



Marriage and the theology of Hebrews. A theological reading of Heb 12:28–13:6 with a focus on marriage*

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Abstract

Taking into account the debate about the continuity or discontinuity in Heb 1-12 and Heb 13, with the implication of whether the hortatory material in chapter 13 is consistent with chapters 1-12 or it is a list of miscellaneous exhortations instead, this article seeks to discern connections between the concept of marriage in 13:4 with the ideas stated in 12:28–13:6. This endeavor is informed by a reading of 12:28-13:6 made in three steps. First, 12:28-29 is read as a transition for the hortatory material in chapter 13. Second, 13:1-6 is traced as a conceptual structure for the understanding of marriage in 13:4. Third, the article identifies connections of the exhortation about marriage in 13:4 with ideas developed in 12:28-29 and 13:1-6.

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Keywords

Hebrews, marriage, theology, exhortation, purity.

El matrimonio y la teología de los hebreos. Una lectura teológica de Heb 12:28 - 13:6 con un enfoque en el matrimonio

Resumen

Teniendo en cuenta el debate sobre la continuidad o discontinuidad de Heb 1-12 y Heb 13, con la implicación de si el material de la hortataria en el capítulo 13 es coherente con los capítulos 1-12 o es una lista de diversas exhortaciones, el presente artículo busca discernir las conexiones entre el concepto de matrimonio en 13: 4 con las ideas presentadas en 12: 28-13: 6. Este esfuerzo se basa en una lectura de 12: 28-13: 6 desarrollada en tres pasos. Primero, 12: 28-29 se lee como una transición para el material exhortatorio en el capítulo 13. Segundo, 13: 1-6 se delinea como una estructura conceptual para la comprensión del matrimonio en 13: 4. En tercer lugar, el artículo identifica las conexiones de la exhortación sobre el matrimonio en 13: 4 con las ideas desarrolladas en 12: 28-29 y 13: 1-6.

Palabras clave

Hebreos, matrimonio, teología, exhortación, pureza.



Introduction

The specific terminology for marriage, expressed by derivatives of the root *γάμος*,¹ occurs 57 times in the NT². In the NT literature where this terminology is found, Hebrews is the only book with one single occurrence (see Heb 13:4)³. While the importance of a concept in a book cannot be determined solely on the basis of the frequency of its specific terminology, a single occurrence of a concept does raise the interesting question on how this concept is connected with the ideas explored in the book. Generally speaking, when a notion appears several times in a document, the association of this notion with the conceptual contours of the document tends to be more evident in the text, since there are more possibilities of explicit explanations of such connection or clues that implicitly point to a connection. Conversely, less occurrences of a notion may imply fewer opportunities for the articulation of its connection with the points argued in the document. In cases of only one occurrence, conceptual connections may not even exist, as the notion may be an isolated idea merely mentioned along with other ideas.

With this perspective in mind, there is a fundamental question to be pursued in this article: is it possible to discern connections between the concept of marriage and the ideas developed in Hebrews? If so, how is marriage conceptualized in the theology of Hebrews? In order to pursue this question, I will engage in a theological reading of Heb 12:28-13:6. As it will become evident in my discussion below, 12:28-29 is part of the conceptual climax of the theology of Hebrews

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- 1 The derivatives include the noun *γάμος* (*marriage, wedding celebration*), and the verbs *γαμέω* (*to marry*), *γαμιζώ* (*to give [a woman] in marriage, or to marry*), *γαμίσκω* (*give in marriage*). See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 187-188.
 - 2 This frequency includes the lemmas *αγαμος* (*unmarried man/woman*) and *ἐγγαμβρεύω* (*marry as next of kin*). See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 5, 368.
 - 3 The number of occurrences can be organized in the following way: Matthew (18 times), 1 Corinthians (15 times), Luke (11 times), Mark (5 times), 1 Timothy (3 times), John (2 times), Revelation (2 times), and Hebrews (1 time).

articulated until chapter 12, and is also a transition for the hortatory material found in chapter 13. Therefore, since in this article I will not be able to cover the entire theology of Hebrews, I will focus on how 12:28-29 provides a theological framework, which draws from the concepts developed up to that point, for the exhortations that are delineated at the end of the book. With this framework in mind, I will move to 13:1-6, the immediate context where marriage is mentioned. After hearing the theological tone of 12:28-29 (step 1) and observing the basic structure and ideas of 13:1-6 (step 2), I will concentrate on the reading of 13:4, the exhortation about marriage (step 3). After these 3 steps, it would be possible to conclude whether and (if so) how the concept of marriage is connected with the ideas developed in Hebrews. According to this plan, I will begin the reading of 12:28-29.

1. The Transition to Chapter 13 - 12:28-29 Sets the Theological Tone

A potential obstacle for the connection of the concept of marriage with the ideas explored in Hebrews is related to its location in the book. More precisely, due to differences in terms of vocabulary, form, and style, there is a trend in Hebrews scholarship that argues for a discontinuity between chapter 13 (where marriage is mentioned in v. 4) and the previous chapters of Hebrews, with the implication that chapter 13 would be «a series of miscellaneous exhortations»⁴. The most recent study focused on the differences of chapter 13 and Heb 1-12 is probably an article written by A. J. M. Wedderburn⁵. In this article, he firstly highlights differences in terms of arguments and style. According to him, while 12:25-29 is the climax of the arguments developed in chapters 1-12, chapter 13 is «a series of miscellaneous exhortations»⁶. Furthermore, in contrast to the style of chapters 1-12,

4 A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», *New Testament Studies* 50 (2004): 394.

5 See A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», 390-405.

6 A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», 394.

chapter 13 is «tersely formulated, almost staccato in its string of direct or implied exhortations and commands»⁷. Secondly, Wedderburn underlines differences regarding vocabulary. He provides lists of words in chapter 13 that appear for the first time in Hebrews, words in chapters 1-12 that do not appear in chapter 13, and words in chapter 13 that are not found in chapters 1-12 but that are synonymous of terms that appear in chapters 1-12⁸. At the same time, Wedderburn recognizes points of contact between chapters 1-12 and chapter 13⁹. Finally, he suggests that chapters 1-12 and chapter 13 were written by different authors (which would explain the differences between these texts), but the author of chapter 13 wrote this chapter later, and with the content of chapters 1-12 in mind (which would explain the points of contact between these texts). Since a difference of authorship implies different recipients and purposes, Wedderburn argues that chapters 1-12 and chapter 13 cannot be simply merged «into one harmonious whole»¹⁰. Although Wedderburn's proposal is distinct from previous ideas in Hebrews scholarship¹¹ that stipulated that chapter 13 was an appendix of the book or a later addition by another later writer to give the impression that Hebrews had a Pauline authorship, Wedderburn's view of Hebrews is similar to these previous ideas in the sense that he emphasizes a discontinuity between chapters 1-12 and chapter 13.

However, Wedderburn is aware that his theory is not aligned with current trends in Hebrews scholarship, which does not regard the differences in style and vocabulary as evidence for discontinuity. In fact, he starts his article acknowledging that «it is generally thought that Heb 13 is an integral part of the document»¹² and he will attempt

7 A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», 394.

8 See A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», 395-398.

9 See A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», 403.

10 See A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», 405.

11 See, e.g., G. W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, Anchor Bible 36 (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 229-245, 267-268; H. Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Holman New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 237-238; E. D. Jones, «The Authorship of Hebrews XIII», *Expository Times* 46 (1934-35): 562-567.

12 A. J. M. Wedderburn. «The "Letter" to the Hebrews and Its Thirteenth Chapter», 390.

to challenge this dominant trend. Indeed, Gert Steyn affirms that «most scholars these days are of the opinion that . . . Hebrews 13 is authentic and that it belongs to the rest of the book»¹³ and David DeSilva argues that «the literary unity of Hebrews is rarely challenged today»¹⁴. Overall, scholars have observed continuity between the last chapter and the other chapters of the book in terms of content and connections of style and form. From a *thematic* standpoint, DeSilva points out that «each exhortation» in chapter 13 «is directly relevant to the pastoral need addressed by chapters 1 through 12, giving the hearers specific directions concerning how they are to persevere in the face of a hostile society and arrive safely and unwearied at the goal of the “lasting” city that is to come»¹⁵. In his remarks on Heb 13:1-17, Luke T. Johnson argues that «virtually everything said here echoes earlier passages in which the author praises what his hearers are doing or exhorts them to do»¹⁶. In terms of *style*, Attridge highlights that the abrupt «shift in tone and style at 13:1 from the solemn warning of the previous pericope to the series of discrete and staccato admonitions that begin this chapter (13:1-6)» is «not totally unprecedented» in Hebrews. He mentions examples of similar abrupt shifts in 12:14 and 25¹⁷. With regard to the argument that the *vocabulary* of Heb 13 is different from Heb 1-12, Albert Vanhoye underlines that each section of 12:18-21 and 12:14-17 has fourteen words not found elsewhere in Hebrews¹⁸. This should minimize an overemphasis on the difference of vocabulary in Heb 13. From a *formal* perspective, based on Hellenistic rhetoric, Gareth Cockerill

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- 13 Gert J. Steyn, «The Ending of Hebrews Reconsidered», *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 103 (2012): 235.
- 14 David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle «to the Hebrews»* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 483.
- 15 David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 483-484. See also R.V.G. Tasker, «The Integrity of the Epistle to the Hebrews», *Expository Times* 47 (1935-36), 136-138. Jukka Thurén, *Das Lobopfer der Hebräer: Studien zum Aufbau und Anliegen von Hebräerbrief 13* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1973), 57-70.
- 16 Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2001), 337.
- 17 Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 384.
- 18 Albert Vanhoye, «La question littéraire de Hébreux XIII.1-6», *New Testament Studies* 23 (1977): 129. See also C.R. Williams, «A Word-Study of Hebrews 13», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 30 (1911): 129-136.

stipulates that Heb 13:1-17 is a *peroratio*, a final attempt of the orator «to move his audience in the desired direction», generally drawing «on the earlier parts of the speech, using short exhortations and vivid imagery»¹⁹. According to this perspective, the key point of continuity is 12:28-29²⁰, a passage that concludes²¹ chapter 12 and provides the transition to chapter 13²².

In light of what has been discussed previously by the author of Hebrews, 12:28-29 basically exhorts the audience to have gratitude (ἔχωμεν χάριν) and offer worship/service acceptable to God (λατρεύωμεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ)²³. Indeed, the exhortations to gratitude and worship/service are related, as the latter is a relative clause subordinated to the former²⁴. This syntactical relationship is properly captured by NASB²⁵, «let us show gratitude, *by which* we may offer to God an acceptable service» (italics mine). As Attridge points out, «gratitude is part of the worshipful response that Hebrews tries to evoke»²⁶. In this way, λατρεύωμεν «is the main thrust of the exhortation»²⁷.

Before I move to the discussion on how the concepts of gratitude and worship in 12:28 inform chapter 13, it is important to recognize

19 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 675. See also Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 36 (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2001), 554. For further arguments regarding the unity between chapter 13 and the previous chapters of Hebrews, see William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991), 496-497. For a helpful study on Heb 13, including its form, function, and key themes, see F. V. Filson, «Yesterday»: *A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13* (London: SCM, 1967).

20 «Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire». Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references in this article are to the English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2011).

21 The tone of conclusion is indicated by Διὸ (therefore), which is the first term of v. 28. Attridge calls this a «paraenetic conclusion» introduced by Διὸ. Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 382.

22 As Peter O'Brien indicates, «Hebrews 12:28-29 is the key link». Petteer T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 503.

23 The subjunctive hortatory form of ἔχωμεν and λατρεύωμεν in v. 28. See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 955, indicates that these are the two exhortations of the verse.

24 ἔχωμεν χάριν, δι' ἧς λατρεύωμεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ.

25 *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). NASB.

26 Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 382.

27 Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 383.

that vv. 28-29 add further details to these concepts. The exhortation to gratitude is justified positively by the idea that the audience of Hebrews is receiving an enduring kingdom (βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες, v. 28)²⁸. In its turn, the encouragement to worship includes the suggested manner of performing this service, namely, «with reverence (εὐλαβείας²⁹) and awe (δέους)» (v. 28). The ground for such manner of worship is the somber recognition that «God is a consuming fire»³⁰. Thus, acceptable worship in 12:28-29 is related to the acknowledgment of the seriousness of divine judgment³¹.

However, how are the ideas of judgment and kingdom related? It seems that the answer starts in 12:22-23. According to these verses, the audience of Hebrews has «come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem», and «to God, the judge of all»³². If Zion is an allusion to the divine kingship³³, the idea that believers have come to Mount Zion is consistent with the information in 12:28 that they are receiving a kingdom. In both cases, the divine kingdom is already a reality for believers, even though v. 28 implies that their complete reception of the kingdom still awaits a future fulfillment. Nevertheless, why is God called judge in this context, and not king? As a matter of fact, in many places in Hebrews God is

28 Overall, translations render the participle παραλαμβάνοντες as a participle of cause. In this way, the reason or cause of gratitude is the reception of this kingdom: «let us be grateful *for* receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken» (italics mine).

29 This word is used in 5:7 to describe Jesus' reverence to the Father, as he was facing the threat of death on this earth.

30 και γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκων.

31 In Heb 12:23 God is called «the judge of all». Similarly, 12:25 emphasizes that those who refuse Him cannot escape. In 10:27, the language of fire (πυρὸς) is used to describe the divine judgment that will devour the adversaries. This idea of fire seems to be explored in the description of Christ's second coming as a divine judgment in 2 Thess 1:5-9. «This is evidence of the righteous *judgment* of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering-⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels⁸ in *flaming fire*, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus⁹. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might» (italics mine).

32 There are other details in 12:22-23 but I will concentrate on Zion and God.

33 For a helpful discussion about believers coming to Zion in Hebrews, see Felix Cortez, «"The Anchor of the Soul that Enters Within the Veil": The Ascension of the "Son" in the Letter to the Hebrews» (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2008), 426-449.

portrayed as king in His throne (1:8; 4:16; 8:1; 12:2), having Christ seated at His right hand (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Indeed, there are two important Psalms used by the author of Hebrews to develop the idea of Christ as co-regent king, namely, Pss 2:7 (see Heb 1:5; 5:5) and 110[109 LXX]:1 (see Heb 1:13; 10:13), 4 (see Heb 5:6; 7:17, 21). In Pss 2 and 110, Zion is mentioned (see 2:6 and 110[109 LXX]:2) as the place of the king. In Ps 2, the Son will destroy the nations (v. 9), as «his wrath is quickly kindled» (v. 12) against the rulers of the earth (v. 10), who are considered enemies of the Lord and his anointed Son (v. 2). It is noteworthy that, in this context, these rulers are advised to “serve (verb δουλεύω, LXX) the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (v. 11). Therefore, the enemies of the divine kingdom should serve Him with fear and trembling, having in view the destructive wrath of the king against them. In Ps 110 [LXX 109], read Christologically through the lenses of Hebrews, the Son (who is called Lord in the Psalm) sits at the Lord's right hand as a co-regent king (v. 1, 5), and is also a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (v. 4). Similar to Ps 2, there is an emphasis on the attitude of the divine king against His enemies (110:1-2), with special reference «on the day of his wrath» and his «judgment against the nations» (110:6).

Hence, if the ideas of kingdom and judgment in Hebrews 12:28 are thought from a Christological perspective of Pss 2 and 110, in Zion there is the divine kingdom and its judgment against the enemies. Furthermore, I suspect that a parallel can be drawn between Ps 2:11-12 and Heb 12:28-29. In this psalm, the enemies are advised to serve (verb δουλεύω, LXX) the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling, having in view the destructive wrath of the divine king against them. In Heb 12:28-29, believers are exhorted to serve/worship (verb λατρεύω) God with reverence and awe, having in view His destructive judgment. Generally speaking, the content of the advice (Ps 2:11-12) and of the exhortation (Heb 12:28-29) is similar, but the concepts are nuanced differently by distinct words for service. Likewise δουλεύω, λατρεύω means *to serve*, but it has a religious or cultic connotation, being used in Hebrews in terms of

worship (see 9:9, 14; 10:2; 12:28; 13:10)³⁴. Moreover, the advice is given to enemies, while the exhortation is addressed to believers. However, Heb 10:26 warns the Christian audience that «if we go on sinning deliberately» (Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν), there is «a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the *adversaries*» (italics mine). In this way, the fiery divine judgment will come against enemies or adversaries, and 10:26 seems to imply that, because of continual deliberate sin, those who were believers become enemies of God³⁵.

The problem of sin is explicitly explored in Hebrews. As a matter of fact, it is because of Christ's sacrifice and priesthood (see 9:11-14) that believers' consciousness of sins is cleansed, enabling them to serve/worship (verb λατρεύω) God (9:14)³⁶. In this sense, Christ's priesthood is the basis for the worship believers offer to God. It is important to note that in the context where believers come to Mount Zion, while God is called the «judge of all», Christ is referred to as «the mediator of a new covenant» (12:22-24). In the other two instances where Christ is called mediator (μεσίτης) of a new or better covenant (see 8:6; 9:15), this mediation is related to His priesthood. Christ's sacrificial death redeems people from their transgressions under the first covenant and enables them to receive the promised inheritance (9:15). If the reception of the kingdom in 12:28 is seen as the promised inheritance in 9:15, then Christ's priesthood is not only the basis for the worship believers offer to God—as this priesthood purifies their conscience from sin, enabling them to serve/worship God, but Christ's priesthood is also the basis for their reception of the kingdom under the conditions

34 See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 586.

35 Hebrews 1:13; 10:13 depicts Christ as co-regent king, waiting for his enemies be made a footstool for his feet. It is noteworthy that 10:29 describes the continual deliberate sin (v. 26) as trampling underfoot (verb καταπατέω) the Son of God. This comparison indicates that the sinner in 10:29 treats Christ as an enemy. I am indebted to Dr. Felix Cortez for this insight.

36 I am reading 9:14 and 10:2 together. In the former, the conscience is purified from dead works, while in the latter, the conscience is cleansed from sins. According to this parallel, dead works are sins.

of the new covenant, because His priesthood redeemed believers from past transgressions and enabled them to receive the promised inheritance, the divine kingdom.

Concisely, because of Christ's priesthood, believers are able to worship God and receive the kingdom, which are the themes of 12:28. Even the theme of divine judgment, mentioned in 12:29 as the reason for reverent worship in 12:28, can be seen in relationship with Christ's priesthood. As indicated above, due to the continual practice of deliberate sin, a believer becomes enemy of God and will face judgment. What 10:26 adds to this picture is that «there no longer remains a sacrifice of sins» for that person. According to 10:29, the punishment of the former believer is deserved because he/she has «trampled under foot (verb καταπατέω) the Son of God» and «regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified» (NASB)³⁷. This statement has two basic implications: (1) the former believer has invalidated the priestly work that enables him/her, under the conditions of the new covenant, to receive the promised inheritance/the kingdom and to worship God in an acceptable way; and (2) comparing with 1:3 and 10:13, where Christ is waiting for his enemies be made a footstool for his feet, the former believer is treating Christ as enemy by trampling Him under foot. It is not a surprise that in the judgment he/she will be destroyed as an adversary. In this sense, by means of gratitude and reverent worship believers affirm Christ's priesthood. On the other hand, the fiery divine judgment is the punishment for those who reject His priesthood.

How does this large picture of gratitude for the reception of the kingdom, which is a form of reverent worship offered to God in view of the divine judgment, and all these concepts connected with Christ's mediatorial priesthood, inform chapter 13? Many scholars suggest that the exhortations to gratitude and worship in 12:28 take concrete

37 I have quoted the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995, translation because it renders the verb καταπατέω more literally.

form in the life of believers in chapter 13³⁸. To put it in another way, gratitude and worship are the key concepts to start reading chapter 13. Koester even argues that the (medieval) chapter division of 12 and 13 «obscures the natural section break» in 12:28. For him, the last section (*peroration*) of Hebrews is 12:28-13:21, finished by a benediction (13:20-21), and followed by a conclusion in 13:22-25³⁹. While there is no scholarly consensus on how to outline chapter 13, many scholars agree that 13:1-6 constitutes a subunit⁴⁰. Therefore, for the purpose of this article, I will briefly describe the structure of this subunit for the discussion of marriage in 13:4, and assume that 12:28-29 is a key link between the subsection of 13:1-6 and the content elaborated until 12:27.

2. The Subunit 13:1-6. The Immediate Context Where Marriage is Mentioned

As Attridge points out, the subunit 13:1-6 is structured in «a series of four brief hortatory couplets asyndetically coordinated

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- 38 Commenting on Heb 13:1-7, Johnson claims that «these instructions about life in community flow immediately from 12:28, which called for a giving of thanks that is a worship pleasing to God. It is striking that the service of God is expressed by moral dispositions and behaviors in common». Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 339. For DeSilva, «Hebrews 13:1-21 outlines the response that shows gratitude to God and pleases God». David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 483-484. According to Koester, «worship or service pleasing to God is the theme of the peroration. The idea is introduced in 12:28-29 (...) and developed in 13:1-21». Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 555. Cockerill maintains that, in chapter 13, the author of Hebrews gives «specific instructions on how God's people are to live this life of gratitude and awe». The author «makes concrete application of the key themes developed in the earlier part of the sermon», Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 674-675. See also L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 497-498.
- 39 Likewise, George Guthrie recognizes a section of practical exhortations in 12:28 – 13:19, followed by benediction (13:20-21) and conclusion (13:22-25). George H. Guthrie, «The Structure of Hebrews Revisited», a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Washington, DC, 2006, 2 (handout: Figure 2), accessed December 20, 2017, <https://hebrews.unibas.ch/documents/2006GuthrieH.pdf>. This is Guthrie's more recent unpublished outline of Hebrews that includes minor adjustments to his two earlier books. However, among these adjustments is the new proposal that the section of practical exhortations at the end of Hebrews is found in 12:28 – 13:19, and not in 13:1-19 as indicated in his two earlier publications. See George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1994), 144; George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 39-40.
- 40 See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 555; L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 507-521; Petter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 504-514; Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 677-688; Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 384-389.

and interspersed with comments, which offer grounds for the exhortations»⁴¹. Emphasizing the link of this subunit with 12:28-29, Cockerill stipulates that these hortatory couplets indicate «how to live the faithful life of gratitude and godly fear within the community of God's people»⁴². For a better visualization of these four pairs of exhortations, I will elaborate on Attridge's suggestion that they are divided into two blocks, namely, vv. 1-3 and 4-6⁴³ (see Table 1).

Table 1: The Hortatory Couplets in Heb 13:1-6

	Block 1	Block 2
Hortatory Couplets • Comment	Let <i>brotherly love</i> (φιλαδελφία) continue (1) Do not neglect to show <i>hospitality</i> (φιλοξενίας) (2a) • for (γὰρ) thereby some have entertained angels unawares (2b)	Let <i>marriage</i> be held in honor among all (4a) Let the <i>marriage bed</i> be undefiled (4b) • for (γὰρ) God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous (4c)
Hortatory Couplets • Comment	Remember those who are in <i>prison</i> (3a) • as (ὡς) though in prison with them (3b) And those who are <i>mistreated</i> (3c) • since (ὡς) you also are in the body (3d)	Keep your life free from love of <i>money</i> (Ἀφιλάργυρος) (5a) Be <i>content</i> with what you have (5b) • for (γὰρ) he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (5c) • so we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (6)

From a linguistic standpoint, the main difference between the two blocks is that the first one uses imperatives for the exhortations, while the second block employs «predicate adjectives and a present

41 Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 385.

42 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 676.

43 Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 385.

participle [5b] with imperatival force»⁴⁴. Conceptually speaking, it could be said that there is a communality between all the hortatory couplets, and at least two differences between the two blocks. On the whole, the four pairs of exhortations conceptually deal with love. The first couplet is related to brotherly love in general and brotherly love toward strangers, a love expressed by hospitality. The second pair deals with brotherly love toward those in prison and those who are mistreated, a love expressed by being empathically mindful of them, as if we were in their situation. The third couplet refers to matrimonial/sexual love. Finally, the fourth pair concerns the love of money. In terms of the conceptual differences between the two blocks, the first one stimulates the expression of (brotherly) love, while the second block is concerned with a distorted or perverted version of love. Therefore, whereas the first block highlights actions that need to be performed (show hospitality, remember those mistreated and those in prison), the second block emphasizes behaviors that must be avoided (adultery/sexual immorality, love for money)⁴⁵ in order to maintain or protect an institution (marriage) and a Christian virtue (contentment⁴⁶). The ideas of maintenance and protection are particularly evident in the language of holding marriage in honor (Τίμιος ὁ γάμος) and the undefiled marriage bed (ἡ κοίτη ἀμίαντος). In short, the first block stimulates the expression of love, with a focus on the brother or sister, whereas the second one warns against the distortion of love, with a focus on sexuality (adultery/immorality) and money (greed).

Another interesting difference is that God is mentioned in the second block. The fact that the attitudes toward marriage and money are somehow related to God should not be overstated. In 13:16, doing

44 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 677. The «brevity of style allows» the author «to speak with striking forcefulness». Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 683.

45 As Johnson emphasizes, the same combination of sexual and economic behavior «occurs in other New Testament texts (Luke 16:9-18; 1 Cor 5:1-6:11; Eph 5:3-5; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3-7), as it is also in a number of Hellenistic moral discourses (see Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.7.21; Lucian, *Nigrinus* 115-16; *T. Jud.* 18.2; Philo, *Abraham* 133-34; *Posterity of Cain* 116)». Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 341.

46 See Matt 6:25; Luke 3:14; 1 Tim 6:7-8; Phil 4:11.

good and sharing (εὐποιίας καὶ κοινωνίας) are actions classified as «sacrifices pleasing to God». In this sense, the practice of hospitality and the empathic concern for those mistreated and in prison could be regarded as sacrifices acceptable to God, inasmuch as they are interpreted as good works and altruism. On the other hand, the connection of block 2 with God does not derive from another passage in chapter 13, but appears already in the comments that «provide motivation for heeding the exhortations»⁴⁷. More precisely, proper attitudes toward marriage and money are motivated by specific divine actions, judgment (expressed by the verb κρίνω) and provision/help (indicated by two statements from the στ⁴⁸) respectively. The first action is negative, as it involves divine condemnation. The second one is positive, as it describes divine support.

Regarding the positive divine action of help, the author of Hebrews encourages believers to be *confident* (expressed by the participial form of the verb θαρρέω) about God's action, which excludes the fear (expressed by the verb φοβέω) of human agencies (13:6). It is noteworthy that the verb φοβέω is used in another context to depict the faith (πίστις) of Moses' parents and of Moses himself, as they did not fear the king's edict (11:23) and his anger (11:27), respectively. In fact, 10:35-39 seems to indicate that the examples of faith provided in chapter 11 are mentioned to encourage *confidence* (παρρησία, 10:36) and endurance (υπομονή, 10:37)⁴⁹. On the other

47 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 677.

48 The first statement in 13:5 («I will never leave you nor forsake you») is not literally found in the LXX. The basic difference is that in Hebrews this is a statement said by God, while in Deut 31:6, 8 this is spoken about God («He will not leave you or forsake you»). Despite this difference, the Greek language employed in Hebrews and Deuteronomy (LXX) is essentially the same. Actually, UBS indicates in its index of quotations that Heb 13:5 quotes Deut 31:6, 8 (see 863). A similar statement, now spoken by God, is found in Jos 1:5; Gen 28:15. See also Ps 37:25; 2 Cor 4:9. Regarding the second statement in Heb 13:6 («The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?») is a quotation from Ps 118:6 [117:6 LXX]. See also Pss 27:1; 56:4, 11.

49 The connection between 13:1-6 and 10:32-36 seems to be confirmed by the description of the sufferings experienced by the immediate audience of Hebrews in chapter 10. The public exposition to reproach and affliction (10:33) appears to parallel the situation of mistreatment in 13:3. Furthermore, the compassion for those in prison (10:34) parallels the exhortation to remind those in prison in 13:3. Moreover, the joyful acceptance of the plundering of property (10:34) seems to parallel the warning against the love for money and the encouragement to contentment in 13:5-6.

hand, in the contrastive example of the Israelites that died in the wilderness (3:16-17), the lack of faith or unbelief (ἀπιστία) was the reason (see 3:12, 19) for them to receive the judgment of God in His wrath, not entering the promised land that is referred in Hebrews as the rest of God (3:11, 18; 4:3). Indeed, Num 14:9 clarifies the nature of this lack of faith/unbelief in the context of the narrative of this event. In the appeal made by Joshua and Caleb (see Num 14:6-9), it was evident that the Israelites were afraid of the people of Canaan (human agencies), instead of having the confidence in the divine provision, as expressed by Joshua and Caleb, "the Lord is with us; do not fear them." Therefore, what seems to be clear in the theology of Hebrews is that, to use the language of 11:6, it is impossible to please (verb εὐαρεστῶ) God without the confidence of faith⁵⁰. This confidence is the basis for the contentment that avoids the love of money. According to this conceptual framework, such contentment pleases God, and considering that the adjective εὐαρέστως and the verb εὐαρεστῶ are employed to describe the *acceptable* worship that believers are exhorted to offer to God (12:28) and the sacrifices of doing good and sharing that *are pleasing* to God (13:16), the contentment of believers in 13:5-6 could be conceptually seen as an attitude of worship to Him.

Up to this point, I have indicated how the couplets in block 1 are concrete forms of worship, as pleasing sacrifices of doing good and sharing, and how the second couplet in block 2 is a form of worship, as contentment expressed by a faith that pleases God. How about the first couplet of block 2, which refers to marriage? Can this couplet be understood also according to the concept of worship in Hebrews, as informed by 12:28-29? With this question in mind, I will move now to a more specific discussion of marriage in Hebrews.

50 In 11:6, faith is defined as the belief that God exists, or that «He is» and «that He is a rewarder (μισθοδοτής) of those who seek Him». *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). Even though the idea of confidence is not mentioned here, I assume that the belief that God rewards believers/seekers implies confidence.

3. Marriage in 13:4

Τίμιος ὁ γάμος ἐν πᾶσιν καὶ ἡ κοίτη ἀμίαντος, πόρνους γὰρ καὶ μοιχοὺς κρινεῖ ὁ θεός

As I have discussed above, marriage is mentioned in a hortatory couplet, which includes a comment that refers to God's action of judgment to motivate, in a negative way, the audience to follow this exhortation (see Table 1). The hortatory couplet warns against the distortion of love. In this case, the protection of sexual love from perversion is achieved through a proper preservation of marriage. From a linguistic standpoint, the pair of exhortations about marriage do not use verbs, but predicate adjectives (Τίμιος, ἀμίαντος) with imperatival force⁵¹.

In the first exhortation, the adjective Τίμιος is placed in a position of emphasis (first position)⁵²: Τίμιος ὁ γάμος ἐν πᾶσιν. This adjective conveys two related meanings, namely, *being of exceptional value (costly, precious)* and *respected (held in honor, high regard)*⁵³. There are 13 occurrences of Τίμιος in the NT. Besides Heb 13:4, Τίμιος refers to a teacher held in honor (Acts 5:34), a precious life (Acts 20:24), Christ's precious blood (1 Pet 1:19), precious promises (2 Pet 1:4), a precious fruit (James 5:7), costly wood (Rev 18:12), precious stones (1 Cor 3:12), and jewels (Rev 17:4; 18:12; 16; 21:11, 19). According to this perspective, in Heb 13:4, marriage (ὁ γάμος⁵⁴) must be held in honor, which conveys the related idea of being regarded as something of exceptional value or precious. The prepositional phrase ἐν πᾶσιν

51 «This predicate construction implies the mission third person imperative, "Let ... be"». Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 682. See Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 387.

52 See Petter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 509.

53 W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.*, 1006.

54 γάμος describes the *wedding celebration* (the «public ceremony associated with entry into a marriage relationship») and the *state of being married*. W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 188. While Heb 13:4 employs γάμος in the sense of being married, the other 15 NT occurrences seem to use γάμος to refer to the wedding celebration (Matt 22:2-4, 8-12, 25:10; Luke 12:36; 14:8; John 2:1-2; Rev 19:7, 9).

seems to imply that all people⁵⁵, and not only the married couple, are involved in this practice of holding marriage in honor or attributing to it an exceptional value.

In contrast to the first exhortation, the next parallel exhortation has the articular noun in the first position of emphasis (ἡ κοίτη). Such inversion seems to suggest a chiasmic arrangement of this hortatory couplet⁵⁶. If this suggestion is accepted, the content of v. 4 could be organized according to Table 2⁵⁷.

Table 2: A Diagram of 13:4

Segment Clause 1	(A1) Τίμιος (B1) ὁ γάμος ἐν πᾶσιν (prepositional phrase)
Logical Connective	καὶ
Segment Clause 2	(B2) ἡ κοίτη (A2) ἀμίαντος πόρνους γὰρ καὶ μοιχοὺς κρινεῖ ὁ θεός (subordinate clause)

In this diagram, the parallel articular nouns ὁ γάμος and ἡ κοίτη constitute the central theme of the exhortation pair, and the parallel predicate adjectives⁵⁸ Τίμιος and ἀμίαντος express what is expected about the central theme in the hortatory couplets. A comparison of the terms employed in segment clause 1 (Τίμιος, γάμος) and the ones used in segment clause 2 (κοίτη, ἀμίαντος) seems to indicate that the first exhortation is more general, while the second

55 «The phrase ἐν πᾶσιν is taken as masculine ("by all" or "in the case of everyone"), although it could be neuter ("in every way" or "in all respects2)». Petter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 509 n 45. See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 558.

56 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 683; Petter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 510; L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 508.

57 Based on Albert L. Lukaszewski's syntactical diagram of Heb 13:4. Albert Lukaszewski, ed. *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament*, SBL Edition (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2011).

58 See the syntactic force of Τίμιος and ἀμίαντος in Heb 13:4 in the notes of Albert Lukaszewski, ed. *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament: Expansions and Annotations* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2010).

one is more specific⁵⁹. The noun *κοίτη* conveys the related meanings of "a structure for laying down" (*bed, marriage bed*) and "engagement in sexual relations" (*sexual intercourse, seminal emission*)⁶⁰. Considering the 4 NT occurrences of *κοίτη*, the term refers to bed (Luke 11:7), pregnancy (Rom 9:10)⁶¹, and sexual immorality (Rom 13:13)⁶². In Heb 13:4, the marriage bed or marital sexual relations (*κοίτη*)⁶³ should be undefiled or pure (*ἀμίαντος*⁶⁴). In the 2 NT occurrences outside Hebrews, *ἀμίαντος* describes a pure and *undefiled* religion (James 1:27), and an imperishable and *undefiled* inheritance (1 Pet 1:4). In the other occurrence of *ἀμίαντος* in Hebrews besides 13:4, this term depicts Christ as a holy, innocent, and *unstained* high priest separated from sinners (7:26). Thus, *ἀμίαντος* tends to convey a moral, cultic, or religious sense of defilement. The language of defilement in Hebrews is also used in 12:15, which associates defilement with coming short of the grace of God. As a matter of fact, the warning about the danger of defilement precedes a reference to Esau's sexual immorality in 12:16, an example that should not be followed by believers. This reference to Esau will be helpful for my comments on the justification or reason provided at the end of 13:4 for the purity of the marriage bed. Before I move to this justification, I would like to emphasize again that the hortatory couplet of 13:4 moves from a general to a more specific exhortation regarding marriage, with the implication that the «second exhortation makes the first more specific»⁶⁵. In this sense, marriage bed/marital sexual relations (*κοίτη*) specify the

59 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 683.

60 W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 554.

61 With reference to Rom 9:10, according to Louw and Nida, the meaning of this word «focuses more upon the state of pregnancy than the event of conception». L&N, 23.50.

62 Louw and Nida point out that the use of *κοίτη* in Rom 13:13 as «"sexual immorality" is a peripheral extension of meaning of *κοίτη* "sexual relations"». This extension seems to be justified by the list to which *κοίτη* is added in Rom 13:13.

63 This meaning is informed by its parallel with *γάμος* in segment clause 1.

64 See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 54.

65 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 683. For Johnson, the second exhortation of the pair «does not add but rather clarifies the first statement, by focusing on the sexual rather than the legal or relational aspects of marriage». Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 341.

topic of marriage (γάμος), and undefilement (ἀμίαντος) specifies the religious and moral sense of honor and value (Τίμιος), in reference to marital sexual relations. In this way, the hortatory couplet could be understood as follows: marriage should be honored or regarded of exceptional value (exhortation 1), and «the most fundamental way of honoring marriage is by not violating the marriage bed through sexual relationships outside marriage»⁶⁶ (the point of exhortation 2).

The more specific meaning of the second exhortation of the pair is confirmed by the reason provided at the end of 13:4 (πόρνους γὰρ καὶ μοιχοὺς κρινεῖ ὁ θεός) to motivate the attitude advised in the hortatory couplet. Firstly, the nouns πόρνους (sexually immoral people) and μοιχοὺς (adulterers) is directly related to sexual relationships (κοίτη), which means that the explanatory reason⁶⁷ at the end of 13:4 is more explicitly connected with the second exhortation of the pair. Furthermore, the prepositional phrase ἐν πᾶσιν at the end of the first exhortation suggests that this exhortation applies to the audience in general. Conversely, the inclusion of the subordinate clause that describes the motivation for the hortatory couplet, and more directly the second exhortation, has the effect of applying the second exhortation of the pair (and by extension the first exhortation) to a more specific group, namely, those who defile (in terms of sexual immorality or adultery) the marriage bed.

The specific group of people mentioned in the last part of 13:4, πόρνους (sexually immoral people or fornicators⁶⁸) and μοιχοὺς (adulterers⁶⁹), is basically characterized by sexual practices outside marriage. The nouns πόρνος and μοιχός are mentioned elsewhere in the NT in 1 Cor 6:9. Considering that these terms appear there separately in a list of unrighteous practices, they do not convey exactly the same

66 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 683.

67 Identified by the use of γὰρ.

68 See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 855. The other 10 NT occurrences of this noun are found in 1 Cor 5:9-11; 6:9; Eph 5:5; 1 Tim 1:10; Heb 12:16; Rev 21:15.

69 See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 657.

meaning⁷⁰. Since the related term πόρνη means prostitute⁷¹, the label πόρνος (fornicators) could refer to either married⁷² or unmarried people who practice sexual immorality, while μοιχοὺς (adulterers) would refer only to married people, as the concept of adultery implies unfaithfulness to a spouse⁷³.

According to this perspective, the use of πόρνος and μοιχοὺς in Heb 13:4 includes fornicators and adulterers, meaning that the defilement of the marriage bed would be caused not only by a married person having sexual relations outside his/her own marriage, but also by the sexual partner outside this marriage, who could be either a married (adulterer/fornicator) or unmarried (fornicator) person. Therefore, the general application (ἐν πᾶσιν) of the first exhortation in 13:4 (Τίμιος ὁ γάμος) is necessary, since the honor of a specific marriage depends on everyone, the husband and the wife, and also those who are outside this marriage, both married and unmarried people.

It is noteworthy that the first of the two occurrences of the noun πόρνος in Hebrews is found in 12:16, which refers to Esau as sexually immoral or totally worldly (πόρνος ἢ βέβηλος)⁷⁴. While most translations render βέβηλος as *godless* (NASB, NIV, NRSV, NET), the more precise idea conveyed by this adjective is *totally worldly* («pert. to being worldly

70 Likewise, in Matt 15:19-20, *adultery* (plural μοιχεῖαι) follows *sexual immorality* (πορνείαι) in a list of practices that make a person unclean (plural κοινοῦνται).

71 See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 854. See Matt 21:32-32; Luke 15:30; 1 Cor 6:15-16; Heb 11:31; James 2:25; Rev 17:1, 5, 16; 19:2.

72 In Matt 5:32 and 19:9, the related noun πορνεία (sexual immorality) is used for married people. See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 854.

73 See W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 657. Peter O'Brien argues that «the terms "sexually immoral" and "adulterers" are not synonymous in the New Testament: the former (*pornoi*) is a more general term for those who engage in sexual relationship outside marriage, while "adulterers" (*moichoi*...) is used of those who are unfaithful to their marriage». Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 510. See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 558; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 392.

74 I am following Lukaszewski's suggestion that πόρνος is modified by ὡς in μή τις πόρνος ἢ βέβηλος ὡς Ἡσαῦ (Heb 12:16). See his notes on Heb 12:16 in Albert Lukaszewski, ed. *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament: Expansions and Annotations*.

as opp. to having an interest in transcendent matters»⁷⁵). While the OT never explicitly accuses Esau of sexual immorality, Cockerill stipulates that the key to understand this reference is the concept of bodily desire or pleasure⁷⁶. According to this interpretation, the author of Hebrews «used the term "immoral" for Esau because he was controlled by bodily desire and because he "sold" the eternal for a pittance of the temporal»⁷⁷. Indeed, Esau «wanted the pleasures of this world» and «he paid for that pleasure like one who hires a prostitute-one could say he sold himself for that pleasure. And what a little pleasure it was. (...) Esau sold his eternal "birthright" for nothing more than "one meal"»⁷⁸.

Without entering into the discussion on whether this interpretation eliminates the possibility of a literal interpretation of Esau as *πόρνος*, in my estimation, Cockerill's point does fit the argument of Heb 12:16. Esau's sexual immorality and total worldliness is associated with the fact that he «sold his birthright for a single meal». As a result, «he was rejected», which means that he was unable to inherit (verb *κληρονομέω*) the blessing (12:17). Elsewhere in the NT, the language of inheritance (*κληρονομέω*) appears in statements where the noun *πόρνοι* (and also *μοιχοὺς* in 1 Cor 6:9-10) is mentioned, and the emphasis is that these people will not inherit (verb *κληρονομέω*) the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:5). In Rev 21:7-8⁷⁹, the language against

75 W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 173. Johnson argues that this term «means precisely to be unconcerned with the demands of God's holiness (Lev 10:10; 21:9; Ezek 4:14; 21:25; 22:36 ... 1 Tim 1:9; 4:7; 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16)». Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 324.

76 Cockerill's non-literal account of the sexual immorality of Esau in Heb 12:16 is different from the literal interpretation that assumes that the author of Hebrews is using later tradition to refer to Esau as sexually promiscuous. For Cockerill, «Hebrews rarely draws on such tradition». Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 638-639. He is aware, however, of the literal interpretation, and even quotes the sources of later tradition and the contemporary interpreters who use these traditions as the key to understand Esau's sexual immorality in Hebrews. «On the immorality of Esau see *Gen. Rab.* 63:9, 12 (commenting on Gen 25:27, 29); *Jub.* 25:1-8; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (on Gen 25:27); and Philo, *Virtues* 208; *Sobriety* 26; *Sacrifices* 120; *Alleg. Interp.* 3.2; and *QG* 4.242. See also Thompson, 259-260; Attridge, 369, esp. n. 48; and Lane, 3:454-55». Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 638n26.

77 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 639.

78 Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 639.

79 See also Rev 22:15.

πόρνοις is strong. In contrast to the inheritance (the verb κληρονομέω is used) of the one who conquers, the πόρνοις will face the divine judgment depicted as «the lake that burns with *fire* (πυρὶ) and sulfur, which is the second death» (italics mine).

If these NT parallels are read together with Heb 12:28-29 and 13:4, the divine judgment (κρινεῖ ὁ θεός, 13:4) against those (πόρνοις and μοιχοῦς) who defile the marriage bed (against exhortation 2), and dishonor marriage (against exhortation 1), can be related with the language of the kingdom and of the consuming fire of 12:28-29. The recipients of divine judgment in 13:4 will not receive the enduring kingdom mentioned in 12:28, but will face God as a consuming fire (12:29). Accordingly, their lives are not characterized by gratitude and acceptable worship to God (12:28). Conversely, the attitude of those who, being aware of the divine judgment, honor marriage and keep the marriage bed undefiled, could be seen as an act of gratitude for receiving the enduring kingdom and a reverent offering of acceptable worship to God.

Besides this conceptual connection between 13:4 and 12:28-29, a general parallel of the hortatory couplet of 13:4 (marriage) with the other pairs of exhortations in 13:1-2 (hospitality), 3 (empathy for those in prison and mistreated), and 5 (money) can be suggested. Reading these hortatory couplets with the historical situation of the immediate audience of Hebrews in mind, Koester argues that «those who show hospitality bring strangers into their homes (13:2)», and those strangers could be potential agents of marriage bed defilement in those homes. Moreover, «imprisonment of a spouse left the other spouse without marital companionship for an indefinite period (13:3)». Furthermore, «economic difficulties (13:5) sometimes led to the exchange of sexual favors in return for benefits»⁸⁰. When the exhortation of 13:4 is read with these potential situations in mind, the honor and purity of marriage is elevated above any circumstantial

80 Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 565.

need or temptation, as the rationale offered for such honor and purity focuses on God's action and not on human circumstances. In fact, the serious divine reaction (judgment) against those who dishonor and defile marriage gives an idea of the exceptional value (Τίμιος) that marriage has in the eyes of God.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the last Greek word in the hortatory couplet about prison/mistreatment, before the pair of exhortations about marriage in 13:4, is *body* (σώματι, 13:3). Indeed, *body* is a fitting term for the transition from the exhortation about mistreatment to the one about marriage. In 13:3, the body is explicitly the concrete *object* of mistreatment, but in 13:4 the body is implicitly the concrete *agent* of potential marital dishonor and defilement. The awareness that believers live *bodily* should lead them to an empathic concern for those being mistreated (the explicit point of 13:3), and it is also with their bodies that they honor or dishonor marriage. Accordingly, it is with their bodies that they show gratitude and offer reverent worship to God by honoring marriage and keeping it undefiled, just as it is with their bodies that they will face divine judgment if they dishonor and defile marriage (an implicit point of 13:4, when read in light of 12:28-29).

Conclusion

This article attempted to delineate the conception of marriage in the context of the theology of Hebrews. This attempt followed three steps: (1) it depicted the conceptual contours of the transition from chapter 12 to chapter 13, which highlights the theological tone of Hebrews; (2) it explored the conceptual micro-structure of 13:1-6 as the immediate context where marriage is mentioned; and (3) it delineated how the notion of marriage in 13:4 is connected with the two previous steps, showing how they inform the idea of marriage in that verse, especially in terms of an attitude of worship to God and the acknowledgment of the future divine judgment.

Overall, marriage in Hebrews is not an isolated concept merely mentioned along with other notions with no connections with the ideas developed in the epistle. Rather, a theological reading of 12:28-13:6 provides a rich perspective for the understanding of marriage in Hebrews, as this reading uncovers connections and implications that are not immediately evident in a simple reading of 13:4.

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