

The Profound Mystery:

Marriage Love, Divine and Human

Geoffrey C. Bingham



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Things We Firmly Believe
The Day of the Spirit
For Pastors and the People
The Splendour of Holiness
The Way and Wonder of Worship
The Wisdom of God and the Healing of Man
Great and Glorious Grace
Oh, Father! Our Father!
The Everlasting Presence
Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?
Ah, Strong, Strong Love!
Where Conies Dwell

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Marriage Love, Divine and Human

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Dedicated to

Constance Edna Laurel

*my companion and lover for 48 years
who has taught me much that is in this book*

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Introduction

Two decades ago the number of books treating the matter of human sexuality probably seemed sufficient. In the last twenty years a veritable flood of volumes has come onto the market, and some of them are exceptionally good. I think that those which are theologically well based are the most valuable. Not only have some books dealt with the matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage on a practical level, but some have also sought to do fresh research into the validity or otherwise of the Erasmian view of divorce—that approach to divorce espoused by the Reformers and their successors in the Protestant churches, as against the firm stand by the Roman Catholic Church of the ‘no divorce’ principle. For centuries the Church of England held out against divorce, occasionally permitting the so-called ‘innocent party’ to be regarded as a true communicant, but that has all changed. Whilst remarriage of divorced persons is not easily accepted, it is often permitted. The Erasmian view virtually holds sway.

Recent research into the Old and New Testaments, especially of the passages dealing with marriage and divorce, has shown itself to be most thorough. Scholars are questioning the Erasmian view as they have rarely done over four hundred years. Christ’s radicalising of the law, and especially the law regarding marriage and divorce, has been freshly viewed, and the Erasmian view—also known as ‘The Evangelical Consensus’—is

being strongly criticised as unbiblical. It would take a large volume—or volumes—to present the fruits of the new research.¹

Over the years I have read widely on this subject but feel inadequate to bring together the mass of useful findings in regard to marriage, divorce and remarriage. I have taken a far simpler line in seeking to see marriage in its biblical background, treating it as a creation ordinance as Christ did in the Gospel, and also in its protological, typological, soteriological and eschatological categories. A reader not much versed in these theological terms may be put off reading the book, but I urge such a person not to be daunted by the terms, since they are explained in the book, and because they have quite deep significance. I feel that many of our more ‘practical’ treatments are ultimately not really practical. I am sure we have sadly neglected truly biblical teaching which could so enrich our marital and familial situations and relationships.

I am hopeful that the way I have dealt with this important subject may shed new light for many on the essential nature of marriage and, so, on the questions of divorce and remarriage. Best of all it may lead some of us to discover the marvellous reality of the ‘profound mystery’ of the man-woman ‘one-flesh’ union with its wonderful experience of enriching communion. To see that each human marriage is really a prophetic foretaste and forecast of the Ultimate Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb (Christ) is to have a remarkable light shine into our own marriages.

I am sure that many of us are aware of the tragedies into which we are being literally hurtled in these days

¹ A bibliography is included in this book.



when divorce is so widespread; when divorced persons are knowing immense pain; and when the children of fractured marriages are being thrown into intolerable confusion, despair, anger and even cynicism. *De facto* partnerships provide no useful solution to our dilemma, yet many marriages *de jure* also seem, in many cases, to promise little more.

I just hope and pray that this volume, which by no means covers everything, may bring some comfort and help, and aid in reversing, at least to some degree, the present loss of marital and familial joy and security.

The Glorious Beginning

It has been said that human beings live in a mysterious nostalgia. They long to go back to some wonderful beginning, something that was once real and beautiful.

Wordsworth once voiced it:

Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.

Is that a myth, or is it founded on reality? Man was made in the image and likeness of God. Could any creature have been more than and higher than that? He was created male and female—something celestial creatures in all their beauty were never to be and never to know. First man was without companion when he named all the animals. They had companions, and, seeing their mateship, he longed for something like that. Then he was given the deep sleep during which his mate was drawn from his side. When he awoke the wonder was there.

She was the wonder. His first words on seeing her were, 'At last!'. He seemed to have been a long time



alone. The miracle of her creation out of him meant she had not been created apart from him. 'She is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.' He understood the unity and the affinity. They were one. 'Let her name be Woman for she was taken out of Man!' For all time none could exist without the other. Each ex-isted,¹ a man being a man and a woman being a woman, but together they were Man. Now as one they would exist as Man.

Since this union of male and female made them one, and their oneness constituted full Manship or Humanity, it is no wonder we have nostalgia for those days.

Even so, those primal days confront us with a sense of pain and loss. Had the ancient king not spoken of his love with the Shulammitite lass in the unforgettable Song of Songs,² we might not have thought man-woman love could be so pure, so full and beautiful. It is not that we have failed to hear the poems of John Donne about loves, or missed the operas and sonnets of ancient and modern loves. We hear the insistent cry in the midst of the noisy rock'n'roll beat that 'love is all', but few believe it. Yet some part of us insists that love of man and maid must be good. Even we have had a taste or sight of that which is unforgettable. Hence our nostalgia for the real.

¹ By 'ex-ist' we mean that each person was whole as a person within himself and within herself. They were outside each other in what we call 'discrete being', but they were made for each other to exist or 'in-ist' as one.

² This Book which is also known as 'The Canticles', 'The Song' and 'The Song of Solomon' was composed of a series of songs often sung at weddings. Each song was known as an epithalamium; that is, a nuptial poem or song given in honour of the bride and bridegroom.



'FROM THE BEGINNING'

It was Jesus who referred his listeners back to the pure beginning. When they asked him questions about marriage, divorce and remarriage, he referred them back to the creation of man and woman. He said:

Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:4-6).

It is not really necessary to delve into what 'one flesh' means. It must mean 'as one being' but it also is talking about the union of bodies. The making of woman out of man, and their coming together as Man or Humanity, tells us that the male-female entity is not only remarkable, it is also a practical joining that makes two one. If with the word 'union' we add 'communion', then we have the full story. The Song of Songs only becomes intelligible in the light of 'comm-union'. Two joined legally in marriage may still be two 'ex-isting' and never 'in-isting'. 'Comm-union' means each lives within the other and both live as one. Doubtless this seems to be an ideal which can never be reached, but, ideal or not, it is how we would wish it to be.

'NOT SO FROM THE BEGINNING'

When they asked Jesus about divorce he simply said, 'From the beginning it was not so'. There was no idea of



divorce in the beginning. How could such a communion-union be wrenched apart? It was not only beautiful, but it was also practical: each loved the other totally, and union was a wonderful way of life, not only in sexual enjoyment but also in the shared living of life. Who would want to divorce? The idea could not even exist. If they had been able to think about this strange idea, they would see intolerable pain as resulting from it. Man and Woman were made ever to be one.

I think that if you look at Jesus answering his interrogators you will see that he was calm. He could not even think of divorce and, undoubtedly, he had good reasons for his thinking—reasons we will later explore. He was aware that a lot of time had passed since the time of the first remarkable union, but he did not seem to think that time, or the unfortunate happening of Man's sinful fall, should alter what we might describe as 'built into creation'. For this reason it would be good if we could get some of Jesus' mind on the matter, and why he crossed out divorce as an option.³

THE WAY MAN AS THE PRIMAL COUPLE WAS CREATED

Before we look at creation as an entity that came into being, we must look at God the Creator. At this point in history in which we live we have the advantage of what

³ Some readers will be astute enough to see that Jesus seemed to make an exception for what he called *porneia*, sometimes thought of as fornication or some other form of sexual indecency. We will certainly take up this matter and discuss it.



we might call ‘the total Scriptures’. These seem to have been written over a period of some 1400 years. They take up the writings of the Israelite people and the later Christian Community. They make a whole whereby what are called ‘the mysteries of God’ are available to us. All our modern scientific thinking and research—genuinely brilliant as it is—cannot give us the views of God, Man and creation that the Scriptures do.

We are discussing God, Man and creation from the Scriptures and not from outside scientific texts. We are concerned from a biblical point of view to know about man, woman, marriage, divorce and remarriage. Other and different views exist in the world, and we recognise that fact. Such views we are not debating.

THE CREATOR WAS AND IS LOVE

In the various creation accounts we are not told that the God who made all things was and is love any more than we are told He was not love. For certain reasons this fact of His being love was not raised. It is, however, raised time and again in descriptions that follow the creation accounts.

If we accept the biblical fact that God is love—something both Jews and Christians would agree on, even if they would interpret the idea differently—then we would need to see that everything created was made in love, and the whole creation could be called ‘a love creation’. The closest we get to this is that when God finished creating ‘God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good’. Later the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Koheleth, said of God, ‘He has



made everything beautiful in its time’, and Jeremiah the prophet said, ‘It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom’. In other words, to make all things wisely surely comes close to making them in love. What is made out of wisdom must add up to being made out of love.

Man and woman were made in love. I think we have good reason to believe that the Divine law of love was placed in their hearts, so that for them to love would have been natural. The reason we believe they were made in love, and so were ‘love-creatures’, is the fact that God made them in His own image and likeness. It is at this point we need to see that God is love. To understand this we need to go to the whole Bible and seek to understand the mystery of the Trinity.

God Is Love: The Trinity

As we travel through this book we will have small difficulties in that we are speaking about matters which can only be understood as we traverse the whole Bible. So we are making a great leap into the New Testament which frankly speaks about mysteries. ‘Mysteries’ are ‘secrets’ which are hidden truths. They are very down-to-earth, and do not require intellectual brilliance to understand them. They are not mystical. If our minds are open to hear them and to respond to them, then what seems to be a mystery becomes an open secret.

One of these mysteries is the Trinity, although the New Testament does not actually name it as a mystery. The word ‘trinity’ is never used in the Bible, and yet in the New Testament we seem to be faced with the fact that Jesus was come from God where he was called ‘the Word’ and was said to be ‘face to face with God’. He also told his hearers that God was uniquely his Father. The Spirit of God was known by this term in the Old Testament and he,¹ also, is from God. Both the Son and

¹ In most English translations the ‘it’ is used in the Old Testament and in much of the New Testament. Occasionally the pronoun ‘he’ is found in the New Testament, referring to the Holy Spirit.



the Spirit are unintelligible unless they have deity. It took many hundreds of years for the Christian theologians to work out the idea of the Trinity in language which could be understood by the people of their cultures and age.

At this point we are only interested in one thing, and that is the unity of the Trinity: the one-ness of the Three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One way of coming to this is to look at the passage of I John 4:7–21, and we need to ponder the text here given to us:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for 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 loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation [propitiation] for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.



If we look through the passage we will see that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are mentioned as being together and working together. Looking closely at the statement ‘God is love’ (vv. 8, 16) we discover that it is the Father who is said to be love. It is not said of the Son or the Spirit. Elsewhere (Col. 1:13) Jesus is said to be ‘the Son of his [the Father’s] love’, and the Spirit said to be, in effect, ‘the Spirit of love’ (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:8). The theologians speak of the Father as *fons divinitatis* (the fountainhead of deity) and they speak of the Son as being eternally generated from the Father, and of the Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son. This means the Source of Divinity is the Father, and the Son and the Spirit proceed from that Fountainhead. The old theologians said they were of the one ‘substance’ or ‘quality’, but that each was—and is—a Person.

If we thought that love held the Three together, then we would be wrong, for that would make love a fourth entity, or what the theologians call ‘a hypostasis’. It would give love a being of its own and on its own, so to speak. Readers should not give up at this point of reading, thinking the matter of the Trinity and love too complicated or difficult to follow and understand. It is essential to know the Three are One, and so are the one God. To sum up this section: the Father is love, and the Son and the Spirit, arising from the Father, are loving Persons, so that it can be said, ‘God is love’.

All we have reasoned here is borne out in the New Testament, to say nothing of the Old Testament. In John 17 as Jesus was praying to the Father he said:

I do not pray for these [disciples] only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may



be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

In this passage he revealed that he and the Father were One. The Father was in him and he was in the Father. The Father had always loved the Son. When all believers would be in the Father and the Son they, too, would be one. Elsewhere the Holy Spirit is known as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, and it can be shown that, as such, the Spirit is in the Father and the Son, and They in him. The Spirit is also known as the Spirit of love, unity and fellowship. What he is within the God-head works out within the Community of Christ, the Church. This is the unity proceeding from the Father who is love, who is the Fountain of love. To sum up: the Three Persons are one in *communion*. Leave out the idea of *communion* and we have no true Triune God.

If we were to follow the theologians, then we would see that they talked of the *perichoresis* of the Godhead. They also called this the *circuminsessio*. It was a theological way of describing what they called ‘the interpenetration of the Three Persons’, so that they could be said to coinhere one another, though this never meant they would coalesce. Also the two terms meant that as the

Three Persons were different—one being the Father, another the Son and another the Spirit of the Father and the Son—they, so to speak, gave (and give) of their differentiations, all of which went (and goes) to make a complementarity of Triune Being.

Again, the reader should not give up, for the theologians have done us well. They have shown in language that we can understand how God is One and God is love. They also spoke of God's works *ad intra*, meaning the relationships within the Trinity which produced the relational works the Three carried out internally. I think that if we trace these in the Bible we will find the following:

- (a) the Three Persons honour one another;
- (b) the Three Persons give to one another;
- (c) the Three Persons receive from one another;
- (d) the Three Persons serve one another.

I think that it is reasonable to call these works the works of love.

In addition to the works *ad intra*, the theologians spoke of the works *ad extra*, and in these they included the action of God in creation, in redemption and in the final uniting of all things by the end of human history, sometimes called 'the regeneration of the world'. Of course, the use of the terms *ad intra* and *ad extra* are ways of helping us to understand God, but really they are all the one. God is love within Himself and so He created out of that love, redeems out of that love and finally renews and unites all things out of that love.²

² If we were in the business of *proving* our point we could show from the Scriptures that the Three Persons are said to be present in the work of creation, of redemption and of the ultimate renewal of all things.



If we have grasped this wonderful truth that God is love, then we can go back to creation having seen the outcome of creation, being convinced by that outcome that God is love. We have not dealt with the heart of the matter: the great revelation through the Cross of Christ that God is truly love. If we were to spend time on that event, we would see that the Three Persons—out of their differentiations—were in the work of the Cross. We cannot pause here to open this up.

Let us, then, go back to creation and see what it meant for Man to be created as male and female, and then joined as one in the union-communion they knew.

Man Created in Love for Love

THE MAN-WOMAN UNION CREATED IN LOVE

What we are saying is that when God created man, and then created the woman from the man, so that in union—as ‘one flesh’—they are the image and likeness of God, they were, in fact, created in love. They were created by the love of God from the love of God. They were created to be one in love. Their very oneness reflects the Oneness of the Triune God and, in this sense, is the image and likeness of God.

It may well be true that other elements also constitute ‘the image and likeness of God’, but for the moment we are not concerned with these other elements. It is enough to establish the fact that Man—man and woman in union as ‘one flesh’—are God’s love-creation. This does not mean that the rest of the creation was not created in love, for it was. It does not mean that it was not a love-creation, for it was, and is, but it means that Man alone is uniquely the image and likeness of God. What we are saying here is of far-reaching importance. Jesus’ saying ‘from the beginning’, and ‘from the beginning it was not so’, is of the utmost importance.



Since the man was made by God, and the woman was drawn from him, and since, as one, they now embrace the term ‘Man’, then it is essential we see them as a love-unity. If we extend this principle from the primal couple to all males and females universally and down through history, then we see that there are not two races of humanity—one male and one female—but only one race which is inseparably male-female, and is this in love. We are aware that something has happened in history which appears to have divided the two so that they are not wholly one, but that is another and important matter we are not discussing at this point. We will, of course, have to discuss it.

THE UNITY OF THE TRIUNE GOD IS THE CREATED UNITY OF THE MAN-WOMAN

Dr Geoffrey Bromiley makes the following observation:

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election.¹

Bromiley is saying that the ‘trinitarian unity and distinction’ of Persons are innate in the creation of Man as male and female—innate in their unity and in the retention of their persons as both ‘ex-isting’ and ‘in-isting’. God

¹ Geoffrey Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1981, p. 77. In my thinking this book is one of the finest and clearest we have in English on the subject we are discussing of marriage, divorce and remarriage.



cannot make Man in love and this not be his lot. It is to this that Jesus refers when he speaks of the impossibility of severing a ‘one-flesh’ union. I am aware that it is held by some that he would not have warned against ‘putting asunder’ such a union if it were not possible. Some go further and say that the divorce is, after all, but an affirmation that ‘coming asunder’ has already happened in the marriage. We will take up this matter later, but for the moment we must say that the creation of the man-woman ‘one-flesh’ unity in no way envisaged a ‘putting asunder’ of that union.

MARRIAGE IS A CREATION ORDINANCE

In Genesis 2:18–25 we have the story of the second creation, that of the woman from the first one who had been called ‘man’:

Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, 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 cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man 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 which 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 leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

We must notice that until verse 24 nothing is spoken about marriage, but everything is spoken about the oneness of the man and the woman, and thus of all males and females of the human race. Only in that verse is marriage indicated, though not named as such. This is the verse Jesus thought to be so vital, as also did Paul after him. What it indicates is that a son would, in one sense,² decide against his parents in favour of the woman. He takes the initiative and cleaves to her, not she, primarily, to him. There is no shame in nakedness: to the contrary, it appears to be a blessed state.

CREATION AND LAW

By using the word ‘ordinance’ we have implied that there is an order of marriage. Not just an order *to* marry, but a principle by which true marriage obtains. Jesus certainly infers that this order of marriage is for all times. Often marriage is said to be of the ‘ontological order of things’. Ontology is really the study of ‘being’. True being is ontological: it is ‘the way things really are’, or ‘the way God has created all things to be and to function’. We call this ‘biblical ontology’. Was, then, a law involved in the

² There is no thought that the parents are rejected but that the time has come to leave them for the first priority of his life, the woman. Doubtless true parents would accept this ‘leaving’ and delight in it, as though they had accomplished their bringing up of their son to this great climax of his life: marriage.



matter of marriage? The answer is, ‘Yes, and no’. If, by this, we mean a strict, iron-clad, immutable law from a God who devised it as an eternal law, then ‘No!’. If we mean that the law *of* God—that is, the law by which God subsists in His ‘three-person’d’ Being³—then ‘Yes!’. By this we mean that God has the law of His own being, the law of unity, or *perichoresis*, of love. He is not *under* this law: it is just the way He is and acts. When Man is created in His image and likeness, then that is the law Man has on the human plane of living, just as God has it on the Divine plane of living.

We can approach it this way: God is love. His law is the law of love. Man is created not as one individual or even two individuals—the man and the woman—but as a community. The law *of* God given to Humanity from Himself becomes the human law of love. It is not spelled out as such. It is just ontological—the way things are in creation because of the way God is as the Creator. It does not have to be given as ‘hard copy’ but remains, so to speak, ‘soft copy’ in the heart and being of Man, the community of human beings. All that is written on a computer is soft copy. When it is printed out it is hard copy. At creation no hard copy was given for two reasons: (i) God spoke to Man directly, and (ii) Man being the image and likeness of God knew, in innocence, all he had to know. The primal couple knew the law of God but would have thought no more of it than they would of their own breathing.

In their innocence they were one. The law of God which later emerged explicitly as loving God with all

³ John Donne the English poet once addressed God in a sonnet as ‘three person’d God’. He also spoke of ‘the knottie Trinitie’.



one's being, and one's neighbour as oneself, was working all unself-consciously. Pure love was the order of the day.

The Loss of Love, of Communion

SEDUCED FROM GOD: WITHDRAWAL INTO SELF

How many thousands of times we have replayed the scene presented to us in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis! How many different nuances and ideas are brought to us by contemplative minds! In the light of what we have previously said, we can fairly easily understand what took place. In Eden, ‘the place of delights’, all was well: everything was sufficient for the primal couple. God had loved them and, out of that love, created them. They had every reason to trust Him because He had brought them together in marvellous union and communion. Communion existed between God and them, and between them both.

It was not as if they were mere lolling lotus-eaters. They had been given lordship over the creation. They had a future. They were in action—useful action. They were to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, subdue its dynamic elements for usefulness and have lordship over



all things. Locally and immediately they were to keep the garden and work in it. One prohibition was placed before them—they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree would prove lethal. Another tree of which they *could* eat was the tree of life. The antithesis of the tree of death, it promised immortality.

THE BRILLIANT, CRAFTY SERPENT

We are not seeking to know the origins of evil. All we know is that the serpent was brilliant—‘subtle’ and ‘crafty’ are the words sometimes used of him. The primal couple knew God, and His word was the word by which they lived. The serpent came with another word, and the woman was beguiled into believing that word and acting upon it. Paul later said she was ‘seduced’. John the Seer later called the intruder ‘That ancient serpent, who is the Devil’. The suggestion was that God had withheld deity from this couple of humans. Already they were ‘*like God*’, but now they were being tempted to be ‘*as God*’. Since the serpent used the words ‘*like Elohim*’ he may have meant they would both be gods, each in their own right.

We might ask a number of questions such as: ‘How did the serpent get to the woman and have her alone?’; ‘Why was the man not here?’; ‘Why did she not first confer with her husband since he was *fons humanitatas*, under and from God who is *fons divinitatis*, and so the Source of *fons humanitatas*, even her source?’; ‘How did the serpent break through the union-communion to cause the woman to take the initiative and then bring her husband into the eating?’. Giving answers to these questions



is a risky thing. Paul's comment that 'Adam was not deceived' meant that he knew what he was doing. Following his wife was some sort of a cover for what he did deliberately. He was pitting the serpent's word against the word of the Creator. He wanted autonomy; that is, he wanted self-rule and not rule by God. He wanted to be a god, *as* God.

Intriguing as all these comments may be, the matter before us is the break between God and Man, and between the man and the woman. In one sense Man's union with God can never be broken, especially because he is still the 'image and likeness of God' however much he strains against *that*. In another sense he is the enemy of God and would like to get out of the union. Certainly his communion with God is wholly broken. He has broken the law *of* God in that he refused to love God with all his being.

THE LOSS OF COMMUNION

The break between God and Man was a violent one. Dread came into the human hearts when, in the garden, they heard 'the sound of God'. The voice which had created them, shaped them in love and given them the creation, now was the cause of deep fear. The conversation between God, the man and the woman, and the statements to the serpent now take on understandable form. The man blames both God and the woman, thus showing his break in communion with both. The woman blames the serpent. The serpent can say nothing but listen to the sentence of doom—doom which will come one day through the seed of the woman he has deceived.



The man and the woman are still in union. Time will prove this so. Loss of communion does not mean obliteration of union. This is one of the common deceits that human beings use to get out of an uncomfortable bond. Where there is communion, union holds strongly. The judgments God gave to the woman were that she would have childbirth in sorrow. The man would rule over her. He had not ruled over her previously. If in the primal soft copy there was acknowledgment that she came from him, here is a hard copy of husband ruling. As for the man, he will have to fight the soil for his living. The delights of Eden must give way to the toil for living. One wonders whether his ruling over woman was not also part of judgment, and this is said without irony. Even if he rules, the woman will desire¹ him, which seems to carry with it some idea of a conflict.

Descent Into Shame

I believe we have every right to conclude that once communion was broken with God, and was thus broken between the man and the woman, everything took on another look and hue. For example, being naked was now a thing of shame. The writer of the Book of Hebrews later said that the word of God means that nothing can be hidden: the word exposes it. 'Before him no creature is

¹ An intriguing explanation of the man ruling over the woman and the woman's 'desire' is given in relation to Cain and his conversation with God over the non-acceptance of his sacrifice. God tells Cain, 'If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it'. 'Desire' here means 'desire to rule' and this may be what the woman has towards the man—desire to rule him where he is designed to rule over her, because of the Fall.



hidden, but all are open and laid bare [naked] to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' Undoubtedly nakedness before God has with it the powerful sense of guilt; but let us take a few moments off to see how Man has coped with this sense of shame at nakedness down through his centuries.

Shame of nakedness is not found in some cultures, at least not at first appearance; but there is an endeavour in most to cover the genitals. The first couple sensed nakedness as a shameful thing. Pulchritude is a word meaning 'beauty' or 'loveliness' but carries the idea of purity in the viewer as well as in what is viewed. This idea is strong in the Song of Songs. Prurience is its opposite: lasciviousness is in the eye of the beholder, and the beautiful is seen as impure. Paul says, 'To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure' (Titus 1:15). This idea of prurience is absent from The Song of Songs. Failure to have love-communion in a relationship with God will take us on to a demeaning view of His creation when we have relationships as fallen persons. Thus the genitals, through which true love expresses itself in the heights of its communion, become defamed by prurience. The joy of pulchritude is lost. For humorists of the bawdy kind, the quickest way to sniggering laughter is to give genitals pet names, or ridicule them. Unclean humour seems to give temporary relief to those who have failed in the high beauty of truly loving intercourse.

Frustration Because of Loss of Communion

Another observation is that pure love of man and woman—issuing from the pure love of God—makes



genuine intercourse to be the richest expression of man-woman union-communion. Failure to achieve this, for reasons we do not set down here, results in the more fearful and violent anger in persons male or female. Tragedies can quickly happen from such anger. Those selling art and entertainment know that what they call 'sex' is the quickest way to attract sales. This is because the unfallen union-communion represents, indeed, a peaking in emotional and spiritual relationships. Outside of that flow of love from God, sexual practice often becomes a biological act which does not produce love of the true kind. Hence the anger, the frustration and the sneering, bawdy humour.

A CONCLUSION ON THE DIVISION THAT SIN BROUGHT

We cannot estimate what the change in relationships did to the primal couple. On the one hand the sad thing is that their first child turned out to be a murderer, and on the other the second child turned out to be a person of faith. Jesus called him a prophet, and the writer of Hebrews called him a man of faith. So much for an authentic 'knowledge of good and evil' the first couple thought they would achieve by listening to the word of the crafty serpent. Perhaps more than we might dream about, the serpent was out to discredit the man-woman union and communion. This union was to be the type of the one who was to come, whose marriage as Bridegroom to the purified Bride would be the goal and meaning of history. To attack marriage on the human level is to attack it as it is on the Divine plane.

The True and the False Love

MAN MUST LOVE

Whilst it is true that in the Judaic-Christian cultural history love of God and fellow man is strongly taught, it is also recognised in many cultures that love, if it were to be in total action, would solve many of the problems clans, tribes and nations face in our age. Even if the matter is not explicitly discussed, the 20th century development of 'human rights' goes a long way to acknowledging that hatred, cruelty and oppression are evil.

Whether or not we can develop some theory regarding love, it seems that deep down in Humanity is the knowledge that human beings should love. Sometimes it might take the form of desisting from unlove, that is, unloving actions. There is often a sense of pride when we do what we think are loving actions. This may well be a sop to the guilt of our consciences. We ought to note that in this century there has been more social and welfare aid given nationally and internationally than in all the other centuries combined. Indeed community aid abroad and at home is at its phenomenal best. Most would interpret this as an expression of love.



For a moment let us go back to the idea we presented of ‘the law of God’. If, as I seek to maintain, this soft copy is inherent in being a human, then love will be what I call ‘an ontological thrust or must’, a kind of categorical imperative. Perhaps we could assess cultures according to their words of ‘love’ and ‘affection’, as also for ‘lust’ and ‘lechery’. We might trace the motions of pulchritude and prurience. I am not sure. What I am sure of is that human guilt is very much in proportion to the attitudes and acts of non-love that we have and that we commit.

HUMAN WORDS FOR LOVE

Philology and the use of words is a risky study if we are going to come to certain conclusions. It has been said that a dictionary is a series of guesses. Even if we did word studies on the words used for ‘love’, and followed our critical system of deriving the meanings of these words from studying the contexts and situations in which they are used, we might fail to arrive at final and valid conclusions.

C. S. Lewis’s book *The Four Loves*¹ is certainly a fine introduction to such a word study, but I think it has been rightly questioned. Likewise the famous classic *Agape and Eros* by Bishop Anders Nygren² has been

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, Collins, London, 1971.

² Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, SPCK, London, 1957. Helmut Thielicke in his *Theological Ethics: Volume 3: Sex* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, pp. 27–28) both explains and criticises Nygren’s thesis. He writes:

Hence *agape* cannot be defined at all without taking into account the concrete medium to which it happens to be attached. It therefore cannot be defined apart from the given, or not given, kind of *eros* through which the specific interhuman relation is determined. This indicates the limitations of the view that concerns itself with defining only the ideal type, a view with which Nygren is essentially satisfied



challenged by other theologians. I think it is a valuable book, but perhaps its practical application requires careful discernment before use since *eros* and *agape* cannot be defined as wholly different and wholly other in all cases. Apart from a couple of associated words the term *eros* is not found in the New Testament. That does not matter: the idea of *eros* could be traced, I am sure. Without being an expert in this field, I venture to say that as God is love (*agape*), and since all love is in God as Father (I John 4:7ff.), then Man when created was a person to whom this *agape* flowed and from whom it was expected to flow in the actions of life to, and for, others.

Only God is Love

We need to recognise that God is love (*agape*), and not simple a loving One. There is no such abstract quality as 'love'. Love is, and is in the Person of God, and operative in the Divine Triune Community. This means that Man, made in the image and likeness of God, is structured—so to speak—to be one who loves. Since

and which in our own approach to the theology of sexuality we shall seek to break away from.

He then goes on to say, 'First, in *eros* the *worth* of the other person is the object; in *agape* the *authentic being* . . . of the other person is the object'. Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pt 2 (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1978, pp. 737–747, 752, 795, 827) has an extended criticism of Nygren's presentation of *agape* and *eros*. He comments, 'Agape-love takes place in affinity, *eros*-love in opposition, to human nature' (p. 743).



love cannot be decanted *to* him, and since for him to love means God must be in him and loving through him, then fallen man must devise a love which helps to ease his conscience and gives him a sense of being truly human. I think we should either say that such love is human, is not from God, is not authentic or that it is a pale imitation of the real (ontological) thing. I believe that, all things being considered, it could be called *eros*.

In calling it *eros* I am aware of a number of things. The first is that the Greeks could define their own word and its meaning, and we would have to accept that is how they saw it, and, perhaps, see it. Nygren goes a long way to say that *eros* at its best was a high form of love, noble and as close to selfless as could be possible. Perhaps there are various levels at which we can use the word 'love' in different cultures. Our argument cannot here be conclusive. As for the word *eros*, we are conscious it is being used almost exclusively for describing 'sex' whatever that word may really mean.³ To be erotic is to be preoccupied with the matter of 'sex'. Hence our word 'erotica' to cover all things connected with biological copulation.

To limit *eros* to this area is not appropriate. Over a long lifetime I have observed human behaviour and none the less my own. I have recognised that we fallen human beings are innately selfish, not by creation, but by the

³ I think the word 'sex' is used very carelessly in our present society. It seems to hover around the biological side of human activities. We have the terms 'sexy' and 'chemistry', the preoccupation with genitalia, and the titillation of the mind and imagination that these things are required to evoke. 'Sexuality', rightly understood, should be a useful term for covering the whole range of man-woman relationships, catching up the idea of families and society as a man-woman community.



Fall.⁴ What is not strange is that we are cleverly loving; that is, we give and give in order to ultimately get. I see *eros* as ‘calculating love’. What happens when it does not ‘get’ is difficult to describe. Anger at ‘no return’ and resentment of love wasted can result in deep bitterness and an extended sense of injustice. Yet I have seen—as it were—such flashes of what seem to be *agape* that I am startled and moved beyond measure. In such cases I leave the motivation of the heart to God, but since God is never absent from any human being, I am not at a loss to know why and how such things do happen.

THE FIRST COUPLE, *EROS* AND *AGAPE*

You will notice that I have hesitated to say that *eros* is an imitation of *agape*. I suppose I think of *eros* as ‘fallen *agape*’. I am sure that all love in the primal couple, whether or not it had to do with love of creation, of animals, of beauty, of God, of one another and its action in sexual intercourse, was *agape*. Theologically I am aware that the primal couple had not been tested as to their love for God until the serpent came, and it could be asked whether their love was genuine before that testing. I think

⁴ I recognise that many Jewish writers will have nothing about a ‘Fall’, and that optimistic Christian theologians reject it as horrific. Humanists, whether Christian or not, will have none of it. Thus their ideas of love are easy to describe. Man can love if he will, and that is the sum of the matter. When we say Man does not love agapitically because of the Fall, we are not excusing him from responsibility to love properly and fully. He is really commanded to love and should go about doing that, whether he succeeds or not. Of course, this is taking us into another area of discussion—fallen Man’s ability, or otherwise, to truly love.



that kind of a question cannot be answered. We can only speculate about it.

My further theological awareness is that the redeeming acts of God are what have shown His love. This would be the case with Israel as also it would be with Christ and the Atonement—the things we saw above in our brief study of I John 4:7–21. In one sense the Fall had to happen in order to show His love, not that God had not loved the primal couple, but God's love, whilst shown in creation, must of necessity, because of the Fall, be shown in redemption. I am sure that God had always intended His love to be known through saving Israel from Egypt; men and women from the guilt of their sins; and the world from perishing by judgment. I am hoping that the intrusion of these theological ideas will not cause a reader to put down this book. I also hope it will not divert anyone from the main aim of this volume which is to show what love—especially marriage love—can really be, whilst also giving relief to those who have never been married or have married and divorced and even remarried. A little theology along the way never hurts anyone!

DID THE PRIMAL COUPLE KNOW TRUE LOVE?

This question, which is asked in order to get us back on track, is one which cannot be fully answered, but some kind of an answer can be given. Any person whose heart is towards God will know His love. We do not know how the hearts of that man and woman were before God. If they felt no repentance for their act, then they would

not have known Him as Love, although they might have felt His love towards them. To receive the knowledge of God is to know Him as Love, no matter at what point in history a person may live.

Some of us who know God also know that we oscillate—so to speak—between living in His Divine love (*agape*) and in our human love which we now designate as *eros*. *Eros* is immensely powerful.⁵ *Eros* in its physical attraction and operation produces the strange and seemingly wonderful situations that we see in grand opera, much art, and even at a lesser level, in soap operas. Sometimes we are shocked by the homicides which happen in families, and possibly more in *de facto* situations. Perhaps in the latter there is less security in the tenure of relationships. *Eros* seems constantly to conquer the world, but its returns are ultimately trivial. Even so, it is this kind of love which—to quote the cliché—‘makes the world go ’round’.

If we can discern between *eros* and *agape*, then we realise that it is difficult for *eros* to survive the curse, whilst *agape* which ‘never fails’ is the only true basis for all relationships.

⁵ See my book *Twice-Conquering Love* (NCPI, Blackwood, South Australia, 1992) in which I seek to show, through stories, that *eros* has enormous drive and deep affects and effects upon and in the loved persons.

'One-Flesh' Union and Marriage Are Not Only an Ontological Creation Ordinance—I

GOD CREATES FROM HIMSELF

When God created Man in His own image and likeness, then the life of Man on his human, creaturely level was to be 'the living, personal image of God'.¹ As such it was to parallel on the human level that which obtains in the Triune God on the Divine level. We discover what this kind of living means by our knowledge of the law of God—the law by which, and in which, God Himself subsists as the Triune Community.

THE LAW OF THE TRINITY

We need to see that the law of God is the law in which God subsists as Three persons: the Father continually

¹ J. A. Motyer, 'Biblical Concept of Law', in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1990, p. 624.



being the Fountainhead and Source of the other Two Persons, and their being of His love. We said this Trinitarian Unity was given to Man at creation and so was present in the primal couple and their union. This is a wonderful thought, quite dizzying to the mind in its reality—its mystery—and its implications. We could have added another wonderful thought: that as God has His *perichoresis* so did the primal couple, and it was the way their love would have operated and would still operate when Man seeks to be one with God in *communion*. The outflow from the Divine *perichoresis* was into the human *perichoresis*; hence the circular life of *agape* in the couple. That is, their way of life was in their union with God and so with each other in the fullness of *agape*.

WHAT THE PRIMARY MARRIAGE WAS INTENDED TO INDICATE

We would think the primary 'one-flesh' union was the intended norm for all marriages that would be down through human history. This seems, surely, to be confirmed by Jesus' reference to the 'one-flesh' union and marriage in Matthew 19:1–6, Mark 10:7–9 and Luke 16:18. When in Matthew 19:1–6 Jesus took them to this point (cf. Luke 16:18), Jesus' questioners—and later Jesus' disciples—not accepting what seemed to them to be an idea radically different from their own, raised the question of divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1–4. We need to look carefully at this Mosaic provision regarding divorce, since at first sight it seems to accept the fact of divorce:



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 bill 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 husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband 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 guilt upon the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance.

At first sight the passage seems to be a genuine law in Israel, and appears to permit and, perhaps, endorse divorce. Divorce, then, did exist in Israel. How then—in the face of this provision—could Christ put the creation ordinance forward as the prescribed way of true ‘one-flesh’ union and marriage, and as one which did not countenance divorce? At this point we make a statement which we have yet to substantiate. We say, ‘The creation ordinance is the true ontological order and should be followed since it represents the Trinitarian Unity of the Godhead in whose image and likeness Man was made; that is, the man and the woman as one together. Christ himself said no one was to put asunder that union. In the face of the practice of divorcing of wives in Israel, Moses did not make a law *for* divorce—*for there was none such in Israel*—but in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 he made an ordinance concerning control of the *mode* of divorce since divorce had become a practice in the community’. For the moment we must leave it there, but we will return later, seeking to show that (i) this was not a law, as such, for divorce, and (ii) rightly understood it could even stand in the way of divorce, and thus,



in some measure, counter the destroying of the ontological 'one-flesh' union.

THE CREATION ORDINANCE OF THE 'ONE-FLESH' UNION AND MARRIAGE IS PROTOLOGICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL

Marriage Is Protological

We quoted a small section of Geoffrey Bromiley's book, and now we will repeat that section, plus more of his statement:

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election. Analogically, what is between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the church, is also what is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife. Neither the intratrinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and his bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage as it is now lived out is a bad copy of a good original . . . It is simpler, however, because God himself took the initiative at the level of both original and copy. At the level of the original the deserted husband lovingly went to look for the erring bride and bought her back. He did this by offering himself, in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption.²

When we speak of marriage as protological—protological meaning 'at the beginning' or 'the first'

² Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, pp. 77, 78.



(*protos*: first)—we are really inferring what we call ‘eschatological’—at the end (*eschatos*: last).³ Bromiley in his first sentence (above) is speaking of the protology of the ‘one-flesh’ union and marriage, for he speaks of ‘the people of his [God’s] gracious election’. The first—that of creation—is linked with what is ahead—the climax or *telos* of history: the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Trinitarian Unity is what husband and wife should know, and be that in which they live. Such Unity is not static, and so God says to the primal couple, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’—and so on. In the matter of being shaped in the image and likeness of God, they will, of course, be living in love.

Marriage Is Typological

Having spoken of this protological (creational) ordinance, Bromiley also points out something more concerning marriage which lay ahead of the marriage order of creation. It is firstly that God will be Israel’s Husband,

³ W. D. Davies in his book *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge University Press, London, 1966, p. 35), gives us an example of protology:

But as we have already indicated, and shall attempt to show at length below, the eschatology of Israel was a protology, that is, the End was conceived in terms of the Beginning, of the creation of the universe itself and of the people of Israel at the Exodus.

In this sense marriage which came at the creation was protological. What we have to keep in mind in using the terms such as ‘ontological’, ‘protological’, and so on, is that they are all personal to God; that is, God is planning, executing and completing all these elements. He is the Beginner, the Executor and the Completer of all things. He is intimately concerned with his creation, with Man in particular, and so with all that has its genesis and completion in Him.

and Christ will be the Husband of his Bride the Church. Thus creation marriage is a *type* of that Marriage—or two Marriages—to come. This Divine-human Marriage with Israel and the Church not only shows the way men and women should go about marriage, but it is also a reflection and expression of the Unity which was—and is—in the Triune Community. God, in this sense, made the creation marriage a reflection of what was yet to come: the Marriage with Israel and the Marriage with the Bride and the Lamb. In that sense marriage was looking ahead, and it was, in one sense, prophetic. If this be the case, then our view of marriage on this understanding should be even more heightened.

Well, was, and is, this the case? Bromiley shows that at creation marriage was a type of what was to come. We have somewhat of a parallel of this kind of typology in Romans 5:12–21 where Adam was ‘a type of the one to come’—Christ. Adam was a type of failure, but the main point is there was another Adam to come: the one called the ‘second’ and the ‘last’ Adam, that is, the true Adam. By comparing the two we can see how Christ is the true one. We can then know what is sometimes called ‘the archetype’. In printing, the archetype was the metal type-face from which the ectype or copy was made. In this sense God’s Marriage with Israel, and Christ’s with the Church, is the archetype. Just to test this out, we may ask whether Christ’s love is truly *agape*, and whether he would ever divorce his wife the Church. The answer is obvious.

At this point we need to notice that Bromiley includes elements which are soteriological; that is, that marriage has to do with salvation, but we will shortly deal separately with this factor.



Karl Barth speaking of Genesis 2:24 says:

... as this whole second account of creation ... is permeated by the reference to God's gracious covenant with Israel as the internal basis of creation itself, the same is true of its conclusion ... it envisages the most important Old Testament relationship in which Yahweh is represented as the faithful Lover, Bridegroom and Husband of this people, and the latter as the equally unfaithful beloved, bride and wife ... In the New Testament Yahweh and Israel are Christ and His Church ... Indeed, now that its prototype—Christ and the community—has emerged as a historical reality, it [marriage] can and must receive quite a new consecration ... as a representation of what is its essence according to Gen. 2:18–22.⁴

Barth is saying that the account of Genesis 2:18–24 is not only typological but also prototypological of God and Israel and so of Christ and the Church. He agrees that it has direct reference to the first couple, but that it is not confined to it.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt 4, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1969, pp. 142, 143.

'One-Flesh' Union and Marriage Are Not Only an Ontological Creation Ordinance—II

MARRIAGE IS PROPHETICAL IN THAT IT CONSTITUTES A MYSTERY

The principle of the Marriage of Israel and God—the Marriage of Christ and the Church—tells us that the creation ordinance did not begin and end at creation, just to be repeated endlessly in all marriages until the end of time, but was intended to be prophetic of that coming Marriage. Even so, the essence of the creation ordinance was the 'one-flesh' union, and no future marriage would be other than that. That is why Paul uses Genesis 2:24 when referring in Ephesians 5:31–32 to the Marriage of Christ and his Church:

'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This



mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The ‘profound mystery’ is really that Genesis 2:24 referred primarily to the Marriage of Christ and his Church. What would make it a mystery is that (i) it was not made evident in the original words that its reference was to the coming Marriage, and (ii) a mystery always remains a mystery until the moment when it is time for it to be revealed and, so, properly understood.

Helmut Thielicke, in referring to Paul’s words, says:

On the basis of this ‘symbolic’ character of marriage, Ephesians 5:32 speaks of a ‘mystery’ . . . In the New Testament the term ‘mystery’ is always used in the sense that a visible, earthly reality or process becomes a similitude of the transcendent sphere of salvation, that ‘nature’ thus points to the ‘supernatural’. . . This kind of pointing or reference is called a ‘mystery’ because it cloaks and reveals at the same time: the mystery reveals itself to faith, whereas unbelief cannot understand it; ‘to him who has, will more be given . . . , but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away’ . . . Because marriage points to the order of creation and redemption it is a similitude of this kind and it also exhibits the same double meaning: for those who stand in faith within the order of redemption it *has* this symbolic character, whereas for others it can be merely a contract, a biological phenomenon, or at most a human bond. This is why the letter to the Ephesians calls it a ‘mystery’.¹

Another writer, Andrew T. Lincoln, speaking of ‘the mystery’ says:

‘Mystery,’ therefore, is not *any* deeper meaning of an OT text but precisely *this* meaning of Christ and the Church posited by this writer. Similarly, the mystery is not any marriage or marriage

¹ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, pp. 125–126.



itself, but the special marriage relationship of Christ and the Church. This is not a denial of the straightforward reference of Gen 2:24 by any means. Indeed, as we have seen, that interpretation of Gen 2:24 underlies the exhortation to husbands in vv 28–30. But even that use of Gen 2:24 depended for its force on the ultimate reference the writer believed it had to the archetypal union between Christ and the Church . . . It was because the Church was Christ's body which was one with him, a relationship which was the model for human marriage, that wives could be seen in terms of their husband's bodies.²

Lincoln then gives us a window into the Greek text of the statement, 'this is a profound mystery, and *I am saying* [*ἡγὼ λέγω*] that it refers to Christ and the church'; so he continues:

The emphatic *ἡγὼ* and the particle *δε* in v 32b make clear that the writer is stressing that this particular interpretation of Gen 2:24 as a reference to the profound mystery of the union between Christ and the Church is his own. If, in fact, it also originated with him, then presumably he reached it through a typological exegesis, resting on a correspondence between creation (Gen 2:24) and redemption (Christ and the Church). Christ has already been seen in Adamic terms in Eph 1:22 (the church is his body), and so a text that refers to Adam's bodily union can now be claimed for Christ's union with the Church. *ἡγὼ λέγω*, 'but I am speaking,' occurs also in the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, where it serves to introduce an interpretation contrary to the generally accepted interpretation of the Scripture passages in view.³

Excursus: A Note on the Radicalisation of Law

Lincoln's comparison of Christ and Paul radicalising the law should be noticed for future reference. For the

² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42, Word, Dallas, 1990, p. 381.

³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 382.



moment let us see that as Jesus radicalised the law of God in the Sermon on the Mount to restore it to its pristine (original) truth and form, so Paul—as had Christ—was radicalising marriage in the light of Genesis 2:23–24. By ‘radicalising’ we do not mean going beyond what God made it to be, but stating what God made it to be. If Israel had known the law of God in its true essence, then it would not have erred in the way it set forth that law. I think we may see that Christ so radicalised marriage that Deuteronomy 24:1–4 cannot be contemplated for true marriage, and certainly cannot be nominated as true law.

Markus Barth also has a passage which refers to the protological marriage as prophetic. He says:

Why does Paul quote Genesis, which belongs to the ‘Law’ in the Jewish canon, rather than a Prophetic or Psalm text? It is not sufficient to answer that this was customary, or that, after the many allusions to Prophetic statements and images in the hymn (5:25–27), an additional Prophetic reference would have looked redundant. Rather Paul intended to show—as he did also in Galatians and Romans by mentioning Abraham’s faith in God’s promise—that he respected the Torah (the Pentateuch) as the highest authority among all OT books, and that even such parts of the ‘Law’ that had evoked legal, legalistic, and at times casuistic debates and interpretations (the so-called *halacha*) were in actuality Prophetic in nature: ‘A man will leave . . . will be joined . . . the two will become one . . .’ The substance of this promise according to Paul is not only marital bliss: it is Christ’s love for the church. Therefore what Gen 2:24 says about union in ‘one flesh’ is for Paul a prophecy more than anything else. Marriage stands under the sign of God’s promise; it is not at the mercy of human traditions, laws, and their interpretation.⁴

⁴ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, Doubleday, New York, 1981, p. 732.



We can conclude that the 'profound mystery' is therefore what is intended by Genesis 2:24. Barth also says:

Indeed, according to Paul, the supreme love and the first work and effect of Christ were announced, promised, and guaranteed as early as the creation story. But creation itself, viz. the creaturely existence which God gave to man in the beginning, was only an intimation of marriage, not its ontological and ethical ground. Only Jesus Christ's coming, his love, his death, his dominion are the final, solid basis and model.⁵

All of this alerts us to the fact that 'one-flesh' union and marriage are of far-reaching importance, so that any infraction of the ontological Marriage will have important implications for marriage in its protological and typological nature, to say nothing of its soteriological and eschatological elements which we now proceed to examine.

⁵ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 731.

'One-Flesh' Union and Marriage Are Not Only an Ontological Creation Ordinance—III

MARRIAGE IS SOTERIOLOGICAL

Bromiley, Thielicke and Lincoln certainly show us that whilst the marriage is what we have called ontological, it is also intentionally protological and typological and is based—at least for God's Marriage with Israel and Christ's Marriage-to-come—on the soteriological: thus marriage is soteriological.¹ By 'soteriological' we mean it is based on the redemptive work of God. It can be shown this was so of God as Israel's Husband in saving

¹ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, p. 104:

... marriage rests upon a primeval order of creation and is at the same time incorporated in the order of salvation, in the sense that it has symbolical or parabolical force and is capable of representing the relation between God and his people, between Christ and his church.



her from Egypt, and it is so with the Church being saved by Christ in the redemptive act of the Cross. To quote Bromiley again:

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election. Analogically, what is between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the church, is also what is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife. Neither the intratrinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and his bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage as it is now lived out is a bad copy of a good original . . . It is simpler, however, because God himself took the initiative at the level of both original and copy. At the level of the original the deserted husband lovingly went to look for the erring bride and bought her back. He did this by offering himself, in the person of the divine Son,² as the price of redemption.³

Bromiley is telling us that in Israel God revealed the nature of marriage and His part in His union with the Bride Israel, and that this was linked with the redemption provided through His own Son for the Church. We will have occasion to go to the Old Testament to see God's relationship with Israel His Bride, and so to see the insoluble nature of marriage itself. What we do

² We will later see the Trinitarian work of redeeming the elect, the Church, but Acts 20:28 speaks of the Father's offering of His Son: '... care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son'.

³ Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, pp. 77, 78.



know from Ephesians 5:25–27 is the saving and sanctifying act⁴ of Christ to redeem the elect of God and make them his Bride:

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, 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.

This giving up of himself intimately and personally as in Galatians 2:20, ‘. . . the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself [up] for me’, and the love for the whole Church as in Ephesians 5:2, ‘. . . as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’, show the immense love Christ had, and has for his Church. Bromiley speaks powerfully of Christ’s redemptive winning of his Bride:

God the Son comes into the world as the heavenly bridegroom, rescuing or establishing his own marriage in face of the infidelity of his spouse or bride. To accomplish this task, which will carry with it the reinstatement of earthly marriage, he does two things: he bears the cost of human unfaithfulness and he breaks its power. *In these two ways he wins, or wins back, to himself a people that can finally be united to him in endless union. He also makes it possible for this people to realize to some degree on earth the creaturely copy of this union in human marriage [emphasis mine].*⁵

⁴ Here ‘saving and sanctifying’ together constitute the fullness of redemption. This is seen in ‘Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her’.

⁵ Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, p. 46.



THE IMMENSITY OF THE TRINITARIAN SOTERIOLOGICAL ACT

Christ as the Bridegroom does not simply save his Bride from perishing, although that is certainly true, but, as the new Adam with the new Eve, brings to history the renewal of all things. So Markus Barth seeks to give an answer to the question, 'What mystery lies in and behind the act of "becoming one flesh"?:

In Ephesians . . . Paul finds . . . a prophecy of the 'new' creation, even of the New Man and his Bride (2:15; 4:24; 5:25–27, 32) . . . In Ephesians . . . Paul's interest lies not in the intrusion of sin and its consequences, but in the intervention of the Messiah who has raised those dead in sin, who cleanses his Bride, and will appear for the wedding (4:13). Resurrection, forgiveness, the happy meeting at the Bridegroom's parousia—these eschatological moments are decisive over the personal conduct of the saints—even when married . . . Marriage is not the cure for, or the repair of, the damaged creation. Rather Christ's union with the church has effected an unprecedented situation: the new creation leaves no room for a dialectic tension or wavering between creation and redemption. Marriage is no longer explained as a 'creation order,' but as an expression of renewal of all things through Jesus Christ. Indeed, according to Paul, the supreme love and the first work and effect of Christ were announced, promised, and guaranteed as early as the creation story. But creation itself, viz. the creaturely existence which God gave to man in the beginning, was only an intimation of marriage, not its ontological and ethical ground. Only Jesus Christ's coming, his love, his death, his dominion are the final, solid basis and model.⁶

In the protological marriage, the soteriological is not implied or explicitly envisaged, but because Genesis

⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 731.



2:24 is prophetic, then it is also the ‘profound mystery’ referring to Christ and his Church. Thus it embraces the soteriological and, as we will see, the eschatological also. We note here Barth’s words that Christ’s marriage is ‘the final, solid basis and model’ for present human marriage. In this sense the human husband is to act savingly towards his wife—‘husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her’. We will later see how this would work out.

SOTERIOLOGY AND THE LAW OF GOD

If Paul is right in saying that Genesis 2:24 is prophetic and typological of Christ’s Marriage, and if it is linked with his soteriological act so that all marriage must now incorporate this saving nature of the Bridegroom, then how does that stand in relation to what we have called ‘the law *of* God’? The answer must be—as ever—that God’s law is of His own being, and its transcript is given to man at creation as primal law. At Sinai the law is personally delivered by God to His covenant people. It is also made into hard copy when written on the tablets. J. A. Motyer’s saying, ‘Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God’, tells us that ‘the recurring claim is not, “You must do what I [God] tell you” . . . but “You must do this or that because I am what I am”’. Motyer continues: ‘The Lord longs for his people to live in his image, and to that end he has given them his law’.⁷ This tells us that what is called ‘the law of God’ does not

⁷ Motyer, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 624.



exclude salvation. Jesus indicated this in Matthew 23:23–24 when he was addressing law-obsessed people:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

There can be little doubt that in speaking of ‘the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith’ Jesus included the soteriological in the law. Jesus rarely saw the law as a thing separate from the prophets; hence his statement:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17–20).

He had come to fulfil ‘the law and the prophets’; that is, to confirm and establish them as a whole. Whilst there must not be confusion regarding ‘law’ and ‘gospel’, and certainly no coalescing of the two, yet there must not be a wrenching apart of these inseparable entities. Israel knew ‘the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith’ in its soteriological system contained in the law. The very fact that God could save His Bride from her sins and establish her as His



Spouse—all within ‘the law and the prophets’—tells us that Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31–32 are not incongruous: what is written in the law, the Pentateuch, is not against the law of God, but the very outworking of it.

**CONCLUSION: THE SALVATION OF THE
BRIDE BY THE BRIDEGROOM TELLS AGAINST
THE ‘PUTTING ASUNDER’
OF THE ‘ONE-FLESH’ UNION**

Christ comes as the true Adam to make his Bride the true Eve, and to bring forth fruit to eternity—a matter we shall have cause to contemplate. Keeping the prophecy of Hosea in mind, we see that in his saving work the Husband refuses to abandon the sinful Spouse and insists on making her into the holy Bride. It is interesting to note Markus Barth’s comment on the rabbinic view of marriage in the law:

When the rabbis used Gen 2:24 to declare marriage a Jew’s sacred duty and to prescribe the right mode of sexual intercourse, they did not mention the Messiah and love. While they did not forget either in discussing marriage, their interest was concentrated upon other matters. In his allusions to the same Genesis text in I Cor 6–7, Paul mentions the Messiah, but not love.⁸

When we think that there is nothing about the law which for the covenant-member is not love, then the saving work of Christ for his Bride brings no dichotomy, but rather the vast wonder of grace and love.

⁸ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 732.

'One-Flesh' Union and Marriage Are Not Only an Ontological Creation Ordinance—IV

MARRIAGE IS ESCHATOLOGICAL

We saw the essence of the archetypal Marriage in Markus Barth's description of Paul's view of marriage. We quote again:

Paul's interest lies not in the intrusion of sin and its consequences, but in the intervention of the Messiah who has raised those dead in sin, who cleanses his Bride, and will appear for the wedding (4:13). Resurrection, forgiveness, the happy meeting at the Bridegroom's parousia—these eschatological moments are decisive over the personal conduct of the saints—even when married.¹

Barth sees the eschatological reality of Marriage and also its effects, as such, on human marriages—especially in

¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 731.



the community of the covenant—until that *telos* is reached.

With Bromiley we saw, ‘In these two ways he wins, or wins back, to himself a people that can finally be united to him in endless union’. Later in his book Bromiley concludes:

Finally, we must realize that as marriage has a christological original and a soteriological basis, so it has an eschatological goal. In a sense the original, basis, and goal are the same. The marriage of God and his people is the original. The achieving or restoring of this marriage is the basis. The glorious and eternal fulfilment of this marriage, after the episode of human desertion and reclamation, is the goal. God does not let his original purpose come to nothing. By way of the reconciling work of the Son and the regenerating ministry of the Spirit, he overcomes the threatened separation and maintains the union. In spite of all remaining opposition, he will bring his plan to joyful and victorious fulfilment when this age reaches its end and all things are definitively made new.²

ESCHATOLOGICAL MARRIAGE: THE TRINITARIAN GOAL OF HISTORY

We are now at the heart of the ‘profound mystery’ which is not simply that Genesis 2:24 is prophetic, typological and protological of the marriage of Ephesians 5:31–32, but that the ultimate in mind is the eschatological act of union and communion which flows from and with these nominated elements. God, in history, is about the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Nothing will quite reveal the mystery of God, of Christ and, so, of the Church, as will—and as does—this Marriage.

² Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, p. 80.



Robert Jenson in his brilliant book on Jonathan Edwards has mined precious mineral out of Edwards' *Miscellanies*:

Edwards' answer takes us finally to the center of his systematic reflection, to—'as it were'—his notation of the universal melody's fugal structure: 'To this I say, that the Son is the adequate communication of the Father's goodness . . . But yet the Son has also an inclination to communicate *himself*, in an image of his person that may partake of his happiness: and this was the end of the creation, even the communication of the happiness of the Son of God. . . . Therefore the church is said to be the completeness of Christ.' It is as and only as a factor in the plot of the triune God's inner life, that God has a need to overflow. In the *Miscellanies*, Edwards is beautifully simple: 'The end of the creation of God was to provide a spouse for his Son Jesus Christ, that might enjoy him and on whom he might pour forth his love. . . .' '[H]eaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse.' The church is *with* Christ the object in the triune love and so the purpose of creation.³

Jenson comments, carrying Edwards' thoughts further:

Christ is the agent and beneficiary of all events from creation to fulfillment; 'as Mediator [Christ] rules all events . . . so as to conduce to the good of his church, and to bring to pass the ends of his mediation,' for since 'God created the world to provide a spouse . . . for his Son,' so 'the spiritual marriage of the spouse to him, is what the whole creation labors . . . to bring to pass.'

³ Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 42. (I have not been able to give the reference to Edwards' *Miscellanies* apart from Jenson's own references to that work which he used for his writing from the original manuscripts of Edwards. The *Miscellanies* are not presently available in print.)



And Edwards does mean ‘whole creation,’ for the material universe is, we must remember, but the intersubjective field of the community of spirits that makes history. Thus he can, with supreme sophistication and naïveté, say, ‘the whole course of nature . . . [is] subservient to the affair of redemption,’ or again, ‘Every atom in the universe is managed by Christ so as to be most to the advantage of the Christian.’ . . . It emerges in the discovery not of God’s good in ours but of our good in God’s. And that is to say, the God the soul enters is the triune God, so that the soul can be one with God while yet God works his own will that is not necessarily ours; and the universality the soul appropriates is the encompassing fact of Christ’s history rather than of the soul’s own religious aspiration. I must quote one more piece of Edwards’ beloved spouse-mysticism, of a drastic Christianity I am not sure is elsewhere found: ‘There was, [as] it were, an eternal society or family in the Godhead, in the Trinity of persons. *It seems to be God’s design to admit the church into the divine family as his son’s wife* [emphasis mine].’⁴

No wonder Jenson speaks of ‘Edwards’ beloved spouse-mysticism, of a drastic Christianity I am not sure is elsewhere found’, for Edwards is virtually saying that all of history—call it ‘salvation history’ or what we will—is to find its goal and its fulfilment in the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. When we survey the ‘end things’ as they are presented to us in the Wedding Feast; the Holy City; the New Temple; the River of Life; and the Tree of Life with its leaves to heal the nations, and when we contemplate the hints given of the fruitfulness of the nuptials of the Bride and the Lamb, we can understand Edwards’ fascination of the Wife of the Lamb being admitted into the Divine Family.

⁴ Jenson, *America’s Theologian*, pp. 42–43.

The Triune God Working for the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb

THE MYSTERY OF GOD IN THE 'PROFOUND MYSTERY' OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL MARRIAGE

If we do not have this *schema* of Edwards which Jenson outlines, and if we do not grasp Paul's 'profound mystery' as integral to God's plan and history,¹ then the use of God's Marriage with Israel in the Old Testament, and the references in the Gospels, Paul's Epistles and the Book of the Revelation, will seem to be a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces have to be forced to fit, or perhaps which

¹ I am not saying that Edwards' *schema* as Jenson outlines it is all of Edwards' 'A History of the Work of Redemption' (in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1974, pp. 532–615) for Edwards went on from this survey to the richer elements contained in the *Miscellanies*, but his theology of the Marriage is so significant that an understanding of it could greatly enrich our own theology which has lived without it as a major element.



suddenly fit too well! Whilst the Marriage does not cover all of God's plan and purposes, it is certainly a very vital key to unlocking much of the mystery of God.

REFERENCES IN THE GOSPELS, THE EPISTLES AND THE REVELATION TO THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE ULTIMATE MARRIAGE

John the Baptist referred to Christ as the Bridegroom and himself as 'the friend of the bridegroom' (John 3:28–30); that is, as 'the best man' who, in those days, made all arrangements for the wedding and introduced the bridegroom. John must have had in mind Israel as God's Bride, and so Jesus as Messiah. J. O. F. Murray observes: 'In some real sense the Baptist testified that God Himself was in Christ betrothing His bride to Himself afresh'.² In saying he was the 'friend of the bridegroom', John was saying that Jesus, and not he, was the true Bridegroom. In fact the whole event was a momentous announcement of God's act in Christ in Israel. It was also a statement as to the Messiahship of Jesus.

In Matthew 9:15 (cf. Mark 2:19) Jesus certainly referred to himself—even if only figuratively—as the Bridegroom who was present. The rejoicing of Matthew's friends at the feast was likened to a marriage celebration. There is certainly some reference back to John the Baptist and his disciples, and Jesus is showing the difference here between John and himself.

² J. O. F. Murray, *Jesus According to S. John*, London, 1936, in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, International Commentary Series, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977, p. 241.

Two parables of the Kingdom are used in Matthew 22:1–15 and 25:1–13. The first is almost fierce in its insistence that guests come and, when they come, that they appropriately present themselves. The father-king gives a marriage feast for his son. His ‘everything is made ready’ is echoed in Revelation 19:6–10 where ‘his Bride has made herself ready’ and ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’. Without elaborating the Matthew 22 parable which tells of the Father preparing the Bride before she appears at the wedding, it appears that the Messianic Feast which Jesus speaks of is one with the wedding feast.³ The Matthew 25 story of the wise and foolish virgins again needs no elaboration. Immense joy is anticipated with the coming of the bridegroom. It is eschatological with the warning of preparing for the joy, and the event is not to be taken lightly.

In the Synoptic Gospels and the Epistles we have references to marriage as God ordained it. It is when Paul speaks of Genesis 2:23–24 as being the ‘profound

³ The parable of Matthew 22:1–15 is of a great wedding feast, as is proclaimed in Revelation 19:7ff. The parallel account in Luke 14:15–24 is occasioned by a man’s statement, ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’. Jesus calls the banquet, ‘my banquet’. In 25:1–13 the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is a Kingdom parable, and the feast, whilst a marriage one, is no less the Messianic triumph—those not at the feast are not in the Kingdom. The parable deals with ‘the good and the bad’—a feature of most Kingdom parables. To be shut out of the marriage feast is to be shut out of the Kingdom, and Jesus warns specifically against this. In the same vein Jesus speaks with his disciples at the last supper:

You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28–30).



mystery' that we realise we are in the situation of the revelation of that mystery in its various elements which we have called ontological, typological, protological, soteriological and eschatological. This understanding throws us back into the reality of God being Husband to Israel and Christ being the Bridegroom to the Church. The references in Revelation to the Marriage help us to further understand the mystery. They also help us to understand that 'the mystery is history' and 'history is the mystery'. They also help us to understand what human marriage is all about. They form a powerful basis for contemplating the issues of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Without the wider perspective we could not attend to the details within the panorama of human relationships.

THE TRIUNE GOD WORKING TOWARDS THE WEDDING FEAST AND ITS OUTCOME

We saw that the 'one-flesh' union and marriage at creation came from the Trinitarian Unity. The male and the female *together* constituted the image and likeness of God, and so we concluded that human marriage is 'all of God'. It is the work of His love. At the same time the Spirit and the Son are involved in the coming Marriage. The Three Persons of the Triune God are working to effect the Eschatological Marriage.

If the parables speak of the Father's work for His Son, then in John's Gospel (6:45, 65; cf. Matt. 11:25–27) it is the Father who reveals His own Son and draws men and women (the Church, the Bride) to Christ. It is the Father who initiates the work of the Cross and Resurrection out of which, and by which, the Bride will



be saved and cleansed. Hence Paul's 'God was in Christ' statement, and his saying, '... the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his Son'.

At the same time it is Christ the Son who is called the Saviour of the Bride (Eph. 5:23, 25; cf. I John 4:14). In whatever condition he finds her⁴ he gives himself for her, and so works that he sanctifies her—'having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word'. She is made splendid ('glorious': cf. Rev. 21:9ff.) and fit for her Spouse.

The Holy Spirit is no less in the preparations for the Wedding. He is the Revelator of both Father and Son (John 16:12–15), and without that revelation the mystery would remain undisclosed. It is he who brings the saving gospel to the elect people of God, the true Bride. Through the power of the Cross, the same Spirit sanctifies the Bride (cf. II Thess. 2:13–14; I Pet. 1:2; I Cor. 6:11). To continue: it is God the Father in Revelation 19 and 21 who prepares the Ultimate Marriage Feast of the Bride and the Lamb. The Warrior-Bridegroom returns from his victory over all evil powers to usher his Bride into the fit home he has been preparing for her (cf. John 14:1–10), but prior to this the Bride must go through certain preparatory rituals.⁵ 'Made herself ready'; 'clothed with fine linen, bright and pure'; 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' so that she has 'the glory of God' are all statements made about this preparation.

⁴ Do we here think of God as Husband to Israel and of Hosea's prophecy and that of Ezekiel 16 and 23 in regard to the Church?

⁵ These rituals are seen in the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Esther, and in the Song of Songs, but they happen in all thoughtful, contemporary wedding preparations. Few cultures would be found without them.



In all this the Holy Spirit has been working as one with her until the point when ‘The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come”’, and all the elect, hearing this, also say ‘Come’, for that has been the church’s cry through the preparatory ages—‘*Maranatha*: Lord, Come’. It seems God’s design to admit the Church into the Divine Family as his son’s wife is now to take place. Had the Son not become incarnate he could not have had a human Bride and he could not have conducted her to the Godhead and so inducted her into the mystery of that same Divine Family. Now humanity is joined to marvellous Deity; is a partaker in the Divine nature; and the plan for history has reached its *telos*.

For our part this excursion into the nature of the ‘profound mystery’ opens the way for us to approach present human marriage with eyes wide open as to its nature, and with the knowledge that it is a primary ordinance in the eyes of God. The law of God has at its heart the law of marriage, and so must be approached with humility and awe.

Marriage in the Old Testament—I

COVERAGE OF MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

When we realise that the Pentateuch was written from within the community of covenant with Yahweh, and that the doctrine of creation was basic to Israel's understanding of God, His covenant-community, and His Kingship of the world, then to describe marriage as though it were merely a cultural ordinance would be only to define its practice within the modes, function and laws of the community. The creation accounts of marriage help to define its true nature; and the account of the Fall and its consequences for man-woman relationships help us to see the problems which face human society because of the departure from full creaturehood to the hoped-for autonomy of being individuals, rather than being persons in community—the true state for marriage and ensuing familial life. What, then, was creational marriage?



THE CREATION ORDINANCE OF MARRIAGE

The primal Man was created in the image and likeness of God. He was created male *and* female. His unity of being within the polarity and union of male-female relationships derived from the Unity of the Triune Godhead. Without this he was not in the image and likeness of God. Whatever sense there may have been of the female being innate in the Man, the male—Adam—recognised her as part of his being: ‘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’. Eve was not a female created by God at the time of the male, Adam, and then brought to union—which was the biological fact for animals. In Genesis 1:28 God blessed them. Their union was blessed by God—a factor not to be overlooked. It was all part of creation being ‘very good’. At the same time their union was with a view to their vocation, which, itself, included their functions. To think of union outside of vocation is to miss the point of it. Fruitfulness in producing children was also linked with stewardship over the whole creation. Only in this context and perspective do we realise what marriage is.

As we have seen, the man makes the woman his priority in relationships, in some sense deciding against his parents in favour of a special union with his wife. The dynamics of their relationship are determined by their premarital chastity, the social reality of the wedding ritual and the physical union of their being via their male-female sexuality. The ‘one-flesh’ union is final and is intended to be inviolable.

If we remember that this reality of marriage exists prior to the Fall, and that the Fall cannot alter what is



ontological but can only effect variations from the primal order, then when we come to marriage within the Old Testament we will have, on the one hand, testimonies to the beautiful reality of the pre-Fall union and, on the other, evidences of the divisive powers of the Fall along with the sufferings which are part of the punishment and the curse for the Fall.

CREATION ORDINANCE NOT TO BE TREATED IDEOLOGICALLY

As we have suggested previously, the union of the primal couple operated in their innocence. The union came out of the *agape* of God.¹ We take it that in all human beings the ontological thrust is present, even if denied because of human sinfulness. The moment we idealise the primal marriage and devise an ideology in order to correct the ills and spills that come from post-Fall marriage, we are creating a principle and law that is apart from God. All that is holy law is known only in union with God whose grace will surely enable us to live in the best ways of marriage as we are dependent upon Him. Without doubt the

¹ The verb *agapao* is used in the command for husbands to love their wives in Ephesians 5:25, and it is not to be supposed that a higher order of love than *eros* is commanded because of the redemption of the married couple. The love and unity of the original couple derived directly from God. The soteriological element of love would always have been present in God. We might even suppose that the primal man, rightly operative, ought to have 'saved' his wife from the incursions of the serpent. This, of course, is only speculation.



'hardness of heart' of which Jesus spoke began in marriage at the Fall.

At the same time we have many passages which speak of the beauty of the man-woman relationship. Perhaps the richest of these is the Song of Songs, with all its variety of joyous testimonies to the love of a couple. Also rich are statements such as 'A good wife is the crown of her husband'; 'A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels', which are found in Proverbs 31. Likewise we have so many examples of that love which today we call 'romantic'. We have the loving patience of Jacob as he seeks to win Rachel when he 'served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her'. There is a lovely reference in Proverbs 5:18–19:

Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
a lovely hind, a graceful doe.
Let her affection fill you at all times with delight,
be infatuated always with her love.

Thus the picture that is presented to us of women subjugated within a cast-iron patriarchal system is not always true to the facts. Within the cultural orders there was room for the true romance of man and woman, and perhaps, in many cases, more protection than now for secure relationships. To pass by the relational codes for life as set out in the Pentateuch is to ignore the vitality of the community in its worship and practice, and its sociality that was known in a dynamic community. Had this not been so, then idolatry could never have been viewed as so reprehensible.



THE LAWS OF MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Under this heading we would be talking of marriage as we find it in the ‘pre-history’ section of Genesis chapters 1–11; of the patriarchal ways of marriage; and the forms and precepts for marriage and families within Israel. However, this subject is beyond our present limited coverage, and we need to examine it in the detailed literature available to us.²

Marriage as Relational–Functional in Covenant

What we have to keep in mind is the fact that there was a hierarchy of function of the man and the woman in the creation ordinance by reason of the derivation of the two: a hierarchy which Paul reveals in the idea of ‘head’ and ‘body’ in I Corinthians 11:3 where the Divine and the human meet in a practical outworking of marriage. The idea of hierarchy is abhorrent to much modern thinking, especially to egalitarian thinking in an age when we are seeking to democratise all systems—a principle or ideology which by no means has as yet proved itself. Hierarchy,

² See the articles on ‘marriage’ in various Bible and Theological Dictionaries such as *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1987); *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 4, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1977); *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1980); *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1990); J-J. von Allmen’s *Vocabulary of the Bible*, (English Translation, Lutterworth Press, Great Britain, 1959); G. Bromiley’s *God and Marriage*; Helmut Thielicke’s *Theological Ethics*, and other sources indicated in the bibliographies of the articles.



rightly understood, may provide resources of love and wisdom yet undreamed of.³ We also have to keep in mind that the man is to *rule* over the woman and that this is a responsibility which must be undertaken, and which can be worked out in ways of love—benign—or ways of dominance—malignant. We always, and rightly so, register protests at injustice, but often we judge other cultural structures from the viewpoint of our cultural or ideological mores. I think a delving into Israel's covenant structure; our understanding of its background of creation and covenant thinking; and our post-Israel understanding of the Trinitarian Love-hierarchy may give us a new understanding of Divine Fatherhood and family, and a richer understanding of what we call 'patriarchalism'. Without doubt all forms of relational living are subject to misuse and abuse, but we must not miss the wood for the trees. Modern views of marriage and family are difficult enough to form in the present unprecedented flux of human relationships without us being critical of past cultures in which, perhaps, the maximum security of clans and tribes was secured in a way better than we have yet been able to fix and stabilise.

THE WAY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PRESCRIBED

An examination of the legislation in Israel for marriage, its guidance and protection can be found in Exodus 21ff.,

³ See my *All Things are Yours* (NCPI, Blackwood, South Australia, 1991), in particular the Appendix: 'Superordination and Subordination', pp. 101–127.



Leviticus 19ff. and Deuteronomy 21ff.⁴ The ‘Ten Words’—also called ‘The Ten Commandments’—spoken personally and directly by God to Israel, deal with marriage and family in a strong manner. Marriage and family are inseparable and each must be thought of in the light of the other. Honour to parents, prohibition of adultery, and the unmasking of (sexual) covetousness show how marital and familial life was viewed within the covenant of God. If marriage is a ‘profound mystery’ to Paul, the ‘profound mystery’ obtained in Israel even if not explicated as such. The dismissal of Israel’s culture under the harsh criticism of ‘dominating patriarchy’ may require more justification than it has yet produced.⁵ The many accounts of love, family life and communal life—as for example in Leviticus 19—show us that life was not lived as a rigid, personless contractual ‘covenant’ but teemed with warm life. The Song of Songs could not have emerged from low-grade views and experiences of life.

MARRIAGE AS COVENANT

Only if we understand the unilateral nature of God’s covenants with Man through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets will we understand something of

⁴ Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, pp. 16–18.

⁵ I recognise that these last few paragraphs could be criticised as ‘special pleading’. I think, nevertheless, that until we understand the Fatherhood of God from the revelation of Him as the Son brought it to the human race, we cannot get behind the reality of God as Covenant-Father to Israel, and so how covenant-fathers are given the responsibility of fulfilling their part of the marital–familial hierarchy, as covenant-wives and mothers also were to fulfil theirs. I think this is a vast area of relational living yet to be fully researched.



what the husband meant as he simply said, 'I take you as my wife'; that is, marriage in Israel was a unilateral covenant. If we take marriage within the covenant of Israel with God to be a covenant⁶ of like nature, then this has rich implications. God's covenant is unilateral and is not as such a contract; that is, it is not *legal*. It does, however, carry obligations—the obligations of faithfulness which respond to the grace of loving covenant.⁷ Note in Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14 the relationship of the 'companion of her youth', 'the wife of your youth', 'your companion'. The relation descriptions are beautiful and are one with 'the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe'. Here one does not find the wife the mere object of the man's sexuality and the virtual slave of her husband. Often when we research other cultures we do so in the light of the mores of our own, and may sometimes miss the wood for the trees.

If we look at marriage as protological of God's covenant with Israel, then it is not primarily a matter of hegemony (leadership or predominant influence exercised

⁶ O. J. Baab in the article 'Marriage' in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 284, says:

In the Bible marriage is regarded as a covenant entered into by two families who thereby form an alliance through their representatives, the bridegroom and the bride. So marriage is both personal and communal.

⁷ Some commentators argue that marriage in Israel was not a covenant. Those who argue it was use Proverbs 2:17, 'who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God', and Malachi 2:14, 'Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant'. It can easily be argued that the two references quoted may not of themselves mean that marriage was covenantal, other than giving the marriage contract this name.

by one state over others) but of the responsibility of love exercised within a functional hierarchy.⁸ This hierarchy itself arises from the act of creation—the woman being drawn from the man and he being her head, as Paul later states the case to be. This is brought out in the passages of the Old Testament which speak of Israel being the lover, bride and wife of God who is Lover, Bridegroom and Husband. The bride, taken by her husband in Israel, had security, and in regard to the dowry given, provision was made for that to be made available to her if divorced or widowed. Many commentators have said it was a better regime than that of Arabian culture. Israel, as the lover, bride and wife of God had security and love beyond description if those words could be spoken in Exodus 34:6–7.

⁸ For example, the (ontological) hierarchy of the Father, Christ, the man and the woman in I Corinthians 11:3. It cannot be denied that (i) it is a hierarchy, (ii) it is one of function, and (iii) it is one of love. I think it can also be shown that, as with all true hierarchies, it has a *perichoresis* that is a flow-on from the Divine *perichoresis* of the Triune Godhead.

Marriage in the Old Testament—II

GOD AS HUSBAND TO ISRAEL

Israel as Lover, Bride and Wife: God as Lover, Bridegroom and Husband

Here we have a wealth of material which speaks of God as Lover, Bridegroom and Husband, and, in the light of the early chapters of our book, this material is significant. It is no wonder that the Song of Songs was looked upon by many in Israel as allegorical of God as Husband and Israel as Bride. The story, as it can be put together from the prophets who use the imagery of love, betrothal, marriage and of an infidelity which is met with unconditional love, seems to be something like the following.

God and His Lover, Israel, in Tender, Youthful Love

In Jeremiah 2:2–3 God says to Israel, ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you



followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord'. Israel, it seems, was a devoted wife. In Ezekiel 16:8–14 there is a moving passage which describes how God, who had saved the baby girl from perishing, now prepares her for marriage: 'I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine'. There follows the description of her beautification for her nuptials, closing with, 'And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendour which I had bestowed upon you'.

The outcome of the marriage was disastrous. Israel became idolatrous and adulterous. The terms are virtually synonymous. Israel became involved in Canaanite worship. Any idolatry would be a refusal to love God with all one's being, but Canaanite worship was particularly abominable in that 'the cycle of seasons was believed to be intimately associated with sexual relations between gods and goddesses'. The emphasis lay on human sexual exertion to effect good seasons and fruitfulness and not—as, say, in Psalm 104—on the loving provision of Israel's God. This not only made nonsense of Yahweh being Creator and the Giver of all things, but it also made the idols the objects of the very convenantal love that should have been fastened upon God as Covenant-Lover and Husband. Throughout the Prophets the adultery of Israel is linked not only with idols but also with other nations and, of course, inevitably with their idols who were their gods. True life for Israel should have lain in the pure worship of God—'worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness'.



THE COVENANT OF GOD AND THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

One of our failures to understand God and His love for Israel, and so the truth of marriage, comes through a mistaken view of covenant as contractual—as a basically legal arrangement, so to speak. God’s covenant was unilateral—all of grace. Exodus 34:6–7 shows the nature of God in the face of the sin and obstinacy of Israel—already shown in their worship of the golden calf. Marriage is called a covenant in Proverbs 2:16–17 where the writer speaks of the promiscuous woman who ‘forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant¹ of her God’. Likewise in Malachi 2:14 the prophet says:

. . . the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.²

¹ O. J. Baab in his article ‘Marriage’ in the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 284, says:

In the Bible marriage is regarded as a covenant entered into by two families who thereby form an alliance through their representatives, the bridegroom and the bride. So marriage is both personal and communal. Our justification for using the word ‘covenant’ derives in part from the use by biblical writers of the figure of marriage to describe the covenant relation between Yahweh and Israel . . . and in part from the place of the covenant in social contracts of the biblical community.

² It can well be argued that these two references do not make marriage in Israel a covenant, especially as a contractual one. What can be well argued is that marriage may only be seen in the light of God’s covenant with His people. That covenant was unilateral and when the bridegroom said to his bride in a simple statement, ‘I take you as my wife’, he said it in the background and context of the covenant-people who had received all the gifts of God for their living (cf. Rom. 9:4). When we forget the worship of Yahweh was the heart of human living, we miss the Divine dimension in Israel’s sociality. Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt 4, pp. 142–143) argues from the second account of creation (Gen. 2:18–25), saying:



So it is that the first prophet to show, under the figure of marriage, the faithfulness of God in the midst of Israel's unfaithfulness as a wife, was Hosea in the 8th century B.C. It is Hosea's theme that is reflected in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and even Malachi. Whilst some structural elements in the prophecy of Hosea are puzzling, the message is clear. Hosea's lover was, has been, or becomes, a prostitute. Her children are not fathered by the prophet. In the figure, God, the Husband of Israel, hates the children for they are not His own. Even so God will not abandon her. Whilst she has lived in promiscuity and wrongly attributes her 'good things' to the Baals, God will so hedge her around that she will ultimately be shut up to her first husband, 'Then she will say, "I will

It does, of course, point to the divine basis of love and marriage as the due fulfilment of the male-female relationship. But as this whole second account of creation, without prejudice to the concreteness of its statements in their direct sense, is permeated by the reference to God's gracious covenant with Israel as the internal basis of creation itself, the same is true of its conclusion. Beyond its direct statements it envisages the most important Old Testament relationship in which Yahweh is represented as the faithful Lover, Bridegroom and Husband of this people, and the latter as the equally unfaithful beloved, bride and wife. It also envisages the perfect form of this relationship to be brought about by Yahweh, an imminent betrothal between Yahweh and Israel 'in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies' (Hos. 2:19), in which the faithfulness will not be one-sided, but mutual. To be more precise, Gen. 2:24 regards the male-female relationship in the light of this great theme running through the whole of the Old Testament. Therefore when a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, becoming one flesh with her, this takes place because God in His election of Israel and covenant with it has bound Himself so recklessly with this people, making Himself one with it so unreservedly and with such promise... And it should now be clear that if we take into account this equation and therefore this fulfilment of Gen. 2:24 and the rest of the Old Testament history of promise we are inevitably led to a different evaluation of the relation between man and woman.



go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now”’. God will denude her of all things, bringing her to shame and desolation. Having done that, God will have, as it were, a new day of wooing and betrothal. Hence in Hosea 2:14–20 God says:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
 and bring her into the wilderness,
 and speak tenderly to her.
 And there I will give her her vineyards,
 and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
 And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
 as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.
 And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, ‘My husband,’
 and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the
 names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned
 by name no more. And I will make for you a covenant on that
 day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the
 creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the
 sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in
 safety. And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to
 me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in
 mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall
 know the LORD.

Not only will Israel be His newly wooed and betrothed
 Bride, but her children will be accepted and made the very
 children of God:

And in that day, says the LORD,
 I will answer the heavens
 and they shall answer the earth;
 and the earth shall answer the grain,
 the wine, and the oil,
 and they shall answer Jezreel;
 and I will sow him for myself in the land.
 And I will have pity on Not pitied,
 and I will say to Not my people, ‘You are my people’;
 and he shall say, ‘Thou art my God’ (Hosea 2:21–23).



What needs to be grasped is that God views His Marriage with Israel seriously. It must be ‘holy marriage’, conforming with the revelation of the man-woman ‘one-flesh’ union of Genesis 2:24 and the revelation through the ‘Ten Words’, confirming the holiness of marital love and the family it brings into being. When there is infidelity such as Israel shows, there must be judgment. That judgment must bring repentance and when repentance comes then—and only then—can restoration be truly effected.³ This is seen clearly in the passages we are about to examine, but perhaps as strongly as anywhere in Ezekiel 16:35–58. In verses 42–43 God says:

So will I satisfy my fury on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you; I will be calm, and will no more be angry. Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things; therefore, behold, I will requite your deeds upon your head, says the Lord GOD.

Even so, the incredible marital love of the Divine Husband is seen in verses 59–62:

Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am

³ The idea of God’s forgiveness must never be seen apart from His holiness. His love is a holy love. It demands repentance not only for the vindication of his own holiness but also that the repentant one may know forgiveness as the total removal of guilt and pollution. Without such there can be no evocation of responsive love. For love to cover up sin and so to ignore it that some rapprochement may be made between sinful Man and holy God is a travesty of redemption.



the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.

It does not seem out of place to indicate here that for persistence in love with an adulterous spouse God, the True Husband, is the paradigm, and also—if we may use the term—the archetype for the human ectype. The provision in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 for divorcing a spouse of ‘indecent’ seems to pale in the light of such marriage *agape*. Forgiveness within the marriage banishes the matter of divorce.

Marriage in the New Testament: Jesus and Marriage

THE MATTER OF JESUS AND MARRIAGE IN THE GOSPELS, THE EPISTLES AND THE REVELATION

We saw in previous chapters that the New Testament speaks strongly in terms of the Eschatological Marriage—that of the Bride and the Lamb. John the Baptist referred to Christ as the Bridegroom (John 3:25–30), and Jesus also used this language, applying it to himself (Matt. 9:14–17). He introduced the true idea of marriage into the Sermon on the Mount and, when approached about marriage by the Pharisees, gave his own understanding of it in clear terms. It is possible to join his two parables of Matthew 22:1–14 and 25:1–13—which are wedding parables—with his references to the Messianic Feast (Luke 22:14–18, 28–30). Certainly the Marriage Supper of the Bride and the Lamb seems to envisage this victory feast (Rev. 19:6–9; cf. 21:1–21).

We have already seen that the Father prepares the Bride for Christ and that Christ anticipates the teleological



nuptials, and that in some way the Holy Spirit is linked with the holiness of the eschatological Man and Woman. So in the sense of all these things, Jesus' mind was occupied with them, and his understanding of his role and goal in history very much pertained to them. Thus he knew himself as the Bridegroom, and his giving of himself for the Church his Bride¹ was part of the reason for his death on the Cross; and we conclude that the marital elements we have called protological, typological, soteriological and eschatological were always in his thinking and actions.

JESUS' VIEW OF MARRIAGE

It is when we come to look particularly at some of the details cited immediately above, that we realise how prominently marriage figured in Jesus' thinking. Thus in Matthew 5:27–32 we see that Jesus in his second antithesis² in the Sermon on the Mount does not abruptly introduce the matter of marriage, divorce and remarriage, but speaks firstly of the purity of mind which looks at human sexuality, secondly of the inviolate nature of marriage and thirdly of the impossibility of remarriage even if a divorce be granted for *porneia*:

¹ Ephesians 5:25–27; cf. 5:2; Acts 20:28.

² Some see six antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, and this may well be, but it seems to me that verses 27–32 are dealing with the one matter. The word 'adultery' here is linked with faithlessness in marriage, and so Jesus' words refer to holiness in that estate. His linking of what seem to be two antitheses, is 'It was *also* said'. It would seem they both deal with the one matter. Holiness within marriage is a theme in the Epistles (cf. I Thess. 4:3–7; Heb. 13:4).



You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; 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; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

We need to keep reminding ourselves that Jesus’ radicalising of the law was not, in fact, the introduction of a newer and higher law,³ but was simply the repristination of Primal Law from the inadequate, and often wrong, view which had obtained in Israel. In our language, Jesus was going back to the creation ordinance regarding marriage.

In Matthew 19:1ff. the Pharisees approached Jesus with a view to testing him regarding the matter of marriage and divorce:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man

³ This raises the whole matter, again, of Primal Law, Natural Law, the law given at Sinai, and Israel’s view of that law. It also raises the matter of conscience and law, and how law is viewed by sinful Man, and by those—also sinful—who live in God’s covenant.



put asunder.’ They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘For 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 unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.’

Jesus reply was simple: divorce was not part of the creation ordinance. That should have been sufficient as an answer, but they virtually disregarded it, citing the injunction of Deuteronomy 24:1–4, to which he replied that Moses had made a provision for divorce only because of ‘their hardness of heart’. This passage in Deuteronomy has been greatly debated, and we will seek to deal with it in the section of this book on divorce. It is sufficient for us to note that Jesus did not see divorce as part of the creation ordinance—part of the Primal Law. Mark 10:2–10 confirms this whilst Luke 16:18 does not even consider the Deuteronomy passage. The following passage (Matt. 19:10–12) was an in-house discussion (cf. Mark 10:10–12):

The disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.’ But he said to them, ‘Not all men 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. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.’

It bears out the fact that the disciples had grasped the radical nature of Jesus’ view of marriage which was that marriage was inviolate and permanent; there should be no divorce; and remarriage was inadmissible. It could only



cause adultery.⁴ His references to being eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven lifted the whole matter on to the highest plane—that of the Kingdom of God—and did not leave it on the lowest plane—that of the kingdom of Man.

It seems to me that the apostles had grasped Jesus' view of marriage and would have seen it as related to the creation ordinance, which, in turn, in Paul at least, has its wider soteriological and eschatological connotations. I believe, in regard to Jesus' view of marriage, that we are shut up, apostolically, to the Old Testament *prophetic* understanding⁵ of the inviolability of marriage, the matter of no divorce and no remarriage as shown in Jesus' own exposition of these things. There is also the wider question of Jesus' teaching as a prophet, or rather as *the* Prophet.⁶ In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is speaking

⁴ I am aware of the varying exegeses on these Synoptic passages but believe Jesus' words have the intent I here outline.

⁵ By this we mean that the apparent concession to divorce as set out in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 was to meet the exigency of men divorcing their wives and was by no means an apodictic law regarding divorce.

⁶ It was Calvin beyond others of the Reformers, and for that matter of all theologians, who spoke of the trifold office or offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. If we conclude that Jesus was the Prophet set out in Deuteronomy 18:15f., then we must also see him as the Priest—a matter which the writer of Hebrews has done so powerfully. If we look at his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount as also being priestly in the sense of Jesus being instructive (*torah*), then Jesus' teaching is even more underlined as the true *torah* of God the Father. In Israel the prophetic and priestly ministries and their functions are linked. In Ezekiel 7:26, 'Disaster comes upon disaster, rumour follows rumour; they seek a vision from the prophet, but the law perishes from the priest, and counsel from the elders', shows the normal function of prophet and priest. In Deuteronomy 17:8f. the Levitical priests, with other judges, are to be enquired of regarding judgments for justice. Malachi 2:7, 'For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts', further describes the place of the priest in regard to the law. Israel in Jesus' day lacked true prophets, and Jesus warned against the false



as the Prophet in that he claimed he had come not to abolish ‘the law *and* the prophets’ but to fulfil them. One of the meanings—and I believe the primary meaning—of ‘fulfil’ was ‘to confirm and establish’ the law, and this was certainly the function of the prophets in the Old Testament. The ‘I say unto you’, as we have seen, is the radicalising of an inadequate view of true law and the directing of his hearers to do ‘the will of my Father who is in heaven’, under pain of eternal excommunication. This certainly makes Jesus to be ‘that prophet’ of whom Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 18:15–22 and of whom Yahweh said, ‘And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him’. This is innate in Matthew 7:24–27, and especially in ‘Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them’, as also in ‘every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them’. The Sermon on the Mount must be taken no less seriously than the ‘Ten Words’ given at Sinai. There are not lacking expositors who claim that Jesus was the new Moses on the new Sinai, and that he was, in effect, the True Lawgiver no

prophets (Matt. 7:15–20). In Jeremiah 23 God himself warns against such, saying:

I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people.

Finally his office as King is likewise present, in that the whole Sermon concerns the matter of the Kingdom of God, and his authority in pronouncements is acknowledged by the listeners. Jesus did not gradually become Prophet, Priest and King, but was surely inducted into this trifold office at his baptism.

less than Yahweh was on Sinai. It can also be said that the Sermon on the Mount is a commentary or exposition on the 'Ten Words', the law given at Sinai.

Whilst what we say immediately above seems to be arguing a case for marriage as against divorce and remarriage, we need to observe that Jesus is not arguing a case in Matthew 5:32 but making an apodictic statement. Apart from that the issue is raised not by him but by the Pharisees, so that Matthew 19:1ff., Mark 10:2ff. and Luke 16:18 deal with the question which was asked in order to test him. It is Jesus' whole approach to the matter of marriage which should be taken into consideration; for example, the event of the marriage in Cana of Galilee; his approach to the woman of Samaria and the woman taken in adultery; his relationships with women; and then the even wider issue of his redeeming of men and women, thus translating women to a level not known in contemporary Judaism: the virtual emancipation of them from autocratic domination.

What we must not lose sight of is that Jesus viewed all the elect people of God—both men and women—as his Bride; for his being the Bridegroom, as even the Synoptics indicate, was continually in his mind. The fact that the apostles knew this mind is borne out in the Epistles, to which we now turn.

Marriage in the New Testament: The Pauline View of Marriage— /

If we go immediately to the Pauline passage of Ephesians 5:21–33, we will certainly discover that he bases all he says on the creation ordinance, but this along with the soteriological and eschatological elements of the marriage-union which we have discussed. Paul, however, has a body of ideas in regard to the creation of Man and the functions of the man as husband and the woman as wife, along with their places in the community of the Church. It would be good for us to look at some of these elements before we consider the Ephesians passage in detail, but these elements cannot be fully understood except in the light of the Ephesians passage. For example, I Corinthians 11:2–16 introduces us to the principle of marital hierarchy:

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.



Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. 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 woman ought to have a veil 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 woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.

THE MATTER OF HIERARCHY AND MARRIAGE

The key to the husband-wife relationship is the hierarchy of verse 3, ‘the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God’. Without doubt there is a hierarchy here. Failure to understand the hierarchy¹ will be failure to understand the

¹ J-J. von Allmen (*Vocabulary of the Bible*, p. 258) observes:

The married couple form a hierarchy, a reflection of that which binds Jesus-the-Head to His body which is the Church (cf. Eph. 5:22–33), and are besides in conformity with the creative purpose of God (I Cor. 11:8f.; I Tim. 2:13). The man is the head of the woman (I Cor. 11:3), that is to say, the one who gives her her *raison d’être*; the woman is the body (Eph. 5:28) or the glory (I Cor. 11:7) of the man, that is to say, the one who expresses, manifests, and reveals him (as the Church gives expression to Christ). The



‘one-flesh’ union. The hierarchy is one of love (*agape*) in which no member is autocratic and in which the egalitarian question, as such, does not arise. For the husband to be the head (*kephale*)² certainly relates to the creational happening of the woman being drawn from man, but the primal man did not create her. We have seen the intimacy of ‘she is bone of bones and flesh of my flesh’. The eternal generation of the Son from the Father who is *fons divinitatis*, and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son speaks of a hierarchy of love. There has to be a *prius* (that which takes precedence) of the Father, and this being so, a hierarchy that has its oneness

man sustains his rôle of head in loving his wife (Eph. 5:33; Col. 3:19), for in the Bible the exercise of authority is love; the woman sustains the rôle of body in submitting herself to her husband (Eph. 5:22ff.; Col. 3:18), that is to say, in being obedient to him.

See also his *Pauline Teaching on Marriage* (Faith Press, London, 1963, p. 39) where he puts the matter in a slightly different way, though without direct reference to I Corinthians 11:3, but with reference to Ephesians 5:21–33:

The Christian couple reflects further the whole Christ by reproducing, at its own level, the Christ-Church hierarchy: as Christ is the head, the captain of the unity which he forms with the Church, the husband is in the same way the captain, the head of the one flesh which he forms with his wife (v. 23). And as the Church is the Body of Christ (v. 29), so the wife is the body (v. 28, the flesh v. 29) of the couple-unity. In this sense, the hierarchic unity of the Christian couple links up with the creative will of God. *For grace does not invalidate the creation, but restores it by liberating it from the weight of sin* [emphasis mine].

² In my book *God’s Glory, Man’s Sexuality* (NCPI, Blackwood, South Australia, 1988, pp. 126–144) I have sought to grapple with this matter. In *All Things Are Yours* I have taken up the matter of hierarchy, especially in the Appendix ‘Superordination and Subordination’. Unfortunately the word ‘hierarchy’ is generally in disfavour today when the processes of democratising all relationships is proceeding. Even so, it appears that no sooner is a hierarchy levelled than a new one takes its place, and not always to the advantage of the members.

in communion, all members coinhering one another. This is the case with the hierarchy of I Corinthians 11:3, and in it the Divine-human *perichoresis* is operative, and *perichoresis* can never be confined within any hierarchy. Its nature as *agape* will always cause it to flow outwards from itself to the conceived family and then on to the world.³ We have to dismiss the image of a hierarchy being a superiority–inferiority functional arrangement and see it as a vocational hierarchy. Head and body—as in Ephesians 1:22–23; 5:21–33; cf. I Corinthians 12:12ff.—are not sectionalised but are intimately one. In Ephesians 1:23 the Head who is Christ gives his fullness (*pleroma*) to his Body the Church, so that they are one entity. This cannot be understood apart from the ‘one-flesh’ union.

In our Corinthian text above (I Cor. 11:2–16), the man must not cover his head: his headship must be seen, and the woman must cover her head that the relationship of herself as body must be seen.⁴ That the husband has a *prius* is said by Paul in verses 7 and 8. There can be no sectionalising of the two—the husband and wife—for they are ‘one flesh’, one body. Whilst the woman derives from the man, the man is born of a woman, so that

³ The blessing of God of the primal couple in Genesis 1:28f. was for the vocation of procreation and the stewardship of the created world. Marriage cannot be understood as being contained only in the couple: they must be fruitful. The man and the woman find each other in this work of fruitfulness.

⁴ I am aware that this explanation may seem simplistic, but since Paul says the man is the image and glory of God, and the woman is the glory of the man, then the text itself seems to indicate that *both* show forth the glory of God *together*. If the woman operates autonomously, that is, independently, then she is showing her own glory and the man lacks his glory which in turn is the glory of God. That is, the two together *represent* the glory of God.



neither may be independent of the other. *Communion* is the key to this fourfold hierarchy,⁵ and all things come down from the Father and, rightly understood, all things return to him through the *perichoresis*. The hierarchy is undeniable since ‘all things are from God’ (v. 12).⁶

J-J. von Allmen, in speaking of the hierarchy of the ‘one-flesh’ union, makes the claim that:

... the hierarchic unity of the couple is not, for St. Paul, the result of the Fall, but the expression of the creative will of God (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13), and it is not because Eve was seduced first (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14) that woman is to be subject, it is because God, in the beginning, drew her from the man as He will draw the Church from Jesus Christ. By its inward order too, the Christian couple thus joins again with the first human couple and miraculously reproduces it. To invite the woman to make herself independent of her husband (1 Tim. 2:12)⁷ or the man to make himself independent of Christ would be to deny or to fight against the creative will of God and His perfection.⁸

⁵ I have seen little of the fruits of research into the dynamics of hierarchy, especially the Divine-human hierarchy. Human hierarchies can never be an analogue of the Divine order because of the sinfulness of the society in which they are devised; for the autonomy of the individual is often heightened within them, and the superiority–inferiority concept is thus developed. It might be claimed that hierarchies must exist where Natural Law obtains and that, as such, they point to the transcendent hierarchies. If so, then those categories must only be understood in the light of *agape*.

⁶ That is, both men and women owe their existence to God, so that whilst woman is drawn from man and the man born of the woman both must keep in mind that they are not independent entities, each competent to live outside the ontological order, devising their own actions and intentions. As Paul put it in another context, ‘In him we live and move and have our being’.

⁷ von Allmen appends a note here, ‘*AuQentevv* means exactly: to act on one’s own authority, in an autonomous way’.

⁸ von Allmen, *Pauline Teaching on Marriage*, p. 46.

In the light of this statement the debated passage of I Corinthians 14:32–36 must refer back to the headship of the husband, for the woman who asks questions within the assembly (whatever her reason, motivation and mode) should have her husband as her first reference. In all our examination of the apostolic understanding of the man-woman relationship, we have to keep in mind the matter of the Fall, and man and woman before God and before all fellow humanity. The dissonance that came with the Fall does not alter the ontological relationship of man and woman, but it does deeply affect it, so that if we do not constantly keep in mind our human sinfulness, we will be making perfectionist demands on one another which will bring despair and resentment and widen the breach already made by the Fall.

Paul's statement in Ephesians 5:32 about the 'one-flesh' union and marriage arising from Genesis 2:24 gives us the cue of where Paul is coming from. He is coming from the same place that Jesus had come from—the creation ordinance. He is supportive of what Christ has said in the Gospels. So in I Corinthians 7:10–11 he says:

To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord,⁹ that the wife should not separate¹⁰ from her husband (but if she does, let her

⁹ In saying that the Lord gives a charge, Paul is saying that a clear objective direction has been given by Christ. To have a direction is not only helpful but it also indicates the true way of Christian living. When Paul goes on to talk about mixed marriages and possible divorce, he is speaking realistically in the light of what happens and how one should face such a situation. When he says, 'I say, not the Lord', he is surely saying that his apostolic advice is virtually what the Lord would say.

¹⁰ The two verbs used here are *chorizo* meaning 'to divide' or 'to separate' and *aphiemi* 'to send away', 'to dismiss', 'to let go'. Here they appear to be synonymous for 'divorce', the latter probably best translated as 'sending away by divorce'.



remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

He stays with the dominical statement in regard to ‘no divorce’. It is as though he is saying, ‘Christ has already given direction in regard to marriage, so let us accept that’.

It is when we go on in the text in regard to what has been called ‘mixed marriages’, that is, one spouse being a believer and one not, that it seems Paul may be making room for divorce. Here there is some sort of ‘exception’ which may arise from Christ’s use of the permission to divorce. Thus, ‘if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so’, settles the matter of separation. Nothing of what Paul has said about ‘no divorce’ is cancelled in that the spouse is to remain single, not remarry and, if possible, effect reconciliation. The statement ‘in such a case the brother or sister is not bound’ has been taken by some to mean ‘is freed from the marriage and is thus free to remarry’. This is hardly likely in the light of verses 10 and 11.¹¹ Nowhere in Paul’s whole disquisition is the question of remarriage raised.¹² However, in this chapter

¹¹ The practice of quoting one commentator against another does not prove the rightness or wrongness of a view or interpretation. All we can say here is that there is a body of exegesis which opts for the simple view.

¹² Bromiley (*God and Marriage*, pp. 67–68) speaks of Paul’s concessive statement:

This exception is not a concession to hardness of heart on the part of believers. It is an acceptance of the dissolution which is forced on believers by hardness of heart on the part of their non-Christian partners. Disciples have here no control over the divorce. They do not wish it and they have no responsibility for it. It may be freely stated, then, that ‘in such a case the brother or sister is not bound’ (1 Cor. 7:15).

This spirit is vastly different from that of commentators whose minds are switched to the possibility and legality of a second marriage, a point Paul does not raise for he is more interested, as Thielicke points out, in the community getting on with the business of the Kingdom of God. That spirit is surely shown in Jesus’ statement ‘for the sake of the kingdom of heaven’ in Matthew 19:10–12.



we are not concerned with the matters of divorce and remarriage. They will be the subject of a later chapter.

Marriage in the New Testament: The Pauline View of Marriage—II

THE PASSAGE OF EPHESIANS 5:21–33

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject 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, 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. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, 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.



The Setting of Ephesians 5:21–33

We should at least go back to verse 17 where Paul admonishes his readers to be wise, knowing the will of the Lord and so to be filled with the Holy Spirit which will result in true worship with thanksgiving. In the context of such worship, all relationships will be appropriate ones—those of husband–wife, parents–children and servants–masters—and all relationships go together, so to speak. They are the relationships of the godly human community reflecting the Divine Community of the Godhead. These relationships constitute wisdom, for wisdom is knowing the will of the Lord in regard to them. We also note this knowledge is in the context of worship.

Excursus: A Note on the Word ‘Equality’

It is fascinating to see how differently this word is understood. Its present, general use in society is egalitarian and linked with the ideology of democracy, and has its stronghold in humanism. It also seeks to preserve not simply the discreteness of each person, but each person’s autonomy.¹ Theological argument obtains as to the validity of either an egalitarian church or one with a hierarchical structure, the former often exegeted on the basis of Galatians 3:28. J-J. von Allmen says:

The New Testament, which has too great a love of men to yield to the myth of equality, is then making no evaluation by

¹ By ‘discrete’ we mean the distinctiveness of person which each human has. So in the Trinity the Father, Son and Spirit, although coinhering one another, are still discrete, and this as against individualism which is the bid to live autonomously over and against all others. Discreteness does not prevent communion. All differentiations of persons add to the common whole, the full body of Humanity. This is so in the Trinity.



putting man and woman in their place in the light of the relations between Christ and the Church: it assigns to them the place in which their vocation can and must be exercised, the post where God expects their free obedience, the situation from which they will be able to form themselves into couples, the spot where their initiatives, their wills will not shatter the harmony of creation.²

Bromiley uses the term somewhat differently:

Third, differentiation still occurs within the common salvation and the mutual service . . . Within marriage the differentiation of men and women, or husbands and wives, takes the form of order, of an ordered equality in which there is no superiority or inferiority but in which one is first and the other second. All the relevant passages make this point. According to Ephesians 5:23f., the husband is the head of the wife and the wife is to be subject to her husband. According to Colossians 3:18, wives are to be subject to their husbands . . . In calling for headship and submission, the direction of the Spirit is neither endorsing tyranny nor enjoining servitude. It is directing to the new life of Christ in which differentiation remains but only on the premise of reconciliation with God, of equality of salvation and service, and of mutual forgiveness and discipleship. It is a direction to order, but to an order of equality and love.³

Bromiley and von Allmen are of one mind regarding the differentiations, but their use of the word ‘equality’ differs. For von Allmen equality is a myth; for Bromiley there is ‘an ordered equality in which there is no superiority or inferiority but in which one is first and the other second’. I understand what the two men are saying—what they are getting at—and I agree with them as I comprehend the angle at which they are coming to their

² von Allmen, *Pauline Teaching on Marriage*, pp. 45–46.

³ Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, pp. 60, 61.

explanation, but my own understanding is that neither equality nor inequality exists before God, but simply the totality of each person and the ‘one-flesh’ union of the two in communion. Their totalities, so to speak, form the couple’s communion, not by cancelling the differentiations but by revelling in them. Undoubtedly words are symbols, the meanings of which differ, often, from person to person, but theologically the doctrine of the Trinity, whilst insisting on the fact that the Three Persons have deity, nevertheless maintains the *prius* of the Father and the totality of each Person within the indivisible Unity of the Triune Godhead. Thus the freedom of each Person lies in the communion of the Three. Likewise in the ‘two’ of marriage this principle obtains, deriving from the Trinitarian Unity as Man is in the image of God. The images which words represent to us have generally been formed outside of faith and in the autonomy of our own living. Only when the words are used in the context of revelation and the mystery of God and the gospel, do the images change from their transmogrified forms to their living reality. Since the thinking of fallen human beings is always self-centred, the change to being ‘other-person centred’ requires—and effects—this radical change of word meanings.

AN EXPOSITION OF THE EPHESIANS PASSAGE

In verse 21 Paul calls for mutual subjection out of reverence⁴(*phobia*: ‘fear’; cf. v.33, *phobetai*: ‘respects’, ‘fears’)

⁴ When holy fear of God—as against slavish and legal fear—is absent, so is respect, and the subject lives in pride and self-emphasis. Psalm 130:1–4 shows that forgiveness brings fear of God, and that kind of ‘fear and trembling’ can only have a good outcome. Thus we work out our own salvation with ‘fear and trembling’ and God all the while works within us.



for Christ, a term which is only used here in the New Testament. A holy fear is the context and environment which follows being filled with the Spirit and sees mutual submission as arising from Christ. Verse 22 does not repeat the verb, and so Paul may be beginning a series of submission relationships such as ‘wives to husbands’; ‘children to parents’; ‘slaves to masters’. The husband, in one sense, has submitted himself to his wife in marriage by leaving his father and mother for her. He has ‘died’ to the old relationships to become ‘alive’ to her. She is everything to him. There may even be an echo of Ezekiel 16 and of God’s refusal to abandon His love for His wife, Israel, and in that sense He submits to her, as we see also in Hosea. As He does this without surrendering His Husband-leadership, so here the wife must be subject to her husband. Of course, the Church is in mind with Christ as the Husband. ‘As to the Lord’ may mean that fear of the Lord leads the wife to submit, or as the Church submits to him, so the wife in this parallel situation submits to her husband. In all this passage we need to keep in mind that Paul is primarily speaking of the ‘profound mystery’ of Christ and the Church in all its elements ontological, protological, typological, soteriological and eschatological. At the same time the practicalities of receiving and applying these elements in the human marriage are to be kept in mind. Thus verse 23 repeats the theme of Ephesians 1:22–23 where Christ is Head of the Church and the Church is his Body, for he



has given his fullness to her and so she constitutes his fullness; and he has done this, having effected the Church's salvation in being her Saviour.⁵ Thus in verse 24 subjection of the wife to the husband parallels the Church's subjection to her Head, Christ.

If we forget the creational marriage and its ordinance which is reprimed in Christ, then we will think Paul is announcing a new law or going back to that part of the curse where the man shall rule over his wife. If the husband does not 'save' his wife, then she will not have cause to be in submission to him, for the Church's submission to Christ the Husband arises out of his *agape*.⁶ The Christian woman is first in Christ and then in her husband. Verse 25, which enjoins husbands to love their wives, is not a command outside of Christ's love for the husbands: indeed it is the source of their love for their wives. *Agape* comes to them only through salvation (I John 4:7–19), and as husbands love their wives—to whom also *agape* has come⁷—then that love is evocative

⁵ For the Church to be the fullness of Christ's body is the equivalent of I Corinthians 11:7 where the man is the image and glory of God and the woman is the glory of the man. Christ's glory is the Church and is shown by the Church.

⁶ How does a man save his wife? The word 'saviour' is not always used in terms of moral redemption, but for things such as protecting, guarding, liberating and so on. We could also argue that wives come to marriage with residual problems and whilst we must be wary of seeing these problems from the psychological point of view and so treating them, yet the true husband—by reason of their 'one-flesh' union—is with his wife in the working out of her salvation (cf. Phil. 2:12–13). It is interesting that in Titus 2:4 Paul says that the younger women are to be taught to love their husbands. In Ephesians 5 Paul does not enjoin wives to do this. Of course, there is the general injunction to love all persons (cf. I Thess. 3:12 and the Johannine Epistles).

⁷ This point in parenthesis is not here raised by Paul.



of wifely submission, again not forgetting that the vocation of the two as being one is in the experience of the 'one-flesh' union and God's intention for that union as seen in Genesis 1:28f. In whatever circumstances that arise, the husband is so spouse-centred that he gives himself up for her. Christ's giving himself for the Church is the archetype the husband has before him as well as the source from whom he draws for this *agape* giving.⁸

Verse 26 speaks of the intention of Christ's giving himself up to death for the Bride (cf. Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2): it was to sanctify her 'to be his holy bride'. Part of the wedding ritual is, in most cultures, the lustrations by which the bride prepares herself for pure union with her betrothed. Christ effects that purification by 'the water and the word'. If here 'the water' refers to baptism, then it is something radical in cleansing and an act never to be repeated, making the baptised one with the baptiser, and indeed is irreversible. The cleansing of forgiveness and purification from the guilt of sin (cf. Jer. 33:11; Ezek. 36:24–28; Heb. 9:14) bind the Church to Christ for ever. The word which sanctifies—'You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you' and 'Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth'—removes the impediment to reconciliation and makes Christ and his Bride one. Of course the cleansing by the water and the word amount to the cleansing of the Atonement. In Christ the husband has this intention of purification for his wife: she is ever to be holy. It is Christ's eschatological intention for his Church, for in Revelation 19:8 'it was granted her

⁸ As always, where there is a deficient view and understanding of the propitiatory love of the Cross, there will be a corresponding deficiency in the action of husbandly love.



to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure'; in 21:1ff. she is the holy city, coming from God who has prepared her as a bride for her husband and she has 'the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel'. This, then, must be the understanding, vision and intention of the husband which leads to his beautifying of his wife, especially as in the sinful human situation, 'love covers a multitude of sins'.

Since husbands and wives live within the archetypal betrothal and marriage, and together live out their ectypal⁹ lives, so the husband loves his wife as himself. As a fallen sinner he had lived autonomously, loving himself with a 'lethal love' and doubtless exploiting the woman. Now, transformed by redemption, he gives his fullness to his spouse, and she becomes his fullness, his body, of which he is head, and the two are 'one flesh', united in and by Trinitarian Unity. So the husband loves his wife and nourishes and cherishes her. This is ever the way of Christ with his Church.

Verse 30 says that all in the Church are members of his Body, which, as it stands, would seem to point out that we are all members of his Body the Bride. Some old manuscripts refer it to Genesis 2:23 when they add 'of his flesh and of his bones', this referring to the 'one-flesh' union or the woman's derivation from the man. Whatever the meaning of verse 30, verses 31–32 are the key to the whole passage or pericope. In verse 31 the

⁹ The ectype is the copy derived from the archetype: it has its being by reason of the archetype. Because God is Being, so ectypes have being—being which is derived and sustained by the archetype, be it the Father for human fatherhood, the Son for human sonship and the Church—'the mother of us all'—for the wifely and motherly ectypal living.



creation ordinance is that the man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh. In verse 32 Paul speaks of the ‘profound mystery’, which we have seen refers to Christ and the Church, and that this was its original, prophetic intention, now fulfilled in Christ and the Church. Even so, the primal couple was included in this, as are all couples, and so the sum of their ‘one-flesh’ union is that husbands must love their wives and their wives must have fear—reverence, respect—for their husbands; doubtless in view of the analogy or archetype of Christ the Husband and the Church his wife.

We have noted before that Genesis 2:24 is protological and eschatological. If, then, we can see the eschatological consummation of the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, we are encouraged, so to speak, to look back into the present to view the nature of marriage and the way of living in it. At the same time we must see the soteriological nature of marriage—that husbands and wives are made one through the Cross—and that in spite of continuing sinfulness and recurring imperfections in relationships, the grace which comes to us in and through salvation enables us in this penultimate age to live richly in our marriages. Knowing that human marriage is penultimate, we will not make it an idolatry or an ideology. Our hope and our mind is set upon the Ultimate Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and the eschatological sheds back its light, so to speak, on our present union and communion of human marriage.

Divorce and the 'Profound Mystery'

APPROACHING THE SUBJECT

In our day when divorces are in millions across the world, we must be sensitive in our treatment of the subject. Many are in pain because of what we might call the wrenching apart of a union given in creation: a union or fusion of two which cannot be divided simply by the pronouncement of divorce. Also there are the ramifications of 'single parent' situations resulting from divorce and remarriage; the divided loyalties and loves—to say nothing of hates—of the children of divorcees. We must be warmly human, sympathetic, understanding and empathic in the cases which derive from such separations. Even so, we must not surrender the biblical injunctions and teachings on marriage, divorce and remarriage, for in the long run it is only according to biblical principles that healings can come to ease the pain of these rifts. Certainly moralistic, judgmental attitudes will not aid in such healing.



The Difficulty of Our Subject

If we take the view that marriage is inviolate—that divorce was never to be part of created human experience—we are, nevertheless, faced with the *fact* of divorce. Somehow we have to come to terms with that. We then need to see whether, in fact, dissolving a marriage by divorce can really dissolve the ‘one-flesh’ union created by marriage. We are naturally faced with the subject of remarriage of a person, or persons, divorced.

We have already observed that few of us can claim complete objectivity in seeking to deal with these problems. Even when we genuinely desire to use the Scriptures as our guide we face the fact that exegetes or interpreters of various passages come to differing conclusions, and in some cases the biblical passages are reasonably capable of differing interpretations. One example of this is Isaiah 50:1:

Thus says the LORD:

‘Where is your mother’s bill of divorce,
with which I put her away?

Or which of my creditors is it
to whom I have sold you?

Behold, for your iniquities you were sold,
and for your transgressions your mother was put away.’

Interpreters suggest that (i) the question is rhetorical: God is saying his listeners cannot find a bill of divorce for there has been none, and (ii) ‘Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away’ makes it clear there was a divorce. This illustrates the problem of unanimity in seeing and interpreting the same text. Even so, we would expect



clarity on the matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage. I certainly do not intend to go into the enormous amount of text written on the passages of the Old and New Testaments relevant to our discussion.¹

What method, then, shall we use to examine the questions of divorce and remarriage, if, indeed, these are proper options? Surely we need to do what both Jesus and Paul did; that is, start with the creation ordinance. As we have seen, it was to this that both Jesus and Paul referred. To both of them marriage was inviolate and permanent. Helmut Thielicke has a section on the subject. He makes some 13 points the first two of which are:

1. Jesus declares that marriage in the sense of God's original order of creation is indissoluble and describes entrance into a new marriage as adultery (Mark 10:1ff.; Matthew 5:32, 19:1ff.; Luke 16:18).
2. This position taken by Jesus is maintained in the tradition of the primitive church. Only narrowly restricted exceptions justify a divorce: the *porneia* of the wife and a mixed marriage in which the pagan partner demands or carries out the divorce (thus Paul in I Cor. 7:15).²

¹ This literature is extensive and in many cases detailed. An example of the latter is the work of Gordon Paul Hugenberger. His book *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1994), occupies over 400 pages of fine print and is an examination of Malachi 2:10–16. His work is eminently justified but it shows how contraverted are the various scholarly interpretations of this passage. On the other hand we have a simple discussion by four authors (J. Carl Laney, William Heth, Thomas Edgar and Larry Richards) entitled *Divorce and Remarriage* (IVP, Downers Grove, 1990) which represents varying views of the subject and, of course, of the main passages under discussion. A person who has scarcely studied the subject could be quite confused by the varying arguments.

² Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, p. 163.



Thielicke then goes on to say that the two points above seem contradictory, but in fact they are not. He later says that Jesus, in radicalising the law to what we call its pristine state as Primal Law, seemed to be re-establishing Primal Law as law for all and preparing folk for the new aeon or age which, of course, is the Kingdom of God or the ultimate age. He points out this cannot be the case since there will be no marriage in the new aeon. It is clear from the passage in Matthew 19:1–12—as also in the Sermon on the Mount—that Jesus is talking to God’s covenant-people and exhorting them to true conduct *now*. At the same time he does this on the principle of ‘He who is able to receive this, let him receive it’; that is, ‘He who has an ear to hear let him hear’. He had said he had come to establish and confirm the true law of God. His faithful people will always hear him in this penultimate age and seek to act accordingly. In his statements on marriage, divorce and remarriage, Jesus was not out to set up a regime under which all would conform to his words³ as a ‘new law’ or as a reconstituted ‘old law’. His final words in Matthew 7 show the dire consequences of not hearing his words and so refusing to act upon them.⁴

Discursus on the Erasmian View

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466–1536), the great Christian humanist, brought into being what is now

³ Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees dealt with the questions they raised, and not the imposition of a law that was pure beyond that which Israel practised. His recognition of the *fact* of the so-called ‘exceptional clause’ was not a *commendation* of it, as the Matthew 19:1–12 pericope shows. It can be shown that he did not receive that exception, but he acknowledged that it was there for the hardness of human hearts. Submission to ontological correction cannot be legislated or enforced.

⁴ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, pp. 163ff.



known as 'the Erasmian view' which, apart from the exception of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, has generally been held in the Western churches since the time of the Reformation. In commenting on I Corinthians chapter 7, Erasmus provided a theological and homiletical treatment of the chapter but without a critical examination of the grammar. He also misunderstood Romans 7:2–3 as not applying to the matter of marriage and divorce.⁵ V. Norskov Olsen said, 'The Protestant theologians followed Erasmus in their commentaries'.⁶ The Reformers generally followed Erasmus, and today the Erasmian view is known also as 'the Evangelical Consensus'. Without doubt there has been a great body of theological reasoning to substantiate Erasmus' view, although:

In all of this, we should bear in mind Erasmus's concerns and his context. His main aim was to aid the salvation of people who were being told that there was no salvation outside the church and its sacraments. He operated in a situation where legalistic applications of the biblical teaching were resulting in extreme licentiousness.⁷

What we have to keep in mind is that the Western church had virtually not accepted divorce until the early 16th century. That it should have changed then is remarkable.

⁵ Few writers on the matter of divorce have felt the necessity to use the Romans 7:2–3 passage. One exception was John Murray in his book, *Divorce* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, 1961), pp. 78–95.

⁶ V. Norskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce: A Study of Their Interpretation from Erasmus to Milton*, B.G.B.E. 10, J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1971.

⁷ Paul Traeger, *Remarrying Divorced Persons*, a Study Research Assignment (unpublished), 1993.



Of course, if that change could be substantiated biblically, then it would have to be accepted.

Argumentation for Two Views

Argumentation has proceeded for a long time as to whether the Erasmian view is correct or whether the view held by the church fathers until the early 16th century is the true one. The materials amassed by both schools are vast. The same biblical texts and passages are gone over, time and again, by various interpreters. The task of presenting and evaluating these views is a formidable one, and I do not feel competent to make such a presentation, although my own reading of the matter is that there ought to be no divorce and so no remarriage. What I concede is that where there is hard-heartedness, then allowance is made for a spouse to be freed from the marriage; but, properly speaking, the soft-heartedness of love and forgiveness should seek to maintain the marriage.⁸ The situation of I Corinthians 7:15 means that if a separation is forced by the unbelieving partner, then that has to take place. Even so, in this as in other cases, there are no provisions for remarriage.

As we have said, it is a fact of human experience that divorces do take place. Also remarriages take place, and we have to come to terms with these two practices, but our point is that neither is biblical; neither comports with the

⁸ I recognise that 'soft-heartedness of love and forgiveness' are constraining elements which come with the gospel and were not built into marriage in the Pentateuch. In Judaism it was even required that a spouse—generally the man—divorce his wife for 'indecency' or 'the naked thing' and, as this was contemporary law, the spouse would be bound to do so. Even so, it was not according to Primal Law.



creation ordinance of marriage. The fact that Deuteronomy 24:1–4 acts, it would seem, as a concession should not be seen as a law-making provision for divorce, but rather a seeking to make the best of the situation where divorce is insisted upon. There is no law in the Pentateuch demanding divorce.⁹ It has been well argued that Deuteronomy 24:1–4 is a provision made to discourage divorce and certainly to discourage remarriage. Jesus certainly took it into consideration when arguing with the Pharisees in Matthew 19:1–12, but the thrust of that passage is that it was not part of the Primal Law. From the beginning the two were ‘one flesh’. They¹⁰ were joined together by God. No human being should dare to put them asunder. This was ‘the law and the prophets’ which Jesus came to confirm and establish as he radicalised the law from the forms it had taken in Israel over the centuries.

I am sure that those who take the view that marriage is inviolate and those who take the view that in the face of human sinfulness what was meant to be inviolate cannot always remain so—hence the concessive provision of Deuteronomy 24—both sincerely seek to face up to the practical situation in which sinful men and women live as

⁹ Where two were found to be committing adultery they were to be stoned (cf. Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22–24; John 8:5 *passim*). This, as a law, might not have been widely practised. It certainly seems to have fallen into desuetude by the time of the Gospels. The term *porneia* in Matthew 19:9 is explained variously by exegetes, some of whom argue it was not adultery.

¹⁰ It has been argued that it is not ‘whom’ but ‘what’ has been joined together that should be understood, but the argument seems to lack point and substance especially in the light of the pericope of Matthew 19:1–12, and I Corinthians 7:10, to say nothing of Ephesians 5:21–33, Romans 7:2–3 and II Corinthians 11:1–3.



couples. Both are convinced their views and their reasoning are correct.¹¹ I marvel at the intricate detail of theological and exegetical argument, and know that seeking to cover it all is most exhausting. I also appreciate the work and persistence that goes into this research and argumentation. As I said, I am not competent, and certainly not inclined to follow and—if it were possible—seek to sort out the whole matter. I feel sure there must be some helpful way to pursue, and this is the way I wish to take in the next chapters.

¹¹ In these persons arguing the case for and against divorce and remarriage, I do not include those who are impatient of biblical and exegetical argumentation and who believe they see the matter clearly and need no biblical support for their views. I am talking of those who are down-to-earth and use commonsense and who see the obvious, practical way to go about things, so that divorce is no problem and remarriage is really an obvious way to go to have social companionship and, in some cases, to provide a second parent for the children of a divorce. I certainly appreciate where they are coming from but do not think such solutions are necessarily what are the best, though I concede that they often seem to ‘work’. Jesus did not make his pronouncement on marriage, divorce and remarriage apart from the truth he had received from his Father, and the importance and authority of the pronouncements he uttered. He knew that men and women would do just what they desired to do—Primal Law or no Primal Law—but he did have words for those who had ears to hear, for those who were able to receive what he said.

The Marital Love of God and Man: The Love of Christ

THE NATURE OF MARRIAGE

I now propose to return to the material set out in chapters 6–10 which deals with the protological and eschatological nature of marriage, with some reference to chapter 12 which takes up the fact of God's love to Israel as her Husband. This latter chapter leads on to the New Testament teaching of Christ being Bridegroom to his Bride the Church.

I sense that argumentation on marriage, divorce and remarriage must continue to be interminable whilst those pursuing it are seeking to discover what is legitimate and what is not. Being creatures of conscience this will be natural enough, but being creatures of conscience means we operate according to the dictates of conscience. This is normal enough, but the conscience, *of itself*, is no guaranteed guide. It guides us insofar as it is related to two factors: (i) the view it has of God; and (ii) the view it has of law. These two images—or eikons—are always with us, and the only way to change the action of conscience is to have our images of God and law transformed, that is, biblically informed. Thus the conscience of a person has



to be informed of new materials for understanding, and convincingly so, or it will remain immutable on the former training it has had.¹

In respect to our subject, the conscience will have been trained in and by the culture in which we have lived and by the views set out to us to be biblical. By nature—even fallen human nature—human beings have images of God and the law, and so operate by such images. Only communion with God, through His word and by His Spirit, will assist us to know God truly; that is, as far as human beings can know Him. Since His law is the law of His Triune Being and is the way He subsists, then to separate that law from Him or to see it as a heavy imposition by Him upon us, will give us deficient views of Him and His law. Thus when we come to matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage, we will inevitably treat them along legal lines. If we fail to understand that human marriage has its being *within* the Divine Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, then we will miss the essential reality of marriage. If we fail to see that for us marriage is penultimate and never ultimate, then we will again have the wrong perspective on it.

We have to keep in mind that we have images of God, Man, creation and the law of God. What is eschatological

¹ The conscience requires study, and a concordance will enable us to do this. Not a great number of books are available, apart from articles in Theological and Biblical Dictionaries. Thielicke's three volumes on *Theological Ethics* deal with the matter of conscience more generally than specifically. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* (Collins, London, 1968) has two sections on conscience which are excellent. More extensive is Randall C. Zachman's *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Fortress, Indianapolis, 1993). My little book *The Conscience—Conquering or Conquered?* (NCPI, Blackwood, South Australia, 1987) could also be helpful.

is beyond what eye has seen or ear heard, or the heart of Man imagined (I Cor. 2:6–12). When we enter upon marriage we often do so with the greatest of ignorance as to its nature. We may understand many of its biological elements, and even be couched in some of its relational elements, but we may miss the heart of the matter; namely, that it is to do with the ‘profound mystery’: the fact that the primary Marriage is that of the Bride and the Lamb, and that our own marriages are prophetic of that Marriage and are ectypes derived from it—the archetype. Unfortunately, when our whole person is not informed of this, it will work with images that are deficient, and these will be the ones to which the conscience relates.

I am aware that some readers will wonder what all this talk means, especially those who had done social studies and approach marriage from what I call ‘the horizontal view’; that is, the view which comes to us by observation—that which we call ‘the scientific view’. What can be observed from this horizontal view may be valuable, but it is incomplete without the vertical dimension. The Scriptures give us this view if we will avail ourselves of it. It is this view we will now seek to expound. I propose to return to Ephesians 5:21–33; allied New Testament passages; and, in our next chapter, allied Old Testament passages.

THE TRUE MARRIAGE WHICH TEACHES US THE REALITY AND MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

In chapters 14 and 15 we saw something of the Pauline view of marriage. What we did not explore to any degree



was the nature of the love Christ had—and has—for his Church, and so the love that a husband should have for his wife. I think the problem we face today is simply that human love, which is not Divine love, will not face the relational problems that will always confront us as humans, especially because of the Fall. Our present social mores and expectations differ, rightly or wrongly, from those of our parents. Modernity has brought with it a different set of values. Marriage has virtually ceased to be regarded as a covenant, and the vows taken and given in the wedding service are more or less part of a ritual which does not resonate for many. Early this century P. T. Forsyth spoke of ‘leasehold marriage’. Today couples live together without marriage, thinking they can ‘try each other out’ or ‘get to know one another’ before ‘committing themselves’ to marriage. Often what is called ‘love’ is physical infatuation or what is sometimes called ‘chemistry’. By nature of the case marriage cannot be other than something which is covenantal, effects union and opens the way to full communion.

Eros and Agape

We have discussed the idea of *eros* as being human love which may reach to great heights, but, since its source is wholly human,² it does not ‘bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things’.

² I have suggested that *eros* is not wholly of fallen humanity, that it is the Divine love implanted at creation, but which has taken on our fallenness. It might be described as ‘fallen *agape*’, but what we understand as its sexual expression is nevertheless valid for all humans—for those in *eros* as well as *agape*.



Even those who claim to do these things in *agape* must acknowledge many failures along the way since pure *agape*-living is rare. They must also confess that but for God's grace they could not love in this way. It is little wonder that *eros* does not necessarily produce the marriage it would claim it could. At the same time we must recognise that innumerable marriages lived outside the gospel have been reasonable successes. This makes us wonder whether *eros* is not often exercised under the common grace of God, and so has some of the marvellous elements of *agape* accompanying it. Whether we like it or not, all humanity 'lives and moves and has its being in God'. 'He is not very far from any one of us.'

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR HIS BRIDE THE CHURCH

The passage we need to look at is 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, 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. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

The comparison for human, husbandly love is 'as Christ loved the church'. Christ's love is love that comes from the Father, the *fons divinitatis*. It is really 'the love of God [the Father] in Christ Jesus': Christ being 'the Son



of his love'. This love through which Christ 'gave himself for [us]' and 'gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' still continues; hence the ascription 'to him [Christ] who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood'.³ The love of Christ is not something we can dissect and analyse, for it would not then be love, since God is love. However, love is seen in its *actions*, and Christ's actions are described.

The First Action Is His Giving Himself Up for Her

This is giving himself up to the death of the Cross.⁴ He gave himself willingly, as at the same time the Father gave him up. He accepted the Father's giving him up. He was given up to death, which was the same as being made sin, and bearing our sins in his body, as also suffering 'the just for the unjust'. All of this is too terrible to contemplate, but contemplate it we must or we will not see the love which is his love for the Bride—'the joy that was set before him'. Even when we contemplate it, we will never reach the perimeters of that love. He takes upon himself the impurity and pollution of the human race. The Lord lays on him the iniquity of us all. He tastes death for every man. He pours out his soul unto death. He is laid in the dust of death. None of us can assess the horror and ignominy and shame that is visited upon him. We cannot possibly know the extent of this suffering for we do not understand the holiness of God

³ Romans 8:39; Colossians 1:13; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2; Revelation 1:5.

⁴ We need not here discuss any seeming hiatus in his will as some have seen in the prayer in Gethsemane.



and what affront our original sin was to Him, and how our acts of sin continually violate that holiness. We can only make pitiful stabs at understanding it all, but His love is borne in on us. Ultimately the Holy Spirit makes it known in our depths, for it is he who searches the deeps of God and communicates them to us.

The Second Act of Love Is His Purification of His Bride

It is part of the work of the Cross, for the blood of Christ purifies the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Paul says, 'But you were washed, but you were sanctified'; and the author of Hebrews speaks of 'our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water'; whilst Peter speaks of the sprinkling of Christ's blood and says, 'having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth'. He also speaks of baptism 'not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience'. The same Peter had said of the previously unclean Gentiles, 'God . . . cleansed their hearts by faith'. In that purification there is the cleansing from the guilt and pollution of sin, and in sanctification there is the separation of his Bride from the world, and her inclusion into—or as—the people of God. The fruits of the Cross are seen in baptism which washes by 'the word of the Cross'. Without this word baptism is only an ineffective ritual. The word cleanses and sanctifies as Jesus had said it does, and it does so irreversibly. As baptism was the sign and seal of discipleship, so the effective cleansing of the Bride is proof against any divorce of this Couple.



The Third Work Is the Beautification of His Bride

The Bride whom Christ first envisages and then transforms is taken from the flotsam and jetsam of fallen humanity. The ‘washing of [the bath of] regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’ is what beautifies the new Woman. She is to be prized for her innate holiness. She is to be beautiful, glorious, unblemished. The old spots and wrinkles must give way to new bridal beauty ‘having the glory of God’. All this is effected from the ‘Skid Row’ of derelict humanity—out of every race, out of male and female, out of bond and free.

The Fourth Work Is the Making His Bride To Be His Own Body

Not until he came was this part of the ‘profound mystery’ revealed. No husband ever thought of his wife being his body and he her head. No husband ever gave the fullness of himself to his wife, henceforth never to be sectionalised as ‘head’ and ‘body’ but as ‘one flesh’. The pleasurable and gratifying bodily union of the couple may stop short of the vocational union and intention of the two as ‘one flesh’, but not so with Christ and his Bride. Her holiness, purity and beauty are to be part of the vocation the Couple will pursue in both time and eternity as they move to the Eschatological Marriage and the fruits of its accomplishment.

EPHESIANS 5 AND THE SONG OF SOLOMON

It is at this point we take up the Song of Solomon and see how the bride is caught up in passionate love and

adoration for her lover, and how he no less loves and adores her. The Ephesians passage and the Song of Solomon have deep affinities. If we call the king and his Shulamite woman pure lovers, then we will not be far from the truth. Their songs are not for nothing called epithalamiums—nuptial songs and poems sung and said for the bridal couple at their wedding festivities—for they witness to, and teach, the heart of true love, whether the names *eros* and *agape* are used or not!

It is only in the context of such love as this, that the question of the couple separating and reforming into further marriages becomes inconceivable.⁵ Marital love is as inviolate as the love of God—that Trinitarian Love and Unity with which the primal couple were invested at creation. The last thought we could ever have would be of Christ divorcing his wife, and, as for his remarrying another, that is even beyond conception.⁶

⁵ By saying words like this we do not mean that when such love obtains then divorce and remarriage are out of the question, but if such love does not obtain then they are in the question. The love of the husband is intended to keep the union inviolate. Probably some couples may claim to have an experience of mutual love which parallels that of the king and the Shulamite maiden, for even if that were so it does not mean that only such an exceptional love-partnership can stand the test of time. God's love can—and does—transform the worst of spouse relationships. Such love 'never fails', if that is how we will have it!

⁶ What we must keep in mind is that we cannot emulate the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Nor is their Marriage a set law for us—one we must accomplish. No: it is their Marriage which is the true primal one, and it is in their Marriage that we can make our own, and make our way in marital life, no matter how faulty we may be. Sharing their Marriage is a gift given by the loving Father.

The Marital Love of God and Man: God as Israel's Husband

EPHESIANS 5 AND THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Markus Barth, in describing the Old Testament relationship of God as Husband to his Bride Israel, says, ‘The analogies between Eph 5:23–32 and the prophetic description of the bridal or marital Yahweh-Israel relationship are unquestionable’.¹ Undoubtedly behind Paul’s mind were these Old Testament passages, but, of course, he had a new sort of marriage in mind—that of Christ and the Church—and although the prophet Hosea loved his wife with an incredible love, the thought of the Church repeating Gomer’s history is not present in Ephesians 5, even though Christ purified her from pollution before he espoused her.²

¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 615.

² Paul does have a warning in II Corinthians 11:1–3, but he does not seem to think the Church will go the way Israel went in her idolatry. Even so, dangers do exist, and the second and third chapters of the Revelation point to these. Christ the Head of the Church is ever alert to the problems in the



GOD AND ISRAEL IN COVENANT- RELATIONSHIP AS HUSBAND AND WIFE

In chapter 12, footnote 2, we quoted Karl Barth arguing from the second account of creation (Gen. 2:18–25), saying:

It does, of course, point to the divine basis of love and marriage as the due fulfilment of the male-female relationship. But as this whole second account of creation, without prejudice to the concreteness of its statements in their direct sense, is permeated by the reference to God's gracious covenant with Israel as the internal basis of creation itself, the same is true of its conclusion. Beyond its direct statements it envisages the most important Old Testament relationship in which Yahweh is represented as the faithful Lover, Bridegroom and Husband of this people, and the latter as the equally unfaithful beloved, bride and wife. It also envisages the perfect form of this relationship to be brought about by Yahweh, an imminent betrothal between Yahweh and Israel 'in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies' (Hos. 2:19), in which the faithfulness will not be one-sided, but mutual. To be more precise, Gen. 2:24 regards the male-female relationship in the light of this great theme running through the whole of the Old Testament. Therefore when a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, becoming one flesh with her, this takes place because God in His election of Israel and covenant with it has bound Himself so recklessly with this people, making Himself one with it so unreservedly and with such promise . . . And it should now be clear that if we take into account this equation and therefore this fulfilment of Gen. 2:24 and the rest of the Old Testament history of promise we are inevitably led to a different evaluation of the relation between man and woman.³

churches and so he walks amongst these golden candlesticks both rebuking and encouraging where there is need.

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt 4, pp. 142–143.



This quote is helpful to us in seeing the meaning of the creation ordinance for couples, and the persistence of God in his covenantal marital relationship with Israel. We cannot bypass the story of Hosea and Gomer and must repeat what we have shown in chapter 12 of God's love for Israel. If this love is thought of only as figurative and simply a prophetic technique for bringing Israel to heel from its idolatry, then we miss the principle of 'one-flesh' union found in Genesis 2:24. God's passion for Israel is no less than Christ's for the Church, and, rightly understood, both loves are the one. The conclusion from Hosea's prophecy is that God persisted with Israel as Hosea did with Gomer. Even though Ephraim was joined to his idols and was to be left alone in his infatuation, yet God tells Israel, 'I will love [you] freely'. He looked to the day when His 'Gomer' would become pure and of one mind with Himself.

We have also observed that it seems God had divorced Israel because Hosea 2:2 says, 'Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife and I am not her husband'. Commentators have differed as to whether this statement is rhetorical or literal, and whilst it could be either, yet the final outcome is shown in Hosea 2:16–20. If this is divorce—and we cannot say dogmatically that it is—then God Himself does not see it in the light of Deuteronomy 24:1–4. The outcome of His dealings with Israel is the same as Hosea's with Gomer—no divorce. It is possibly the time for us to say here that if Deuteronomy 24:1–4 had not existed, marriages in the face of human hardness of heart would have been difficult and, perhaps, beyond human forbearance. That Hosea was in a position to divorce Gomer means that the magnificence of his love was shown by his not



taking this escape route. Had that escape not been there, he could never have shown Gomer his love to her: she would have thought of it as simply the way it had to be!

My understanding of the so-called 'divorces' spoken of in Hosea 2:2; Isaiah 50:1; 54:4–6; and Jeremiah 3:1, and the judgments in Ezekiel, are that they are acts of God that do not break the covenantal union God has with Israel, although they certainly break the communion. It will probably always be debated whether Deuteronomy 24:1–4 is really a law of Israel or something provisional, given in the face of the hardness of heart of fallen human beings: some sort of temporary barrier erected against the sadness of divorce.⁴ As I understand Matthew 19:1–12, Jesus saw true marriage as an indissoluble union of two and, in that understanding, there can be no divorce. The idea of divorce has no ontological basis and so it is not a term—so to speak—which God knows. Even if the term is used in the prophets Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, yet it is not a reality. It may even be that Israel wanted to escape the marriage bond by divorce, and God granted it, only to ignore it and seek to draw Israel back to Himself, as though, anyway, divorce had no validity.⁵ The thought of God being bound by a law He had not given as Primal Law is unthinkable.

⁴ We know some have said that the prohibition of remarrying the first husband after a second marriage and divorce might have been a deterrent to divorcing in the first place.

⁵ Andrew Cornes in his *Divorce and Remarriage* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1993, p. 169) says of Israel and God:

She has done more than enough to justify not only divorce but judicial death (e.g. Hos. 2, Ezek. 23) . . . It never entered his [God's] head, however, to remarry. Indeed, even while divorced, he regarded her sexual escapades as 'adultery' and clearly considered that she was, rightfully, his wife.



GOD'S RESTORATION OF ISRAEL'S MARRIAGE WITH HIM

What is clear in Hosea's prophecy is that God persists with Israel as Hosea did with Gomer and, we might say, even more. His promise to Israel in Hosea 2:16–20 is:

And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal.' For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. *And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD [emphasis mine].*

Likewise in Jeremiah 3:1–14 we see what seems to be a divorce, and yet, at the conclusion of the pericope, northern Israel is still called God's wife:

'If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her?
Would not that land be greatly polluted?
You have played the harlot with many lovers; and would you return to me?' says the LORD.
Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see!
Where have you not been lain with?
By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness.
You have polluted the land with your vile harlotry.
Therefore the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come;



yet you have a harlot's brow,
you refuse to be ashamed.
Have you not just now called to me,
“My father, thou art the friend of my youth—
will he be angry for ever,
will he be indignant to the end?”
Behold, you have spoken,
but you have done all the evil that you could.’

The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: ‘Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the harlot? And I thought, “After she has done all this she will return to me”; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it. She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the harlot. Because harlotry was so light to her, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. Yet for all this her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, says the LORD.’

And the LORD said to me, ‘Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah. Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say,
“Return, faithless Israel, says the LORD.
I will not look on you in anger,
for I am merciful, says the LORD;
I will not be angry for ever.
Only acknowledge your guilt,
that you rebelled against the LORD your God
and scattered your favors among strangers
under every green tree,
and that you have not obeyed my voice, says the LORD.
Return, O faithless children, says the LORD;
for I am your master;⁶

⁶ The word ‘master’ is translated from the verb *baal*, ‘Lord’, ‘husband’, ‘master’. The AV has ‘I am married unto you’. The NIV has ‘I am your husband’.



I will take you, one from a city and two from a family,
and I will bring you to Zion.” ’

In all this God has His honeymoon with Israel in mind:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; evil came upon them, says the LORD’ (Jer. 2:1–3).

Again, in Ezekiel 16 the passionate, yet sad, story of God with Israel is told. Incredibly beautiful as she was in God’s eyes, and espoused to him, she played the harlot with his deep love and sought other lovers. In depths of this tragedy God declares his love for her:

... I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant ... and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD (Ezek. 16:60–62).

No less powerful is the story of God as Israel’s Husband in Isaiah. In 50:1–2 the matter of divorce is brought up:

Thus says the LORD:
‘Where is your mother’s bill of divorce,
with which I put her away?’



Or which of my creditors is it
to whom I have sold you?
Behold, for your iniquities you were sold,
and for your transgressions your mother was put away.'

In 54:4–8 any thought of divorce is put away:

Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame;
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 forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.
For a brief moment I forsook you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the LORD, your Redeemer.

Thus in 62:4–5 God speaks of her:

You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My delight is in her,
and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
For as a young man marries a virgin,
so shall your sons marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.



What more, then, could be said of God's love for His Spouse Israel? Against this kind of love our human love, which endures so little, pales into faint shadow, and thoughts of divorce instead of persistent love die to a voiceless whisper. We can do no better here than quote again words which are in footnote 5, above:

She [Israel] has done more than enough to justify not only divorce but judicial death (e.g. Hos. 2, Ezek. 23) . . . It never entered his [God's] head, however, to remarry. Indeed, even while divorced, he regarded her sexual escapades as 'adultery' and clearly considered that she was, rightfully, his wife.

*The Marital Love of
God and Man:
Christ Battling for His Bride*

**THE BACKGROUND TO THE ARGUMENTS
FOR DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE**

Because what we call ‘sexuality’ is the most immediately potent element in the human race, it can also be called the most powerful stimulant to emotion. What human beings desire almost more than anything is emotional satisfaction, and whilst such does not always relate to sexuality, certainly emotion can sway us deeply when we consider the matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage. It has to be said that the desire for fulfilment in intimacy almost always overrides a rational approach to these three inter-related subjects. This is seen when desire overcomes the matters of marital fidelity, parenting of children and the consequent ignoring of the Divine order for human relationships.

When we approach these three matters directly we will either ignore the theological implications or we will



rationalise our theology to support our immediate desires. Thus when Christ pointed to marriage as a creation ordinance, and therefore as being inviolate, his disciples were shocked. Their image of marriage was radically different from Christ's. In this chapter we want to see the theological implications of the three matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage. In fact we have already seen these in previous chapters. In order to put ourselves back in the theological picture, let us look once more at Bromiley's statement:

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election. Analogically, what is between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the church, is also what is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife. Neither the intratrinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and his bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage as it is now lived out is a bad copy of a good original . . . It is simpler, however, because God himself took the initiative at the level of both original and copy. At the level of the original the deserted husband lovingly went to look for the erring bride and bought her back. He did this by offering himself, in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption.¹

Bromiley is showing us that the significance of marriage is seen in the Trinitarian nature of God. He is also showing us that what primarily matters in history is the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. He points us back to

¹ Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, pp. 77, 78.



what we have seen in our last chapter: that marriage takes on the soteriological element in addition to its creational nature. We are reminded that it points to the Ultimate Marriage and so is eschatological in intent and consummation. As the writer points out:

At the level of the original the deserted husband lovingly went to look for the erring bride and bought her back. He did this by offering himself, in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption.²

All along it is the Son who is to be the Bridegroom, yet the Father is the Initiator of the event.

Bromiley also says:

God the Son comes into the world as the heavenly bridegroom, rescuing or establishing his own marriage in face of the infidelity of his spouse or bride. To accomplish this task, *which will carry with it the reinstatement of earthly marriage*, he does two things: he bears the cost of human unfaithfulness and he breaks its power. *In these two ways he wins, or wins back, to himself a people that can finally be united to him in endless union. He also makes it possible for this people to realize to some degree on earth the creaturely copy of this union in human marriage* [emphases mine].³

It is this kind of thought which puts us back, theologically, on the right track. All history is really a movement

² This statement clears up what seems to be an anomaly when in the Old Testament God is Husband to Israel and in the New Testament Christ is the Bridegroom and, ultimately, Husband to the Church. Just as the Father and the Son are both kings in the Kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15) so it is the Father who had always affianced the woman—the people of God—to His Son. Thus Bromiley's statement, above.

³ Bromiley, *Love and Marriage*, p. 46.



towards the end things, primary amongst which is the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. It is here that Markus Barth further helps us:

In Ephesians . . . Paul finds . . . a prophecy of the ‘new’ creation, even of the New Man and his Bride (2:15; 4:24; 5:25–27, 32) . . . In Ephesians . . . Paul’s interest lies not in the intrusion of sin and its consequences, but in the intervention of the Messiah who has raised those dead in sin, who cleanses his Bride, and will appear for the wedding (4:13). Resurrection, forgiveness, the happy meeting at the Bridegroom’s parousia—these eschatological moments are decisive over the personal conduct of the saints—even when married . . . Marriage is not the cure for, or the repair of, the damaged creation. Rather Christ’s union with the church has effected an unprecedented situation: the new creation leaves no room for a dialectic tension or wavering between creation and redemption. Marriage is no longer explained as a ‘creation order,’ but as an expression of renewal of all things through Jesus Christ. Indeed, according to Paul, the supreme love and the first work and effect of Christ were announced, promised, and guaranteed as early as the creation story. But creation itself, viz. the creaturely existence which God gave to man in the beginning, was only an intimation of marriage, not its ontological and ethical ground. Only Jesus Christ’s coming, his love, his death, his dominion are the final, solid basis and model.⁴

Since marriage is put up into this highly significant bracket, the three matters—marriage, divorce and remarriage—can no longer be viewed from what we might call ‘the human point of view’.⁵ Fallen humanity, with its

⁴ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 731.

⁵ Here we are thinking of the human contemplation of a divorced wife who now has to bring up children without a father and has to live without conjugal relations. Human thinking would have her remarry to provide a father for the children and a conjugal relation for the woman separated from such by the divorce. Such thinking seems to be one of sympathy and arises out of commonsense. It ignores all we have been saying. Such thinking might



defective images of God and the law, would ameliorate marriage as a creation ordinance and make provision for the putting asunder of what God has joined.⁶ Since God knows no divorce of Israel, and the Son knows no divorce of his Bride the Church, then this ‘model’ must be the true one for human marriage. To break down this model and to transmogrify it in any way is to attack the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and is to denigrate it, putting an impediment in the way of the proper experience of marriage on the human level.

CHRIST’S BATTLE FOR HIS BRIDE

We have seen that Christ is the Saviour of the Church and that he is the model for the human husband:

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, 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. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

even have envisaged a wife for Christ, but Christ always had his Bride in mind, and in that sense was never deprived of a spouse or was celibate. Rightly understood, no one in Christ is deprived of participation in marriage.

⁶ It is an old argument that not all marriages are authentic; that is, God did not join every couple. This is a specious argument designed to help people out of a difficult union. If pursued it might mean that it is a rare marriage in which God has joined the partners—perhaps he has never done this this side of the Fall! Surely the coming together in a societal ritual certifies the marriage of the couple. It is the very union which provides the basis for the initiation and growth of marital love.



He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body (Eph. 5:25–30).

This means there can be no talk of divorce, much less of remarriage. Divorce comes out of hardness of heart,⁷ and hardness of heart out of the Fall, and the Fall is evil's opposition to the plan of God coming to fruition: the plan of the Ultimate Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. I think there can be no question that God recognises the *fact* of continuing divorces. Christ's radicalisation of the marriage reality does not mean his words will be heeded. Such divorces will always have to be accommodated in some way or another in the human situation, and even in the ecclesiastical situation, which is not a way of saying they are permissible. As Helmut Thielicke observed:

... the 'contradiction' between the conditional allowance of divorce and the radicalism of the order of creation is only a symptom of the deeper 'contradiction' between this aeon and the original will of God, in which the legal ordinances of this aeon are also involved... Since this contradiction is retained and made the very foundation of the call to repentance, the 'additions' in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9... are a 'practical and proper [*sachgemässe*] interpretation of Jesus' injunction in the sphere of law.'... Because this conditional allowance of divorce is thus a proper interpretation of Jesus' injunction, it declares that

⁷ By this we do not mean that both spouses are necessarily hard of heart. Nor do we mean there are not some fearful situations in which it is impossible for one spouse to stay with the other when non-separation may lead to intolerable hardship and even death. Under certain circumstances separation is unavoidable, but this does not necessarily mean divorce. If divorce is unavoidable because of the present Marriage Law Bill, then divorce will happen. This does not mean the believing spouse accepts the separation as putting asunder the 'one-flesh' union. This is the situation which Christ calls 'becoming a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake', but for this no easy formula can be devised.



the indissolubility of marriage is the ‘real’ will of God (*voluntas propria*). But if this is so, then it is impossible to think of the legality of an accomplished divorce as being at the same time legitimate. On the contrary, then the law can no longer be a cloak to cover the wrong that is *always* inherent in a broken marriage and in *every* case is expressed in its divorce.⁸

Here Thielicke gives us an important pastoral insight. Jesus showed the true nature of the law, thus radicalising it, and leaving no loophole for divorce. Where hardness of heart—and so divorce—occurs, hearing the words of Jesus should bring repentance for the wrong done in divorce. Thus, within the Community of Christ, this hardness is recognised as having happened, the divorce as having occurred and the need for repentance now required.⁹

We can now see that as Christ would never divorce his Bride, nor enter into another marital relationship, so the human bridegroom must have the same view as Christ. Christ’s aim:

that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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 (Eph. 5:26–27),¹⁰

is of such an order that he must do battle throughout history as the Warrior-Bridegroom in order to bring her to

⁸ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, pp. 165, 166.

⁹ This is vastly different from people entering into divorce fully aware that it is wrong, and calculating that later repentance will cover the divergence from God’s will. This sort of calculation is even more reprehensible when remarriage is contemplated and effected.

¹⁰ This eschatological perfection, purity and beauty of the Bride comes to its fulfilment and consummation at the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. The same principle should obtain with every human bridegroom–husband.



this state. In giving himself for her on the Cross he had to do battle with the powers of darkness, and so liberate her from 'the prince of the power of the air' and his evil hosts.

Likewise, as King-Priest he must continually intercede for her at the right hand of the Father; thus preventing the powers of evil from alienating her as the serpent alienated Eve from the Creator (cf. II Cor. 11:1–3). Finally, in Revelation 19:11ff. (cf. I Cor. 15:24–28) we see Christ, as the Warrior-King, win victory over the nations of the earth, the beast, its image and the human opponents of Christ. Whilst all this action is described in powerful apocalyptic language, the truth is that every day, in every domestic situation, in the affairs of marriage, family and all human relationships, Christ is battling for his holy Community, his People—his Bride. No breakdown of domestic and familial relationships is minor or insignificant to him. It is all linked with what his Father, he and the Spirit are about in history.

This is the 'profound mystery'. It is the mystery we are privileged to understand and in which we are not only permitted to live, but in which we are also called and commanded to participate. We must live by and in this 'mystery' and by so doing we will know the richness of marriage even in a world which is imperfect and which requires grace in its every moment in order to walk in, and to love, the will of the Father. Having said all this, ultimately it is the family, the fruit of the marriage, which is the Father's intention, for marriage of spouses is never, in itself, the goal to be attained. This leads us on to the important matter of the family. 'Be fruitful' is the Divine as well as the human vocation of the 'one-flesh' union and communion.

The Matter of Marriage and the Family

THE ‘PROFOUND MYSTERY’ AND THE FAMILY

Throughout our discussion we have made only passing reference to the matter of family. This, to some degree, may reflect our present approach to marriage; that is, that it is the union of a man and a woman which matters most. Certainly that union matters much, and without it there can be little thought of family, but the primal union was with a view to family: ‘God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply”’. The blessing was certainly with a view to fulfilling the whole mandate of stewardship:

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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (Gen. 1:28).

The same principle is seen in Psalm 8:5–8:

Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.



Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

The blessing was with a view to marital union; with a view to family; and with a view to the stewardship of the creation. These three things were inseparable. Yet, as we have seen, they were more than that. The ‘profound mystery’ was prophetic and protological of the *telos*—the climax—of creation: the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. All history must be read and interpreted through this principle of Divine-human Marriage, as also it must be seen as ‘salvation history’, for the Marriage is soteriological. Yet the Marriage is with a view to the Family of God: ‘every family in heaven’, or ‘his whole family’, or ‘fatherhood’. This is because God is Father.

THE FATHER AND THE FAMILY

Human egotism, which thinks primarily of the enjoyment partners have of one another, and which considers ‘the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other’¹ to be a *right* of every person born, may yet neglect the truth of family as its *responsibility*. In the ancient liturgy of the ‘Form of Solemnization of Marriage’, the first reason for, and duty of, marriage is that: ‘It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be

¹ ‘The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony’, *The Book of Common Prayer*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, n.d.



brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name'.² In this sense the 'be fruitful' is likewise ontological, protological, soteriological and eschatological. It is the Father whose intention it is to have His Family. So the writer of Hebrews speaks of 'many sons'; of them being brought 'into glory'; of the Son as 'the pioneer of their salvation; and of the Son and the sons as having 'all one origin':

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying,

'I will proclaim thy name to my brethren,
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee.'

And again,

'I will put my trust in him.'

And again,

'Here am I, and the children God has given me' (Heb. 2:10–13).

The theme of the Fatherhood of God is primary in the New Testament. In the Old Testament God's Fatherhood is implicit, especially as covenant-Fatherhood, but in the New Testament is explicit, especially in John's Gospel and the Epistles. It is also present in the Synoptic Gospels. The teaching of the Church as the Family is also present. To quote Edwards again on the eschatological outcome:

'There was, [as] it were, an eternal society or family in the God-head, in the Trinity of persons. It seems to be God's design to admit the church into the divine family as his son's wife.'³

² 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony'.

³ Jenson, *America's Theologian*, p. 43.



We have seen that the Trinitarian Unity and Distinction of Persons within the Godhead is given to the man and woman in their union so that in love they may be inviolate. Likewise the same Trinitarian Unity and Distinction of Persons is given to the whole Family of God that the Family may be inviolate. The Divine Family—the Trinity—is the foundation, basis and source of the Family of God, the Church. Trinity has its being in the Father, the *fons divinitatis*, and likewise the Church is created by the Father, through the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus it is ‘the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth’.⁴ The New Testament is clear on the fact that Christ died to ‘gather into one [family] the children of God who are scattered abroad’,⁵ and Paul, in the remarkable passage of Ephesians 2:11–22, shows that the new humanity which was created at the Cross has brought Jew and Gentile together to be that one Family under the Father.

In all of this the ultimate intention of the Father is shown, for ‘he destined us in love to be his sons’, and so ‘those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren’.⁶ The multitudes of the redeemed before the throne—as we see them in the Book of the Revelation—are the Family, the progeny of Christ and his Church.⁷ That the Wife *is* the Church and

⁴ I Timothy 3:15.

⁵ John 11:52.

⁶ Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:29.

⁷ Romans 7:4 has:

Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Whether this figure is speaking of the marriage union resulting in spiritual children—‘unto God’—or the fruits of holiness (Rom. 6:22; Gal. 5:22–23) is



that the Church is the Family is no problem in the biblical use of figures.

THE BATTLE FOR THE FAMILY

In seeing the wonder of the Eschatological Family, we should not forget the fact that history has witnessed a powerful struggle for the Family. Jesus did not hesitate to name certain religious leaders in Israel as being of their father the devil, and saying they wished to do the desires of that father. The Apostle John also referred to ‘the children of God and the children of the devil’, and he named Abel as a child of God and Cain as a child of the devil.⁸ That ‘ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’ was the serpent in Eden who seduced Eve.⁹

We need to pause, then, and see that the purpose of the serpent was to defame the Triune God by means of separating the primal couple from their ‘one-flesh’ union and communion. If the serpent could accomplish this, then it would gain the ascendancy in its struggle with the Creator. The tragedy of the murder of Abel by Cain is one repeated in innumerable ways down through history. All of it is an attempt to build a counter-family to that of the Family of the Father and so destroy the nature of God as Father. When God ceases to be Father in the sight of

not clear and does not matter. It is difficult to build a dogma from a figure. Fruitfulness lies in union with Christ. John 15:1ff. shows this quite clearly.

⁸ John 8:44 passim; I John 3:10ff.

⁹ Revelation 12:9; II Corinthians 11:1–3; I Timothy 2:14.



humans, then all relationships lose the source of their power. A landslide in relationships begins to take place.

As we have indicated, the attack begins with the man and the woman as they come to marriage. The division of the two will determine the disintegration of the family. To represent the man-woman relationship as delectable, primarily because of sexual intercourse, is one of the lies that gives the ascendancy to *eros* and presents *agape* as tame and colourless. True *eros*—not perverted *eros*—is its proper self within *agape*—and in that sense is *agape*. To claim that *eros*, as fallen human beings know it in existential guilt, is the true essence of marriage is a diversion from the truth. Division between the primal couple was at the root of Cain's being a murderer.¹⁰

Another important point for consideration—a point we began to consider in the second paragraph immediately above—is the serpent's brilliance in attacking the unity of the primal couple. Any division here will immediately affect the view or image of the Unity of the Triune God in whose image Man—the man-woman entity—was made. It would also tell against the two powerful eschatological elements: (i) the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and (ii) the ultimate Family of God. As no one can compute the moral-spiritual power of flawless Divine-human, 'one-flesh' unity, so no one can compute the immense damage resulting from division of that unity. Paul's statement that in Christ there is neither male nor female must be construed as 'no division between male and female,

¹⁰ This may appear to be a simplistic statement. It raises the matter of the same couple producing a righteous man who was a prophet, and an unrighteous man who was a murderer. Here we have the conflict of the image of God in Man, and Man rejecting the intimate knowledge of God. Here are both 'the mystery of iniquity' and 'the mystery of god-likeness', and it is beyond us to rationalise them.



no conflict within that polar unity'. To construe it simply in terms of equality is really a *non sequitur*. If, as we have been saying, Genesis 2:24 is the 'profound mystery' of Christ and his Bride, then the first man Adam was protological of the Second or Last Adam. (We must ever keep in mind the first Adam was a mystery in that he was protological of Christ. Innate in the first was the whole family of Man—Paul's 'in Adam'—and innate in the Second is the whole Family of the Second or Last Adam: the true Family of God.) We see, then, the whole battle for the Family began when the serpent sought to defame the creational work of God, and so to defame the *telos* to which it was moving—the *telos* which is the true meaning of history.

It is beyond the scope of this book to outline the immensity and significance of the battle for the Family down through what we call 'history', but the fact of it is evident, and we ought to examine it more fully. The Family, as also the Divine-human Marriage, is a key to history. To argue the matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage in the light of the *rights* of those involved is to put the debate on a humanistic level which ignores the great eternities and rejects the *responsibilities* which go with being truly human. To consider these relational matters only in the light of the right to companionship—'the society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other'—is to ignore the true character of created Man as the partner with God in His Divine intention for the Eschatological Man, the Eschatological Woman and the Eschatological Family.

In saying all this we are not ignoring the fall of Man, and the need for the human race to live under grace and



so to seek to make all relationships reasonable, but we are directing our ammunition towards the heart of evil. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual, and do break down many evil strongholds. The hearts of the fathers can be turned to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers. God does hate divorce because He understands the enormity of it and the tragedy it brings to the human race.¹¹ Through it the hearts of the fathers and the hearts of the children are turned against each other. The world becomes sad with the disintegration of the family of Man.

Two Women, Beasts and a Warrior-King

The ways of evil are many but yet are apparent to those who understand ‘the mystery of iniquity’ along with ‘the mystery of godliness’. Again, the argument is a vast one, and we cannot hope to compass it, but in the Book of the Revelation we find the thrust of the serpent. Called ‘the red dragon’, he opposes the ‘woman clothed with the sun’ and seeks to destroy her ‘male son’¹² and ‘the *rest* of her offspring’ who are the saints. In chapter 15 two clones come from the dragon, namely the first and

¹¹ See II Corinthians 10:3–5; Malachi 4:5–6; 2:10–16. For a full exposition and exegesis of the second Malachi passage see Gordon Paul Hugenberger’s *Marriage as a Covenant*. Excellent commentary is also supplied by Ralph L. Smith in his *Micah–Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32 (Word, Waco, 1984).

¹² This is a strange term ‘male son’—as the Greek has it—and seems to have some special significance. It has reference to Psalm 2:9 (cf. Rev. 2:27; 12:5)—the ‘one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron’. The woman flees into the wilderness and the dragon goes off ‘to make war against the rest of her offspring’, who are obviously the saints: the members of the Church.

second beasts. The three constitute an unholy trinity.¹³ In chapter 14 ‘Babylon the great’ is first mentioned. In chapters 17–19 Babylon is shown as the unholy woman — the counterpart to the holy woman¹⁴ of Revelation chapters 12, 19 and 21.

Babylon, ‘the mother of harlots’, shows an evil femininity and is paired with the first beast. She is regnant over the nations, and the beast and the ten kings turn on her and rend her. The burning of Babylon is deeply mourned by the kings of the earth and the great merchants. The impure woman had said, ‘A queen I sit, I am no widow,¹⁵ mourning I shall never see’, but her demise comes suddenly. Not only is she destroyed, but the beasts and their followers, and, ultimately, the devil himself, also come to destruction. It is the Warrior-King, the Bridegroom of the beautiful and pure woman, who commences the slaughter of all evil creatures and sees it to its conclusion.

It is necessary to see that the beast and the impure woman have only a *de facto* relationship. Nothing *de jure* exists. There is no ‘one-flesh’ union. The ‘ultimate’ of

¹³ I think it can be shown that the dragon and the first and second beasts together constitute an unholy trinity: the dragon the ‘father’, the first beast ‘the son’ and the third beast ‘the [un]holy spirit’. Evil is never creative and devises all things in the form of what is ontological. Herein lies the secret of its power.

¹⁴ Some see the woman of chapter 12 as differing from the woman mentioned in chapters 19 and 21, but these can be shown, I believe, to be the one.

¹⁵ This is a quote from Isaiah 47:1–11 where Babylon says she will not know widowhood or the loss of children. The idea of a spouse and of children is deeply seated in the femininity of Babylon, but her confidence for these is not in God but in herself, as the contexts of Isaiah and Revelation show.



evil is utter disintegration. What we conclude, then, is that whilst the Triune God gives to His Son and ‘daughter-in-law’ a flawless union and the issue of the Family, evil accomplishes nothing. Nothing of union and communion is known to it, and in the end it is barren and disintegrates from its own corruption.

Feminism and Masculism, Oppression and Justice

Whatever the rightness of the claims of feminism and masculism, both ideologies¹⁶ are in danger of self-destructing as systems. This is because to confine oneself to one’s gender¹⁷ must mean, ultimately, a rejection of the true union and communion in which the differentiations form the complementarity of unity. The moment there is gender consciousness—self-consciousness—and attempts to assert gender ideologically, as against the two, man and woman, constituting the one image and likeness of God, then there is a perversion of the male-female entity. There is also a distortion of the true nature of God as Man is intended to reflect Him.

¹⁶ There can be no doubt that many of the complaints of feminists have substance. Injustice stems from the moment of Adam’s turning on his woman, and these have persisted in many forms down through the centuries, and certainly restitution is essential. Masculists who complain of feminine domination have likewise some substance to their complaints, but both have missed the principle of the man-woman unity. This unity is not an ideology, but part of the Divine creation. Ideologies must always fail, since their devisers believe their philosophy is sufficient—and indispensable—to cover all things and bring them to the desired utopian conclusion.

¹⁷ One-gender consciousness, and one-gender ‘participation’ is the essence of homosexuality and lesbianism.



The facts of male and female domination cannot be denied. It is simplistic, however, to imagine a deliberate male conspiracy to oppress women, even though there has been such male domination in history. To put such forward as a fruit of the Fall is not simplistic. The desire to rule is part of human sinfulness in both males and females. Even if patriarchalism can be shown to be dominant in history, it needs to be shown that—with its obvious faults—it is not necessarily wrong. Of course an ‘ism’ is wrong since ‘isms’ are ideological, but if ‘patriarchal’ means ‘fatherly’ then it is not necessarily wrong. The abuses men have done under the guise of ‘fatherly’ does not invalidate true fatherliness. If men would derive their ‘fatherliness’ from the Father; ‘sonliness’ from the Son; their ‘brotherliness’ from the Elder Brother; and their ‘husbandliness’ from the true Husband, then society would have little to fear. Likewise, if women would derive their ‘motherliness’ from ‘the mother of us all’; their ‘daughterliness’ from that motherhood; receive ‘sisterliness’ as a gift from the same source; and ‘wifeliness’ from the Bride of the Lamb, then we would have little to fear.

I am certain that injustice in history has a nemesis which works until restitution is made. We can see this at work in many ways in history; for example, in the oppression of African-Americans in North America, and of Aborigines in Australia. Likewise, we must expect some of this nemesis to eventuate where women have been unduly and unfairly oppressed by what is known as the ‘patriarchal system’. Some of this may have existed in Israel, and Jesus may have radicalised the Primal Law of love and marriage, but that does not mean we should seek to go beyond ‘male and female made he them’ and



innovate new systems—new ideologies! Jesus came about Fatherhood and Family; about ‘the two shall become one flesh’; and about redeeming the sinful uses of relationships and bringing the human race into reconciliation. As for justice being done where injustice has been committed: ‘Shall not the Lord *speedily* avenge his elect?’.

CONCLUSION TO THE ‘PROFOUND MYSTERY’: IT IS ALL ‘FAMILY’

We said marriage is with a view to ‘family’ and although not all couples can have children, they are part of the whole Family of God and can make their contribution in the familial entity. We recognise human frailty and sinfulness, and the many—and often enormous—mistakes that we make in our life of relationships yet, where we have repentance for these failures, grace can have its way and love can rehabilitate us, no matter how dreadful the sins and mistakes. No failure need cut us off from anyone.

Always having the presence of God, and always having before us the great Family reunion that is set before us, should encourage us to know that, despite the attempts of the Evil One to destroy our families and confuse our human race, we will one day participate in the Marriage Supper of the Bride and the Lamb and we will participate in the Holy Family of the Triune God. It is according to the principle of ‘family’ that we will be partakers of the Divine nature—forever.

Postscript

When I commenced writing this book I did not visualise the vastness of reading which would be required. I had written books on the subject before, but had always felt somewhat uncertain in some areas when speaking of the matters of divorce and remarriage. In over forty years as an ordained minister I have never married any person who has been divorced. I have, however, counselled countless persons whose marriages have been breaking up; who have divorced or been divorced; who seek advice regarding divorce and remarriage, and in almost every case have felt my counselling was helpful and comforting. It did not mean, of course, that the advice I gave was always heeded, but the friendship and support given seemed to tide some folk over their most painful periods.

As this book will have shown, the more I read of treatments of the matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage the more my past ideas were confirmed, even though I was honestly prepared to have to change some of those ideas. It has been helpful to come to a better understanding of those matters. I believe we should teach these things we have been neglecting to open up to our congregations and to those folk who come for counselling. More than ever, too, we need to grasp hold of the nature of the gifts of marriage, of sexuality and of parenthood. Those of the Community of Christ need to know their identity as the Bride of Christ; the nature of Christ's Lordship in this age and the age to come; and the nature



of the Church as it is ‘helpmeet’ to the Son of God in his outworking of history. Not only will the triumphal Messianic Bridal Feast bring living hope to us all as persons, and thus stimulate us to present action, but it will also help us to know our vocation now in history. I am aware that there is much common thinking which views theology as being out of the practical realm of life—a thing for spiritual theorists and as impractical. To the contrary: genuine theological research is as close to the mark as you can get regarding the practice of life, and especially of relationships. So often we think that grasping theological teaching is beyond the capacity of our congregations and so we descend to lesser levels of preaching. In doing so we cheat the Family of the Father—our brothers and sisters in the faith—of proper expectation of marriage; of the basis for hope of the future; and of what is their true inheritance.

It would not be exaggerating the matter before us to say that much of our preached theology lacks substance when it views human relationships as something to be primarily dealt with by the social sciences, and when it misses the focal significance of God’s law—the law which requires total love of God and full love of the neighbour. The resurgence of Trinitarian theology in the last decade or so must inevitably lead us on to the nature of the ‘profound mystery’ and so—on the human level—to the primary importance of marriage and the family. Ultimately all theology is domestic: it speaks of the Divine and celestial Family. It speaks of the human family in this penultimate age, and points to the marvel and mystery of the Family in the ultimate age, the aeon to come. I hope, then, that we will make up for centuries of neglect and help to heal what a younger colleague has

described as ‘a terrible and long-standing wound in the body of Christ’.

I hope the book is helpful for those who have made great mistakes. As I said in the last chapters, laws are not primarily for judgment but for mercy and faithfulness and justice. Where grace gives us the grounds for repentance, let us follow the principles of its liberating power and let us have no remorse but take the way out to new and restored relationships, and find our place in the loving Family of God.

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