at work, what would you be doing typically at work?

[Bekah:] Well, the nature of student work means that I'd be doing a different thing most weeks. So sometimes it might look like going for coffee with a student, chatting through stuff, sometimes it might look like dealing with a massive mental health issue, sometimes it might look like popping around my neighbour's house and saying hello, or it can look like a different thing every week. So I guess one good thing about the pandemic is that it's allowed me to have a sort of stability, rather than everything being in flux. And also because I could be doing anything, it allows me to just kind of fix my eyes on God as the first thing of the week, rather than do things as the first thing I do in my week.

[Denise:] Thank you. When you are at work, Have you sensed God's presence and purpose in your work?

[Bekah:] I mean, that varies, whenever I'm doing work. I think the most helpful thing for me to do is to pray before I start working and pray during working, so that I, I guess, keep my eyes fixed on God, because it's easy to just get on with stuff and let God kind of fall to the wayside. But I think that something God's been teaching me about recently is I think we can often talk about spiritual things and non-spiritual things, and say 'spiritual' would be reading my Bible or I don't know, singing a worship song; and 'non-spiritual' would be gardening or washing up or whatever. And when you work for a church, there's obviously a bit of a crossover between those things. Because you'd be doing admin or whatever, and it might feel not spiritual but it might be about spiritual things. And so, I think one thing God's been teaching me is that there isn't really a spiritual/non-spiritual divide, that everything is spiritual, and really how you do things with purpose for God is less about what you're doing and more about how you're doing it, and who you're doing it for. And so, doing everything with God in mind is the best way for me to feel that I'm in His presence and doing it with a purpose.

[Denise:] So, your next few months, what are you hoping is going to happen? What are your hopes for the next few months?

[Bekah:] I mean, probably similar to everyone else, lifting of restrictions. Though I've loved being just with my husband in our house for the last however many months, it would be nice to be able to see other people, and go to restaurants and things like that. Looking forward to seeing, obviously Mum and Dad, but also Boaz, because I've only met him once. (That's their dog in case you didn't know.) I suppose my other hope within that is that, what you were just saying about wilderness and the good things about the pandemic, that people won't forget about this as the pandemic lifts, I think working with people to try and evangelise and share Jesus, my hope is that we won't kind of lose the progress of people actually thinking about God during the last few months and people will continue to do it, even when they don't need to because they're kept in their homes. So my hope is that God is still on the agenda, I suppose.

[Denise:] And finally, if you could have us pray for something what would that be?

It could be more than one thing.

[Bekah:] We just did an initiative in our church kind-of launched off the back of Valentine's Day and the sense of loneliness and the pandemic, where we gave out little postcards that said 'you are loved' and had a link to our church website, and a box of Maltesers, and everyone in the church basically had one of those and we're supposed to get them to a neighbour, and we've heard amazing stories of people that gave them to bin men or their Amazon delivery person or

their estranged child who they haven't seen in years. I guess it can be really easy after something like that to just forget about it and leave it and be like 'I've done that, I can move on', so my thing that I'd love prayer for is that people would catch the energy and the momentum of sharing Jesus with their friends and their neighbours, and that they'd be praying for those that gave them to to receive Jesus.

[Denise:] Okay. Shall we pray for that now then.

So Father thank You for Bekah, I pray that You'll be with her up in the cold north of Durham, and that You will bless both her and John. Lord, I pray for this initiative about 'you are loved', I pray that those that have received Maltesers and little messages will be blessed by them, and that those that gave the messages will keep up the energy, keep up the initiative and keep sharing Jesus. And Lord, I pray that You'll bless them up there, that You'll bless their church which is Emmanuel in Durham and all the work that they're doing up there. Lord, I pray for the students that are in Durham or not in Durham, and that You will be with them in this very strange time, so Lord, bless Bekah. And I pray that she'll have a great time at her church which she's going to go to now, and that she'll be able to meet up with some people, even though it's at a social distance. Lord, be with her and be with her community. Amen.

Thanks Bekah.

[Bekah:] Thank you.

[Denise:] Have a good time at church! Bye bye!

[Bekah:] Bye!

Confession

[Denise:] We're just going to move into a time of confession now, because quite a lot of what Bekah says makes me feel quite inadequate. So, we are in a season of Lent and it's a time of when we remember how Jesus was tested in the wilderness. Jesus was tempted, but He didn't sin, unlike us, we're constantly needing to bring the ways in which we've messed up and ask for our forgiveness. And God has said that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So let's just take a few moments to bring those things that we're not happy about now.

Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed. We've not loved You with our whole heart. We've not loved our neighbours as ourselves. In Your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with You, our God. Amen.

So we're going to listen to a song, you can join in if you want, but please, I'm going to turn myself on to mute if you're going to sing, it's called Living Hope and it's just reminding us that even though we do mess up, Jesus is our hope, He's the one that has paid the price for our sin.

1st Song: Living Hope

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| 1. How great the chasm that lay between us,
How high the mountain I could not climb.
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke Your name into the night. | 2. Then through the darkness, Your loving-
kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul.
The work is finished, the end is written:
Jesus Christ, my living hope. |
|--|--|

3. Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless
 grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame.

4. The Cross has spoken, I am forgiven,
The King of kings calls me His own.
Beautiful Saviour, I'm Yours forever,
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Chorus:
Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free!
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me!
You have broken every chain,
There's salvation in Your name,
Jesus Christ, my living hope

5. Then came the morning that sealed the
 promise,
Your buried body began to breathe.
Out of the silence, the Roaring Lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me.

Repeat verse 5

Jesus, Yours is the victory!

Chorus x 2

Jesus Christ, my living hope
Oh God, You are my living hope

Reading: Luke 12:4-10 [NIVUK 2011]

4 'I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

8 'I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Talk: Ways We Drift Away From God's Teaching On Contentious Subjects

[Denise:] So we're going to hear from Andrew now, but just before he speaks, I'd like to pray for him.

So, Father, I pray that what Andrew says will be Your words, and that as he speaks about some controversial topics, and that people will listen with grace, and that Your words will be a challenge to all of us to be Your ambassadors where we are. So bless Andrew with Your Holy Spirit, Lord, and help us to listen. Amen.

[Andrew:] Amen. Thank you, Denise. And thank you, Bekah, it was really good to hear from Bekah too. Just on that little example that Bekah gave of doing something off the back of Valentine's Day, I was toying with doing something that Sue Pollard mentioned in the newsletter, I think, to do with ideas for connecting with our neighbours at this time, you know, you can put little notes through your neighbour's door, I was thinking of doing this (Need to talk to Lindsey about this doing this) with maybe one of those multipack Mars bars or something, just saying thank you for being a good neighbour at this anniversary time of lockdown, because it's going to be almost one year, coming up quite soon, of having the first lockdown. So this is an opportunity to say thank you for the neighbours being there, and maybe even looking forward to seeing them

afterwards. So there are other ideas locally in Kenilworth with that we could do too.

So we're going to continue with this theme, looking at or beginning to look at the subject of marriage. You'll remember from last week that Graham Archer set the scene by giving us a steer into the early words of the Genesis account, looking at God's words on marriage there. The next few weeks will be as follows: today, I'm going to be looking at our fears around talking about marriage in this current social context; on March 14, Phil Swards will give a proper overview of the whole Bible's take on marriage; and the week after that, I will be talking about what Jesus said about marriage; and of course, there's going to be some resources that we'll make available to help you with your own study, too.

Now, as we look at the theology around the subject of marriage, we need to be honest and aware of the ways in which contentious subjects are sometimes avoided or deflected. This talk today is hopefully going to help us to honestly review our own approach and attitude to this subject. Now, of course, we certainly will need to consider pastoral implications around the current discussions on marriage. But the Western Church has an even greater need than considering pastoral matters. I would say already, if I'm honest, that our local church is already desiring to be a loving and caring church. To my mind, the first priority for us instead is our focus on the Word of God, and what God has already said about marriage. Now, as the church in recent weeks, we have already explored the topic of the Bible, coming to see that Almighty God has uniquely revealed Himself and His will, in the words of Scripture. Now, this is massively important, and primary. So the question of marriage must begin there. If a person regards the scriptures as God's true and reliable Word, then if God speaks clearly on marriage in Scripture, then that is how we settle the matter, and the matter is relatively straightforward. If, however, a person doesn't regard Scripture as God's word, then the matter of marriage is inevitably more challenging and more complicated.

So today I want to point you to the best route through the subject of marriage. We will indeed address the pastoral questions. But our first responsibility is to discover if God has spoken clearly on the subject or not in the Bible. But I think we need to be realistic. Many Christians are in fact afraid of saying what the Bible says. Many Christians are routinely silent when the subject of sexuality is raised. But Jesus Himself addressed the likelihood of our fears. He told us what to do when it comes to fearing the opinions and actions of people. Let us have our first slide. And I'll just read to you again that passage that Denise mentioned. It says this:

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows....(Luke 12:4-10)



And Jesus goes on to say,

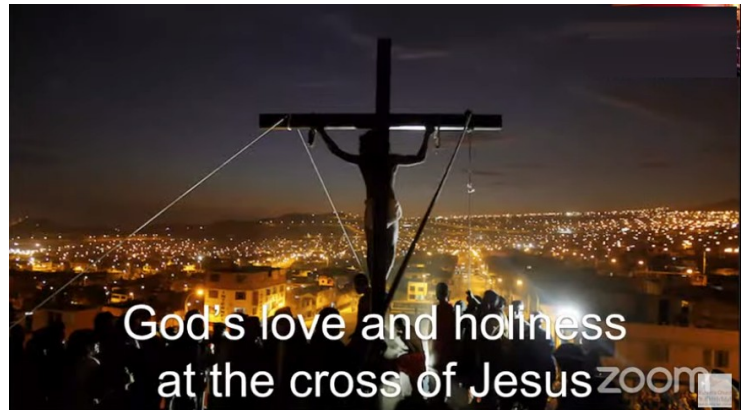
8 'I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. **9** But whoever disowns me before others will be

disowned before the angels of God. **10** And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

These are strong words from Jesus. Now, I'm speaking in the main, I think today, to people who would say they are followers of Jesus Christ. So are we listening to what our Lord Jesus Christ has said? Are we listening to Him? Who are we fearing? Now, whenever we are exploring ethical or moral matters, when society is raising questions, we need to remember the whole narrative of Scripture, because that is how we gain our compass bearing, our direction.

Let me remind you of a couple of themes that indicate how things tend to slide with human beings. At the very beginning of Genesis, we have the snake in the temptation passage in Genesis 3 saying, "Did God really say?" The entire approach of the serpent with Adam and Eve is to question what God had said. So that's one particular theme that set the course of how human beings related to God. Later, of course, we have the story of Israel, and there is a pattern with Israel, repeatedly being led into the practices of surrounding nations, instead of holding on to the commands that God gave. Now, in both these cases, both the Adam and Eve story, and Israel's story, exile was the result. Separation is the natural result of sin. And exile, if you like, is the historical equivalent of God's judgement. They turned away from God, and God inevitably removed them from His presence. You see, these two stories clearly point to God's final judgement on the Last Day. Now, in the passage that we've heard today, in Luke 12, Jesus reminds His own disciples not to fear people, but to fear the One who has authority to throw you into hell. He's talking about fear of the Lord. We are to heed God above all others.

Let's have our next slide. Now, how serious is this? You see, this view of Jesus reveals His own reverence for the holiness of God, Jesus' own understanding of how holy God was. His deep love for people never prevented Him from first honouring God, the Father. God's holiness was a tangible reality for Jesus, and it explains why He chose the Cross on our behalf, rather than colluding with humans who would wish to downplay sinfulness. Jesus accepts that sin is real. Sin is serious and it needs to be dealt with. So He honours God's holiness and expresses God's infinite love for sinners, when He became the sin-bearer on the Cross.



So, as we look at the subject of marriage, we need to sensitively hear what society is saying about marriage. But we need to hear even more clearly what God is saying, out of proper awe and respectful fear of Him. We have recently established that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. There are no words with higher status. There are no human experiences that compare to the authority of the Word of God. Just as the angels cry out, "holy, holy, holy," if we truly know God, then we will be glad to sing of the purity and holiness of God above all other words, above all other commands.

However, my gut feeling is that there are many Christians today who seem struck down by the implicit and explicit messages in society. Some feel they simply must not question the freedoms of people to love as they please. People fear the threat of being cancelled (you know the 'cancel culture' idea). Some of us think we must not disagree with the changing ethics of our day.

What about you? How do you feel when the subject of marriage arises? Is it your first thought to turn to the Bible and establish what God has said? Do you carry questions with you and go through Scripture? Or do you read what society is saying instead? The question that I hear in my own heart is this: am I more concerned about the acceptance of people than the honouring of God? Perhaps I put more value on the approval of children or friends and colleagues than valuing the Word of God, God Almighty. Why? Why might I swerve in this way? It may be true that some of our colleagues and our friends would be shocked if we described a straightforward, orthodox biblical view of marriage and said that it was true. Our children may say that we're offensive in our beliefs. And so what do we do? Do we keep the peace by generally saying nothing?

Well, Paul, in one of his letters, helps us make a clear distinction. He tells us who Christians should be focusing on in terms of behaviour. Let's have our next slide. This is from one Corinthians 5, verses 9 to 13. And Paul was addressing a particular sexual immorality problem that was happening in Corinth, and he says this,

"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked person from among you.'" 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

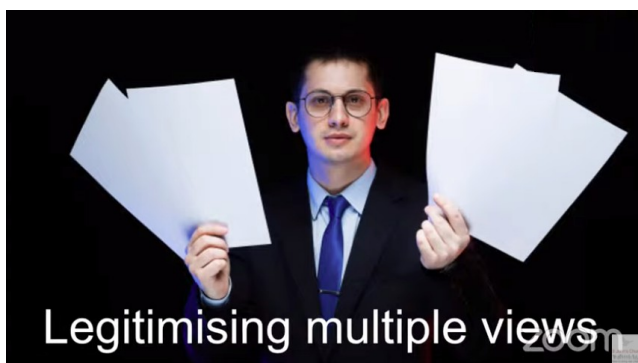
So Paul gives us clarity. Paul gives us clarity as to who to focus on. You see, the wider UK population will behave as they choose. And that is between them and God, who we will all face on the Last Day. You see, God is the judge of all those wider people, not us. And He will assess each and every person according to what they've done, and those who know Christ will be saved. But we Christians, according to this passage in Corinthians, we Christians are to look to the beliefs and behaviour of the family of God. We are to be able to think clearly and speak confidently about important matters, without fear of what other people may say or do. But so often, we don't.

I want to look this morning at the ways we slip into unhelpful ways of dealing with this emotive subject of marriage. Let's have our next slide. You see, I think that quite a lot of us will slide into what I would call 'selective silence', where some Christians may be tempted to avoid disputed topics because we fear these topics will divide our churches. Some of us de-emphasise parts of the Bible that we don't want to talk about. We fear the ramifications from friends, family and wider society. And so even within church, we can be gradually led by the wider culture's values. Because the fearful church is silent, and isn't transparently addressing these matters, people slide in their beliefs. You end up with a heart embarrassment before the text. Some of us, some Christians, can be apologising for parts of what the Bible says, because they personally don't like those bits. And they distance themselves from what God has said,



implicitly doing what? Implicitly undermining the authority of what the Bible teaches. Now, this inevitably has an influence on what our hearers think. If we can do that with the text, that may give them permission to do that to the text as well.

Let's have our next slide. I think there's also a pattern emerging particularly as we go into conversations and discussions about the subjects of marriage where people start to legitimise alternative positions that the Bible actually condemns. It's almost like you're holding multiple views, in an attempt to defuse the topic in hand. Some Christians develop a pattern of comparing multiple views, regardless of the strength or weakness of the different views. Now this approach can create the impression that all views are equal, when in fact, they often aren't.

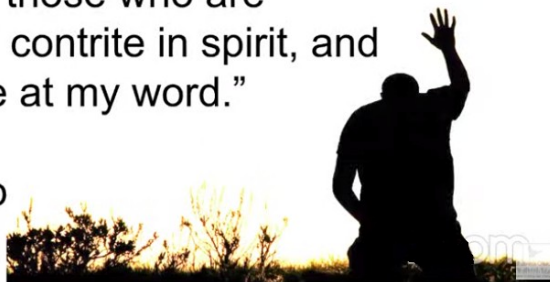


So I just want to encourage you this morning, integrity and honesty is really needed when we look at this subject of marriage, especially when we're reviewing newly-proposed views. There's a phrase that I heard someone teaching to me recently, where they talked about what was called 'the art of imperious ignorance', so I'll say that again, 'the art of imperious ignorance', where someone, after listening to two sides of a debate, someone may kind of throw their hands up and simply say, "Well, we simply can't know what God has said on a given subject." And this is a kind of imposed pronouncement that attempts to silence the possibility of any conclusion, when in fact, a more rigorous study is needed to work towards a true and clear answer. We must resist such pronouncements because that's simply gagging conversation. And this leads me to where I would want to point you in terms of your proper attitude to the subject of marriage: there needs to be more reading to properly understand the matter. Now some may baulk at the work involved in properly researching subjects from multiple sources. But if this matter of marriage is important, and I do believe it's very important, it requires us not to oversimplify for convenience. If God's Word is at stake, then hard and honest work must be done, regardless of the consequences.

Let me move on to the next slide. Because I want to set this in the context of what God says about people who truly engage with this, in fear and trembling before His Word. Isaiah 66 says this:

**“These are the ones I look on
with favour: those who are
humble and contrite in spirit, and
who tremble at my word.”**

Isaiah 66:2b



Let me read that to you again. "These are the ones I look on with favour: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my Word." In our dealings with surrounding views and opinions, we can forget how much higher the Word of God is. Yet those who are humble and actually tremble before God and His Word will be the ones who can discern correctly without being confused or deceived.

Let me give you an example. Thinking back to what Graham Archer explored last week, he put before us as a church, the passages in Genesis, formative primary descriptions of human beings, male and female, designed by God to beautifully reflect His image, and designed to complement each other, as night and day are paired forever. When God makes humanity, and pairs male and female, God says, "very good." That's the first time He says, "very good," everything up until that point has been "good." But when He pairs male and female, when He makes humanity and pairs them together, He says, "This is very good." This was His best work of creation, His very, very best work. Do we tremble at the words of God? Do we stand in awe at the majesty of God's fantastic and precise creation of marriage? Just as all the other pairings in the Genesis account are established, till the end of the world, light and darkness, sky and earth, seas and dry lands, night and day, male and female are paired as God's fixed and perfect complimentary design. Do we bow down in reverence before the ways of God? Before the ways of God in making us this way? Do we worship God for His wise and good ordering of human life? Or do we go quiet and accept all other views as of equal status? Do we try hard to accommodate all views for fear of upsetting people?

I want to draw to a conclusion in a moment by asking you to be honest with yourself today. Who has your allegiance? Who has your devotion? Are you prepared to go back to the Bible, and to put the work in. If you call yourself a follower of Jesus, and I'm trying my best to, then you and I will need to heed the scriptures, just as Jesus Himself did. So today, this is an opportunity for you to recalibrate how you and I will approach the subject of marriage. Now, if it's just a trivial matter, we could easily say, it's just a matter of interpretation. But if it is a central, vital matter in Scripture, we need to be very clear about it. Because the consequences are enormous. Listen carefully: if we can change our minds about marriage, perhaps we can change our minds about the Gospel, or the Resurrection, or even about Jesus Himself. The consequences are huge. So this morning, do you want to be clear? Do you want to approach this with a true and holy reverence for God?

Prayerful Reflection

Let's have a time of response to this. Let's pray.

This is touchy stuff. So Holy Spirit, would You just come to us now in a moment of quiet and stillness?

Can I encourage everyone to remember, we are in the presence of Almighty God, Almighty God.

Father, by Your Holy Spirit, would You reveal to us again, the attitudes and motives of our hearts. Help us to be honest, Lord.

And Father God, I want to pray that You would give courage to Your people now. I pray, Lord, that we would choose Your Word, that we would choose to honour You by honouring Your Word. Lord, in the hearts of all who listen and watch, would You set in there, in the heart, a higher view of Your Word than of any other opinion.

Cause us to be people, Lord, who tremble at the holy words of Almighty God.

And Father, from this place, would You then give us integrity to address the question of marriage, beginning with You, before we hear the voices of others.

I just want to pray a prayer to do with renouncing false allegiances. I apply this to myself, but I'm going to be praying it for us all. If you know that you

have given your allegiance to pleasing other people, if you have given too much weight to keeping other people happy, bring that to God now.

And I just pray in the name of Jesus Christ, we renounce false allegiances, particularly the allegiance of keeping other people happy. Lord, we put the opinions and feelings of other people second to honouring You first. We've renounced those fears. And I pray Lord, You would lead us into a truer freedom, where we are faithful to You, above all. So fill us with Your Spirit and give Your Church courage at this time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So I'm going to finish there and we'll continue with some other prayers.

Intercessions

[Jeremy:]

Thank You Lord for Your Bible

Lord, once again we begin by saying thank You to You for Your Bible. Thank You, God, that we have it in our possession. Thank You, God, that it's free, or cheap, and we can read it freely, Lord, with no restrictions on us. Thank You, God, for all the things that You've outlined in it. Just help us to understand it, Lord, I pray. Amen.

Thank You Lord for Marriage

Father, I want to thank You for Your Word. I want to thank You for all the things that You've said, Lord, for marriage, that most important of relationships, Lord, that points to that most important of relationships, between Christ and the Church. Lord, I thank You for the things that we can learn. God, keep us on track, I pray, as we seek to interpret Your Word and to understand it for today. Keep us on course, Lord, that we might be true to Your Word and so be true followers of You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thank You Lord for Your Church in India

Lord, I want to pray for Your Church in India. Lord God, there is such dreadful persecution going on there at the moment, Lord, the state introducing anti-conversion laws and so on. Oh, Lord, give Your Church strength, I pray, to uphold Your name and to continue strong in the faith. Precious Lord Jesus, keep them, Lord, I pray, keep the Children's Homes that we know, that serve the Dalit class and that are so, so hit upon by the state, that refuse to allow them to do anything, Lord. O God, give the leaders strength, I pray, and wisdom to know how to navigate at this time, Lord. I pray for Your whole Church, for strength and for endurance in it all. Lord, it's a terrible, terrible thing, and I just lift them up to You, Lord. O God, keep them Lord, I pray, keep them strong. Amen.

2nd Song: The Power of Your Love

1. Lord, I come to You;
Let my heart be changed, renewed
Flowing from the grace
That I found in You.
Lord, I've come to know
The weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away
By the power of Your love.

Chorus:
Hold me close
Let Your love surround me
Bring me near
Draw me to Your side
And as I wait
I'll rise up like the eagle
And I will soar with You
Your Spirit leads me on
In the power of Your love

2. Lord, unveil my eyes
Let me see You face to face
The knowledge of Your love
As You live in me.
Lord, renew my mind
As Your will unfolds in my life
In living every day
By the power of Your love.

Chorus x 2

Blessing

[Denise:]

So, Father, renew our minds as Your will unfolds in our lives. Help us to live by the power of Your love. Help us to honour You above all else.

A blessing from Jude 1:

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – **25** to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.

Help us become blameless and pure, children of God without fault, in a warped and crooked generation. Help us to shine like stars in the sky and hold firmly to the word of life.

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You in every way. Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet. Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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