

# Man & Wife

Genesis 2:18-25

We've seen God establishing His covenant of grace not just with individuals but with households, promising to bless to a thousand generations (Dt. 7:9). These blessed generations are made in the covenant of marriage, the wonderful union of man and woman.

## Summary of the Text

For the first time in the creation narrative, Yahweh God says something is not good: for man to be alone (v. 18). To remedy this, He will make a helper suitable or comparable to him, but first He brings every beast of the field and birds of air to Adam so he can name them (v. 19). Adam completes this but notices there is no helper like to him, so God puts him into a deep sleep, takes out one of his ribs, fashions it into a woman, and brings her to him (vv. 20-22). Adam then speaks the first words by a person recorded in Scripture, praising his wife who is both like and yet different from him (v. 23). The author point out that this is paradigmatic for all of humanity: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (v. 24). The man (*adam*) and his wife (*ishah*) were naked and unashamed (v. 25).

## A Comparable Helper

Adam was made to do a job: to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it (Gen. 1:28). To do this he needs help. He does not need a hired hand or someone to follow orders, but a comparable helper, meaning someone who matches up and complements him. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Helper who would come and lead the church into all truth (Jn. 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). He is equal to Jesus, fully God, but has a specific role to carry out the plan of the Father and the work of the Son. Adam needs another image bearer like him to help him get dominion over the earth and fill it with people, and God gave him the perfect helpmeet: "For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:8-9). Some people find this orientation offensive or demeaning because they can't imagine unity and diversity, equality in value and yet differing strengths and roles coinciding harmoniously. These people are called chauvinists and feminists. But Scripture teaches us to rejoice, as Adam and Eve did, in the way God made us both different and interdependent: "Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God" (1 Cor. 11:11-12). Men are oriented to the mission, and women are oriented to the man and that mission. Adam needs Eve's wisdom (see Proverbs), industry, support, and fruitfulness. Eve needs Adam's leadership, protection, and provision. When the serpent comes, Adam doesn't guard or protect Eve, and Eve doesn't look to Adam to lead (Gen. 3:1-2, 17; 2:15). Instead of faithfulness begetting faithfulness, sin begets sin death enters our world.

## One Flesh Union

Adam and Eve established the pattern of a man leaving his father and mother and joining his wife, and the two becoming one flesh. We get dressed up, witness vows, and celebrate this at weddings. A marriage consists of a man and a woman, covenant vows to be faithful to one another, and sexual union. We know "one flesh" refers to sexual union because Paul tells the Corinthians that a man who is joined to a prostitute is one flesh with her (1 Cor. 6:16). The one-flesh union in marriage is wonderfully taught and celebrated in Scripture, and not prudishly at all. The Bible must teach us how to think and speak about these things, and not the sensibilities of another era like the 50's which gave birth to the 60s or Victorian England when red

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light districts thrived. Before the fall Adam and Eve worked, rested, ate, spoke poetry, and made love. While public nudity after the fall is shameful, before the fall both Adam and Eve are naked and unashamed. Though sin will introduce accusation and alienation into marriage (cf. Gen. 3:12), Adam and Eve are given tunics of animal skins by the Lord to cover their shame, a picture of the sacrifice the second Adam will make to atone for sin and reconcile us to God and one another (Gen. 3:21). After God pronounces the curse on the serpent, the woman, and the man (including the promise of the triumph of grace in Gen. 3:15), Adam names his wife Eve “because she was the mother of all the living” (Gen. 3:20). He apparently believes God’s promise to multiply her seed, “knows” Eve, and she conceives (Gen. 4:1). So right at the beginning we see the gift of love in marriage, the brokenness sin brings, and the restoration accomplished by grace. Responding to questions about “any reason” divorce, Jesus affirms the goodness of sex in marriage, quoting and commenting on Genesis 2:24: “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6). Paul tells husbands and wives to give themselves to one another sexually and honor the authority that each has over the other’s body, abstaining only in times of prayer and fasting (1 Cor. 7:3-5). The foundational Scriptural teaching about the great gift of love in marriage has sometimes been misunderstood in the church in reaction to a licentious culture. Pagan piety to the gods consisted of sexuality immorality, and parts of our post-Christian culture are returning to it. The gospel calls us to chastity before marriage and sexual fidelity and satisfaction within it (Prov. 5:18-19; Song of Songs).

## Covenant Headship

Adam was not just the first human, but the covenant representative of our race: “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21-22; cf. Rom. 5:14-15). You were there in Adam, and if you trust in Christ, you were with Him too, represented by the second Adam. Adam was the head of our race, but he was also the head of his wife: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3). In his representative capacity, Adam is not just an individual, he is the family, the covenant head. “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23). In a marriage, each person is responsible for his or her individual sins. But who is responsible for the marriage? The head. The two are one, united by covenant (Mal. 2:14; Prov. 2:17), and he represents them before God. What does the head told to do? “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25). He must *die* to his selfish desires and take responsibility to love her efficaciously, the way Jesus loved His bride, the church. Jesus laid down His life courageously and gladly, not blaming God for the great honor of the assignment nor the church for needing saving. Unlike Jesus, husbands themselves are sinful, but they must repent and imitate Him in loving sacrificially. How does the church respond to Christ? We listen, honor, and follow: “Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything...Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph. 5:24, 33). As a husband imitates Christ, incarnationally honoring and caring for his wife, she receives and gives back to him, and he is doubly blessed, as is she: “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself...This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:28, 32).