

The Whole Counsel of God
Study 14

**TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH:
THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF MARRIAGE**

*“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother,
and be joined to his wife;
and they shall become one flesh.”*

Genesis 2.24

Marriage is an intensely practical matter. As a result, the subject of marriage is commonly taken up in practical teaching or in counselling rather than in a study of biblical doctrine. We have a strong biblical basis for this. In Paul’s letters, the subject of marriage is taken up in the practical rather than doctrinal sections of his letters. In this study, we will look at marriage from a doctrinal point of view, but we must not lose sight of the practical nature of this subject.

There are two reasons for taking up the theme of marriage in a study of biblical doctrine. The first is that the subject of marriage is an essential part of the doctrine of man. Every human being is made in the image of God, and this is usually taken up in the doctrine of man. But, every human being also has gender, and the image of God in us is not to be divorced from the fact that we have gender. The biblical doctrine of man must take into account that man was created male and female. Once we take up the subject of gender, we must press on to the subject of marriage because gender was created for marriage and its significance is only fully realized in marriage.

Marriage is presented within the creation account of Genesis 2. In fact, it is the climax of this creation account. This means that it is rooted in the created constitution of man. We cannot have a complete understanding of the human being without understanding the marriage relationship. The biblical doctrine of marriage brings out a key feature or dimension of the human being. We have all been created for the special type of union that marriage is. The doctrine of marriage brings out the relational nature of mankind.

There is a second reason for taking up the subject of marriage in a study of doctrine. In the OT marriage is taken up as a metaphor for the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel. This idea is taken over in the NT, but here a profound shift takes place. Rather than seeing the Lord’s relationship with the church from the point of view of the marriage relationship between a man and a woman, the apostle Paul derives the norm of the human relationship from the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ and the church is the archetype, and the human marriage relationship is the type. This raises the theme of marriage above the human level to the divine. It is not just a part of the doctrine of man. It is part of the doctrine of God, i.e., of theology.

Our study will be principally a doctrinal study, but it has profound practical significance. The doctrine of marriage is the foundation for all practical teaching and all biblical counselling on the subject of marriage. The practical teaching deals with the issues in experience, but the basis for biblical instruction is not in the practical issues people struggle with. That is where the problems rather than the answers come from. The basis for the biblical instruction and counsel comes from God: what God has established in creation and what God is doing in Christ. This is a matter of divine revelation and a subject of doctrine for the church.

A. MARRIAGE AND THE RELATIONAL NATURE OF MANKIND

In Gen 2.18-23 we have the account of the creation of the woman for the man. Strictly speaking, this narrative is not an account of the marriage of the first man and woman but of God’s work in creation. The

subject of marriage is brought up in the decree of v 24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” Creation is God’s act while marriage is the act of union between the man and the woman. Since we are concerned with the subject of marriage, we will begin with the decree of v 24 to get at a biblical definition of marriage. Then we will go back to the creation narrative that leads to this decree to see how marriage fits in with the doctrine of man.

1. A biblical definition of marriage (Gen 2.24)

Genesis 2.24 points to three reference points for marriage: the couple, the parents and God. The marriage is made in the union of the man and the woman: the two become one flesh. This is the definitive act of marriage. The marriage involves the parent-child relationship: “...a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife....” Marriage is defined in the context of and out of the family. Finally we observe that Gen 2.24 presents a formal decree that ordains the relational realities of marriage. Marriage thus takes place under the decree of the creator based on the creation of the first man and woman, as indicated by the connecting phrase, “Therefore shall....”

Marriage is personal, societal and sacred. It is personal in that it is the personal union of two. It is societal in that it is defined within and defined off from the foundational social unit, the family. And it is sacred in that it is a union under God. This sacred aspect makes marriage a covenantal union.

Marriage as a sexual act is the union between the man and the woman.

Marriage as a social act is a union in the eyes of family and one’s larger social world.

Marriage as a covenantal act is a union under God and by his decree.

a. Marriage as a sexual act

The act of marriage is the act of two becoming one flesh. All scriptures testify to this definition of marriage.

Jesus defined marriage from Gen 2.24 as the union of two becoming one flesh (Matt 19.4-6). To appreciate the force of his understanding of marriage, we must take note of the context for Jesus’ statement. The Pharisees asked him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all (Matt 19. 3). Their question assumed that divorce was lawful under certain circumstances. That was a given because Moses allowed divorce. The question in debate for the Pharisees was over the lawful reasons for divorce. Jesus pointed them to Gen 2.24 and added, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (v 6). By this statement Jesus is making two points. The first is that marriage is defined by the fact that God made mankind male and female as stated in Gen 1.27 and by the decree of the creator in 2.24. The second point is that the decree of the creator makes divorce (with the intent of remarriage) an act that works against what God has done.

The Pharisees immediately sensed that Jesus’ answer challenged the Law of Moses which made provision for divorce (v 7). This side of Jesus’ answer points to the way he thought about marriage. He pointed out that if one who has such a legal document of divorce remarries, the marriage entered is an act of adultery and so an act of breaking a marriage. We must weigh Jesus’ words carefully. If divorce ended the marriage, remarriage would not be adultery. By saying that remarriage is an act of committing adultery, therefore, Jesus affirms that divorce does not sever the union of two as one flesh. Jesus is putting the focus sharply on the point that Gen 2.24 makes. Marriage is not a legal arrangement that can be terminated by a legal procedure. It is entered upon by the act of union (sexual union) in which two become one flesh under the decree of the creator. This union can only be sinfully broken by an adulterous act of union.

While we are on the subject, we should take careful note of what Jesus is saying about the union of marriage. He is not saying, as he is often understood, that what God has joined no man *can* separate. Rather, he is saying that what God has joined “let no man separate.” The sin of adultery is that it separates what God has joined.

For our study we are focusing on the fact that Jesus defined marriage solely by Gen 2.24 and did not allow any subsequent legislation change the nature of marriage. For Jesus marriage was not a legal procedure. It was the act of union under the decree of the God who made male and female.

In 1Cor 6.16 Paul clearly sees sexual union as the act of union in Gen 2.24 when he says that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her and quotes Gen 2.24 in support for this. Paul does not regard the act of going to a prostitute as constituting a marriage, but he sees the act of marriage in Gen 2.24 as the act of sexual union.

When the Bible says that two shall become one flesh, more is meant than what we would mean by the phrase, physical union. The word, flesh, in Gen 2.24 takes up the term Adam used to describe the woman when he said that she was flesh of his flesh. The idea here is that she was of the same nature as he was. In the Bible, man is flesh. The word flesh does not refer to the physical part of man in separation from his spirit or soul. Without spirit there would only be dust and man would not be flesh. Man as flesh includes his spirit and soul because he is living flesh due to having spirit and in being a living soul. The word flesh refers to his entire nature.

The biblical understanding of man as flesh shows that the sexual union is not simply a union of two bodies as if the bodies were separate from the souls of the two persons. Such an unbiblical view of the sexual act was behind the Corinthian view of fornication. They saw sexual activity in the way they regarded food and the stomach (1Cor 6.13). What we eat does not define who we are. The food passes through. The resurrection body will not be sustained by food that is produced from the ground and so will not have our present digestive system. The Corinthians applied this logic to the question of sexual activity and reasoned that sexual union does not affect the person. Paul brings two considerations against this way of thinking. First, the resurrection of Jesus shows that the body is not to be regarded in the way we regard our stomachs. The Lord is for the body and the body is for the Lord, and God will raise our bodies. Paul's point here is based on the view of human nature set in Genesis 2. Man was created as flesh. His body is essential to his identity. In God's view, a human being is never defined apart from his body. Even in the state between death and resurrection, the soul is still defined by its identity in the body, i.e., who the person was on earth and what he will be in resurrection.

As a second consideration, Paul appeals to Gen 2.24. Sexual union does not just involve the sexual organs (which we will not be needed in the resurrection, Matt 22.30). It involves the flesh or the body and so involves the whole person. Genesis 2.24 shows that sexual union involves one's identity.

Paul refers to this union of two as one body in Eph 5.28-31. He gives the practical application of the idea that two are one flesh as follows: "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church" (vv 28-29). The man's love of his own body is his love for himself. He is to love his wife as his own body even as Christ loved the church, and this love is no mere love of "the physical shell" of the soul. It is a love of the whole person.

Marriage is the union of two persons in the act of sexual union, and this union involves the whole person.

b. Marriage as societal act

In the Bible, human beings have a collective identity and are seen within the social groupings of families, tribes and nations. The foundational grouping is that of the biological family defined by the parents and their children. We must understand the part of the marriage decree in Gen 2.24 in light of this. When a man gets married, he no longer has his principal social identity in the family of his parents. Rather, through marriage a new social unit is formed, and this new unit is the basic building block of society.

The husband defines the new social unit. This follows from the fact that the woman was formed out of the man so that the relationship is defined from the man as head. That is why the decree to separate from

the parents is given to the man and not the woman. It is understood (within the logic set up in the creation of the woman out of the man) that in the marriage union the woman takes her familial identity from her husband and so leaves her own family behind. The husband who determines the new social unit is the one that must obey the decree that secures each marriage as the principal social relationship.

Marriage is personal and private in the intimate union of the two. But, this has societal significance. Marriage is in a sense a public and social institution that establishes a man and a woman as a new social unit. Due to this aspect of marriage, the groom and the bride move out from under their parents and stand alongside of them in social status. Genesis 2.24 places the marriage relationship on the top of the hierarchy of social relationships.

c. Marriage as a covenantal act

The full force of Gen 2.24 is pointed out by Jesus in Matt 19.5-6. It is the decree of the creator by which God joins the two together to become one flesh. Genesis 2.24 is treated as the creator's word as stated in Ps 33.9: "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Every couple that is joined in marriage becomes one flesh under this decree of the creator. A marriage is not made by a religious minister or by the law of the land. It is not even made by the vows that the groom and bride make to each other. Biblically, a marriage is made by the creator's decree.

When Jesus said that what God has joined together no one is allowed to separate, he pointed out that this decree stands over the two who are joined under it. In other words, the work of God through his word stands over the will of the two who are joined by that word. This makes marriage a covenant union. In the OT a covenant is a word or declaration that binds two parties together, and this word is held by God and stands above the will of the person's bound together. The bond by the covenantal word is thus sacred.

The covenantal language is used for marriage in Prov 2.17 and Mal 2.14. Proverbs 2.17 says that the adulterous woman "forgets the covenant of her God." The language does not suggest the vows she made to her husband. Rather, it has the weightier sense of the marriage covenant that God established under which she got married. In seeking a sexual relationship with a young man, this older woman has forgotten that she was bound by the covenant of God to the "companion of her youth" (v 17), i.e., the man she married when she was young. By calling the marriage bond the covenant of God, Proverbs hints at the covenant curse on the covenant breaker.

Malachi calls a man's first wife his companion and his wife by covenant (Mal 2.14). The prophet says that the Lord is witness between the man and the wife of his youth, and sees the man's act of divorcing his wife as dealing treacherously against her. Here we get the clear sense of the man and woman entering a covenant with each other of which God is the witness and the one who will punish the covenant breaker. But, Malachi does not suggest that the covenant consisted of vows made. There is no indication in the Bible of formal vows being exchanged in the making of a marriage. If we stick with the biblical view of marriage, we will understand the prophet's words as pointing to the fact that the act of sexual union was consciously carried out as a conscious act entering into the covenantal union of marriage. That marriage was a deliberate act of forming such a union is seen throughout scripture. If vows were not ceremoniously spoken, a sacred commitment or oath was made implicitly as the two enter the covenantal relationship (Ezk 16.8).

The Bible knows of sexual unions that are not marriages (such as prostitution, fornication, adultery and concubinage). Paul in 1Cor 6.16 states that such an act takes place under the decree of Gen 2.24, but it is not carried out as an act of entering a covenant. The act of marriage is thus abused.

The first account we have of a marriage in the Bible is the narrative of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 24. The marriage itself took place in the simplest manner possible. It says, "Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her" (v 67). The act of union was the act of marriage. The more involved part of the narrative concerns the way the marriage was bought about out of the two families (for the matter of family was all important to Abraham

and the covenant). Rebekah's family knew that she was going to be joined to Isaac, and Isaac took Rebekah into the privacy of the tent in the public space, i.e., within Abraham's rather large household. The fact that he took her to be his wife shows that the two united as a covenantal act.

The reference to Sarah's tent in Gen 24.67, receives an interesting echo in the Song of Solomon. The bride wants to marry her lover and wishes to take him to her mother's house and into the room where her mother conceived her (3.4; 8.2). In the end, however, the groom takes her to the place where his mother gave birth to him (8.5). In this song of marital love, marriage is the act of union in the place of one's birth, in the family home.

The marriages of Jacob to the daughters of Laban (Gen 29.21-30) and of Samson to the Philistine woman (Judges 14) fit the pattern we saw in Genesis 24. There is one slight difference. Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast (Gen 29.22). The larger society beyond the household is thus involved in the setting for the act of union. This is probably due to the fact that Laban was settled in the land and not a nomad like Abraham. At Samson's wedding, the custom of the young men was followed (Judges 14.10). In Jesus' parable of the marriage feast, the custom of the marriage feast has developed to huge proportions (Matt 22.1-14). On the side of the way society celebrates the occasion of a marriage, the Bible leaves room for custom and development. The fixed feature, however, remain: marriage is the physical union of two in the setting of family and it is carried out as a covenantal act.

2. Marriage and the created nature of man

The decree of marriage in Gen 2.24 is connected to the narrative of vv 18-23 with the phrase "For this reason." This shows that marriage is based on the preceding creation narrative. In fact, the marriage decree is of one piece with the narrative of the creation of the woman out of Adam.

Genesis 2.18-24 is neatly tied together. It begins with God saying that it is not good for the man to be alone and that he will make him a helper. The narrative moves through the steps of Adam naming the animals and the woman. It ends with the decree (of God) in response to the way Adam named the woman in v 23. The closing line is that a man and a woman shall be one flesh, and this is the divine answer to the divine statement that it is not good for the man to be alone. We can lay out the arrangement of the sequence as follows:

- A1. God speaks: states that it is not good for the man to be alone and states the purpose of making him a suitable helper
- B1. Adam speaks: names the animals, but no suitable helper found
- B2. Adam speaks: he declares that he has found the suitable helper
- A2. God speaks: the creator's decree is stated, "...and they shall become one flesh."

God speaks the purpose and the conclusion. He has the first and the last words. Adam speaks in naming, and that is the speech of discovery and acceptance of what God has done.

The story of the creation of the woman moves toward the decree of marriage. The message in this is clear. God made man and woman for the marriage union. This points to a feature of human nature, a feature by the creator's design—we are created for the type of relationship realized in marriage. Since this is part of our created design, the doctrine of man must take in the truth of this. There is no complete understanding of the human being without this.

a. Designed for a unique relationship

In Genesis 1, after God completed each creative work he looked at what he had made and said that it was good. Now in Gen 2.18 for the first and only time God said that something was not good. God did not say that the man he created was not good but that his state in being alone was not good. This means that only in

the creation of the helper is everything good. The narrative thus puts a sharp focus on the human need for relationship.

The statement that it is not good for the man to be alone did not come from Adam. God did not leave Adam to discover and express his loneliness. The statement is made by God. This point is important. Gen 2.18 is not dealing with a human felt need but with an objective fact of human existence, not with loneliness but with existing alone. This is not first of all a matter of our feelings but of our created nature.

God does not explain why it was not good for man to be alone. Rather, he proceeds to provide the solution to the problem of being alone. What God had in mind when he said that it was not good for the man to be alone must be discovered from what the woman he created was to the man, and this is stated in Gen 2.23 in Adam's words.

God began the journey toward a wife by having Adam name the animals. This points to the area of Adam's need. Up to this point in the narrative, Adam stands alone as a living soul in a garden. What he needs is a relationship with a living soul, and in the Bible animals are seen as living souls. But, the way Adam named the animals showed that none were a helper "according to what is before him" (so the literal translation). Gen 1.28 shows where the deficiency lay. Mankind alone was created in the image of God, and this gave mankind the rule over the animals. In the language of Ps 8.6, God put the animals under his feet. This uniqueness of man in creation is indicated in Genesis 2 by the different ways in which Adam and the animals were created. God breathed the breath of life (the spirit) directly into Adam, whereas the animals were simply formed out of the ground. Adam has the spirit of life in a way that raised him above the animals and gave him an intimate relationship with and closeness to God. As a living soul he stood above the animals and so was left alone.

Once Adam established by his naming exercise that indeed in the garden and among animals he was alone, God proceeded to form the woman as the suitable helper. The way he named her shows that she was that helper "according to what is before him." Adam did not simply give the woman a label. One might add that any man who wants to comprehend a woman under a simple label has a complex problem. Perhaps women are better described in poems than in names, and Adam had the innocence and intuition to do this. He described her for what she was in relation to him. Adam's poetic description points out three things about this relationship. First, by calling her flesh of my flesh, he stated that she was his equal in nature. She was as human as he was. This set her apart from animals and put her alongside of him. Second, he observed that she was not only human like him (this is now flesh) but she was human from him (of my flesh). This is what he latched onto. We know this because he named her on the basis of this insight. He called her *ishah* because she was taken out of *ish*. He gave her the feminine version of the word used for him.

The decree of marriage is based on the way Adam named the woman. This means that to fully understand the marriage relationship we have to listen to Adam very carefully. Only as his equal could the woman be the real helper to Adam. If she was in anyway inferior in nature, she would leave Adam alone. In whatever way she was below him, she would doom him to being alone. But, as his equal, she would help him by delivering him from the lonely state. But, she is not a mere equal. If all that was needed was an equal, God could have created another human apart from Adam and brought this person to him as a companion, friend and partner. Such a human creature would be as noble as Adam, but for Adam that creature would not be as fascinating as the woman he received. In the woman, God did not simply give another person, a partner. He formed a relationship that was wonderful to Adam. She was fully human out of him. This means that he saw her as belonging to him in the most profound way. Paul caught the point that enthralled Adam in Eph 5.28-33. The husband should love his wife as he own body, as himself, and nourish and cherish her wife as his own flesh. The sense of belonging and love in this is much deeper and even wholly different from the love a man may have for a friend. It would be a desecration of friendship to treat the friend as your own body. In friendship we have to leave the friend with his own identity and independence. But, the marriage bond is different. A wife can never be "a friend" because she is something much more profound than that. When Paul spoke of the love of the husband for the wife, he said, "I speak of a mystery." There is no mystery to friendship.

That Eve was taken out of man was God's doing. But, Adam had his role in the relationship. He named her and imparted to her an identity from himself. In this he followed up by naming what God did in creating. In the marriage relationship, the man gives to the woman her identity from his own identity, and this means that he gives his all, his life, to her.

The wonderful and mysterious relationship between a man and a woman in marriage shows us that we are created with a relational identity. The male identity was designed to be fully realized in a relationship with a woman, and the feminine identity was designed for this relationship with the male. This is a matter of created design. The relational nature is actualized in marriage, and here the transaction is not just physical. Our personal identity is relational so that we are open to being defined within the marriage union.

b. The ultimate relationship

In Genesis 2, procreation is not in view. God did not decide to create the woman so that the human race could procreate. The subject of procreation is first raised in God's judgment on the serpent and the woman for their involvement in sin. This means that the marriage relationship is seen not as a means to an end, i.e., for giving birth to children. The great love song of the Song of Solomon harmonizes with this. The love between the bride and the groom is celebrated without any mention of the outcome of the love union, i.e., children. We see this reflected in the NT use of the image of marriage for Christ and the church. Again, the marriage relationship is an end in itself without any further goal of having children.

What we are saying does not depreciate the value put on having children in the Bible. In Gen 1.28, the blessing on the man and woman, i.e., the marriage, is the blessing to be fruitful and multiply. Children are the divine blessing on the marriage union. But, they are not the goal of that union. The relationship of love is seen as having its own value in fulfilling what we have been made to be. This is reinforced in the marriage decree of Gen 2.24. The relationship set up in procreation (between parents and children) must give way to the marriage relationship.

c. The transcendent relationship

The marriage union is made through sexual union, but it is not just a sexual transaction. Here human beings are different from animals. Animals have sex in order to procreate (Gen 1.22). But, the Bible does not say that two animals shall become one flesh. We observe this in that we do not see animals getting married. They have a sexual drive, but they do not have the kind of love that makes for human marriage.

When discussing the decree of marriage, we noticed that a man and a woman become one flesh under the decree of God. The physical aspect of sex in itself could not bring about the mysterious union of marriage. The union made through the sexual act transcends the physical side. This is not left solely to the objective fact of the creator's decree. Human beings are created with a kinship with God and have transcendence over the physical world. This enables them to rule the world. It also means that what they do with their bodies they do with their spirits and in their relatedness to the divine. This is seen in the dynamics of love that come with sexual union. Adam does not simply copulate with the woman presented to him and go on with his work. He pauses over her and evaluates, describes, names, celebrates her and gives her an identity: in short he loves her. Adam's words (v 23) and God's word (v 24) resonate. Behind the human words expressing love in momentary exhilarating terms is the abiding word of God that gives the commitment of love a status that is not limited to human experience of love.

Genesis 2 shows that we have been created for this unique, ultimate and transcendent relationship. But, the full significance of this is not brought out in the creation account. For this we must turn to the theme of marriage and the divine-human relationship.

B. MARRIAGE AND THE DIVINE-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

In the OT marriage is used as a metaphor for the LORD's covenant relationship with Israel. The fact that marriage is covenantal provides a natural basis for the analogy (Ezk 16.8). The prophets who developed this analogy were dealing with Israel's unfaithfulness to the LORD. They were prophesying in view of the failure of the spiritual marriage as Israel forsook God, the husband, and went after other gods.

In the NT the analogy of marriage is used for the relationship between Christ and the church. This time the vision is not of failure but of eternal success. Christ "...will present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing...holy and blameless" (Eph 5.27). The closing vision of the Bible is of the glorified church as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21.2).

The visions of failure and success in the spiritual marriages are parallel to the states of marriage in the two Testaments. In the OT, the marriage scene is a mess. Polygamy and concubinage were practiced. Moses gave legislation for divorce. As Jesus pointed out, the state of marriage was adapted to the hardness of people's hearts. Jesus established the original institution of marriage for the NT. For his disciples, the institution of marriage would not be accommodated to the hardness of human hearts. He came to redeem from sin and not to accommodate sin. The accommodating and ideal practices of the institution of marriage reflect the difference between the old and the new covenants.

The OT prophets saw the marriage covenant between the LORD and Israel as the Law of Moses. This covenant brought Israel into a sacred relationship with the LORD without changing the heart of the people, and so it failed. The relationship between Christ and the church is different. Christ removed the barrier of sin by his blood and gave the Holy Spirit. When it comes to the conduct of the believer, the gift of the Spirit means that he is not left to walk in the flesh. The believer now can walk by the Spirit and not carry out the desires of the flesh. In marriage, the believer by the Spirit can carry out God's original design. He is not left to adapt the standard of marriage to the hardness of the heart. The gift of the Spirit is also significant for the church as the bride of Christ. YHWH of the OT tied Israel to himself by the law, but the law left the nation in its sinful state. Christ, in contrast, imparts his life, power and eventually glory to the church. The relationship is not external. It is one that fulfills the idea of marriage. Christ imparts his life and all to the church.

There is a significant shift in the direction of thought between the OT and NT. In the OT, the prophets used marriage as a metaphor for Israel's relationship with God. In Ephesians 5 the line of thought is reversed. Christ's relationship with the church is not seen in light of the human marriage relationship. Rather, the human relationship is seen in light of Christ's relationship with the church. When Paul speaks of the two becoming one flesh, he says, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Eph 5.32). The mystery of Christ and the church is the eternal purpose of God. Now we see that the true prototype is not the human marriage but the marriage between Christ and the church which God purposed from eternity.

The Spirit's work in the believer is to make the reality in Christ real in our walk and experience. In this work he carries out his role in the trinity. He will only apply to us what is from the Father through the Son. When it comes to his grace for married Christians, he will work to make the husband and wife reflect the relationship between Christ and the church. In this work he builds on the foundation of creation, but he does not simply work to realize what is stated in Genesis 2. He rather he causes the dynamics of the relationship between Christ and the church to be worked out in the Christian marriage.

In this relationship, the husband represents Christ and the wife represents the church. We could put this more abstractly and say that in the divine-human relationship, Christ and the husband represent the divine side of giving and the church and the wife the human side of receiving. This is not intended to demean the wife. The mystery Paul opens up in Ephesians 5 elevates the church to a full union with Christ and a participation in all that is his. On the human level, the fact that the man represents Christ in the relationship does not take anything from the wife. It means that the husband gives his all to the wife. It is a relationship of imparting and participation.

Genesis 2 shows us that we have been designed for such a relationship. Our identity is relational. This is true of our individual as well as our collective identities. The individual is designed for marriage, and collectively mankind is designed for union with God. This relationship of union has an order. It is structured from the man to the woman and from Christ to the church. The two are to be integrated in that the relationship of Christ and the church is to be reflected in the relationship between the husband and the wife.

The woman in this relationship is in a real sense equal to the man. Without the equality in nature, there could not be the full participation and the wonderful oneness. But it is not just a matter of equality. If the woman takes her equality in nature to make herself a mere partner in the relationship, she is working against the kind of unity God created the man and woman for and is not allowing the marriage to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church. By giving her equality in nature and capacity the priority, she may in certain instances promote efficiency in performance, but she is not establishing the higher and spiritual reality of the unique relationship. The man and the woman do not have a mere individual identity. Their personal identities are relational and they must actualize their identities in the formation of the relationship.

As a human being, the woman is in the image of God just as the man is. This is the main point in Gen 1.26-28. It is the first truth. As the image of God, the man and the woman stand between God above and the creation below them. They are like God and rule over the lower creation. Mankind standing within creation reflects God's relationship with creation, and here the woman stands alongside of the man. This equality is seen in the NT. The apostle taught that the new man (self) is put on by both male and female Christians and this new man is renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him (Col 3.10). But, mankind is not simply related to God and creation. There is a relationship between man and woman in marriage, which reflects the personal relationship or union between God and his people. The difference between this interpersonal relationship and the relationship with creation is important. The relationship with creation is one of categorical difference and of ruling. The physical world cannot be one with God. God does not impart his glory and life to creation, and creation cannot participate in this. Creation does not have the capacity for such participation because it is not in the image of God. Here man is unique within creation. Pantheism, in which all creation is one with God, is a pagan notion.

The relationship between God and mankind is personal, and this relationship was designed to become one of union. This union does not involve mankind melting into God and losing all distinct personal identity. This would dissolve all relationship and there would be no possibility for love. Rather, the union between the Lord and his people is that mysterious oneness that is reflected in marriage.

If we redefine and reconfigure marriage, we give up the only grasp we have of the ultimate union between God and man. What is even worse is that as we redefine the marriage relationship we will inevitably read ideas into the relationship between Christ and the church that are not true. A feminist view of marriage will lead to a feminist view of the church. How can it be otherwise? Apart from the marriage relationship, we have no way of seeing the nature of the love relationship of Christ and his church. Since the identity of husband and wife are interrelated, a change in the identity of the church must involve a change in the identity of Christ and redefine Christ and even God in the divine-human relationship. In this change, the human side determines the relationship, and this is a total reversal of the relationship. In fact, it is idolatry for human beings to shape the identity of God. But, how we understand Christ in relation to the church is inseparable from how we understand marriage, for marriage is our only access to this understanding.

The marriage union is a great mystery, as Paul said, and Christian couples are the stewards of the very language of this mystery. If they give up the human analogy of the mystery, they are destroying the conceptual building blocks of the mystery. This brings us to the weightiness of human identity. We do not live or exist unto ourselves. We are not isolated individuals but have relational identities. In the way we live we are defining others both horizontally and vertically. The early creed given by the apostle Paul to the Gentile Christians states the case of our existence: "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (1Cor 8.6). This is true of gender and marriage as of everything. Gender and marriage are to be kept

as a sacred trust for aspects of God's relationship are uniquely carried within them. If the marriage union is a great mystery, then the Christian couple is the steward of the great mystery of Christ and the church.