

GENESIS 2:18-25

A PERFECT PLAN FOR A PERFECT MARRIAGE

“The LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 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. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”¹

There are two very practical and very human views of the creation of man and woman. One is the man’s view; the other is the woman’s view—surprise. Are you ready? The woman’s view of creation is first. Woman’s view says that God made the man, looked at him, and then He said, “I can do better than that.” So, He made the woman.

The man’s view states that God made the beasts and man, and then He rested. After a while, God created woman. Neither beast nor man has rested since.

Frankly, I relate jokes such as these with a degree of trepidation. Marriage is held in increasingly low esteem today; and even telling a joke can possibly be used to disparage commitment of a man to a woman and of a woman to a man. There are a great number of jokes illustrating the war between the sexes. I sometimes wonder if the humour directed at marriage actually masks a deep dissatisfaction—a gnawing resentment we moderns feel at the imposition of what we construe as a hopelessly outmoded institution.

Marriage is falling out of fashion; it is not unusual for people in their thirties and forties to have been in multiple relationships—relationships and not marriages. Sex is pushed onto our youth through music, the Internet and games; even schools foist sex on our children. Gratuitous teenage sexual activity has become so commonplace that though we may be disturbed, we are no longer shocked at reports of twelve-year-old girls having babies. One news article a few years back stated that one in five middle school students have engaged in sex.² The expectation that a bride—or that a groom—will be a virgin on their wedding night is increasingly remote. Despite our contention that the Bible is authoritative for faith and practise, some studies suggest that professing Christians may not be faring that much better than are outsiders.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Marilyn Brown, **Sex Survey ‘Eye-Opening’ For Local Parents**, <http://www.tampatrib.com/MGBW1T2U2HE.html>, accessed 13 December 2005

I fear that defenders of marriage have already been defeated. Whenever a culture is compelled to define a social institution as well-established as marriage, that institution is ridiculed by the very fact that it requires definition. Nevertheless, I *am* compelled to define marriage because of the insistence by social and judicial activists that it is proper—and even desirable—to identify novel unions as *marriage*. Not all sexual coupling qualifies as marriage.

The ascendancy of modern feminism exposed a long-standing tension between the sexes that had simmered just below the surface. It is not merely that contemporary social currents threaten the institution of marriage, but it is apparent that the present social condition finds its roots in human discontent and in the struggle for supremacy between the sexes. Nowhere is this struggle more evident than in the marriage relationship.

Unfortunately, men have sometimes abused their responsibility as husbands and even their responsibility as men. If history provides an accurate gauge, societies often conspired to ensure that women were treated as chattel—some still do treat women as chattel! As a result, whether consciously or unconsciously, men have at times treated women as inferior to themselves and acted as though the opinions of their wives and daughters were of no value. Men have assumed at various times in history that they had the right to act like boars when it came to gender relations. I am not saying that all men at all times adopted such attitudes, but it is apparent that such attitudes were often tolerated in society. Attitudes such as these are still tolerated in some religious communities and within a surprising number of cultures in this day.

Women, likewise, often considered themselves superior to men even as they chafed under what seemed at times to be an unjust domination. In reaction to perceived injustice, contemporary feminism has evolved until it is less an affirmation of women's social equality than it is raw male bashing. For the moment, the pendulum has swung to an extreme and the most oppressed group in western society may just be white males. While feminists and feminised males complain about a political patriarchy, and even an ecclesiastical patriarchy, males are endangered whenever a woman becomes angered. An example of the current craziness was recently suggested in my reading.

Jeff Iorg, President of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, has recently written, "Tucked within an otherwise humorous Super Bowl ad by T-Mobile was a supposedly comedic line when a woman handed a newborn to his mother, 'Sorry, it's a boy.'

"The line sounded like a thunderclap to me when I first heard it. The growing cultural bias against boys—really all traditional aspects of maleness—is pervasive, but usually communicated more subtly. This was a far more blatant statement than I anticipated in a Super Bowl commercial.

"Even if it was supposed to be a comedic line, it was 'hostile humor' making a profound point about our culture's rejecting of boys, men and masculinity."

Iorg continued with the analysis, "Why is it culturally acceptable to ridicule boys but not girls? Why is giving birth to a boy a disappointment? And why do I think this is a big deal?

"Underlying all this is the opposition to maleness, feminization of boys, and rejection of gender distinctives in our culture. The goal is gender-neutrality—genderless participation policies, unisex public facilities, same-sex marriage, etc. Maleness is something to be fixed, not celebrated and shaped.

"We might laugh off a silly ad, but the sad result of our cultural determination to redefine manhood is in our future. We won't be laughing when we get what we are striving for."³

³ Jeff Iorg, "First-Person: Not So Funny," Baptist Press, Monday, February 09, 2015, <http://bpnews.net/44188/firstperson-not-so-funny>, accessed 9 February 2015

Dr. Iorg is tragically correct in his final analysis—perhaps our culture is already getting what we want! The craziness of modern attitudes grows worse day-by-day. A recent news item captured my attention. It quoted from a woman’s blog post as she defended her decision to abort her child. In her blog, this woman wrote, “I couldn’t bring another monster into the world. We already have enough enemies as it is. It didn’t matter that I would be raising a son, he would still come into contact with boys, men, perhaps even the suit jockey who would inevitably twist his carefully constructed upbringing with their kindness. He would think ‘These men aren’t so bad, why would mom say that they are holding me down?’ Not all men are bad, my driver showed genuine concern for my well-being that day and I may have taken my anger out on him. That may have been uncalled for. But I knew what I had to do.”⁴ I wept as I read that. What a pitiful creature this woman has become! How tragic her life when she has allowed her heart to be so poisoned that she consigns all men to the realm of monsters! She should pray that men don’t begin to reciprocate toward women with the consent of law.

Already, before the law, males have few rights; and if the male happens to be of European descent, he is considered guilty without need of a trial. In a rush to prove our tolerance, even churches have embraced attitudes that condemn maleness and exalt femaleness. Both the nation and entire denominations have been feminised, with the result that manly character once honoured is today ridiculed and censured without hesitation. As result of such social changes, marriage, also, is vulnerable to assault from increasingly radical ideologues intent on redefining what God instituted. In order to remind us of the good gift of marriage that God gave to mankind, consider the first marriage. Recall the events described in those early hours of the creation before Adam received from the hand of God a helper fit for him. The account of the first marriage is provided in our text.

MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO GOD’S PLAN — The key to understanding God’s ideal is found in the term “helper fit” in **verses eighteen and twenty**. The corollary to this thought is found in **verse twenty-four** when God declared that the man and the woman shall become one flesh. Bound up in the concept of a “helper fit” and the concept of “one flesh” is the key to God’s perfect plan for marriage. Focus on these two thoughts as we explore the mind of God. The words Moses used, “helper fit,” might seem to imply that the weight of responsibility to satisfy the man rested on the woman, as though she must be deemed suitable in his estimate. The Hebrew, however, conveys no such thought. The man had no say in accepting the woman; the woman was created to make the man complete. The term “helper fit” might more accurately be translated “a helper who is like him.”⁵ The emphasis lies in the thought of complementarity.

Children delight to pose riddles and we adults are equally delighted to listen to children’s recitation of riddles, in no small measure because their joy in stumping us is so delightful. A child’s riddle asks the question, “What is most like half of the moon?” We adults will guess, “Half of an orange?” “No!” “Half of a basketball?” “No!” “Half of an Edam cheese?” “No!” Their obvious delight at our inability to guess the answer correctly is apparent in their reaction. You will mention everything round and orange coloured that you can think of until at last you say, “I give up. What is most like half of the moon?” The excited answer is delivered in a delighted voice, “The other half of the moon!”

⁴ Dominic Kelly, “I Couldn’t Bring Another Monster Into The World.” Feminist Aborts Baby Because It’s A Boy,” *Opposing Views*, Monday, February 09, 2015, <http://www.opposingviews.com/i/society/feminist-woman-defends-decision-abort-baby-because-it-was-boy>, accessed 10 February 2015

⁵ e.g. **HOLMAN CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE**

The answer is correct. The thing most like half of the moon is the other half of the moon. Just so, if we ask what is most like a man? The obvious answer is, “A woman.” What is most like a woman? Again, the answer is, “A man.” Men and women are different; but they are more alike than anything else in all creation. “Vive le difference,” as the French say. The purpose of the sexes is to complement one another. Among the animals there was not found “a helper fit” for Adam, so God made “a helper fit” for Adam—God made one who was adequate to the man’s needs and who was complementary.

The strength of this verb is seen in an example from Nehemiah’s account of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Listen to **NEHEMIAH 12:8, 9**. First Nehemiah names the Levites in charge of the songs of thanksgiving: “The Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah and Mattaniah, who with his brothers, was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving.” Then he makes the notation that “Bakbukiah and Unni and their brothers stood opposite them in the service.” Bakbukiah and Unni were associates of the Levites, complementing them in their service through supplementing their work.

A similar demonstration of the concept of complementarity is revealed in **NEHEMIAH 12:24**: “The leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua son of Kadmiel and their colleagues, who stood opposite them to offer praise and thanks, one contingent corresponding to the other.”⁶ The verb speaks of complementarity, not of egalitarianism. Contemporary theologians and social scientists seek equality in all things; but the Bible presents complementation in marriage—mutual strengthening by partners in a marriage.

We would suppose from the foregoing that marriage was meant to strengthen the partners, the man and the woman united in that bond. Neither is necessarily weak alone, but together they are complementary, lending their strengths to each other so that together they are stronger than they could be apart. This would appear to be the meaning of the wise man’s statement that “Though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” [**ECCLESIASTES 4:12**]. Ideally, marriage is to strengthen either party. Ideally, man is to receive woman as God’s gift to complement him. Likewise, woman is responsible to see that her role in no small measure lends her strength to her husband. Together, a married couple is stronger than either can be alone—they strengthen one another.

As I focus on the text, I take note that the woman is to be a “helper.” This information is too frequently overlooked in contemporary marriage relationship. The Apostle teaches that “woman is not independent of man nor man of woman” in marriage [cf. **1 CORINTHIANS 11:11, 12**]. Especially is this so in the marriage that is founded on Christ. Christian families are to recognise their interdependence—men confessing they need the help of wives and wives willingly extending help to the men.

In a practical sense, this means that a man is not to assume that he must do it all; but neither may a woman pick and choose how she will support her husband. The man is to value his wife, to esteem her and not simply as a beautiful creature; rather, he is to honour her as a gift from God Himself. He is not to assume that he is master or even that he is superior at every task. He will discover that his wife will perform any number of duties and tasks far better than he is able to perform them. He must endeavour to encourage her to excel in such areas, giving her freedom to oversee those particular duties and tasks. Likewise, a wife must not insist that she will fulfil her role independently of her husband, for she is his helper. Only as the two individuals who are now one co-operate and complement one another can they hope to enjoy the strength that God intended them to enjoy and exhibit together.

⁶ **THE NET BIBLE (NOTELESS)**, (Biblical Studies Press, 2003)

This emphasises again the point that man and woman are not equal—they are complementary. Marriages are not to be egalitarian; they are to be complementary. Equality would imply identity, but the biblical teaching is similarity in the marriage relationship. Before God, men and women *are* equal. Paul makes this quite clear when he writes, “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” [GALATIANS 3:26-28]. In salvation and in the exercise of the spiritual gifts entrusted to each of us, we stand before God as equals. In the institutions that God gave (the home and the church) there is structure that finds its roots in the words of our text where we are informed that we are not equal; rather, we are complementary.

What would happen if men ceased viewing their wives as their equals and began to see them as gifts given to make them complete? Living with an equal leads either to conflict as we seek to gain superiority, or it leads to a cessation of conflict with an uneasy truce which only awaits the opportunity to find sufficient means to complete the subjugation of the threat to our position. When a man sees his wife as the one who completes his life, he realises that he needs her. He will value her and esteem her as a precious gift from God. He will be cautious not to knowingly hurt her or to debase her because she is his strength. Likewise, the wife who sees her husband not as her equal but as the one to whom God has given her that she may make him complete will find fulfilment that is otherwise only a dream.

THE ONGOING ASSAULT AGAINST MARRIAGE — To maintain a marriage relationship in today’s world is increasingly difficult; the pressures multiply exponentially. Among the societal pressures gaining ascendancy and threatening the biblical view of marriage are rampant hedonism, widespread acceptance of adultery, the ease of divorce, an increasingly cheap view of human life and unrealistic romanticism.⁷ Consider the impact of these assaults against marriage.

Hedonism, the view that my pleasure is the greatest good, destroys marriages today. Hedonism champions the view that the chief goal in life is pleasure and justifies pursuit of pleasure regardless of long-term consequences of one’s actions. Hedonism so focuses on one aspect of sex that it is blind to the full purposes God intended for this divine gift. Hedonism says sex is for fun ... period! Once we accept this premise, it is no problem to adopt the view that the more of sex we have with the greater variety of partners, the more intense our pleasure. Admittedly, one does not need to be married to enjoy a sexual relationship. However, an unmarried individual seeking sex can never know the depth of intimacy and the intensity of love that grows out of sharing life in an honest relationship. The cost of hedonism is the destruction of the capacity to experience intimacy and to discover the intensity of real love.

Strangely enough, hedonism has found its strongest support from professed Christian theologians promoting what they designated the “new morality.” This strange view was popularised by churchmen such as Bishop A. T. Robinson, Joseph Fletcher and Harvey Cox. Well-known evangelicals such as Gordon McDonald and Tony Campolo rushing to the support of a former President of the United States have served to foster the view that there are no serious or long-term consequences to a hedonistic view. The fact that Gordon McDonald was “restored” following a non-marital escapade during a previous pastorate no doubt assisted him in adopting his newfound enlightened view.

⁷ For this overview, I have drawn heavily from James Montgomery Boice, **Genesis: An Expository Commentary, Volume One** (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1998) 137-139

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In this contemporary view, anything is permissible “as long as it does not hurt the other person.” Whether it will be injurious or not is subjective and thus determined solely by the situation and not by the standard of morality stipulated by the Word of God.

The difficulty is that it is not so easy to define a “situation.” A couple in the privacy of a living room or a bedroom may decide that intercourse outside marriage will not hurt them and that no one else need know. They cannot be sure, however, that it will not hurt them or that no one else will ever know or even know the consequences beyond that immediate relationship. If nothing else, their decision will change their own attitudes toward marriage, and that has consequences for the whole of society.

Before I leave this particular view I need to state what should be obvious to us as Christians—that sex is a divine gift given for specific purposes. Sex is a gift from God, who defines the purposes of His gift. Clearly, *procreation*—the propagation of the race—is one reason God gave mankind the gift of sex. The first blessing of man speaks of this purpose for sex [see **GENESIS 1:28**]. God looks for godly offspring [cf. **MALACHI 2:15**]. Christian couples should seek to raise godly children to the glory of God.

Another reason for the gift of sex is *purity*. God’s plan was one man for one woman. Because of the wickedness of the day it must be stated that God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve; marriage is the lifelong union of a woman and a man. Sex is a powerful force within life. Without the gift of celibacy, we struggle against powerful urges. Restraining us as Christians is the knowledge that we cannot honour God either in serial adultery or in licentious living. Paul stated the issue rather clearly when he said “It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” [**1 CORINTHIANS 7:9**]. Singleness can be a gift, but marriage is a gift to those who cannot restrain themselves.

Yet another reason God gave the gift of sex is *pleasure*. God meant that husbands and wives should enjoy one another and not to use sex as a weapon in the fight to gain power over another. Husbands and wives are to enjoy one another [see **1 CORINTHIANS 7:3-5**] and the marriage bed is to be reserved for one another alone [see **HEBREWS 13:4**]. Thus, marriage provides for godly employment of the gift of sex. In summation, sex is given mankind to permit procreation, to ensure purity and to provide for our pleasure.

Let’s return to the focus of this particular point in the message. Also destroying marriage is a *widespread acceptance of adultery*. Sophisticated justification of adultery is provided by counsellors and psychologists who advocate affairs as tonic for lacklustre marriages, arguing that infidelity may actually revive the stale marriage. Some individuals claim to be happier and to be better lovers because of an adulterous affair. Christians hearing such arguments should be amused at the knowledge that while this excuse may be used to justify one’s own affair, the same excuse will be rejected if the other party attempts to employ it to justify his or her own adultery. The adulterous partner in a marriage will react with outrage and shock if his or her spouse was to attempt to justify an affair with the same rationale.

It is evident that as the divorce rate rises, the acceptance of adultery rises correspondingly. If adultery helps hold marriages together, why should we see the positive correlation between adultery and divorce? If the argument was valid, there would be an inverse relationship instead of the correlation now witnessed. Adultery does not strengthen marriages; adultery destroys marriages. Though those identified with this darkened world may close their eyes and choose to believe this lie, Christians at least should vigorously reject it for what it is. Christians must not only warn outsiders of the consequences of adultery, but they must demonstrate the purity of life that keeps them from such sin.

The *ease of divorce* also serves to undermine marriage. This scourge effects not only pagan society—divorce is having an impact within the Christian community. A generation ago there still existed significant social pressure to maintain a troubled marriage, and this ensured that it was difficult to get a divorce. While no one would argue that homes held together by fear of social censure were necessarily happy homes, children did grow up with benefit of both parents. The need to live together and work things out in spite of fallen desires, did lead many couples to do precisely that, with the result that their marriages were preserved and ultimately even strengthened. Society was stronger because the institution of marriage was stronger.

Marriage in the biblical perspective recognises that it is often hard to live together. Biblical marriage exhibits determination to work hard to make the marriage viable. It doesn't seek perfection, but instead seeks to view realistically the fallen nature of those with whom we live. Consequently, through such hard work and based upon a realistic view of human nature, couples do learn to love one another and to stay together. Trust is fostered and love grows until couples truly love one another instead of merely tolerating one another. In contrast to that view is the approach which demands easy perfection, and which is prepared to dissolve the marriage if perfection is not immediately forthcoming. Such an attitude leads to an endless search for what cannot be found—perfection. Furthermore, that strained view empowers another for happiness as an individual depends upon a spouse for happiness instead of discovering contentment within.

When God performed the first marriage, He spoke of the man and woman as being one [GENESIS 2:24]. Jesus ratified this vital truth when he cited the words of the Father together with His own commentary in MATTHEW 19:5, 6. “‘A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” It is not a sin to divorce, but divorce is the result of sin; divorce cannot be said to enjoy the blessing of God. We have forgotten the horror of God's statement concerning divorce through the prophet Malachi. “‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and the one who is guilty of violence,’ says the sovereign LORD” [MALACHI 2:16].⁸

The *increasingly cheap view of human life* destroys the foundations of marriage. In particular, the ease of abortion undermines the marriage relationship. Abortion has been made an exclusively private affair between a woman and her doctor. Such an attitude is destructive to marriage because it excludes the father from a decision affecting his offspring. The law views the unborn as the exclusive property of women! Even more germane to the matter at hand, the view that abortion is a private affair between a woman and her doctor excludes a father from the time-honoured obligation and right to defend his own child.

When Dr. Bernard Nathanson wrote his startling book, “Aborting America,” in 1979⁹ he had presided over more abortions than perhaps any other person at that time. He had presided over more than 75,000 abortions by his direct action. Whereas he had previously justified his nefarious work as doing the greatest good for the greatest number, he came to see that what he was actually doing was murdering human beings. He realised that each human life, however small, is precious. It is a second reason that he gave for his decision to oppose abortion on demand that I want you to hear. The family is being dissolved, he maintains, by fiat of the high court. A father is denied the natural right to defend his child by current social and legal policy. If that father is denied the natural right to defend his child, then he cannot reasonably be saddled with any other responsibility toward the child; and that is to society's detriment.

⁸ THE NET BIBLE

⁹ Bernard Nathanson with Richard Ostling, **Aborting America** (New York: Doubleday, 1979)

An inescapable conclusion to this view is that by upholding the right to kill the newest, the most vulnerable member of a family, the court transforms the state into a foe of the family. Let that thought sink in! By upholding the right to kill the newest member of a family, the court makes the state a foe of the family. Marriage, pregnancy and childbirth act as adhesive holding the family together. Sexual activity separated from the family and from childbearing tends to dissolve the family and destroy other social institutions. Over fifteen years ago, I wrote a notation in the margin of one of my commentaries on Genesis. “It will not be long until a father is granted the right to determine life or death for the newborn. Since he cannot defend, then it is his to determine whether he shall defend or not the newborn.”

Already, “ethicists,” led by Peter Singer of Princeton University, are suggesting that whether a newborn child is permitted to live should depend upon whether that child is wanted. Imagine that! A leading advocate of destroying the family teaches this at a school established by Christians! My prediction is that life for a newborn will be increasingly based upon the doctrine of privacy supposed to have been found in the Constitution of the United States of America and adopted by the liberal skills that function as justices of the Supreme Court of Canada.

We should not imagine the right of privacy between a woman and her doctor is a problem only for fathers; this novel “right” concerns all parents—mothers and fathers—of pregnant girls. In a case involving the pregnancy of an unmarried minor daughter, according to the prevailing provincial and federal view today, a mother of the pregnant girl has no more rights than does the father of that unborn child. A minor has a right to an abortion without the consent of her parents. In this instance, parents are placed in an inferior position to the abortionist. The full impact of such social views is not fully apparent yet; but undoubtedly we shall witness even more devastating changes to the family in days to come.

A final threat to the sanctity of marriage is *unrealistic romanticism*. Perhaps because of the prevalence of a hedonistic philosophy throughout society, children enter adulthood with romantic notions that are folly-wide-the-mark. Every girl is convinced she deserves a man who looks like Brad Pitt and who is focused solely on her desires. Every boy approaches marriage age certain that he deserves a wife who looks like Mila Kunis and who is as sexually exciting as she appears on the silver screen. Consequently, both men and women enter marriage with a view that places responsibility for happiness on their spouse. The view is unrealistic and places too much power in the hands of another. Ultimately, we are each responsible for our own happiness within the marriage relationship, though ideally will we endeavour to honour and edify our spouse.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE — Marriage exists for God’s glory. Ideally, marriage reflects God’s view of the church. James Boice tells of an elder of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia who stated that God created sheep so that Christians might understand how they act and what they are. Boice continues by saying: “I had never thought of it that way, although I should have. I had thought of it the other way around, that God had created sheep and that Jesus came along and discovered that they made a good illustration. Our elder meant that God had created sheep with this end in view—that Jesus would have the illustration when he should come to this important part of his teaching. The point is: If this is true of sheep, it is even truer of marriage, for the Bible tells us explicitly that God created marriage in order that by marriage we might understand the most important of spiritual relationships.”¹⁰

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, **Genesis: An Expository Commentary, Volume 1, Genesis 1:1 – 11:32** (Zondervan, 1982) 117

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Marriage was instituted by God; and as result He meant us to discover completeness in marriage. Beyond that, He was providing a picture of Christ and His church. By that, I mean that in the Word of God Jesus is portrayed as the great bridegroom of the church. We who believe on Him are portrayed as His bride. We who profess to know Christ are expected to reveal the relationship of Christ to His church through our marriages. The church does not dictate to Christ how He is to serve us, but instead the Bride of Christ willingly and graciously submits to Him. Likewise, an awesome responsibility is placed upon each husband to reflect something of the beauty of Christ's love for the church through giving himself for his wife. Listen again to the Word of God.

“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 Saviour. 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 splendour, 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” [EPHESIANS 5:22-33].

I suspect that the major difficulty with our marriages is love of “self.” This shouldn't be surprising as our culture trains us and encourages us to adopt precisely such a view. Others are responsible to contribute to *my* sense of well-being, to foster *my* sense of self-worth, to serve *my* goals and to bolster *my* ego. Unfortunately, this attitude, detrimental to Christian faith and inimical to God's glory, has infiltrated the church. Though we say that we love others, we are constantly told that we deserve something better. Without thinking, we continue to love ourselves and we continue to justify loving ourselves.

According to Paul's teaching in the Ephesian letter, husbands are to demonstrate their commitment to and love for their wives through serving them—through seeking the best for their own wives. A husband is responsible to love his wife, surrendering himself for her benefit. Likewise, wives must love their husbands through demonstrating a gracious spirit of submission. A husband serves his wife through building her up, leaving his father and mother to live exclusively with his wife. A wife serves her husband through encouraging him and by respectfully submitting to him as the head of the home. Husbands and wives learn to serve one another through fellowship with Christ who served us by “taking” upon Himself “the very nature of a servant,”¹¹ assuming human likeness, and humbling Himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross [PHILIPPIANS 2:7].

Because of Christ, Christians understand the concept of service differently from non-Christians. To the mind of the outsider, service means servility. Service in the estimate of those outside the Faith implies that the one serving has less worth. Christians can never think this way. Christ, who has the greatest worth of all, is at the same time the servant of all. Therefore, God “has highly exalted [Christ] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” [PHILIPPIANS 2:9].

¹¹ NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

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You may recall that as He prepared His disciples for His death Jesus took off His outer clothing, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin, knelt down and washed His disciples' feet. He then said, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" [JOHN 13:14, 15]. We are being Christlike when we serve another person. Assuredly, this attitude of service should characterise the Christian home as husbands and wives build one another up through serving one another.

The best marriages pass through times of pressure, and wives and husbands do compete for supremacy over one another. Wives are vexed at the thought that they have lost freedoms and that their husbands are not all that they had hoped they would be. Husbands grow weary with the constant challenge to their responsibilities and they sometimes wish they could be free of the conflict. At such times, singleness grows attractive and divorce has great appeal. Remember, however, that your marriage is to the glory of God. Remember that though it may not yet have achieved perfection your marriage reflects the perfect relationship of Christ and His church. Remember that the world is watching you; and it is discovering more about the character of Christ than it shall ever learn from other sources, save the Word of God itself. Amen.