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and for all who want to make our Maker's design
the blueprint for their homes and marriages

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“to bring all things in heaven and on earth together
under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:10 NIV)

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God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation

MARRIAGE

and the

FAMILY



Biblical Essentials

ANDREAS KÖSTENBERGER

with DAVID W. JONES

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time in its history, Western civilization is confronted with the need to *define* the terms *marriage* and *family*. What until now has been considered a “normal” family, made up of a father, a mother, and a number of children, has in recent years increasingly begun to be viewed as one among several options, which can no longer claim to be the only or even superior form of ordering human relationships. The Judeo-Christian view of marriage and the family, with its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, has to a significant extent been replaced with a set of values that prizes human rights, self-fulfillment, and pragmatic utility on an individual or societal level. It can rightly be said that marriage and the family are institutions under siege in our world today, and that with marriage and the family at risk, our very civilization is in crisis.

The current cultural crisis, however, is merely symptomatic of a deep-seated *spiritual* crisis that continues to gnaw at the foundations of our once-shared societal values. If God the Creator in fact instituted marriage and the family, as the Bible teaches, and if there is an evil being called Satan who wages war against God’s creative purposes in this world, it should come as no surprise that the divine foundation of these institutions has come under massive attack in recent years. Ultimately, we human beings, whether we realize it or not, are involved in a cosmic spiritual conflict that pits God against Satan, with marriage and the family serving as a key arena in which spiritual and cultural battles are fought. If, then, the *cultural* crisis is symptomatic of an underlying *spiritual* crisis, the solution likewise must be spiritual, not merely cultural.

In *Marriage and the Family: Biblical Essentials*, we hope to point the way to this spiritual solution: a return to, and rebuilding of,

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the biblical foundation of marriage and the family. God's Word is not dependent on man's approval, and the Scriptures are not silent regarding the vital issues facing men and women and families today. In each of the important areas related to marriage and the family, the Bible offers satisfying instructions and wholesome remedies to the maladies afflicting our culture. The Scriptures record the divine institution of marriage and present a Christian theology of marriage and parenting. They offer insight for decision making regarding abortion, contraception, infertility, and adoption. They offer helpful guidance for those who are single or unmarried, and address the major threats to marriage and the family: homosexuality and divorce.

In the following pages, we will seek to determine what the Bible teaches on the various components of human relationships in an *integrative* manner: the nature of, and special issues related to, marriage and the family, childrearing, singleness, and so forth. Because the Bible is the Word of God, which is powerful and life-transforming, we know that those who are willing to be seriously engaged by Scripture will increasingly come to know and understand God's will for marriage and the family and be able to appropriate God's power in building strong Christian homes and families. This, in turn, will both increase God's honor and reputation in this world that he has made and provide the seasoning and illumination our world needs at this time of cultural ferment and crisis with regard to marriage and the family.

MARRIAGE IN THE BIBLE

What is God's plan for marriage? There is considerable confusion in contemporary culture regarding the nature of marriage. Only by returning to the biblical foundation for marriage and the family will we be able to rediscover God's good and perfect plan for humanity in this all-important area of our lives. In this chapter, we will survey all the major biblical passages regarding marriage in both Testaments.

MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Rooted in Creation (Genesis 1–3)

In exploring the biblical teaching on marriage, there is no more important paradigm than God's intended pattern for marriage presented in Genesis 1–3. Although Genesis was originally addressed to Israel's wilderness generation in preparation for entering the Promised Land, the early chapters of this book provide the parameters of the Creator's design for marriage in every age. This is reflected in Jesus's and Paul's teaching and applies to our own age as well.¹ Who is this God who had saved Israel from slavery in Egypt and had given the nation the law at Sinai? What are the foundational teachings on the family, societal structures, and sin?

The first three chapters of Genesis provide answers to these questions, initially from the vantage point of ancient Israel, but ultimately for every person who ever lived.² In Genesis 1–3, the God whom Israel had come to know as Redeemer and Lawgiver

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is revealed as the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful, all-wise, and eternal God who spoke everything there is into being. Marriage is shown to be rooted in God's creative act of making humanity in his image as male and female. Sin is depicted as the result of humanity's rebellion against the Creator at the instigation of Satan, himself a fallen creature, and as becoming so much a part of the human nature that people ever since the fall are by nature rebelling against their Creator and his plan for their lives.

The depiction of the original creation of man and woman and the subsequent fall of humanity in Genesis 1–3 centers on at least three very important clusters of principles: (1) the man and the woman are created in God's image *to rule the earth for God*; (2) the man is created first and is given *ultimate responsibility for the marriage relationship*, while the woman is placed alongside the man as his "suitable helper"; and (3) the fall of humanity entails *negative consequences* for both the man and the woman.

Created in God's Image to Rule the Earth for God

The fact that both men and women are created in the likeness and image of their Creator invests them with inestimable worth, dignity, and significance. God's image in the man and the woman has frequently been identified as conveying their possession of intelligence, a will, or emotions.³ While this may be implied to some extent in Genesis 1:27, the immediate context develops the notion of the divine image in the man and the woman as indicating representative rule (see Ps. 8:6–8). This rule is the joint function of the man and the woman (note the plural pronouns in Gen. 1:28), although the man carries ultimate responsibility before God as the head of the woman.

Theologians have identified two aspects of the divine image in man: a *substantive* aspect (that is, an analogy between the nature of God and characteristics of humans), and a *functional* aspect (humans exercising the function of ruling the earth for God). While a substantive element cannot be ruled out, the functional

component seems to reflect most accurately the emphasis in the biblical record.⁴ This follows from the immediate context of Genesis 1:27, where creation is defined in terms of being fruitful and multiplying and subduing the earth (Gen. 1:28). The first man and the first woman were thus charged to exercise representative rule in part by *procreation*.

In this sense, then, human beings are “like God.” Just as God rules over a large domain—the whole universe—so humanity is given charge of the entire earth to rule it for God. This also establishes the principle of *stewardship*: God, not the man and the woman, is ultimately owner of the created realm; the man and the woman are simply the divinely appointed caretakers. Moreover, this stewardship is a joint stewardship shared by the man and the woman. *Together* they are to exercise it according to the will and for the glory of God. *Together* they are to multiply and be stewards of the children God will give them. And *together* they are to subdue the earth by a division of labor that assigns to the man the primary responsibility to provide for his wife and children, and to the woman the care for and nurture of her family.

The Man’s Ultimate Responsibility for the Marriage and the Wife’s Role as His “Suitable Helper”

The apostle Paul’s comments on Genesis 1–3 repeatedly root the man’s primary responsibility in both the family and the church in the fact that he was *created first*. Not only does Paul draw attention to the fact that the man was created first, but he also points out that it is not the man who was made for the woman, but the woman for the man (1 Cor. 11:9; see Gen. 2:18, 20) and from the man (1 Cor. 11:8, 12; see Gen. 2:22). Moreover, the man was the one who received the divine command (Gen. 2:16–17), was presented with the woman (Gen. 2:22), and named the woman with a name derived from his own (Gen. 2:23; see 3:20), which also implies his authority.⁵

While Genesis 1 simply notes the creation of man as male and female in God’s image, Genesis 2 provides further detail on the

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exact order and orientation of the creation of man and woman. At the beginning of human history, God made the first man, endowed him with life, and placed him in a garden (Gen. 2:7–8, 15). Moreover, God addressed to the man certain moral commands (Gen. 2:16–17). Prior to the creation of the woman, the man had already begun exercising the divine mandate to subdue the earth, by naming the animals (Gen. 2:19–20). In order to supply his need for companionship, God created the woman to be Adam’s wife.

God’s creation of Eve demonstrates that his plan for Adam’s marriage, and all subsequent marriages, involves a monogamous heterosexual relationship.⁶ God only made *one* helper for Adam, and she was *female*. What is more, it was *God* who perceived Adam’s aloneness and created the woman. The biblical text gives no indication that Adam was even conscious of being alone. Rather, God takes the initiative in fashioning a compatible human companion for the man. For this reason we can confidently say that marriage is God’s idea and that it was God who made the woman as a “suitable helper” for the man (Gen. 2:18, 20 NIV).

But what is the force of the expression “suitable helper”? On the one hand, the woman is *congenial* to the man in a way that none of the animals are (Gen. 2:19–20; she is “bone of [his] bones and flesh of [his] flesh,” Gen. 2:23); on the other hand, she is placed alongside the man as his *associate* or *assistant*. On a personal level, she will provide for the man’s need for *companionship* (Gen. 2:18). In relation to God’s mandate for humanity to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28), the woman is a suitable partner both in *procreation* (becoming “one flesh” with him, Gen. 2:24) and in the earth’s *domestication* (Gen. 1:28).⁷ Her role is distinct from the man’s, yet unique and exceedingly significant. While assigned to the man as his “helper” and thus placed under his overall charge, the woman is his partner in ruling the earth for God.

There are, however, those who would blur the biblical roles of man and woman, or deny the wife’s subordination. Yet nowhere

is the *man* called the *woman's* “helper.” Thus equality and distinctness, complementarity and submission/authority must be held in fine balance. The man and the woman are jointly charged with ruling the earth representatively for God, yet they are not to do so as “unisex” creatures, but each as fulfilling their God-ordained, gender-specific roles. In fact, since these functional differences are part of the Creator’s design, it is only when men and women embrace their God-ordained roles that they will be truly fulfilled and God’s creational wisdom will be fully displayed and exalted.⁸

The Fall of Humanity and Its Consequences

The fall witnesses a complete reversal of the roles God assigns to the man and the woman. Rather than God’s being in charge, with the man, helped by the woman, ruling creation for him, Satan, in the form of a serpent, approaches the woman, who draws the man with her into rebellion against the Creator. This does not imply that the woman is more susceptible to temptation than the man. It does indicate, however, that God’s plan is to have the man, not the woman, assume ultimate responsibility for the couple, extending leadership and protection to his female counterpart. The man, by his absence, or at least acquiescence (Gen. 3:6: “her husband who was with her”; see Gen. 3:17), shares in the woman’s culpability; and she, by failing to consult with her God-given protector and provider, fails to respect the divine pattern of marriage. In the end, it is the *man*, not the woman, who is primarily held responsible for the rebellious act (Gen. 3:9; see Gen. 3:17; Rom. 5:12–14), though the consequences of the fall extend to the man and the woman alike, affecting their respective primary spheres.

In the case of the woman, consequences ensue in the realm of childbearing and the relationship with her husband. Regarding childbearing, the woman will experience physical pain. As far as the woman’s relationship with her husband is concerned, loving harmony will be replaced by a pattern of struggle in which the woman seeks to exert control over her husband, who responds

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by asserting his authority—often in an ungodly manner by either passively forcing her into action or actively dominating her (Gen. 3:16; see 4:7).⁹ The man, in turn, will henceforth have trouble in fulfilling God’s command to subdue the earth (see Gen. 1:28). He must extract the fruit of the land from thorns and thistles and eat his bread by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:17–19). In the end, both the man and the woman will die (Gen. 3:19, 22).

Nevertheless, God continues to provide for the human couple, clothing them (Gen. 3:21) and, more significantly, predicting a time when the woman’s seed—the promised Messiah—will bruise the Serpent’s offspring on the head (Gen. 3:15). In the meantime, however, the couple is expelled from the garden (Gen. 3:24) as a sign that their rebellion against the Creator had met with severe sanctions that would cast an ominous shadow on their marriage during their sojourn on earth from that time onward.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Marital Roles according to the Old Testament

Even subsequent to the fall, God’s creation design for marriage continues to provide the norm and standard for God’s expectations for male–female relationships. Based on the foundational treatment of Genesis 1 and 2, subsequent chapters of the Hebrew Scriptures provide information on the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives toward each other. While the reality often fell short of the ideal, this does not alter the fact that the standards that were in place for Old Testament couples and believers were grounded in the pre-fall ideal.

The Role and Responsibilities of Husbands toward Their Wives

The Old Testament does not contain an explicit “job description” for husbands. Nevertheless, it is possible to infer some of the major responsibilities of husbands toward their wives from various portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. Among these are the following: (1) to love and cherish his wife and to treat her with respect and

dignity; (2) to bear primary responsibility for the marriage union and ultimate authority over the family; and (3) to provide food, clothing, and other necessities for his wife.

First, a man is to *love and cherish his wife and to treat her with respect and dignity*. As one endowed with the image of God, commissioned as the man's suitable helper and partner in filling the earth and subduing it, and as his complement provided by God (Gen. 1:27–28), his wife is worthy of full respect and dignity and is to be cherished as his trusted companion and friend. As the foundational creation narrative stipulates, in order to be united to his wife a man is to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they will establish a new family unit (Gen. 2:24). Part of their marital union will be the procreation of offspring (Gen. 1:28).

Second, from the man's creation prior to the woman, later biblical writers (such as Paul, see 1 Cor. 11:8–9) rightly infer that his is the *primary responsibility for the marriage union and ultimate authority over his family* including his wife. Consider the following indicators in the opening chapters of Genesis: the man's responsibilities prior to the creation of the woman (Gen. 2:19–20); the man's direct commission by God to keep the garden of Eden and not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:15–17); and the man's naming of the woman (Gen. 2:23). While the fall distorted the way in which men exercised their headship in subsequent generations (Gen. 3:16b), men were not to avoid their God-given responsibility to be in charge of their marriage and family and all that this entailed. The man's primary responsibility and ultimate authority is consistently seen in the Old Testament pattern of male heads of households, a system which is commonly called "patriarchy" but which is better described as "patricentrism."¹⁰

Third, a husband is to provide his wife with food, clothing, and other necessities. While the context is that of a man's responsibilities toward concubines or slave wives, the most important discussion of the husband's duties in this regard is found in

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Exodus 21:10. This passage stipulates that, “If he [the man] takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her *food*, her *clothing*, or her *marital rights*.” According to this passage, the husband’s obligations toward his wife (and concubines or slave girls) are delineated as involving the provision of food, clothing, and marital rights respectively. This circumscribes the husband’s responsibility to provide his wife with peace, permanence, and security (Ruth 1:9 speaks of “rest”).

The Role and Responsibilities of Wives toward Their Husbands

Wives’ roles and responsibilities toward their husbands were considered to be essentially threefold in ancient Israel: (1) presenting her husband with children (especially male ones); (2) managing the household; and (3) providing her husband with companionship.

Regarding the first wifely duty, that of *presenting her husband with children* (particularly sons), people in ancient times married in order to have children. In keeping with the belief that fathers lived on in their children, bearing a child was considered to be an act performed by a wife for her husband.¹¹ Bearing a son was the noblest contribution a wife could make to her husband and her household. Failure to do so, on the other hand, was viewed as a disgrace. Hence, in the book of Genesis we see that Rachel is desperate that she has not yet borne Jacob any children, and when God later enables her to conceive, she interprets this as God having taken away her reproach (Gen. 30:1, 23).

Second, wives were to *manage their household*, fulfilling the divine mandate of keeping the garden of Eden prior to the fall of humanity (Gen. 1:28; see 2:15). The wife’s responsibilities in ancient Israel in this regard included cooking, clothing the family, tending the garden, and harvesting grain. Yet while there was a general division of labor along those lines, the boundaries were not rigid, and some of these activities were not limited exclusively to women. Abraham (Gen. 18:1–8), Lot (Gen. 19:3), and Esau (Gen. 27:30–31) all are shown to be involved in meal preparations in the

Old Testament. Wives also were to supervise household servants involved in domestic chores.

Third, in keeping with God's original purpose for creating her (see Gen. 2:18), the wife was to *provide companionship* for her husband. While legally his subordinate, ideally the wife served as her husband's confidante and trusted friend (see Mal. 2:14). The mutual trust and intimacy characteristic of an ideal marriage is celebrated in the Song of Solomon (e.g., 2:16; 6:3; 7:10).

Violations of God's Ideal for Marriage in Ancient Israel

Polygamy

The history of Israel witnesses repeated instances of polygamy (or, more precisely, polygyny). While it certainly was within the Creator's prerogative and power to make more than one wife for the man, God intentionally made only Eve, revealing to Adam his plan with the words, "A man [singular] shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife [singular], and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). As could be expected, though, after the fall of humanity, God's ideal of monogamy was not consistently upheld.¹² Within six generations, barely after Adam had died, the Bible records that "Lamech took two wives" (Gen. 4:19).

While polygamy was *never normative* among the followers of Israel's God, Scripture reveals that it was indeed a recurrent event, even among some of its most important individuals (both reportedly godly and ungodly). Despite this trend, the Old Testament clearly communicates that the practice of having multiple wives was a departure from God's plan for marriage. This is conveyed not only in Scripture verses that seem univocally to prohibit polygamy (see Lev. 18:18; Deut. 17:17), but also from the sin and general disorder that polygamy produced in the lives of those who engaged in the practice. For example, the Old Testament reports disruptive favoritism in the polygamous marriages of Jacob (Gen. 29:30), Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:4–5), and Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:21). In addition, jealousy was a frequent problem between the competing

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wives of Abraham (Gen. 21:9–10), Jacob (Gen. 30:14–16), and Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:6). Moreover, Scripture reports that Solomon's foreign wives "turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:4), a violation of the first commandment, and David's multiple marriages led to incest and murder among his progeny. The sin and disorder produced by polygamy, then, is further testimony to the goodness of God's monogamous design of marriage as first revealed in the marriage of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Not only is polygamy nowhere in the Old Testament spoken of with approval (see Ex. 21:10–11; Deut. 21:15–17), but many passages clearly uphold monogamy as the continuing ideal (e.g., Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10–31; Ps. 128:3; Ezek. 16:8).

Divorce

Another component of God's design for marriage that Old Testament Israel regularly compromised is the durability of marriage. The opening chapters of Genesis make clear that God designed marriage to be *permanent*. This is evident in the paradigmatic description of marriage in Genesis 2:24: "A man shall leave his father and his mother and *hold fast* to his wife, and *they shall become one flesh*."¹³

Again, however, the Old Testament indicates that many did not respect that God's plan involved the durability of marriage. Divorce was a serious problem early on in the history of Israel. In the Mosaic code, it was stipulated that a priest could not marry a divorcée (even if she was not the guilty party; Lev. 21:7; see Lev. 21:14). In an attempt to bridle sins stemming from divorce, Mosaic legislation prohibited a man from remarrying a woman whom he had divorced and who subsequently had married another man (even if her second husband had died, Deut. 24:1–4). The reason for this was that by her second marriage "she has been defiled" (Deut. 24:4), perhaps indicating that illegitimate remarriage after divorce amounts to adultery. Moreover, the Old Testament records several examples of divorces and attests to the general practice

of divorce among the Hebrews (Ezra 9–10; Neh. 13:23–31; Mal. 2:14–16).

Despite the presence of divorce in the history of Israel, however, the Old Testament confirms that durability continued to be a component of God’s design for marriage. This can be seen in that the Mosaic legislation seems specifically to *forbid* divorce if the wife was a virgin at the time the marriage was consummated (see Deut. 22:19, 29). In addition, it is evident that God does not approve of divorce, for the Old Testament on several occasions uses the analogy of divorce to describe Israel’s spiritual apostasy (see Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8), and the prophet Malachi makes clear that God does not approve of divorce motivated by hatred (Mal. 2:16).

Adultery

Another way in which God’s ideal for marriage was compromised in the history of Israel was by way of adultery.¹⁴ While it could be argued that fidelity was Adam’s only option, his lack of an opportunity to commit adultery does not diminish the fact that fidelity is an inherent component of God’s pattern for marriage: “A man shall leave his father and his mother and *hold fast* to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). As with the principle of monogamy, however, after the fall of humankind the Old Testament reports that numerous individuals struggled to be faithful to their marriage partners.

Perhaps the best-known incident of adultery recorded in the Old Testament is David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the consequent murder of her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Other instances of marital infidelity abound in the history of Israel. There are, to name a few, Reuben’s adultery with Bilhah (Gen. 35:22; see 49:3–4), the adultery of the Levite’s concubine (Judg. 19:1–2), and Hosea’s wife Gomer’s adultery (Hos. 3:1). Despite these instances of adultery in the history of Israel, however, the Old Testament reiterates in numerous places that God’s ideal for marriage is *fidelity*. For instance, the seventh commandment directed God’s people

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in no uncertain terms, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). The sexual laws in the Holiness Code plainly stipulated, “You shall not lie sexually with your neighbor’s wife” (Lev. 18:20), setting the penalty for adultery as death (Lev. 20:10; see Num. 5:11–31; Deut. 22:22). Moreover, the book of Proverbs repeatedly classifies adultery as both foolish and dangerous (Prov. 2:16–19; 5:3–22; 6:32–33; 7:5–23; 9:13–18; 22:14; 23:27–28; 30:20).

What is more, the Lord frequently used the analogy of physical adultery to depict his displeasure over the spiritual adultery of Israel when they departed from him, their first love, in order to pursue other gods (Jer. 3:8–9; Ezek. 16:32, 38; Hos. 1:1–3:5). In short, then, although many in the history of Israel did not adhere to God’s design of fidelity within marriage, the Old Testament is clear that the Lord’s standard did not change. God expected his people to be faithful—both to their spouse and to him—and was clearly offended when they were not.

Homosexuality

Heterosexuality is an unequivocal component of the Creator’s design for marriage. Yet after the fall of humanity, the Old Testament indicates that the principle of heterosexuality was often violated through same-sex relations. Examples include many of the inhabitants of the cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1–29), the Gibeonites in the days of the judges (Judg. 19:1–21:25), as well as numerous other unnamed lawbreakers in the history of Israel (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14).

In spite of these offenses, however, the Old Testament makes clear that the principle of heterosexuality, established at creation, continues to be an integral part of God’s design for marriage. This is testified to by the severity of the punishment prescribed for homosexuality—death (Lev. 20:13)—by the presentation of heterosexuality as normative (Prov. 5:18–19; Eccl. 9:9; Song 1–8), and

by the fate of individuals in the history of Israel who engaged in homosexual activity.

The idea of a homosexual marriage is not only contrary to specific biblical injunctions concerning same-sex intercourse (see Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17) but also runs counter to the Creator's design for marriage. Heterosexuality—not homosexuality—is plainly in view in God's law of marriage: "A *man* [masculine] shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his *wife* [feminine], and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). What is more, this is the only possible arrangement for marriage, as the Creator has commanded and expects married couples to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

Since homosexuality involves same-sex intercourse that cannot lead to procreation, it is unnatural and cannot logically entail the possibility of marriage. Indeed, even among the animals, the writer of Genesis repeatedly notes that God made each species male and female, "according to their kinds," for the express purpose of procreation (Gen. 1:21, 24, 25). Moreover, since an aspect of humanity's representative rule over and subduing of the earth for God is procreation (Gen. 1:27–28), and procreation is impossible between two males or two females, homosexuality militates not only against God's design for marriage but against his created order as well.

Sterility

Fertility is yet another essential part of God's design for marriage of which certain individuals fell short in Old Testament times. Fertility is certainly entailed in God's command to Adam and Eve; "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) is, incidentally, the first command God gave to human beings. Indeed, in the Bible fruitfulness in marriage is repeatedly described as a virtue to be sought after and is viewed as a blessing once obtained (see Ex. 23:26; Deut. 7:14; Ps. 113:9; 127:4–5; 128:3–4). Moreover, certain elements of the Old Testament law appear to be crafted with the intent of furthering the fruitfulness of marriage. Examples include a newlywed soldier

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being given a year off “to be happy with his wife whom he has taken” (Deut. 24:5) and the institution of levirate marriage that had as its goal the production of offspring for a deceased relative (Deut. 25:5–10). Conversely, the Old Testament views barrenness as a reproach (see Gen. 30:1, 22–23; Isa. 4:1; 47:9; 49:21).

Despite the importance placed on fertility in the Hebrew Scriptures, the fact remains that numerous couples in the history of Israel experienced difficulty conceiving children. One important difference between one’s lack of fertility and one’s failure to implement other components of God’s design for marriage is that sterility is not usually a conscious choice. Nevertheless, in the Old Testament sterility is sometimes presented as a curse stemming from personal sin, as in the case of Abimelech’s wives (Gen. 20:17–18) and David’s first wife, Michal (2 Sam. 6:23). On other occasions, sterility is presented as a simple fact of nature, as in the case of the three mothers of the Hebrew race—Sarah (Gen. 11:30), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), and Rachel (Gen. 30:1)—as well as Manoah’s wife (Judg. 13:2), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:2), and the Shunammite who aided Elisha (2 Kings 4:14).

While the Bible gives no explicit directives on how to overcome sterility, a common denominator among many of those in Scripture who were at one time fruitless but later became fruitful is prayer. For example, God answered prayers for fertility offered by Abraham (Gen. 15:2–5; 20:17), Isaac (Gen. 25:21), Leah (Gen. 30:17), Rachel (Gen. 30:22), and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:9–20). These answered prayers, as well as the Lord’s general multiplication of his people in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, are further testimony to the fact that fertility is an essential component of God’s design for marriage and is possible for those who seek God regarding it.

Dilution of Gender Distinctions

Complementarity, which includes the notion of equal worth but differing roles for the sexes, is an essential and foundational part

of God's design of marriage. However, as is evident from the other marital distortions mentioned above, the history of Israel features several instances where the principle of complementarity was not observed. Individuals who engaged in homosexuality or who purposefully avoided fruitfulness (e.g., Onan, Gen. 38:8–10) cannot be described as having behaved in a manner that is fully consistent with the God-ordained pattern of complementarity.

In addition, the Old Testament features a number of individuals who clearly and specifically abandoned their God-ordained gender roles, some without participating in other marital distortions. For instance, men who failed in the leadership of their home (at least on occasion) include Adam, Eli, David, and Ahaz, and examples of women who (at least at times) were not "suitable helpers" within their families include Eve, Bathsheba, Jezebel, and Athaliah, among others.

Despite these examples of distortion of the Creator's design of gender roles, even after the fall, the Old Testament repeatedly confirms the fact that complementarity is part of God's plan for marriage. Equal worth of husbands and wives is seen in a number of different spheres: legal parity in regard to parental obedience (Ex. 20:12; 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 5:16); economic privileges that allowed for daughters and wives to inherit property (Num. 27:1–11; 36:1–9; see Prov. 31:13–18, 24); and liberty for both sexes to have personal spiritual encounters (Judg. 13:2–25), experience answered prayer (1 Sam. 1:9–20), engage in public worship (Neh. 8:2), and perhaps even to participate in the prophetic office (Ex. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Neh. 6:14).

At the same time, the Lord's design for marriage in the Old Testament includes important functional differences for the sexes as well. In addition to the Lord's specific confirmation of Adam's headship after the fall (Gen. 3:16), complementary gender roles as established at creation are evident in the Old Testament narratives recounting the marriages of the patriarchs (e.g., Abraham: Gen. 18:12, where Sarah calls Abraham "my lord"; see 1 Pet. 3:5–6) and

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godly kings of Israel (e.g., David in 1 Sam. 25:40–42; 1 Kings 1:16, 31). King Lemuel’s description of a virtuous wife as an industrious homemaker under her husband’s authority (Prov. 31:10–31) also reflects the complementary pattern instituted in Genesis 2.¹⁵ As with the other components in God’s design for marriage, it is clear that the history of Israel did not alter the Lord’s plan for these institutions.

GLIMPSES OF THE IDEAL (WISDOM LITERATURE)

The Excellent Wife (Proverbs 31)

The book of Proverbs concludes with an acrostic poem (moving from the first to the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet) extolling the virtues of the excellent wife whose worth to her husband surpasses that of great material wealth (Prov. 31:10–31). At the heart of the poem (vv. 20–27) appears to be a chiasm (i.e., an ABBA’ pattern), climaxing in the reference to the woman’s husband being respected at the city gates (v. 23). This may indicate that the respect that the man receives is in large part related to the noble character and accomplishments of his wife.

Some have commented that this woman must have been phenomenal, since on the one hand it is said that she rises early in the morning (Prov. 31:15) and on the other that her lamp does not go out at night (Prov. 31:18)! When did this woman sleep? Rather than viewing these qualities as existing in a woman all at one time, depicting a day in the life of the ideal woman, one may view these attributes as having developed over a period of time and as being exhibited in a woman’s life during different occasions and seasons of life. Indeed, the excellent wife of Proverbs 31 displays many virtues that remain relevant for women aspiring to be godly wives today. The Proverbs 31 woman:

- Is a major asset to her husband (vv. 10, 11)
- Is a trusted companion (v. 11)
- Is for and not against her husband; she has his well-being and best interests at heart (v. 12)

- Is industrious and hardworking (vv. 13, 27)
- Procures and prepares food for her entire household (vv. 14, 15)
- Rises early (v. 15)
- Locates and purchases real estate (v. 16)
- Reinvests extra earnings from her home business (v. 16)
- Is vigorous, energetic (vv. 17, 25)
- Produces clothes for her family and as merchandise (vv. 13, 18–19, 21–22, 24)
- Is kind to the poor, reaches out in mercy to the needy (v. 20)
- Ensures that she and her children are properly and finely dressed (vv. 21–22)
- Contributes to others' respect for her husband and oversees her household so he can devote himself to a role of leadership in the community (vv. 23, 27)
- Is ready for the future and prepares for eventualities (vv. 21, 25)
- Displays wisdom in speech, teaching of kindness (v. 26)
- Is praised by her children and husband (vv. 28–29, 31)
- Is God-fearing rather than relying on her physical beauty (v. 30)

While some might find this ideal unattainable, it is a worthy goal to which women today may aspire. This picture is consistent with God's overall design for women as supportive partners of their husbands. However, this kind of woman clearly breaks the stereotype of a woman who is "confined to the home" or diminished in her personhood. She is a woman of great resourcefulness who is a source of strength and inestimable blessing to her husband and children. Who would not want to have a wife and mother aspiring to such a role model?

The Beauty of Sex in Marriage (The Song of Solomon)

In the midst of the deterioration evident during the course of Israel's history, there is one other bright spot in the Hebrew canon: the Song of Solomon. On the basis of the notion that God established marriage, including the physical union of husband and wife (Gen. 2:18–25, esp. Gen. 2:24–25: "one flesh . . . both

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naked and . . . not ashamed”), the Song of Solomon celebrates the beauty of marital love, including its intimate sexual expression.¹⁶

Not only does the Song of Solomon contribute to the Hebrew (and Christian) canon a collection of love poems celebrating the strength and passion of married love (including sex), the book also anticipates the restoration of the relationship between the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, which was ruptured by the fall. Subsequent to the fall, the judgment pronounced on the woman included that her desire would be for her husband (Gen. 3:16), which in all likelihood conveys the woman’s sinful desire to manipulate and control her husband rather than to lovingly submit to him (see Gen. 4:7).¹⁷

In the third and only other instance of the term translated “desire” in these passages, Song of Solomon 7:10, the woman exclaims, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.” Rather than the woman’s desire being illegitimately to control her husband, a restoration of the original state is envisioned in which the husband’s desire will be for his wife. Once again, the woman gladly rests in the assurance that she is her husband’s, and the husband does not dominate his wife but desires her. This kind of love signifies a return to paradise. As in the original garden, the man and the woman will be able to be “both naked and . . . not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25).

MARRIAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

No Longer Two, but One: Jesus’s High View of Marriage

Jesus’s teaching on the requirements of discipleship regularly subordinated one’s kinship ties to the obligations of the kingdom. However, while our Lord had much to say about people’s need to give first priority to Jesus’s call to discipleship, he provided comparatively little instruction on marriage. Doubtless the major reason for this is that Jesus, like his contemporaries, assumed the validity of the divine pattern for marriage set forth in the opening chapters of Genesis.

When questioned about divorce, Jesus affirmed the permanent nature of marriage in no uncertain terms. Adducing both foundational Old Testament texts, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, he asserted, “So they [husband and wife] are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt. 19:6 NIV). This makes clear that Jesus considered marriage to be *a sacred bond between a man and a woman, established by and entered into before God*.

While Jesus held a very high view of marriage, however, his teaching on natural family ties provides important parameters, placing it within the larger context of God’s kingdom. The culmination of this development will be reached in the eternal state where people will no longer marry but will be like the angels (Matt. 22:30). Thus, Jesus lays the groundwork for Paul’s teaching that “from now on those who have wives should live as if they do not . . . for this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:29, 31 NIV).

Submission and Sensitivity: Peter’s Message to Husbands and Wives (1 Pet. 3:1–7)

Peter’s comments on the marriage relationship are penned in the context of believers suffering at the hands of unbelievers, specifically, believing wives called to live with unbelieving husbands. Peter’s general rule of conduct is submission “for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (1 Pet. 2:13), including government (1 Pet. 2:13–17), authorities at work (1 Pet. 2:18), and at home (1 Pet. 3:1). In the case of work relationships, submission is urged not only to superiors who are “good and gentle but also to the unjust” (1 Pet. 2:18). Wives, likewise, are to be submissive to unbelieving husbands (1 Pet. 3:1).¹⁸

In all of this, Christ has set the example (1 Pet. 2:21), all the way to the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). Marriage, as well as other human relationships, is thus set in the larger framework of a believer’s Christian testimony in the surrounding unbelieving world. While there is no guarantee (see 1 Cor. 7:16), believing wives are to work

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and pray that their husbands “may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct” (1 Pet. 3:1–2; see 1 Cor. 7:12–14). Such wives are to cultivate inner, spiritual beauty (1 Pet. 3:4), being submissive to their husbands as Sarah was to Abraham. They are called to do so even when their husbands’ directives are not informed by a regenerate mind and heart, as long as this does not involve sin (1 Pet. 3:3–6; see, e.g., Genesis 20).

In the sole verse addressed to husbands, Peter admirably balances the recognition of distinctions between the marital partners and the notion of their equality in Christ. On the one hand, wives are called “the weaker vessel” with whom husbands are to live in an understanding way. Yet on the other hand, wives are called “heirs with you [their husbands]” of the gracious gift of life (1 Pet. 3:7). The reference to removing any obstacles for joint marital prayer closes Peter’s instruction to married couples.

Paul’s Vision for Marriage

Fulfilling One’s Marital Obligations (1 Cor. 7:2–5)

Paul’s pronouncements on marriage in his first letter to the Corinthians are part of his response to a letter sent to him by the Corinthians, in which they had requested that the apostle rule on several controversial issues (1 Cor. 16:17). In his response, the apostle takes a strong stand against a false *asceticism* that values singleness as more spiritual than marriage (1 Cor. 7:1). Suppressing their physical functions for the sake of spiritual advancement, the proponents of this teaching apparently called on those who were married to refrain from sexual intercourse with their spouse or even encouraged them to divorce him or her in order to pursue an allegedly higher, sexless spirituality.

While 1 Corinthians 7 is often discussed in the context of Paul’s high valuation of singleness, it is worthy of note that the same chapter also contains a very strong affirmation of marriage. In 1 Corinthians 7:2–5, Paul urges the husband and the wife not to

withdraw from normal marital sexual relations but to fulfill their sexual obligations toward their marriage partner. This reveals Paul's high view of marriage and contradicts the misguided spirituality promoted by some in the Corinthian congregation.

Marriage an Honorable State (1 Tim. 2:15; 4:1–4)

First Timothy contains a very strong reaffirmation of the centrality of marriage in the age of Christ. As in Corinth, some in Ephesus (the destination of 1 Timothy) were teaching that Christians ought to abstain from marriage. Paul counters this teaching with extremely strong language, contending that those “who forbid marriage” (1 Tim. 4:3) were “devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). In contrast, he maintains that “everything created by God [including marriage] is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4).

Earlier in the letter, Paul affirms “childbearing” (i.e., a woman's devotion to her domestic and familial duties, including childrearing) as a vital part of a woman's life of faith (1 Tim. 2:15) and calls candidates for both overseer and deacon to be faithful to their wives (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; see Titus 1:6) and to manage their households well, keeping their children submissive (1 Tim. 3:4; see Titus 1:6). In the former passage, Paul adduces both the Genesis creation and fall narratives (see 1 Tim. 2:13–14), which indicates that he views marriage as a divine creation ordinance that, though affected by the fall, continues to obtain in the age of Christ.

All Things under One Head: The Roles of Husband and Wife (Eph. 5:21–33)

Paul's most thorough treatment of marriage is found in his letter to the Ephesians. Read *in the context of the entire letter*, it becomes clear that Paul set marriage within the larger context of God's final restoration of all things under the headship of Christ. At the very outset Paul affirms God's overarching purpose for humanity (including married couples) in the age of Christ: “to bring all

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things in heaven and on earth under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:10 NIV). This establishes Christ as the focal point of God’s end-time program, as well as the head (Eph. 1:22), not only over the church (Eph. 1:22) but over every authority, in the present as well as the coming age (Eph. 1:21). Clearly, Christ’s headship here conveys the notion of supreme authority, not merely that of provision or nurture. As the exalted Lord, Christ is the head, and all things are subjected to him (see Phil. 2:9–11).

The first important lesson for marriage from Paul’s teaching in Ephesians is therefore that the marriage relationship must be seen within the compass of God’s larger purposes, that is, the bringing of “all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:10 NIV). This includes spiritual powers who will be fully submitted to Christ (Eph. 1:21); the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles in one entity, the church (Eph. 2:11–22; 3:6–13); the restoration of creation (see Rom. 8:18–25), which men, as divine image bearers, are currently working to subdue (Gen. 1:28); and, most relevant for our present purposes, the restoration of the male-female marriage relationship as realized by Spirit-filled, committed Christian believers, who overcome the cursed struggle of manipulation and dominance (see Gen. 3:16) in the power of Christ and relate to each other in proper submission and Christlike love.

Paul continues to develop these important truths in the following chapters of his letter. In Ephesians 2, he affirms that believers (and hence also Christian husbands and wives) were once in the realm of Satan, but now they have been made alive in Christ, by grace (Eph. 2:5). They have been raised and exalted *with him*, participating in his victory over Satan (Eph. 2:6). God’s end-time plan to bring together all things in and under Christ is nowhere more evident than in his inclusion of the Gentiles in the community of believers together with believing Jews (Eph. 2:11–22; 3:6).¹⁹ This Paul calls a salvation-historical “mystery,” hidden in

the past in God's own purposes, but now brought into the open and unpacked by the apostle himself.

At the close of his discussion of believers' spiritual blessings in Christ, Paul prays that Christ would live in their hearts by faith and that, rooted and established in love, they would know his love in their lives (Eph. 3:17, 19). The fact that Paul begins his prayer with a reference to God "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph. 3:14–15) underscores the relevance of Paul's prayer not only for believers in general but *for married couples and families in particular*. Here, the Creator is identified as the one who both established marriage and has rightful jurisdiction over it and whose rule over families extends to earthly families as well as heavenly realities.

The second half of the letter is given to an exposition of the new life in Christ that believers are to enjoy in the unity of the "body of Christ," the church. They are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, give preference to one another in love, and preserve spiritual unity in peace (Eph. 4:1–3; see 4:4–6). God has given spiritual gifts and instituted various ministries in the church to equip believers for ministry. In all this, his goal is the "perfect man" (Eph. 4:13 NKJV) who speaks the truth in love and in all things grows into Christ, who is the head (Eph. 4:13–16). Paul then contrasts the old self, with its independence, lack of submission to authority, and bondage to passions and lusts, with the new self, which is characterized by proper submission, respect for authority, and love. Becoming a Christian is like putting off old clothes and putting on new ones (Eph. 4:22, 24; see Col. 3:9–10): there must be a marked, noticeable change in spirit and behavior—including the realm of marriage and the family.

In the context immediately preceding Paul's teaching on marital roles, he exhorts believers to live lives of love in keeping with the love of Christ who gave his life as a sacrifice for them (Eph. 5:1–2; see 5:25). Conversely, there must be no sexual immorality (*porneia*; Eph. 5:3; see 1 Cor. 6:15–16). As God's end-time community,

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the church (and hence every believer) ought to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).²⁰ In the first instance, this Spirit-filling refers to congregational worship (Eph. 5:19–20). Paul then relates Spirit-filling to the marriage relationship (Eph. 5:21–24). *Being properly submitted* (Eph. 5:21, 22) is thus a mark of Spirit-filling, in contrast to believers' previous lifestyle, which was characterized by rebellion toward authority.

The second important lesson for married couples, then, is that the instructions for wives and husbands (as well as those for parents/children and slaves/masters later on) are *directed to Spirit-filled believers*. In the following verses, Paul cites models for both wives and husbands to emulate: for wives, the church in her submission to Christ (Eph. 5:24); for husbands, Christ's sacrificial love for the church, resulting in her cleansing, holiness, and purity (Eph. 5:25–28). Later, Paul will add a second, commonsense analogy from the nature of things, appealing to self-interest: everyone loves one's own body; therefore, in light of the one-flesh union between husbands and wives, if husbands love their wives, this is tantamount to husbands' loving themselves (Eph. 5:29–30).

On the basis of Ephesians 5:21 ("submitting to *one another* out of reverence for Christ"), some argue that Paul does not teach the submission of wives to their husbands *only* but *also* that of husbands to their wives in "mutual submission." However, we must not stop reading at 5:21 but glean from the following verses what is Paul's definition of "submitting to one another." It is clear that the answer is (our third important principle on marriage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians) that *wives are to submit to their husbands* who are called the "head" of their wives as Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:22–24) while *husbands are to love their wives with the sacrificial love of Christ* (Eph. 5:25–30). This runs counter to the notion of "mutual submission."²¹

A comparison with Ephesians 1:22 and 4:15 further supports the notion, fourth, that "*headship*" entails not merely nurture (though it does that; see Eph. 5:29) but also a *position of authority*.

This authoritative position of the man is a function of God's sovereign creative will (and perhaps reflective of God's authority in light of his revelation of himself as Father), not of intrinsic merit or worth on his part. Hence the husband's leadership, as well as the wife's submission, is to be exercised within the orbit of grace rather than legalism or coercion. Note also that the Colossian parallel, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18), sums up the entirety of Paul's counsel to Christian wives with regard to their marital disposition (no word about "mutual submission" here).²²

That wives are called to recognize and respect proper authority over them is not unique to them. Men, too, must submit to Christ, local church leadership and discipline, the civil authorities, and their employers. Nevertheless, this does not alter the fact that there is a sense in which wives are called to submit to their husbands in a way that is *nonreciprocal* (see 1 Pet. 3:1–6 in the context of 1 Pet. 2:13, 18). Husbands' exercise of authority, in turn, must not be an arbitrary or abusive one, but should be motivated by love.

Fifth, it must also be pointed out that it is thus manifestly *not* true that wifely submission is *merely a result of the fall*. To the contrary, as mentioned, Genesis 2 contains several indications that headship and submission were part of God's original creation: God created the man first (Gen. 2:7; noted by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:8 and 1 Tim. 2:13) and laid on him a dual charge (Gen. 2:15–17); and God made the woman from the man and for the man (2:21–22; see 1 Cor. 11:8–9) as his suitable helper (Gen. 2:18, 20). God's post-fall judgment in Genesis 3:16 does not alter the fact that male headship is part of the design of the husband-and-wife relationship prior to the fall; it merely addresses the negative consequences of sin on the way in which husband and wife now relate to each other.²³ That wifely submission is not merely a result of the fall is further supported by the present passage, where it is Christian women, that is, those who have been redeemed and regenerated

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in Christ, who are nonetheless called to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22).

Paul rounds out his discussion with a familiar allusion to Scripture: “and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph. 5:31; see Gen. 2:24: “they”).²⁴ Paul’s major point seems to be that marriage has the honor of embodying the “one-flesh” principle that later obtained also in the union of the exalted Christ with the church, described by Paul in terms of “head,” “members,” and “body.” Like the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s salvific plan, this, too, is a *mystery*: it was hidden in the divine wisdom in ages past but now has been given to Paul to reveal. Marriage is thus shown to be part and parcel of God’s overarching purposes of “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:10 NIV).

The lesson to be drawn from this is that marriage in Christian teaching, rather than being an end in itself, is subjected to Christ’s rule. Just as Christ must rule over all heavenly powers (Eph. 1:21–22) and over the church (Eph. 4:15), he must also rule over the marital relationship (Eph. 5:21–33), the family (Eph. 6:1–4), and the workplace (Eph. 6:5–9). A married couple is part of the church and part of that spiritual warfare that resolutely resists evil (Eph. 6:10–14) and seeks to promote God’s purposes in this world (Eph. 6:15, 19–20). Thus the marriage relationship has as an important purpose the bearing of Christian witness in the unbelieving world. Directly, this occurs by the husband’s and the wife’s living out God’s purposes for the Christian couple. Indirectly, this takes place by being part of a biblical church that actively propagates the gospel message.

Not only is marriage therefore part of *God’s end-time purposes in Christ* (Eph. 1:10) and part of the *Spirit’s operation* (Eph. 5:18), it is also part of one other important larger reality, namely that of *spiritual warfare* (Eph. 6:10–18). Thus marriage ought not to be viewed merely on a horizontal, human plane but should be understood

as involving spiritual attacks that require husbands and wives to “put on the full armor of God” in order to withstand those attacks.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

We note three points of application. First, while some may view submitting to one’s husband’s authority as something negative, a more accurate way of looking at marital roles is to understand that wives are called to *follow their husband’s loving leadership* in their marriage. This leadership and submission is to take place in the context of a true partnership in which the husband genuinely values his wife’s companionship and counsel and the wife sincerely esteems her husband’s leadership. It is one of the unfortunate legacies of radical feminism that many tend to view male-female relationships in adversarial terms. This is contrary to God’s desire and design and to the biblical message.

Second, there is a *difference between traditional and biblical marriage*. Traditional marriage may be understood as the type of division of labor by which women are responsible for cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, and so on, while men are at work earning the family income. While Scripture does specify work outside the home as men’s primary sphere and the home as the center of women’s activity (e.g., Gen. 3:16–19; Prov. 31:10–31—though the woman’s reach is not *limited* to the home: 1 Tim. 2:15; 5:10, 14), the Bible does not seek to legislate the exact division of labor a husband and wife ought to observe. Hence within the biblical parameters outlined above, there remains room for the individual couple to work out their own distinctive and specific arrangement. This may vary from couple to couple and ought to be considered a part of Christian freedom.

Third and last, *improper caricatures* of the biblical teaching of wifely submission and the husband’s loving leadership (which includes the proper exercise of authority) must be *rejected* as either deliberate or unwitting attempts to discredit such a model as unworthy of a woman’s human dignity or our modern,

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“enlightened” times. The kind of submission Scripture is talking about is not akin to *slavery* where one person owns another. It is not *subservience* where one person is doing the bidding of another without intelligent input or interaction. It is not even truly *hierarchical*, since this conjures up notions of a military-style, top-down chain of command in which the soldier is asked to obey, no-questions-asked, the orders of his superior. None of these labels constitutes an accurate description of Scripture with regard to the roles of men and women.

Rather, the biblical model for marriage is that of loving complementarity, where the husband and the wife are partners who value and respect each other and where the husband’s loving leadership is met with the wife’s intelligent response. If Christ chooses to submit to God the Father while being equal in worth and personhood, there is no good reason why God could not have designed the husband-and-wife relationship in such a way that the wife is called to submit to the man while likewise being equal in worth and personhood. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3).