

The Profound Mystery of Marriage:
What the Bible says that your pastor isn't telling you

J. Joseph Beard

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A NOTE TO THE READER

This book was written for Christians. It is an appeal to Christians to honor marriage and to do so by honoring the Bible's teachings on marriage. To those who may pick up this book who are not Christians, I would advise you that a proper understanding of the doctrines recorded here requires a proper understanding and acceptance of the good news about Jesus, as Jesus and his work in our lives are the foundations of our marital principles. If you are not a Christian, you will probably not agree with or understand this book. If you desire to become a Christian, then you should seek Christ with your whole heart and repent of your sins to follow him, as he is close to those who seek him. More information on some foundational Christian principles can be found in this book's conclusion.

To those who are young Christians who have not yet put forth the time and energy to diligently read and study the Bible, I would recommend that you make those efforts before taking the time to read my book. The words of God are more important than my words, and you will need a working knowledge of scripture and an ability to discern truth and error if you are to begin digesting works about scripture written by other mere men.

To those more mature who would undertake a reading of this book, I hope that you will find it useful. You will need to read with a mind open to the conviction of scripture, as many of the topics I discuss are contrary to the notions of the world's culture, and many of those cultural ideas have seeped into the Church. It is in response to arguments which I have heard repeated in countless discussions with both church leaders and laity that I have written this book, and I have relied on my own experience of my fellow Christians and the culture in describing the problems we face and the justifications of those problems which are given. I believe that this book will be helpful in correcting many of the errors which have crept into the Church, and will be valuable for providing wise counsel concerning marriage for both young and old. Bear well in mind that a simple change of action regarding these things is not enough; we must learn to love first and make these things an outgrowth of love, lest we become a band of clanging cymbals. I pray diligently that God will bless you and use this work to his glory.

- Job Joseph Beard

PART ONE: The Mystery, the Metaphor

* * *

Chapter I The Glory of God in the Things He Has Made

It is written in the book of Romans, at chapter 1 verses 19-20:

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

Here Paul explains to the Church that God has been made known through the things he has made. In Paul's day, as in ours, there were those among the Gentiles to whom Paul ministered who would attempt to claim that there is no God, that we cannot know if there is a God, or that we could have no real way of knowing the character of a God if there is one. Paul on the other hand, as a Jew well-versed in scripture, knew clearly that there is a God, and he knew much about him. Paul knew God not only because he had the benefit of reading the record of God's interactions with mankind throughout human history, but because he himself had seen a vision of Christ resurrected, the ultimate embodiment of God before his eyes. In this way, Paul was without excuse as to knowing that God is.

Paul argued though that the Gentiles, having had no written account of God's hand in history, having never seen Christ in the flesh, and likely having never even heard the

good news were also without excuse. God, Paul argued, had been clearly displayed in the things he had made. Paul used creation as a proof of God's divinity and great power, and the evidence is still before our eyes today. There is no one, excepting those whose hearts are darkened, that can look into the night sky, see the fabulous array of stars and not acknowledge that there is a God. Those who refuse to believe will try to explain away the heavens and the earth around them with "rational" theories about natural laws and random chance, intentionally dusting aside the obvious fact that where there is a law there is one who has written a law. God has penned the physics which hold the stars together, and explaining the workings of what he has made will not explain him away. The overwhelming greatness of the cosmos alone is more than enough evidence to prove that there is a far-greater God.

The fact is, much to the hardened heart's dismay, that all of what God has made gives him glory, even the heart of the one who refuses to acknowledge him. Paul wrote again in Romans 9:21-23:

"Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-"

So in the end everything gives glory to God by displaying something of his character. Even if that which has been made is a hardened heart bent on sin, it gives glory to God by displaying the balance between his mercy and his wrath. Paul wrote again in Ephesians 1:3-6:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every

spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

So in the beginning God created the world with a plan in mind to glorify himself. From even before the foundation of the Earth God foreknew the details of the last days and which hearts would come to his saving grace, and all these things were made to give him glory.

This creation which we live and see unfolding day by day before our eyes was crafted by God in six days, over the course of which God created and called the things he made good.¹ But we know that on the sixth day, as the work of creation drew to a close, God placed the man in the garden and declared in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Without the woman, the creation was incomplete. All of creation and man alone, even in a sinless state, is not a great enough design that God's glory should be adequately revealed, and so God in his wisdom crafted a woman, the crown jewel of creation, for the man. And finally, having seen that all he made, even as it was poised to fall, was good, God rested on the seventh day.

Now union of the man and the woman, which at the beginning of scripture is highlighted above all the other things that he created, is of great significance to the believer in Christ. Even setting aside the fact that this union is the very foundation of the social fabric, marriage has a deep value to our understanding of God. In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul pointed out the symbol which God created at the institution of marriage:

¹ Genesis 1

"Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

So we see that from the very beginning God's plan was made and that marriage was instituted, perhaps most importantly, as a symbol of Christ's relationship to the Church. For this reason, it is a primary goal of any married couple to use their marriage in such a way that their roles display Christ and his Church. To accomplish this goal, we must delve into a consideration of the profound mystery: what does the Bible say marriage should look like, and how does a proper marriage display the relationship between Christ and the Church?

The marriage metaphor comparing Christ to the groom and his people to the bride is a persistent thread throughout scripture. The Bible begins with marriage and the Bible ends

with marriage. Consider what John wrote in Revelation 19:6-8:

"Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure' - for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints."

Or again in Revelation 21:9-10:

"Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,"

The Old Testament is filled with references to marriage setting God up as a husband and his people as a bride. Isaiah 54:1-7 reads:

"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,' says the LORD. 'Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out, do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. Fear not, for you

will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you."

There are many more examples of this kind of language in the Old Testament. It could even be argued that there are entire books of the Bible, namely Song of Solomon and Ruth, whose most important value is to describe the marriage relationship between God and his chosen people.

The New Testament is also full of marriage themes, as we have already seen demonstrated above. In fact the New Testament begins, after a brief genealogy, with the story of the marriage of Joseph and Mary.¹ Some of Jesus' principal teachings, like those in the Sermon on the Mount,² highlighted faithfulness to marriage, demonstrating its importance in our right walk with God. Jesus also added to the Biblical imagery of marriage as compared to himself and the Church, by equating himself to a bridegroom in passages like Matthew 25:1-6:

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed,

¹ Matthew 1

² Matthew 5

they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'"

Or again in Luke 5:34-35:

"And Jesus said to them, 'Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.'"

These analogies clearly are many, and there are far too many to write about here. God claims continually throughout scripture that his people, be it Israel or the Church, are his bride. This illustration of Christ and the Church is one of the greatest purposes of marriage.

Marriage exists to glorify God. The theological ramifications of this cannot be ignored and could scarcely be overstated. Without a healthy understanding of marriage we will fail to have a healthy understanding of God, and if that is the case then we of the Church and indeed all of mankind will suffer. If we are to understand God from the things he has made, and this thing marriage is the picture of our relationship to Christ, we must let nothing stop us from doing marriage in the way that God has prescribed to us, and in so doing we will glorify him both by understanding him more and by displaying him to the world. Let us then examine this profound mystery and understand both our marriages and a right relationship to God.

Chapter II

What Biblical Marriage Looks Like

As it stands, the discussion of marriage among the Christian brothers and sisters tends to be significantly muddled by a general confusion about what marriage ought to

look like; this is a significant problem, as a confused presentation of marriage is a confused presentation of Christ's relationship to his people; indeed, it is a confused presentation of the gospel. Across different cultures ideas about what starts a marriage, ends a marriage or constitutes a marriage in between can vary widely. Usually American cultural notions about what defines marriage have become the norm for American Christians, and this is an unfortunately dangerous position as the cultural understanding of marriage shifts into an increasingly Godless state. Thankfully, scripture records a great deal of information about what marriage is, and we have that information available to us that we might rectify our marriages and thereby demonstrate the gospel within our homes.

Before taking a look at what is often done incorrectly in American marriage, one should make a quick overview of what marriage is and how the Bible describes that marriage should work. Marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a woman. This union was established by God as the first and most important human institution. Marriage brings many benefits and serves many practical purposes, such as companionship,¹ efficiency of work,² the ability to raise a family,³ a sense of purpose,⁴ physical enjoyment,⁵ and others, but the greater purpose of marriage is to glorify God as a picture of Christ's relationship to his people,⁶ as noted above.

The Christian marriage begins with a betrothal, when a man asks a woman's father for her hand in marriage and the father agrees to the union. When the groom is ready to take the bride into his house, he takes her in and the two are free to sexually consummate the marriage. There can be no sexual

¹ Genesis 2:18

² Ecclesiastes 4:9

³ Psalm 128

⁴ Ecclesiastes 9:9

⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:3

⁶ Ephesians 5:22-33

component of the relationship before this point, and marriage is the only acceptable context for sexual activity. In a marriage a man and a woman each have distinct roles which display Christ's relationship to his people, with the man leading and loving his wife and the wife submitting to and respecting her husband. In time the married couple is expected to give birth to children and raise them in a Godly manner. The marriage is an unbreakable commitment, and the two live faithfully together as one until either partner dies. This simple and beautiful model gives us a priceless picture of Christ's relationship to the Church without which our understanding of the gospel will fall into jeopardy. Sadly, the picture has all too often been distorted by sin, and is often distorted to the point that it becomes something else entirely.

The distortions against marriage come in a variety of forms, all of which undermine the picture of Christ's love for the world. Sexual immorality, even sometimes between members of the same sex, has become a rampant undermining of the Biblical model. Divorce also, which should never exist among God's people, has also become a point of major concern as many marriages end in divorce. Childbearing, an important component of marriage, is now generally considered optional for a Christian couple, and childbearing is generally put off until a time when children will be convenient. The Biblical model of betrothal has been completely supplanted by an unbiblical model of dating and engagement, with civil licenses and superficial ceremonies upheld as definitive over a man's word, or even the authority of God. Christians regularly marry non-Christians, though scripture indicates clearly that they should not, and while the Bible always holds marriage as a priority, American Christians are increasingly putting marriage off until later in life while seeking out higher education, greater wealth, and worldly living. Such things as these should not be, and the problems associated with each of these, as well as their impact on a correct understanding of the gospel will be assessed herein.

Before moving on to in-depth descriptions of some foundational marital principles and their impact on our understanding of the gospel, it is important to make a caveat concerning our understanding of the marriage mystery, that is, marriage as a metaphor for the gospel. Throughout this book we will examine what scripture records concerning marriage and then demonstrate how those things exemplify the relationship between Christ and the Church. We will not, on the other hand, examine what scripture records concerning Christ and the Church and use that to prove otherwise Biblically unfounded principles. For instance, we will see that the Bible teaches that men should love their wives; likewise, the Bible teaches that Christ loves the Church. In this way the loving husband, through marriage, gives us an example of Christ's character. To turn this metaphor backward would result in complete nonsense. For example, one might argue that Christ was literally crucified to save the Church from her sins, and therefore all husbands ought to die literally by crucifixion in order to save their wives from sin. Clearly this would be a teaching opposed to scripture. Indeed by reversing the mystery one would have to begin arguing that husbands are gods and wives are their creations, which would make no sense. This is not to say however that a husband who loves his wife as Christ loves should not model his love after Christ's love, but only that the marriage metaphor ought not to be a construct for applying God's characteristics or actions onto people beyond what scripture commands.

Such an example of taking the analogy beyond its scope is seen when a person uses the mystery of marriage to create new extra-Biblical regulations. For example, scripture teaches that women are not to teach over men in the Church,¹ which we can reasonably say demonstrates Christ's leadership over the Church and the Church's submission. We could not however extrapolate that to say that a woman should never

¹ 1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:12. Appendix A gives a more thorough discussion.

explain anything to her husband at home by arguing that explaining to her husband would make Christ out to be ignorant of something which the Church needs to explain. Our goal is not to draw new commands out from the mystery of marriage; it is simply to explain how the commands and examples that we have been given demonstrate the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Throughout this book, many highly controversial topics will be covered. I have endeavored to remain faithful to scripture in spite of what the culture, or even popular Christianity, might argue to the contrary. It is highly unfortunate that there are those in the Church who, realizing that scripture supports an ideal for marriage that they find unpalatable, will make the argument that the marriages exemplified in scripture are simply an old cultural practice or a matter of legalism, and that there is no reason to let the scriptural stance interrupt our current cultural norms. The reality is that God in his word has defined and described marriage in a certain way, and it is none of mankind's business to attempt to change that to suit his desires. To do so is to discredit scripture, which we know ought never to be done. True, we do live life differently today than people did thousands of years ago, but in something as foundational to the human experience as our marriages man will never change. To make an attempt to alter something as foundational as marital roles and regulations would be about as reasonable as altering the parent-child relationship in such a way that the child was in charge of the home. Such an arrangement could never function properly because it is an affront to God's design. More importantly, marriage exists to show Christ's relationship to the Church, and that is a relationship we certainly have no power to change. Christians cannot alter gender and familial roles in such a way that women and men are of equal rights and roles without inadvertently demonstrating to the world that we consider ourselves equal to God. And how much worse it would be to put a wife in

authority, as if to tell the world that we are in charge of God! As Christ is unchanging and his relationship to the Church is unchanging, so our marriages must consistently reflect the unchanging principles of scripture. Anything else will confuse the Christian's understanding of Christ's ministry.

God made marriage first to glorify himself and at a distant second to please us; our purpose therefore should be to glorify God in our marriages. If we are to give God the glory in marriage, then we must do marriage in the ways which God has prescribed. When those things are done and understood properly, marriage becomes a picture of the gospel displayed for all the world to see.

PART TWO: Foundational Principles

* * *

Chapter III The Stance of the Woman

Before delving further into more practical issues of marriage, there is one foundational principle of marriage and social relationships in scripture that cannot be ignored. This teaching is likely the most misunderstood and most offensive to the culture, however we must humbly accept the teaching from the word of God. This teaching is that, according to scripture, women are to be held under the constant and all-encompassing authority of men. That the woman is held under the authority of her husband means that she belongs to her husband or father and maintains no right to self-determination. That the woman is so held does not detract from her high value. She is the most valued among those things a man holds. Her lack of self-determination does not take away from her animation, her intelligence, her capability, or any facet of her character. The woman, for being under the authority of man, is to be considered no less human, and above all she is to be no less loved, cherished, and cared for. However, that the woman is held under authority helps us to define her roles and the roles of the men who interact with her.¹ Without this initial understanding, the other principles discussed in this book will fall flat. Seeing that other Biblical marital principles are contingent on this principle, it is highly unfortunate that feminism has taken such a large grasp on the culture and has seeped into the understandings of the Church. It is because feminism has upended society and because reversing that trend is so important that I have chosen to include a broad

¹ This chapter focuses on a woman's position in society. See Chapter XI for a discussion of women's roles.

discussion of a woman's place in society here, at the outset, rather than waiting until my more pointed discussion of her roles.

That the woman is held under an all-encompassing masculine authority is supported by scripture in several ways and in many places. It is not my intention here to include all of the evidences, but simply to give a sampling. In the interest of saving space and avoiding repetition this chapter includes only those scriptures which would not find a more suitable home elsewhere. In scripture we see numerous examples in Bible narratives of women being held under a strong masculine authority, even to the point that they are traded as property. These descriptive practices are upheld and supported in the prescription of the Old Testament law, and New Testament teaching regarding women's roles maintains the established practice. There are also theological ramifications regarding our relationship to Christ which solidify this understanding. This teaching, a very difficult teaching for many, has massive implications for our understanding of marriage.

Our most basic examples of a woman's place under masculine authority come to us in Old Testament stories which support the ideology; in these stories women are treated as property more often than not. A perfect and simple example of this is found in Joshua 15:16-17:

"And Caleb said, 'Whoever strikes Kiriath-sepher and captures it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife.' And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it. And he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife."

So here we see the principle played out simply. The daughter, Achsah, is held under the authority of her father Caleb. He can do as he wishes with her, and her will is inconsequential. He chooses to offer Achsah up as a prize to the one who captures Kiriath-sepher, and when Othniel accomplishes the task, Caleb gives Achsah to him as a person

might give any piece of property. We might also consider the case of Ruth, in Ruth 4:5 we read:

"Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance."

Here again we see that Ruth's marriage to Boaz was handled as a business transaction. She was a widow and was to be inherited, of sorts, by her next of kin. She was traded over in the same way as a parcel of land. Boaz had no right to marry Ruth unless the next of kin refused her and gave up his right to her, which he ultimately did.

This story in Ruth is an example of the Levirate marriage custom recorded in Deuteronomy 25:5-6:

"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her."

So the Old Testament law provides instruction that the brother of a deceased man should father the man's heir. This practice has ceased in modern times, but we see that it was carried out from Judah's generation at earliest¹ to at least the time of Christ.² Though Christ said nothing against the practice we shouldn't assume that Levirate marriage would be acceptable today. When the Sadducees asked Jesus about the practice, they weren't having a discussion about Levirate marriage so much as the Sadducees were challenging a belief in the resurrection, so Jesus' response makes no mention of the

¹ Genesis 38

² Luke 20:27-33

law. The most important aspect of the Levirate marriage command is that the dead brother has a son to carry on his inheritance, which was an important function because of ancient Hebrew estate laws, not something that we are much concerned with today. However the command of Levirate marriage does give us an important point concerning women: in the Old Testament they are treated as reproductive property. Here we see the woman used simply for the sake of reproducing and carrying out the inheritance of her husband. She is given no say in the matter of whom she might like to be remarried to, having only the brother as an option, and this should speak loudly to anyone who is overly concerned with a woman's right to reproductive choice or any other self-determination. Levirate marriage was ultimately beneficial for the woman however, as she would have a son to care for her when she reached her old age. While the widow may have avoided remarriage altogether, and especially if she was beyond childbearing age, she would gladly be remarried to a brother.

From the Old Testament law we might also consider Deuteronomy 20, in which Moses gives word concerning warfare, at verses 13-14 he discusses the conquest of a city, and we read:

"And when the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword, but the women and the little ones, the livestock, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as plunder for yourselves. And you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the LORD your God has given you."

Here the Bible clearly calls women "plunder," and "spoil," which are to be taken and enjoyed in the same manner as any piece of property might be taken and enjoyed. The Hebrew word for plunder is חָלָל , the same word that might be

used of any plunder won in a war.¹ That the women are to be taken and held as property in this context is not unreasonable if we understand that the women were held by the authority of their husbands and fathers until the Israelites killed them, at which point the women are free for the taking. Deuteronomy 21:10-14 gives further instructions regarding captive women taken as wives, saying nothing which would lead us to believe that a woman deserves any say in the matter, but highlighting that the woman does deserve good treatment.²

Exodus gives us several more passages in which women are treated as property. In Exodus 21:2-5 we find an example in Hebrew slave laws:

"When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever."

This passage exemplifies a principle regarding the ownership of slaves. Exodus 21:7 teaches that a female slave is owned forever, with no time limit once she has been sold (not unlike a wife). With a man it was different however. A

¹ For definitions of Greek and Hebrew words, I am relying on sources and definitions which are commonly accepted among conservative scholars as well as my own experience with the text. The reader is invited to check his own regular sources, from which he should find little or no variance with my assertions.

² Deuteronomy 21:14

Hebrew man could be purchased as a slave but could be forced to work for no more than six years, going free in the seventh. The law quoted above deals with a conflict that was sure to arise. If a master gave one of his female slaves, his property, to another of his slaves, who would keep ownership of the woman and her children when the slave man went free? The answer was that the slave owner was the true owner of the woman, and that the only way the husband could stay with her was to continue in service forever, with his commitment to lifelong bondage clearly displayed by the hole bored through his ear. It is a noteworthy picture of sacrifice that a man would sell himself into a lifetime of slavery to love his bride.

The slave husband in this situation is not able to take an owned woman as his property, meaning that she cannot fully come under his authority, while she is already owned by another and he himself is in a property state. The Hebrew word here for wife is always a form of אִשָּׁה , which can alternately mean woman or wife. The word is usually translated as wife when it is given a pronominal suffix (literally saying, "woman of his," or the like). Concerning the woman given to the slave, the word only receives a suffix in verse 5, when the husband says "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free." The possible implication of this is that she is not truly his until he gives his word to stay under the master's control, but instead she is something of a sexually used slave-woman.

Regardless of the exact specifics behind the practice, this passage clearly demonstrates that women are held as property in a sense, and that a legal conflict about ownership of a woman could arise. The Bible gives no thought to the woman's aspirations. She is simply held by a master or given by him. Leviticus 19:20 gives a similar situation, in which a betrothed slave-woman is sexually involved with a man other than her betrothed. While the penalty for this would normally

be death for both of them,¹ death is not prescribed here because a woman owned by her slave-master cannot be truly owned by her husband-master.

Exodus 21 is also especially interesting in its use of the word **בַּעַל**, which is sometimes translated as "husband" and designates an owner or master over something. The word is used of a husband in 21:22, which describes reparations due to a husband (**בַּעַל**) if his pregnant wife is injured. Interestingly, the word is also used throughout chapters 21 and 22 (perhaps most notably in verses 28, 29 and 34 of chapter 21) where the word is translated as "owner" concerning the owner of an ox or donkey in similar situations of reparation. It would appear from this context that the Mosaic Law's concept of a man's relationship to his wife is at least somewhat akin to a man's ownership of livestock.

Concerning Exodus 22 we must further note verse 16.² The verse reads:

"If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife."

This passage and its parallel show that a young woman is held under the authority of her father. If a man takes the girl and uses her, then he is forced to pay for her and keep her because a woman who is no longer a virgin would be of less value to her father and he would have greater difficulty in finding a suitable home for her. Essentially, the practice here is "You break it, you buy it."

Though some Bibles would insert a heading above verse 16 and count it as the beginning of a new section, verse 16 is in fact a continuation of the laws in 21:33-22:15 concerning reparations made for stolen or injured livestock. In the mindset reflected by the placement of these verses here in the law,

¹ Deuteronomy 22:23-24

² This verse finds a parallel in Deuteronomy 22:28-29

there is no evident difference between a seduced virgin and a gored bull.

This talk of owning women does not mean that the women can be treated in whatever manner her master wishes. For example, verse 8 of Exodus 21 says that "...He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people..." and verse ten says, "If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights." From this we gather that the wife or slave taken as a wife deserves to be treated well and cared for. Her needs are to be met, because she is not an object, but a person who is to be tenderly loved.

In spite of these scriptures, some will argue that such commands are simply from the old law and not something that we ought to follow today, and in some sense this is agreeable. We are not bound by Old Testament law to make ourselves right before God, but the principles behind these laws are useful instruction in loving our neighbor and understanding God's righteous standards. The Old Testament Laws are the guiding principles of proper social stance and are key to our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world, an important component for us if we are to love our neighbors; it is on this component, not the letter of the law, that we are focused. The intention behind discussing these various laws is not to promote polygamy, Levirate marriage, slavery, or unkind treatment to wives, but to draw recognition to the overarching authority structure regarding marriage that resonates throughout scripture.

Regardless though of whether or not one accepts Old Testament law, the New Testament echoes and supports the Old Testament notion. 1 Peter 3:1-6 reads:

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external-the braiding of hair

and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear-but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."

Here Peter uses Sarah as an example and indicates that Christian women should be submissive to their husbands even to the point of calling them "lord," (κύριον). The same word is often used to describe Christ in the New Testament and is the word that would be commonly used of master over a slave.¹ This is a demonstration of great respect and obedience, and is perfectly aligned with the Old Testament's teaching. There are many other New Testament examples upholding the Old Testament standard of a woman's stance which should be apparent in later chapters of this book.

This notion that women are to be held under a vast authority, even as property might be held, contains a valuable nugget of theological understanding. In Romans 1:1 Paul writes, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God," In this verse Paul refers to himself as a servant using the Greek word "δούλος," meaning a slave or a bondservant.² Here Paul is asserting God's ownership over him, and most specifically in that he has been set apart for a special service in delivering the gospel. Paul had a special calling, but is it not true that all Christians are slaves to God? Titus 2:14 speaks of Christ

¹ See Colossians 3:22 for example

² A case of the same word is used to describe Onesimus as a slave in Philemon

"who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

Indeed, we have been redeemed in a manner not unlike that of Ruth, and are now owned as a possession by Christ, our heavenly husband, our master, and our savior. We are his and no one can snatch us from him!

Predestination gives a perfect example of God's control over man which is to be exemplified in marriage. We read of God's predestination in Ephesians 1:3-5:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."

We read also in Romans 9:18, "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." So we see that it is not by our own faith that we are saved, as faith is a work, but by grace through the work of faith which God has graciously bestowed on us. God's sovereignty over his creation extends beyond the administration of grace however. In Isaiah 10:15 the prophet spoke against the king of Assyria's pride in his military conquests:

"Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!"

If God so controls the people, using kings and mighty armies as his tools, hardening the heart to control the will, and

selecting the ones who will believe even before the foundations of the earth, if we in the hands of God have no control of our own destinies, then it is entirely appropriate that the woman, symbol of humanity, be completely under the control of the man, the symbol of God. Could her own will and self-determination be an accurate reflection of the relationship between Christ and the Church? Clearly not. If we are to reflect God's relationship to ourselves then the power that a man holds over a woman must be so. Ultimately, rejection of a woman being held under the authority of her husband amounts to a rejection of God's sovereignty and of our whole-hearted devotion to him.

Of course, as Christ loves us dearly, men must love their wives. This talk of authority and ownership is not a justification for a man to mistreat his wife. Paul also wrote in Ephesians 6:5-9:

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him."

Colossians 4:1 also says, "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." If men are commanded to treat a slave well, then how much better they must treat their wives! If this picture of ownership is reflective of the relationship between Christ and the Church, then the husband must be most loving and sacrificial! Paul also wrote in Romans 8:28-30:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

So we see that God's predestination is for his glory but not for his glory alone. These things work together for the good of his bride, the Church, resulting in her glorification. The husband likewise should give much concern and attention to his wife's best interest. Don't all women ultimately benefit from the strong headship of their husbands? Peter instructs us that women are the weaker vessel,¹ and this is still true. The woman is weaker than the man, and she needs him to be her protector and provider. Those women who leave the protection and care of their husbands throw themselves into the flame of a dangerous and sinful world that is intentionally opposed to their best interests.

Having seen the extent of the authority a man holds over a woman, we must recognize that there are exceptions to a man's authority. It would be unwise to attempt to extend male authority to cover all women, as scripture makes note that there are some women who come out from under the authority of a man. Daughters remain under the authority of their fathers until they are betrothed or their father dies.² If her father is dead and she has no husband, a woman is free to live by her own authority. A woman whose husband divorces her is no longer bound by a man's authority, and the widow likewise is not bound. Numbers 30:9 gives an example of the freedom of

¹ 1 Peter 3:7

² See Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-9 for an example

the widow and the divorcée. Women in these exceptional positions gain self-determination and independence in society as a man might, and also gain the responsibilities that come with them.

Paul gives explicit teaching concerning the widows' freedom in Romans 7:2, where he writes, "For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage." In this verse the words translated "a married woman" is ὑπανδρος γυνή, literally, "an under-man woman," the implication that the wife is owned by and under the authority of the husband is obvious. The words "law of marriage" translate νόμου τοῦ ἀνδρός, literally, "law of man." This should demonstrate that the widow is freed from the familial authority of a man. Interestingly, even widowhood here shows an example of Christ's relationship to the Church. As the death of a husband frees his widow from his law, so now the old man (the law which once held sway) is dead, and the widow Church is free to be joined to Christ her husband.

We must be careful to understand of course that the widow is placed in a difficult situation. Much as the Church would be without Christ, so is the widow without her husband. Her provider, protector and closest friend is gone, and because of this very sad state the Church should be especially careful to help her in her time of need. That widows be cared for is obviously important to God, as he declares himself to be the defender of widows and calls on his people to do likewise on many occasions.¹ Jesus was considerate of his mother Mary, whom he had a special responsibility to care for when he, in John 19:26-27, gave her to the disciple whom he loved. Paul notes that widows deserved special care, saying in 1 Timothy 5:3-5:

¹ See Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 68:5, Zechariah 7:10, or Malachi 3:5 for a few examples of many

"Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day,"

Now the widow (as well as the daughter) must come back under the authority of the husband if she remarries, and remarriage is advisable if the woman is young enough to do so. Paul instructed this a few verses later in 1 Timothy 5:14: "So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander."

The ramifications of the teaching that women are to be held under absolute authority, under "the law of man," are obviously revolutionary. To apply this understanding to the Church will require reversion and revision in almost every area of life. We glean from this teaching that women, apart from those few whose leaders have died, are to be held in a manner similar to property. As we shall see, this issue will impact our understanding of how marriages should be entered into, how their roles are structured, and how their sex-lives operate, among a host of other issues. Such tumultuous change will be difficult and harshly opposed by unbelievers and culturally-minded Christians alike, but it will ultimately create a much healthier society.

We have understood from the stories and the teachings of scripture that a woman is held under a complete authority by her father or her husband. Radical as it may be, without this understanding the other marital teachings in scripture will be impossible to decipher. We have also seen that these understandings point us back to Christ, and that they have practical useful ramifications in everyday life. The Bible gives no other example to follow in this area, and Christians should

not invent an unbiblical way of handling social interactions to appease those who bristle at the implications of the Biblical teaching, but should accept the Biblical way that has been provided. This teaching may be difficult to accept and will require many changes in many lives, but it is the teaching of scripture nonetheless and for the sake of the Church's spiritual health it must not be neglected.

Chapter IV Sexual Morality

In spite of the reputation which Christians have sometimes given it, sex itself is not bad. In the right context, sex is in fact quite good. The goodness of sex was proclaimed by God in Genesis 1:31, when he proclaimed the goodness of the creation of both male and female. Truly, Genesis 1:28 records the first command which God gave the two, that they should, "Be fruitful and multiply..." clearly something for which sex is useful. Sex is not only functionally valuable; it also serves as an agent for the binding together of the husband and wife.¹ Heightened emotional attachment is also a good characteristic of sexuality, as is well demonstrated in the Song of Songs. Paul also spoke to the value of sex within marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:3, writing "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband."

In the wrong context however, sex is very bad. In our culture today sex is often abused. The responsibility for this falls quite squarely on the people, as church leaders tend to do a sufficient job of explaining to the people what is and is not proper in sex, often even going beyond what is written. The Biblical rules about sex are well-known for the most part, even among unbelievers who practice sexually immorality as they please. In this chapter we will review and clarify those

¹ Genesis 2:24

guidelines for this important part of marriage while examining the implications of these things for our understanding of our own relationship to God as well.

Before diving into a discussion of exactly what constitutes sexually right and sexually wrong, it is first beneficial to understand that sexual morality is not only an issue of purity, but an issue of property. That is to say, sexual sin is not wrong only because it is immoral in and of itself (though often it is wrong in that sense), but it is also wrong because sexual sin overlaps with property laws.

An example of sexual intercourse being treated as a claim to property is recorded in the life of King David. 2 Samuel records that David's son Absalom attempted to overthrow the kingdom, and that David, for fear that his plan would be successful, escaped with his servants and left ten concubines to keep the house.¹ When Absalom entered Jerusalem, his first act was to publicly engage in sex with the concubines.² This act was committed that he might demonstrate that he had become a stench to his father and was, effectively, a proclamation that he had stolen the kingdom out from under David.³

The ramifications of this act were not lost on young Solomon, who legitimately received the kingdom from David some years later. 1 Kings 2 records an incident in which Solomon's half-brother Adonijah sent to Solomon to request the hand of Abishag, who had served as David's concubine before David's death⁴ but never had sex with him.⁵ Adonijah evidently connected his own relationship to Abishag with his status as a former crown prince,⁶ and Solomon did as well. Solomon's response to Adonijah's request for Abishag's hand

¹ 2 Samuel 15:16

² 2 Samuel 16:22

³ 2 Samuel 16:21

⁴ 1 Kings 2:17

⁵ 1 Kings 1:2-3

⁶ 1 Kings 2:15

was the response not of a man who has been asked to give a woman in marriage, but of a king whose kingdom was in danger of being stolen; he wasted no time in having Adonijah executed.¹ In both of these instances, the claim to a woman equaled a claim to property.

Exodus 20:15 records the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal." Understanding that it is sinful to take another man's property, and that a woman, Biblically speaking, is treated as a man's property, we can recognize plainly that it is wrong to take another man's woman. We have already considered passages defining restitution which point us clearly toward the man's authority over the woman and have seen that Exodus 22:16 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29 require a man who has sex with an unbetrothed young woman to pay the family for her and keep her.² These passages demonstrate to us, as has been noted, that the woman is traded similarly to property, and that a man who "breaks" another's property must "buy" it. Herein we see a property problem with fornication; fornication is not wrong simply because it is sexually impure, but also because it is the wrongful taking, using, and damaging of a man's daughter, his property.

Of note, Exodus 22:16-17 also emphasizes that if a young man and woman have sex outside of marriage we should encourage them to stay together. It is perplexing that there are many cases in the Church in which a young man and woman become sexually involved and "break up" their relationship because of it. Their reasoning is that what they have done is wrong, and so they ought to avoid each other to keep from doing wrong again. Pastor and parent alike in our generation tend to agree with this short-sighted decision, and particularly as marriage is viewed as an impossibility for young people. The intentions may be noble but the outcome is faulty. In reality such couples should marry in order to maintain their sexual purity, and then they will have room for

¹ 1 Kings 2:22-23

² See Page 24

the free expression of their sexual desires. If the two do not follow this teaching they will face difficulties in their future relationships.

With that in mind, we must also recognize that while the young man is under compulsion to seek the woman's hand in marriage (to buy what he broke), the father is under no compulsion to hand over his goods. He might very well choose to accept the payment for the bride from the young man without actually giving the daughter. This financial hit serves as a significant deterrent to a young man who might consider sex before marriage. He can't just take whatever he wants without consequences to his own property.

The penalty for fornication impressed upon a young woman, much weightier than the penalty for a man, also demonstrates the relationship of property and sexuality. Deuteronomy 22:13-21 records that a fornicating woman who marries without disclosing her sin was to be stoned to death at the door of her father's house. Clearly a lack of virginity in marriage is not a desirable thing, but also not an unallowable thing. Leviticus 21:7 says that the priests were required to marry sexually pure women, and the command stands as an indication that the common people were not so required. Hosea took a sexually unfaithful bride,¹ and King David had an unfaithful bride returned to him.² All of these examples point out that the stoning of the woman is not because of an impurity issue so much as it is because of a husband's displeasure at having been duped into taking "damaged goods." The young man who has taken this bride brings her back to the door of the man who made the sale that he might be forced to watch his daughter's grisly demise; this is the price he pays for his unjust transaction. Furthermore, we see that the woman, as property, is held to a much different standard than her husband, as she has no similar recourse for her husband's former sexual relations.

¹ Hosea 3:1

² 2 Samuel 3:14-16

We might also note that these high penalties ensure that young women will be unlikely to commit fornication and that if they do they will be unlikely to hide the fact. It would be much better for a woman to marry her partner or shift to him a high fee than to marry another later and die for having kept the secret!

Seeing that the penalty for a woman's premarital sexual activity is so high, many would ask if it is befitting to take a woman who is not a virgin as his bride. As the examples above show, it is not a sin to take a sexually impure bride. Purity is important and is upheld in the Bible however. Pertinent examples might be found in the story of Tamar,¹ who lived out the rest of her life in solitude after being raped by Amnon. In any case, if a man is sure that sexual immorality in his potential bride will not continue then he should decide the matter in his own heart and be sure that he is able to love the wife he has chosen steadfastly, not holding her past sins against her.

Now if it is wrong to take another man's daughter, it is most certainly wrong to take another man's wife. As she was once her father's so now she is her husband's, but the bond between husband and wife as one flesh is much stronger than the father-daughter bond. Clearly then, for a man to take another man's wife would be a much more egregious theft. The seventh commandment is recorded simply at Exodus 20:14: "You shall not commit adultery."

Before continuing, it is important to establish the meaning of adultery. Adultery is committed by a man who has sex with another man's wife or by a wife who has sex with another man. Adultery is not (as many in modern culture would believe) committed when a husband has sex with an unmarried woman or when an unmarried woman has sex with another woman's husband; this would be an act of fornication

¹ 2 Samuel 13:1-22

because the woman involved was unmarried. Deuteronomy 22:22 describes a case of adultery:

"If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel."

Leviticus 20:10 shares a similar sentiment. Clearly the theft of a wife cannot be repaid; only one's life is acceptable reparation in the eye-for-eye balance.

In extramarital sex the gulf of separation between genders again becomes evident. Interestingly, while the Old Testament law requires that a man not take someone else's wife, guaranteeing her absolute sexual fidelity, it does not require a man's absolute fidelity to his own wife, and it would be quite unreasonable for the law to do so. The man was not held by his wife as one might hold a piece of property, but maintained the freedom to take more women as he might choose. The culture of the Old Testament was decidedly polygamist, so to require of a man that he not have sex with more than one woman would be incongruous. Rather than forbidding that a man have sex with another woman than his first wife, the Old Testament requires that if the man has sex with a woman outside of his initial marriage that he must take the second woman as a wife as well.¹ Ultimately there is a financial mechanism to stop men from continually having sex outside of marriage, as they could only take as many women as they could afford to purchase and maintain.

We have considered that adultery and fornication are both theft, but it is not only theft that must be considered when looking at sexual immorality as a problem of property. The tenth commandment, recorded in Exodus 20:17, also bears relevance:

¹ Exodus 22:16

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

This passage again demonstrates clearly that a neighbor's wife is placed into the same category as his other property (house, livestock, or slaves), and the passage explicitly commands that a woman so owned is not to be coveted.

It is in this light, I assert, that we must understand Jesus' discourse concerning adultery in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:27-30 he says:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Jesus' definition of adultery clearly goes much farther than many are willing to accept by including even the coveting of another man's wife. The fact is that avoiding sex outright with a neighbor's wife is not enough to fulfill Jesus' teachings regarding adultery. In order to live out holy sexuality the Christian must not even begin to covetously flirt with adultery. He should not look at the married woman lustfully nor even think of her in such a way! Such immorality should be avoided at even the most extreme costs, as the penalty is more extreme than any worldly loss.

There is an important caveat to be made concerning Jesus' discourse here. While this passage is often used as a warning against all extramarital sexual thought whatsoever,

Jesus' discussion here is not about fornication (πορνεία) but about adultery (μοιχεία).¹ Because Jesus' comments are in the context of adultery, we can reason that the Greek word here translated "woman" (γυναίκα) would probably be better translated as "wife". Jesus' point, I would humbly submit, is not that it is a sin to look at an unmarried woman, but that it is a sin to lust after another man's wife, because in so doing he has already committed an offense against his married brother.

Though Jesus may not have mentioned it specifically, we can rest assured that fornicative lust is no more Biblically palatable. It is perhaps by narrowly defining Jesus' teaching here that some have justified their indulgence in unbiblical sexuality. These are the kind who would tear Titus 1:15 from context and declare that all sex must be pure, for it reads:

"To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled."

Of course they err in forgetting that Paul who wrote these words wrote also 1 Thessalonians 4:3:

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;"

Or Galatians 5:19:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,"

Or Colossians 3:5:

¹ A noteworthy distinction between these two Greek words is seen Hebrews 13:4

"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

Other verses by Paul which carry a similar sentiment could be listed, but the point is here demonstrated clearly enough. Paul was a man who had escaped the burden of the law, knowing that his salvation had come by grace through faith and not through his works.¹ He was perhaps the most free among the brothers in the early Church, rebuking even Peter for appearing to lean toward the old covenant of works.² If Paul in his great liberty could see the value of sexual morality among the brothers then surely any brother can. The first church council at Jerusalem, in spite of their ruling against strict adherence to the Law of Moses, also saw the value of sexual morality, as Acts 15:20 records.

In all of the three New Testament verses quoted above, the words "sexual immorality" translate a form of the Greek word "πορνεία," which the King James Version accurately translates as "fornication" throughout. Exactly which additional sins *πορνεία* might describe is somewhat unclear; does it describe only extra-marital sex proper or other sexual acts in general? Should a definition similar to Jesus' broad description of adultery in Matthew 5, which includes even inappropriate looking, be applied to *πορνεία* as well? I would suggest that it should; as it is wrong to covet another man's wife, so it would be wrong to covet another man's daughter. Regardless of how strictly one might like to apply Matthew 5, the point is that sex outside of marriage is wrong and stepping as close to the line as one can is clearly unwise.

Having understood the weighty implications of property in sexual morality, we next turn our attention to issues of purity. Regarding purity, it is first beneficial to consider Old

¹ Ephesians 2:8-9

² Galatians 2:11-14

Testament laws concerning sexual morality. Leviticus 18 contains a host of these. Verses 6-17 forbid sexual relations with close relatives, including mother, step-mother, sister, half-sister, granddaughter, aunts of all kinds, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, mother-in-law, daughter, step-daughter, and step-granddaughter. These laws find a parallel in Leviticus 20:11-21, which records penalties for the various sexual perversions, penalties which include death, exclusion from the community, and childlessness.

Even the most ardent opponents of Christianity in today's culture tend to agree that incest is among the most disgusting crimes against nature. They will also quite readily accept Leviticus 18:23, which opposes bestiality. Thankfully there are not many proponents of such activities against whom it is necessary to argue. Likewise, Leviticus 18:19 forbids intercourse during menstruation, something which I would think no one particularly wants anyway.

It is strange that there are those, both within and without the Church, who readily oppose incest or bestiality yet have so much difficulty accepting verse 22 which opposes sodomy. Those who carry such a strange double-standard generally do so by applying some kind of humanist thinking, claiming that bestiality is inherently more unnatural or sick or is somehow otherwise incomparable with sodomy, but they fail to recognize that there's nothing innately more unnatural or bizarre about the one than there is about the other, and that all of these things are ultimately immoral not simply because they are unnatural but because God says they are wrong. Truly, the inconsistent supporters of sodomy must acknowledge that they despise incest and bestiality as being immoral not because there is some rational argument as to why these are more unnatural than sodomy, but that they despise the two only because they themselves have been influenced by the old Christianity from which the culture has turned. Without Christian morality the sodomite must accept other sexual perversions as matters of personal preference as well.

Unfortunately the idea that men should be allowed to marry men and women should be allowed to marry women has grown into a quite prevalent distortion of marriage. Even apart from Leviticus 18:22 the perversion is plainly incorrect for several reasons. We might consider Genesis 19, where we read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is well-known that these cities were destroyed for their sins, and that inappropriate relations between men was the most obvious of those. For those who would refuse to accept Old Testament teaching, calling it "legalism," there is a word from Paul in Romans 1:26-28:

"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."

Here Paul declares that homosexual practices are dishonorable, unnatural, shameless, erroneous, debased, and a refusal outright to acknowledge God; decidedly not something that Christians should support.

We might also note that "marriage" between two people of the same sex has no place in our understanding of the purpose of marriage. Marriage exists to glorify God, and it does this largely through the portrayal of Christ's love for the Church. Is there any picture of Christ's love for the Church in a man having sex with a man (as if Christ is self-focused) or in a woman having unnatural relations with a woman (as if the Church needs no Christ)? Clearly not. The metaphor of Christ and the Church necessitates distinct roles for members of the

opposite sexes; of the two partners in sodomy, which will we then expect to fill which roles? And if marriages are expected to produce offspring, a topic discussed below, then how is the couple expecting to do that? Certainly they will not by any natural means. Clearly this kind of "marriage" does not fulfill the Bible's expectations.

Sadly, the Church shares a portion of the responsibility for the unnatural relations of some as many Christians have failed to exhibit the gospel in their own marriages. Can the Church truly blame the unbelievers for not exhibiting Christian marital values and proper gender roles if she won't do so herself? A liberal professor once put it best when, disappointed by the results of 2003's presidential election (which focused highly on "same-sex marriage"), he said, "Well, now that Christians have told the homosexuals that the Bible says they can't get married, I hope someone reminds the Christians that the Bible says they can't get divorced." His comment was a well-deserved jab. Indeed, it seems that we Christians are more willing to tell the unbelievers to stop sinning than we are to tell each other. It is somewhat perplexing that Christians claim sexual perversion will undermine marriage, when the proper understanding of marriage has already all but vanished because the Church has disrespected it. Particularly as there has been a breakdown in respect for gender roles, it should come as little surprise that gender and sexual roles have become devalued as a whole. It would be most fitting for Christians to remove the plank from their own eye in this regard.

Though it should be clear at this point without saying it, prostitution is roundly condemned in the Bible.¹ Even the money earned by prostitution is unholy.² Our culture would have us expect that prostitution is somehow worse than sexual immorality in general (perhaps because it is committed in cold blood for money, rather than as an "accident" of passion), but

¹ Leviticus 19:29, Proverbs 23:27, 1 Corinthians 6:15, etc.

² Deuteronomy 23:17-18

the Bible doesn't support this idea. In fact, one passage in Ezekiel seems to cast general sexual immorality in an even worse light than prostitution. Ezekiel 16:32-34 reads:

"Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings. So you were different from other women in your whorings. No one solicited you to play the whore, and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; therefore you were different."

Evidently adultery is worse than prostitution in the sense that while the prostitute at least gains some material thing from the arrangement, the adulteress is a brazen sinner for the sake of sin itself. It is strange that American culture might depict extramarital sex as something beautiful, even as some kind of outgrowth of love, while generally depicting prostitution as the lowest a person can fall. Truly, if prostitution is the lowest rung on the ladder, adultery is buried somewhere beneath it.

We should take the Bible's tough stance against prostitution as an equally tough stance against pornography. The Bible obviously does not explicitly speak against pornography (as the technology required to create it did not exist when the Bible was written), but there is ample evidence to oppose viewing pornography. The word "pornography" is derived from the Greek words πορνεία, discussed above, and γραφή and means literally, "fornicative writing." That the very word pornography finds its root in an activity which Paul warned us to avoid should be enough to persuade the Christian that pornography is problematic. Jesus' teachings in Matthew 5 (if we are to apply it to fornication as well as adultery) should be even more convincing. Truly though, pornography is simply the modern replacement for prostitution, as a person

in Biblical times who wanted to look at what the consumer of pornography looks at today would have no other option available to him but prostitution. If we understand that the one who partakes in sexual immorality is worse than the prostitute that he pays, then we should likewise understand that a person who sets out to view pornography is committing a sin even more dire than the prostitute at whom he looks. The one who expects that these somewhat indirect references are not sufficient evidence against pornography might consider how viewing pornography contrasts with loving his neighbor as himself. Is it loving to contribute to a prostitute that she might lead many into sin? If a man would not sell his own daughter into pornography, could he possibly love his neighbor as himself by leading his neighbor's daughter into pornography? Clearly pornography has no place in Christianity.

Paul advised Timothy to flee youthful passions, sage advice to be sure. He warned the Ephesians at 5:3-5:

"But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

If speaking of such activities is inappropriate itself, then approaching practice could be no better. Paul's exhortation at Philippians 4:8 to think on pure things is likewise relevant. Here we might also note that sexual sin is placed on the same level as covetousness, and that covetousness is equated to idolatry. This is the ultimate disaster of sexual immorality: it is impure, it is covetousness, it is theft, and it is idolatry. Ultimately, to embrace sexual sin is to embrace a great many other wrongs.

The penalties for sexual sin in the New Testament Church mirror the penalties described in the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul gives a stern rebuke to the Church at Corinth for their arrogance in permitting a member to have sex with his father's wife. Paul's response to this in verse 9 is to declare that the Church should refuse to associate with the sexually immoral. Exclusion then, the option available to the Church which is most akin to death or exclusion as described in the Old Testament, is the reasonable penalty for sexual immorality. Hebrews 12:15-17 presents an even more pressing matter of penalty:

"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears."

Esau is well-known for having sold his birthright for a meal,¹ and sexual immorality is comparable to his failure. The pleasures of sexual sin are fleeting, surely even less valuable than the meal was to Esau, yet they come at a much higher expense than a birthright. Truly, sexual immorality may serve as an indicator of one's spiritual state. If one is so overpowered by the flesh that he cannot avoid such a heinous sin then perhaps he is not regenerate at all. Might he not be one of those who on the final day finds himself outside and begging Christ to open the door to the feast and let him in?² Surely this is another support that a Christian who lives in sexual immorality should be expelled from the congregation; he may be no Christian at all.

¹ Genesis 25:29-34

² Luke 13:25

All of that said, a person should not need a law to keep him from sexual immorality, as a warning might be better suited; the practical problems associated with sexual immorality ought to be enough to dissuade any person of sound mind from partaking. Proverbs 5, 6:20-35 and 7 give such a warning, indicating that a man who goes into adultery lacks sense¹ and is to be compared with an ox on his way to the slaughter.² Ultimately, adultery will only give a man bitterness³ and the spite of his community.⁴ In Proverbs 9:13-18, folly itself is personified in similar terms to those describing the prostitute and the adulteress. Sexual immorality is a detriment to a man far worse than the brief enjoyment it might afford.

The comparisons of sexual morality to Christ and the Church are plentiful. Throughout scripture unfaithfulness to God is often likened to sexual unfaithfulness in marriage. Ezekiel 23 contains perhaps the most vivid descriptor of this. In verses 7-10 he writes concerning Israel:

"She bestowed her whoring upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them, and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone after whom she lusted. She did not give up her whoring that she had begun in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her and handled her virgin bosom and poured out their whoring lust upon her. Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted. These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and as for her, they killed her with the sword, and she became a byword among women, when judgment had been executed on her."

¹ Proverbs 7:7

² Proverbs 7:22

³ Proverbs 5:4

⁴ Proverbs 6:30-33

So then sexual immorality is the picture in life of the problems associated with idolatry, something which the whole of scripture attests that the Church ought surely never to engage in. Likewise, the unfaithfulness of a bride to her husband should never be. In committing adultery, the wife shows the most extreme disrespect for her husband possible; she is not unlike a church which would declare God to be impotent, less valuable than a dumb stone which can neither see her sins nor judge against them.¹ Sexual immorality and idolatry are inextricably tied. Not only does sexual immorality exhibit idolatry, it is also a result of idolatry. Romans 1:23-24 records that an intentional abandonment of the creator results in a worship of the created; indeed, it is an unhealthy adoration of the human form which leads to sexual sin.

The Christian who lives in sexual immorality also badly blurs the distinction between Christianity and the world. 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 records that our sexual attachment in marriage is to be likened to our spiritual attachment to the Lord. Is it not clear then that a sexual attachment outside of marriage represents an attachment to the spirit of the world? Consider, is not the virgin bride of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7 a direct contrast to the prostitute of Babylon described in Revelation 17? Therefore in our sexual purity we display to all the world that there is a distinction between the Church and the world, that we are as separate as night is from day. Surely Christ has come to wash us clean and without spot, and thanks to this we are pure before him as a virgin bride on her consummation day, a point Paul stressed to the Corinthians.² This is a distinction to which the world could never claim. Should we then live as the world lives, walking in sin as the whore of Babylon demonstrates? Clearly not. Our faith in Christ sets us apart as a holy people, reserved for the service of God; our sexual purity demonstrates this in a theological as well as a practical sense.

¹ Psalm 135:16-17

² 2 Corinthians 11:2

While sex is very harmful when taken out of the correct context, sex within the appropriate guidelines is no enemy of the Christian. Quite the contrary, Paul advocated a robust sexual relationship between the husband and wife. In 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 he writes:

"The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Sex is not an unhealthy thing; it is simply a thing which must be constrained to an appropriate relationship. It is when healthy marriages with healthy sexual practices are hindered that sex becomes a problem and a temptation. As the Southern adage tells, "No one needs to go out to eat if the cooking is good in the kitchen." Truly, healthy sex within marriage promotes faithfulness, as well as the unity of the couple who display the depth and intimacy of our relationship with Christ.

Consider The Song of Songs, a book uplifting sexuality for all to see; knowing that it does so, could sex then be unholy in the eyes of any? Understanding that marriage is the illustration of Christ and the Church, it should come as no surprise that sex, a most important aspect of marriage, is glorified throughout The Song. It is in sex that the husband and wife are bound together as one flesh,¹ and we must view the consummation of marriage through sex as the picture of our ultimate union with Christ to be accomplished at our glorification. Paul spoke to this in 1 Corinthians 6:13-14:

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:16

"'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food' – and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power."

In this passage Paul encouraged the Corinthians to sexual purity, that they may be pure vessels of the Spirit,¹ awaiting the fullness of their resurrection to physical unity with Christ. The Song then, with all of its innuendo, is a picture of this glorification, not only a praise of the beauty of marital sexual bliss but also a praise to Christ himself. It is his coming glory which the bride longs for when she says in 8:14, "Make haste, my beloved..." and it is our patience in waiting for him which she insists upon in 3:5 when she says, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases." Truly, the abstinence of a young person awaiting marriage demonstrates to us the patient endurance required of the saints as we await Christ's return, and the bond of sex in marriage is a praise to the Lord for his imminent coming. The expression of love and desire inherent in marital sex is perhaps the most beautiful picture of the Church's relationship to Christ that we could endeavor to find.

Truly, the abuse of sex in our culture is most sad. Sex is a beautiful thing, a blessing to us from God that we can come closer to experiencing intimacy with him. Sex is a picture of our bond with God, and our sexual purity is a display of the all-encompassing purity which he has given us. Sex can be used for much building up, but it can be abused for much tearing down. Let us follow the guidelines that God has set for us most diligently, that we may avoid harming ourselves, our neighbors and our understanding of God.

A final verse for consideration from Hebrews 13:4:

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:19

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

Chapter V

The Unbreakable Nature of Marriage

Divorce, even among Christians, has become unfortunately common. Divorce is a horrible action, always self-seeking and certainly never an example of love for one's God or neighbor. The principles given in the New Testament regarding divorce are fairly straightforward and reasonable, teaching without any doubt that the commitment to marriage is a lifelong commitment and that divorce is unacceptable. Jesus spoke on several occasions regarding divorce and remarriage, perhaps most notably in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:31-32 Jesus says:

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

This teaching is fairly simple to understand. First we should note that in the OT law men had a right to divorce where women did not,¹ as is implicit in the phrase, "Whoever divorces his wife..." Jesus quotes the Old Testament law as teaching that a man can divorce his wife for any reason at all, just as long as he gives her a certificate of divorce. Jesus' teaching for his followers requires a higher standard of holy living however, and he teaches his disciples that men should

¹ Deuteronomy 24, which Jesus is presumably referencing, is one of a few passages that give an example of a man divorcing his wife. No examples of women divorcing husbands exist in scripture.

not divorce in cases where there is no sexual immorality. There has been debate about what exactly constitutes sexual immorality fit for divorce, but taken in light of Jesus' firm stance against even sexual thinking, the stiff penalties for a woman's sexual immorality given in the law, and the emphasis in scripture placed on a husband's absolute authority, it seems that any sexual misgivings on the part of the woman that the husband deems worthy of divorce are indeed worthy of divorce. Jesus' claim that sexual immorality excuses divorce fits well with Old Testament laws concerning adultery. Deuteronomy 22:22 calls for the death of a woman caught in adultery; if the law had been followed then no man would have been stuck with an adulterous wife for long. By Jesus' time however the death penalty was no longer available to the Jews as a punishment,¹ so having the freedom to get rid of a wife who had earned death would be the most comparable course of action.

The point in this passage that might seem the most bizarre to our culture is the notion that anyone who divorces his wife in a case without sexual immorality causes his wife to commit adultery. Though this would seem strange to a modern conception of justice which grants women equal rights, the wife is always at the whim of her husband and would in fact become an adulteress because of her husband's action. Ultimately God is the standard of justice and it is his own prerogative to determine what does and does not constitute unrighteousness. The fact that the wife can be made guilty by her husband's actions points out to us the Biblical understanding of the cohesion and submission of the marital union. Of course the husband would not be absolved of guilt in the situation of putting his wife away without due cause. He is commanded elsewhere not to divorce his wife but to love her gently,² and he will be held to account for that. Perhaps worse than his failure to love his wife is the fact that he will

¹ John 18:31

² 1 Peter 3:7

have lead someone else into sin, and we might reasonably assume from Matthew 18:6 that it would be better for him to have a millstone attached to his neck and thrown into the sea. If a woman is divorced from her husband she is never to marry someone else, because that would be a commission of adultery and would lead the male partner into sin as well. So from this passage we derive that a woman cannot divorce and cannot remarry if divorced. A husband can divorce but only in cases of sexual immorality. There are no other excuses for divorce.

Jesus reaffirms these same principles in Matthew 19. He presents to the Pharisees that divorce is allowable only in the case described above, and that divorces were allowed before his coming only because of the people's hardness of heart. Jesus adds to his previous command at verse 9, saying: "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." So from this we can add to our set of marriage principles that a man who divorces his wife can only remarry if he divorced her because of sexual immorality. Otherwise the divorce was illegitimate and for him to take another woman while disregarding his responsibility to care for the first would constitute adultery.¹

This teaching of Jesus' is presented in a very similar form in Mark 10. One discrepancy between the accounts in Mark and Matthew is that in Mark 10:11 Jesus mentions that a woman might divorce her husband. This is likely a reference to a practice allowed by the Romans rather than Jewish practice, as women did not have a right to divorce under Old Testament law. In any case, Jesus brands such a divorce as illegitimate and states that her "remarriage" would in fact be adultery. There is no exception allowing divorce for sexual immorality as there is recorded for men in the Matthew parallel.²

¹ Consider Exodus 21:10

² Another parallel to these passages is recorded in Luke 16:18

Paul further affirms Jesus' teaching in 1 Corinthians 7, where at verses 10-11 he says,

"To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife."

Again we see that divorce is commanded against. The wife has no right to divorce though Paul acknowledges that a practical, illegitimate separation may wrongly occur. The word here for separate is a conjugation of χωρίζω (to separate); while the word used for divorce here pertaining to a man is a conjugation of ἀφίημι (to send away). This is a demonstration that in Paul's mind there was a difference between a man divorcing his wife and a woman leaving her marriage. Indeed, a characteristic of God is even demonstrated to us in the subtlety of these words: either the woman leaves on her own or is sent away, but the man, not unlike God, is immovable. The husband is told not to divorce his wife, and Paul, writing in generalities, doesn't take the trouble to write out the sexual immorality exception. Paul further notes that the wife should not remarry but implies by his silence on the matter that the husband might under the correct circumstances. He further adds to the teaching by noting the ideal situation, which is that the two should be reconciled if they split for the wrong reasons.

This principle of reconciling the marriage is significant. From it we understand that within the Church, any marriage of illegitimately divorced people, which is actually adultery, is not appropriate and should be ended immediately with the spouses reconciled to their true marriage.¹ Furthermore, we might note that if a woman, as her husband's property, is

¹ This is not to be confused with remarriages of legitimately divorced persons, discussed below.

illegitimately separated from her husband he has a right to use whatever means are available to him to force her reconciliation. An example of this is portrayed in the life of King David. David's first wife Michal, whom he bought at the price of 100 Philistine foreskins¹ was later illegitimately given to a man named Palti while David was on the run from Saul. Later, in 2 Samuel 3, as soon as David reaches a point of sufficient political clout, he immediately has Michal forcefully returned to him.² Any husband whose wife is estranged has the same right to do likewise, and such a return is fitting because the second marriage is truly adultery, the theft of his wife, and is really no marriage at all.

Back in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul goes on to say in verse 15 that in his opinion (specifying that it is not a word from God),

"But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace."

In this case Paul says essentially that if a Christian was married to a non-Christian and that non-Christian left the marriage then the believer would be free. Taken in light of Jesus' commands we could assume that Paul did not mean that the Christian would be free to remarry but would be free from trying to reunite. We might presume though that the wife's leaving would not stop the husband from taking another bride, and that he would be released from his responsibility to care for the first wife (as he could not reasonably care for someone who left of her own volition). Otherwise we might reason that the wife who leaves would be guilty of adultery, freeing the husband to divorce and remarry. A wife whose husband left in a similar situation would not have these options available to her, as we learned from Jesus that a woman should never remarry, at least while her husband is alive.

¹ 1 Samuel 18

² 2 Samuel 3:14-16

Paul notes the obvious in 1 Corinthians 7:39, that if a husband dies his widow is free to remarry, presumably whatever the circumstances. There's no reason to think that this wouldn't apply to a husband who outlives a wife as well.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 gives another command concerning divorces:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance."

Numbers 30:9 (which has also been noted concerning widows) demonstrates that a woman whose husband has divorced her holds the same sort of responsibility for herself in society that a widow might hold. In an Old Testament context this would have presumably included the social capability to give herself into another marriage. Such a situation is certainly not ideal, but was allowed in the Old Testament times because of hardness of heart.¹ Understanding however that such a circumstance will arise, the Mosaic Law holds that if a woman's husband legitimately divorces her and she gives herself into an adulterous marriage to another man, she may never be returned to her husband, not even if the latter man dies. While this rule should perhaps not be held strictly to the

¹ Matthew 19:8

letter (as it is part of the Old Covenant), the gravity behind the law is considerable. According to the passage, the reasoning is that the woman has been defiled, and to return her to her former husband is "an abomination." The word translated "abomination" is תועבה, the same word used in Leviticus 18:22 regarding unnatural same-sex perversions (something Christians clearly shouldn't support). The command in Deuteronomy 24 should serve as a warning to a man not to divorce his wife lightheartedly, even if she has committed a grave sin against him, as he may regret the condition later, after an adulterous remarriage, and never be able to repair it; likewise, a woman should heed this as a warning not to be quick to walk away from her husband to find another man, even if he has divorced her, as she will then never be able to turn back to him. This is not an appeal to the woman to remain in the adulterous remarriage, but is reason for her to live in solitude once she has left it, rather than returning to her first husband. Of course, in the churches application of this principle should be very rare. If husbands are only to divorce because of adultery, then divorce should not be common. Remarriage should be rarer still, as Jesus taught that for a woman to practice it draws others into adultery.

That the commitment to marriage is unbreakable gives glory to the work which God has done in us. In Ephesians 1:11-14 Paul writes of Christ's work in redeeming his Church:

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

In this passage, Paul speaks about our hope of an eternal inheritance with God, given to us through Christ and guaranteed to us by the Holy Spirit. Paul is certain here that he will have an eternal reward. He mentions that he had been predestined for this prize, and points out that his readers, the Christians at Ephesus, were sealed with the Spirit, and therefore could be assured that their eternal salvation cannot be lost. Regarding marriage, this is an important point for the Christian to remember. As the Christian should be faithful and not forsake his marriage covenant, so we can expect that Christ will be faithful and will never forsake us.

These principles should be a great encouragement to the Church because they demonstrate Christ's faithfulness in his love for us. Christ has taken the Church to be his bride, and he will never leave her. Even if we were to turn our backs on him he would reunite with us. The Church could never take anyone besides Christ to be her husband, as it is written in John 6:68-69:

"Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'"

Not only do we see that the Church could never have another husband, we see also the great love of God displayed in that he is ever-willing to reunite with his wayward bride. We see an example of this in the story of Hosea and his wife Gomer. In Hosea 3:1-5 he writes:

"And the LORD said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.' So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, 'You must dwell as mine for many days. You

shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.' For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days."

Here Hosea was instructed to take his wife back, in spite of the fact that she had been unfaithful to him,¹ and he does so because he exemplifies that marriage is an example of the coming Christ's love for us. The children of Israel and all of us among the Gentiles had gone astray, but with great love Christ, the son of David, is drawing us back to seek him. Christ's faithfulness to his bride is a great faithfulness, and all marriages should aspire to such.

And since marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship to the Church, what is a proper understanding of divorce? When a husband abandons his wife, doesn't he portray to the world that God has abandoned him? He shows through his actions that he believes God's grace is insufficient and that a relationship between man and God is intolerable. Likewise, the woman who leaves her husband demonstrates to everyone that she believes she has no need of God and will fare better on her own. The consequences for those who would abandon Christ are made clear in Revelation 21:8:

"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

¹ It is safe to assume that Gomer was not divorced and remarried, as God would not have transgressed his own word to have Hosea take her back, but that she was simply gone away into adultery.

That divorce covers several of the characteristics mentioned in this verse is clear. The divorcing man has been faithless to his bride, and has declared all of his commitments to her to be lies. The divorced woman has been sexually immoral, and has drawn the world into the idolatrous notion that a relationship with the true God is something worthless. Is it not for cowardice that the two refuse to stand firm in their commitments, resolve their problems, and face the challenges of life? It is not my place to judge a man's soul, but the evidence seems telling. Consider Christian, if marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church, and divorce is the separation of the two, then isn't divorce the very picture of Hell on Earth?

The destructive nature of divorce on the lives of divorced spouses, on their children, on their extended families, on the community, and on the Church is obvious to the point that there should be no need to explain it. Also, the destructive nature of divorce in these areas is so deeply hurtful that there could be no way to explain it. The sin of inappropriate remarriage has also done substantial damage. There are surely many who would not have abandoned their marriage to begin with if they knew they would never be able to have another. And what of the pain caused to a spouse who has been abandoned only to see the partner go to another's arms? If divorce will persist, then the one who would divorce should be forced to live under a punishment of loneliness which may drive the wayward home. God has given a very straightforward command concerning divorce, and Christians should abide by it out of respect for God. These principles should be honored so that the Church's relationship to Jesus can be brightly seen in the dark world. What must be done is difficult but obvious. Those who are in illegitimate remarriages should annul them and end their adultery immediately. Those who are separated illegitimately should be brought back together at all costs. Those who marry should stay married. The Church should not tolerate the abuse of these important commands under any circumstances.

And so, at the conclusion we see that Scriptural principles regarding divorce are for the most part straightforward, and they are of the utmost importance because they teach us who we are in Christ. A review of the principles guiding divorce is in order: no one should ever divorce. In cases of adultery a man can divorce his wife (though even that divorce is not advisable), but a wife cannot divorce her husband at all. If any other cases of divorce exist the marriages should be reunited, unless the Christian was divorced by a non-believer, in which case they need not seek reunion. Any divorced woman who remarries commits adultery, and any man who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. If a divorced woman enters into a sinful remarriage after a legitimate divorce, she should not be returned to her first husband. A man who divorced his wife under reasonable circumstances can remarry. If a marriage partner dies, the spouse is free to remarry.

These principles point to Christ, and the Church must defend them if she is to have God's blessing.

Chapter VI Polygamy

Polygamy is a practice flatly despised among modern American Christians. The practice has been so thoroughly opposed that the denunciation of it from the pulpit (or a discussion of it at all) is seldom necessary. References to polygamy are generally heard in few contexts. A politician might call on polygamy as an example of what is not marriage that he may use it as a proof against a perversion like homosexuality, television desperate for shock ratings might showcase polygamists as a freak-show, or, of course, polygamy is the readily available attack against Mormonism, but other than these kinds of references, polygamy is rarely discussed. This lack of discussion is quite culturally reasonable, and especially when we consider that polygamy is

illegal (caused, of course, by the reasonable backlash against Mormons), but a thorough discussion of the Bible's treatment of marriage deserves a thorough discussion of polygamy simply because the Bible mentions the practice so often. An attempt to avoid the issue would be intellectually dishonest.

Before moving on in discussion, a definition of polygamy is pertinent. Polygamy means literally "multiple marriages," and refers to the practice of a man taking multiple wives. Note that the practice of polygamy does not violate (in word, though it may in intent) the common cultural maxim that marriage is to be between "one man and one woman,"¹ as polygamy is not joint marriage between all of the people involved, but rather is marriage between one man and one woman, that man and one other woman, etc. The bond between two and only two individuals is always maintained with the adding of additional bonds. David's wives, for example, were not married to each other, but were each married to David individually. Polygamy is not to be confused with polyandry, the practice of one woman taking multiple husbands. There is no example of polyandry in scripture, and, as the foregoing chapters demonstrate, polyandry is entirely contrary to the Biblical mindset.

Polygamy was practiced throughout the Old Testament by some of the Bible's best-known and best-loved heroes. Abraham fathered children by no fewer than three wives. Sarah was the first, and her servant Hagar he took at the same time.² He also took the lesser known Keturah as a wife;³ whether this marriage was concurrent with the previous two is not specified. It is possible that Abraham had even more partners than this, depending on whether the word "concubines" in Genesis 25:6 refers back to Hagar and Keturah or to others. Abraham's grandson Jacob also took

¹ These words are not found in the Bible, but are often spoken among Christians.

² Genesis 16

³ Genesis 25:1

multiple brides in Leah and Rachel.¹

Moses, Israel's greatest prophet and recipient of her law, also practiced polygamy. The Bible gives us not much information about the extent of the practice for Moses or a list of the names of his wives, but we know that he was married to Zipporah the daughter of a Midianite priest² and also to a Cushite woman.³

King David also practiced polygamy. His wives were Michal,⁴ Jezreel, Abigail, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah by the time he reigned in Hebron,⁵ and according to 2 Samuel 5:13 he further "took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem" thereafter. His son Solomon, as is well known, maintained 700 wives and 300 concubines.⁶ Some have claimed that Solomon's polygamy drove him to abandon God, but 1 Kings 11 makes it clear that Solomon was pulled astray because he married foreign and idolatrous women, not because of polygamy.

So then, seeing that polygamy was practiced by Israel's first patriarch, her greatest prophet, her most beloved king, and many others throughout her history, the question of whether or not God truly opposes polygamy is one which must be asked.

The fact that questions about polygamy deserve consideration is further supported in that the Bible never specifically opposes polygamy. There are no laws against having multiple wives. Scripture never records that God judged someone for having multiple wives. The practice is simply never spoken against. As a matter of fact, there are laws in scripture which lend support to the practice. Leviticus 18:18 reads:

¹ Genesis 29

² Exodus 2:21

³ Numbers 12:1; notably, it is possible that Zipporah had died by this point.

⁴ 1 Samuel 18:27

⁵ 2 Samuel 3:2-5

⁶ 1 Kings 11:3

"And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive."

This is apparently an acknowledgement that a man might take multiple wives, but that he should not take two sisters at once. Deuteronomy 21:15, concerning inheritance, acknowledges freely that a man might have two wives; there is no condemnation of this practice. Exodus 21:10, part of a passage discussing laws concerning slaves presumably taken as wives, notes that a man might take "another" woman for himself, and does not restrain such a practice. Levirate marriage practices¹ would likely have forced polygamy in some cases. Through scriptures like these, the Old Testament law gives quiet support for polygamy by acknowledging its existence and giving rules to ensure its proper function, while never giving rules to oppose it.

While all of these things may seem like good arguments in favor of polygamy, there are scriptural arguments to be had which detract from the support for practice. We should consider that the first recorded instance of polygamy in scripture attributes the beginning of the practice to Lamech.² Lamech was a descendant of Cain and was no nobler than his ancestor. In addition to being the Bible's first polygamist, Lamech is also the Bible's second murderer.

We should also note that while polygamy was often practiced, it was also often practiced unhappily. Genesis 16 and 21 record severe conflict between Sarah and Hagar. Jealousy between Jacob's two wives is recorded in Genesis 30. Similar problems are recorded in 1 Samuel 1 concerning Elkanah's two wives.

Furthermore, the laws in scripture which recognize polygamy all exist to correct potential problems in the

¹ See discussion of Levirate marriage on Pages 20-21

² Genesis 4:19

relationships, problems like uneven care for the wives,¹ jealousy between sisters² and imbalances in inheritance.³ These could be a sign that polygamous marriages are perhaps prone to inequality and hurt feelings, but to be fair we must admit that all of life can be prone to such problems, and laws are made to deal with the problems in many areas of life that are not morally wrong.

Deuteronomy 17:17, records a law of that type which some have stretched in order to prohibit polygamy. In describing laws for Israel's kings, the verse reads:

"And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold."

Some would say that a limit on wives for the king amounts to a limit on wives for all, though this need not be the case. This is more reasonably an acknowledgement that common folk were allowed to take many wives, but that a limit (though not a strict one) was placed on the king. This is apparently so that he would not be needlessly distracted from his duties to God and the people. Though some would attempt to stretch the passage, ultimately it only shows that while polygamy was allowable in the Old Testament law, the laws were necessary to give proper boundaries to the relationships and to restrict the practice from becoming overblown and problematic.

Jesus had nothing to say about polygamy specifically, but his discussion of divorce and adultery recorded in Matthew chapter 19 could be taken as an argument against the practice. Verses 8-9 read:

¹ Exodus 21:7-11

² Leviticus 18:18

³ Deuteronomy 21:15

"He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.'"

We might or might not gather from this passage Jesus' stance on polygamy. If it is wrong to take a second wife having divorced the first, it seems that it would be equally wrong to take a second wife while maintaining the first. The admonition that divorce was allowed in prior times only because of hardness of heart could also be extrapolated to say that polygamy too was allowed only because men were hard of heart. However, we must acknowledge that this is not the immediate teaching of the text and is something of a stretch. Jesus was not discussing polygamy itself, and he may only have called remarriage adultery because it includes failure to maintain marriage to the first wife to whom a man was bound as one flesh. Polygamy would not cause this problem.

Other teachings which raise questions about polygamy without actually banning it come from Paul. In giving qualifications for elders and deacons in the Church to Timothy and Titus he wrote that each of these leaders should be "the husband of one wife,"¹ which is more literally translated, "a one-woman man." These somewhat vague words have been taken to mean a variety of things. Some expect that an elder or a deacon must have only been married once, meaning that even if his first wife died or was loosed for legitimate reasons he could have no freedom to remarry. These interpretations seem overly strict however, and especially in light of Jesus' teachings about the legitimacy of divorce for sexual immorality² and Paul's mention that it is acceptable for

¹ The words "husband of one wife" appear in 1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 3:12, and Titus 1:6. They translate the Greek "μιας γυναικὸς ἄνδρα," "μιας γυναικὸς ἄνδρες," and "μιας γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ," respectively.

² Matthew 19:9

widows to remarry.¹ Some would suggest that the words in question mean that a man should be found faithful to the one wife he has. Whatever the words mean, it is clear that a polygamist is not a "one-woman man," and therefore elders and deacons should not have multiple wives. Some would stretch the phrase in question to cover all Christians, forcing a restriction on polygamy across the board, arguing that the qualifications for elders are a noble set of commands to which we all should aspire. Good as the qualifications for church leadership may be, we must remember that these are not explicitly commands for all believers; had this been Paul's intent he would have written a list of qualities all Christians should share and then told Titus and Timothy to simply choose those who do the best at meeting them. Rather than viewing the qualifications as a list of commands for all, we should consider them in the same way as Old Testament commands regarding the king² and the priests,³ commands which, noble as they may be, are not binding upon the subjects and the laity. Indeed, the Bible always holds a higher standard for leaders than for those they lead.⁴ Furthermore, while Christians may aspire toward the qualities of an elder, everyone cannot meet the qualifications on the lists. Must all Christians be able to teach?⁵ Are all Christians forbidden from being a recent convert?⁶ Viewed in this light, forcing a restriction on polygamy on all people is not required by Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. We might even consider the possibility that Paul is here giving an admission that polygamy was practiced in his day, even by some in the Church, while maintaining that elders and deacons, for their special positions, were to be married to only one woman at a time. In

¹ Romans 7:3

² Deuteronomy 17:14-20

³ Leviticus 21:10-15

⁴ James 3:1

⁵ 1 Timothy 3:2

⁶ 1 Timothy 3:6

Titus 1:5-6 we see this especially. Paul here states that he has left Titus to appoint elders on Crete, if anyone is a one-woman man among other qualities. Paul seems to believe that Titus might have trouble finding a one-woman man among the believers on the island!

Some might also argue that Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:2 that each woman should have "her own" husband indicates that she should have a husband whom she does not share, but this is a desperate and ultimately counterintuitive argument. The Greek word here translated "her own" is "ἰδιον." This word implies that a woman has a husband who is unique to herself in that she does not have a similar relationship to multiple men; it does not imply that she has a husband who is unique to herself in that he has no other women. To clarify, it is as if Paul said to a woman, "You might be running around to multiple men, but you need to get your own," as opposed to, "Your husband might be running around with multiple women, but you need to make him your own." A similar usage of the word is found in Titus 2:5, in which Paul states young women should be submissive to their own husbands. It would be less reasonable to argue that Paul's intent is to tell the young women to be submissive to the husband whom they have cordoned off for themselves alone and much more reasonable to understand that Paul is telling women to each be submissive to their specific husband rather than simply submissive to all husbands in general. Using 1 Corinthians 7:2 against polygamy is counterintuitive in that the verse ultimately supports polygamist ideas. The word ἰδιον which was applied to women dictating that they should have one husband does not appear in Paul's command that men should take their own wives. Paul is in fact saying that women should take one unique husband, while men should simply take a wife without specification to number. Unless Paul is making an allowance for polygamy, there is no good explanation for this difference in the text.

Another rebuttal to polygamy is that a husband might not

be able to adequately love more than one wife. We know that the primary responsibility of a husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church, and it is possible that the polygamist husband would neglect this duty. I would argue that this is largely a problem of the cultural misunderstanding of love. Many women in modern America would feel unloved if their husbands took additional wives for no other reason than that these women have been raised with the expectation that they are to be the object of undivided affection and attention within their marriages. This, of course, is a difficulty which is avoided by a more legitimate understanding of practical versus emotional love, and one which might not exist at all with some cultural adjustment.¹ It is also true that different women have different needs in a marriage. There are women, rare as they may be, who would be perfectly happy in a polygamous marriage. Perhaps the more important issue here is the husband's ability to provide adequate care for physical needs in taking on the extra expense of another bride, an issue of which he should be very cautious. In any case, if a man did plan to take another bride, he would need to be concerned for the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of both wives, and would need to take his first wife's desires into account before adding anyone to the home.

Yet another concern can be raised about polygamy: how could it be relevant to Christ and the Church? The answer is that it doesn't need to be. The profound mystery demonstrates to us how a husband's relationship to his wife displays Christ and the Church, but there's nothing in the analogy to prescribe how many wives a man might have. One would reason that so long as he demonstrates the love of Christ to each of his wives and each of his wives submit to him as the Church would to Christ, then the analogy would be fulfilled in each of the man's marriages.

¹ See Chapter IX concerning the true nature of love in marriage.

Some might attempt to argue that as Christ has one bride, the Church, so a man should have only one bride. While it is true that Christ has only one bride, this fact does not demand that all husbands do likewise, and to force that all men have only one wife by this argument would stretch the marriage analogy beyond its scope. Elsewhere we have considered the commands of scripture regarding marriage and then applied them to the analogy. It would be unbecoming here to stretch the analogy to cover non-existent commands.¹

Quite the contrary, we have already considered that there is a differing standard of sexual morality for men than there is for women and have noted that in passages such as Ezekiel 23 a woman's sexual fidelity is akin to a fixation upon only the true God as opposed to idols.² What then would a man's sexual fidelity to his one wife represent? Was God fixated only on Israel, that he summoned no gentiles to repentance? What do we make of Jonah if that is the case? Aside from these things, we have determined that The Song of Songs is truly a praise to the Messiah. And what does this masculine character of The Song of Songs say at 6:8 but that, "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number." If this picture of the Messiah is polygamist, what theological concern could there be with the practice?

Having seen that the practice of polygamy finds some tepid support in scripture and no strong opposition, I assert that a consideration of the practical values of polygamy is of some value. This book elsewhere describes the value of raising up a large family,³ and there is no better way to guarantee robust reproduction than to assign additional wombs to each man. Polygamy may also help solve those problems with sexual immorality which are not immediately solved by young marriage. A world in which a man is free to take a

¹ A lengthier discussion of the proper application of the marriage analogy is found on pages 15-16

² See Page 47

³ See Chapter XIII

second wife once his first wife has become less appealing to him is a world in which a man is less likely to divorce and more likely to satisfy his sexual desires within the confines of marriage, rather than going out and spoiling someone else's goods, so to speak. Furthermore, many churches are currently faced with a problem in that they have a high female to male ratio. This imbalance is damaging. The growing feminist problem in churches is fueled by single women, and, as feminism drives leading men away, the imbalance creates a feedback loop which will create ever more imbalance. In a monogamous church the excess women will be forced to live without a man's support and without male headship, which will inevitably result in an unhealthy congregational disorder and instability for young women, the Church, and society in general. This is a problem which may or may not have been avoided by adherence to Biblical gender roles in the first place, but regardless, it is a problem which can perhaps be solved now only by polygamy.

This then is the conclusion about polygamy: There are arguments against the practice but none which prove to overtake it. Polygamy was practiced by many in the Old Testament, and laws were given to keep it in check, but there is never a clear command in either testament banning or uplifting the practice either way. In fact, the New Testament arguments against polygamy seem to point out on deeper inspection that it is permissible in the Church. It is possible that there could be some practical benefits to polygamy if Christians adopted it, but it is also likely that it would be a cause of strife for some. Many will expect that polygamy is unideal and more trouble than it could be worth. There is evidence from scripture to support this, and we must all acknowledge that polygamy was not the original standard in the Garden of Eden.¹ However there will be others who understand well the difficulties with polygamy and believe it

¹ Genesis 1-3

to be a worthwhile practice regardless. These would do well to consider the enormous ramifications if they are wrong, especially in light of Jesus' words in Matthew 19.

While polygamy may grate the nerves of the common Christian and the culture, I must humbly suggest that we would be unwise to continue to condemn polygamy with such thin Biblical evidence opposing it. While we may choose not to practice polygamy, and while we may believe personally that it is morally wrong, we must admit that there are no definitive passages opposing the practice and that there are arguments to be had on both sides. Support for polygamy, I must therefore propose, should be treated as a differing but tolerable point of view, not as a sin.

With these things in mind, if there were those who would choose to practice polygamy, they should be held to account to play by the rules. They should treat their wives with fairness, they should show them equal affection, they should bestow equal kindness to their children, they should ensure that the wives are chosen with support for one another so that there will be no jealousy or conflict, they should be careful to take no more wives than they can afford to prosperously maintain, and those who practice polygamy should be barred from church leadership. Civic leaders likewise should not practice polygamy to an extreme. This is the account of scripture regarding polygamy, and the Church will do well to add nothing to it.

PART THREE: Creating a Marriage

* * *

Chapter VII Who Should Marry and When

As it is today, marriage is being put off until ever later in life. The reasons for this are probably more complex than we know, but we can be sure that this is primarily caused by our unquenchable thirst for education, money, and the worldly power or enjoyment that they bring coupled with general irresponsibility and irreverence for the Word. To put marriage, a Godly thing, off for such worldly things is an unbiblical practice and it is one that we cannot continue to encourage. Young marriage finds ample scriptural, practical and theological support.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul addresses some concerns that the Corinthians had regarding marriage. We know from verses 1, 6-7, and 26 that Paul, while specifically clarifying that his opinion on the matter was not a word from God, thought it would be better for people not to marry so long as they suffer no sexual temptation. However, his concern about sexual temptation quickly overrides his favor toward singleness and carries the weight of a decree from God. Paul had written in chapter 6 that the Corinthians should avoid sexual immorality, and he follows that in 7:2-3 writing,

"But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband."

He continues this idea in verse 9 "But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to

marry than to burn with passion." Paul's message rings loud and clear: anyone who struggles with sexual temptation should get married. This points out to us plainly that virtually all people should marry and they should do so in their youth, when their sexual temptations are the strongest. This obviously runs counter to modern American culture, which generally teaches that young people should become sexually capable and then wait for about a decade to get married; often waiting to such an age that sexual desire has subsided somewhat. During the waiting time sexual sin is commonplace.

It is befuddling to me in light of 1 Corinthians 7 that Christians regularly discourage or forbid teenagers from marriage. We know from 1 Timothy 4:1-3 that in later times some will depart from the faith and become forbidders of marriage, and as we see that sexual immorality is a product of this we should certainly not count the elect among them. The sexual drive in a young person is a healthy thing, and it should not be shamed or disregarded; it should instead be expressed in the confines of a Christian marriage. Some have started giving condoms to teenagers in the high school, arguing that the teens will have sex whether we protect them or not. The argument is agreeable but not the conclusion; if our teens will have sex no matter what they are told, then they should be put into marriages so that they can glorify God with their bodies. Only if a young person experiences no sexual temptation should he remain unmarried.

In Matthew chapter 19, we read about Jesus being confronted by Pharisees who, testing him, ask him if it is lawful to divorce for any reason. As noted elsewhere, Jesus taught that it is not.¹ Our current focus on the passage begins in verse 10 and ends at verse 12:

¹ See page 53

"The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.'"

In those verses, the disciples come to Jesus with the concern that it would be best not to marry if one could not divorce his wife. Some reasons for such a claim are easy enough to discern. A man might hold sway over his wife if he could easily divorce her, particularly considering the economic and social plight of a woman without a husband in their culture. Also, if a man could put his wife away to follow his own endeavors, he could maintain a greater degree of financial freedom, perhaps allowing him to find a more alluring bride.

Jesus' answer to the disciples is striking. He attests that only a chosen few could manage to go through life without marrying, and he seems to take it for granted that those chosen few are eunuchs. To clarify for anyone unfamiliar with the terminology: Jesus is saying that the only men who should remain single are those who have been born without testicles or have had them removed.

Jesus' words here are not meant in the strictest literal sense. If they were, we would have to interpret some of Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 7 as an avocation of the mass-castration of the Corinthians. We should also note that Jesus himself was single during his earthly ministry and was not a eunuch. If he had been a eunuch then he wouldn't have been allowed in the temple,¹ and his cleansing of it would have been quite hypocritical. The same principle would have

¹ Deuteronomy 23:1

excluded Paul from temple worship. Apparently Jesus' teaching that only men without testicles should remain single tells us the same thing that we have already read from Paul, that those who struggle with sexual temptation should marry. Jesus also adds another nod to early marriage here. He speaks of eunuchs who have no future possibility of marriage, and his words carry the strong implication that the assignment to singleness is a lifetime state. The notion that one might claim a call to stay single in his youth and turn to marriage later finds no support here. Clearly, those who are made for marriage should marry young and those who aren't made for marriage should maintain their chastity with the utmost strictness.

Of course, one might reasonably compare this passage in Matthew 19 with Jesus' discourse on adultery in Matthew 5:27-30. Jesus' wording was that a man who looks at another man's wife lustfully would be better off to remove the offending hand or eye which causes sin. In both Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 we are given a much more pleasant method than castrating, blinding, or maiming oneself to deal with lust. Let us therefore encourage our youth who struggle with temptation to marry and have sex to the glory of God.

In addition to these Biblical arguments, there are some practical arguments that deserve consideration. Firstly, those couples who meet and marry at a young age will have the opportunity to form a deeper understanding of each other from having spent more time together in their formative stages. In their years of discovering themselves they will learn that they are a husband or a wife and will adhere to those roles. The young couple, having formed their ideals and goals together, will also likely seek to follow the same path through life and will have similar goals, unlike the couple who took time to discover their own unique interests and ideas first. These couples would experience a greater trust in one another because they likely would not have experienced the dishonesty and abuse that often comes with the multi-partnered game of

the dating world.¹ These factors, which will only come by young marriage, could greatly increase the strength of marriages in future generations.

Not only are there practical values associated with young marriage, but there are practical dangers that come with neglecting this important teaching. Truly, Jeremiah is correct in noting that it is as a curse that "the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride..." are silenced,² a curse which John reiterates in Revelation 18:23. First and foremost among the problems associated with late marriage is that of rampant sexual immorality. Paul warned the Church that Christians should marry young because of that temptation, and because the modern Church has not listened we now have a decadent and sexually perverse society on our hands. Young men and women commonly have sex before marriage or at least have significant problems with lust, and the vast problems associated with that should be obvious. Lust is not only a problem for the young and single however. Though few would be willing to acknowledge it publicly, virtually every man has within him a desire to be sexually involved with a young woman. If he did not have an opportunity to be with that young woman in his youth he may be more easily tempted to have sex with a younger woman long after he has been married later in life. That temptation would be especially alluring if the young woman herself was unmarried. Is anyone still shocked when the news reports of student-teacher affairs? And as if marriages have not struggled enough, do they need these extra temptations? Is it good to have people entering into marriages at an older age, bringing years of sexual baggage or frustrations with them? This is not right and it is a painful detriment to the family and the Church. Truly, this problem constitutes the rending of our very social fabric and promises to bring judgment.

And what about procreation? Scripture teaches that it is

¹ A more thorough discussion of dating is found in Chapter VIII

² Jeremiah 16:9

important to raise large families;¹ is it then wise to waste the birthing years? Should it be that the woman spends her years aging in a classroom, bringing the debt of a higher education into her marriage that she might never feel secure in staying home with the kids? Surely anyone of sound mind can see that these consequences are destructive to our spiritual and social health and must be avoided.

In spite of Biblical arguments in support of an early marrying age and practical values to boot, there are many who would make arguments against the practice of marrying young, but these arguments are flimsy.

In arguing from scripture, some would cite the marrying age of some Bible characters as having been older (sometimes much older) than what is here described. Of course, by the same token, there were Bible characters who married at extremely young ages. King Ahaz, for example, became king at 20 and reigned in Judah until he was 36.² When Ahaz was 32, Hoshea became king over Samaria.³ Three years later, when Ahaz was 35, he co-reigned for his final year with his son Hezekiah, who at that time was 25.⁴ A little math will therefore demonstrate that Ahaz fathered Hezekiah when he was 10 years old. The man apparently had his sexual desires at an earlier age than one might ordinarily expect! On the other side of the coin is Isaac, who took Rebekah as his wife when he was 40 years old.⁵ One might take into account that people lived much longer in the days of the patriarchs, perhaps maturing more slowly as well, but really it's not very reasonable to take examples of either kind as a hard and fast example of how marriage should look. These are accurate recordings of the historical events first and foremost and should be taken as teachings of doctrine secondarily at best.

¹ See Chapter XIII

² 2 Kings 16:1

³ 2 Kings 17:1

⁴ 2 Kings 18:1-2

⁵ Genesis 25:20

While there is valuable knowledge to be learned in Bible stories, we must always be cautious not to let the example of a Bible character overshadow the direct teaching of scripture.

Also on a Biblical note, some will rightly point out that some Bible characters like Paul or even Jesus did not marry at all. While this would neglect the fact that Jesus is God, putting him under some slightly different circumstances, and that Jesus is the bridegroom of the Church upon whom all bridegrooms should be measured, it is true that some folks like Paul weren't married.¹ Marriage is not for everyone, as some people do not have sexual appetites or are in some other way incapable of marriage and would be able to serve the Lord better as single people. These people should rejoice in their calling and should live happily in singleness. Paul is correct in noting that for those who remain single there will be fewer worldly entanglements.² John writes in Revelation 14:3-5:

"and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless."

So these who will be redeemed as the firstfruits, who hold a special place with God, will be unmarried virgin men who sacrificed marriage and all to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Could there be a greater gift than to sing a unique song to the Lamb with the 144,000? So those called to singleness will be highly blessed, but those not called to

¹ That is, Paul was not married when his epistles were written; he may have been a widower.

² 1 Corinthians 7:32-33

singleness will be highly blessed in marriage. Both must be cautious not to seek that which is not God's place for them. Paul gave instructions for those people called to singleness in 1 Corinthians 7, always with the caveat that he was giving his own advice and not placing a restriction against marriage. The gift of singleness comes in limited cases under the previously mentioned guideline that there is no sexual temptation, and we must remember that the gift of singleness is a lifetime gift. Paul did not say he was called to singleness one day and then marriage later in life. In like manner, singleness should not be foisted on the youth simply because they are "too young."

Some would argue that statistics disagree with young marriage, pointing out that young marriages are more likely to fail than marriages formed later in life. This is simply an unfortunate cultural phenomenon. Those who marry young in American culture often do so because they were not capable (mentally or monetarily) to enroll in the institutions of higher learning. Probably most who marry in their teens do so as a result of an accidental pregnancy. It is unfortunate that those with the greatest mental, moral, and monetary weaknesses have become the picture of young marriage, and it is of little surprise that fewer of these marriages last. These marriages are likely also short-lived due to a myriad of problems associated with a culture which fails to adhere to a Biblical model for marriages.

Opponents of young marriage have also said that teenagers lack the responsibility and knowledge necessary to adequately handle marriage. Again this is a creation of the culture. In ancient times as well as in the much more recent history of America marriage was not uncommon at ages as young as 14, or even younger in rare cases. Some places which have felt a minimal influence from modern American and European culture continue to marry as young today. It may be true that the youth as they are can't handle young marriage, but this is not caused by some physical ineptitude. As Americans have become increasingly wealthy and have

focused themselves on other things than Godliness, young people have lost focus as well. The immaturity of the youth is not ingrained so much as it is taught by parents and society. The fact is that when young people are not given any responsibility they become unable to handle responsibilities. It is true that young people have less knowledge than their elders, but they can learn what they need to learn as long as they are given adequate support from their families and the Church to do so. Rather than taking responsibilities from young people and saying that they can't handle them, we should be giving responsibilities to them and training them to handle them. This intimate community involvement would be beneficial not only to marriages but to the strength of the community as well. Besides, while scripture gives many descriptions of good qualities which husbands and wives should strive for, there is no spiritual litmus test to determine which young people are and are not ready for marriage. If a person is to claim that there is a certain standard of maturity that must be attained, what will the standard be? Should the youth be forced to wait until his glorification to marry, that he might be spiritually perfect? Quite the contrary, there is scriptural support (modest as it is) for using the development of the body as an indicator of readiness for marriage found in Song of Solomon 8:8-10, which takes example from the development of breasts. If we are not to determine a person's readiness by the body and its sexual appetites, those signs which God has given of sexual maturity, then there is truly no other rational standard by which to judge.

Again, some older Christians will argue against young marriages, saying that they themselves had many enjoyable and fulfilling experiences in their youth before they were married at a later age. While it may be true that they enjoyed themselves in their youth or had experiences that they deemed worthwhile, it must be remembered that the purpose of life is not to enjoy and benefit oneself. The purpose in life is to glorify God. If God's principles are neglected for the sake of

enjoyment, sin is the result. Besides, can a person truly gauge that he had more pleasure by being single than he could have had by being married? Of course he can't, because there's no way for him to compare something that happened to something that didn't happen. In the same way a married person could never say that he would have been happier single because he can't know how happy or unhappy he might have been.

One might further argue that it is unwise for a person to marry young because he will be economically unsound. It is often argued that one should complete a college degree and obtain employment before marrying. This is yet another cultural mess. It is absolutely certain that a man must work to support his family, but for a man to make a living doesn't always require much education, and particularly not the worldly and unfocused type of education offered by the school system. Experience, I believe, is the best teacher for the youth. There have been those fathers who will disallow their daughters from marriage until an older age when they are established in education and career, but they should reconsider themselves. Proverbs 11:26, which points out that a man will curse his neighbor for withholding grain, is pertinent to the discussion. If a man will curse his neighbor over grain, how much more will he curse one who withholds the bride? Besides, for a woman the schoolroom is only a place to acquire debt which she will bring into her marriage to its detriment, and which she will not be able to work off if she is to stay home and raise her children. And will the worldly wisdom she learns be useful in rearing a Godly family? Plainly no.

The desire to send young women to college is largely driven by an unbiblical view of wealth and a tangled mess of unbiblical cultural teachings that would take many pages to sort. For now, be appeased in that the Church and family can

and should aid in supporting young couples, that God will care for the sparrows and the youth alike,¹ that we only need our daily bread,² and that not having enough money to do something that the Bible says to do is a common excuse for not having enough faith to do something that the Bible says to do.

The appeal to young marriage carries with it a comparison to the gospel. We know that marriage is God's picture of his relationship to the body of believers, and in this regard, the comparison continues. Would it be advisable for a man to live as if he were an unbeliever and only repent on his deathbed? Certainly not! We would advise that God's people be gathered to him as quickly as possible, that they could devote their lives to Christ's service and live in the joy of his salvation. If this trait is to be exhibited in marriages, then we should teach the youth to marry as soon as is reasonable, as Jesus taught in Matthew 8:22, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." Ecclesiastes 12 teaches a similar message, saying in verse 1:

"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them!';"

This passage is particularly appealing to the idea of young marriage and sex, as it continues with a long list of poetic descriptors for the ravages of age against the human body. Furthermore, if the consummation of marriage is a symbol of Christ's return, then the putting-off of marriage until a later time is a statement that one does not truly want Christ to return quickly and would rather concern himself with worldly pleasures. Doesn't Paul warn us in 1 Corinthians 7 to live as if the end is near? And doesn't John cry out saying

¹ Matthew 6:26, Matthew 10:29-31

² Matthew 6:11

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" in Revelation 22:20? We should all long for the wedding feast of the lamb, and in the same way, we should encourage our young ones to long for marriage.

The solutions for the late marriage problem are somewhat straightforward. Young people should seek to be married, and the older generation should not discourage them. In fact the older generation has a responsibility to encourage young people. Christian parents should make an effort to bring young people together into healthy relationships and should joyfully give their daughters to Christian men, rather than pushing them into higher education and careers. Marriage is being postponed in part because modern culture has created a lack of suitable and willing young women, and this ought not to be the case. As there is no man in scripture who represents the inability to find a bride,¹ so there should be no man in this predicament in the modern Church. Likewise, young men should seek marriage and stability instead of spending their youth on worldly lusts. Far from expecting our young people to struggle on their own, churches must make an effort to give moral and financial support to young couples, and their union should be celebrated in all of our churches.

If we work together to do these things, we will be able to turn the tide on this hurtful problem for the Church. We know that scripture supports young marriage, and so we should do likewise. From Ecclesiastes 9:9, a final verse for consideration:

"Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun."

¹ Save perhaps for the Benjamites of Judges 21, an example which I expect no one would like to follow

Chapter VIII

The Biblical Alternative to Dating

Having determined which people should marry and when those people should marry, it is next beneficial to turn to a consideration of how the task of marrying should be accomplished. Herein we will see that arranged marriage is the only Biblically sanctioned method for beginning a union, that the alternative to arranged marriage, the dating system, is a dangerous and hurtful model which should be avoided, and that an arranged marriage model sheds light on Christ's relationship to the Church.

An arranged marriage is one in which a woman's father, rather than the woman herself, maintains the power to determine to whom she is given in marriage. The necessity for arranged marriage is built on the foundational principle of a woman's stance in society. We have seen that the unmarried woman is held by her father and therefore has no ability to give herself away. Instead, the responsibility of finding a husband for the young woman falls to the father. With this understanding, a woman's consent to marry is not necessary to create a marriage (though her consent is certainly not a bad thing).

The Bible is filled with examples of arranged marriages. While there is no distinct prescription that all marriages must be arranged, the weight of persistent accounts demonstrates the value of the practice. Indeed, arrangement in the Old Testament might be viewed as an intrinsic part of the relationship.

The first example of arranged marriage is seen in the marriage of the first man and woman. Neither of these had any group of people from whom they might choose their spouse, nor did they have to expend any energy in trying to find one another. Genesis 2:22 records that after God, the Father, had made the woman he "brought her to the man." This is an

archetypical example of marriage, with arrangement as a component.

Other examples of arranged marriages abound in scripture. The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah,¹ the first marriage described in the Bible after Adam and Eve, was accomplished without either of the two even seeing each other beforehand. The account of the marriages of Jacob to Leah and Rachel² records much of the dealings between Jacob and Laban (Leah and Rachel's father), but says nothing about the will of either of the two women. In fact, the marriages were accomplished as a business deal. Othniel won his wife Achsah as a prize for conquering a city after her father offered her, with no record of her willingness.³ Ruth's marriage was dictated by land heritage.⁴ Samson sent his parents to arrange his marriage for him.⁵ Clearly, the model for marriage in the Old Testament is an arranged marriage model.

The New Testament also shows evidence that arranged marriage was practiced. While there is no explicit mention of freedom or lack thereof in choosing marriage partners, there is a hint of arranged marriage found in the letters of Peter and Paul. In 1 Peter 3:1 Peter instructed wives to submit to their husbands even if the husbands were unbelievers. Paul also, in 1 Corinthians 7:13, gave instructions to women who were married to unbelievers. It would be strange for Christian women to select unbelieving husbands for themselves, and especially since Christians were cautioned against such unions.⁶ That some Christian women did have unbelieving husbands indicates that they were probably given into those marriages against their will by their unbelieving fathers. While many in the early Church probably were married to an

¹ Genesis 24

² Genesis 29

³ Joshua 15:16-17

⁴ Ruth 4

⁵ Judges 14:2

⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:14

unbeliever before they came to the faith, others were likely given in marriage to unbelievers thereafter. An example of this is likely found in Timothy's family, as Timothy's mother and grandmother were both believers who, by virtue of the fact that Timothy's father and grandfather go unmentioned, were presumably married to unbelievers.¹ This is particularly notable in the case of Timothy's mother, as one might assume that she was raised to be a believer by her mother. If Timothy's mother was a believer from her youth, arranged marriage seems to be the best explanation for her likely being married to an unbeliever. While Paul was no proponent of marriage between believers and unbelievers, neither he nor any other New Testament writer demonstrates any opposition to arranged marriage.

Aside from purely Biblical considerations, there is practical support for arranged marriage as well. For one, we have already considered that for a woman to marry young is a good thing for everyone involved. One reason however that women are marrying later and later in life is that their fathers have no social responsibility to give them in marriage, as many fathers believe that it is the responsibility of their adult daughters to find their own husbands. The situation of late marriage would likely change however if fathers felt a responsibility to marry their daughters off. The longer a father allows a daughter to stay in his home and age, the more difficulty he will have in finding a suitable husband for her. Furthermore, if fathers were truly responsible for the care of their daughters, the longer a father has a fully-grown extra mouth to feed in his household, the more expensive she will become to him.

A father with a motivation to give his daughter in marriage will be especially motivated to raise her up to be an ideal wife, because the ideal wife will be given much more easily than less ideal counterparts. As the father trains his

¹ 2 Timothy 1:5

daughter to be a good wife and mother, rather than a good student or worker for instance, she will learn valuable skills and practical wisdom that will bring stability and joy to her future family, something which we would all be glad to see.

This is not the only point about arranged marriage that will strengthen the family. The high emphasis placed on the leadership of the husband and the father in arranging the marriage will only help to engrain male headship in the family, ideally leading to stronger families down the line. Additionally, young couples of arranged marriages will avoid the traumatic pitfalls of the dating system, and avoiding these will ultimately result in stronger families. The avoidance of sexual sins which the dating system inherently fosters will be of particular benefit to building strong future families.

The culture's commonly accepted first step for forming marriages is the dating system. In this system, a young man and a young woman spend a great deal of time together alone on dates, and if they like each other enough then they eventually label themselves as each other's boyfriend or girlfriend respectively, at which point the relationship becomes exclusive. After dating one another as boyfriend and girlfriend for some time, they eventually move on to "engagement".¹ The dating system is fatally flawed on several levels, but, tragically, Christians persist in allowing the system. This is often less because they see the system as a good thing and more because they do not realize that arranged marriage is a viable alternative.

There are a multitude of irresolvable problems with dating. Perhaps most importantly, the dating system is simply unsafe for the young Christian. Anyone of a sound mind can recognize that the common result of leaving young single men and women alone together is a massive increase in sexual temptation. When a young man and woman spend time getting to know each other with family and friends (and particularly

¹ See Chapter X for a discussion of the problems associated with engagement

when all of the young people involved live within their parents' homes) the temptation to sexual immorality is virtually erased by the plain fact that the youth can't just start having sex in front of everyone. While dating however, the youths will find ample opportunities to get away, and particularly if one of them lives apart from their parents (or one set of parents is particularly permissive). It is true that young men must be allowed some range of freedom by virtue of the fact that they are men, but we have already understood from our foundational position on a young woman's place that she does not deserve any such freedom. Rather, the young woman is to be held under the broad authority and protection of her father. For a father to allow his daughter to make her own decisions about relationships and to abandon his duty to protect her by sending her out alone with strange men is truly reckless.

Scripture records the dangers of such a failure. We might consider, for example, the situation of Tamar and Amnon in 2 Samuel 13. The passage tells the tragic story of David's daughter Tamar who is raped by her half-brother Amnon, and places a particular emphasis on Amnon's plan to be alone with her so that he can accomplish his wicked goal. Amnon first pretended to be ill, and sent to have Tamar cook for him and feed him.¹ King David surely suspected nothing; this is his own son whom he trusts and who has asked only that his half-sister cook for him! Quite the contrary, in a dating model the father has reason to be suspicious. He likely does not know the young man in the arrangement very well, but he does know that the young man has some level of attraction to the young woman. If David erred in trusting his own son, how can a responsible father trust the dating teenager?

Another example can be found in Genesis 34:1-2:

¹ 2 Samuel 13:6

"Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her."

This passage shows the result of Jacob's failure to stop his daughter from going off alone. Her purpose in going out is telling; we can reason that in going to see the women of the land she possibly desired to learn their ways that she might be more like the people around her. Likewise, today many young women would probably expect that dating should be allowed to them because all the other young women around them might be doing it. However tempting it may have been for Dinah to go out and be like the other women around her, the result of her action was humiliation.

There are yet more examples to be had. Judges 21:21-23 records another instance in which young women went out away from the protection of their fathers and were seized by strange men. In the New Testament, Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:6:

"For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions."

Paul's admonition in verse 5 of the same chapter is that Timothy should "avoid such people." Modern Christians likewise would do well to avoid such as these when we can, though admittedly we will not always recognize them. Of course, by virtue of the fact that we know such people exist we should maintain a vigilant guard against them. These are men who are crafty and who seek a way to sneak past our defenses that they may practice perversity in our own homes; we therefore must not trust just any young man who knocks at the door and asks permission to date our daughters (if even

permission is sought). Certainly, if these men make it their goal to capture weak women, let us at least raise a high defense and force them to use the utmost deception and cunning rather than raising our flag of surrender and sending our daughter out to meet them on their terms! Ultimately, there can be no doubt that the record of scripture shows there is danger for a young woman when she is left alone.

This does not mean, of course, that all men are a danger to all young women all the time. There are some rare young people who can keep their temptations in check and avoid the sexual sins that are so prevalent. We cannot assume that every young man is a rapist or pervert who has come for our daughters with just one thing in mind; indeed, because of the prevalence of dating, decent young men have little other option but to seek a wife through the system. We would be wise to show caution however. Our daughters and the health of our families are far too important to take unwise chances.

Furthermore, we have already seen that the consequence of fornication in the life of a young woman ought to be that she be given in marriage to the man with whom she has fornicated.¹ Many fathers would be horrified to see the kinds of men that they might be setting themselves up to deal with for many years down the road. Why a father would abandon his freedom to choose a son in law and instead allow his daughter to take whichever man she might happen to choose (or become stuck with) is simply beyond my comprehension.

Having seen that the consequences of allowing a daughter to go off on her own are great, we should consider now that at least some of the responsibility for such problems is borne by the father. This point is demonstrated quite graphically in the Old Testament law at Deuteronomy 22:13-21. The passage describes the penalty which is to befall a woman who displeases her husband by losing her virginity to another man before marriage. We see that the burden of

¹ See Page 34

proving the woman's virginity lies with her father, but verse 21 tells the penalty for the family if proof of the woman's virginity is not found:

"then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst."

So the sexually immoral young woman dies for her sin (or perhaps only because she lied to cover over the sin of another) but the consequences of this also fall on the father. In this instance of stoning for sexual immorality the woman is stoned explicitly at the door of her father's house, while in another instance of stoning in this passage the offenders were to be stoned at the city gate.¹ How sad it is that the father must watch his daughter die outside the very door of his house because he did not adequately protect her from sexual sin, but this is the just consequence for his carelessness! Of course, the consequence of sexual sin in the modern world will most likely not be that anyone's daughter is stoned to death on his doorstep, but the consequences of this sin will be real, and God will measure a man's account on the day of his judgment.

Beyond the simple fact that dating is dangerous, we must also recognize that dating is built on an anti-Biblical philosophy in that it is dependent upon a woman's supposed right to choose her own relationships. As is demonstrated above, such an ideal is strongly contrary to the ideals of scripture. The idea that a woman deserves such a freedom is really only an extension of American ideals of freedom, feminism, and individuality which can have no rational Biblical defense.

¹ Deuteronomy 22:24

Giving a young woman the prerogative to choose her husband is in fact a detrimental phenomenon. In forcing a young woman to choose her own husband,¹ a father delegates to her a decision of massive consequence. There are few young women who could make such a decision responsibly. Consider, has the young woman ever been married, that she may discern which qualities in a husband she should desire? Is there even a Biblical list of qualities for a good husband which we might compare to the qualities of the noble wife in Proverbs 31? Unfortunately for the dating young woman there is not. When left to choose on her own a young woman will likely turn to her emotions or cultural norms to make a decision, and these are clearly poor standards. Based on standards such as these, it would be impossible to count the number of fine young men whom young women have rejected in favor of worthless fellows only because they know no better. I would suggest that neither the blessed Christian described in the beatitudes, nor the man who leads, rebukes, and protects his wife, nor the man who seeks the kind of humble service to his bride that Christ exhibited to his Church tend to be the most alluring to teenage women. The consequences of this can be quite tragic, not only in that young women tend to choose "bad boys" over Godly young men, but in that young men who would like a wife are pressured to perform whatever part a woman would like for them to perform.

Truly, there is a paradox in telling a woman to choose her husband. In attempting to choose, the young woman will determine what she wants from life and then find a man who fits the ticket. In essence, she is not choosing a leader so much as she is going her own way and picking someone who wants to go with her. For the woman to choose her leader becomes something of a logical impossibility, because a man can scarcely find a woman to follow him unless he first caves to

¹ I do mean "forcing." Virtually no father in our culture would choose a husband for his daughter even if he was asked to do so.

following her, allowing her to have whatever type of life she might want. Plenty of decent pastors scratch their heads in confusion as men fail to step up and lead in their churches. What these pastors don't realize is that those same men spent their formative years being trained to follow a woman wherever she might go in order to avoid the heartaches of a breakup and attain the joys of having female companionship.

We have already considered that young marriage is a benefit (especially for young women that they may bear more children), but the dating system forces marriage to later in life. This occurs in several ways. For one, many young women buy into the misguided sense of feministic freedom which dating inherently supports, and when given a choice between marriage and singleness many of these prefer singleness. This is especially true when cultural norms constantly depict marriage as a joyless struggle which everyone regrets (as it indeed often becomes when the cultural principles are employed). Not only are many women likely not to choose a man at all, but their avoidance of marriage altogether tends to, at the very least, impress the same ideologies upon their peers in such a way that they are less likely to seek out marriage as quickly as they might have.

A young person is also likely to never choose or to delay choosing a spouse out of a desire to make a perfect choice. All too often a youth with a choice will waste many years waiting for perfection rather than accepting a practical but imperfect spouse. This is not to say, of course, that our young people would do well to settle for a spouse with poor character, but that in choosing (often by bad standards to begin with) some will seek out some overly particular and unlikely combination of characteristics which they will never find. Some will pick out even just one unlikely characteristic and wait unreasonably for it. These need not be bad characteristics per say. A young woman who says, "My husband must be a missionary, because I want to go on missions," is a perfect example, as only so many young men will be genuinely called to such an effort,

and there are likely plenty of decent young men who would fit the ticket otherwise. There's nothing wrong with wanting to marry a missionary, but it would be unreasonable for a young woman to refuse to marry anyone else.

This problem of choosing is compounded by the general requirement of dating that the couple be more emotionally attached than practically suited to one another, and the result is marriage which comes later in life when desperation kicks in and the emotional standards have finally dropped. This problem is especially aggravated when women have the ability to choose because two people choosing each other is much less likely than one person choosing another. Besides this, young women tend to be more emotional, more patient, and more nitpicky than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, I would suggest that the pick-and-choose culture of dating undergirds the modern problem of divorce. As young people bounce from relationship to relationship over the course of a decade or more without ever knowing truly stable relationships, they fail to learn the skills necessary to maintain such relationships in the long-term. In fact, they become infused with the exact opposite mindset, that they can leave any relationship as soon as it is no longer immediately beneficial to them. The choice to stay or go is placed in their hands.

The emotional and social hazards of dating must also be examined. Dating is an emotional nightmare for a multitude of reasons. Because there is no Biblical norm with which to compare dating etiquette, the rules of dating are nothing more than relativistic cultural pseudo-morality. Even defining a dating relationship is problematic. A "couple" who are dating are supposedly committed to one another, but they can hardly be committed to each other when the relationship could end whenever either of the two decides to end things. If there is no actual commitment, what is there to differentiate between a boyfriend and any other boy, a girlfriend and any other girl? Without some kind of Biblical framework, is there really even

any legitimate structure built into such a relationship at all? On what terms should the relationship exist, and what authority is there to enforce the terms? Ultimately the relationship is nothing but a mirage, a mechanism for creating false hopes and heartache. The vague and fuzzy definitions of right and wrong in dating inevitably lead all the daters to have expectations which cannot be reasonably met, and they all likewise fail to meet the expectations of every other party involved. Truly no dater can do right by any other dater, and all of them (generally very much by accident) persist in continually dashing each others' hopes and transgressing each others' standards until everyone is hurt quite badly.

No young person can escape from the multitude of awkward social situations which dating requires. The girls feel worthless when they don't get asked to go on dates, and the guys who ask girls out on dates run the likely risk of rejection. Often young daters try to soften the blow by telling lies or avoiding each other altogether, which only ends up hurting all of them more. Entire groups of friends are split in two when they have no choice but to choose between either the boyfriend or the girlfriend who have split. Everyone seems confused about how long they need to wait before dating their friend's former object of affection. Conflicts abound when multiple daters pursue the same person all at once. The list of social conflicts and confusions could go on and on. Everything about the system creates awkwardness, distrust, and division among young people, and the end result is a persistent "drama" of emotional instability and constant backstabbing between the youth which makes virtually all of them conform to the unfortunate stereotype of an immature and emotionally stunted teenager.

The emotional high and sudden crash of "love" and loss is surely not benefitting anyone's marriage, as the problems with such an emotional roller-coaster persist beyond the teen years. For one, what a young dater adored about a partner who ended a relationship might never be found in a future partner,

and many will find themselves settling half-heartedly for a marriage which they deem incomparable to a former relationship. It would furthermore be impossible to count how many young people enter their marriages with a fear that they will fail the marriage, or how many build emotional barriers for fear that their partner will likewise fail them. Surely many enter marriage haunted by the humiliations of their past relationships. Not only this, but young people who have broken up relationship after relationship must eventually have their emotions seared by the process, and, in the event that divorce crosses their mind, they have surely learned to cope with such a loss well enough to go ahead with a split which they might have never even considered possible otherwise. Indeed, Proverbs 13:12 states the emotional situation with dating quite clearly when it says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." Let us therefore endeavor to help our young people avoid the inevitable smashing of their hopes in dating, and instead help them to fulfill their heart's desire by finding a mate who is suitable for them.

The final point to be had against dating is the most telling: there is no support for dating in scripture whatsoever. Dating has existed for not more than 150 years (if even it has existed for 100), and so the Bible obviously makes no explicit mention of it. The fact that dating is absent from scripture does not make dating wrong, but it does demonstrate a few points against dating. For one, dating is proven to be unnecessary. Humanity survived for several thousand years without such a system, and God evidently saw no need to prescribe or even describe such a system.¹ The nonexistence of dating in scripture leaves it Biblically defenseless. If someone would like to use scripture to demonstrate that dating is more valuable than it is detrimental he will be wholly frustrated in doing so. With that said, I will acknowledge that

¹ That is unless rape, fornication, and dashed hopes serve as its descriptors

it would also be unfair to say that dating is absolutely definitively wrong, because though the Bible speaks against many of the problems associated with dating, it does not speak immediately to dating itself. On those grounds I would be loathe to enforce a new law by condemning anyone who sends his daughter on a date, but I persist in the opinion that the practice is not scripturally supported, is likely to result in practices that scripture would oppose, and is for the most part needlessly detrimental. Why would we expose ourselves to such a hurtful system, when a more beneficial Biblical option exists?

Though arranging marriage seems to be most Biblical and beneficial, there are those who would argue that dating is truly a better system. Their argument can only be that a woman's consent is a necessary factor in creating a marriage, and that she must therefore choose a husband on her own. The Bible however does not require a woman's consent at any point. Largely, the idea that a woman must consent to marriage is rooted simply in culture or in some worldly philosophy. If one was to attempt to make the argument from scripture he might take a scripture like Ezekiel 16:8 as evidence that a woman's consent is required:

"When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine."

This passage comes in a prophecy in which Ezekiel metaphorically compares Jerusalem to a bride who eventually commits adultery and deserves punishment. Is there not an indication here that God's marriage to Jerusalem, and therefore all marriages, requires vows and a covenant of consent? The answer is no for a few reasons. First, the vow in this passage is

made by God, not by Jerusalem. There is no indication here that Jerusalem needed to consent to God's covenant with her. While covenants in scripture do sometimes function with the consent of two parties, this is not always the case. God's covenants with Noah,¹ Abraham,² and Isaac³ were all accomplished without the three needing to give any consent or vow to uphold anything. Seeing that this is the case, we should understand that the weaker member of a similar covenant need not give consent. On those grounds, a covenantal argument actually lends support to arranged marriage in that marriage might represent these covenants between God and man.

Furthermore, I would suggest that to apply a passage like Ezekiel 16 to practical marriage stretches the comparison of Christ's relationship with the Church too far. As has been formerly stated, the objective of this book is not to determine all aspects of man's relationship to God and then extrapolate those things onto marriage, but to discuss those qualities that the Bible says marriage should have and to point out how they reflect God. Using God's covenant with Jerusalem to insist on women's consent abuses the formula by turning it on its head.⁴

If one was to take Ezekiel 16 and use it as an example of how marriage should function, he would also start to run into other confusing problems. If Ezekiel 16 proclaims to us the proper functioning of marriage, then it must also tell us the proper punishment for adultery. Verses 37-39 record that the adulteress should be handed over to her partner in adultery for punishment. Verse 37 records that the adulteress should be publicly stripped naked. Verse 40 states she should be cut to pieces, and 41 that her house should be burned. None of these penalties are found in the law, and all of them go beyond the penalties required in the law. The idea that the adulterer should punish the adulteress is particularly confusing. Clearly,

¹ Genesis 8-9

² Genesis 15, 17

³ Genesis 26, Exodus 6:3-4

⁴ See Page 15 for a more thorough discussion of this problem.

it is a misuse to take a highly metaphorical prophecy about Jerusalem's punishment and extrapolate it backward for use as marital instruction.

In addition to these things, it should be clear to anyone that there are no examples of a woman giving consent as a requirement of her marital status anywhere in scripture (as has been noted above), and the idea that consent is required is contrary to many passages of scripture.

Many Christians have long understood the devastating consequences of dating. I have known more than a few pastors and other Christians who have responded against the system, by saying things like, "My daughter won't be allowed to date until she's 30." The reaction against dating is appreciated, but the frustration is channeled in the wrong direction. Most Christians who oppose allowing their daughter to date have taken up the proper stance of trying to protect their daughters, but they seem to attribute the problems with dating simply to sexual lusts and youthful immaturity. They fail to realize that it is not some practice within the dating system that causes the trouble so much as it is the nature of the system itself. Even among those who have realized there is a deeper problem with a system of dating, many have failed to act simply because they do not see that there is any viable alternative. Having been raised in a culture which promotes independence, freedom of choice, feminism, and late marriage among a host of other cultural maladies, and having used dating as the model by which they themselves formed their marriages, many Christians simply do not notice arranged marriage. Whatever is read of the practice in scripture is often pushed aside as some old backward cultural practice which is no longer beneficial for the modern Westerner, but this could not be farther from the truth! Arrangement is simply the healthiest way that anyone, Old Testament Jew or modern American Christian, could hope to start a marriage.

Even with that in mind, there is a major practical obstacle in implementing arranged marriage: in order for any

one person to practice it, there must be others who are willing to practice it as well. A father could not arrange a marriage between his daughter and a suitor if there was no suitor who would seek an arrangement. No suitor could make an arrangement with a father who shirks his responsibility. Even when there are a few in society who agree with the ideals of arranged marriage, they will have difficulty finding one another, and especially because the subject is strictly taboo; even publicly supporting the Biblical gender roles which undergird the system will earn a person much ire from many feminist-leaning cultural Christians. Even if the father and suitor did find one another, the young woman involved would have to have been well-enough trained that she would support the union, as the culture would quickly cry rape and child abuse against anyone who would attempt to arrange a marriage on a woman who was unwilling. Obviously a cultural shift will have to take place in order for arranged marriage to be practical, and fathers will have the responsibility to start the shift by refusing to allow their daughters to marry any other way. These men must work gently with the youths they will encounter, understanding that many of them will have been raised without any understanding of arranged marriage, and they must work within the Church to teach sound familial principles to others who do not understand them. Until a great change has occurred, many young people will be forced to work within the detrimental dating system as well as they can. Hopefully change can come soon.

Ultimately, the struggle between arranged marriage and the dating system boils down to a discussion of who chooses a woman's relationships. Does a woman decide for herself which man she will marry, or does her father decide for her? Theologically, there is a deeper connection to the relationship between Christ and the Church at play, and our picture to the world of salvation is at stake. We must ask ourselves if a woman choosing her own husband points out to us the

spiritual reality. It doesn't. By giving a woman the choice over whom she will marry, we only distract from the clear scriptural truth that one's relationship to Christ is not dependent upon man's choice, but is instead dependent upon the arrangement between the Father and the Son. As Jesus said in John 10:29:

"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

So then we know that it is the Father who has given Christ his people. No one could have taken the Bride of Christ out of the Father's hand except that he chose to give her. But could the Church have had a say in this? Ephesians 2:4-7 reads:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

The evidence is clear; just as no dead man has raised himself, so no sinner could bring himself to repentance and a right relationship with Jesus Christ. And if no sinner could bring himself into a right relationship with Christ, surely no bride ought to rise up and seek her own man. For her to do so could only represent to us that the Church has raised herself from her state of death in sin. Ultimately, dating becomes a picture not of God's wonderful grace, but of the errant idea that God is unable to save us apart from our free choice to accept him. If a woman truly desires to glorify Christ in her

marriage, she should submit to her father and should follow his will as he graciously lifts her up and delivers her to her husband, just as God the Father has given us to the Son apart from our own designs.

Furthermore, the picture of God given in dating is the picture of an aloof God who must be pursued, enticed and sought out. The God of dating, like the spouse of dating, is one who is not easy to find. This is not the God we should display! What have we learned from Romans 10:6-8? Must the Church ascend to heaven and bring Christ down? Must she descend to the abyss and bring Christ up? No! Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law," Likewise, the caring father who desires that his children be happily married should seek to bring the spouses together, intentionally sending them forth that they might find one another easily.

The weight of evidence seems clearly to support that arrangement between the father and the future husband is the only viable method for moving toward a marital relationship. The Bible often uplifts arranged marriage as an example, and no other options for starting such a relationship are recorded. In fact, arranged marriage is the only reasonable way to begin a marriage based on our understanding of a woman's stance in society. The American alternative to arranged marriage, the dating system, shows itself to be a detriment to anyone it touches, and ultimately the downfall of arranged marriage is the downfall of right soteriology. Clearly the dating system must go and it must be supplanted by arranged marriage.

Chapter IX

A Practical Approach to Marriage

The decision of whom one should marry is among the largest decisions a man can make, as his marriage will affect every aspect of his life for the rest of his life. This decision should be made practically, as marriage, Biblically speaking,

is a union of practical benefit entered into on practical grounds. Unfortunately, many today have ignored the practical necessity of marriage and have instead sought out a union built on an overly emotional foundation. It is therefore important to discuss the natures of love and marriage in their practical facets, particularly as relating to how one decides whom he should marry.

Love is commonly believed to be a feeling or emotion, devoid of practicality, which attracts one person to another. It is said that the "spark" of emotional love should drive one's decision about whom he should marry, often with the motto, "You can't choose whom you love." Proponents of this idea often argue that each person is unique in that one could only feel love for a one specific other with enough strength that the two could be married. The philosophy has left many searching for their "one true love," their elusive future spouse who will emotionally complete them. Incidentally, the argument that one cannot choose whom he loves is also regularly used by those in the same-sex marriage camp, yet another way in which Christian misunderstanding has inadvertently fueled problems among unbelievers. This understanding of love is fatally flawed in that it neglects the practical Biblical ideals behind love and marriage. The Bible shows marriage to have strong practical components, and because of this, people should marry for practical purposes and then do that which is loving toward one another rather than founding marriage on a purely emotional love. When a marriage adheres to a practical model the emotional aspect will follow and help to refuel a relationship that will be much richer and more rewarding than the emotional love could ever be alone. Seeing that marriage is an arrangement of practicality, the understanding that any one person could reasonably marry anyone else within practical parameters and live happily follows. This is not to say that God has not divinely appointed each married couple, but simply that a man should not be seeking out a uniquely emotionally satisfying "true love."

Notably, neither side of the discussion, the emotional versus the practical, completely closes the door to the ideas of the other. Emotional attachment is very much a part of marriage and spouses who love each other actively and practically feel strongly for each other, as they should. Scripture attests an emotional attachment in love. The Song of Songs is a beautiful display of the love between a man and his wife, and this can be taken as an example of the love that is to be experienced between Christ and his Church. As no one espousing a marriage model built on practicality would seek to remove emotion, no one would make an argument of complete opposition to practicality. Any person presumably believes that there are practical parameters for marriage in addition to emotion. Few would take it upon themselves to marry a person with a severe mental handicap for instance, because the impracticality of the situation would prove insurmountable for them.

There is good reason to believe that marriage should be started for practical reasons and not solely for emotional ones. The Bible exemplifies love in terms of practicality and not simply as emotion; scripture also gives demonstration of marriages founded on practical purpose and delivers teachings supporting the practical marriage. A practical marriage model also trumps an overly emotional model in terms of logic and workability. And, as always, the practical aspect of love gives a demonstration of the love between Christ and the Church.

Love is a difficult word to define because the depth of love is impossible for the human mind to fathom. 1 John 4:8 states in part that "...God is love." Therefore, one could reason that to define love neatly would be to define God neatly, a task which is plainly impossible. There is a deeply emotional aspect to love. This emotion both emanates from the practical actions of the lover and also helps to fuel the practical actions of the lover. One who feels an emotional love from a pure heart will put his love into practice, and the one who practices love will reap emotion from it.

When John wrote about love he did not write about love as a whimsical fleeting emotion. John's other writings help put 1 John 4:8 into context. 1 John 3:16-18 reads:

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

Here John equates love with practical action and not emotion. Specifically, John notes that Christ loved us not only with an emotion, but by the act of dying for us. John says that if we are to love like Christ we should love by giving up our lives, again, an action. He further says that giving to brothers in need is an example of love, and giving is clearly another action. Here, John also seems to speak intentionally against a purely emotional love, noting that Christians should not just love with words but with deeds also, and indicating that love does not abide in the heart of one who refuses to act love out. Returning to 1 John 4:7-10:

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Here love is used repeatedly as a verb, not as a noun like emotion, but as an action. Does it seem reasonable that in this

passage love could be described as an emotion or a feeling? Even when John states that God is love, using the noun ἀγάπη, he is surely saying that God is more than the embodiment of sappy feelings. The depths of God and his love are unfathomable, but this passage attests that God's love was manifested in an action, "...that God sent his only Son."

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is perhaps the most famous passage of the Bible describing love:

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Again, love is much more than an emotion and is exhibited in action. A person who acts impatiently and unkindly does not love. A person who envies and boasts does not love. The person who loves is the one who does what is right to his neighbor. The two greatest commandments are, put simply, to love God and neighbor.¹ Did Jesus command that having happy feelings toward others is the commandment upon which all others are dependent? Or is it that the person who loves God will obey all of his other commands, that the person who obeys God's commands will ultimately do right to his neighbor, and that the one who sacrificially treats his neighbor well demonstrates his love for God? Jesus emphasized this point in John 14:15 when he said "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

As the Bible gives a picture of an active love upon which marriages should be founded, so the Bible gives a practical picture concerning the purposes behind marriage. From the very beginning at Genesis 2:18, God notes a practical problem

¹ Matthew 22:34-40

with his creation, that "it is not good that the man should be alone;" God then decrees a practical solution for the problem, "I will make him a helper fit for him." That man needs a practical helper is the first reason for marriage.

Marriage as practicality continues throughout the Bible. The marriage of Isaac to Rebekah is a foremost example. God was sovereign in determining which woman Isaac should marry, but the two were selected for each other by a third party, sight unseen. The marriage was clearly not based on any emotional spark. Genesis 24:67 even gives a practical purpose behind the marriage. "...So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." To put the chapter in context, Abraham sent his servant to find Isaac a wife immediately after the burial of Sarah. This demonstrates that Isaac was married for the sake of quelling his depression, a practical benefit of marriage indeed.

In contrast to Isaac's marriage stand the marriages of his son Jacob. Whereas Isaac's situation was practical and ideal, Jacob selected a bride in Rachel based on her appearance and his emotional attachment to her. Because he was blinded by emotional love for Rachel, Jacob paid an exorbitantly high price for her in 7 years of service (longer than the longest amount of time a Hebrew could be held as a slave in Old Testament law).¹ Of course Jacob was a deceiver and in selecting a bride based on his emotion and her physical appearance he was deceived. He ended up with Leah as a bride also, and was stuck working an additional seven years to pay for her as well. The irony is that Leah, the bride given based on the practicality of her age and whom he did not choose, made the better bride. While Rachel envied,² stole,³ kept idols,⁴ lied,⁵ and birthed only two sons,¹ Leah never

¹ Exodus 21:2

² Genesis 30:1

³ Genesis 31:19

⁴ Genesis 31:19

⁵ Genesis 31:35

appeared to have any immorality and birthed six sons.² Rachel died first of the two, and was buried in the desert.³ Leah was buried in the tomb in the Promised Land with Jacob and their ancestors.⁴ Leah's descendants include righteous King David through Judah,⁵ while Rachel's include wicked King Saul through Benjamin.⁶ When the Northern tribes left Judah they were led by Rachel's son Ephraim in rebelling against Leah's son Judah.⁷ From these things we can learn that Jacob's selection of Rachel based on her beauty and his emotional attachment was not wise; though this is usually exactly what dictates the selection of a mate in the culture's model!

Paul also gives instruction that marriage should be used for practical purposes. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-2, Paul writes:

"Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."

Having already considered the impact this teaching has on young marriage, the practical sensibility of the teaching must also be considered. This passage gives reason to believe that marriage is an arrangement of practicality for sexual purposes. Paul speaks again to the practicality of marriage in 1 Timothy 5:11-15:

"But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having

¹ Genesis 35:24

² Genesis 35:23

³ Genesis 35:19

⁴ Genesis 49:31

⁵ 1 Chronicles 2:1-15

⁶ 1 Chronicles 8:1-33

⁷ Isaiah 7:17

abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. For some have already strayed after Satan."

Here Paul notes that young women who are widowed should remarry rather than dedicating themselves to supplications and prayers on behalf of the Church day and night and receiving aid from the Church.¹ His primary reason for this is that their worldly passions (presumably sexual desire, emotional stability, and a craving for worldly possessions) will draw them away from their commitment and for these practical reasons they will eventually want to marry again. Paul's reasoning that they must remarry is further based on his practical concerns for potential problems in conduct, concerns of serious consequence that can be easily applied to many young women in the Church today. The unmarried woman becomes an idler, gossip, and busybody, as anyone acquainted with young single women would attest. These kinds of women tear down the Church instead of building it up.² Because of this, Paul states plainly that young women, widows particularly, should marry. The alternative to practical marriage given at the end of the passage is that the woman will stray to Satan, an undesirable consequence indeed.

That the Bible demonstrates love as an action and gives practical parameters for marriage is apparent, but the fact is further supported by a look at the problems with love as a simple emotion. To define love as an emotion and use that as a basis for relationships is unreasonable.

Firstly, consider from where the frivolous emotions that

¹ 1 Timothy 5:3-5

² More verses concerning the problem of gossip are listed in the book of Proverbs than could be listed here.

one might call love originate. Usually strongly positive emotions toward other people are simply a behavioral conditioning. People feel good when they are in the presence of people who do beneficial things for them. A woman who makes a man laugh makes him feel good, but does that mean he loves her? Such emotions are strengthened by sexual desire. A physically attractive woman who makes a man laugh is even better than the plain woman who makes him laugh, but still, is that feeling love? Suppose that same woman had great wealth, adored the man's personality, went with him to enjoyable places and made many good memories for him. A man would naturally feel good around this woman, and he may mistake that feeling for love. Might it be though that he has "fallen in love" with a woman who does not believe in God and has no practical wisdom for marriage but is loads of fun to be around? Even if she is a God-fearing woman, what will happen when she becomes old, ugly, incapable, embittered, and impoverished? Will she still be loved then? People might be attracted to a million different qualities, but these are ultimately vain and a weak foundation for a relationship. In discussing characteristics of a worthy wife, Proverbs 31:30 reminds us that "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised." Unfortunately, many have sought out charm and beauty rather than the fear of God.

The state of one's emotions is constantly shifting, making emotion a poor foundation for a marriage. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it?" Emotion and the whim of the heart cannot tell adequately whom is loved or with whom one should spend his life. Marriages generally struggle through difficult problems and are sometimes unhappy for years. One partner can fall into sin and drag the entire family down; illnesses, deaths and economic conditions can place a burden on the family. These are not pleasant thoughts, but are the reality of a fallen world. If marriages are built up on a balance

of feelings then they will crumble as soon as trouble comes to take the feelings away. All too often Christians go into a marriage with great emotion but can't withstand the trials of life. Some have been taught by a romantic culture that life will come easily and when it doesn't they assume that there is something wrong with them and their marriage. Sadly, even among Christians divorce has become the solution.

Pain is a repellant of pleasant emotion, but pain is necessary for a healthy marriage. A loving marriage necessitates reproof, and reproofing love is initially more painful than a neglectful hate. Proverbs 27:6 reads, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy." Is it not certain that some marriages are destroyed when one partner is emotionally unhappy with the faithful and practical reproof of the other? Love between people is often unhappy and unpleasant. A father spans his son because he loves him, a husband puts his foot down and commands his wife for her benefit, and Christians confront Christians in order to root out sin. These things can be very painful, but they are necessary if we are to love one another. If we trust emotions to tell us what love is, then those who love us most will at times seem not to love us at all.

While some will still argue that the "spark" of emotional love is a necessity for beginning a marriage, such a spark presents difficulties of practicality. As has been noted, it is difficult to find two people who happen to spark for each other at the same time and stay that way long enough to get married in the conventional way. The book of Ecclesiastes says at chapter 11 verse 4, "He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap." The implication being that one who waits for perfect conditions in weather (or life by extrapolation) will never act on his crops (or his life condition). The American proverb "Those who wait for perfection wait forever." rings true here. The result of waiting for the perfect spark is that many have stayed single for far too long. This is unhealthy for the individual, the Church, and the

culture in general, as discussed previously. Because all people are sinners, no Christian should expect to find a perfect mate or a perfect emotional spark. In all healthy marriages both partners must learn to give in and settle for imperfections, but by resolving to make the relationship work whether they feel good about it or not many have found that their work made them feel good about it in the end. This is not a call to accept faults and sins without ever working to better ourselves or our mates, nor is it an admonition to settle for a person whose character is unbecoming, but an encouragement to love one another with a love that covers a multitude of sins¹ and to select a partner who is practically workable rather than one who is faultlessly emotionally stimulating.

The emotional notion of love can lead to unhealthy infatuations and abusive relationships. One could easily become fanatically entangled emotionally to a person that he doesn't even know. This is often seen in teenage girls who are "in love" with their favorite celebrities. Amazingly, they think they love someone because they have a selfish fantasy about what that person can do for them, never considering that they might make a sacrifice to do anything for that person. Many relationships actually play out in this manner, with one partner sacrificially serving the other while the other selfishly takes everything without ever giving back. The selfish partner might have infatuated, emotionally needy or lustful feelings toward the selfless partner, and the selfless partner might call this love, but ultimately the wrong actions are the very opposite of love.

As if these detriments were not enough, the emotional notion of love necessarily leads to the emotional scarring of the youth. As each one seeks out an emotional attachment before there is any practical commitment, they suffer heartbreak again and again until a marriage is finally achieved. Could this be a healthy way to begin marriage, entering the union with years of emotional scars and a perpetual fear of

¹ 1 Peter 4:8

abandonment? Clearly not! Anyone who would encourage such activity in a young person seeking marriage should be ashamed of such an abusive mistreatment.

Ultimately, the practical understanding of love and marriage points to a deeper understanding of the gospel. Christ's love is self-sacrificial to the point of death, displayed in practical action and not some flimsy feeling that will turn on a dime. In like manner, the love of the Christian for Christ is not built on an emotional high, but is an unwavering life-changing love that overcomes from the valley and mountaintop alike. In the same way, a husband should live in practical sacrificial dedication to his wife, enduring all hardships, and not simply on the basis of emotional whim, while a woman should love her husband through practical submission regardless of her feelings. A man who would abandon a practical and self-sacrificial love in the times when his emotions fade gives a picture of a Christ who would have resigned well before he reached the cross, and a woman who fails to practically love her husband in the hard times is not unlike the sower's seed whose sprout is choked by the weeds.¹

Such emotional love has done damage to the common understanding of God's character. Perhaps one of the greatest misunderstandings about who God is comes in the question, "How can a loving God send people to Hell?" A great heresy has arisen because many have chosen to view God as a sappy emotional pushover, the type of God who would never hurt a fly and just wants everyone to be happy and have good feelings. This version of God is a far cry from the practically loving father who disciplines his children and the vengeful king who does justice to defend the righteous. True love is painful and difficult at times, but this love of God is far greater than the flitting spark of emotion.

The emotional understanding of love has also left the Church lacking in righteous living. Many Christians will

¹ Matthew 13:22

bristle at the idea that loving God requires action, as if acting out our faith is a legalistic attempt at self-righteousness. While it is true that no man can ever have enough right actions to save his soul, as salvation is by grace alone and through faith alone, the only response to faith in God's grace on our lives is right action. Jesus said in John 15:14 "You are my friends if you do what I command you." John also said in 2 John 6,

"And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it."

Peter agreed, writing in 2 Peter 1:3-9:

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."

Christians, therefore, should not fear to seek out right action as an outpouring of their love as if such love is legalistic or self-righteous. We know that Christ has already granted us life, but we must love in action if we are to demonstrate that we have not forgotten Christ's great work in removing the stain of sin.

So in choosing a bride, how should a young man choose? We know already that it is not fitting for a woman to select a husband for herself,¹ but there are some words that can be given to the young man. 2 Corinthians 6:14 teaches us:

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

Here is a teaching that a Christian man should not be overly involved in the affairs of unbelievers, and can be rightly applied to say that he should especially not take an unbeliever as a bride. This principle is reflected throughout scripture, and fitting Old Testament examples are found in Ezra 10:18-44 and Nehemiah 13:23-31. The Christian man should further not seek out only the most beautiful,² the wealthiest,³ or the best dressed.⁴ He should not even seek the one who is most charming and enjoyable to be around.⁵ He should instead seek a woman who fears God, who honors the principles of submission like those in 1 Peter 3, and who is as able as the wife of noble character in Proverbs 31. These unfading matters of character are of much greater value than personality and outward appearances.

A man's choice in a bride is among the most important he will ever make. Proverbs cautions us at 12:4, "An excellent

¹ See Chapters III and VIII

² As in the case of Jacob with Rachel; see Pages 108-109

³ See James' rebuke of partiality toward the wealthy in James 2

⁴ See Paul's admonition to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:9

⁵ Proverbs 31:30

wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones." and again at 14:1, "The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down." Did Job's wife not discourage him in his ailment at Job 2:9, telling him to curse God? Clearly, the selection of a wife is a most important task; the wife a man chooses will be either for his riches or his ruin, and will either build him up to be a great man of God or tear him down. So then let the young man choose rationally, not overly concerned by the emotions of his heart and the lusts of his flesh.

Chapter X

How Marriage Begins

The most commonly accepted method of beginning a marriage in modern American culture is entirely wrong. This conception of marriage generally holds that when a young man and young woman first commit themselves to marriage they enter into a period of engagement which ends when the two become officially married in a licensed wedding ceremony. An engagement is entered into by the man and the woman at their will, though permission of the woman's father is often sought as a tradition (rather than a requirement). It is widely believed that during the period of engagement the marriage commitment can be dissolved at any time and for any reason. A time of engagement, the breakable quasi-commitment to marriage, does not exist in scripture and therefore does not exist in the realm of Christian marriage. There are no fiancés (male or female) in the Bible. In scripture, any references to committed individuals who have not yet consummated sexually are as husbands and wives.

Scripturally speaking, the union of marriage begins with an unbreakable commitment of betrothal. Betrothal starts when a father and a suitor agree that the daughter/bride is to be exchanged from one household to the other and ends when the actual exchange is made. The betrothal period exists

because of the practical problems of marriage. A married couple needs a place to stay together and raise a family. The betrothal period gives the husband time to prepare housing and shore up other financial needs. The betrothal period ends at either a time prearranged by the husband and the father, or when the husband decides he is prepared. During that time period the woman continues to live with the father and does not have sexual union with the husband, but the husband gains authority over the wife. In some cases there are conditions in the agreement between the father and the suitor such as a dowry, bride-price or length of betrothal time, in other cases there are not. The father of the bride is free to negotiate the terms on what the price for the woman must be. Up until the point that an agreement is made, the father of the bride has the right to refuse his daughter's suitor outright, regardless of what the potential bride or husband might want. Remember, the daughter is held by the father and only he has the right to give her away. To take a daughter from her father is theft, negating the bizarre practice of eloping or receiving a license or blessing for a marriage which has not had a father's approval.

The betrothed are a married couple in a different state of marriage. Sadly, many Christians will label their time of betrothal as a cultural "engagement" and behave toward marriage in that time as the world behaves, not honoring the God-given authority of a husband over a wife and believing that the marriage can be dissolved at any time. These engagements are usually based on the false assumption that marriage only actually begins at the wedding ceremony. In this chapter we will see that ending such an "engagement" is a sin in the same way that ending a marriage is a sin. This commonly misunderstood doctrine of betrothal is important to the life of the Church because if it is neglected, damage will be done to the sanctity of our marriages and families, the balance of biblical authority will be disrupted, and an undue burden will be placed on young couples. Ultimately all of these things dishonor God.

There is good reason to believe that an unbreakable betrothal model is the appropriate model for beginning a marriage. The Bible demonstrates that model of marriage in practice and supports that model through doctrinal teaching on multiple occasions in both Old and New Testaments. Scripture gives no teaching or example that is contrary to the betrothal model. Betrothal also carries theological concerns which demonstrate Christ's relationship to the Church. The engagement model, on the other hand, is largely built on cultural traditions and Biblical misunderstanding.

The betrothal model described above is demonstrated well in Bible stories, though only a few pertinent examples are examined here. The first example of betrothal and arranged marriage appears to us in the story of Isaac and Rebekah, recorded in Genesis 24. This story demonstrates simply that a marriage is founded on a commitment between two families and has nothing to do with ceremonies. In the story Abraham sent a servant to find a wife for his son Isaac.¹ The servant selected a young woman, Rebekah, who seemed to be of good character.² The two families organized a trade;³ at this point in the story the two were betrothed. The servant then took the bride and brought her to Isaac. Significantly, the young bride was sent out from under the authority of her father before she was consummated to her husband. The two were then joined without any ceremony or official recognition. This is the first example of how God's people begin their marriages, making it especially significant.

Another Old Testament example demonstrates to us the unbreakable nature of a betrothal. Judges 14 records the story of Samson's marriage and demonstrates several aspects of the betrothal model. Samson went to his parents and asked them to come with him to negotiate a trade for a Philistine bride,⁴

¹ Genesis 24:3-4

² Genesis 24:16

³ Genesis 24:51

⁴ Judges 14:2

and after a deal was struck Samson left and returned for the bride when he was ready for her.¹ A feast was held to celebrate the glad occasion.² Now this passage becomes particularly important to the discussion because of what happens during the feast, which would be the closest thing in the story to the modern wedding ceremony. The feast ended abruptly, and the Philistine girl's father then gave the bride away to another man. Samson responded in verse 3 of chapter 15 by saying that he has a right to avenge himself against the Philistines for giving his wife to another man, and he proceeds to destroy the crops of the Philistines and to slaughter many of them. Such an action would be unjustifiable if giving the bride to another man was an acceptable behavior. Some might argue that the action was still unjustifiable, but the reaction of the Philistines in light of this is perhaps the most telling part of the passage. Rather than immediately trying to apprehend Samson, they first went and burned the father and the bride to death,³ indicating that the father's actions in giving Samson's wife away were quite wrong. Clearly the woman belonged to Samson as any consummated wife belongs to her husband. Here we have seen the betrothal model played out correctly in the beginning and have a demonstration of the problems that breaking the model can cause. Sadly, Samson's later troubles in life stem from his unhealthy relationships with women, which find their root in this incident. The story also points out that the breach of a betrothal is grounds for the death penalty because the breach constitutes adultery.⁴

As we have seen examples of an unbreakable betrothal in the Old Testament, so the New Testament begins with a similar example of betrothal. Joseph, husband of Mary, first appears in Matthew chapter 1. In that chapter at verse 18, we are told that "...Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before

¹ Judges 14:8

² Judges 14:10

³ Judges 15:6

⁴ See discussion of Deuteronomy 22:23-24 on Pages 122

they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit." Here the two are betrothed. They are committed to marriage, have not yet participated in any ceremony, and have not yet engaged in sexual union. Verse 19 continues, "And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly." The law in this situation was that Mary should be stoned to death.² Joseph didn't want her to die, and being the righteous and forgiving person that he was, decided to let her go without a fuss.

The word "husband" used in this passage is translated from the Greek word ἀνὴρ, the same Greek word that is used to mean husband anywhere.¹ In the Biblical mindset there was no word for a fiancé or betrothal-partner because none was needed. In the minds of the writers of scripture, two people committed to marriage were husband and wife. Such a union could only be torn apart by divorce.

Some might argue that these or other examples are purely descriptive of what occurred and are not a prescriptive model, but this is not the case because the prescription of the law and other teachings also support this model of betrothal.

When Jesus taught about divorce he confirmed that for Joseph to end his relationship with Mary would have constituted divorce. The Greek word for "divorce" concerning Joseph and Mary in Matthew 1:19 is a conjugation of ἀπολύω, meaning divorce, release, set free (as one might release an owned animal) and so forth. In Matthew 5:31-32, only a few chapters later, Jesus uses different conjugations of the same word several times when he condemns divorce in the Sermon on the Mount. This is a big deal. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not condemn "divorce" in the conventional American understanding of divorce. He condemned that a person might ἀπολύω his wife, and the context only a few chapters prior indicates that this is exactly what Joseph would

¹ The word ἀνὴρ is a general word covering both "man" and "husband."

have done in regard to the betrothed Mary. This word for "divorce" coming out of the mouth of Jesus in what is arguably his seminal teaching on marriage and divorce, declares that for Joseph and Mary, two ordinary "fiancés," to split up is divorce in the same regard. To break apart two people who are "engaged" is undoubtedly sinful in exactly the same way as divorce is sinful.

Deuteronomy 22:13-30 speaks about various marriage violations and what should be done about them. Verse 23-24 reads:

"If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst."

This passage talks about the penalty for an act of adultery committed between any man and a betrothed virgin, what contemporary culture would call a fiancée. Both of these should be stoned to death for their crime. Why? For the man, it is because he "violated another man's wife." The young woman in this scenario also deserves death because she is apparently a willing participant in the act, making her an adulteress. This passage from Deuteronomy confirms that the violation of the betrothal-marriage covenant is a crime worth killing over, and surely not something that the Church should take lightly. We have already considered Exodus 22:16 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29 in Chapters III and IV of this book, and from those we learned that the woman is held by her father and that she should be given in marriage to the man who sexually uses her.¹ There is a stark contrast between the results of sexual impropriety in those passages and the result

¹ See Pages 24 and 34-35

recorded here. In the case of rape against an unbetrothed woman, seen in Exodus 22:16 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29, the penalty was a fine and forced marriage. There is a distinction in the scenario recorded in Deuteronomy 22:23-24 however, in that the young woman had already been promised to another husband. In that situation the immoral man cannot take her as his wife because she is already married and it would amount to adultery, which warrants death. In this way, the prescription from God's law undoubtedly supports the unbreakable betrothal model. If the betrothal were breakable, then the woman would simply be given to the immoral man as the other laws require.

The Bible takes commitment very seriously, and Biblical marriages were not defined by a license or a religious ceremony but by the words representing the agreement of the families involved. Numbers 30 speaks to us about the laws regarding vows. Numbers 30 tells, in short, that all vows made between men must be kept. A man's word is binding. In this way, when a father and a groom make a commitment neither of them has a right to back out of it. A marriage commitment is a commitment as unbreakable as any other. However the prescription of the law points out to us the fact that a woman, under the ownership and authority of her husband or father, has no right to make vows for herself. If a woman makes a vow and her father or husband makes no effort to stop her, she is bound to it, but if he opposes her then her commitment does not stand. This is because the woman belongs to the man. Widows and divorced women don't get a way out of vows in this situation. Based on this and other passages already described it is clear that a daughter has no more freedom to choose a husband than her father gives her, and if a father agrees to give his daughter away she is given regardless of what her opinion may be. Likewise, if a father gives to a suitor a permission pending his daughter's approval, leaving the decision in her hands, then when she makes her commitment to marriage it is binding.

While considering the blessings of a father, consider also Isaac's blessing of Jacob over Esau,¹ a blessing which he later had no power to revoke. In a like manner no father can revoke his blessing for his daughter to marry. Indeed, a great fire is set by a small spark from the tongue,² and the power of a man's word in his commitment is greater than many realize.

Concerning commitments, Christ said in Matthew 5:33-37:

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."

The fact to be recognized here is that everything a Christian says should be the absolute truth. Every commitment that comes out of the Christian's mouth should be so truthful that there would never be a need for him to back it up otherwise. He should need neither contract nor pinky promise. If a man commits to a father to marry his daughter, and a father commits to a man to give her in marriage, then that commitment made in private is every bit as legitimate as any commitment made standing at the altar. In this way, "engagement" is as unbreakable as marriage.

The conventional American wedding ceremony completely disregards this command of Jesus'. In modern wedding ceremonies, two people are put in front of everyone that they know and told to "solemnly swear" faithfulness and the like. Didn't Jesus condemn this kind of oath? Jesus himself

¹ Genesis 27

² James 3:5

says that such wedding vows are "from evil." Interestingly, this passage, part of The Sermon on the Mount, immediately follows Jesus' teachings on divorce. Might it be that this teaching on oaths was intended as a commentary on the many words behind an oath of marriage and the whimsical way in which that commitment is often treated? This passage cannot be ignored; it occurs with many of Jesus' other foundational teachings about right actions. Would we encourage a young couple to commit adultery or divorce, also discussed in this passage? Neither should we encourage them to make marriage vows. Young men should instead be encouraged to make an arrangement with a girl's father and to take her as a bride.

Not only are marital vows decidedly opposed to Christ's teaching, but they are completely purposeless. Consider, when a man takes a bride, is he accountable to honor all of God's commands in scripture regarding her, or only to honor the vows that he has made in a ceremony? Clearly the man will be held accountable to uphold all the truths of scripture regarding his marriage whether or not he publicly vows to uphold them, and there are surely many responsibilities of a man to his wife which are not commonly spoken in standard wedding ceremony vows. Seeing that this is the case, the husband is accountable to uphold all of those Biblical truths for which men have prescribed marital vows, whether he speaks a vow or not.

Some fathers will react in shock to learn that they gave their daughter away in marriage long before any wedding ceremony was held. Some, wishing to cling to authority over their daughters until the wedding ceremony which has become culturally dear, will insist that when their younger daughter's suitor arrives to ask for her hand, they will give only a tentative permission. "Yes," they plan to say, "I will tentatively give you my daughter now so that you can plan a ceremony, but I will reserve the right to withdraw my permission until then, and will only actually give my permission during such a ceremony." Such a statement is quite

confusing. Perhaps the father has it in mind to protect his daughter just in case she wants out of the union before the ceremony, but if the father is not fully persuaded of the value of the union he would do better to withhold his permission entirely, rather than stringing the young suitor (and daughter alike) along. Furthermore, what motivation could a suitor have to accept such a tentative agreement? Should he allow his marriage contract to be entirely frontloaded, that he should commit everything while the father commits nothing? If he did desire a tentative permission it could only evidence that he has not given careful consideration to the contract and might himself hope to bail before the ceremony. Besides, if the father is unwilling to give up control of his daughter on this day, then why should he be any more willing to give up control on another day? Perhaps we should allow fathers to give a tentative permission lasting until a year after the wedding ceremony, that they might remove their daughters if ever the marriage becomes unhappy. Is this not clearly absurd? There is no justifiable reason for a father to attempt to maintain control beyond the day that he gives his permission. Apart from the above considered attachment to power or some bizarre obsession with ceremony, I can see no reason for a father to react in this way. Such an obsession is unnecessary however, as arguments will show the meaninglessness of wedding ceremonies in the coming pages.

Opposition against the Bible's betrothal model abounds, and it generally comes from some common cultural misconceptions about what causes two people to be married. Often Christians believe that a ceremony must be held in order for two people to be married, that a legitimate marriage must be licensed by the state, or that sexual union is the defining factor in a marriage. Some have also attempted to argue that the Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians 7 that betrothals can be broken. These arguments prove to be weak ones.

Many will say that in marrying we must obey the government by obtaining a marriage license, drawing their

support from Romans 13 (or the like), and will attempt to say that a marriage is therefore not legitimate without proper licensing. It is true that the government does require the couple to have a license to get married, but I would argue that they have no legitimate authority in doing so. Romans 13:1 reads:

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."

Here we see that persons are indeed to be subject to the authorities, and that whatever authority the government has is granted to it by God. We must however immediately question if such subjection to government should be absolute. It is clear in scripture that some God-fearing men disobeyed governing authorities and were highly esteemed for it. Daniel's incident with the lion's den is a perfect example,¹ as is the apostles' refusal to adhere to the ruling of the Jewish council.² Based on these and other passages we can safely reason that obedience to the government is in some way limited. We might further note that authority is granted to other entities which might conflict with the government. Most notably, God commanded that we should honor our parents³ and that wives should submit to husbands.⁴ What would a person do if established familial authorities conflicted with governmental authorities? It is apparent that there are authorities which supersede government or that there are at least authorities which, along with government, maintain their own distinct realms of authority. Indeed, if there is no authority except from God, as Romans 13 tells us, then government only has authority in those realms which God has granted. Obedience to the

¹ Daniel 6

² Acts 4:18-20

³ Exodus 20:12

⁴ Ephesians 5:22

government then is to be esteemed in those areas over which the government has been granted authority. I posit however that the family not only supersedes government, but that marriage is part of a realm of authority over which government has no legitimate power.

We know that the family was instituted through marriage before government as the first and primary human institution, and from this we can reason that order within the family supersedes government. We see this principle reflected in the Ten Commandments³ as well as in a multitude of prescriptive and descriptive passages throughout scripture. The government therefore has no right to interfere within the family or to attempt to change family structure, and the Bible never gives government that right. Furthermore, as there is no passage in scripture whatsoever which grants any authority over marriage to anyone but God and the family, no one but the family can make any legitimate claim to control marriage.

Furthermore, for the government to attempt to define marriage is illogical, as the government cannot change the meaning of anything which God has established. Few Christians would argue, for instance, that the government should change the definition of marriage to include unions of man and man. Likewise, we should not attempt to change the mind of God as to which male and female couples are or are not married.

I humbly submit on these grounds that Christians should not seek license from the state to marry. However, I do believe that it would be good for government to certify marriage. The difference between granting a certificate of marriage and a license to marry is subtle. By requesting a license the Christian, technically speaking, is asking the state for permission to marry; this is ridiculous however, as the state can have no reasonable right to grant or withhold such permission. A certificate differs in that the government simply

certifies that the marriage exists after the fact and gives their recognition to it.

It is desirable that the government maintain a record of which couples are married, and a certificate is the means to that end. In the world, there will be conflicts between some couples which the couples will not resolve, and the courts will have to resolve them. Suppose that a husband abandoned his wife and children without cause to marry another woman. In such a case he must be held accountable to care for his first wife and his children, and the court will have to step in and force him. Likewise, a wife might leave her husband and bring retribution on herself. A certificate must be issued so that in such cases the court can recognize that there was even a marriage to begin with. Otherwise someone might claim that they were never married in the first place to absolve themselves of responsibility, or someone might alternately claim that they were married to someone when they were not in an attempt to rob them. These matters of paperwork should not be a Christian concern because on the one hand, Christians shouldn't be involving themselves in these kinds of circumstances, and on the other, they shouldn't be settling disputes in the courts of the world. Ideally, Christians shouldn't even be arguing. There are other good reasons to certify marriage however. The state usually offers tax breaks or other legal incentives for people who are married in order to encourage healthy families, and, putting aside whether or not such incentives are justified, if one wants the incentives the government must recognize the union.

That the state has overstepped its authority by issuing licenses to marry is unfortunate and detrimental. Because of this governmental overreach our society has entirely lost sight of what constitutes legitimate marriage; indeed, many who are bound together believe that they are not (the "engaged"), while many who are not legitimately married believe that they are (the sodomite and the eloped). We might also argue that the heightened rate of divorce has come about as a direct result of

marriage licenses, as those who were given marriage by the state rather than God almighty likely view the union with lower regard, and the state's standards have made divorce proceedings increasingly easy.

I humbly suggest that whether or not a Christian should seek a marriage license must be left up to his own conscience. Obtaining a marriage license and having the blessings of the civil authority will likely not harm anyone who understands that the license is truly meaningless before the God who created and judges marriage. However, I believe that Christians would do well to protest this meaningless paperwork which has ultimately served to undermine familial authority, and that we should demand certification rather than licensure of marriages.

While the Christian should follow the state's law as he is able, he must remember that he is held to a higher standard than the law of the government, that being the standard of Godliness. The government requires that citizens not murder, while Christ requires that Christians go so far as to love one another. In the same way, the government may require a license as a means of regulating marriage (ideally to enforce healthy marriage for our good), but the lack of paperwork will not absolve anyone from commitments made between two human beings in the sight of God Almighty. The point is not that government endorsement of marriage is wrong, but that Christians are held to God's standard of marriage over the standards of the government. It should be clear that government paperwork is powerless to alter truth. The license simply accompanies a union which already is; it cannot and does not define marriage.

There are also those who will argue that for a marriage to count as a marriage there must be a religious ceremony overseen by some officially designated minister. This is mainly a vestige of the old license problem, as licensed ministers have the permission of the state to perform legal civil weddings; in this case the officiant is acting as something

of a notary for the state (often going so far as to say that he grants marriage by power vested in him by the state). Ceremonial marriage is also a cultural problem of its own, built on centuries of religious tradition. The fact though is that there need not be a wedding ceremony, as we can observe throughout scripture. Consider, for instance, the case of Isaac and Rebekah above;¹ no intelligent person would deny that those two were married. In fact, there is no example in scripture of any ceremony which makes two people married. The example of scripture is a celebration for two people who are prepared to consummate their marriages. There was a feast held for Jacob,² and for Samson.³ Jesus turned water to wine at a wedding feast.⁴ There will be a wedding feast at the consummation of Christ and the Church.⁵ While all of these passages demonstrate celebration of marriage, none of these examples prescribes a marriage inducing ceremony.

Seeing that there is no Biblical directive on how a marriage inducing ceremony should be conducted, anyone who believes that a ceremony is necessary will be hard-pressed to demonstrate what must be done at one. One might argue, from John 2, that a wedding has not been accomplished unless there is a great deal of wine, or that, from Judges 14:12, no wedding can take place in fewer than seven days. Neither of these features is seen in many weddings that Christians consider to be legitimate. Perhaps anyone could claim that any action constitutes a wedding ceremony and it would work just as well or perhaps better than what is done now, seeing as we have above that the wedding ceremony is "from evil."⁶ Of course, the point at which everything might constitute a legitimate ceremony is the point at which nothing constitutes a

¹ See Page 119

² Genesis 29:21-22

³ Judges 14:10

⁴ John 2:8

⁵ Revelation 19:9

⁶ See Page 124

legitimate ceremony. Ultimately, marriage ceremonies find their legitimacy only in cultural relativism, not in the Bible.

We should consider that Jesus perennially argued against the religious authorities of his day for putting on a religious ceremonial show, keeping the outside of the cup clean without purifying their hearts.¹ This also is the case in today's wedding ceremonies. Is there any value in the ceremony if the two will not keep their commitments, or if they would not have kept their commitments otherwise? Clearly not. Wedding ceremonies and the vows that accompany them are nothing but a superficial show to make a marriage look legitimate regardless of the condition of a person's heart.

In spite of these things, holding a ceremony to commemorate the occasion of a consummation is not a bad thing. It is good for people to have a day which they can look back to and remember their commitments to one another that they may always honor them.² The opposition to the ceremony is that it doesn't change what is any more than the license does. It is good to hold the celebration, but Christians ought to make less of the legalistic superficial ceremony, removing the magical union elements, and make more of the feast. Christ is greatly glorified in the wedding feast! There are some beautiful and relevant symbols in wedding ceremonies which can be carried over. The father "gives the bride away," and though he has already done this when he gave her husband his permission, it is a lovely symbol of a man's authority. The bride wears a white gown, symbolizing the purity of the Saints.³ The bride wears a veil, demonstrating our soon-to-be unveiled knowledge of God⁴ and echoing the purity of Rebekah.⁵ These kinds of traditions need not be lost with the

¹ Luke 11:39

² Though I must say, I have sincere doubts that anyone forgets consummating his marriage just because there was no ceremony.

³ Revelation 19:8

⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:14-16

⁵ Genesis 24:65

removal of the useless superficial aspects of ceremony. We ought to still celebrate the union of our couples with feasting and rejoicing, with white dresses and veils and families and other wonderful things, but the ceremony cannot be a defining standard of marriage.

There is also an unfortunately common belief in Christian circles that teaches sex rightly exists only within the confines of marriage and therefore marriage is created by sex. This goes against everything that is written here thus far, and a rereading of the above examples of marriage in the Bible should give the reader concern with such a claim. Granted, marriage and sex go together and should not be separated. Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 that the husband and wife should not deny each other, and people should not have sex before they are married. Because of this, in the mind of the cultural Christian, marriage creates sex, and therefore (in some minds), sex creates marriage. Some find support in Genesis 2:23-24:

"Then the man said, 'this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

The argument goes that when a man leaves his father and mother to start a family, he is sexually united to his wife, which makes them one flesh, and at that point they are married. However, this is an incorrect understanding of the passage. The passage does not talk about what does and does not create a marriage, but simply what happens in a marriage. Indeed, sex is what unites married couples as one flesh. Paul says that no Christian should be of one flesh with a prostitute.¹ However, the passage says nothing of the idea that sexual unity causes marriage. Being of one flesh happens after the

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:16

marriage. First the man leaves his father and mother, and then is united to his wife, and then the two become one flesh, as the passage plainly states above. The passage does not say, however, that a man must be united as one flesh to a woman that she may become his wife.

We can also look at scripture and see that the Bible gives opposition to the sex-creates-marriage argument. Deuteronomy 22:28-29 gives a perfect example:

"If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days."

In this passage, the man rapes the woman, knowing her sexually, and is still required to purchase her from her father and commit to being married to her for life. If sex is the defining element of marriage, then these things would not be necessary, because simply by entering into her, the marriage would be complete. That this does not create a marriage is further backed up by Exodus 22:16-17:

"If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins."

Here we see that even if two people are joined in sexual union willingly, it is possible for there to have been no marriage because the father did not give his permission. Of course the ideal situation is that the father should give the daughter away for the bride-price, but if he refuses then he still retains his right to keep his daughter and give her away to one whom he chooses.

This sex-creates-marriage argument also goes against the other examples above in which Samson and Joseph had not yet consummated their marriages yet but were considered to be husbands. There are other examples opposing this ideal in scripture as well. In Genesis 19:14, Lot pleads with his "sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters," that they should leave the city of Sodom. Again, we see people who are pledged to marry, treated as spouses (called in-laws here). The Hebrew word for a "his sons-in-law" here is חָמֵדָּ and describes a man related to a family through marriage. A form of the same word can be found in 1 Samuel 18:18 concerning David's relationship to Saul, a relationship which had already been consummated, and is also found in Judges 19:5 describing the Levite with a concubine in relation to her father. This is a compelling case that the unconsummated betrothed are husband and wife, as Lot had formerly said of the daughters that they had never known a man.¹ This word חָמֵדָּ is also translated as "bridegroom" as context dictates in the Old Testament.² This is something of a mistranslation, as in the mindset of the original authors the son-in-law/bridegroom at the wedding feast was as much a husband or son-in-law before, after, and during that day. No special word for bridegroom was needed in the original Hebrew. The same argument can be made concerning חָמֵדָּ the all-inclusive word for a daughter-in-law/bride.

Paul also speaks a word against the sex-creates-marriage argument. In Romans 13:13 he writes:

"Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy."

The word here translated "sexual immorality" finds its root in the Greek word "κοίτη," which more specifically

¹ Genesis 19:8

² See Jeremiah 25:10 for example

implies cohabitation. There are some in today's society who would presume that living together is as good as marriage, reasoning that as long as they are faithful to one another and living a "responsible" lifestyle with all the appearances of marriage that there is no significant difference. Paul here speaks against such an arrangement. There is a difference between cohabitation and marriage, the consent of the father in giving the bride. When Paul forbade "sexual immorality" in this instance, he forbade living in a sexual relationship outside a father's approval. Clearly, simply living together and having sex does not a marriage make.

Christians tend to fail on their understanding of cohabitation as well though; in a case where a couple is committed to living together permanently and the woman's father knows of the matter but never opposes it, he has given his consent by his silence according to the principles of Numbers 30. Judges 21:21-22 likewise gives an example in which fathers gave passive permission for their daughters to be taken (quite literally) as brides. For Christians to condemn these common-law marriages for failure to obtain a license or hold a ceremony, shaming the spouses and even encouraging them to loose and leave one another, is simply unacceptable.

There are some in church leadership who would ignore the above arguments and would still like to support the "one flesh" argument from Genesis, and if that is the case then they should first examine themselves by asking, "Was I faithful in waiting for my wife?" If not, then supporting the "one flesh" argument is an acknowledgment that they are married through sex with a woman other than the woman they currently regard as their wife, meaning that, in their own definition, they have two wives. A good student of the Bible would recognize this as a condition which makes a person ineligible for church leadership.¹ Thankfully, while the sexual immorality was wrong, it doesn't create marriage.

¹ 1 Timothy 3:12

There are a few Christians who have taken 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 to say that it is allowable to dissolve an engagement. In the English Standard Version, the passage in question reads as follows:

"If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry-it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better."

It is argued that the above passage speaks plainly of engagement, drawing a distinction between engagement and marriage, and that the passage says that a man who is engaged has a right to leave if he pleases so long as he is self-controlled. Unfortunately, this is a hasty leap to conclusions. In reality this passage presents difficulties in understanding and translation, and when the passage is treated properly and contextually, there is a better meaning in view.

Before considering translational issues, which are the root of the problem, let us consider Paul's conclusion in the English Standard Version. Some have erroneously taken verses 37-38 to mean that an engaged couple might choose not to marry, go their separate ways and marry other people, but this isn't what the verse says. Even if the ESV's translation, which assumes that there is a betrothal/engagement in view, is accepted these verses could be read as saying that the betrothed couple simply has the option to refrain from sexual consummation entirely if they are so inclined and self-controlled. Paul says here that he may "keep her as his betrothed," not that he may divorce her and take another. Of course those who have consummated must fulfill their sexual

duties to their spouse.¹ Verses 37-38 say nothing about being sexually unfaithful by going to marry another person. If the couple was so self-controlled that they did not need to have sex with the spouse they had then they certainly wouldn't need to go find another.

However, what is said in the ESV is probably a moot point, as there is a confusion in translation. The confusion in the passage revolves around the word *παρθένον*, which means "virgin". The ESV translates the word as "betrothed" (that is a person who is betrothed) and assumes that the "anyone" (*τις*) at the beginning of the passage is a husband or fiancé. The New International Version makes an even worse mess of the translation by translating the words "τὴν παρθένον αὐτοῦ" in verse 36 as "the virgin he is engaged to," thus inserting an assumption of engagement and a fairly gross cultural distortion, though the Greek says no such thing. The words literally mean "the virgin of his." In reality, the male "anyone" in the passage above who believes he is behaving improperly toward his virgin is likely a father who is unwilling to give up his daughter. While not ascribing fully to the alternate translation, The New International Version concedes it as a strong possibility and offers this retranslation in the footnotes:

"If anyone thinks he is not treating his daughter properly, and if she is getting along in years, and he feels she ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. He should let her get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind to keep the virgin unmarried-this man also does the right thing. So then, he who gives his virgin in marriage does

¹ See 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

right, but he who does not give her in marriage does even better."

This alternate translation highlights some of the faults in the ESV's translation of the passage. This translation mentions nothing of engagement or betrothal and doesn't bring any suitor or husband into play. In this translation, a father who does not want to enter his daughter into a marriage doesn't have to do so if he doesn't want to do so. This translation would do nothing to support arguments against the betrothal model, but would really serve to support it by noting that a father has control over the fate of whom his daughter will marry, if he allows her to marry at all. Of course, once the father has given his permission to a suitor, he has no right to take this blessing back, and the passage gives no support to that either.

This passage must be translated in light of its immediate context, as well as its context with scripture as a whole. Consider the verse immediately following the passage, verse 39, which says, "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." The words used here for husband and wife are "ἀνὴρ," which we saw before in Matthew chapter 1, and "γυνή." This word "γυνή" is the equivalent of the Greek word for wife found in Matthew 1:24 "γυνίκα," used to describe the yet unconsummated Mary.¹ The word may also simply be translated as "woman," but the point to note here is that in the previous verse Paul spoke of a παρθένον, not a γυνή. Clearly Paul has shifted his focus in between verses 38 and 39 from a consideration of a woman who is still under her father's authority to a consideration of those who are married, including the betrothed, demonstrated in his change of language. If verses 36-38 had concerned a betrothal, Paul would have used the similar γυνή/γυνίκα

¹ See also Page 39

language used to describe betrothals elsewhere in scripture.

Depending on the translation, there is a spectrum of possible ideas regarding marriage presented across these few glances at the passage. On the right, Paul describes the way that fathers ought to treat their daughters. On the left, Paul seems to speak about husbands and wives simply never consummating their marriages and in a distortion of the left, Paul encourages divorce. Based on the context of the entirety of scripture, there is no choice but to eliminate the last option because it contradicts everything observed thus far and is not even what the English translation actually says. The translation of the right and the one on the left both fall in line with the teachings of Christ, so there is no reason to consider the distortion in the mix. The translation involving the father is the proper translation because it is more reasonable. Does it seem reasonable that at the beginning of this chapter Paul told his readers not to deny each other their sexual rights, but that he then shifts to say that some should never consummate their marriages at all? This seems quite unlikely.

Even if one was to hold rigidly to his support of the distortion, he would have to take a look at the authority of the verse. In verse 25 of the same chapter Paul says: "Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." Here, Paul sets the tone for the entire passage by saying essentially that this passage of scripture is not an explicit command from God, but is instead to be regarded as the opinion of a Godly individual. This verse is to be contrasted with verse 10, which Paul states is directly from God. In verse 17, Paul reiterates that he is expressing his opinions, "...This is my rule in all the Churches." Paul closes the section in verse 40, saying "Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God." Here, Paul notes that he is speaking by his own judgment, and that the Spirit in him is the same Spirit dwelling in any Corinthian Christian. He closes the passage by

acknowledging that his statements here, while considerable, are no more a command of God than anything that anyone else apart from scripture has to say on the matter. Of course, we might note that we, with the same Spirit as Paul, can perhaps make a more complete judgment on the matter because we have all of scripture to compare the matter with. When he wrote this, Paul presumably was not looking at a copy of Matthew's gospel to see Jesus' teachings on divorce. Modern Christians have the benefit of this kind of hindsight. With these things in mind, anyone who would take this passage of scripture in its contradictory translation and tout it as an excuse to end a marriage should reconsider himself.

Comparisons of Christ and the Church to the Betrothal model abound. Christ has chosen a people to be his bride.¹ The heavenly father of the bride has given him permission take her.² Christ has given up his very life and blood as a payment.³ Now, we in the Church are the bride of Christ. However, we have not yet fulfilled everything in our marriage. Christ has gone away to prepare a place for us to live eternally with him.⁴ The wedding feast of the lamb, the consummation, has not yet taken place,⁵ and we are now what the world would call a "fiancée." For the Church to leave Christ before he returns for her would be adultery, and for Christ to abandon the Church would be adultery. Would any well-meaning Christian argue that Christ should abandon his Church under the heading of "breaking up"? Christ would allow no such thing and condemns such action as divorce. We have been sealed with Christ and he will not forsake us.⁶

For the Church to view "engagement" as a breakable pseudo-commitment is to argue that no Christian can have

¹ John 15:19

² John 17:6

³ 1 Peter 1:18-19

⁴ John 14:2-3

⁵ Revelation 19:7

⁶ Ephesians 1:11-14

assurance of salvation, as Christ may abandon the Church at any time and never return. For the Church to treat "engagement" this way is shameful and defames marriage and its primary purpose; this is a disgrace to the cross. When a suitor asks the permission of a father and that father gives a suitor permission, when the two have agreement on the matter, the man and his bride are married in the same way that the Lamb is married to the Church. The couple has not yet had the time of great feasting and ultimate union, but the bond is still unbreakable in the eyes of God.

All of this is very important for several reasons, foremost being that God is no supporter of divorce, and divorce is exactly what's going on when "engaged" couples split up. When marriages, even unconsummated marriages, are rent, lives are torn apart. The marriage crisis in the Church is already tumultuous enough without having to deal with the broken hearts of torn engagements.

Furthermore the most generally accepted ideas about the beginning of marriage demonstrate a doctrine of salvation by works. Commonly, it is believed that for two people to be married they must obtain a license, hire a preacher, make vows in front of everyone, and have the preacher pronounce them husband and wife. It should be apparent to Christians that traditions and legal actions will not save us from our sins, and, in the same way, such action will not create a marriage. Circumcision won't make anyone with an uncircumcised heart a member of the body of Christ,¹ and similarly, a marriage license and a ceremony won't make a person married in the way that a commitment before God will. If marriage is a picture of our relationship to God, do we want to teach the world that some magical ceremony and obedience to laws will bring humanity into right relationship with God? Plainly not. When churches teach that ceremony is essential to commitment, they teach salvation by works.

¹ Galatians 5:6

The unbiblical engagement model also creates a period of overlapping authority. Anyone who has had a long engagement has seen how this plays out. The father of the bride wants the bride to do one thing, while her husband wants another. To whom should she listen? Biblically, women, widows excepted, are always under the authority of men, but in the world of phony engagement, who is the authority? The Bible doesn't give an example to follow here, because the Bible doesn't even acknowledge that engagement exists! Ultimately, any set up of authority during a time of engagement becomes yet another culturally relativistic phony morality. The overlap of authority within engagement almost always results in tension and stress for the couple, which can result in problems for the marriage and the in-laws down the road.

Finally and most importantly, marriage is sacred to God. Marriage is a symbol from God of his love and relationship to us, and the Church must, above all else, maintain this sacred illustration. When Christians proclaim that engagement is not marriage, they proclaim that the Church is not the bride of Christ; we should regard such a statement as the blasphemy that it is. God requires faithfulness in betrothals as the picture of his relationship to the Church, and we must handle them with faithfulness.

If the Biblical model of betrothal is to be practiced some changes will need to be made. Pastors must start treating "pre-marital counseling" as what it actually is, "Healthy Marriage Instruction." This counseling is not a time for warning not-yet-married people about the risks and responsibilities of marriage, but a time of encouraging currently-married-people to live out their marriages in the proper way. They have to know that engagement isn't a time for them to feel things out and make sure they're okay with it. Furthermore, pastors and government must relinquish the prideful notion that they have the power to create marriage. The father and the bridegroom alone hold this power.

Additionally, once a father has given his permission, there is no reason that a man and his bride shouldn't consummate the marriage at their discretion without being frowned upon, feast or not. If the groom is prepared to come for his bride with the people unknowing, isn't that his right? Will he not, in this way, demonstrate an example of Christ whom we know will return as a thief in the night?¹ An "engaged" man should be allowed to take authority as a husband. No father should try to control him, no pastor should discourage him, and the Church should hold him accountable to and encourage him in loving and leading his wife well.

Finally, a word from Malachi 2:13-15:

"And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD'S altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth."

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:2

PART FOUR: Within Marriage

* * *

Chapter XI Women's Marriage Roles

In recent years, there has been a plethora of hotly debated ideas about women's roles. Increasingly, Christian women have shunned their conventional roles as wives, mothers and homemakers to pursue higher education, careers, and leadership roles. This is unfortunate because these practices are contrary to the teachings of scripture. Women are intended to be wives, mothers, and homemakers under the complete (but loving and gentle) control of their husbands. This does not mean that women are not valuable or are incapable; it simply means that their roles in glorifying God are distinct from those of men and are limited in comparison. Having already given some consideration to a woman's position in society, here we will examine the correct teaching of scripture regarding a woman's roles within that position.

If a woman would seek to find her purpose in life, she must first examine the account of creation. In Genesis 1:27 we read: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Here we see that the man was made in the image of God. In saying that "man" was made in the image of God, we should not assume that the verse intends to include all of mankind. Rather, the word man is prefaced by a definite article הַ in the Hebrew, literally saying "So God created the man..." This wording is intentionally exclusive; we are not led to believe that all people are God's image-bearers. The verse indicates instead that Adam specifically, but not all of humanity, was made in God's image. Women are intentionally excluded from being made in the image of God, as evidenced by the masculine pronoun הֵן (him) at the end of the first clause.

The masculine first clause is contrasted to the second clause, which more broadly describes God's creation. The second clause notes that he also created women, but does not say that women were created in his image. Here we see a fundamental contrast in the purposes of women and men; men are to be God's image-bearers, but women are not.¹

The woman's purpose is made clear in the second chapter, which gives us more detail about the creation of humanity. Here in Genesis 2:18, God states quite plainly his purpose in creating women. "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him.'"

Note plainly that the woman was created entirely for the benefit of the man. Where the man was created with a very broad purpose, reflecting the image of God, the woman was created for a very specific purpose, helping the man. From this we can derive simply that any woman who is not focused on actively helping and serving a man is simply not doing what she was made to do.

Genesis 2:22 provides further information for us about our understanding of women's roles. The woman was taken from the body of the man. As children come from the bodies of their parents and are expected to be obedient and subservient to them, so women originally come from men and should do likewise.

Paul comments on these issues in 1 Corinthians 11, writing in verses 7-9:

"For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."

¹ For further discussion on Genesis 1:26, which some say invalidates the claim that women are not made in God's image, see Appendix C.

Paul here confirms what has already been established. Men were created in the image of God, while women were created in the image of man. He also confirms that the woman was created specifically for the man, and that she is subservient because she came from him. This does not imply however, that men are of greater value than women simply because they are of higher position, a point explained in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12.

Genesis 2 continues in teaching that Adam named all of the animals. That God allowed Adam to name the animals indicates to us that Adam has authority over them. This principal of naming as an implication of control appears elsewhere in the Bible. Parents name their children. The chief of the eunuchs in Nebuchadnezzar's court changed the names of the Hebrews who had been taken as slaves.¹ In Luke 1 John the Baptist's name was bestowed by an angel instead of his father (implying that he is under the direct control of God). In Matthew 1 Jesus' name was also given by an angel (an implication that God is his father and authority). Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter.² When the woman was made, Adam was allowed to name her also. The implication of this is obvious. In the same way that Adam named the animals and had dominion over them, so he named the woman and had dominion over her.

The story of the fall of man in Genesis 3 continues to point out the position of women. After the fall God speaks of the condition of the woman in the fallen world. Genesis 3:16 reads:

"To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. '"

¹ Daniel 1:7

² Matthew 16:17-18

So God has decreed that the woman is to be ruled by the man and that she will bear children with pain. Some would say that these are a punishment for the woman because of her sin; others would argue that this family structure is God's rule for order in a chaotic post-fall world. Probably both are true. In any case, for a woman to avoid the rule of her husband and the responsibility of childbearing is either an irresponsible attempt to escape her punishments or rebellion against God's structure for humanity. Neither of the two is advisable. Men likewise are not to avoid their responsibilities after the fall. The result of the curse in the life of the man is hard labor and eventual death. Does anyone respect a man who sits all day and refuses to work? Does anyone respect a man who cowers when the day of his death arrives? Clearly no one respects such a man. Likewise, a woman who fails to do her duty in the family should gain no respect by it.

The male-over-female structure which God decreed is not at all unreasonable considering that the woman was the first to fall into the ploy of the serpent, and she brings her husband after her. Many who would like to put men and women on a more equal footing in this passage have argued that the man was the initiator of sin by his passive inability to stop his wife from sinning, but God states very clearly the man's folly in Genesis 3:17:

"And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;'"

It may be true that the man shares responsibility because he did not protect his wife from sin and did not lead her well, but we can also see that God did not make that the focus of his judgment against Adam and we shouldn't either. Paul again affirms our interpretation, "For Adam was formed first, then

Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."¹

The belief that a woman's primary role is that of a wife, mother, and homemaker, which we can draw from the mention of childbearing and submission to a husband in Genesis 3, is supported by Paul in his letter to Titus. In chapter 2, verses 3-5, as he gives a word of teaching for various age/gender groups in the Church, he writes:

"Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled."

On the topic of women's roles there are a few noteworthy foundational principles to be covered from these verses, straightforward as they are. Paul expects older women to be reverent, not slanderers and not alcoholic, as we would generally expect today. Paul further expects that older women should teach the younger women. The phrase, "They are to teach what is good," should not be taken from its context and applied as a command to teach or lead men, as that would contradict Paul's other writings on the subject. He also doesn't write anything here that might imply that they should teach in a formal church setting, and so in light of his other instructions that women should be silent in church,² he probably means that older women should train up other women in informal settings of everyday life.

It is the roles of the young women which would become a prodding goad to the modern mind. Of immediate concern to

¹ 1 Timothy 2:13-14

² See discussion of 1 Corinthians 14:35-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 in the Appendices.

young women is that they love their husbands and children. This would certainly be problematic for American culture as young women generally forgo husband and children for the sake of education and career, and often with the Church's encouragement. That which is probably most striking to our culture is the instruction that young women should work at home. While Paul doesn't go so far as to admonish women not to work outside the home, the idea is implicit. A woman's place is in the home, not in the school or the workplace. At the end of the verse Paul implies that ignoring these teachings would cause the word of God to be reviled, and because he continues with a teaching directed at young men, it is reasonable to believe that this phrase about the word of God being reviled is not a summation of his commentary on righteous living, but a comment directed specifically at young women. Do Christians desire that the Word should be reviled? No. Therefore let us keep our women in the home.

The idea that a woman should concern herself with domestic affairs finds further support in the description of a wife of noble character in Proverbs 31:10-31. Verses 10 through 12 read:

"An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life."

Here we see that the primary goal of the woman is to bring gain to her husband. The passage continues by extolling the virtues of home economy. The noble wife plants, gathers food, cooks, clothes her children, manages finances and even engages in home-based production for the market. All of these are tasks done in the home and under the direction of her husband. The noble woman in this passage puts no efforts toward herself or her own glory. Verse 23 tells us that "Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders

of the land." It is the husband who, with much thanks to the efforts of his wife, takes a prominent place in the community and works outside the home. Ultimately though, this is to the best benefit of the wife. She enjoys a great blessing in the loving encouragement from her husband and children, who are to bless her and praise her for her noble efforts.

Some have made it their aim to twist the actions of the noble wife in Proverbs 31 to encourage women to work outside the home. They note that the woman in the passage "considers a field and buys it,"¹ "makes linen garments and sells them... to the merchant," and does a great deal of work in general. On these grounds, the feminist claims that the noble woman ought to work outside the home. Work outside the home however is different by its very nature from the work of the noble wife in that the employee-wife sells not her product, but her time and her effort to her employer, making herself something akin to a servant, and this is contrary to the nature of marriage. We have considered that the woman is held as one holds property, and that in marriage she is exchanged, sometimes even for a monetary price. In ancient as well as more modern times, for a man to rent his wife's efforts and time, as well as a part of her allegiance, to another person would be quite scandalous. In a sense, it is as if the employee-wife is not only held by her husband, but by her employer as well.

There are a multitude of risks for a woman involved in work outside the home. In one case the woman's devotion to her family is weakened by her commitment to her work; in another she is pressured sexually by someone in the workplace. Even when there is no misconduct, men regret working with women when false allegations begin to stir all too easily. A list of these kinds of practical concerns could become voluminous, but it is sufficient to say that Christians are best to avoid them by keeping their women in the home.

¹ Proverbs 31:16

In Ephesians 5:22-24, Paul teaches us about marriage as a picture of our relationship with God, and he further comments on the connection to women's roles:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."

This idea is not unique to Ephesians, as Paul restates the commands in Colossians 3:18-19, which reads, "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." Ephesians 5 teaches about the relationship between Christ and the Church and how that relationship is exhibited in marriage. We have already noted that men and women are joined in marriage and become one flesh, and here we see that members in the Church have been made one with Christ. Paul writes here that as the Church submits to Christ, so should a wife submit to her husband. This is a bold comparison to make, as Paul would surely never teach us that the Church should ignore the command of Christ. However we must recognize that in the same way that there is a limitation on the government's authority, so there is limitation to a man's authority. We understand that the man's authority is not the ultimate authority, but that the man himself his subject to God and so is his wife.¹ Therefore the woman should not submit if her husband gives a command which is in direct conflict with the commands of God. We must not discount the authority of the husband however, as the command that the bride should submit as she would to Christ is a weighty command indeed. If a woman is to refuse to submit to her husband, let her first be absolutely certain that he is making a request which is

¹ See discussion on 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 on Page 153

irreconcilably opposed to God's commands.

Paul further develops the idea of marital submission as a picture of the Church's relationship to Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16. Verse 3 reads, "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." Here, Paul makes more comparisons of consequence. Firstly, note that God (the Father) is the head of Christ (the Son). Christ was perfectly submitted to the will of his father in heaven, and here Paul teaches that the marriage union should exemplify that. A woman, by being completely submissive to her husband, shows the world that Christ was submissive to the Father. Paul also states that the head of every man is Christ, setting up a chain of command which, ultimately, puts the woman into submission under God. Indeed, if the husband begins to command the wife in such a way that he is in conflict with God's commands, he has stepped outside the realm of his authority. However from this idea of headship we gather that a woman should be submissive to her husband as the man should submit to Christ. Would any Christian ever argue that a man should ignore the will of Christ? Why then do Christians allow that so many women should be free to act apart from (or on top of) their husbands?

Paul states more than once that the Church is Christ's body, and specifically that Christ is the head of the Church. One might consider another example from nature and learn about the consequences of a church that is disobedient to Christ or of a wife who is disobedient to her husband by looking at the plight of a man paralyzed from the neck down. This could serve as a stark warning to us: As the body must obey the head, so the Church must obey Christ, and the wife must obey her husband. Neglect of these things will cause enormous suffering.

Peter also echoed Paul's instructions concerning women in 1 Peter 3:1-6,¹ which reads:

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external-the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear-but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."

The context of the passage is noteworthy here. Peter had previously been discussing Christ's submission, even to death, at the hands of the world. All the while, Christ trusted in the Father's plan. The "Likewise" at the beginning of the passage indicates that wives should trust God as Christ trusted God, and should demonstrate that trust by obeying their husbands, even if their husbands aren't Christians. Indeed, even as Christ suffered many frightening things at the hands of the world to which the Father subjected him, a wife might suffer frightening things at the hand of an unbelieving husband, and Peter here admonishes them not to fear. From this it should be gathered that the teaching of scripture shows that even the husband who is an abusive unbeliever is to be honored and respected by his wife.²

¹ See also a previous discussion of this passage on Pages 25-26

² This, of course, is not a license for men to mistreat their wives, and Peter adds a word to husbands that they should show honor to their wives in the next verse.

The woman who honors these passages of scripture has done a great deal to glorify God. She has exhibited to the world that she believes in God and trusts his word. The submissive woman demonstrates to us that her first mother, along with all of mankind, has fallen short of God and has sinned. She has shown us that Christ submitted to the will of his father by coming into the world, and that he was obedient to the point of death for our sins. She points out through passages like Revelation 19 and Genesis 2:24, that Christians have been redeemed and that we will one day be resurrected and joined to Christ as one flesh. She shows us that Christians must obey Christ and his word in every aspect of life and corporately as a church body. Herein, the submissive woman has taught us the gospel without saying a single word, and even the unbelieving husband and their children might be saved through her silent witness. If only missionaries and pastors could so readily do such a great work!

Not only is it clear that a woman's submission is of great value, but also that her failure to submit is a great trouble. Since women have begun to live in increasing independence within our culture, devastation has been the result. Many women have come to believe that they need not obey their husbands, and because of this there has been great disunity in the family. As women have taken jobs outside the home they have become disengaged from the work of raising and caring for the family. Working women have also found financial freedom, or even financial dominance, which gives them the capability of leaving (or even ruling) their husbands. Laws which were designed to protect women from abusive mistreatment have restrained men from having any method of disciplining a wife who might refuse to submit, and indeed, among many with a cultural mindset the principle of submission is itself considered abuse. In light of these things, it is no surprise that divorce rates have skyrocketed, families have fallen into disrepair, and the light of the gospel has begun to disappear from our land. Truly, a woman who refuses to submit may hurt more than the husband who hits.

It is clear that a misunderstanding of women's roles in society and the Church has caused large troubles, and it is necessary for both men and women to repent of their unwillingness to stand up for proper roles. If the Church is to flourish Christians must remember that gender roles within marriage ultimately point us to the gospel, and we must do everything we can to protect this sacred imagery. Women should not bristle at the thought of submitting to their husbands, but should work tirelessly to proclaim the gospel through their submission and good works which will build their husbands up. Let the Church pray constantly that this change could come and that God will be glorified once again through the unique roles he created for women.

Chapter XII **Men's Marriage Roles**

A man's role and purpose in life is somewhat more complex and difficult to pin down than a woman's role is. The woman's role is summarized in the word "submit," which, while it is often difficult to do, is not very difficult to understand. A man's role in marriage on the other hand is summarized in the word "love." As is noted above, love is a word with ramifications too deep to understand. Whereas the woman was created in the image of the man to help the man, the man was created in the image of God to glorify God, a task which is undoubtedly more complex; the words given to a man concerning his place in the world and in comparison to God would encompass the whole of scripture. Christ is above all things, but a man must bear his image and be his representative. Truly a difficult task! A man's zeal to glorify God may take him in any of many complex directions as he is gifted and as God leads. Of course, all the commands of the law are summed up in the two commands, to love God and neighbor, so it stands that a man's role in marriage is intimately wrapped up in living out love as Christ loved. But

what does such a love look like?

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25-30:

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body."

From this passage we derive the most important role of a man in his marriage, which is to demonstrate Christ's love for the Church. Much could be said in a discussion of Christ's love for us, and the topic could never be presented exhaustively. Perhaps three of the most important roles in Christ's ministry of love are his position as our prophet, our priest, and our king, and these roles are reflected in the passage above as well as in other descriptions of a man's roles in scripture.

In Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Moses writes:

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers-it is to him you shall listen- just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see his great fire any more, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I

will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

This passage refers to many prophets who came after Moses, but ultimately it refers us to the one greatest prophet of all who was coming, Jesus Christ. During his earthly ministry Jesus proclaimed the words of God to his people, and he continues to teach us through the Holy Spirit in each of our hearts. The role of teaching about God is one that is passed down to men as heads of households as well. Moses also spoke to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:9-10:

"Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children- how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'"

Now none of today's Christians were present on that day at Horeb, but as followers of Christ all have experienced the power of God in a life changing way. Each man, as the prophet of his household, bears the responsibility to teach these things to his children. Moses writes again in Deuteronomy 6:6-9:

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets

between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

We have noted that a woman is not to speak in church, but is to remain silent.¹ Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:35, "If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." And so the man has a responsibility in this regard. If the wife must ask him and depend on him for sound teaching, then the husband must have a thorough understanding of God's word and must be able to teach it to her clearly and thoroughly.

Of note, 1 Corinthians 14:35 points out to us the importance of the family, that the marriage and children as a unit cooperating as a whole is perhaps even more important to the health of the Church than that the Church should have good and homogenous doctrine throughout, because if a husband is to lead and teach his own family he will undoubtedly teach views to his family which vary from that of the Church as a whole, even if only slightly. If perfect doctrine was more important than family cohesion, one would expect that the wife should be taught by the pastor or other leaders, and she should question them. Of course it is good that she does not, because that may lead to a difference of belief in the home that could cause friction. It is more important that she have unity with her husband's beliefs than for her to have good theology (presuming, of course, that her husband is within reasonable grounds). It is through the unity of marriage, not exclusively through the teaching of the Church, that a believer experiences Christ's love for us. Of course, while the husband may show some slight variance in his teaching, he will be held accountable to know and teach truth.

By the same token, since the wife does not have a say of her own in the Church, the husband must be considerate of her

¹ See Page 15. Appendix A gives a more thorough discussion of women's roles within in a church setting.

needs and speak up for her benefit when the Church is gathered, just as the men spoke out for their women in the conflict at Acts 6:1. Women deserve a voice in the Church; the thoughts of women should be listened to diligently, because women have many good ideas, but those ideas should be filtered through their husbands and fathers who can represent them and be their voice in the activities of the Church.

It is unfortunate however that the joy of teaching and leading one's family is often viewed as a burden, with many fathers simply handing the responsibility to train their children over to church leaders or the secular education system. This should never be! The husband's responsibility to teach his family is a great blessing, and will benefit not only his children and wife to help them grow, but will produce fruit in the husband as well. One should never toss away such a gift!

Clearly, if a man in his marriage is to glorify God, he must be able to teach his wife and his children from scripture about who God is, and must furthermore exemplify God's teaching characteristics. Therefore, each man has a responsibility to know God's word, to make it an intimate part of his life, and to fill his household and the ears of his wife and children with good things from the word of God. Not only this, but each man is accountable to teach righteous principles, in his actions as well as in his words. The responsibility of a husband to his wife and children is a large responsibility indeed! It is this responsibility to teach and guide which Paul spoke of in Ephesians 5:26 above, "...having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word..." Every man must teach his bride.

As we know that Christ is our great prophet, we also know that he is the great High Priest. As is written in Hebrews 4:14-5:3:

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a

high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people."

So here we see the job of the priest. He is to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer sacrifices for sin, and to be gentle with the wayward. Christ is the greatest high priest in that he is the ultimate reconciler of man to God, that he is the sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that he, having been a man, is our greatest sympathizer. A husband is to exemplify all of these traits in his marriage, as is made clear by Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:27-28; he asserts that as Christ presents his bride cleansed and without blemish, so must husbands love their wives.

Perhaps foremost among all things a husband must do in this regard, the husband is to live sacrificially for his wife. As Christ did not consider his own needs, but suffered and died for the life of the Church, so every man is accountable to do that which is in the best interest of his wife over himself. This point cannot be overstated. Christ, who is God, lived and then died a painful death in order to reconcile man. Consider Philippians 2:4-8:

"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made

himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

So Christ, though he deserved a position in Godhood, stooped down so far as to be the servant of sinners, even washing their feet, and we are to emulate this kind of self-sacrifice. Would any man have to stoop so far to reach his wife? Are the two not already equal in value in the sight of God, both fallen sinners in need of grace? No man could truly equal the sacrifice of Christ, and so he should work all the harder to demonstrate the same type of selflessness in his marriage. He should always be conscious of his wife's needs and seek to meet them. Indeed, though she must submit to him, he must strive to serve her.

Not only this, but a husband should be more than just a spiritual teacher to his wife; he should be a spiritual leader, just as a priest might be before the people. The man should pray for his wife diligently and should lead her in prayer and worship before God. This is not only for the Church meeting, but for the home as well.

Furthermore, as a husband teaches and guides his wife, he should be gentle and sympathetic with her, just as Christ condescended to a sympathetic state. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:7:

"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

The man has a duty to lead his wife in righteous living, but he should never be harsh with her. When he corrects her he should do so not out of anger, but out of love. He must always understand that she has been made dependant on him,

and for him to withdraw his love and act harshly is not a beneficial correction but a hurtful rebuke. When the wife is hurting, failing, or forlorn, her husband is to be a support to her and show her grace. The wife should always be able to draw near to her husband in confidence that he will gently love her. And as the husband of Proverbs 31 praises his wife for her noble deeds, so the husband should praise and encourage his wife, lifting her up to Godliness.

As Christ is our priest and prophet, so he is also our king. God spoke to David in 2 Samuel 7:16, saying, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." Jesus, the son of David, fulfills these words, as he will be king forever. As Jesus is the great king of kings, so a man is to exemplify a kingship in his marriage. Being the king of the family implies that he is not only the spiritual teacher and leader, but he is the physical leader as well. The husband provides direction and guidance in all things for his family. He holds the final say in all disputes, and his judgments are to be honored.

Of course, the role of the king is not simply to serve himself. Deuteronomy 17:15-17 reads:

"you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold."

The king of Israel was not to seek for himself great wealth, a large harem, or many horses, because the purpose of the king was not to serve and glorify himself. In the same way,

a husband's objective is not to serve and glorify himself. He is to serve his wife and glorify his God. The goal of the king was to provide military protection for his people, to sustain economic wealth for them, and to give them peaceful interpersonal relations. In the same way, a good husband and father does these same things. Indeed, Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:29 rings true:

"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church."

The Christian man works hard to provide for his family; Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 5:8:

"But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Paul writes about the provision of basic needs, but a husband's provision goes beyond that. He cares for the general welfare of his family, helping them to fulfill their desires and training his children up so that they may someday care for their own families well. The Christian man provides protection for his wife and his children, and he helps them to resolve their conflicts and live peacefully together and in society. The husband is not an overlord to his wife (as no man is eager to love an obstinate woman, so no woman is eager to submit to a tyrant), he is instead a loving, leading companion and friend.

Now in order to be an effective leader within the household over which a man maintains control, it is essential that he invoke discipline. Discipline is a controversial topic in society today, but it is not a topic which can be ignored. Clearly, a husband must invoke discipline in order to teach his family as their prophet, in order to purify them as their priest, and to protect and guide them as their king. Such discipline must be accomplished with a heart of humility and grace, as has been described thus far in this chapter.

That a father must discipline his children is seen clearly in scripture from more verses than time and space will allow me to list. To take a few examples from Proverbs, we see that 22:15 tells us the rod will correct a child's folly, and 29:19 indicates that physical punishment can accomplish what verbal chastisement does not. Though many in our culture would have us believe that physical discipline is somehow dangerous or detrimental to a child, 23:13 points out that the rod of discipline does not do harm, and in fact, 19:18 tells us that discipline will save a person from death! 29:17 further shows that the ultimate result of discipline is that a child who is disciplined becomes a joy, whereas he might have been a burden. Perhaps the most familiar among these is Proverbs 13:24 "Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." This verse is well-known through its American approximation "Spare the rod, spoil the child," but this approximation has left out one of the most important points of the verse, the dichotomy between love and hate. Discipline for a child is very much to his benefit, and it should be given to him not out of a motivation of vengeance or punishment or as a hasty act of anger. Disciplining a son in such a way that he is injured or does not learn from the experience to become a better person is really no discipline at all. Discipline for a child should be performed with love and for the sake of love. Though it is painful, discipline is ultimately loving because it is better for a person to learn proper behavior through a little hurt than for him to have comfort on the path to his eventual demise.

Corrective discipline is not only a practical matter for parents and children. Yet again, good practice in the family demonstrates a valuable principle about God. Hebrews 12:5-6 reads:

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the

Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

Here the author of Hebrews quotes from Proverbs 3:11-12 and applies the verse to God the Father as he lovingly relates to his children. If God did not discipline us, then we could expect that he did not receive us. Discipline from God, as the author goes on to explain, is valuable and fruitful for us.

It is not only God the Father who disciplines the wayward, but Christ the heavenly husband himself does as well. As he spoke in Revelation 3:19, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." Paul also declares the discipline of the Lord for our good in 1 Corinthians 11:32, "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world." So here we see that it is not only our earthly fathers and our heavenly father who discipline, but our heavenly husband who disciplines as well. Likewise, if a husband is to represent Christ and is to assure the best interest of his family, he must discipline his bride when she goes astray.

It is clear that a husband must discipline his wife in order to train her up to Godliness. Does Ephesians 5:27 not say that Christ's objective is to "...present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish"? This passage points primarily to Christ's sacrifice, but we know that there is much work to be done in sanctifying the Church to true holiness and that discipline is part of the process. Husbands are admonished in the next verse to love their wives in a similar manner. Husbands therefore must ensure that their wives are growing in holiness, and discipline will in many cases be the only suitable avenue by which holiness comes.

We might also consider that Ephesians 5:28-29, which admonishes husbands to love wives as their own bodies, carries with it a command to discipline. Paul himself

advocated elsewhere the disciplining of one's own body; he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." So then when Paul advocates that a husband love his wife as his own body, discipline is likely part of his thinking.

Truly, we must consider discipline to be a practical necessity for a wife. The detriment to a family caused by a wife who refuses to submit to her husband can be quite severe, and if left unchecked her refusal to submit can result in the destruction of the family and the marriage altogether. Surely a small amount of discipline could rescue the family from far more severe disunity, and so by giving his wife only a little pain a God-fearing man will rescue her, himself, his family, and even his society from much greater pains in the end. Truly, as the poorly trained son will become a burden to his family, so will the untrained wife. Proverbs 19:13 records this truth well, "A foolish son is ruin to his father, and a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain." And again in 25:24, "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife." Apparently if a man fails to discipline his wife when she requires it he would be happier in the end to rent a corner room elsewhere.

The purpose of discipline must be to love as Christ loves. Some would balk at the idea of disciplining a wife as a way of loving her, but these simply misunderstand the nature of discipline. Consider, does a person discipline someone whom he hates, or someone whom he loves? Clearly it is the beloved whom he disciplines, because he does not care what the hated one does to harm herself. Indeed, for a husband to bestow loving discipline on his wife is an honor; he demonstrates that he cares enough for her not to allow her to harm herself through the sin of rebellion.

That wives will be in need of discipline is evident in that they are, as Peter notes in 1 Peter 3:7, a weaker vessel. Their position as a weaker vessel is significant not only because we

understand the wife is more likely than the man to falter and need correction, but because her position as a follower to her husband's lead carries with it the necessity of discipline. It is not those who blaze the trail that step off of their path, but those who follow behind. This is not to imply that the woman is somehow more immoral or less valuable than the man, but we can be sure that because she must follow rather than lead, she must be disciplined.

We must understand however, as Peter requires, that discipline is not an excuse for a husband to be harsh. In spite of the imagery which a husband disciplining his wife might conjure, harsh treatment has no part in legitimate discipline. It is possible for a mature man to discipline his wife without being harsh just as a parent might discipline a child without being harsh. Paul did exhort fathers to discipline their children, but not in such a way that they be provoked to anger.¹ Let me be clear: I am not advocating that a husband abuse his power to discipline. While loving correction, though it may at times be painful, is valuable and acceptable, it must be constrained. A man might discipline his own body, but he would not break it and injure it. There is no excuse for a man to discipline his wife to the point that she is injured, nor is there excuse to hit a woman in anger or at any time when discipline would not be in her own best interest. Discipline should only be used rarely, not for ordinary disagreements, but only in those cases in which there is willful rebellion which threatens to become extreme. When discipline is accomplished in a righteous way, the woman will not be terrified of her husband; she will love him all the more for it. She will be thankful that she has been snatched out of the fire of error and restored to righteousness. Discipline is not accomplished with ignorance or blind rage; Peter requires that men are to deal with their wives according to knowledge. In order to do so the husband must be willing to drive folly far from his wife as the

¹ Ephesians 6:4

proverbs indicate that only discipline will do, but he must do so only for her best interest and with love.

And so these are some basic principles concerning the role of the husband: he is a prophet, priest, and king to his household. He is to lead his household well in teaching, disciplining, defending, providing and drawing them closer to God through his righteous living. By engaging in these roles he will not only do those things which are best for his family, he will do a great deal to exemplify Christ in the world.

Chapter XIII **Procreation**

In American culture the birthing and rearing of children is often viewed as more of a hassle than a blessing. Many fear that having children, or too many children, will take away all of their time, their money, or, worst of all, their freedom, that most valued of American treasures. Many Christians have been taught further error by the education system, the media, or society in general and believe that birthing too many children is irresponsible because our environment or economy cannot adequately support more people. While it is true that raising a child can be difficult and is a massive responsibility, this should never be viewed in a negative light. Scripture teaches us that children are a greater blessing than they are a trouble, and I humbly submit that it is the duty of every Christian marriage to birth as many children as they are capable of birthing and to rear those children in the fear of God. Scripture points us toward this truth on many occasions, and there will be many blessings to be reaped from the endeavor.

Before continuing however, note that scripture does not expressly say that it is a sin not to have children. The support for robust procreation is something of an extrapolation from the teaching that children are a blessing; from this we understand that by not having children the Christian will perhaps bypass the ideal, but not necessarily that he lives in

some grave sin. Indeed, some are incapable of conceiving their own children, certainly a difficult reality, but even these should not ignore their potential to parent. It may be advisable for such couples to adopt a child from an unwanted pregnancy. As these children are at a risk of abortion, we should be willing to do anything we can to encourage their natural parents to spare their lives and allow them to live in a supportive Christian home where their adoptive parents would be most blessed to raise them.

Throughout scripture, children are viewed as a blessing while the inability to have children is viewed as a curse. This is not to say that those who are infertile are accursed, but simply that the trend of scripture views childlessness in a negative way. While the entire Bible carries many examples of this trend, an overview of the book of Genesis should be more than sufficient to demonstrate the pattern. A theme of childbirth appears first in Genesis chapter 1 immediately after God creates humanity. God's first command to men comes in verse 28 which reads:

"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

God clearly desired that his people should procreate, so much so that he required them to "fill the Earth and subdue it". This verse should not be yanked from its context however. The command was given specifically to Adam and Eve, and they fulfilled the command by procreating enough that the Earth was filled. All Christians are not required by this verse to multiply, especially now that the Earth has been satisfactorily filled and subdued. The verse does point out the positive nature of reproduction however. Take note of the beginning of the verse, "And God blessed them." The gifts of

marriage and reproduction were a blessing, and should be viewed in that way. Notably, God gives a similar command to Noah in Genesis 9:1 where he says, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

The prophet Malachi made commentary on God's initial union of the man and the woman in his warning against adultery. In verse 2:15 he writes:

"Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth."

Though Malachi's purpose here is to prove a point about adultery and divorce, which is that those sins are not conducive to the upbringing of Godly offspring, in doing so he notes that in making the two one flesh in marriage God is seeking Godly offspring. There is no reason for us to expect that Christian marriages should be any different from that standard presented in Genesis and upheld by the prophet.

Genesis continues to speak on the blessing of childbearing. When God appears to Abraham in chapter 17, he speaks of Sarai in verses 15-16:

"And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Here again, God calls the birth of Isaac and the eventual birth of multiple nation's-worth of people a blessing. Of course, Sarai had already known that to have children is a blessing and that barrenness was a curse. She had been so

eager to have children that she gave her servant Hagar to be impregnated by her husband.¹ When Sarah finally birthed a son of her own, she greeted his arrival with much joy. In chapter 21 verse 6 she says, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me."

Genesis 25 lists the details of Abraham's death, but the beginning of the chapter denotes the names of other sons born to him, and also the names of sons born to his sons. Though Abraham had done monumental things in his life, had traveled to many places and had amassed great wealth, his children were the blessing to him that is worth noting at his death. The Bible is filled with such genealogies, which, by tracing the family lines of important Biblical figures, demonstrate the importance of family and procreation.²

In Genesis 24 we read of the story of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah. In verse 60 Rebekah's family blesses her before they send her away, saying, "Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!" Clearly, Rebekah's family viewed her offspring as the greatest blessing to her. Had they viewed wealth, pleasure, and comfort as blessings they might have spoken words regarding those things, but they speak only of her children as a blessing. After Isaac was married to Rebekah, he found that she was barren, and in praying for her to conceive,³ demonstrated again that children are a blessing.

That Jacob and his several wives believed children were a blessing goes without saying, as there were at least thirteen children born to them.⁴ Rachel had a particular desire to mother children, saying in Genesis 30:1, "Give me children, or I shall die!" Ironically, Rachel ultimately did die, sacrificing her life to give birth to Benjamin.

¹ Genesis 16

² Most notably 1 Chronicles, though there are many others

³ Genesis 25:21

⁴ Genesis 35:22-26, 30:21

Genesis continues to demonstrate the enormous value placed on childbirth in chapter 38. In this chapter, we see a playing out of the Levirate marriage custom, a demonstration that continuing one's lineage was of the highest priority, so much so that if a man failed to produce an heir his brother was to take the responsibility for him. This responsibility, along with the Old Testament propensity to take additional wives and concubines, suggests that the production of offspring was held in very high esteem.

When Jesus was questioned about the Levirate marriage custom by the Sadducees in Luke 20, he too gave a nod toward robust reproduction. Jesus' proclamation that there would be no marriage at the resurrection because there is no more death hints that because there is no need for procreation in a world of eternal life, there is no need for marriage. This could suggest that procreation is one of marriage's most important purposes.

Jacob's son Joseph is yet another example of the high value placed on having children. Genesis 41:50-52 reads:

"Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore them to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. 'For,' he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.' The name of the second he called Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.'"

Though Joseph endured great hardships in his life, he viewed his sons as a blessing from God and he named them to reflect the fact. Though Joseph had earned great riches and position of authority, it is through his sons that we see his thankfulness to God.

These are plenty of examples of the blessings that children bestow coming from the book of Genesis alone. Much more could be written regarding other characters in the

Bible, some who birthed many children and others who wept before God because they had none. There are many examples of characters in scripture who are told that they will have many children as a blessing and many who are told that they will not bear children as a curse. That having no children or few children is undesirable is obvious. In fact, excepting the few who were gifted with a life of singleness, there is no character in scripture who represents a desire not to have children.

Childbearing is presented as a blessing not only in narratives, but in plentiful prescriptive passages as well. Psalm 128:3-4 is a perfect example: "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD." Psalm 127:3-5 carries a similar message:

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

Notably, this passage not only points out that children are a blessing, but that a man is blessed when he "fills his quiver" and has many children.

Paul also wrote about the birthing of many children in a positive light. In 1 Timothy 2:13-15 Paul writes:

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control."

In this section of his letter to Timothy Paul is opening a discussion about various roles of members in the Church, and before entering a discourse about overseers and deacons, he gives a few words about his expectations for gender roles. Verse 15 says in part, "Yet she will be saved through childbearing". While it would be incorrect to propagate a false gospel by saying that a man is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ but that women are saved through having many children, it is obvious that Paul believes childbearing is a very important task for a woman. Indeed, childbearing is a blessing, and here Paul elevates childbearing as a top priority.

Later in the same letter Paul mentions again the importance of childbearing in the life of a woman. In Chapter 5 Paul gives some general instructions for the Church, including instructions for the Church's treatment of widows. In 1 Timothy 5:9-10 he writes:

"Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work."

Here, Paul briefly describes a woman of good works, someone worthy of support from the Church. As he makes his list of good works for a woman the first item on the list is that she has brought up children. Again, Paul makes the work of childbearing a duty, even going so far as to place child-rearing ahead of hospitality and care for the afflicted.

Paul's opinion on this matter is congruous with his other writings, as he also wrote to Titus that his Church should "...train the young women to love their husbands and children" in Titus 2:4, indicating that the Christian home is expected to have children. That Christians should have children is hinted at further in Paul's discussion on sex in 1 Corinthians 7:3,

where he teaches that married couples should have sex regularly. If the husband desires sex then the wife should not withhold it, and if the wife desires sex then the husband should not withhold it. The primary reason for this is that most all people experience sexual desires which will lead to sin without a healthy outlet.¹ However, in writing this, Paul was certainly aware that the natural outcome of sex is babies. It is therefore likely that Paul wrote this knowing that it would result in an increase of children in the Church.

The question of birth control is obviously linked to the above argument regarding sex because anyone might ask, "Since we have birth-control, can't we have sex regularly without having children? Won't that fulfill Paul's expectation?" The answer to that question is both "yes" and "no." Yes, one could regularly have sex in modern times and never conceive a child. No, that would not fulfill Paul's expectation, because Paul lived in a time when birth control wasn't an option, and the other passages above make it clear that he believed birthing and rearing children was a virtuous task.

In modern times there are three options for birth-control. The first is abstinence, which is only acceptable for those called to singleness. The second consists of those methods which inhibit conception, and the third is abortion of the pregnancy after conception, that is, killing of the unborn child. Concerning the second method, the Bible has very little to say. Genesis 38:6-10 speaks to the subject:

"And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death. Then Judah said to Onan, 'Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.' But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his.

¹ As discussed in Chapter IV; See Pages 49-50

So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. And what he did was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also."

While it is true that this passage is not directed primarily at birth control, concentrating instead on Onan's irresponsibility for failing to father children with his brother's heirless widow, we must still note that this is the only description of a character who practiced birth-control in scripture, and he died for his wickedness, a point which doesn't bode well for the practice.

There is another command in scripture which might be applicable in the contraceptive debate. Leviticus 18:19 forbids a man to have sex with his wife during her menstrual uncleanness (which lasted for seven days).¹ This would disallow intercourse during the time at which a woman is least likely to conceive. It is possible that some would have been inclined to have sex at this time as a method of contraception, but that practice is here forbidden.

The third type of birth control, abortion, is a hot-button issue in American culture today. The issue is widely discussed elsewhere, and so there isn't much need to speak in-depth about its ramifications here, but the process is plainly unbiblical. The Bible teaches that life begins at conception and that God is at work in that creation. Psalm 139:13-16 is a prime example of this teaching. David writes:

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹ Leviticus 15:19

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

Clearly, the Bible here states that God is intimately involved in the creation of every baby still in the womb and that he has a plan for each of his days. To say that an unborn child doesn't yet amount to a person is simply not the Biblical stance. To take the life of an unborn person is clearly no more right than to take the life of a born person. Abortion is as plainly murder as any other murder and cannot be condoned.

We should also note that the ancient version of abortion is plainly condemned in scripture. Leviticus 18:21 reads:

"You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."

Some would protest that there is a large distinction to be made between abortion and child sacrifice which renders the verse irrelevant to the discussion, but the context of the verse speaks volumes. This verse pops up in the middle of Leviticus 18, the Old Testament's greatest list of sexual restrictions. The only reason that such a verse could appear in such a context is that child sacrifice went hand-in-hand with sexual immorality. In a culture which lacked the capability to abort an unwanted pregnancy, burning the baby as a sacrifice after the birth was the next best solution. The penalty for such an act under God's law, as with all such murderous and idolatrous acts, was death.

Exodus 21:22-23 also speaks to the case against abortion:

"When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he

shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life,"

So if a pregnant woman was accidentally struck and her unborn child died, then the one who struck her was liable to die. This is a fair repayment. The life of the unborn child is of equal worth to the life of any other man. In this instance we see the penalty in the case of an accidental death. An intentional death is surely worthy of equal or greater punishment.

Some might argue that circumstances justify abortion. They would rightly note that it would be unpleasant for someone to be born into poverty or with a debilitating disease, or that it would be difficult to bear a child born as a result of rape. We wouldn't want a child to be born into a world where he is unloved or disabled, would we? As well-intentioned as such concerns may be, they do not justify the murder of an innocent person. If we are to accept these arguments for abortion, then we might as well say it is right to murder the homeless, the disabled, and the victims of horrible crimes. This would be starkly contrasted to the ministry of Jesus, but might fall comfortably in line with the philosophy of Adolf Hitler. It would be especially sad that children of unwanted pregnancies would be murdered when they could be gladly adopted by loving Christian homes.

All things considered, birth-control doesn't fall in line with scripture. Abortion is plainly unbiblical, and other contraception doesn't find any support. It is true that the specific arguments against preconception birth-control are thin, but this is likely only because the methods in practice today were non-existent in former times, as the arguments against birth-control from the whole of scripture are strong. Throughout scripture children are viewed as a blessing; why then should Christians disrupt God's natural process for blessing and enriching their lives?

In addition to the argument that Christians should have

many children because they are an implicit blessing to our lives and something of a practical requirement in scripture, there are also theological ramifications to robust childbirth.

The natural process of procreation is an example of God's relationship to his people and is useful for teaching believers and unbelievers alike. Various scriptures compare God to a father and his people to children. Jesus taught us that when we pray we should call God "Our father".¹ John 1:12 tells us that all who receive Christ are children of God. Paul writes in Romans 8:14-17:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Based on these and several other scriptures, it is known that God calls Christians his children. We are called his children for many reasons. We are to obey God as children are to obey their parents.² We can expect God to be a protector and a provider as a father is to his family.³ Perhaps most importantly, we can expect that as children of God we will have an inheritance from the Father and with Christ.⁴ As we raise children we are reminded of these and other principles concerning God and his love for us.

If we call ourselves God's children, there is a point to be made regarding the number of children we should bear

¹ Matthew 6:9

² Colossians 3:20, 1 Peter 1:14

³ 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Timothy 6:17

⁴ See Romans 8:14-17 above

ourselves. We know that God desires all people to be saved,¹ that he might have many children in his kingdom; how then can Christians justify that God would not want us to birth as many children as possible? As Christians we have a responsibility to display God's willingness to extend open arms of grace to many people by our willingness to bear and raise children.

Furthermore, there is an obvious connection between childbearing and the doctrine of the trinity, in which we see both the Father and the Son. Could it be that a man might not fully understand the depth of the Father's love for us until he has contemplated the sacrifice of a son of his own?

Therefore, an understanding of the relationship between parent and child will influence the understanding of the nature of God and the understanding of his relationship to the Church. The purpose of the Christian is to glorify God, and if healthy and robust families can be pictures on Earth of who our God is and how we relate to him, it is clear that Christians ought to have such families whatever the sacrifices. By intentionally birthing a large household, we teach ourselves a greater understanding of God and we teach the world a greater understanding of God.

Not only does childbirth serve as a picture of God and our relationship to him, but it gives us a very clear reminder of the consequences of sin and our redemption from it. In Genesis 3:16 God spoke to the woman:

"To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'"

Evidently the pain of birthing children is an essential part of being a woman in a fallen world, as all women have sinned and deserve the consequences. Unpleasant as painful

¹ 1 Timothy 2:4

childbirth may be, these pains must be used to point out the difficulties which sin has brought upon us. For a woman to attempt to avoid childbearing and its pains echoes an unwillingness to acknowledge sin and point out its devastating consequences. Such avoidance would be unfortunate, as the gospel cannot be rightly preached or understood where there is no acknowledgement of sin.

The pain of childbirth shows us more than the agony of sin however. Childbirth also points out to us a more hopeful spiritual truth, the details of Christ's return. Romans 8:20-22 reads:

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

So we see that the world has been subjected to sin, but that there is hope in the fallen world of a new life that is coming after it, much like the pains of a woman in labor. The struggle of the woman in labor is the struggle of us all, but ours is not a futile struggle, it is a struggle which will culminate with the return of Christ. Christ himself used birth pains as an example of the extreme sufferings to come on the world shortly before his return. Jesus said, recorded in Matthew 24:7-8:

"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains."

As the pain of childbirth demonstrates to us our struggle against sin in this life and the troubles that will befall the

world before the end comes, so the birth of a new child demonstrates to us the return of Christ. Jesus spoke to this in John 16:21-22:

"When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you."

Though the woman giving birth has struggled greatly, there is a reward awaiting her of infinitely greater magnitude. A new life has been brought into the world. How could we rightly limit such a beautiful picture in our lives of the glory we will share when Christ returns for us? Indeed we cannot; it is among our foremost responsibilities, honors, and joys to proclaim it. Now more than ever, in an age in which many have stopped expecting Christ to return at all, we need this pertinent picture of the sin which binds us and the God who will come to free us from it eternally to shine in the darkness.

Beyond spiritual ramifications, there are largely practical ends to birthing many children in the modern Church, and that is the desire to see numbers grow. Recently membership in churches has begun to decline, and this decline is directly related to an unwillingness on the part of young Christians to birth and rear large families. Many have birthed a few and brought them up well with the expectation that those youths will ultimately evangelize the unbelieving (either around the world or to their neighbor next-door) to bring others on the outside to know Christ. Evangelizing the world is surely a noble task, but the current situation demonstrates that healthy growth will not come about through evangelism alone. The best way to get someone into the Church and have him live effectively for the kingdom in his age will be to have him in

the Church and trained in a Christian home from the start. Unfortunately the Muslims and the Mormons have figured this principle out and accepted it more readily than most Christians have. As they are out-breeding us their populations continue to grow while ours, as a percentage, is dwindling.

While some will rightly point out that Christianity is not a numbers game, it must be remembered that numbers are a large part of social influence, and especially in a republic. As American culture and government has been in a decades-long free-fall, we are quickly approaching a point at which the desperation for a well-equipped generation of young Christians is severe. Larger numbers of Christians will be helpful in influencing the culture around us, not only in terms of bringing the lost to Christ, but also in creating an atmosphere in which we are able to serve God freely and enjoy his blessings on our land in general. If we do not begin immediately to honor God by birthing and training young Christians in solid Christian households we put ourselves in danger of losing many of our foundational churches within the next few generations. From there, we can expect to struggle to maintain a foothold in the culture. Our missionary efforts, our evangelism and our good works in the community may all but cease because there will be no starting point from which our efforts will issue and find their support. We may wake up one day to find ourselves like a Paul with no Antioch.

So, having seen that it is good to have children and to have as many as we can, what should we do about those who cannot have children? Having seen that they should be eager to adopt as a prevention of abortion, should they alternately consider turning to medicine to help them conceive? As I am admittedly no doctor and know little about the processes, and as scripture says nothing about modern medicine, I have little to say about the topic. However those couples who are unable to bear children might first consider the plight of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1-2. She was childless and it was painful for her, but it was not impossible for her to conceive because God, in his

own course of time, answered her prayer and gave her several children. There is hope apart from medicine! Abraham is another considerable case. When Abraham was unable to have children for many years he took matters into his own hands by taking Hagar to bear a child for him. This was a human act of desperation apart from God's workings. Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar became a symbol of man's attempt at righteousness through law¹ and Abraham's rightful heir Joseph was sold to Ishmael's sons in slavery. It would have been wiser for Abraham to wait on God! Childlessness is a painful experience, but God gives special care to these. In Isaiah 56:3-5 a special word is spoken to those who can have no children:

"Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, 'The LORD will surely separate me from his people'; and let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.' For thus says the LORD: 'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.'"

Childlessness has been a painful experience for many, but God is good in ways that are higher than our ways. Though we may lose many things in this life, God knows how to give good gifts to his own, and ultimately those who love God are promised a greater and eternal reward for their faithfulness in temporary suffering.

There are some who have sought the aid of modern medicine in conceiving children, and while such an action is not explicitly a sin, it may also not be advisable. Modern medical treatments often go against the body's natural inclination, and unnatural treatments may have unexpected consequences for the body. We are to care for our bodies as

¹ Galatians 4:21-30

the temple of God,¹ certainly not something to be taken lightly. Aside from that general precaution, there are some fertility treatments which result in the creation and destruction of human embryos. These processes are sinful because they constitute the murder of the unborn and should be avoided at all costs. Considering those things it would probably be a better option for those who cannot have children on their own to adopt. While the desire to have children of one's own is surely pressing for some, the benefits would likely outweigh the cost, and especially when there are so many children of unwanted pregnancies who could use a good home.²

Now, it is seen clearly that childbirth is important to the life of the Church. Children help us to understand God and to show him to the world around us, they strengthen and maintain social structure, provide a future for the growth of God's Church, and bless our lives thoroughly. Therefore, Christians must reverse our current trend of low birthrates in the Church. There are several immediate steps that can be taken to help correct our problem. First, Christians should stop using birth control. The Church should recognize the importance of raising a family even if her members must sacrifice worldly pleasures. We should encourage young women to pursue marriage and family instead of pursuing higher education and careers. We should encourage Christians who cannot have children to adopt so that there is no more excuse for abortion, and so that children who would otherwise have no home can be raised in Godly homes. We should support Christian families financially and spiritually who may not be able to support themselves. By taking these steps together as a Church we will see growth in our numbers, joy in our homes, and blessing in all of our lives.

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

² Of note, Christians should not adopt or foster children forcibly taken from their parents. As we have considered elsewhere (See Pages 126-130), God created marriage and family as the foremost human institution, and government, a later addition, has no authority to interfere with family. When Christians adopt it should be from parents who give their children willingly.

Conclusion

* * *

Chapter XIV The Gospel According to Marriage

It comes as no surprise that Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding feast.¹ As we look forward to Christ's return, the great wedding feast of the lamb, we understand that this will be his hour of glory which will usher in all the fullness of our understanding of God. It is for this purpose, our hopeful expectation and glorification of Christ, that the wedding feast exists, and it is for the glorification of God that marriage exists. There would be no better place for Christ to first manifest his glory to his disciples and awaken within them the hope of his ministry that was to come than at the wedding feast which he made to glorify himself.

And so, we have seen the goodness of marriage proclaimed from throughout the scriptures. The Bible exists to tell the story of Christ, and that story, throughout all of the good book, is told in the parable of marriage. Far from being a concept easily snatched from context, marriage runs through scripture like a thread and is one of the book's most important themes. Truly, the Bible is God's love story, and this is the allure of all such stories about love, that in any one some different aspect of the love between Christ and his people is shown. In this way Christ's love has been on a constant display for thousands of years in what he has made.

And what have we learned from this brilliant display? From theological discussions throughout this book we have seen that marriage reflects many important points regarding our understanding of God.

¹ John 2:1-12

We have seen the nature of the triune God reflected in our family structure,¹ and have considered that this great God created everything, ourselves included, and declared it to be good.² We have seen that when God designed the world he made it with a plan to glorify himself and that he is sovereign over all of the world's workings.³ In contrast to God's goodness, we have seen that mankind has fallen,⁴ and have understood that great suffering has been brought onto the world as a ramification of our sin.⁵

Thankfully, we have also seen that God had a plan of redemption for humanity. Rather than existing as an aloof God who is difficult to find,⁶ he has graciously revealed himself to his people and has covenanted with them.⁷ We have seen that God loves us with a real and unwavering love, a love so great that he sent his beloved son to die for us.⁸ When his time was ready, the Son descended from his lofty place and came to the Earth,⁹ where he lived a life of perfect submission to the Father, acting as a servant and even submitting to death on a cross.¹⁰ Christ's work has redeemed his people by putting to death the law which bound them, that they might instead be joined to him by grace.¹¹ Through his blood on the cross, Christ purchased these people for himself, and has founded his Church; she is a people of his own choosing,¹² given to him by the Father's hand.¹³ They are joined not by adherence to a code

¹ Page 181

² See Page 8

³ See Pages 27-28

⁴ See Page 155

⁵ See Pages 181-182

⁶ See Pages 103

⁷ See Pages 98-99

⁸ See Pages 114

⁹ See Pages 161-162

¹⁰ See Page 153

¹¹ See Pages 30

¹² See Page 139

¹³ See Pages 102

of conduct or external matters of ceremony, but instead by the very will of God.¹

So now the two are bound.² The Church can expect that Christ will never forsake her, even in light of her failings,³ and and likewise, the Church can never leave Christ.⁴ Indeed, we see that the Christian has been purchased as an eternal servant of Christ the Lord,⁵ and not only a servant, but an adopted child who is dearly loved.⁶

This love between Christ and his people is active, a love that manifests itself not simply in emotion (though there is surely an emotional component),⁷ but it is a love which results results in good works by both parties.⁸ The Church submits to Christ in everything and honors him; he is our head and we are his body, acting out his will in the world.⁹ The Church is faithful to Christ, refusing to follow other gods or to mix herself back into the people and practices of the world.¹⁰ Christ is our great prophet, our priest, and our king. He teaches his people,¹¹ he provides for them and protects them,¹² disciplining them that they might live in righteousness.¹³

Christ has risen and has gone away to prepare a place for his people, and we eagerly await his return.¹⁴ Indeed, God's creation itself awaits Christ's return that he might deliver us from the agonies of sin and death. We likewise have seen that these sufferings will increase just before his return at the time

¹ See Page 142

² See Page 141

³ See Pages 58

⁴ See Page 59

⁵ See Page 28

⁶ See Page 180

⁷ See Page 106

⁸ See Pages 114

⁹ See Page 153

¹⁰ See Pages 47-48

¹¹ See Pages 156-159

¹² See Pages 163-164

¹³ See Pages 164-166

¹⁴ See Pages 83, 141

of the end, but that when he arrives at his appointed time the Church will triumph over these great struggles and will have an even greater joy at his coming.¹ It is with patience in suffering that we await the return of Christ,² knowing that we will be joined to him in great intimacy when he appears,³ but we fear for the souls of those who will refuse to be joined with him, knowing of the eternal suffering that will fall upon them.⁴ We call out to the world in the hope that many, as many as will come, would avoid these things, and would instead join the eager expectation of the children of God,⁵ We pray that these would come to the light of his grace as quickly as possible.⁶ This is the gospel as demonstrated in a healthy marriage.

We value the gospel highly, and are not ashamed of it. And because of this we must strive to maintain this holy picture of God's goodness in our marriages at all cost. We must repent of the way that Christian marriages have fallen into disrepair, and we must pray fervently that God would give us the strength to do the mending work that needs to be done. And there are many works which can be done! Young people should be encouraged to marry and be brought together rather than sent off to a university. They should be discouraged from dating, sexuality and worldly passions that distract. Older Christians also must be admonished to purity, and must hold their marriages together in spite of the storms of life. Those marriages which have been split should be reunited, even those among the betrothed. Everyone must be encouraged to love in deed and not only in word. Women should be removed from leadership in the Church and community and put back in the home, submitting to their husbands. Husbands must love

¹ See Pages 182-183

² See Pages 50

³ See Page 155

⁴ See Pages 59-60

⁵ See Pages 180-181

⁶ See Page 83

and care for their wives with self-sacrifice. Large families with many children should find support in the Church. Sins of homosexuality and abortion, which are ever more prevalent, should be held off by whatever means the Church can use, and all of God's people should seek that God be glorified in every aspect of their lives. Truly, if marriage is to be done in purity and righteousness, there will always be work to be done in supporting the institution.

We desire that all people should come to the saving knowledge of our lord Jesus Christ, and if they are to truly understand the gospel, the truth will not only come from our mouths, but from our actions regarding this picture God has given to the world. Let us shine brightly in a dark place.

It is written in the book of Romans, at chapter 1 verses 19-20:

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

Appendices

This section of the book contains information on important but secondary matters concerning marriage and gender roles.

A. Female Leadership in the Church

In light of the great work which can be done from within the home to give glory to God, it is highly unfortunate that many women have sought to take on a position of formal ministry to proclaim the word of God. It is the clear teaching of scripture that women are not to speak, teach, or lead over men in the Church. There is a sad irony in that by doing these things many women who sought to do good for the sake of the kingdom have accidentally attacked the faith.

It should be apparent from the whole counsel of scripture that women ought to be limited in their roles in the Church, and Paul gives us specific instructions in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 which say just that. Before his discussion of qualifications for church workers in chapter 3, Paul makes it clear that women are not to fill such roles, saying:

"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."

Here, Paul encourages women to take part in learning within the Church, but he states plainly that they are to do so quietly. This command of scripture teaches beyond any doubt that women should not be teachers over men in the Church and that they should likewise not hold any position of authority over men there; this would include any church position in which they might at some point authoritatively tell a man what to do or instruct him. The word here translated "teach" is a conjugation of διδάσκω, a Greek word with a

broad meaning which covers all kinds of teaching in general; the wording of the verse also makes it clear that ἀυθεντείν, the verb translated, "to exercise authority" cannot be misconstrued as a descriptor of what kind of teaching is specifically disallowed, but is something disallowed in its own right. Women are therefore barred from all kinds of preaching and teaching when men are present and from any position of church leadership that could put them over men.¹ They are further barred from being vocally involved in Bible studies of mixed gender.² Paul's language here is broad and inclusive of women in general, rather than pinpointing any specific group of women.

The understanding that Paul would disallow women from official leadership roles like overseer and deacon is further bolstered by his descriptors of such positions. As has been noted above, Paul expected these leaders to be the "husband of one wife," a descriptor which no woman could possibly meet.³

This teaching is perfectly aligned with Paul's other writings on the topic. In 1 Corinthians 14:33-38 he writes:

"...As in all the Churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the Churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the

¹ Deacons, elders, music directors, trustees, committee members, etc.

² This is not to say that a woman cannot sit in and learn quietly in a Bible study of mixed gender, but it certainly does mean that she should not speak if she does.

³ See Page 66 for further discussion of the phrase "husband of one wife"

Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."

Here, Paul more clearly delineates the process for educating a woman in the Church. He makes it clear that she should be completely silent and shouldn't even ask a question. If she wants to know something, she can ask her husband at home and he can teach her. Paul states plainly that for a woman to speak in the Church is shameful, and indicates that all of the other early churches kept their women in silence. In Greek, the word translated "shameful" (αἰσχρὸν) is thrown to the front of Paul's phrase to place particular emphasis on the word; it is as if he had underlined it. Paul is pressing the point that the Corinthians ought to be ashamed of themselves for having women speak in the Church.

These two passages give a simple, straightforward, cohesive teaching about the way that women should act in the Church, and, in my opinion, the teaching is so plain and obvious that there should be no real controversy surrounding it. Unfortunately, these simple passages have come into conflict with modern culture and are therefore among the most attacked, despised, and disregarded of our time. The passages are so thoroughly attacked that defending them becomes an exercise in pulling teeth and splitting hairs as every possible angle of the passages is defended from those who, evidently, would rather discount them than accept them as they are. Drawn out as the defense of this doctrine may be, it is essential that a defense be given because one can rest assured that the teachings in this book, which are decidedly opposed to feminism, will never be implemented as long as women are at the helm of our congregations.

Some, generally as an attack against the unpopular teaching of 1 Corinthians 14, have asserted that the verses in question should not be considered because practical application of the verses would result in women never being allowed to speak at any church function whatsoever. These

have unfortunately erred in their understanding of the language of the passage. When Paul wrote that it is shameful for a woman to speak "in church" he was not saying that women cannot speak anytime they enter a church building or are on church grounds or at some sanctioned church activity. This kind of application would obviously be a bit overzealous. The word for "church" is ἐκκλησία. This word is a combination of the Greek words ἐκ, meaning "out of" and καλέω meaning "to call," and literally describes an assembly of people who have been called out for some purpose; it would have been used in Greek culture to describe civic meetings, and was later used of the gatherings of the Christian church. The natural meaning of this word then is not to describe any activity at a church building whatsoever, but to describe an activity similar to such a public meeting; it would be correctly understood to include worship services, sermons, or business meetings. It would not include, on the other hand, fellowship activities, meals, general ministerial work, or transitions between services; in all of its uses in scripture, the word ἐκκλησία can never be positively demonstrated to imply any of those kinds of things.

Many have made arguments against the obvious meaning of these passages by saying that Paul was making an instruction that only applied to the women of his culture because he was trying to uphold cultural norms. As culture has changed, these would argue that the Church should change with it. These will sometimes claim that because in 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul references "the Law" that he must be attempting to keep the Corinthian gatherings in line with some Roman code. "Surely," they would reason, "Paul would not make use of the Old Testament law in his teachings." All of this is nonsense.

For one, we might note that Paul was not a man to bend to cultural norms. Earlier in 1 Corinthians, at chapter 1 verses 18-31, Paul had been intentional to point out the superiority of Christianity to Greek and Jewish culture, and he demonstrates

that he was not at all concerned with having the Church look foolish in the eyes of the world. Paul's usual character would not allow him to stifle members of the Church that they might look good for outsiders. The idea that Paul would not reference the Old Testament law as a basis for his teachings is also plainly false; in 1 Corinthians 9:9, five chapters earlier, Paul wrote, "For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.'..." That Paul would reference the Old Testament might come as a shock to liberally minded Christians who have been trained against any application of the law, but we must recognize that while the law has no power to save, it is useful instruction in righteous living and was referenced even by Paul.

Of course, the feminist might persist in this argument, claiming that Paul must have been referencing a civic law because there is no explicit law in the Old Testament forbidding women from speaking. This is a backward argument for two reasons. For one, there is an obvious weight from the whole of scripture which puts women into submission under men and which would lead us naturally to avoid putting them into leadership over men. Secondly, Paul never said that the Old Testament law says women should be silent, as a review of the passage in question should make clear. In 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul simply states that the Law says women should be in submission, which, as this book demonstrates, it does in fact say. Paul's point is that women should be silent as a facet of that submission.

Seeing that the cultural argument fails to hold water, the feminist might next argue that while the issue is not a specifically cultural one, Paul's commands still don't apply to modern American Christians because he only intended the commands to apply to the specific women in the congregations to which he was writing. This is another poor argument.

For one, it is incumbent upon anyone who might make this argument to demonstrate something in the text that would

give a reason why these women specifically should be silenced. Some suggest that women were disruptively asking questions of their husbands during the services, or that they were idly talking and causing distractions. One might claim the women were forbidden from teaching because they had been spreading heresies or were particularly spiritually immature. None of these ideas can be supported by scripture as the reason that Paul wrote what he wrote, and there is no substantial Biblical evidence that any of these imagined problems ever existed at all. Furthermore, if Paul had been instructing against heresy and disruption, then there is no reason for him to direct his command of silence at women alone. The feminist line of argument becomes especially ludicrous in light of the fact that Paul actually gives us his reasons why he believes women should be silent. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul asserts that women belong under submission, in keeping with the whole of scripture, and states that the act of speaking in church by a woman is simply shameful in and of itself. Furthermore, in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 Paul wrote plainly of why he believed women aren't qualified to be teachers. His reasoning: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." So then Paul's ruling about women as leaders and teachers comes not from any cultural reasoning or to solve a specific problem in a few congregations, but his purpose instead is to stop women from leading because of their very nature as descendants of Eve. There is no way to temporally or spatially limit this reasoning.

Furthermore, if we are to argue that 1 Corinthians 14:35-36 only applied to ancient Corinth, then perhaps we should do so with the rest of 1 Corinthians as well. In the context of this section of the letter Paul has discussed orderly action in the Church regarding men and women,¹ the Lord's supper,²

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

² 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

spiritual gifts,¹ the loving administration of gifts,² and prophesy.³ He began the discussion of propriety in the Church by noting the woman's correct place in chapter 11⁴ and ended it by bolstering that stance in chapter 14. If one is to argue that the passage in question only applied to Corinth, he might as readily argue that only Corinthians needed to observe the Lord's supper in an orderly way, or that Corinthians were the only ones to receive spiritual gifts. Of course, no one ever attempts to argue these things because, unlike gender roles, the other topics in 1 Corinthians are not deeply opposed to their own congregation's culture and practices.

Arguments that Paul was addressing only a specific group of women also fail when Paul's language is considered. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 for instance, Paul wrote that it is shameful for "a woman" (γυναικί, with no definite article) to speak in church. That this word is inclusive of women in all times and places as opposed to some specific group of women is undeniable. And concerning the beginning of the quotation, could Paul have reasonably been writing, "As in all the churches of the saints, *those few specific* women" should keep silent? As if some specific unruly mob of women was travelling to all the churches of the saints and causing a global disruption? Such an interpretation is ridiculous at best and intentionally misleading at worst.^{5 6}

¹ 1 Corinthians 12

² 1 Corinthians 13

³ 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

⁴ See Page 153

⁵ The reader should be made aware that some translators attach the words "As in all the churches of the saints," to the previous verse (making the reading, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace as in all the churches of the saints." This translation is really not reasonable. Are we to assume that Paul believed that God's character changed from one location to the next, and that he therefore needed to inform Corinth of his character at other congregations? If such is the case, then God truly would be a God of confusion.

⁶ The reader should also be made aware that a few manuscripts include verses 34-35 after verse 40, which, if they actually belong there, would invalidate the "As in all the churches of the saints" portion of this argument. However,

It is true that the word $\gamma\upsilon\nu\alpha\kappa\acute{\iota}$ is a somewhat broad word which has more meanings than simply "women." The word can also be translated as "wives" and, when used in that sense, is inclusive of betrothed women.¹ Some have attempted to argue that Paul wrote only concerning married women in these passages, and that unmarried women are therefore free to speak. Unfortunately for the feminist, if this argument is to be successful there must be textual evidence to support it, but there is none. Seeing this, there is no good reason not to take the word in its default general meaning. Accepting the general meaning is also most practically reasonable. There is no indication as to why Paul would prohibit married women from speaking but allow their unmarried and less experienced daughters to do so. It appears that the only reason a person would accept the more narrow meaning over the more general meaning is that they seek a way to limit the application of this teaching in any way possible.

Having seen that the passage in question surely does include all women in all churches everywhere for all time, the feminists will persist in argument by asserting that context allows for some exceptions to the rule. In 1 Corinthians 11 the feminist attempts to create a contradiction with 1 Corinthians 14 by claiming in chapter 11 Paul allowed women to speak publicly in some circumstances. Knowing that chapter 14 says it's shameful for a woman to speak in church, how can chapter 11 verse 5 be reconciled? It reads:

"but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven."

seeing as we do in footnote 1 that attaching that phrase to the previous verse is nonsensical, the conventional location for the verses seems most pertinent. Anyone who believes, contrary to most scholars and most manuscripts, that the verses are misplaced is burdened to prove as much.

¹ See pages 39 and 139

Verse 13 also appears contradictory to some:

"Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered?"

The feminist will argue that Paul teaches in these verses that women should pray and prophesy in church, meaning that they can speak in the congregation. They will assert that these verses give context to the verses in chapter 14 which allows women to speak in certain circumstances. Simple reading comprehension can fix the problem however. The verses do not say that a woman should pray or prophesy publicly; they say simply that if a woman did pray or prophesy with her head uncovered it would be dishonorable. There is no indication from Paul that the activity would suddenly become honorable if the woman covered her head, as context from chapter 14 makes clear.

There's another example in 1 Corinthians of Paul using bad practice as an example in teaching. In chapter 15 verse 29 Paul writes:

"Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?"

So here Paul wrote about a practice of baptizing live people on behalf of dead people, which is not a worthy ideal. Paul did not advocate baptism on behalf of the dead, but instead referenced something that the Corinthians evidently were doing to point out their logical problem. Paul's argument in the context of chapter 15 is summarized as "Do you think people won't rise from the dead? If so, why do you baptize people on behalf of the dead? That does not make sense!" In the same way, he points to their practice of allowing women to pray and prophecy, speaking in church, and notes that if they're doing it, especially with head uncovered, then the

whole thing is a shameful mess. Just like baptism on behalf of the dead, Paul's use of bad Corinthian practice as an example in discussion does not justify the practice.

To stretch these verses in chapter 11 to say that Paul is affirming female leadership in churches is especially concerning because this part of chapter 11 is not discussing female leadership or orderly worship, but is discussing women's submission displayed through headcoverings. To use these verses out of that context to support female leadership is unreasonable, especially because the verses are being used to explain away clear teachings in a section which is actually about orderly worship.

Furthermore, good hermeneutics tells us that we should not use a confusing passage like 1 Corinthians 11 as a foundation for doctrine, and especially when a conflicting doctrine is given in a more clear passage like in chapter 14. Probably no one would try to claim chapter 11 as the less confusing passage, and most who use chapter 11 to argue against chapter 14 give evidence that they reject chapter 11 altogether. There is no way one can reasonably claim verses 5 and 13 of that chapter are an instruction that women should teach in the Church without insisting that those women wear headcoverings when they speak. Even still, feminists will do just that. I've never met a female "pastor" who wears a headcovering.

The final argument the feminist has at his disposal to alter the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is to claim that the word translated "silent" does not imply complete silence. This is simply incorrect. The verb admonishing that women be silent is a conjugation of *σιγάω*; no instance of this word in the New Testament can be positively demonstrated to imply something other than literal silence. Paul's instruction to the Corinthians that their women should be silent matches well with his instruction to Timothy that women should be quiet (*ἡσυχία*); there is more room for discussion as to whether or not *ἡσυχία* means total silence in this occurrence, but it

certainly may mean that and cannot be proven to mean otherwise. When put into context with 1 Corinthians, the meaning of the word is clear.

It should become clear at this point that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 cannot in any way be turned around to support the feminist, so instead of altering the meaning, the feminist will instead attempt to discredit the verses entirely by claiming that Paul is making a rhetorical statement; this argument postulates that Paul is simply quoting back to the Corinthians something which they previously wrote to him and which he is now refuting. This argument is perhaps the most desperate of all.

Some scholars accept that rhetorical statements are found in 1 Corinthians; the problem with the argument in question however is that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is not comparable to any of them, and that even the commonly accepted rhetorical statements themselves are not certainly rhetorical. The accepted rhetorical statements are found in 6:12-13, 7:1-2, and 8:1. 6:12-13 reads:

"'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything. 'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food' – and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

So in these verses we see three sentences which, according to some translators, should be cordoned off by quotation marks and labeled as rhetorical statements. There are a few pertinent points to be made about this passage and its rhetorical statements, points which will be relevant to the other legitimate rhetorical statements as well. First, the rhetorical statements serve as the introduction to a new topic of discussion. Second, the discussion started by the statements takes up a significant portion of the text; in this case the

discussion is about sexual morals and lasts from verses 12-20. Third, after Paul makes a rhetorical statement, which might create a somewhat vague understanding of his position, he gives enough information in the following verses to ensure that we know what his position truly is. Fourth, even if the quotation marks which indicate these words are a parroting of the Corinthians' words are removed, the meaning of the passage will not change. Truly, we cannot be fully certain that Paul is parroting the Corinthians; he may simply be saying something that he himself thinks. These principles are likewise represented in 1 Corinthians 7:1-2:

"Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."

So here again it is possible that Paul is changing the subject by using a phrase that the Corinthians first wrote to him. The ensuing discussion about marriage lasts for the duration of chapter 7, and, while the quotation might at first make Paul look like an opponent of marriage, the reader understands clearly that this is not his stance. Also, we see that the quotations can be removed without changing the substance of the passage. Paul, I assert, likely did believe that it was good for men to remain abstinent so long as they did not have sexual temptations. The third rhetorical statement, in 1 Corinthians 8:1 shares similar characteristics:

"Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up."

Here again, removal of the quotation marks would not change the meaning of the passage, and the rhetorical

statement serves to open a discussion about food offered to idols which lasts all the way to the beginning of chapter 11.

So now we come to the serious problem with putting quotation marks around 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Even if we are to accept that the three rhetorical statements above are indeed rhetorical statements parroted back to the Corinthians, we must recognize that 14:34-35 does not match the pattern at all. For one thing, adding or removing the quotation marks around the verses would change the meaning of the passage entirely! Without the marks, Paul tells the Corinthians to keep their women silent. With the marks, he lambasts the Corinthians for suggesting that the women should not speak. Seeing especially that there are no quotation marks in ancient Greek, we would have to assume that if Paul is making a rhetorical statement, that he did so in such a way that the Corinthians could not have reasonably known what his meaning was. Furthermore, this passage does not open a larger discussion. The supposed purpose of the rhetorical statements in other places is that Paul references something the Corinthians said and then offers his lengthy opinion and discussion on the matter, but in 14:34-35 Paul continued to write about the same subject matter (order in church gatherings) as he did before. Furthermore, if 14:34-35 is rhetorical, then Paul gives no further discussion about the statement at all.

It is here that the feminist will cry foul. Some, bent on proving that Paul could not have meant what he wrote, will attempt to argue that verses 36-38 are a rebuke aimed at those who would silence women instead of a rebuke for those who would allow them to speak. To be clear, the verses in question read:

"Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a

command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."

Indeed, if anyone is a spiritual person they should simply accept Paul's teaching that women should be silent rather than arguing against it as some do. The feminist will claim however that the word "Or," is a mistranslation of the Greek word ἢ. Evidently some believe that the word, rather than expressing the ordinary kind of contrast that one normally expects of "or," in this context demonstrates Paul's desire to overturn the previous statement that women should be silent. Paul's argument in their minds is as follows, "You have said that women should be silent in the church. *To the contrary*, was it from only you men that the word of God came?" This however is simply not Paul's meaning and is not the meaning of the word in question. The "Or" doesn't exist to refute the statement that women ought to be silent in the Church, but instead exists to confirm the fact. Paul is using the word to demonstrate that either his first statement must be true (that women should be silent) or his second statement must be true (that his detractors believe themselves alone to be the source of God's word). It is an either this *or* that arrangement. Paul's argument stated more correctly is, "I say that women should be silent in the church. *Otherwise*, perhaps you think that you know better than me because the word of God comes only from you." In these verses Paul rightly accused the Corinthians of spiritual pride for having practiced the faith differently than all the other congregations and having believed that they alone were correct.

Ultimately, an attempt to label 14:34-35 as rhetorical is a dangerous interpretive path to tread. If these verses are to be called rhetorical with such an obvious lack of textual evidence supporting such an interpretation then anyone could label any command which he does not like as a rhetorical statement. Attempts to redefine 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are the first step down a slippery slope of calling every command a rhetorical

statement and liberally interpreting every passage of scripture until the interpreter has effectively thrown the Good Book in the garbage.

Those who would argue against the proper understanding of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 can do so only from a feminist bias and should acknowledge that if Paul had wanted to teach that women should be silent in church he could have scarcely made the point more clearly. Indeed, the feminist, with his constant word-wrangling, would have us believe that there is no conceivable linguistic construction by which a person could genuinely teach that women should be silent. Paul's point on the topic is obviously clear however, so clear in fact that he sarcastically mocks anyone who might reject this blatant teaching as a person who believes himself to be both the sole source and only destination of God's words. As Paul writes, he assures us that there is no debate to be made regarding this command, saying that any spiritual person should agree with what he has just written about this topic and that anyone who disagrees should not be recognized in the Church. This is very stern language about a topic which scripture takes very seriously and that the modern Church unfortunately does not.

The very notion that a woman might lead men in the Church is perplexing not only in light of Paul's commands regarding church leadership explicitly, but also his commands regarding marriage in general. Consider: if a woman takes a position of leadership over a church or in the civic realm, then might she not be placed in authority above her husband, a church member and citizen? Certainly she might, and this position is unjustifiable when compared with the teachings of scripture. Truly, the metaphor of marriage can be completely turned upside down by feminist action in the Church. There have been some women so brazen as to serve communion to their husbands, as if to say that the bride has broken her body and shed her blood for the sake of rescuing Christ from sins. Such a perversion should never be practiced. It was Christ

who broke the bread and passed the cup at his last supper, and the man, his representative, should do this in remembrance of him.

When direct arguments to assail Paul's teachings about submission have failed, many will make an attempt to show that his prescriptive teachings recorded in scripture are negated by the descriptive actions of Bible characters. Such an argument is gravely erroneous however, as the historical narrative of the Bible often records descriptive accounts of behaviors which were not exemplary without giving a moral judgment on the behaviors. If we were going to accept every behavior on the part of a Bible character for an example of how to live our own lives, we might spend time drunk and naked in our tents like Noah, be willing to give our wife to the Egyptians to protect our own necks like Abram, deceive our fathers to steal our brother's birthright like Jacob, murder an Egyptian like Moses, or commit any of the hundreds of horrible sins that Bible characters committed. We must be careful to examine the actions of Bible heroes against the teachings of scripture and remember that the prescriptive commands in the Word of God are more exemplary than the accurately recorded actions of sinful men.

Perhaps the most common argument for women in ministry is the case of Priscilla, a woman who was instrumental in teaching the gospel to Apollos.¹ Some have argued that because Priscilla taught a man, all women have a right to teach and lead in the Church. An examination of the facts reveals no support for such a teaching. Note plainly in Acts 18:26 that it was not only Priscilla who spoke to Apollos, but also her husband Aquila. Based on the teachings we have seen elsewhere, we can assume that Priscilla was helping to explain with Aquila and under his authority. Therefore, what was spoken by Priscilla is not teaching and leadership; it is devoted support for her husband. Additionally, the story does

¹ Acts 18:24-26

not take place in a church meeting, but after a meeting at the synagogue, perhaps even in Priscilla and Aquila's home. Priscilla is not teaching from the pulpit or leading a service, but is having a private conversation with her husband and Apollos after the service has ended. To take such an action and twist it to say that women ought to preach over and lead men is a gross distortion indeed. Notably, Priscilla (sometimes called Prisca) and Aquila are mentioned in several passages, usually in greetings from Paul, but Priscilla is never mentioned apart from her husband.¹

A second commonly cited example of "women in leadership" comes from Romans 16:1-2, where Paul commends Phoebe to the church and calls her "a servant" or as some would translate the word, "a deaconess." The Greek word in question is *διάκονον*. A case of the same word is used in 1 Timothy 3:8 in referring to the official title of a deacon, but that understanding of the word is not implied here for several reasons. The word is used throughout the New Testament to describe general service and only finds usage which is understood to imply a certain title in 1 Timothy. Evidently the word did not come to describe a specific position of leadership until sometime after Paul wrote to the Romans but before he wrote to Timothy. If this is not the case, we would have to assume that Paul was contradictory in that he considered Phoebe to be a holder of the official deacon title even though she did not meet his qualifications for the office. In 1 Timothy 3:11-12 Paul clearly describes deacons as having a wife, which Phoebe certainly could not. Paul also precludes women from taking on such positions with his introduction to the topic in 1 Timothy 2:11-14. Paul clearly meant that Phoebe had been a servant to the Church, but not that she held some specific position of leadership.

If one would persist in the argument that Phoebe must have been a holder of the title, they must also consider exactly

¹ Acts 18:2, Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19

what holding the title of deacon would mean. Scripture gives no lengthy discussion of what specifically a deacon is authorized to do, but we have our best descriptor of the deacon's work in Acts 6, which many consider to record the selection of the first deacons.¹ These men were chosen not so that they could preach and teach, but so that they could serve tables and allow the apostles to preach and teach. The deacons in the Bible are not a group of leaders or teachers, but a group of servants. There is no reason to believe that Phoebe did any larger work than the first deacons did. These two verses in Romans are the only mention of Phoebe in scripture, and they do little or nothing to describe what specific work Phoebe did for the Church. At best one might guess that she had been charged with delivering Paul's letter, which, while it was a vital task in the life of the Church, had nothing to do with teaching and leadership over men. Because we already understand Paul's painstakingly clear teaching regarding women in leadership, it would be very strange to think that he is here commending Phoebe for her work in those positions. Clearly, even if one accepts the most liberal understanding of Phoebe's position, he must acknowledge that her position fails to support an argument for women as leaders in the Church.

A third commonly mentioned argument for the support of women in leadership is found in the story of Deborah and Barak found in Judges 4. Indeed, Deborah was a prophetess and a judge in Israel. I will not attempt to argue that women cannot be given the gift of prophesy, but I will argue that there is no support found here or elsewhere to say that women should prophesy publicly, and particularly not in organized church meetings. If they are given prophesies, they can share them in private or let their husbands share them publicly for them, as Paul's example would allow. Deborah was introduced as "...Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth..."² indicating the importance of her marriage; it is perhaps even

¹ That is, men who were chosen to serve (διακονεῖν).

² Judges 4:4

plausible that her husband took the role of publicly proclaiming Deborah's prophesies and decisions. There is no recorded incidence of Deborah prophesying publicly. Furthermore, Deborah's action of judging Israel is not necessarily exemplary behavior. The book of judges represents to us a time when "there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."¹ At the time Deborah was judging, the nation of Israel had already been conquered by Canaanites because of her sins, and it is not unreasonable to think that a woman might have been judging Israel as a consequence of that. Perhaps Deborah was put in place by Canaanites, or perhaps she was simply put in place by Israelites under the influence of feminism. Deborah's act of judging was likely not appropriate, but God still gave her grace and worked through her in spite of the Israelites' hardness of heart. Throughout the book of Judges there are many examples of heroes who display poor behavior. Samson, another judge, demonstrates behaviors as wild as killing, stealing, sleeping with prostitutes, and marrying outside of God's people, yet liberal scholars scarcely leap to say that we should do likewise. Even if one believes that Deborah's behavior was exemplary, he should recognize that she was decidedly not a church leader. He might argue that she was a civic leader, but ultimately she was simply someone to whom the Israelites went to sort out their conflicts.

Perhaps the most ironic part of the usage of Deborah's position to derive feminist leadership is the blatant anti-feminism in the story itself. In the story, Deborah tells Barak that God has ordered him to attack Sisera in battle. Barak, apparently in unbelief, says that he will only go into battle if Deborah accompanies, probably an attempt to get her to back down from the prophecy once her own life is at stake along with his. Deborah's response is to say that she will go and that God will deliver Sisera to a woman. Indeed, at the end of the

¹ Judges 21:25

battle Sisera flees and is killed in his sleep by Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Some tout the story as having two female heroines, Deborah and Jael, but they miss the obvious point of the story: Jael kills Sisera as a punishment to Barak. He should be humiliated because a woman killed the commander of the opposing army. She is only allowed to do this to shame Barak because of his lack of faith. Viewed from that degrading perspective, the idea that this story is a victory for feminism is laughable. Furthermore, Deborah is not the military leader that many would make her out to be. Barak is the military leader. She only accompanied him. It is Barak who, along with three of Israel's other judges but not Deborah, is mentioned in the "Hall of Faith," at Hebrews chapter 11.

Though some might have accepted that Deborah's leadership was at least a support for women in positions of civic leadership, it would be wise for them to note that Isaiah seemed to view female civic leaders as either a curse or wickedness (or likely both). In Isaiah 3:11-12 he wrote,

"Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him. My people-infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you and they have swallowed up the course of your paths."

Granted, Isaiah's purpose in the passage is not to speak ill of female leadership, but he does make several comments on poor leadership and political curses against the people in general. Here he looks at female leadership as a woeful thing, a curse, but one that has been dealt to the people by their own hand, as if to say that they committed the sin of putting women in charge and now they have to pay for it. The feminist might take the comparison between a woman's leadership and an infant's leadership to be particularly telling of the Bible's stance on the topic.

Ultimately, all of the arguments in favor of female leadership within the Church fail to demonstrate in any way that women should be allowed to lead in the Church, and particularly when we compare the actions of the women involved to the straightforward teachings of Paul. If we were going to circumvent direct teachings of scripture by way of descriptive stories, we might instead consider that Jesus appointed no women among the apostles, that there were no women pastors in the early Church, that there are no examples of women serving as missionaries apart from their husbands, that no books of the Bible were written by women, and that scripture almost constantly tells the stories of men while more often than not neglecting to so much as record the names of the women involved.

It should be evident to any reader that the Church has only allowed feminist leadership and teaching because of her close ties with the non-Christian culture. The teaching of scripture regarding the place of women should be quite clear to anyone who reads the Bible honestly, and it is so clear that no Christians (or virtually none) considered it reasonable to put women in leadership over men for well over a thousand years. Why then should the issue have become problematic for Christians in only the past one hundred? Obviously it is because cultural norms have changed and the Church has followed suit. The feminist movement clearly did not begin within the Church but came from without, and the most radical feminist ideals still come from outside the Church, generally from those who are intentionally opposed to Christianity and are well aware that the teachings of scripture stand decidedly against them. It is a shame that the Church has persistently become ever more liberal in order to maintain cultural relevance; she is not unlike Israel, adopting the gods of her pagan neighbors. We can rest assured that this kind of cultural relevance will only lead to our downfall.

Of course, all of this is not to say that women should not serve in the Church. Examples of women who served in the

Church are plentiful, but those women served in appropriate capacities. Perhaps the best example of this is found in Matthew 27:55-56. After Jesus was crucified we read that

"There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee."

These women ministered not only to the Church body but to Jesus himself. In fact, their devotion to Jesus is perhaps even greater than that of the apostles, who scattered when Jesus was arrested. From this it is clear that women can and must minister in the Church, but their ministry is not one of teaching and leadership. Could these women have taught the all-knowing Christ as he traveled? Could they have led him as he walked? Was the ministry of Mary and Martha not that they served him and guests in their home, and that they honored his teachings? To minister means much more than to lead, and women should focus their ministries on caring for the needs of the Church and not on leading it. There are plenty of roles in which women can and should serve. Christians are to fellowship over the breaking of bread, and where there is bread, there is someone to cook bread and someone to clean dishes. During services there are children to be cared for in the nursery, and women are the obvious first choice for that job. Christians are commanded to serve God in music, and women are quite capable of playing musical instruments without being charged to lead worship or to teach. Men who lead in the Church often need creative or critical help in planning, and women can provide a second head that is better than one alone without taking the reins for themselves. There are offerings to be counted and collected, there are timid people to encourage, there are girls who need role models, there are carpets to be vacuumed and there are bulletins to be printed. The list of jobs

that women can do to serve the Church without resorting to leading and teaching could go on and on, and particularly if we are to create a truly self-sufficient Church. There are so many jobs that could be done that few women would be able to find the time to care for their husbands, their children, their homes and their own personal devotions to Christ in addition to completing the tasks for the Church that must be completed. Why would they need a position of leadership to fill their time? Is it simply because they wish to lord it over those whom they lead? Is it that they want to be recognized by the crowds for their efforts? This is exactly the kind of leadership which Jesus regularly denounced.¹ Therefore, let us consider Paul's description of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 and remember that each person is designed to fill a different role. Perhaps the roles filled by women are not those at the forefront or in the spotlight, but without the support of their women, leading Christian men are like hands which try to work with no arms behind them.

It is saddening to see that the scriptures have been distorted and have created a heretical women's movement in the Church. It is unfortunate enough that the word of God has been neglected and that he has been disobeyed, but we must add to our woes the destructive consequences of these actions, which are many. These consequences cannot all be listed here, but even a few observations should be enough to concern anyone with a sound mind.

Women in church leadership have done an incalculable amount of damage. A prominent example of this problem is that of the young women's missionary movement in Bible believing churches; it is a movement which on the surface appears to be a great work for the kingdom of God, but which on further inspection becomes a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel.

¹ See Matthew 23:5-7 and Luke 22:24-27 for example

Consider: There are many young women who, without an adequate understanding of scripture, claim that they have been called to missionary work. Their hearts are in the right place. They want to serve God in the biggest and best way they can, they want to see the world come to know the love of Christ, and they believe that Matthew 28:18-20 has been spoken directly to them. It is not unreasonable for them to think in this way, as contemporary Christianity tends to make missionaries look like super-heroes who have the highest calling (though the legitimate missionaries themselves will attest to the opposite). When these young women go out to travel the world it feels good to them. The Church is eager to make opportunities for them to go, and when the door is opened, these misguided young women claim that God has called them to missionary work.

Unfortunately, they err because they have not adequately compared their supposed calling to the command of scripture. They neglect to note that Matthew 28:18-20 was spoken to the apostles, not to young Christian women. They ignore a plethora of scriptures which say they should be under the authority of a husband whom they should serve and they are evidently unaware of scriptures which bar them from such leadership. Plainly, the misplaced zeal of these young women leads them to do something that God would not want them to do, and the consequences are disastrous.

Once these zealous women have flown off overseas they serve in ministries that are not scripturally grounded¹ and are therefore ineffective.² Meanwhile families at home are crumbling and diminished because the Church has lost its young wives and mothers who should be providing stability and service. Truly, by neglecting marriage, these young

¹ As evidenced by the fact that they allow women into teaching and leadership roles while separating them from their fathers and inadvertently discouraging them from marriage.

² That is, they are at least less effective than one would hope; God still works through many imperfect situations.

women unintentionally erase God's picture of the gospel to the world. More practically, men who might have been effective evangelists at home or might have gone abroad legitimately are hindered, the more scripturally grounded ministries they may have performed are eroded, and the gospel message is weakened worldwide. This is a most horrible and ironic state; those most zealous to spread the gospel to the world effectively hinder it from being spread.

Of course, the fact that women serve in teaching and leadership roles plays into the problems that have already been discussed throughout this book by creating a self-defeating cycle of feminists espousing feminist ideology, but it is even worse that women are simply incapable of doing the jobs to which they have been assigned. For one to properly accomplish tasks of church leadership they must be lead by the Holy Spirit, but it appears that these women are not lead by the Spirit into such endeavors, because the Bible, those words guided by the Spirit, plainly states that they should not hold such positions. Apparently these women haven't even taken adequate time to study the scriptures before they have raised themselves up to teach them. To claim that a woman is called by the Spirit to lead men is about as sensible as saying that a murderer is called to kill and an adulterer called to take another man's wife. All three are things which have been explicitly commanded against.

True, it is a perennial problem that men won't step up to leadership positions. Sometimes it is argued that women must do the job because no men will, but if there is no man to do the job then the job has likely not been ordained by God. The Church exemplifies a lack of faith in God to accomplish his purposes when she puts women to doing men's work. If Christians truly believe that God wants something done, then we should trust him to supply the man. God brought Jonah to Nineveh in the belly of the fish, and he lifted Ezekiel up in spite of the bitterness of his spirit to carry him to Tel-abib; surely then he can find a man to teach a Sunday school class

or organize a canned food drive. It is unfortunate that there is a tendency to ignore God's timing in supplying leadership roles for churches. Efforts to bring about his will in one's own feminist way bring to mind Sarah's unfaithful actions in giving Hagar to Abraham; as she worked in her timing to produce a son, so the Church has acted to produce leaders. Ironically, women who take on leadership positions actually stop men from taking on other jobs. No man, and particularly not one who has a solid understanding of scripture, wants to serve under a woman. Even church attendance can sag when women start to take on leadership roles, because men don't want women leading them around, and men are not to blame for that. Of course, men are not exonerated from doing their duty in Christian service. Men need to step up to the plate, and women need to step down.

This then is the conclusion concerning women's roles within the Church. Scripture explicitly prescribes that women are to learn in silence and are not to teach or lead over men, and there is no excuse to do otherwise. This is not to say that women cannot serve at all. Women must serve in the Church for it to function properly, but they must serve in appropriate capacities. By attempting to serve in positions for which they are not gifted or qualified, women will dim the light of the gospel.

B. Headcoverings

If there is one command in scripture more neglected than women's silence in church gatherings, it must surely be Paul's teaching regarding headcoverings. The teaching is recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16:

"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. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head,

but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God."

This passage is admittedly not the Bible's most clear. Paul's comment about the "angels," a word which would probably be better translated as "messengers," is particularly unclear, as there is no immediate indication of who these messengers might be. Some of the passage's principles have already been discussed; namely that it describes a chain of authority descending from God the father through Christ and the man to the woman, and that men are made in God's image while women are made in man's image.¹

¹ See Pages 145-146, 153

Before a consideration of what the passage describes concerning women, it is pertinent to consider what the passage says concerning men. Paul teaches here that a man should not cover his head, particularly if he is praying or prophesying, because he is representing God's image. To cover God's image, Paul reasons, would dishonor God. Interestingly, modern American Christianity still adheres to this command. When a group of Christians prays, men are often asked to remove their hats.

The situation is different for women¹ however. Paul admonishes that for a woman to have her head uncovered while praying or prophesying² would dishonor her husband. This is because the woman is not made in the image of God but of man. By praying and prophesying, which are a man's roles in the Church, and by showing her head, she usurps her husband's position as the image-bearer of God.

Paul uses hair as a natural evidence of the principle which he is advocating. Paul accepts it as a facet of nature itself that long hair shames a man and short hair disgraces a woman.³ It is possible that there is a connection here to men's roles, as long hair can be a nuisance to work, warfare, or the like. Paul may also be making a connection to the man's natural state of baldness when he comments on a woman shaving her head.

Regardless of the exact meaning of Paul's evidences, their application to the issue at hand is the same. Paul asserts that it would be shameful for a woman to have short hair, apparently because this would represent a usurpation of her husband's place, and states that for a woman to have an

¹ I would suggest that the "women" in this passage should more likely be the "wives," simply because the passage is discussing headship, which, in my mind, would be relevant to marriage. There is room for a variance of conviction on the matter.

² As is noted above, these verses do not insinuate that women should pray or prophesy publicly. See Pages 200-202

³ Another part of this passage which has, for the most part, survived to our time in spite of the disregard for other parts of the passage.

uncovered head would be equally shameful. A woman who refused to cover her head, Paul says, would do just as well to go all the way in shaming herself by cutting off her hair. Long hair, to the contrary, is a woman's glory. Paul uses this fact, which he accepts as *prima facie* evidence, as a demonstration from nature that a woman needs a covering.

Now at this point many would take the words of verse 15, "For her hair is given to her for a covering." and argue that a woman should need no headcovering because her head is already covered by her hair. The context of the entire passage demonstrates however that this is not the case. Paul is not saying that the woman's hair is a sufficient covering, but is saying, as in verses 5-6, that the woman's natural covering is an evidence of her need for a man-made covering. If this was not the case, then verses 5-6 would make little sense. Indeed, the words "But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head." indicate that the woman does in fact need a covering in addition to her unshaved hair.

The prevalent argument given against women's headcoverings is a cultural one. It is asserted that Paul's reasoning for insisting that women cover their heads is somehow related to the common cultural practice in Corinth that married women cover their heads.¹ Paul then is only trying to urge the Corinthian women to give an outward sign of marriage to the culture so that they do not dishonor their husbands. Because headcoverings are not a part of our culture, the argument goes, they are unnecessary for the modern Christian.

There are a few relevant problems with this argument, not the least of these being that the passage gives no evidence that Paul's reason was a cultural one. To the contrary, Paul speaks of the headcovering as displaying a spiritual reality, not a cultural norm. As was stated with arguments regarding a

¹ If in fact such a practice did exist

woman's silence in the Church, there is little reason to believe that Paul had any inclination to bind the Church to the regulations of the culture in general. Truly, if the cultural argument is true, then Paul's command to wear headcoverings would be the equivalent of binding all married women in our culture to wear a wedding ring, a minute stricture with which Paul, a man of great freedom, would probably not be concerned.

I also have difficulty believing that pagan Corinthians had a certain time-honored tradition regarding the chaste look of their married women. Paul had to write extensively to the Church in Corinth concerning sexual mores.¹ Evidently some grave errors had slipped into the Church, and it is likely that these errors came from the culture without. Paul did note one instance of immorality in the Church which even the world could not accept in 5:1, but this verse also indicates that he had come to expect flagrant sexual sin among the pagans.

Furthermore, the cultural argument regarding headcoverings is fatally flawed in that it doesn't explain the whole of the passage. If women are told to wear a headcovering because it demonstrates that they are married, then why are men told not to wear a headcovering? What relevant point about marriage would this be making? Clearly, there is none, and there could be no satisfactory explanation for this if we are to accept the cultural argument. It is particularly interesting that there are only enough cultural phenomena to explain away exactly that which one would like to explain away.

Further arguments that the headcovering, or lack thereof, is simply a cultural indicator of gender, an indicator which need not be applied today because it is not a part of our own culture, are also unconvincing. Again, Paul's reasoning for his statements regarding headcoverings are stated in the passage, and he does not mention cultural gender norms. Paul

¹ See 1 Corinthians 5, 6:12-20, and 7

references a chain of submission representing the Godhead and order in the family. He refers to the fact that women are not made in the image of God. His supporting arguments center on a teaching from nature itself demonstrated in the human body. These are reasonings based on unchanging natural and spiritual realities, none of which is as simple as a malleable cultural norm.

In any case, headcoverings are simply not as far removed from our modern culture as one might think. One does not need to look very far into American history, probably not more than 100 years, to find that their protestant ancestors honored this teaching of scripture by wearing bonnets. Some very young girls will even still wear a baby-bonnet today. Women in various denominations around the world still wear headcoverings, and while the coverings have fallen decidedly out of style in American urban areas, it would not take a person more than an hour or two of travel toward rural farmlands to encounter some sparse Christians who understand and practice 1 Corinthians 11. Indeed, as is already noted, the half of this teaching which regards men is still practiced almost universally among protestants. With these things in mind, we must admit that Paul's teachings about headcoverings are still alive and well among Christians to some degree, but the implications for many young women have simply been neglected.

Furthermore, Paul's argument that there is something within nature itself that demands a headcovering for women still finds traction in the modern world. We see this in that even unbelievers of various sects wear headcoverings¹ and that women the world over are generally expected to have longer hair than men. Evidently there is still a natural inclination among humans to cover a woman's head, an inclination which Christians should not ignore.

¹ Muslims, for instance

Therefore we must admit that the cultural argument fails. I would suggest that the argument has come about not because of some new archeological or linguistic finding about Corinthian culture, but rather because of a shift in American thinking. The 20th century ushered in a revolt in cultural understanding of women's roles, and women almost undoubtedly abandoned headcoverings because of that. The Church, I believe, has simply crafted an excuse after the fact to keep up with the culture.

The fortitude with which some Christians will stand against the headcovering is somewhat confusing in light of the fact that wearing a headcovering certainly won't hurt anything. There is really no difficulty in wearing a scarf or a headband of whatever sort. Some might say that such an external adornment might become a source of spiritual pride, or even be impressed as a regulation which could be viewed as affecting salvation, though the same might be said of any righteous action which could puff a person up; we would scarcely discourage other right living for such reasons. The benefits of a headcovering would far outweigh any negative aspects a person could find. A woman who makes a practice of wearing a headcovering when she is outside her home will only demonstrate to the world that there is something different about Christianity, that we are not a part of the world and its culture. Headcoverings, if they are to be worn by unmarried women, might be especially beneficial for these youths who are often pressured to dress immodestly or to keep up with the fashions of the crowd; a headcovering might serve as a pertinent reminder of virtuous living. Truly, it seems that the worst consequences of a woman wearing a head covering would be that she honors the teachings of scripture, honors her husband, honors Christ, and shows the decadent culture a thing or two about modesty.

Ultimately though, upon giving his opinion, Paul apparently believed the headcovering issue to be of lesser importance than some others and allowed the Corinthians to

make up their own mind on the subject. The wording of his question, "Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered?" in Greek does not beg for an answer in either direction, so apparently Paul was leaving some room for the Corinthians to decide the matter based on their own consciences. The passage in question ends with Paul's note that there should be no inclination toward contention on the matter. Though one might argue that Paul is here admonishing the Corinthians to accept his opinion about headcoverings without grumbling, I would suggest that he is perhaps encouraging them not to have conflict about the matter either way.

C. Dominion in Genesis 1:26 and 1:28

Some, when confronted with the argument that Genesis 1:27 intentionally limits men to the role as God's image-bearers, will quickly retort that Genesis 1:26 in conjunction with 1:28 gives verse 27 proper context which makes a woman's likeness to God irrefutable. Their argument is a decent one, but one which I believe to be incorrect. I have decided to include my dissent from the common opinion here in the appendix because the dissent is dependent upon a retranslation of Genesis 1:26-28 which I believe is likely to be correct, but which I cannot posit with the utmost certainty because I am, admittedly, limited in Hebrew scholarship. I openly invite the advice of scholars more learned than myself in this discussion, and in all others for that matter.

First, consider the passage in question. Genesis 1:26-28 reads:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his

own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

The argument goes then that in verse 26 God says he will make “man,” presumed to mean all of mankind, in his image, and that these image-bearers will have dominion over the earth. In verse 28, God says to “them,” both the man and the woman, that they should have dominion over the earth. It is evident therefore, or so the reasoning goes, that God created both the man and the woman in his own image. I believe however that this is translational error.

Before considering the translational issue though, we should consider that verses 26 and 28 do not say outright that women were created in God’s image. They say that “man,” possibly understood to mean mankind, was to be made in God’s image. The verses then say also that man is to have dominion over the creation. Just because dominion is extended to the woman also in verse 28 does not mean that the status as image-bearer was also extended.

In verse 26 the error of translation comes in the translation of the word וַיְרִדוּ , commonly translated, “And let them have dominion.” This translation is based on the belief that the word is an imperfect masculine third person plural of the verb רָדָה , meaning “to subjugate or rule over.”¹ This is a strong possibility, but I would posit that the word is perhaps instead a perfect composite third person plural of the word רָדָה ,

¹ The case for the traditional translation is strengthened by the fact that the Septuagint translates the word in question with $\alpha\rho\chi\acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega\sigma\alpha\nu$, a word which lends itself to some form of primacy or domination. We must remember however that the Septuagint itself, while valuable, is notoriously inaccurate. It is possible that modern scholars are perpetuating a very ancient mistake based on the Septuagint, which even the Masoretes accepted.

to be translated “and they went down.” The only difference between the conjugation of these two words is that the hireq is exchanged for a qamets.¹ Verse 28 is even more open to mistranslation. Here the same word is conjugated וַיֵּרָדוּ, and whether it means “and y’all shall have dominion over” or “and y’all shall go down” the conjugation is exactly the same. On those grounds, I humbly submit a retranslation of the verses in question:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ And they went down among the fish of the sea and among the birds of the heavens and among the livestock and among all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. And God created the man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and go down among the fish of the sea and among the birds of the heavens and among every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

There is no significant reason that God’s quote “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” does not end where I have indicated. If the quote ends there then we can easily understand the following words to be a description not of what God said the man should do, but of what God and the heavenly assembly whom he addressed did. In this translation they went down from the heavenly places for an intimate encounter in the creation of man. From there, when God addresses the new humans, he does not command them to have dominion over all the earth’s creatures, but instead exhorts them to go down (presumably from the relatively higher place where he created them) and live among their

¹ These pointing vowels were not added to the consonantal text until between the 6th and 10th centuries AD, plenty of time for such a tiny mistake to be introduced.

fellow creatures. It is befitting that the fish of the sea, the lowest of the creatures, would be the ones first listed in an exhortation to go down. This translation is fitting with the well known words of Psalm 8:4-6

“what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion¹ over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,”

This passage suggests that man was made in a place either literally or figuratively lower than God, so as to beg his descent, and in a place higher than the other created things, requiring mankind to descend likewise.

This retranslation of Genesis 1:26-28 sweeps away the idea that God gave a dominant description to mankind as his image bearer, and in so doing removes the grounds for argument that the woman, told to dominate in like fashion, was also made in the image of God. With this accomplished, we see that verses 26 and 28 match well with verse 27’s indication that a “him” was made in the image of God while a “them” was created in general, and also brings the passage in line with Paul’s understanding from 1 Corinthians 11 that men are the glory of God while women are the glory of men. Most importantly however, this understanding of the passage aligns with the broader scope of scripture, in which husbands display Christ in their marriages, while wives display the Church.

¹ Note that this word “dominion” in Psalm 8 does not translate the same word as the word from Genesis in question, though translators likely used it as a nod to their understanding of the account in Genesis.