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And They Shall Become One Flesh

(Genesis 2:18-25)

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24)



It is the intent of this study to **celebrate biblical marriage**.¹ In our narrative (Gen. 2:18-25) God sets forth the nature of marriage. “This section is the foundation of the institution of marriage.”² The text begins with a statement in verse 18. Verses 19 and 20 provide an illustration of what He is talking about. Verses 21 and 22 describe how God brought about Adam’s wife Eve. Verses 23 through 25 give the result of God’s actions. We live in an unfortunate age when marriage must be defined, but nonetheless before we go any further let us consider a working definition for marriage.

Biblical marriage is a . . .

- divinely established covenant (i.e., contractual agreement that defines obligations and consequences),
- between two people of the opposite gender,
- for sexual monogamy, emotional partnership and race proliferation.

By defining biblical marriage in this way we are equally saying what marriage is not.

- A biblical marriage is not two people living together.
- A biblical marriage is not two people sleeping together.
- A biblical marriage is not two people of the same gender living together regardless as to its legality or social acceptance.
- A biblical marriage is not polygamy.

In our current culture, commitment is a rare commodity and an unfortunate failure. Yet commitment rests at the root of any relationship. **In marriage itself commitment functions on two distinct levels. First** and foremost is a **commitment to the marriage covenant**. Without commitment to the covenant itself, the marriage relationship will fail. All relationships need to be put in their proper perspective. A commitment to God comes first, then to one’s spouse, and finally to one’s own self interests. **Second**, there must be

a commitment to the marriage relationship. This side of the equation can be strongly problematic. In any relationship, it takes two. Even though a person might be committed to the relationship, in the absence of a reciprocating commitment there is no real relationship. The relationship might be **functional**, but it does not have the core characteristics of any genuine relationship. There is no warmth, intimacy, transparency, and vulnerability. It is not marked by loyalty or trustworthiness. In healthy relationships the best is always assumed and there is neither judgment nor condemnation when failure exists. In a genuine relationship, one can bear their soul and not experience shame or fear or guilt.

This does not negate the need to seek a healthy relationship with one's spouse even when it seems to have already collapsed. But it does establish the idea that even with a commitment to the marriage relationship a genuine relationship with one's spouse might not exist.

Although the scenario of an unhealthy relationship is discouraging and can lead to despair and depression, it must not be forgotten that our first and primary relationship is to the Triune God. God the Father is our true Abba in whose arms we rest. Jesus Christ the Son is our ultimate hero, friend and (if I may be so bold) lover. The Holy Spirit is our ultimate comforter, encourager, sustainer, and strength. It is our God in whom we find the true fulfiller of all our spiritual, emotional, social, and physical desires. Everything else apart from Him is but a mere shadow. **No relationship can ever do for us what God alone does.** This must never be forgotten. It is the course set and the comfort sought.

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In light of these two initial presuppositions, let us consider the text of Genesis 2:18-25 and the contributions it can make to our marriage.

God's observation (v.18)

Then the LORD God said, "**It is not good for the man to be alone**; I will make him a helper suitable for him (Gen. 2:18).

The "not good" of 2:18 is set in sharp contrast to the "good" noted throughout the creation narrative (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, 2:9, 12, 17, and finally in verse 18). Did not God create that initial scenario in which Adam found Himself alone? Is God assessing this initial action as "not good?" The "not good" of 1:18 is not moral. It is not saying "evil or sinful." Rather it is saying, "It is not good for the purpose of reproducing after his kind." God is not making a moral call as to whether being single or married is good or bad. It is only "not good" if you are the only one for the purpose of race propagation.

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God alone was the substance.

For the purpose of “reigning” over creation and of continuing his line, Eve proved to be a suitable counterweight to Adam’s design. Again, **the issue is not companionship or community**. God was enough for Adam. The relationship between Adam and Eve was a shadow to be enjoyed, but only a shadow. God alone was the substance. Yet for the shadow to fulfill its design there must be a horizontal relationship. “Relationship is modeled after God who does not exist in isolation but is a tri-unity, surrounded by a heavenly court.”³

God’s illustration (v. 19)

“Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and **whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name**” (Gen. 2:19).

Adam’s role as mediating ruler is illustrated by the naming of the animals. It is also the means God uses to show Adam’s inability to fully carry out God’s mandate to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28).

Adam’s Education (vv. 20-25)

“The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, **but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him**” (Gen. 2:20).



God enabled Adam to see his need.⁴ Adam needed to realize his need before he would appreciate the gift. “Rather than squandering his most precious gift on one who is unappreciative, God waits until Adam is prepared to appreciate the gift of woman.”⁵

This verse suggests five ideas.

A. Adam could not resolve the issue of race proliferation.

The primary thought is on his inability to fulfill God’s role for him without this helper. The one God would create would be his counterpart. **The one created would not be identical to him but a compliment of him.**

The word [helper] describes one who provides what is lacking in the man, who can do what the man alone cannot do. The man was thus created in such a way

that he needs the help of a partner. Or we may say that human beings cannot fulfill their destiny except in mutual assistance.⁶

B. God created marriage (vv. 21-24).⁷

Marriage is God's idea (Gen. 2:18-25) and therefore right. God will not have a "better idea" sometime later. God is not going to change the pattern. No matter how much we wish to distort and redefine the family or marriage, the objective standard of God's Word declares it to be one man + one woman for one lifetime.

C. Marriage is to be monogamous and heterosexual.

What God did in creating "male and female" (Gen. 1:27) does establish a notable pattern. God did not create two of the same gender. This indirectly speaks to the issue of homosexuality.

D. Marriage is two individuals becoming one (Gen. 2:23, 24).

The man 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." For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and **they shall become one flesh** (Gen. 2:23, 24).

The idea of "one flesh" expresses the complete personal community of one man and one woman as spiritual unity.⁸ The word used for "becoming one" carries the idea of "cleaving" and of "gluing" together. The imagery is graphic. **There is an infusion and co-mingling of lives.** For this reason, divorce "tears flesh." Therefore, the idea of one flesh is a graphic word picture of what the Scripture speaks of when referring to the marriage **covenant**. Yet what does this mean when it speaks of a man and a woman becoming one flesh? Perhaps there are several explanations behind this idea.

- **First**, it is the breaking of one relationship and the establishing of another.
- **Second**, it is the establishing of a new household where the husband is the head.
- **Third**, it is the refocusing of one's energies toward one's spouse.
- **Fourth**, one flesh speaks of a monogamous relationship.
- **Fifth**, one flesh comes to bear on a shared life. Two image-bearers becoming one in intellect, volition, and emotion. There are shared joys, sorrows, and problems. In a one-flesh relationship, what we do directly affects the other person. Everything about the individual is impacted and altered.

The "one flesh" language is judicially true even if it is not functionally true. When two individuals enter into covenant, they become **judicially** one (i.e. legally). This does not mean they are **functionally** one. If either one fails to pursue the relationship they will

not function as “one flesh.” No matter how committed one might be to the marriage covenant and to the marriage relationship, if the other spouse does not respond in kind they are not functionally “one flesh,” although they remain judicially one. Remember the two commitments necessary in the one flesh union.

Think with me of the unity candle in many marriage ceremonies. Prior to the wedding ceremony, a large single candle and two slimmer tapers are placed in holders and arranged in the area where the wedding ceremony will be performed. During the wedding ceremony, after the exchange of vows and rings, the bride and groom move to the area where the candles have been readied. The bride takes her lighted taper; the groom takes his lighted taper. Simultaneously, the bride and groom use their individual tapers to light the single large candle between them. The bride and groom extinguish their tapers and return them to their holders. The lighting of the single candle symbolically represents two individuals joining as one, and the extinguishing of the individual tapers shows the bride’s and groom’s intent to subject their individual needs to the greater needs of their union.

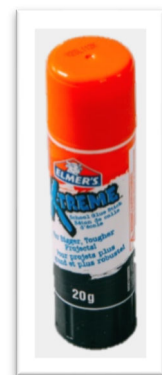
In the marriage covenant, two individual lives now become one flesh. “For the first time in Scripture the words of a human being are recorded in direct discourse. The total sum of what man himself has to say in the creation narrative is an exclamatory outburst concerning his helper, “She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”⁹ Many suggest in the statement, “She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” we have a pledge of loyalty. Adam entered into covenant with Eve. It is in the union of these two lives we are to see the permanency of the marriage covenant (Matt. 19:6).

Therefore, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, **let no man separate** (Matt. 19:6).

From Genesis 2:18-24 and its repetition in Mark 10:2-9 it can be seen marriage was “intended to be a lifelong integration of two lives.”¹⁰ The Greek word employed by Jesus in Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7 and the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31 to describe the union between a man and a woman is “**proskollao**.” It is used in Acts 5:36 of men who have “joined” themselves to a particular movement or teaching.

The word is from “**kola**” and means “to glue in contrast to nailing, to join together tightly.”¹¹ Literal examples are gluing a broken pot, to glue inlay work of gold and ivory, to steep barley in water, to close a wound. It is also used of the penetration of poison into a body. “The Septuagint used the word to describe the union created in Genesis 2:24.”¹²

The word “cleave” means “to cling, stick, stay close, cleave, keep close, stick to, stick with, follow closely, join to, overtake, catch.” Consider the graphic usage of the word in various contexts.



- Eleazar's hand clung to the sword (2 Sam. 23:10)

He arose and struck the Philistines until his hand was weary and **clung** to the sword, and the LORD brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to strip the slain (2 Sam. 23:10).

- Leprosy clung to the servant of Elijah (2 Kings 5:27)

Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall **cling** to you [Gehazi] and to your descendants forever." So he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow (2 Kings 5:27).

- Job speaks of bone cleaving to skin and flesh (Job 19:20)

My bone **clings** to my skin and my flesh, And I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth (Job 19:20).

- Jeremiah speaks of an undergarment clinging to a man's loins (Jer. 13:11)

For as the waistband **clings** to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah **cling** to Me,' declares the LORD, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory; but they did not listen (Jer. 13:11).

A husband is to cleave to his wife. He is to follow hard after the woman of his youth (Prov. 5:15-23). **The union that exists between a husband and his wife is mystical** (i.e., judicial), **but it is also emotional and physical** (i.e., functional). **This union is so real that divorce means "to rip in two."**

Marriage is like the taking of individual threads that represent the parts of one's life and knitting those various parts together to form a singular cloth. When a divorce takes place the cloth is rent in two.

One of the greatest tragedies in the Evangelical church is the way we have treated divorced people. We have added insult to injury by holding them at arm's length.¹³ Those who have been divorced need our encouragement, love, and forgiveness. Divorce is far deeper than a physical tearing. It is the ripping of one's soul. We should rush to the aid of those who have or are living through the trauma of this heartache. Just as we should and must rush to the aid of anyone who is living in bondage to any addiction or having to endure the consequences of someone else's sin.



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E. Marriage has a distinct identity.

1. A wife is a husband's helper (Gen. 2:18, 20).

The Hebrew word is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament. It simply means helper. A wife helps her husband. Notice the nature of this help. It is first and foremost for race propagation. Secondly, it is to be co-regent with him over God's dominion. "The woman would share the man's nature; that is, whatever the man received at creation, she too would have."¹⁴

Marcus Dods notes how, "By the formation of woman out of man, that she is dependent upon him (1 Cor. 11:8); and by her being formed of his rib, that she is neither his servant nor his idol, but his partner. With this new creature man is at once thoroughly satisfied."¹⁵

2. The wife is God's gift to man (v.22 "taken from the man and brought to the man")¹⁶



Most commentators recognize the word translated "rib" should be "side." Consider the following verses from Proverbs stressing the wife's value to the husband.

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rottenness in his bones (Prov. 12:4)

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord (Prov. 18:22).

House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD (Prov. 19:14).

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels (Prov. 31:10).

Because marriage is a gift, it is undeserved, to be received with thanksgiving, and to be prized. One's spouse is to be cherished.

3. The wife is man's equal (v.23 "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh").

From Scripture we learn that the husband is the head of the wife and she is to submit to his leadership (Eph. 5:23, 24).

²² "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ **For the husband is the head of the wife**, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body" (Eph. 5:22, 23).

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Yet, nowhere is it stated that the wife is inferior to the husband. She is man's equal. Both have qualities unique to their role and in their essence and position they are equals (1 Pet. 3:7). Although we struggle with the idea of headship, it is only in the area of **function and not essence**. We will explore this idea further in the study on Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and the Christian Home. In the absence of honoring this pattern, only anarchy and chaos exist.

4. The Marriage Covenant supersedes family relationships (v.24 "for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother").

The verb [leave] frequently describes Israel's rejection of her covenant relationship with Yahweh and the verb [join] often designates the maintenance of the covenant relationship. Thus, to leave father and mother and cling to one's wife means to sever one loyalty and commence another. Already Scripture has sounded the note that marriage is a covenant rather than an ad-hoc makeshift arrangement.¹⁷

The word, "leave" means "to depart from, leave behind, leave, let alone." Once a man marries a woman that woman is to become his partner in and for life.

5. Marriage demands complete co-dependence (v.24 "shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh")

Marriage is a covenant where each member promises to work at such a unity that their actions and attitudes are those of one "whole" person (i.e., oneness, like-mindedness, unity, harmony). **Unity means to act as "one unit."**

Verse 25 states nothing existed that would drive a wedge between Adam and Eve. There was complete transparency between them. There was no shame, fear, or guilt.

Each of these five ideas contributes to a real relationship as they are affirmed mutually. Even in the absence of "functional" unity, these truths are still valid. Our denial or abuse does not make false what is true. It is important to remember how the marriage covenant is a shadow of something that is far richer and more enjoyable. **The shadow only exists to provide a foretaste, a foreshadowing of something that is immeasurably better.** God is our ultimate and eternal spouse to whom we are married. May He always be for us what we will never be by ourselves?

A PPLICATION: (Making the Transfer)

In every marriage ceremony, we begin with the following words:

"The Bible teaches that marriage is to be a permanent relationship of one man and one woman freely and totally committed to each other as companions for life. Our Lord declared that man shall leave his father and mother and unite with his wife in

the building of a home, and the two shall become one flesh.”

Who gives the bride to be married? Bride’s Father: Her mother and I.

We do well to remember the vow.

“Do you take [this woman] to be your wife; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to understand, till death shall part you, according to the design of God in creation, and commit yourself completely to her?”

Today, it is important to once more remember the divine nature of the marriage covenant. Let us see how marriage is to reflect our union with God in Christ. May God enable us to protect and celebrate the marriage covenant.

¹ Image on page 37 of “couple” by StockSnap from Pixabay

² Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 125.

³ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

⁴ Image on page 39 of “child reading Bible” by Free-Photos from Pixabay

⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶ Ross, 125.

⁷ John Davis provides similar thoughts that are worthy of one’s attention. John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 78, 79.

⁸ Ross, 126.

⁹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, NICOT, 1:179.

¹⁰ “Marriage, Divorce and Re-Marriage”, Richard W. DeHaan, p. 3.

¹¹ Photo on page 41 of “glue stick” by Charles Deluvio on Unsplash

¹² Horst Seebass, “Join, Cleave to” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown [Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, c1976], 2:348-49.

¹³ Image on page 42 of “rejection” by John Hain from Pixabay

¹⁴ Ross, 126.

¹⁵ Marcus Dods, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 12.

¹⁶ Image on page 43 of “heart” by Maciej Szewczyk from Pixabay

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Genesis*, NICOT, 1:181.

