

# AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH

*A Study of Marriage as a Type of  
the Relationship between Christ  
and His Bride - the Church*

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# 1. In the beginning

**Genesis 2:18** *And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*

Six times prior to this the Lord surveyed His creation and said, “It is good.” The division of night and day, the oceans and seas teeming with glorious aquatic creatures, the kingdom of animals ranging from the winged fowls to the crawly creepers, He found nothing lacking or incomplete in them. Now, however, after the creation of man, the Lord for the first time declares, “...*It is not good that the man should be alone...*” Everything else the Lord God created elicited the response, “It is good,” except that of man. Why?

Here we must discern the first contours of a greater plan unfolding. It is not as if God did not know that man was incomplete without a woman, but, rather, that the text in Genesis is inviting us to understand and explore the mystery of marriage seen in the light of Christ’s futuristic bride - the Church. Returning to the text in Genesis 1, we read these words:

**Genesis 2:20** *And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.*

The text above gives the impression that finding a help meet for Adam was not a straightforward matter. We understand from Genesis 1 that all living creatures were made in pairs, for God commands them to procreate: “And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth” (Genesis 1:22). We can only sympathize with Adam who, much like a single man who wonders if there ever will be a “Mrs. Right” for him, is given the task of naming all the creatures one by one.

“...*but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him*” captures the essence of the mystery of marriage. Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary defines a mystery as, “a religious truth that one can know only by revelation and cannot fully understand.” We can highlight this sense of mystery with the following questions:

- Why was not Adam given a spouse concurrent with his own creation just like the other creatures?

- Why did he have to endure a period of waiting which, according to God's testimony, was not good?
- Why were all the other creatures considered "not suitable" (NIV), "not comparable" (NKJV), or "not fit" (ESV) for him?

This booklet seeks to explore these and related mysteries which will become clearer as we progress. The creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 are not to be read as two separate accounts by two different authors (as proponents of the documentary hypothesis claim), but as complementary accounts written by the same author, Moses. After the creation of the woman, the account closes with the words:

***Genesis 1:31*** *And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

It would not be an exaggeration to state that without the woman, creation was incomplete; it was her creation which was the reason that Moses added the adverb "very" before "good." The Hebrew word for "help meet" is *`ezer* and means

“one who helps or gives succor.” When given the prefix “*eli*” (God), we get *eli`ezer* or “God is help.” Consider the following two verses which have *`ezer* translated as “help.”

***Psalm 20:2*** *Send thee **help** from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;*

***Psalm 146:5*** *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his **help**, whose hope is in the LORD his God:*

If we extend this application to the Genesis creation account, a beautiful picture emerges: God intended the woman to be perceived as His “help” or *eli`ezer* extended to man. To borrow from Psalm 20:2, she is God’s help from His sanctuary. Yes, she is God’s gift to man - comparable to him, fit for him, and suitable for him. We know that Jacob waited fourteen long years for Rachel. How long Adam was made to wait for Eve we are not told. It could have been much longer than Jacob’s wait for all we know.

We also know from the Scriptures that the Lord Jesus Christ is waiting for His bride, the Church, to prepare herself. The immeasurable value of the bride is easily grasped in the great length of time the Lord patiently waits for her to prepare herself. In our fast-paced world, patience is still a virtue.

## 2. The mystery of one flesh

**Genesis 2:23** *And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*

**Genesis 2:24** *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

Adam experienced a sense of amazement at the sight of Eve. He seemed genuinely awed by the fact that God had created a creature who was made, not directly from the dust as he was, but from his own body. No other female was brought into existence as Eve was; no other male creature was put to sleep with a female emerging from its ribs. Just as the biological relationship between a father and his son or daughter triggers powerful bonds, Adam must have spontaneously experienced a profound sense of oneness and intimacy with this woman who was not a stranger, but *bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh*.

Here we need to pause and discern the genius of God in selecting this method to give Adam a wife. It is generally the norm that every individual loves himself, unless, of course, one is dysfunctional and



suffers from pathological self-hate, for instance. In creating a woman from Adam's own rib, his own physiology, God cemented the bond of affection between our first parents. Every time a man and a woman feel the pull of love and affection towards each other, they are experiencing the primal affections which naturally arise on account of their shared physiologies. The mysterious chords they mutually feel gently pulling them ever closer until they re-enact the original creation, is God-ordained. It is this primeval truth that Paul appeals to when he exhorts men to love their wives:

***Ephesians 5:28*** *So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.*

***Ephesians 5:29*** *For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:*

At this juncture, we will need to link the above with the greater mystery of the flesh of Jesus Christ. Let us summarize our findings thus far. So far we have seen how Adam had to wait for his own partner while all other creatures appear to have been created parallel with their partners. In addition, we have observed that Adam's wife was created quite unlike any other female - from the very same physiology of Adam. Furthermore, we have argued that, unlike other creatures, our first

parents were created in this unique fashion in order to trigger and cement powerful bonds of love and fidelity. We may find examples of animals and birds mating for life, but this in no way can compare to the institution of marriage, where many societies draw up elaborate laws to further and protect marriage, not to mention celebrate it in joyous ceremonies etc.

Now why did God choose to go about instituting marriage in this manner? If He so chose, He could have done it some other and equally fascinating way. A clue lies hidden in the verse below (emphasis mine):

***Romans 5:14*** *Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the **figure** of him that was to come.*

The New Living Translation (1996) puts it this way (emphasis mine):

*Still, everyone died - from the time of Adam to the time of Moses - even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. **Now Adam is a symbol, a***

***representation of Christ, who was yet to come.***

If Adam was a figure, or symbol or representation of Jesus Christ who was to come, we should look for the deeper meaning of marriage within the framework of Christ's redeeming work. In other words, the account of the creation and act of marriage in Genesis 1 and 2, points to a more profound revelation pre-figuring the relationship of Jesus with His wife, the Church.

A good place to begin is the aforementioned shared physiology between Adam and Eve. Adam not only preceded Eve but he was the source from which she derived her body. In one sense, Adam *covered* Eve with his own flesh and bones. It appears that the mystical union in marriage is beautifully symbolized in the act of the male relative *covering* the female, as in the case of Ruth and Boaz.

***Ruth 3:9*** *And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.*

There is the tacit recognition in Ruth's declaration that the man is the source of her own flesh and bones, and that in covering her with the corner of his garment, they were symbolically re-enacting

the creation act. Contrast this with the two harlots, Aholah and Aholibah (Ezekiel 23), who represented Samaria and Jerusalem respectively. Intriguingly, both names stem from root words meaning, “having their own tents or *coverings*.” They were harlots because, although having a covering (husband), they were promiscuous and sought their own coverings (husbands).

We can take this thread on the flesh of Christ acting as a *covering* and extend it to the New Testament teaching of uncut hair on a woman. The apostle Paul writes:

**1 Cor 11:15** *But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.*

In the creation account we noted that Eve derived her body from Adam through a divine act. If we follow our earlier thread on Adam’s flesh and bones acting symbolically as a covering for Eve, it seems reasonable to assume that long or uncut hair is her way of acknowledging this debt and demonstrating her submission to the divine order. Note in the verses that follow that this seems to be the logic underpinning Paul’s argument:

**1 Cor 11:7-10** *For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.*

In stating that the woman is *the glory of man*, Paul is stressing the fact that the woman had her source in the man and reflects his glory and praise. Further to this, just as Christ's existence is not contingent upon the existence of His bride, the Church, the man also had a separate existence which was complete (albeit lacking only the companionship of the woman). That the woman owes her very existence to man (through the agency and will of the Almighty) is the biblical rationale for her submission to her husband.

*For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels* (I Cor 11:10) appears obscure. Who are these angels? Commentators fall into two groups - one which believe these to be the holy angels, and the other, fallen ones. The first group side with the holy angels citing that they are present in church and consider the order of the saints. The other group is convinced that Paul is alluding to the spiritual chaos in the days of Noah when angels, in their opinion, lusted after

women who were rebellious. Whichever side one leans towards, both interpretations underline the importance of obedience and submission to divine order, which is embodied in the creation of Adam and Eve.

In our modern and trying times, much debate and rancor has focused on the unequal relations between men and women, something which no doubt must be redressed, however, Christians must shift the center of the discussion back to where it rightly belongs: God's plan for marriage understood as a symbol of His relationship with the Church. Christ preceded the Church, His bride. Because Adam's flesh can only breed death and decay on account of the Fall, it was necessary for God to clothe Himself in heavenly flesh to save His bride, the Church. The Word was made flesh (John 1:14) to clothe and cover us with His heavenly garments.

***Philippians 3:21*** *Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*

When Jesus told Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of

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God” (John 3:5), He was drawing his attention to the need for putting on the flesh and bones of the bridegroom - Jesus Christ. This is clearly spelled out in the command to be *born again* which implies that an earlier birth - a former flesh - has been rejected. We can observe the theme of flesh and bones repeated again in the discourse of Jesus. It is for this very reason that Jesus is referred to as the “second Adam.”

**1 Cor 15:45** *And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

It would be an error to think that an earthly marriage is the only lens through which we can approach the heavenly union between Christ and His bride, but it is a fantastic microcosm through which the eternal mystery of Christ and the Church can be grasped. Surely, the biblical pattern is one of sacrificial love and commitment which bears no resemblance to many modern marriages shot through with physical and psychological abuse, bitterness, and petty squabbling, which occasionally end in tragedy.

**Ephesians 5:25** *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

One vital lesson God expects us to glean from our study thus far is the necessity of marrying in the Lord alone. This truth can be summarized in this way: Adam had to wait for his bride because his union with her was a type of Christ's union with His bride, the Church. His wife had to conform to the eternal template ordained by God before the creation of the world. Adam's bride had to emanate from his own physical body, just as the Church puts on the body of Christ through baptism in Jesus name.

***Galatians 3:27*** *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

The story of Abraham selecting a bride for his son, Isaac, is instructive in that it demonstrates Abraham's understanding of this principle. In seeking a suitable bride for Isaac, Abraham is at pains to stress that Eliezer limit the quest to his own blood relatives alone.

***Genesis 24:3, 4*** *And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.*



Why was Abraham so adamant that Eliezer only bring a wife from his own kindred? There were no doubt plenty of brides who would have been honored to be called after the name of Abraham. In order to understand Abraham's command, we will need to grapple with the covenant of circumcision first given to Abraham.

**Genesis 17:10, 11** *This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.*

Let us analyze the above verse in light of our earlier discussion about the flesh and bones of Adam providing a *cover* for Eve. Circumcision was a brutal and bloody act which disfigured the male genital of an eight-day old child. Keep in mind that God forbade any cuttings or incisions on the body, except for circumcision.

**Leviticus 19:28** *Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD.*

So what was circumcision supposed to mean? What message did it seek to convey? It simply expressed the truth that Adam's flesh and bones could no longer provide a worthy covering for his

bride and children. The bruising and marring of the male reproductive anatomy bore stark evidence of this truth. The throwing away of the foreskin, which became synonymous with every detestable thing that Israelites associated with the gentiles, represented the discarding of the adamic bodily covering. Those who obeyed this command were actually acknowledging the inadequacy of the adamic covering and, by faith, looked forward to the covering of the Messiah over the bride, the Church.

This brief analysis explains Abraham's reticence at the idea of securing a bride from among non-members of his family. Abraham would not break the pattern of the heavenly; after all, he was the father of faith and the faithful. Christ can only provide a covering of His heavenly flesh and blood for those who enter into the covenant of Acts 2:38 with Him:

**Act 2:38** *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

### 3. Husbands love your wives

***Ephesians 5:25*** *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

***Colossians 3:19*** *Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*

In the admonitions above, the apostle Paul specifically commands the men to *love* their wives and the wives to *respect* their husbands. We will see in this and the next chapter why the commands are so specific. In this chapter I will consider the command for men to love their wives. There are several reasons no doubt that we can enlist to buttress this command, but I will limit the discussion to two:

- The command as a check on the misuse of power.
- The command as a method for enhancing mutual respect.

Beginning with the first aspect, few would deny that men have long displayed a tendency towards misuse of power, especially in regards to women. The pages of history provide abundant witness for this abuse which often arises due to the unequal power relations between men and women. The

subject of the precise machinations of power has given rise to a myriad of theories. Academia focuses on feminist, Marxist, and postmodern (Foucault, for example) theories, to name a few. Nevertheless, as this study is a Bible-based one, I will limit my examples to the witness from its hallowed pages. It is instructive that the first bigamist (one man married to two women) in the Bible, Lamech, not only was violent, but arrogant.

***Genesis 4:23 & 24:*** *And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.*

This is the first time that men began to deviate from the original plan of God for marriage. It is of more than passing interest that Cain is mentioned by Lamech. Sadly, Lamech seems to be perversely influenced by the example of Cain's murder, boasting that he will be avenged seventy-seven fold. The text above suggests that when violence, murder and boasting became routine in the history of man, this was accompanied by the practice of polygamy. Rather than feel remorse, it is truly shocking that Lamech publicized his sin to his two wives. This should come as no surprise to us because the Lord already made the connection

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between the “hardness of the heart” and bigamy/polygamy.

***Matthew 19:8*** *He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*

Based on Jesus’ words above, it is incumbent on us to understand that one man was not created to have two or more wives as seems to be the case in the lives of even the great heroes of faith, such as Abraham and David. What we observe in the case of Lamech and the words of the Lord is that males are prone to “hardness of the heart,” especially in relation to their wives. It is for this reason that the command for husbands to love their wives is given - to act as a check on this tendency towards hardness.

Again, if we keep in mind that the very reason God made the woman from the rib of the man is precisely to endear her to him, the commandment to love his wife makes perfect sense. Had God intended for one man to take two wives, He would have produced two wives from his ribs. Besides, and more crucially, this would distort the heavenly pattern - Christ has only one bride, not two or more. As I mentioned previously, a husband will be well-served in remembering that in loving and cherishing his wife, he is honoring

and fulfilling the pattern of the heavenly - through his love and commitment he constantly reaffirms and becomes a participant in the eternal love story between Christ and the Church; now that is an enduring love story.

Let us return again to the theme of the commandment for a man to love his wife. So far I have indicated that this injunction was designed to curtail his proneness towards misuse of power. It is worth our while to consider two different methods of exercising power in the proto-marriage era, as outlined in the Book of Genesis. Now, it is my contention that *before* the Fall Adam exercised a more benign headship over the woman (and all creation). Prior to the Fall, Adam's headship was legitimate only in the sense that he was the first in the created order, something akin to the right of the firstborn son. In the aftermath of the Fall, however, a new and apparently negative element of power is introduced into the relationship by God.

***Genesis 3:16*** *Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall **rule** over thee.*

If my interpretation is correct, we are looking at two divergent notions of power in the Genesis account in the evolving interpersonal relations between the man and his wife, something which would impact on all their descendants. I believe something insidious was injected into their relationship after their rebellion. Earlier, the man's headship can be usefully compared to that of the firstborn son in the family. What kind of rule does such a one exercise? It is one where he feels a certain responsibility for the welfare of his siblings; one in which he generally doesn't boss them around (that is left to the patriarch), and in which he mostly seeks to perpetuate the legacy of the family name.

Sadly, because of the Fall, a new and menacing curse was sown into the otherwise blissful relations between husband and wife. Again, regretfully, it seems that because Eve took the initiative in *preaching* to Adam rebellion, she found herself on the receiving end of the curse of ruling. We can discern the twofold nature of this exercise of power in the words of Paul:

***1 Timothy 2:11-14*** *But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*

Paul clearly demarcates the two ways that man now exercised power. One was by virtue of the order or chronology of creation, while the other was punitive. Nevertheless, the woman was to have the final say because Paul continues:

***1Timothy 2:15*** *Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*

Paul is here alluding to the great hope of all nations - the coming of the promised Messiah through a woman. The Devil's victory over the woman was short-lived when he heard God prophesy that she would be the vessel through which the Messiah would come and bruise his head.

***Genesis 3:15*** *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

What a beautiful picture emerges when this is seen within the lens of God's unfailing love for His bride, the Church! It was to redeem His bride that Jesus laid down His life. For men the message is crystal clear: Christ's undying love for His bride is the model that should guide their conjugal ties.



Another appalling story from the pages of the Bible should suffice to highlight the ugliness of men's misuse of power with respect to women. The very fact that a mighty man of God, David, is used to illustrate this point is a sobering thought indeed. David's love towards God is gloriously portrayed in the Psalms. They lyrically showcase some of the most sublime expressions of love ever showered on the Almighty, and countless individuals throughout history have borrowed his words in their liturgies and personal devotions.

Somehow, though, the fact that David not only had many wives but also lied, schemed, and murdered to bed one more woman - who was married - casts a shadow upon his otherwise blameless love for God.

**2 Sam 11:27** *And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.*

That this story has even found its way into the pages of the Bible reflects positively on the justice and righteous indignation of God. David's misuse of power was displeasing to the Lord. We rarely hear preachers talk about the suffering of David's legal wife (or wives). What did they feel about being married to a man who could look out from

his balcony and sleep with any woman he fancied?  
How can a woman respect her husband if he  
occasionally abuses his power to humiliate her?  
For her to respect him, he needs to love her.  
There can only be one way out of this  
predicament - husbands love your wives.

Before we proceed, there is one phrase that  
disturbs many men - even Christian ones who do  
their utmost to adhere to the Bible. It is the one  
which dictates the degree to which we are to love  
our wives - *as Christ loved the church and gave himself  
for it* (Ephesians 5:25). Christ loves one church  
alone and He laid His life down for her. Men are  
commanded to emulate this great example. There  
are wives who feel they are trapped in a long and  
committed marriage, but one in which there is no  
love. It is like being condemned to a long but  
uneventful life.

It is not difficult to find women who are loved  
and cherished by their husbands. It seems to show  
all over their faces and is demonstrated in their  
positive outlook towards life in general.  
Communication is a central feature of a successful  
marriage, both verbal and non-verbal. This should  
not be difficult to grasp if we remember that the  
woman was created because God declared that  
man should not be lonely. Put differently, women

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are ideally made for conversation and companionship. It is for this reason that telephone companies would rather speak to the woman of the house and not the man. Not only are they good speakers, but, and more importantly, good listeners too. On the flipside, this is perhaps what got Eve into trouble in the first place - she made time for conversation with the serpent. This is where she could have deferred to her husband, Adam. As is often the case, men are not the best at conversation and would rather come straight to the point. Consider this: in listing 9 differences between men and women, one study claims the following:

***Language:** Women often excel at language-based tasks for two reasons: two brain areas that deal with language are larger in females, and females process language in both hemispheres while males favor a single brain half.<sup>1</sup>*

Clearly, this seems to align with what God had in mind when he created the woman. How often do we hear women say to men, “Are you listening?”

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<sup>1</sup> 9 Differences Between the Male and Female Brain. *Brain Fitness for Life*. <http://www.brainfitnessforlife.com/brain-anatomy-and-imaging/9-differences-between-the-male-and-female-brain/>  
Accessed 8.02.2013

On the other hand, men have often confided to me that they just cannot keep pretending to be interested in the constant “chatter” of their wives. They may nod politely as if interested but have disconnected early in the conversation. The solution, as always, is the Word of God. A husband should understand and accept that loneliness is contrary to God’s plan for him. As such, he should embrace - or rather rejoice - at God’s solution, the woman. Earlier, I spoke about a wife who is loved. Proverbs 31: 10-30 is a good reference. Here are some excerpts.

*Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands... She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms... She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant... She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness... Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her... Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.*

Both in business and domestic affairs the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 excels. Notice that she comes across as a proactive individual; she *seeks* wool...she *considers* a field and buys it, she *arises* at night etc. This is far removed from the caricatured figure of the “pious” and “submissive” woman who doesn’t move a finger without her husband’s permission. Modern feminists who attack the Bible for purportedly propagating this latter image ought to consider Proverbs 31. This is a strong, industrious, conscientious, and proactive woman who engages in business and runs her household with wisdom. Such is her virtue that her husband trusts completely in her judgment, for, *She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.*

Furthermore, this woman *openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.* This latter sentence is vital as we shall see in the next chapter. Jesus noted that “...*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh* (Mark 12:34). A woman, whose husband constantly puts her down, especially in public, will have to deal with a wife who disrespects him occasionally in public where it hurts most. Perhaps the man who said, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” was only receiving his due. What goes around comes around. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 must have been truly loved by her husband for she opened her mouth to speak words of wisdom and

kindness. If a man wishes to enjoy a home environment similar to that of Proverbs 31 (which man wouldn't?), the answer was given by a rabbi and apostle 2000 years ago:

***Ephesians 5:25*** *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

Although not central to this discussion, some have wondered how the apostle Paul, as an unmarried man, could understand the problems of marriage. Actually, the issue of whether Paul was married or not is still up for debate. In I Corinthians 7:8 Paul counsels the widows to stay unmarried just as he does. The Greek word *agamos* is used to refer to a widow who has lost a spouse. Moreover, as an ardent Pharisee, it was conventional to marry at some point. Finally, the fact that Paul seems to be intimately conversant with the dynamics of marriage, offering profoundly useful counsel, seems to indicate that he was married at some point in his life, but that God endowed him with the gift of celibacy to fulfill his mission to reach a lost and dying world.

## 4. Wives respect your husbands

*1Pe 3:1, 2, 5, 6* Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

Whether it was Paul or Peter, they seemed to stress two different characteristics for the men and the women. Men were commanded to *love* their wives whereas women were commanded to *respect* or submit to their husbands. This is not just coincidental if we take the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. We have looked in the previous chapter at the need for men to love their husbands because marriage is a symbol of the perfect love between Christ and His bride, the Church. Let us now look at the need for women to respect their husbands.

Note in the verse above that Peter believes that wives can actually be a vehicle for their unsaved husbands to be saved, if they submit to their husbands and conduct themselves as Christians.

This sounds counterproductive: should men's arrogance be rewarded with submission? Peter is here revealing something most men know, but few women apparently. I admit that this part should be easy for me to write about by virtue of being a man, but I pray the Spirit of the Lord to guide my thoughts.

What is respect? One simple way of defining it is the quality or state of being esteemed. Whether they admit to it or not, males yearn for respect and recognition. Much of what they do, at some stage or the other, is put on display in the hope of eliciting a well-timed "bravo" or "Well done." Now for women this may be hard to wrap their heads around (some women I have talked to just shake their heads in disbelief), but bear with me.

If this is hard to believe then just consider who the overwhelming majority of the world's explorers or inventors, besides the odd Marie Curie, were - males. Ever since a boy understands that his friends, parents, and society in general applauds achievements and loves winners, he applies himself vigorously to what can be summed up by the Olympic motto, *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, which is Latin for "Faster, Higher, Stronger". In their heart of hearts, few men care for the other Olympic motto, "The most important thing is not



to win but to take part!” The writer of Proverbs is aware of this (although the latter part is perhaps not as popular as it once was, thanks to hair dye).

***Proverbs 20:29*** *The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.*

Everything around us seems to confirm this observation that men yearn for respect. Men seem to be on an ever-ending quest for recognition and honor. If it isn't the field of sports, then they will test their abilities elsewhere. Military awards and distinctions and University degrees are other inventions made to cater for this incessant need for respect. I recently attended my PhD graduation in the field of Education at King's College, London, University of London. Those of us (about 5) who were PhD graduates wore a blue and red gown while the rest, who numbered in the hundreds, wore yellow.

Much as I felt a sense of well-deserved accomplishment, I did look around at this medieval spectacle and wonder which attention-starved male was responsible for this not-so-subtle invention. In the Bible, another male, the patriarch Jacob, decided to express his love for his favorite son, Joseph, with a unique multicolored coat which turned out to be a dangerous undertaking.

Now before women dismiss this whole matter as a charade, we need to ask whether this is something the Almighty Himself may have hardwired into men. After all, not only was Adam made to have “dominion” over all of creation, but the Bible itself frequently exhorts us to seek the rewards and crowns which are laid up in heaven.

**1Cor 9:25** *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

**Revelation 22:12** *And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*

Respect undoubtedly is a vital ingredient in the psychosocial make-up of a male. In the inner cities of the USA sociologists have carefully studied the dynamics of gang culture and concluded that the word “respect” plays a central role, especially with respect to black males. Given the denigration of slavery, the deprived neighborhoods, broken families, and bleak prospects staring them in the face everywhere, males cling on to an idealized concept of “respect” as the only means of salvaging what remains of their human dignity.

With this background in mind, the command for the wife to respect her husband becomes all the more important. It would be wrong, even pathetic, if a man keeps demanding that his wife respect him, but the Spirit of the Lord will gently sensitize the god-fearing wife to show him respect. One reason many marriages are unhappy is because the couple do not openly speak about these issues with each other, and even if they did, they risk hurting each other further as they miss out on the two golden pillars of marriage - love and respect.

We can sum up the twin-barreled concept of love and respect as follows: a husband ought to love his wife unconditionally because Jesus loved the Church unconditionally and, in the same vein, a wife ought to respect her husband because he symbolically represents the headship of Christ over the Church. A wife who is loved will also find it easy to reciprocate with respect and the same goes for the husband who is respected. A house built on these two biblical foundations will indeed be a house founded upon the rock because these pillars spring from the Word of God (Luke 6:48).

## 5. The power of two

***Ecclesiastes 4: 9-11*** *Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?*

Husband and wife teams who are united in the Lord are a powerhouse for good. Through one couple, Abraham and Sarah, God spawned a mighty nation, Israel, which has impacted upon our world and is still with us today. When Abraham and Sarah agreed together to submit to the will of God and journey to Canaan, little did they realize that their unity would result in earth-shaking biblical events, such as the destruction of a superpower, Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, the fall of the walls of Jericho, David and Goliath, Elijah at Carmel, and, above all, the manifestation of the One God Himself in flesh, Jesus Christ (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:14). This is the power of two.

In this chapter, we need to go beyond the love and respect which constitute the foundation for a solid and fulfilling marriage. In all of human relations, nothing is designed to unite and keep

two people together for a longer period of time than marriage. Therefore, obviously, how a couple spends this time together is crucial. The Christian couple must discern the great potential of their marriage to be a force for good in furthering the kingdom of God.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 summarizes some of the potential of marriage. Firstly, the two have a great reward for their labor. Secondly, the one who is strong can lift the other up, and they can attend to each other's physical needs. Let me be quick to state that being single can no doubt be part of the will of God for some people, such as the apostle Paul, but the subject of this booklet is biblical marriage. All the same, even Paul recommended marriage because of widespread fornication in Corinth, a city famous for its Temple prostitutes. One man in the church even had illicit sex with his father's wife (The New Living Translation says "stepmother"). Our world today can, at times, be worse.

***1 Cor 7:1, 2** Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*

Returning to the theme of the power of godly unity in marriage, this truth is well-illustrated in

the lives of Aquila and Priscilla. In fact, each time they are mentioned in the Bible, they are mentioned together. We are first introduced to them in Acts 18:2 as a Jewish couple who moved to Corinth because the Roman Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome. What must have been a painful and humiliating experience turned out to be the hand of God because this couple now became trusted co-workers in the ministry of the apostle Paul. That this union was not a freak twist of fate is evident from the fact that they were in the same trade of tent-making as Paul. We can be sure that this generous and sacrificing couple often shared their profits with the apostle who worked day and night to bring souls into the kingdom of Christ.

When Paul decided to travel to Jerusalem via Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). Paul must have genuinely enjoyed their company. The name *Levi* means “attached to God,” something which was amply demonstrated in the lives of this God-dedicated couple. Later, when Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth, he did not forget to pass on the greetings of Aquila and Priscilla who were of such timely assistance to him in Corinth.

**1 Cor 16:19** *The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*

Note once again that *with the church that is in their house* implies that this couple had opened their house for prayers and services in the city of Ephesus from where Paul was now writing the Letter to the Corinthians. Clearly, they were addicted to the ministry and were united as one to honor the Lord through their marriage.

Now while they were in Ephesus, without the commanding presence of Paul, this couple was determined to continue in the spirit and example of Paul. When a certain preacher called Apollos came to Ephesus preaching John's baptism, they gently sprung into action:

**Act 18:26** *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*

Observe carefully that they *took him unto them*. This indicates that they befriended him and invited him to their house. This is one of the many advantages of a couple united for Jesus - they have a greater array of methods and tools to draw from. A Christian man alone would be

constrained in reaching out to a woman, for example, and the other way round. Once they endeared Apollos to them, it was much easier to share with him the message of baptism in Jesus name as Paul had expounded to them.

That the great apostle Paul had himself been a close associate of Aquila and Priscilla must have played a role in the respect that Apollos accorded them. This couple worked with an apostle, corrected a preacher, and started house churches. None of this would have been possible if their marriage was not built on the twin pillars of love and respect, and lived for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have, like most Christians, often quoted the Lord's words in Matthew 18:19 & 20 to refer to a plurality of believers praying or interceding for a common purpose. However, somehow, we forget to apply this principle to marriage too:

***Matthew 18: 19, 20*** *Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

Unlike two believers who are not married, a married couple is generally in close enough

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proximity to each other to *agree on earth as touching anything*.

This power of a married Christian couple to do great things for God can unfortunately also unleash terrible consequences if it is misused. Ananias and Sapphira sold their possessions and *agreed together* to lie to the apostles (Acts 5). Here we observe a parallel with Adam and Eve who were also united in their determination to eat the fruit together and become “gods”. The power of conjugal unity is multiplied several-fold for good or evil. A single person who is in doubt about a certain decision may struggle and decide to postpone that decision, but, once in a relationship, that individual will be more inclined to succumb to constant pressure from the spouse.

I have often wondered why Ananias and Sapphira gave half of their goods. It appears that like the children of Israel in the days of Elijah, they halted between two opinions. To give all their possessions would mean that they were totally “sold out” to God, a most commendable thing. Conversely, to give none of their possessions would imply greediness and selfishness, and yet they could not decide to fully trust in the Lord. At least the rich young ruler was honest and went away because he had great possessions, but Ananias and Sapphira were destroyed because of

indecision. Choose ye this day whom you will serve takes on added meaning here. Their sin was that they were neither hot nor cold, and we know what the Lord thinks about this twilight zone.

**Revelation 3:15, 16** *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*

The tragedy of this couple can be brutally captured in the statement: Ananias and Sapphira *lied* together and *died* together. In addition to halting between two opinions, they got carried away by the spirit of generosity that was sweeping the Jerusalem Church and they wanted some recognition. Some people are willing to do whatever it takes to be given special mention in the Church. The judgment on Ananias and Sapphira should forever warn us of the dangers of seeking unmerited recognition.

I have never understood why Adam passively ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil without putting up some serious resistance. Some have wondered if, since “Adam was not deceived,” according to Paul (I Tim 2:14), he must have decided of his own volition to support his wife whom he loved so dearly. I am

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not sure I subscribe to this speculation, but, if it has any credibility, this only magnifies the effects of a husband and wife's power to agree.

Thankfully, the pages of the Bible reveal some great examples of husbands and wives who refused to agree with their spouses for evil. Abigail is one such case in point:

**1 Samuel 25:25** *Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send.*

Abigail's husband was called *Nabal* which means "fool." Given all that I have written about a wife respecting her husband, we run into a crisis of sorts when we read that his name was "fool." Needless to say, it is a challenge for a wife to love a husband called "fool." Nonetheless, Abigail still lived with this man, despite his shortcomings. Now, however, Nabal's folly was about to cause the destruction of his entire family, and Abigail decided the time for respect was gone.

David was aggrieved that Nabal had shown no gesture of appreciation for the security he had been afforded. In a sense, Nabal, and, by extension, Abigail, prospered because David and

his men protected their livelihood. Surely, common courtesy dictates that Nabal return this favour. Rather, Nabal insulted David, true to his foolish nature. Such was the humility and pleading of Abigail that David restrained himself from shedding blood. Despite this, Nabal died shortly after when he heard what David was planning to do to him, and the story ends with David marrying Abigail. Had Abigail agreed together with Nabal, the story would have ended with tragedy for the entire family. Unity must be in the Lord alone for a married couple.

The other great example is Job, a man whose patience is legendary. It is understandable that his wife was very distressed as she witnessed every blessing slipping away right before her eyes. The list is truly astounding: his entire livelihood destroyed in one day - donkeys, oxen, sheep and camels, and seven sons and three daughters killed by falling debris as they sat in their eldest brother's house (Job 1:14-20). The reaction of Job is unprecedented and worthy of a great man of God.

***Job 1: 20:22*** Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of

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*the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*

The real test for Job, however, must have been his wife's words, *Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die* (Job 2:9). Here is an instance of a man who received no help whatsoever from his spouse contrary to Ecclesiastes 4:10: *For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow.* In reality this was a case of one falling and the other kicking him while he is down. Job's wife failed in her role as the *ezer* (help) sent from God. This makes the resilience and faith of Job even more remarkable given that his own wife persuaded him to abandon faith in God.

Every spouse needs to reflect now and then on the kind of influence they are having on their partners. Few writers have portrayed the sinister nature of the power of persuasion that a spouse can have in a marriage like Shakespeare. In *Macbeth*, the reader shudders at the evil influence of Lady Macbeth upon her husband, the Scottish general, Macbeth. She shores up the courage of her hesitant husband pushing him to murder King Duncan to fulfil the prophecy of the trio of witches and put the blame on the king's chamberlains. She was sorely mistaken in her delusion: "[a] little water clears us of this deed" (2.2.66). Her punishment was just: she descends

into madness unable to cope with the guilt of her crimes and dies.

The power of a couple's unity to further the will of God is a type of Christ working with and through His bride, the Church, to release great and manifold blessings. Isn't it exciting that the Lord exhorts His people to "put him in remembrance?"

***Isaiah 43:26*** *Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.*

In other words, God is not unreasonable; He is not a petty tyrant but challenges His bride to even "argue with him," as the English Standard Version has it. Doesn't this sound like a couple discussing an issue intensely? God wants the Church to wrestle with Him in prayer; to intercede and remind Him of His promises. A Church that does not pray is like a spouse who gives the other a calculated "silent treatment" as a form of punishment. This is as far as the parallels go however as the Lord is infallible and can never go wrong. In the relationship between the Lord and His Church it will always be the Church which struggles to keep up with Him.

## 6. Marriage and children

***Malachi 2:15*** *And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.*

***Malachi 2: 15*** *Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth (New Living Translation).*

The Bible is clear that God desires the marriage union to produce and nurture children who know and love Him. Adults can often fail to appreciate this important point. It is easy for us to overlook children in the mistaken belief that there are more important things to attend to. We may even perceive them as an annoyance to be shooed, silenced, or disciplined. How far-removed these attitudes are from the heart of Jesus can be gauged from the passage below:

***Matthew 19:14*** *But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

**Matthew 19:15** *And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*

In Malachi 2:15 God underscores one of the major purposes of marriage: God-fearing children. A Christian marriage which fails to fulfill this criterion will always be tormented with this failure. As we have continually made connections to the heavenly pattern thus far, the corresponding image here is Christ giving birth to spiritual seed (I Peter 1:23) and the Church nurturing those children through His Spirit and guidance.

**Isaiah 66:8** *Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.*

A God-fearing marriage will generally produce God-fearing children. Isaac built altars and worshipped God often because that is what he saw his father do; Philip, one of the seven deacons, had four daughters who prophesied because their father was a man of God filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 21:8 & 9); and Samuel was a mighty prophet because he was the son of a praying woman. In other words, the quality of Christian marriages will determine the quality of the next generation of saints in the Church.

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Perhaps more than ever in the history of the Christian Church there is a need for marriages to provide a holy, loving, and solid environment for children to grow up in. At a time when the very definition of marriage has been severely undermined, the Church must redouble its efforts to teach, guide, and pray for married couples. What is called for is not an iron-fist policy which instills wholesome principles through fear, but a wise, patient, and prayerful attitude. I find it significant that Paul admonishes fathers in particular:

***Ephesians 6:4*** *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

***Colossians 3:21*** *Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.*

Fathers have a perfect model in God Himself, (we call Him “Abba Father”). In His relations with Israel, God was a loving Father to them. He told Pharaoh that Israel was His first-born son. When they went astray, He sent them prophets rising early to plead with them to return. Paul said to the Athenians, *And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent* (Acts 17:30). What a tremendous example of

love and patience the Father of spirits of all flesh is! (Hebrews 12:9).

Somehow, with the help of the Lord, parents have to find a balance between the extremities of parenting. Eli the High Priest can represent one extreme of the spectrum in that he failed to provide a firm godly leadership for his sons for which he ended up paying with his own life. The verses below are an indictment on Eli:

**1 Samuel 2:12** *Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.*

**1 Samuel 2:29** *Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?*

On the other end of the spectrum is a pastor I knew years ago who meant well, but maintained unsustainable levels of pressure on his children. Paul's exhortation not to provoke one's children is apt here. Marriages which take seriously the command to love and respect will in turn inculcate these valuable characteristics in the children.

I would like to conclude this study on the mystery of marriage with a brief look at the two verses below written by the apostle John.

***John 19:34*** *But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.*

***1John 5:6*** *This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.*

I believe there is a beautiful symbolism behind the blood and water that issued from the *side* of Jesus. We recall that God took a rib from Adam from which he made his wife. In a similar vein, it was the blood and water issuing from the side of the Lord which constituted the holy elements through which He redeemed His bride, the Church. In other words, both brides were taken from the side of their husbands and share the same “DNA”, if you will. This is truly a marvelous representation of the relationship between the man and his wife and Christ and His bride, the Church. Nothing represents intimacy better than one’s own side.

***Revelation 21:2*** *And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

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***Numbers 6:24*** *The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:*

***Numbers 6:25*** *The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:*

***Numbers 6:26*** *The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*