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• EAST AFRICA •

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE AND PARENTING

by

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A Christ-centered biblical exposition and application of God's revelation concerning marriage and parenting, covering its institution, purposes, our roles and responsibilities with particular attention to relationships, communication, sex, parenting, family planning, and divorce.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF MARRIAGE

I. The Origin of Marriage

A. Some notions of how the institution of marriage started

1. African Legend (Lesotho): “Long ago there were four young men who always hunted together. There was no one else on earth or so they thought, but one day God created woman and taught her to speak, to bake bread and clay pots, to grow grain and cook it. Thus, one fine day the four brothers met this young woman and wondered if she was a human being or an animal. One of them said he liked her and withheld his brothers from treating her as game. The three of them went away saying they were only interested in hunting game and if he wanted that animal all to himself he was welcome to it but they would then also go and hunt for themselves. They were never seen again because, after years of hunting, they were caught by the lions and died in the wilderness when they were too old to look after themselves and defend themselves. Their woman-loving brother stayed with the woman who lived in a cave near a well in the rocks. She possessed fire, so she cooked his meat for him and gave him some porridge and boiled vegetables as well, which she had cultivated herself. The man was very happy and better fed than ever. They had many children, and in the end even grandchildren, who looked after the old people.” (Knappert 1990: 153)
2. Indian Legend: Blind Deerghatumma proposed marriage to give absolute power to men over women.
 - a. His proposal was because women were exercising “too much power.”
 - b. However, if the reason for marriage is to allow men to abuse power, we should abolish marriage all together.
3. Some suggest that marriage evolved as man evolved:
 - a. Marriage is said to have originated as a result of the need to sort out duties in relation to child-rearing and good preparation.
 - b. However, if the roles in marriage evolved, they can continue to evolve and change into different roles.
4. If marriage is only a human institution, whether developed by legend or naturally evolved, man can change the rules that govern it or do away with it altogether.

B. The Word of God records that God started marriage (Gen 2:18-25)

1. The divine origin of marriage is quoted by Christ in **Matt 19:5**.
2. The divine origin of marriage is quoted by Paul in **Eph 5:31**.
3. Therefore, we cannot change it or do away with it. Our job is to obey what God says regarding His institution.

C. Marriage completes God’s good for man by providing a helper suitable for him

1. “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Mankind was actually created in two stages (**Genesis 2** is a detailed account of the creation of humanity, which is first described in **Gen 1:26-27**). Having made only man, who was designed to receive a companion, implies:
 - a. There was more to be done—God’s work regarding man was not yet completed: man was and is designed to receive a companion to be in union with him.
 - b. The perfect man in paradise (the perfect place) with good food, a good job (**Gen 2: 15**), and a good God, was still not adequate or sufficient all by himself.
 - c. Mankind was made like a lock and key—either one without the other is useless.
 - d. People are interdependent, not independent.
 - e. The typical state of men and women is to be married. Celibacy is a special gift from God (**1 Cor 7:7**).
2. “I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18). A “helper suitable” means someone “corresponding to,” or a “counterpart” of, the man, to complement and assist him, not be his slave. That implies:
 - a. Man needs a companion with whom to talk, feel, empathize, rejoice, sorrow, etc.
 - b. The need for a helper reveals man’s need for an assistant, a supporter, a contributor, a companion.
 - c. Man needs help to populate the earth and in the task of dominion over the earth.
 - d. The title “helper” is an honorable one.
 - (1) God Himself is sometimes called our “Helper” (**Ps 30:10; 40:17; Heb 13:6**).

(2) Jesus called the Holy Spirit our “Helper” (**John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7**).

(3) Since the title of “Helper” is a legitimate one for the Creator of the universe, then it is hardly a lesser or demeaning one for a wife. To the contrary, it is a title of honor, and she should wear it proudly.

(4) Husband and wife thus mirror the three Persons of the Trinity who “help” each other create, govern, grieve, enjoy, etc.

3. The process God used in having Adam name the animals revealed that no animal was suitable as man’s helper (Gen 2:19-20).

a. *The Lord brought the animals to Adam to name, that is, to examine their qualities.* Adam examined the qualities and gave suitable name based on those qualities. The process revealed that “*there was not found a helper suitable for him*” (**Gen 2:20**).

b. *A certain Rabbi gives us this picture—the animals coming in pairs: “Everything has a partner, but I have no partner.”*

c. *Adam may have become aware of certain needs within himself by God’s design—the need for companionship, assistance in life’s tasks, personal and sexual intimacy.* However, Adam did not find what he was looking for among the animals because what he needed was not an animal.

d. *Application: Men have you become aware of and admitted your inadequacy?*

(1) You were designed not to be independent of your wife.

(2) You also should be aware that your need for a suitable helper cannot be met by anything in the material or animal realm.

D. God created man’s suitable helper from man’s own body (Gen 2:21-22)

1. God made the helper while Adam slept. There is no record that Adam had any part or input into the design or process.

2. Adam did not know how to solve his need for a helper.

3. God determined what Adam needed in accordance with His eternal purpose and wisdom. Only He knows the factors that make a woman a suitable helper, companion, and complement to a man in order to reflect in them His own image.

4. The Lord determined how to meet the need—what was suitable as man’s helper.

5. God made the helper from Adam’s own substance, his own body, his rib, a substance different from animals. That implies:

a. She is not to be identified with the animal world.

b. She is not a beast of burden, despite many cultures that treat women as such.

c. She is not to be beaten, physically or verbally.

6. As someone has wisely said, “The woman was not made from man’s head, to rule over him, or from his feet, to be crushed by him, but from his side, to complement him as an equal partner, but with a different role.”

7. Application: What is your attitude and behavior toward your wife or husband?

II. The Nature and Purposes of Marriage

A. *Marriage is, at its root, spiritual*

1. Marriage symbolizes the oneness between the three members of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Just as the three members of the Trinity are separate persons but one God, so a husband and wife are separate persons but are joined to each other and “shall become one flesh” (**Gen 2:24**).

2. Marriage is a picture of the relationship Jesus Christ has with His church (Eph 5:22-33).

a. The wife is to submit to her husband as the church submits to Christ.

b. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for the church.

c. Therefore, the married couple should be a vivid, living example of the relationship that Christ has with his church.

B. *Marriage is the foundational and core institution of human society*

The *breakdown of marriage* (through divorce, same-sex unions, and sex outside of marriage), which inevitably follows a neglect of the Word of God, is destroying Western culture and will do the same to non-Western cultures.

C. Purposes of marriage

1. From the Genesis account, the following purposes of marriage emerge:
 - a. Companionship (**Gen 2:18**)
 - b. Unity (**Gen 2:24**)
 - c. Procreation (**Gen 1:28; 9:1, 7**)
 - d. Pleasure (**Gen 3:16**; see also **Eccl 9:9; Song of Solomon 1-8; 1 Cor 7:3-5**)
2. To these the New Testament adds the following purposes of marriage:
 - a. Protection from sexual immorality (**1 Cor 7:9**)
 - b. Personal or progressive sanctification (**Eph 5:26**)

2. MEN AND WOMEN: THE IMAGE OF GOD AND HUMAN NATURE

I. Human Beings and the Image of God

A. Human Beings as Created Beings

1. The first thing Scripture tells us about God is that he is the creator (Gen 1:1). The first thing that Scripture tells us about ourselves is that we are *creatures*, created by God (**Gen 1:26-27; 2:7, 18-22**).
2. Scripture also tells us that God did not simply make the first two human beings (Adam and Eve), and then leave us on our own. Rather, God makes *every single person* (**Exod 4:11; Job 10:8; 31:15; Ps 100:3; 119:73; 139:13-16; Isa 44:24; Jer 1:4-5; 27:5**).
3. There is a connection between creation and ownership. Because God made us, we are his (**Deut 10:14; Ps 24:1; 50:10-12; 95:6-7; 100:3; Isa 17:7; 29:19; 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18:1-10; Rom 9:20**).

B. Why God Created Humanity

1. God did not create human beings out of any lack, or deficiency, need, or sense of need. God does not “need” anything (**Acts 17:24-25**). God is unique. God is self-sufficient. He is one, but by nature is a complex being consisting of three persons, known as the Trinity (e.g., **Gen 1:2, 26; Duet 6:4; Ps 110:1; Isa 42:1; 48:16; 61:1; Matt 28:19; John 1:1, 14; 8:58-59; 10:30-33; 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:5-15; Rom 10:9-13; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Heb 1:1-3; 1 Pet 1:1-2; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 20-21**).
2. The Bible tells us that God created mankind to glorify himself (Isa 43:7; Rom 9:23; Rev 4:11; see also Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31). We rightly do not like it when other human beings want to be “glorified” (i.e., be magnified; worshipped; praised; extolled; made the subject of one’s ultimate love, affection, esteem, honor, etc.). However, what is wrong for us is right for God, because God alone is *worthy* of our ultimate love and glory. God *is* love, goodness, beauty, truth, and is the ultimate source and ground for all of these virtues. Consequently, God’s highest gift that he can give us is *himself*. God’s unswerving commitment to his own glory fuels his love for us and is good news for us—the more we glorify God in our lives, the more we become like him.
3. To glorify God means that we are to be in right relationship with him. The first and greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (**Mark 12:28-30; Matt 22:36-38; Deut 6:5**). The essence of eternal life is “that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (**John 17:3**). To “know” God (and for him to “know” us) means far more than simply cognitive knowledge, but implies relationship: choice; setting favor on; having regard for; intimacy (**Gen 4:1; Ps 1:6; Jer 9:23-24; Amos 3:1-2; Matt 7:23; 1 Cor 8:3; Gal 4:8-9**). To be in right relationship with God—to love and know and glorify him—should cause us to *delight* in him (**Ps 37:4; Ps 94:19; Isa 58:13-14**). Consequently, the Westminster Larger Catechism correctly affirmed in Question 1: “What is the chief and highest end of man? Answer: Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever” (Westminster 1647).

C. The Image of God in Human Beings

1. In Gen 1:26-27 God said: “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
2. “Image” and “likeness” appear to be synonymous terms. The Hebrew for “image” is *tselem*. Insofar as man is concerned, *tselem* is defined as “likeness” (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001: “*tselem*,” 2:1029). The Hebrew for “likeness” is *demuth*. *Demuth* is defined as “model, shape, something like,

likeness” (Ibid.: “*Demuth*,” 1:226). Their synonymous nature is seen in that in **Gen 1:26**, when God proposes to create man, he uses both terms, but in **Gen 1:27**, when he actually creates man, only “image” is used; however, in **Gen 5:1** (which refers back to the creation of Adam) only “likeness” is used. **Gen 9:6** uses only “image,” and **Gen 5:3** uses both terms, but in reverse order from how they were used in **Gen 1:26** (and, in **5:3**, the prepositions are also reversed from the way they were used in **1:26**—i.e., **1:26**: “*in Our image*,” “*according to Our likeness*”; **5:3**: “*in his own likeness*,” “*according to his image*”).

3. Males and females equally bear the “image of God” (IOG).

a. **Gen 1:26** says “*Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.*” The basic meaning for “man” (*adam*) is the collective “mankind, people,” which includes both males and females. That it includes both the male and female here is made clear in the next clause, which says, “and let *them* rule . . .” **Gen 1:27** makes explicit that both males and females are included equally, since it says, “And God created man [*adam*] in His own image, in the image of God He created him; *male and female* He created *them*.” Further, in **Gen 1:28** God blessed “them” (the man and the woman) equally and spoke to “them.” In **Gen 1:29**, when God says “I have given *you* every plant yielding seed,” the “you” is plural, not singular.

b. *Thus, as Hoekema explains: “Man and woman together are the image of God. . . . Man’s having been created male and female is an essential aspect of the image of God. . . . Man’s existence as male and female means that man as a masculine being has been created for partnership with another being who is essentially like him but yet mysteriously unlike him. It means that woman is the completion of man’s own humanity, and that man is wholly himself only in his relationship with woman.”* (Hoekema 1986: 97, *emph. in orig.*)

4. The IOG is not specifically defined in Scripture. However, different passages help us see what probably is involved with the IOG.

a. *The IOG as related to God’s nature and glory.*

(1) God is spirit (**John 4:24**). When God created Adam and Eve, in his image and likeness, the incarnation had not yet occurred. That indicates that the IOG is a “spiritual” image/likeness, probably including our capacity for relationship with God. This is at least hinted at when God created man (and unlike how he created other forms of life), He “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*” (**Gen 2:7**; see also **John 20:22** where Jesus “*breathed on [his disciples], and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’*”). Further, in **Gen 1:28** God for the first time addressed his creation directly; his speaking to Adam and Eve indicates that they are different from the rest of creation—because they have the IOG God can communicate with them in a way he does not with other kinds of created beings.

(2) “Image” (*tselem*) is defined as, “man, God’s likeness, God’s image, i.e. he is God’s viceroy, representative or witness among the creatures” (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001: “*tselem*,” 2:1029). Thus, the IOG is not just something we have, but is something we are. The concept of man as the *image* or *likeness* of God “tells us that man as he was created was to *mirror* God and to *represent* God” (Hoekema 1986: 67).¹ As a mirror reflects, so man should reflect God and His glory. Further, since God’s mandate to people was to “fill the earth” (**Gen 1:28**), God’s image and glory would be spread over all the earth as his representatives obeyed the mandate. Two analogies may help to explain this idea of the IOG:

(A) *A telescope takes something that is actually huge (a distant planet or star), but seems very small to us, and makes it seem larger (to us) than it otherwise is. There is a natural creator/creature gap (that has been intensified because of sin). Although God is “huge” in the sense of being omnipresent, many people give him no thought; to them, God is no bigger than a distant planet or star appear to the naked eye. However, like a telescope, God’s people, who bear his image,*

¹“This fact is tied in with the prohibition of image making found in the second commandment of the Decalogue: ‘You shall not make for yourself a graven image’ (Ex. 20:4, RSV). God does not want his creatures to make images of him, since he has already created an image of himself: a living, walking, talking image. If you wish to see what I am like, God is saying, look at my most distinguished creature: man. This means that when man is what he ought to be, others should be able to look at him and see something of God in him: something of God’s love, God’s kindness, and God’s goodness.” (Hoekema 1986: 67)

bring God “closer”—others see God clearer and larger because of God’s representatives among his creatures.

(B) *Similarly, the IOG can be compared to a microscope, which makes visible things that otherwise are invisible to the naked eye.* Like a microscope, people bear God’s image and thereby make his invisible reality visible.

(3) The perfect human image and representation of God is Jesus Christ. Scripture specifically calls Christ “the image of God” (**2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15**) and “the exact representation of His nature” (**Heb 1:3**; see also **John 14:8-9; 2 Cor 4:6**). In Christ we see the IOG in all of its perfection. Consequently, “There is no better way of seeing the image of God than to look at Jesus Christ. What we see and hear in Christ is what God intended for man” (Hoekema 1986: 22).

b. *The IOG as related to human structure.* In some sense the IOG has to do with “who we are” (i.e., our *ontology*; our being; our essence) as human beings; in some sense our being and nature reflects the being and nature of God himself. **Gen 5:1-3; 9:6**; and **Jas 3:9-10** indicate that all people still bear the IOG even though mankind fell into sin; thus, there is some aspect of the IOG that inheres in all people as a part of our very being. (See also **Psalms 8** which, although it does not use the phrase “image of God,” speaks of mankind in accord with the concept of man as set forth in **Genesis 1**.) The similarities with the structure or being of God include:

(1) Similarities of form. God is plural, yet is one (i.e., the Trinity); we are plural, yet one:

(A) *We were created male and female.* More than sexual differentiation is involved here, because animals are male and female, but the Bible does not say that they have been created in the IOG. When **Gen 1:27** says that God created mankind in the IOG, and then adds “male and female He created them,” the verse is saying that “the human person is not an isolated being who is complete in himself or herself, but that he or she is a being who needs the fellowship of others, who is not complete apart from others” (Hoekema 1986: 76). That point is made clear in **Genesis 2** which describes the creation of woman and the institution of marriage. Indeed, the plurality-within-unity in human beings which is most indicative of the Trinity is best seen in marriage, where the man and woman, although remaining individuals, “become one flesh” (**Gen 2:24**).²

(B) *Further, each person consists of a material, physical part (body) and an immaterial, non-physical part (soul); however, these are unified as one person, an “entire self.”* God manifested this himself by becoming a human being in the person of Jesus Christ, who was both fully man and fully God. Thus, it is *not* true that our physical aspect is sinful or bad, whereas our non-physical aspect is holy—humanity is a unity, and this is indicated by the fact that, in the age to come, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and we will not merely be disembodied souls, but will have new bodies as well.

(2) Similarities of position. God is creator and has dominion over everything; we are creative and have been given dominion over creation and all that is in it.

(3) Similarities of capacities. God is rational, moral, volitional, and passionate; we are rational, moral, volitional, and passionate beings. In this regard, “God’s image in man impresses within him an intuitive sense of right and wrong. Formal code or no, it was a sufficiently clear rule of life, which all men, in varying degrees, have both obeyed and suppressed. It is to this that men were and are justly held accountable.” (Wells and Zaspel 2002: 142) This “intuitive sense of right and wrong” is discussed in **Rom 1:18-2:16**. Thus, God justly condemned people, even before the Mosaic law was given, for such things as covetousness (**Gen 3:6**), false worship (**Gen 4:5**), murder (**Gen 4:8-11**), sexual sin (**Gen 6:1-7**), evil thoughts (**Gen 6:5**), dishonoring parents (**Gen 9:22-25**), pride (**Gen 11:4-8**), and idolatry (**Rom 1:18-32**), because the people knew better.

c. *The IOG as related to human function and relationships.* Other passages speak of the IOG not

²Hoekema cautions that “what has just been said, however, must not be interpreted as implying that only a married person can experience what it means to be truly and fully human. Marriage, to be sure, reveals and illustrates more fully than any other human institution the polarity and inter-dependence of the man-woman relationship. But it does not do so in an exclusive sense. For Jesus himself, the ideal man, was never married. And in the life to come, when humanity will be totally perfected, there will be no marriage (Matt. 22:30).” (Hoekema 1986: 77)

as something that is “static” or that remains unchanged in all people despite the fall of humanity into sin, but in dynamic terms connected with what we do and how we relate to God and to other people.

(1) **Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18, Eph 4:22-24, and Col 3:9-10** all talk about the image in dynamic and moral terms. In these passages the IOG is connected with our “new self” in Christ. This indicates that, in some sense, the IOG was tarnished through sin, and we no longer bear it properly. The IOG is being restored in God’s people as they come into a saving relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ, and are progressively sanctified through obedience to God and submission to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In fact, one way to look at sanctification is that it is the restoration of the IOG in all its fullness in redeemed people.

(2) One reason Christ became a man was not only to bear our sins, but to be the example of what we are to be like. Christ *only did* what the Father wanted him to do (**John 4:34; 5:17-20, 30; 6:38; 8:28-29; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24, 31**). Thus, our goal is to become “transformed into the image of [God’s] Son” (**Rom 8:29**), because as we walk in God’s ways we express God’s character and reflect his goodness.

(3) There is also a sense in which the IOG is eschatological. **Luke 20:34-36, 1 Cor 15:49** and **1 John 3:2** indicate that there is an everlasting, heavenly aspect of the IOG that will not be fully realized until we are in the final state in the new heavens and the new earth. Then, and only then, we will be “like Him” (**1 John 3:2**), and “like the angels” (**Luke 20:36**), and will “bear the image of the heavenly” (**1 Cor 15:49**). At that time we shall no longer have the power of indwelling sin within us; our characters shall be perfectly conformed to the nature of Christ.

5. Ethical implications of the IOG. The functional and structural aspects of the IOG are obviously related: one can either view the structural elements as existing for the purpose that people function properly, or that what we do is based on who and what we are. There are at least three ethical aspects of this:

a. *Relationships and love are central to the IOG*. The “structural” nature of God, and the way in which he created people, implies a relational aspect to our being bearers of God’s image. The very fact that God is a Trinity and that he “is love” (**1 John 4:8**) indicate that, as a part of his very essence, all persons of the Trinity are in perfect loving relationship with each other. Further, the first time that God said that something was “not good” was when he said “*it is not good for man to be alone*” (**Gen 2:18**). Those facts imply the following:

(1) The IOG is not (only) shown by individuals alone; rather, a necessary part of demonstrating the IOG is corporate—by people in relationship with one another. The most intimate human relationship, which is both built into the creation order and is designed to reflect Christ and the church, is marriage (**Gen 2:24; Eph 5:23-32**). Thus, our marriages, in particular, should reflect the IOG.

(2) Because Christ is the perfect representation of the IOG, “What must therefore be at the center of the image of God is . . . that which was central in the life of Christ: love for God and love for man. If it is true that Christ perfectly images God, then the heart of the image of God must be love. For no man ever loved as Christ loved” (Hoekema 1986: 22). Indeed, we are to love others precisely because they have been created in the IOG.

b. *The IOG rules out ethnic hatred*. The IOG is far too rich to be completely represented by a single human being. Indeed, “*the [IOG] in its totality can only be seen in humankind as a whole,*” which implies that “we can only see the full riches of the image of God as we take into account all of human history and all of man’s diverse cultural contributions” (Hoekema 1986: 99-100, *emph. in orig.*). This may be one reason why Christ has redeemed people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (**Rev 5:9**; see also **Rev 7:9-10**). That fact alone should eliminate such concepts as racism, and ethnic or tribal hatred. Christians of all ethnic and other groups must think of themselves as *Christians* first, and as members of ethnic, national, political, economic or other categories second. It is true that “blood is thicker than water.” However, for Christians the blood of *Christ* must be seen as the common blood that binds us together, not the blood of family or race, since, in fact, all people’s blood is red and interchangeable anyway.

c. *How we value and treat others is how we value and treat God*. Our creativity and dominion,

and our rational, moral, volitional, and passionate capacities, reflect a permanent, stable aspect of the IOG; however, we can use all of those things dynamically. It is our *abuse* of those things through sin which demonstrates the loss or tarnishing of that image. Indeed, “The very greatness of man’s sin consists in the fact that he is still an image-bearer of God. What makes sin so heinous is that man is prostituting such splendid gifts” (Hoekema 1986: 85). Three implications follow from these facts:

- (1) “The reason that murder is said [in **Gen 9:6**] to be such a heinous crime that it must be punished by death is that the man who has been murdered is someone who imaged God, reflected God, was like God, and represented God. . . . To touch the image of God is to touch God himself; to kill the image of God is to do violence to God himself” (Hoekema 1986: 16). Indeed, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves precisely because we are all created in the image of God. Thus, the way we treat a fellow image-bearer of God demonstrates how we see, treat, and value God himself (**Jas 3:9-10**; see also **Prov 14:31**; **1 John 4:20**). Again, this is particularly true within marriage (see **1 Pet 3:7**).
- (2) None of the passages that discuss the IOG imply any difference in how we are to treat non-Christians compared to how we are to treat Christians. We are to treat human beings alike, because they all bear the IOG.
- (3) Even the most sinful people bear the IOG. Consequently, we must not look at people as less than human because of who they are or what they have done—and we can appeal to the IOG to give them hope that there is a better way of living.

II. Men and Women are Ontologically Equal

A. *“Ontology” relates to the nature of being or existence*

When we say that men and women are ontologically equal, we mean that men and women are equal in terms of their being, or essence of what they are. More specifically, this implies that men and women are equally valuable; neither sex is “more human,” or “more like God,” or “closer to God.” That is so despite various physical and functional differences between men and women, and despite the fact that the male (Adam) was created first (from the dust of the ground [**Gen 2:7**]) whereas the female (Eve) was created second (from Adam’s rib [**Gen 2:21-22**]). None of those facts or circumstances affects men’s and women’s ontological equality.

B. *Men’s and women’s ontological equality is seen scripturally in several ways*

1. As has already been discussed (section I.C.3, above), **Gen 1:26-27** states that God created “man” (i.e., “mankind”) which included both male and female; both equally bear the IOG. Since both men and women equally bear the IOG, *ipso facto* they are ontologically equal.
2. In **Gen 1:28-29**, God’s blessing, his “dominion mandate,” and his provision for food were equally given to man and woman.
3. In **Gen 2:18, 20**, God decided to create a helper “suitable” for Adam, because the animals were not “suitable.”
 - a. *The term translated “suitable” (neged) means “that which is opposite, that which corresponds” (Koehler and Baumgartner, 2001: “neged,” 1:666).* Hoekema explains: “The words [‘suitable for him’] imply that woman complements man, supplements him, completes him, is strong where he may be weak, supplies his deficiencies and fills his needs. Man is therefore incomplete without woman. This holds for the woman as well as for the man. Woman, too, is incomplete without the man; man supplements woman, completes her, fills her needs, is strong where she is weak.” (Hoekema 1986: 77)
 - b. *The fact that Eve was formed from Adam’s own body demonstrates her ontological equality with Adam, because she is of the same substance as Adam.* Adam recognized this when he said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (**Gen 2:23**).
4. Men and women are equally fallen in sin (**Rom 3:23**), and thereby equally in need of redemption.
5. Men and women are equally redeemed in Christ, and are equally redeemed in the same manner (**John 3:16**; **Acts 2:21**; **Rom 10:8-13**). Indeed, in Christ “there is neither male nor female,” and women are equally “‘sons’ of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (**Gal 3:26-28**).
6. Men and women are equally recipients of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:16**).
7. Men and women are equally “fellow-heirs” of the grace of eternal life. They have the same

eschatological destiny (**Gal 3:29; 1 Pet 3:7**).

III. Despite Their Equally Bearing the IOG, and Their Ontological Equality, Men and Women Exhibit Multiple Differences

The sexual differences between men and women are obvious. However, multiple other physiological, chemical, and neurological differences appear to be built into what it means to be “male” and “female.” These in-born traits affect the physical, mental, psychological, and social realms of men and women; they affect how men and women tend to perceive things and act. The differences go beyond the different ways that boys and girls are nurtured and socialized, and in the roles men and women are asked by particular cultures to play. Of course, nurture, socialization, and culture are very important—they interact with, and may augment, biological differences. Further, not every male may differ from every female in an absolute sense in each measure of comparison—in many cases, male-female differences are statistical differences or tendencies that can be schematized like “overlapping bell curves.” However, the following examples indicate some of the significant ways in which the two sexes are differentiated. These general tendencies should be borne in mind because they affect how we see, regard, and relate to each other. Recognizing these tendencies can do at least two important things for us and our relationships: (1) It can lead to greater *understanding* and *appreciation* of the “opposite sex,” and a greater understanding and appreciation of what is implied by the “IOG”—how both sexes lead to a “wholeness” of what it means to be human that neither sex can fulfill on its own. (2) It can *enhance* our relationships, including our marriages, by helping us to realize when we are acting in stereotypical ways and need to change our behavior. Louann Brizendine says: “If we acknowledge that our biology is influenced by other factors, including our sex hormones and their flux, we can prevent it from creating a fixed reality by which we are ruled. The brain is nothing if not a talented learning machine. Nothing is completely fixed. Biology powerfully affects but does not lock in our reality. We can alter that reality and use our intelligence and determination both to celebrate and, when necessary, to change the effects of sex hormones on brain structure, behavior, reality, creativity—and destiny.” (Brizendine 2006: 6-7)

A. Physiological Differences

1. The average height for men is 1.77m while women are on average 12cm shorter (Except as otherwise noted, points 1-4 in this section are from Archbold n.d.).
2. The average female hip measurement is 1.00m while men’s hips are on average 8cm smaller.
3. The average male weighs 78 kilos which is 13 kilos heavier than the average female.
4. Women have less body water (52% for the average woman v. 61% for the average man). This means that a man's body will automatically dilute the alcohol more than a woman's body, even if the two people weigh the same amount.
5. Men usually have greater upper body strength, build muscle easily, have thicker skin, bruise less easily and have a lower threshold of awareness of injuries to their extremities. Men are essentially built for physical confrontation and the use of force. Their joints are well suited for throwing objects. A man’s skull is almost always thicker and stronger than a women’s (Conner n.d.)
6. Only 5-7 percent of women are as strong as the average male. Men have greater hemoglobin concentrations and lower body fat, which gives “fit” men an edge over “fit” women in all sports except long-distance swimming (This and point seven of this section are from Rhoads 2004: 144-45, 221-22).
7. Women’s skin is more sensitive to touch than men’s; women can hear higher sounds and a broader range of sounds and tones in the human voice, detect fainter odors and identify more accurately what they smell, and perceive and remember colors better than men (see also Brizendine 2006: 17). Women’s greater sensitivity to smell is largely related to chemical changes in the female brain related to the particular time of the menstrual cycle (Brizendine 2006: 86-87).

B. Health Differences

1. Women have a 78% greater chance of becoming blind (Points 1-6 in this section are from Archbold n.d.).
2. Men are 2.7 times more likely to become involved in a road traffic accident.
3. Men are 4 times more likely to die of a smoking related illness.
4. Women are 3 times more likely to suffer from migraines compared to men.
5. Although men are more likely to suffer from heart attacks, women are more likely to die within 1 year of a heart attack.
6. Men are approximately 3 times more likely to commit suicide than women.
7. Women who smoke are 20 to 70% more likely to develop lung cancer than men who smoke the same

amount of cigarettes (Points 7-12 in this section are from Canadian n.d.).

8. The same drug can cause different reactions and different side effects in women and men (even common drugs like antihistamines and antibiotics), and some pain medications, known as kappa-opiates, are far more effective in relieving pain in women than in men.

9. Women have stronger immune systems to protect them from disease, but are more likely to get autoimmune diseases (diseases where the body attacks its own tissues) such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, scleroderma and multiple sclerosis.

10. After menopause women lose more bone than men, which is why 80% of people with osteoporosis are women.

11. Anxiety is four times more common in women than in men, and depression is 2-3 times more common in women than in men, at least during women's reproductive years, in part because women's brains make less of the hormone serotonin and more estrogen (see also Brizendine 2006: 2-3, 53, 132-33). Additionally, approximately 10% of women suffer from postpartum depression within a year after giving birth (Ibid.: 181-83).

12. During unprotected intercourse with an infected partner, women are 2 times more likely than men to contract a sexually transmitted disease (STD) and 10 times more likely to contract HIV. The consequences of STDs are also far greater for women than men—women are much more susceptible to reproductive cancers and infertility (Rhoads 2004: 108).

C. Neurological and Chemical Differences

1. Men's brains average about 9% bigger than women's brains (after correcting for body size), but both men's and women's brains have the same number of brain cells (women's are packed more tightly) (Brizendine 2006: 1). Women have 11% more neurons, and four times as many brain cells (neurons) connecting the right and left side of their brain, than do men. Thus, the typical woman's brain seems to be "networked," and the typical man's brain more compartmentalized. Men rely easily and more heavily on their left brain to solve one problem one step at a time. Women have more efficient access to both sides of their brain and therefore greater use of their right brain; they can focus on more than one problem at one time and frequently prefer to solve problems through multiple activities at a time. Positron emission tomography (PET) scans show that women seem to use more neurons for almost every activity tested. The woman's way seems better for many verbal tasks and for recovery from strokes, the man's for spatial tasks (Conner n.d.; Rhoads 2004: 27-28; Brizendine 2006: 4-5).

2. The central hub for emotion and memory formation—the hippocampus—is larger in women's brains. Further, there are much greater connections between the emotional centers in women's brains than in men's. Women use far more areas of their brain for processing emotion than do men, and have greater "emotional memory." Thus, typically women are better able to "read" people—faces, tone of voice, emotional signals and nuances—than can men, with the exception of anger and threat, at which men are as efficient as women (Brizendine 2006: 4-5, 117-34; Rhoads 2004: 262).

3. Additionally, some verbal areas of the brain are larger in women than in men, and on average women tend to talk more (in girls 2-3 times more), speak more rapidly, and listen more than do men (Brizendine 2006: 28-30, 36, and 125-31).

4. All fetal brains begin by looking female, but in the 8th week a huge testosterone surge begins in boys' brains which kills off some cells in the communication centers and grows more cells in the sex and aggression centers (Ibid.: 14). Males receive another large testosterone surge when they are 9-15 years old (Ibid.: 91). Men typically have ten times more testosterone than women. High testosterone levels appear to increase masculine (e.g., aggressiveness, domination, competitiveness, mechanical and spatial abilities) and decrease feminine (e.g., interest in babies, housekeeping, dolls) traits and behaviors (both within males and females). Prenatal levels of testosterone are more important than adult levels in explaining later preferences and behavior (Rhoads 2004: 28-34, 49, 57-59, 153-54, 172). Rhoads states: "As men women age, differences between the sexes diminish. Standard social science observes that grandfathers are kinder and more lovable than fathers, and that mothers become more independent as they grow older. Researchers who look for biological causes think this convergence can be explained in part by the fact that men lost testosterone over time, while women lose estrogen faster than they lose testosterone." (Ibid.: 49) Further, when men are frightened or fail their testosterone levels decrease; when they succeed, men achieve a pleasurable testosterone increase; women do not appear to get the enjoyable testosterone surges when they win or achieve things.

5. Whereas male brains are washed with testosterone in utero, young girls of about 18 months undergo what is called "infantile puberty," which lasts about two years, in which the ovaries begin producing

huge amounts of estrogen that “marinate the little girl’s brain.” This prompts the development of the ovaries and brain for reproductive purposes, but also enhances the female brain circuits and centers for observation, communication, emotion, and nurture, and reinforces the impulse to make social bonds based on communication and compromise. Then, from menarche to menopause, women are subject to hormonal (estrogen and progesterone) surges which affect their brain circuitry, and thereby sharpen women’s thinking and emotional responsiveness. Pregnancy further changes women’s brains and chemistry. After menopause ends, these profound, cyclical hormonal surges, women’s emotions tend to become steadier, but less acute, and women less emotionally responsive (Brizendine 2006: 19-22, 32-35, 97-116, 135-52).

D. Personality and Attitudinal Differences

1. Interest in, and attitudes toward, sex are significantly different between men and women, and remain great as we age. The sex-related centers in male brains are about 2-2½ times larger than parallel structures in female brains (Brizendine 2006: 5, 91). One survey indicated that more than seven times as many men as women reported feeling sexual desire more than once a day, and more than four times as many women as men said “not at all.” On average men say they think about sex three to five times per day; women say several times per week or month. In 20-30 year olds, males think about sex more than once per minute, whereas females think about it once per day, or three to four times per day during their most fertile days (Ibid.: 91). For men more than for women, good and frequent sex is closely associated with marital happiness. In and out of marriage, women say that they engage in sex to share emotions and love; men give reasons that are more physical, such as need, sexual gratification, and release. Similarly, men who commit adultery are more likely to do so for reasons of sexual variety and excitement, whereas women are more likely to do so for emotional intimacy that they lack with their husbands. When deprived of sex, men are much more likely than women to become morose and irritable (except as otherwise noted, points 1-3 in this section are from Rhoads 2004: 26, 48-66, 121, 152-53, 173, 252).

2. Testosterone levels are reflected in the appearance of males; the same holds true of estrogen levels in females. Estrogen levels directly correspond to both fertility and beauty. These hormones are related to men’s and women’s conceptions of male and female attractiveness.³ Men generally think women are most beautiful when their estrogen levels are highest (ages 20-40); mature women who seem younger than their age have above-average levels of estrogen. In fact, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) studies indicate that feminine beauty affects a man’s brain at a very primal level, similar to what a hungry man gets from a meal or an addict from a fix. Men give significantly greater importance to the physical attractiveness of a potential female partner than women do to the physical attractiveness of a potential male partner. Men tend to favor women who are slightly younger than themselves, with clear skin, lustrous hair, full lips, and figures with the waist about 1/3 smaller than the hips. Women, on the other hand, tend to prefer strong men who are a few inches taller than themselves, a few years older than themselves, with symmetrical features; they care far more about a partner’s resources, power, and status than do men. Both men’s and women’s preferences appear to be universal, regardless of race (Ibid.: 56; Brizendine 2006: 61-63, 85-86).

3. Women value athleticism, strength, and aggressiveness in a partner, whereas men in general are not attracted to dominant females, and find competitiveness and dominance-seeking by a woman to be unattractive (Rhoads 2004: 152-53, 173).

4. Men tend to be more stubborn, less flexible, and want more “space” than women do; groups of males tend to be bonded by mutual interest in the same activities, but boys are relatively more attached to things, and less to people. On the other hand, from childhood girls tend to focus on close relationships and, especially, a best friend.⁴ Thus, men’s self-esteem tends to be derived more from their ability to

³Rhoads adds that, although a man’s face can look too masculine, a woman’s can rarely appear too feminine (Rhoads 2004: 57). In that regard, although there are, of course, differing levels of testosterone in men, there appears to be one basic “type” of man whereas, differing levels of testosterone in women appears to result in “two types of women” (i.e., those who are more “typically” feminine and those who “are more likely to mix typically feminine with typically masculine traits and behaviors”) (Ibid.: 29-32).

⁴Brizendine notes that the combination of oxytocin and dopamine form the biological basis for the drive for intimacy with its stress-reducing effect. Both oxytocin and dopamine production are stimulated by ovarian estrogen at the onset of puberty, and for the rest of a woman’s fertile life. That means that teenage girls get even more pleasure from connecting and bonding than they did before puberty—“it’s the same kind of dopamine rush that coke or heroin addicts get when they do drugs” (Brizendine 2006: 37-38).

maintain independence from others, while women's is derived more from their ability to maintain close relationships with others (Brizendine 2006: 41).

5. The above points reflect an apparent temperamental difference between the sexes seen in Genesis 2-3, both before and after the "fall" of mankind. Males appear to have a more definitive relationship with "work" and productivity than do females.⁵ In **Gen 2:15** God took "the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it." The man was also given the responsibility of naming the animals (**Gen 2:19-20**). Further, as a result of Adam's sin, God's punishment relative to him was to curse the *ground*, thus intensifying and making more difficult man's labor (**Gen 3:17-19**). On the other hand, the woman was created specifically to be "a helper" for the man (**Gen 2:18-22**); that indicates an inherently prominent "relational" orientation within females. That relational orientation is seen most acutely in women's unique ability to give birth and nurse. Consequently, Eve's sin likewise resulted in a punishment directed to woman's special nature: greater suffering relative to the birth process and a changed relationship with her husband (**Gen 3:16**).⁶

E. Behavioral Differences

1. A large body of research finds that males are more competitive and females more cooperative; in fact, males not only like competition more but also do better when a situation is seen as competitive. This tendency is even reflected in differences in preferred forms of humor—women like to laugh with others, and use jokes as a way of making others feel comfortable; men tend to communicate through insult, jest, and innuendo (Points 1-4 in this section are from Rhoads 2004: 134-36, 140-43, 156, 171-72, 193, 198, 204, and 219-21).

2. Men in general are more aggressive, tolerate more risk, and engage in more reckless behavior than women. There appears to be a biological basis for this, linked to male exposure to testosterone *in utero*, along with decreased amounts of serotonin in men compared to women, and structural differences in male versus female brains. On the other hand, females generally are far gentler and more peaceable than males in large part because of hormonal differences (relatively high levels of serotonin, oxytocin, and estrogen compared to men).

3. From early childhood to old age females are more interested in infants than are males, and are more empathetic, tender-minded, and nurturing than are men. Females appear to be better at nurturing than are males. There appears to be a biological basis for this. "The most important nurturing hormone is the peptide oxytocin. In both males and females, oxytocin promotes bonding and a calm, relaxed emotional state. In men it is released in large quantities during orgasm. In women, oxytocin is released in large quantities during pregnancy and breastfeeding." (Rhoads 2004: 198) Women and mothers are more attached to young children than are men and fathers. Studies have shown that women mothers are better than men and fathers at reading body language, identifying babies' emotions, reading babies' faces, and distinguishing babies' cries and noises; babies appear to prefer the sound of their mother's voice.

4. The above differences may lie behind the "fight-or-flight" response that kicks in under conditions of great stress in men; on the other hand, research indicates that women react to great stress through a "tend-and-befriend" process, rather than through "fight-or-flight." Tending involves trying to protect one's self and offspring from harm; befriending extends the protective element to groups who provide mutual aid when the woman is unable to care for herself or her children (see also Brizendine 2006: 41-42). Thus, women tend to use social support under conditions of stress than do men. Men tend to coalesce in groups for offensive purposes, women for defensive purposes.

5. Men and women tend to process and react to emotional difficulties differently. Both men and women are comfortable being physically close to happy people, but only women report that they feel equally comfortable being close to someone sad. Men are used to avoiding contact with others when they themselves are going through an emotionally hard time (Points 5-6 of this section are from Brizendine 2006: 28-30, 36, 125-31).

6. Although men and women report feeling the same amount of anger, they tend to process their anger differently. Men, especially younger men with higher testosterone levels, have a quicker anger response,

⁵The difference between men and women with respect to work or other activities appears to be not so much a matter of intelligence (both sexes have the same average level of intelligence), ability, or aptitude—but rather attitude or orientation; hormonal differences appear to account for much of this difference (Brizendine 2006: 7-8).

⁶These basic orientations are seen in cross-cultural divorce data: women divorce men for not working hard enough at steady jobs; men do not divorce women for that reason. On the other hand, men divorce women for not doing enough housework; women do not divorce men for that reason. (Rhoads 2004: 61). See Section V.C.1, below.

and express anger more aggressively. Women tend to have a less direct response to anger; their manner of expressing anger and showing aggression tends to be more subtle although just as real.⁷

F. Infant Studies

1. One-day-old females respond more strongly to the sound of a human in distress compared to one-day-old males. Three-day-old girls maintain eye contact with a silent adult for twice as long as boys. Girls will look even longer if the adult talks; it makes no difference to boys. One-week-old girls can distinguish an infant's cry from other noise, whereas boys usually cannot. Four-month-old girls can distinguish photographs of those they know from people they do not; boys generally cannot. On the other hand, five-month-old boys are more interested than girls in three-dimensional geometric forms and in blinking lights; they smile and babble at them as if they were animate, which girls rarely do (Points 1-4 in this section are from Rhoads 2004: 5, 23, 25, 145, 154; see also Brizendine 2006: 15-18).
2. One-year-old infants can distinguish, and prefer to look at, children of their own sex, even if the girl is shown in dark pants banging on a drum and the boy in a dress holding a doll.
3. Girls between twelve and twenty months display more empathy and comforting behavior than boys of the same age. By age two boys run around more and, when looking at a picture book with passengers in vehicles, the boys focus on the vehicles while the girls focus on the people inside.
4. Boys are more assertive than girls at thirteen months of age; sex differences in aggression appear by age two, which is well before girls and boys are capable of reliably knowing which behaviors are more characteristic of one sex than the other. Rhoads adds, "If socialization explained most of the gender differences in aggression, one might expect males to become more aggressive as they age, since the sexes would become more and more socialized to their gender roles through time. But in fact, the reverse occurs: the sex differences diminish with age" (Rhoads 2004: 145).

G. Human Universals and Cross-Cultural Studies

1. "Among human universals found in every known society are binary distinctions between men and women, division of labor by sex, more child care by women, more aggression by men, and domination of the public sphere by men" (Rhoads 2004: 17-18; Points 1-6 in this section are from Rhoads 2004: 17-18, 26, 151-52, 155, 169, 195, 203).
2. "Matriarchies—societies where women have more political, economic and social power than men—do not exist; in fact, there is no evidence that they have ever existed. Even matrilineal societies, where kinship structures are determined by the female line, are rare" (Ibid.: 151).
3. Conversely, one study of 186 societies finds that mothers are the principal or almost exclusive caretakers of infants (age two and under) in 90 percent of the societies; human males around the world do very little caregiving during a child's infancy, and around the world mothers spend vastly more time not only with infants and toddlers, but also with children up to age ten, than do fathers. "Cross-nationally, girls show more interest in babies and are preferred as babysitters. Neither Israeli kibbutzim nor U.S. communes have had any success in abolishing such sex roles, although many have made doing so their highest priority" (Ibid.: 26). Further, "in all cultures that have been studied, girls like dolls and play parenting more than boys do. Four-year-old boys asked to care for a baby watch passively, while four-year-old girls tend to it actively." (Ibid.: 195)
4. Certain aspects of male play, such as dominance struggles, combat, and rough play, appear to be cross-culturally universal or nearly so. School age females try to mitigate conflict, whereas school-age boys enjoy it (see also Brizendine 2006: 24, 40).
5. Differences in personality traits such as independence and friendliness are generally constant across ages, educational levels, and nations. Substantial similarities exist across cultures. Men are not

⁷In talking about pre-pubescent girls, Brizendine notes the more subtle nature of girls' aggression compared to boys', while at the same time unconsciously testifying to the fallen nature of humanity (sweet little girls included): "Little girls don't usually exhibit aggression via rough-and-tumble play, wrestling, and punching the way little boys do. Girls may have, on average, better social skills, empathy, and emotional intelligence than boys—but don't be fooled. This doesn't mean that girls' brains aren't wired to use everything in their power to get what they want, and they can turn into little tyrants to accomplish their goals. What are those goals as dictated by the little girl's brain? To forge connection, to create community, and to organize and orchestrate a girl's world so that she's at the center of it. This is where the female brain's aggression plays out—it protects what's important to it, which is always, inevitably, relationship. But aggression can push others away, and that would undermine the goal of the female brain. So a girl walks a fine line between making sure she's at the center of her world of relationships and risking pushing those relationships away." (Brizendine 2006: 28-29)

appreciably more “masculine,” nor women more “feminine,” in traditional compared to egalitarian countries.

6. “When men and women in six cultures were asked what kind of person they would most like to be, women used adjectives like *loving*, *sympathetic* and *generous*, whereas men used *assertive*, *dominating*, *competitive*” (Rhoads 2004: 152).

IV. Effects of Male-Female Differences in Interpersonal Relationships

The above differences between men and women are reflected in different ways in which men and women deal with relationships. Being aware of these tendencies can help us better understand and relate to our spouse, and help us stop trying to fit him or her into our mold. Male-female differences can, of course, lead to conflict within a relationship, but awareness of the source of such differences can help us to resolve conflicts when they occur. The following are very basic types of such relational conflicts:

A. Relational Conflicts Resulting from Male-Female Differences

1. The most frequent complain men have about women: women are always trying to change them; the most frequent complaint women have about men: men don't listen.
2. Men always assume women want advice and solutions to problems, that that is the best way to be helpful and to show love; women often just want empathy and someone to sincerely listen to them. However, when a woman tries to change, or improve, or correct, or give advice to a man, men hear that they aren't competent, or don't know how to do something, or that they can't do something on their own.
3. Men often try to change a woman's mood when she is upset by offering solutions to her problems, which she interprets as discounting and invalidating her feelings. Women often try to change a man's behavior by offering unsolicited advice and criticism and becoming a “home-improvement committee.”

B. Awareness of Male-Female Differences to Resolve Conflict

1. When women are upset, it is not the time to offer solutions, though that may be appropriate at a future time when she is calmed down. A man appreciates advice and criticism when it is requested. Men want to make improvements when they feel they are being approached as a solution to a problem rather than as the problem itself.
2. Men have great needs for status and independence (emphasis on separate and different). Women have needs for intimacy and connection (emphasis on close and same).
3. Women need to receive caring, understanding, respect, devotion, validation, and reassurance. Men need to receive trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval, encouragement.
4. Women are motivated when they feel special or cherished. Men are motivated when they feel needed. A man's deepest fear is that he is not good enough or not competent enough, though he may never express this (Relationship n.d.).
5. Brizendine concludes with observations from her own clinical (neuropsychiatry) practice: “As both men and women grow into middle and older years, gain more life experience, and feel more secure, they often become more comfortable expressing a fuller range of emotions, including those—for men especially—they have long suppressed. But there’s no getting around the fact that women have different emotional perceptions, realities, responses, and memories than do men, and these differences—based on brain circuitry and function—are at the heart of many interesting misunderstandings. Evan and Jane came to see each other’s realities. When she broke down crying out of the blue, he tried to figure out if he was being unresponsive in some way. When she was tired and didn’t want to have sex, he fought his instincts and took her at her word. When he became irritable and possessive, she realized she hadn’t been sexually attentive enough.” (Brizendine 2006: 133-34)

V. Marriage in the Context of Male-Female Differences

Given the above differences between men and women, it is not surprising that God designed marriage into the creation order (**Gen 2:24**). A committed marriage along the lines that the Bible describes (**Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Pet 3:1-12**) is the best circumstance in which both sexes can mutually complement each other and find fulfillment and satisfaction.

A. Marriage per se that makes people happier, healthier, and better off financially.

A vast amount of research demonstrates that marriage itself makes people happier, healthier, and better off financially (Waite and Gallagher 2000: passim; Morse 2001: 83-158; Thomas and Sawhill 2005: 57-74; Rector, Fagan, and Johnson 2004: passim; Stanton 1996: passim) Nock summarizes some of the research data,

as follows: “Married people are generally healthier; they live longer, earn more, have better mental health and better sex lives, and are happier than their unmarried counterparts. Further, married individuals have lower rates of suicide, fatal accidents, acute and chronic illnesses, alcoholism, and depression than other people. Some disagreement may exist about the magnitude of such effects, but they are almost certainly the result of marriage, rather than self-selection. Married people do not simply *appear* to be better off than unmarried people; rather, marriage changes people in ways that produce such benefits.” (Nock 1998: 3, citations omitted) Further, there are clear and positive effects—physical, mental, emotional, educational, social, and behavioral—that marriage has for children (Rector, Fagan, and Johnson 2004: passim; Waite and Gallagher 2000: 124-49; Morse 2001: 83-158). Cohabitation is not the equivalent of marriage for any measure of wellbeing (Morse 2001: 64, 93; Thomas and Sawhill 2005: 57; Wilson 2002: 3-7, 38-40).

B. The positive effects of marriage are particularly evident in males.

“The culture of marriage and fatherhood civilizes males, and in the wake of either marriage or fatherhood a man’s testosterone level falls” (Rhoads 2004: 147). Thus, marriage creates more peaceful and law-abiding men. “After researchers control for race, income, parents’ education and other societal variables, they find that family structure determines a large proportion of crime leading to incarceration” (Ibid.). Additionally, family structure *per se* appears to affect family income—several studies indicate that married men earn more than unmarried men, and that about half of the wage difference “is a direct effect of marriage” (Thomas and Sawhill 2005: 60; see also Wilson 2002: 17). Although almost all studies conclude that women gain from some from marriage, because of the more dramatic effects in men, men seem to gain the most; men gain “by simply *being married*” (Nock 1998: 3; see also Rhoads 2004: 92, 253).

C. The nature of the marriage makes a difference to both men and women⁸

1. Women’s caring more about her husbands’ resources and status, but men’s *not* valuing those things in their wives, are reflected cross-culturally in divorce data. “Several studies have found that women divorce men who are not ambitious and do not work steadily at good jobs. . . . In contrast, couples with ambitious wives or wives with increasing incomes are more likely to divorce. And while women seldom divorce men based on a failure to do enough housework, men do seek divorce on that ground.

A cross-cultural anthropological study examining reasons for conjugal dissolution in 160 modern and primitive societies finds this pattern everywhere. Since many of these societies are poor, one might have guessed that men would divorce women who did not help bring home the bacon. But as Laura Betzig reports, the economic reasons for divorce are ‘clearly segregated according to sex. Husbands are divorced for failing to provide material means, wives for failing to process them.’” (Rhoads 2004: 61)

2. On the other hand, many research studies have looked at *happy marriages*. “Surveys of mature married couples also find that women dislike men who regularly give way, even when it is their husbands giving way to them! One well-researched topic compares marital power to marital happiness, which can be measured by subjective scales. Marital power is trickier to measure, but social scientists try by asking questions (who makes up first after a quarrel? who decides where you will live?) and by observing couples debating something (who gives commands, interrupts and conciliates). One survey of over twenty such studies found only one constant: Wife-dominant couples were the least happy, and the wives in wife-dominated unions were less happy than their husbands. (When male dominance helps marriages, it is moderate, not autocratic, dominance; marriages do not work where wives cannot influence husbands.) . . . In one way, men and women in traditional marriage both get exactly what they want. As noted earlier, when asked how they would like to be described, men use words like *dominant, assertive, independent*. Women asked the same question say *loving, generous, sensitive*.

If marriage means bringing together one person with a taste for assertion and another with a taste for generosity, we should not be surprised to find that the former is, in some sense, the head of the family. This doesn’t mean he rules like an absolute dictator. Indeed, it’s still quite common to hear of small, feminine women who have their strong, masculine husbands “wrapped around their little fingers.” Happy women usually rule indirectly. They can rule because their husbands love and want to please them. They can also rule because, as psychological studies have demonstrated, women can read

⁸Monogamy is, of course, the Biblical ideal, and divorce is strongly discouraged in the Bible (see **Gen 2:24; Matt 19:3-9; 1 Cor 7:10-14**). Not surprisingly, these truths are borne out sociologically. Rhoads states, “Monogamy is preferable to polygamy, which leaves many more men without a woman, thus promoting violence among men competing for women. It is also preferable to serial monogamy, which raises the possibility by violence by jealous former partners” (Rhoads 2004: 146).

men better than men can read women. What matters, then, is only that men be the ostensible heads of households. In such cases, both parties emerge happy.

One way to get men to dominate less and be open to their wives' influence is to create what Brad Wilcox calls "soft patriarchs." Such figures can be found in conservative Protestant churches, which urge husbands to be "servant leaders" who attend to their wives' needs for communication and affection as well as to the family's need for economic wherewithal and moral leadership. While the emotional work of marriage may not be inherently pleasurable or come naturally to men, it can become central to their lives if it is seen as a duty or as intrinsic to a mission. . . . Wives doubtful about whether to grant titular household leadership to husbands should realize they may not have to give up much more than the title. Some studies have shown that husbands overestimate their decision-making power, while wives underestimate theirs. Yet an early study 'found that the most satisfied husbands were those who believed they had the greater decision-making power even where there was no independent evidence of it.'

A woman who seeks power outside the family through a dominant and aggressive personality will have to be as agile as Spiderman if she is to be happily married as well. My female students often warm to Anne Moir and David Jessel's description of another type of female power, which is 'something subtler, the force that creates relationships, binds families and builds societies.' This kind of power we desperately need. It is past time for both sexes to appreciate its importance." (Rhoads 2004: 72, 261-62, 263) The above data merely confirm that the Bible has been right all along.

3. GOD'S WILL FOR WIVES

I. Introduction

A. The role of wives is generally learned from role models to whom we are exposed: our culture; our own fathers; relatives; friends; mass media, etc.

Our tendency—either consciously or subconsciously—is to imitate our primary role models or to react against them.

B. The only stable and secure foundation for the proper role of wives is God's Word

1. Good and bad role models, or information in the mass media, may be *helpful*, or *illustrative*; however, they cannot be *foundational*.
2. We must test every role model and idea about wives by the Scripture, because "*There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death*" (**Prov 14:12**).

II. Major Scriptural Texts

The major texts dealing with wives we will consider are: **Gen 2:15-18, 24-25; Eph 5:2-23; 1 Tim 5:14-15; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-6; and Prov 31:10-31.**

A. Gen 2:15-18—¹⁵*Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.* ¹⁶*The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."* ¹⁸*Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."*

1. Regarding Gen 2:15-18:

- a. Husband-to-be is to be a worker, a steward of God's creation.
- b. Wife-to-be is created to be her husband's suitable helper.
- c. *The problem of aloneness is solved as one helps the other.*

(1) Often men and women live out their daily routines in two separate spheres, neither interacting with nor assisting the other in any significant or meaningful amount. Such separation does not facilitate intimacy, nor solve the problem of "aloneness."

(2) This does not require that a wife be her husband's co-worker on his job, but it does require that she take an interest in what he does and try to be supportive, encouraging, and helpful with respect to his work.

(3) Application: Whatever a wife does, she was created to do it from the perspective of a suitable helper—i.e., with the purpose that her husband not be alone in his life tasks, in any of its aspects.

d. *The husband is the covenant head of his household.*

(1) Adam was created first, received the command directly from God, and Eve was created to be his helper.

(2) The wife is to accept her husband's instructive leadership, insofar as it is godly.

2. Mankind's subsequent sin has corrupted this relationship. In **Gen 3:16** God said to the woman: "*I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*"

a. *The woman had been created specifically to be "a helper" for the man (Gen 2:18-22). That indicates an inherently prominent "relational" orientation within females.* That relational orientation is seen most acutely in women's unique ability to give birth and nurse. Eve's sin resulted in greater suffering relative to the birth process and a changed relationship with her husband.

b. *With respect to the statement, "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you," most commentators agree that this verse reflects the beginning and cause of marital discord and/or sexual power struggle, although the precise nature of the interaction between the "desire" and "rule" are disputed.* Different views of the meaning of this verse include the following:

(1) The punishments of Gen 3:14-19 each relate to essential life function and relationship. The woman's motherhood is burdened by severe pain, and her role as man's helper will be deprived of ultimate fulfillment (Walton 2001: 227-28).

(2) "You will still desire [as you did before the Fall, though now tainted by sin] your husband, and he will still rule [as he did before the Fall, though now tainted by sin] over you" (Busenitz 1986: 207).

(3) Desire is the pre-existing subordinate relationship, but "rule" means that the man will now dominate harshly (Stitzinger 1981: 41-42; see also Fleming 1987: 352, "*God is warning the woman about the chilling change in her husband so that she may be aware that the man is not about to treat her in the same way as before*").

(4) Woman's desire is to master her husband, and his God-ordained rule will require effort (Foh 1974-75: 376-83).

(5) Woman's desire is to possess and manipulate her husband, but he is capable of dominating her (Vogels 1996: 197-209).

c. *It is only in Christ that we have, through our new, regenerated hearts and the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, that wives and husbands have the ability to recover a proper, God-ordained, loving, and mutually-edifying marital relationship.*

B. Genesis 2:24-25—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.* ²⁵*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

1. The husband is to establish a separate and intimate household for his wife.

a. By command this responsibility is given to the husband.

b. By implication the same command and responsibility is given to the wife.

2. The parent-child relationship is not the primary social relationship; marriage is.

3. The wife must separate from her parents.

a. That does not mean that she should stop loving, honoring, or caring for her parents; it does mean that the new family can receive advice and assistance, but not commands, from the parents.

b. It implies separating mentally, emotionally, economically, and physically from the parents, insofar as that can be done—i.e., to no longer be in a state of dependency on them.

c. It does mean accepting and helping the husband as part of a new, separate decision-making unit and household.

4. The wife must allow and encourage attachment, an intimate bond of love—physically, mentally, and emotionally. She must strive to "become one flesh" with her husband. She must strive to be so united in her relationship with her husband as to foster a "naked and unashamed" intimacy with him.

5. Application: Wives, as well as husbands, often are not willing to "cut the apron strings" to mom and dad. The insecurities of "leaving and cleaving" must be worked through. Insecure wives can cause their husbands to cling to their own parents, friends, children, job, sports, alcohol, pornography, or another woman simply by neglecting to entrust themselves to their husband's care and oversight, instead of encouraging him to cling to her. Admittedly, many men rebuff the effort of their wives, but there are

many wives who fail to try, or who give up too soon.

C. Eph 5:22-24—²²*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.* ²³*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.* ²⁴*But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

1. Historical context.

- a. *Women in classical Greek culture led a completely secluded life.* They took no part in public life, never appeared on the streets alone, and never even appeared at meals or social occasions. A woman had her own apartments, and none but her husband could enter them. It was the aim of the Greek that she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible, and ask as little as possible. Women were kept in subordination because they were considered less rational than men. The virtue of women was silence (see Gombis 2005: 326).
- b. *In Hebrew society, “although within the confine of the Hebrew home the wife and mother had a place of honor and love assigned to her, and one that was no doubt higher than that in the surrounding paganism at any period of Israel’s history, nonetheless there was never any thought of equality between her and her husband.”* The wife was considered distinctly inferior (Bowman 1947: 442).
- c. *In Roman society, women had a higher status.* They tended to have greater financial independence, and were able to have greater social interaction and engage in public and civic life in more ways than in classical Greek and Hebrew societies. Nevertheless, there were different sexual and legal rights for men and husbands compared to women and wives. Further, “heads of some households could hold total sway over their wives, making them subject to their husband’s domination and their position vulnerable to exploitation” (Winter 2003: 18).
- d. *At the same time in Roman society at the time of the New Testament, there was a countervailing trend, the emergence of the so-called “new Roman woman”—i.e., “a woman in high position, who nevertheless claim[ed] for herself the indulgence in sexuality of a woman of pleasure”* (Ibid.: 21). That was reflected in different modes of dress and promiscuous sexual behavior. That trend was so pronounced that Emperor Augustus promulgated new laws which “prescribed moral conduct, financial disadvantages in remaining single, the procreation of children with resulting career advantages, and dress codes for wives; it proscribed marriage between certain classes, and punished inactivity on the part of husbands who ignored their wife’s extramarital liaisons” (Ibid.: 39).
- e. *In contrast to both the inferiority of women in traditional Greek, Hebrew, and Roman societies, Eph 5:22-33 “is a manifesto for a radically new society. Because the household was a microcosm of the entire believing community, it provides a concrete model for how Paul’s readers can carry out the command in Eph. 5:18-21 to be ‘the household of God’ . . . While Paul does not here call for the overthrow of patriarchy, he does indeed call for the relationship between husbands and wives to be oriented according to the New Humanity”* (Gombis 2005: 322, 328). Consequently, the household is no longer for the benefit of the patriarch, and wives are no longer considered inferior; headship is based on self-giving and the cross, and authority is to be used for the good of those in subordinate positions; husbands are not to dominate their wives, but to love them (a command that appears in no other ancient household code); those in positions of subordination are to be subordinate “from the heart,” again, based on the cross; the entire passage is patterned on the relationship of Christ and the church, which radically reorients how marriage is to be understood, making it theologically rich and meaningful (Ibid.: 324-28).

2. Literary context.

- a. *Eph 5:22-33 is Paul’s most extensive discussion of the roles of husbands and wives.*
- b. *The passage arises out of Paul’s discussion of the proper way for Christians to “walk” [live] (Eph 4:1; 5:1-2, 15).* The more specific context stems from Paul’s exhortation to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). “Being filled with the Spirit,” in turn, is characterized by four participles: “speaking” (5:19); “singing” (5:19); “giving thanks” (5:20); and “submitting [submitting] to one another” (Eph 5:21). Paul then describes the concept of *submitting* [submitting] in the context of marriage—he first applies it to wives (Eph 5:22-24), and then to husbands (Eph 5:25-33).
- c. *We know that the passage which begins with Eph 5:22 relates back to Eph 5:21 (and thereby back to Eph 5:18) because there is no verb in 5:22.* Although most translations of 5:22 say something like “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” the words “be

subject” are actually not in the Greek of **5:22**; they are only found in **5:21**.

d. In contrast to non-Christian household codes which were directed only to men to indicate how they were to control their wives for their own benefit, “Paul addresses wives directly, exhorting them to participate fully and willingly in the New Humanity” (Ibid.: 326).

3. “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord”—the nature of biblical submission.

a. *What submission is not.*

(1) Submission is not inferiority.

(A) *Jesus the Son is not inferior to God the Father, although He is subordinate to the Father (1 Cor 11:3).* While on earth Jesus did *nothing* on his own initiative, but *only* did what he saw and heard from the Father (**Matt 26:39; John 4:34; 5:17-20, 30; 6:38; 8:28-29; 10:18; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24, 31**). Even in heaven he continues to be subordinate to the Father (**1 Cor 15:24-28**).

(B) *Similarly, by God’s design husbands and wives have different roles within the marriage; the wife is not inferior to her husband, although she has a subordinate role.* This is hinted at in that, in **Eph 6:1** and **5**, Paul says that children should “obey” their parents and slaves “obey” their masters. Instead, in this passage and **Col 3:18** he substitutes another Greek word, which is translated “be subject to.” This indicates that there is a significant difference in the status of a wife, and in the nature of her relationship with her husband, compared with the status of children and their relationship with their parents, and the status of slaves and their relationship with their masters.

(2) Submission is not suppression or oppression.

(A) Many men, even many Christian men, have suppressed and/or oppressed their wives throughout the centuries.

(B) They have oppressed their wives’ talents and potential, and have neglected the wisdom and fuller companionship God has given them through their wives by suppressing them.

(C) Such suppression not only is sin, it is the *exact opposite* of love—the exact opposite of how Christ “loved the church and gave himself up for her” (which is how husbands are commanded to love their wives).

(3) Submission does not mean that a wife cannot have their own opinions and express them freely, have talents and potential and use them fully, and have righteous dreams and desires and pursue them as she is able.

A wife is a separate individual from her husband. Her opinions, talents, abilities, dreams, and desires add, as fully as the husband’s, to the richness of what married life is designed to be.

(4) Submission does not mean that the wife has a right to feel resentment.

(A) **Eph 5:33** says that the wife is to “respect her husband.”

(B) There is no respect in the kind of submission that is done only out of fear of reprisal or with gritted teeth.

b. *What submission is.*

(1) The idea behind “submission” or “being subject to” is of placing oneself under someone—being subordinate, not inferior. Paul reinforces this thought in **Col 3:18** (“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”), which is virtually identical to **Eph 5:22**.

(2) Biblical submission is always voluntary, from the heart, and to the Lord.

(A) *Submission is voluntary.* The Greek verb for “submission” (“be subject to”) used in **5:24** and implied in **5:22** is *hupotasso*. That verb “is here and elsewhere in like contexts in the New Testament always in the middle (reflexive) voice, and the implication is that *the one ‘submitting himself’ does so through an act of his sovereign will and that he could equally have elected to have done otherwise. . . .* Its normal usage is for the relationship between equals, or at all events for the act of submission to duly constituted authority on the part of one who voluntarily submits to the same. It is the act of a free person in a democratic society in which he wishes to see the principles of law and order maintained, and for which end he is prepared to sacrifice somewhat of his liberties to the common good of all. In a word, the verb in question is one which gives expression to the principle of liberty as opposed to license, of order

in place of anarchy” (Bowman 1947: 443-44, *emph. in orig.*).

(B) *Nowhere in this passage or anywhere else in the Bible are husbands told to “make,” “force,” or “manipulate” their wives to submit.* Submission is an act of free choice on the part of the wife, not something that is to be coerced by the husband.

(C) *Submission is from the heart.* This fact follows from the fact that submission is a voluntary act of the wife. Although external “submission” might be coerced, internal submission (the only kind of submission that is pleasing to God) cannot be coerced. Submission “from the heart” is Christ-like and cross-based. It is *not* a form of “passive-aggressive” survival strategy or form of manipulation to enable the wife to control her husband or get what she wants. Instead, submission has the good of the marriage, the family and, ultimately, the glorification of God as its object.

(D) *Submission is to the Lord.* The reason why submission can be both voluntary and from the heart is that, ultimately, submission is an act of love and obedience to the Lord. That is indicated both in **5:22** and **24**. A wife’s submission to her husband, at its heart, is an act of faith and trust in Christ—a way of saying, “I will choose to give up some of my liberty to this man because I love you, Lord, more than him; I am trusting that you will protect and build up me, my husband, and our marriage, and will be glorified by my obedience to your word.”

4. **Eph 5:22-24**—additional comments.

a. **Eph 5:22**—“*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*”

(1) Wives are not told to submit to every man; they are not told to submit to someone else’s husband. Submission simply is to one’s own husband in recognition of his position in God’s ordained family structure. This includes submitting to difficult, even non-believing husbands (**1 Pet 3:1**).

(2) To be subject to one’s husband as to the Lord” does not mean that the husband is equal to the Lord, as if he is Christ’s infallible representative on earth. It does mean that submission is based on the wife’s love for and obedience to Christ. Her love for Christ sets her free, regardless of the response of her husband, because she knows she is pleasing the Lord.

b. **Eph 5:23**—“*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.*”

(1) This is the reason God gives for the command for wifely submission. God has determined and designed the order.

(2) Paul is showing us the fact that, at its heart, marriage is a spiritual institution. Marriage is designed to reflect Christ and the church.

(3) There can only be one “head” or final authority. If there is no head, or if there is more than one, the result is the same: confusion, indecision, power struggle, and anarchy. Consequently, God designed both marriage and the church to have one head.

c. **Eph 5:24**—“*But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*”

(1) In 5:24 we are told that just as the church is subject to Christ, wives need to be subject to their husbands, but in 5:21 Christians are to submit to one another. These verses may be reconciled in this way:

(A) Even though there is this mutual submission to one another, husbands and wives do not submit to each other in the same way.

(B) The key is to remember that the relationship between Christ and His church is the pattern for the relationship between husband and wife

(C) *Are Christ and His church mutually submitted?* “No”—if it means that Christ lines Himself up *under the authority of* the church; but “yes” if it means that Christ submitted Himself to suffering and death for the good of the church, and that the church gratefully and willingly submits to Christ by affirming His authority and following His lead.

(D) *Christ’s example is how a husband submits to his wife.* He makes decisions with her best interest in mind. He sacrifices himself for her. He willingly

foregoes focusing on himself and demanding what he wants for the sake of his wife and the marriage. A wife who knows that her husband has her best interest at heart, and is even willing to die for her, if necessary, as Christ died for His bride, the church—such a wife will almost always happily and willingly submit to such selfless headship

(2) When Paul says that “as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands,” he is presenting the ideal.

(A) *In reality, the church is often sinful and rebellious.* Just as the church struggles to achieve perfect submission to Christ so wives struggle to achieve perfect submission to their husbands, especially if their husbands are not fulfilling their God-given roles.

(B) *However, failure to submit has negative consequences for church and marriage.* Unbelievers judge the genuineness of our faith by how seriously we follow what we say we believe. If they see that we don’t obey the very Scriptures we claim to believe, they will reject and ridicule the Scriptures, the Lord, and our claim to be followers of Christ. Thus, the name of Christ will be dishonored.

(3) The command to submit, and the struggle to do so, applies “in everything.”

(A) That is an all-inclusive term which is to be obeyed not just when convenient, comfortable, pleasurable, or preferred.

(B) *If married to a difficult man or an unbeliever (1 Pet 3:1) let your conduct—your gentle and quiet spirit, your loving and gracious attitude—win your husband over.* Let your conduct and attitude that says, “I want to submit to your leadership; please help me to do that.” That makes the gospel attractive to your husband.

(C) The *exception* to “in everything” is if a wife is asked or commanded to sin by her husband. As the apostles said, “we must obey God rather than man” (**Acts 5: 29**; see also **Exod 1: 17**; **Dan 3:18**; **6:6-13**).

D. 1 Tim 5:14—*Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.*

1. Young widows are encouraged to marry, have children, and manage the house.

2. Childbearing is a significant role of a wife.

a. **1 Tim 2:15** reinforces this thought: “*But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children.*”

b. Paul is using this significant role as an example of “continuing in faith and love and sanctity and self-restraint.”

c. It indicates that women in general must accept their primary calling—motherhood.

3. Home management is a primary calling for a wife.

a. The phrase “keep house” or “manage the house” is from two Greek words, *oikos* (“house”) and *despotes* (“lord” or “master”).

b. The wife is to be the lord or master or manager of the household. However, the husband is the ultimate head and overseer of the household (**1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12**).

E. Titus 2:3-5—³*Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good,* ⁴*so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,* ⁵*to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.*

1. Training of younger women is a primary calling.

2. Younger women must be taught how to be good homemakers.

3. If these things are done, then the Word of God is not maligned or blasphemed by the unsaved world.

4. How a woman treats her husband and children and how she keeps her home is a testimony to non-Christians.

F. 1 Pet 3:1-6—¹*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,* ²*as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.* ³*Your adornment must not be merely external--braiding the hair, and*

wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; ⁴but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. ⁵For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; ⁶just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

1. Context and structure.

a. **1 Pet 3:1-7** is Peter's longest and most detailed discussion of the roles of wives and husbands.

b. *This passage is a specific application of the nature of Christian submission which, in turn, is an aspect of the more basic manner of how Christians should live:*

(1) The general context is the proper way for Christians to live—i.e., “abstaining from fleshly lusts” and “keeping your behavior excellent” (**1 Pet 2:11-12**).

(2) The more specific context is Peter's instruction to all believers to “submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution” (1 Pet 2:13). Peter then uses three participles—servants “*be submissive* [the same participle Paul used in **Eph 5:21**] to your masters with all respect” (**1 Pet 2:18**), “*wives, be submissive to your own husbands*” (**1 Pet 3:1**), and “*husbands live with your wives in an understanding way*” (**1 Pet 3:7**)—which draw their imperatival force from the verb in **2:13**.

(3) Peter also uses the example of Christ's suffering to illustrate the concept of Christian submission (1 Pet 2:21-25). He specifically exhorts us to follow this example: “*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps*” (**1 Pet 2:21**).

(4) In 1 Pet 3:1, 7 specifically applies these concepts of submission and the example of Christ to wives and husbands by use of the same adverb (“likewise”). Consequently, our obligations and responsibilities as wives must be seen as specific ways in which we demonstrate submission and Christlikeness, which are at the heart of “excellent [Christian] behavior” (**1 Pet 2:12**).

c. *In 3:1-6 Peter's instructions to Christian wives are based on three appeals:*

(1) An appeal to expediency (3:1-2)—the evangelical effect of the wives' behavior;

(2) An appeal to motive (3:3-4)—wives are to be and do what is precious in the sight of God; and

(3) An appeal to precedent (3:5-6)—wives should follow the examples of holy women in the past.

2. 1 Pet 3:1-2.

a. *Peter's exhortation to wives to “be submissive to your own husbands” (3:1) is an almost verbatim parallel to Paul's exhortation to wives in Eph 5:22*. The term “be submissive” is the same Greek verb used by Paul in **Eph 5:21, 24**.

b. *The specific situation addressed by Peter in 3:1-2 includes the possibility of a Christian wife who has an unbelieving husband*. The phrase in **3:1**, “*so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word,*” implies that most Christian wives had Christian husbands, although some did not (Grudem 1988: 137; see also Michaels 1988: 157). The concepts which Peter discusses in this passage apply regardless of whether or not the husband is a Christian.

c. *In first century Roman society, a wife's taking a religion different from her husband's was seen as an act of insubordination*. Consequently, Peter's focus is the wife's maintaining a good reputation for the sake of the gospel, and submitting to her husband because of the influence that she has with him.

d. *When Peter says in 3:1 that an unbelieving husband “may be won without a word” he is not forbidding all verbal testimony by Christian wives*. Rather, he is suggesting that such testimony is not obligatory, and sometimes may not be helpful (e.g., if the husband has demonstrated his great hatred or anger at the mention of Christ). Thus, a Christian wife should not continually nag or preach to her hostile husband about the gospel. Instead, her behavior is the means that Peter says God will use to win her husband. This indicates a high view of God's sovereignty over the process of salvation. It also should increase prayer “for the grace to live rightly and for God's working in the husband's heart” (Grudem 1988: 138).

e. *According to 3:2 the wife's behavior should be “chaste” (“pure, free from moral defilement”) and “respectful” (“reverent”)*. Pure behavior reminds us that submission does not include obedience to demands to do something that is morally wrong. These virtues are directed

primarily to God (see **2:12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23, 25**), but are visible to the husband, and therefore are for her husband's benefit.

3. **1 Pet 3:3-6.**

a. Peter then develops the importance of the nature of truly godly behavior by contrasting external (perishable) "adornment" with internal (imperishable) "adornment."

b. True "adornment" (i.e., "making oneself beautiful or attractive") that is pleasing to God is inner (**3:4-5**). In fact, the real adornment that is "precious in the sight of God" is "the hidden person of the heart" (**3:4**) which manifests itself externally in:

- (1) pure/holy and respectful/reverent behavior (**3:1-2**);
- (2) the "quality of a gentle ['not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentle, humble, considerate, meek'] and quiet ['quiet, well-ordered, without turmoil'] spirit" (**3:4**);
- (3) submission to and obeying their own husbands (**3:5**); and
- (4) doing what is right without fear (**3:6**).

c. In **3:3** there is no adjective that modifies "dresses" ("clothes") (the NIV incorrectly says "fine clothes"). As Grudem says, "It is incorrect, therefore, to use this text to prohibit women from braiding their hair or wearing gold jewelry, for by the same reasoning one would have to prohibit 'putting on of clothing'. Peter's point is not that any of these are forbidden, but that they should not be a woman's 'adorning', her source of beauty." (Grudem 1988: 140) The reference to "gold jewelry" suggests that Peter may have had wealthier women in mind. People with the means to dress finely need to be reminded that outward adornment of any kind is not what counts in the sight of God.

d. In **3:4** Peter's phrase "a gentle and quiet spirit" ties together his twin themes of wifely submission and wifely adornment. That kind of spirit is "this way" that the holy women, including Sarah, "adorned themselves" and were submissive to their husbands (**3:5-6**). Beauty in God's eyes, and true submission, are not simply matters of external looks or outward obedience, but stem from a heart and spirit that above all put their trust and hope in God.

e. In **3:5-6** the reference to "holy women" and, specifically, Sarah and Abraham indicates that Peter's instructions to wives includes women with Christian husbands. Interestingly, the only occasion in the Bible in which Sarah referred to Abraham as "lord" is **Gen 18:12**. In that verse Sarah laughed and was speaking to herself. That is significant because it shows her inner attitude. Sarah's example further gives godly women hope, because in **Gen 21:10-13** Abraham listened to Sarah and did as she requested but sending Hagar and Ishmael away. Thus, Abraham showed consideration for Sarah's feelings over the interests of his own son. It is doubtful if Abraham would have done that if Sarah had not lived in a chaste and respectful way, both internally and externally. By living that way, Christian wives today demonstrate that they have become "the children of Sarah" (**3:6**).

G. Prov 31:10-31—¹⁰An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. ¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. ¹²She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. ¹³She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight. ¹⁴She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar. ¹⁵She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens. ¹⁶She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong. ¹⁸She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hands grasp the spindle. ²⁰She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy. ²¹She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet. ²²She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple. ²³Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land. ²⁴She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen. ²⁵Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future. ²⁶She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. ²⁷She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: ²⁹"Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all." ³⁰Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. ³¹Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates.

1. This passage gives a number of insights regarding an "excellent wife" who "loves the Lord."

a. She is a good looking, hard working wife, mother, homemaker, wise instructor, a good Samaritan and successful businesswomen who fears the LORD.

b. *The excellent wife is focused on her husband, her family, and the needy.* While she does business outside the home, and does it well, her husband, children, and the needy are not neglected. She does it all in the fear of the Lord.

2. The Wife's Value (vv. 10-12).

a. *"A wife of noble character who can find?"*

(1) The Hebrew word for "noble" means "efficient with high moral qualities." Literally, it means "a woman with many parts." She is many faceted with many parts or sides to her personality.

(2) That shows the ideal woman using all of her gifts and talents for her home and through her home. The question implies that it is very hard to find this kind of wife.

b. *"She is worth far more than rubies."* No price can be put on her value. She is priceless or invaluable.

c. *"Her husband has full confidence in her."* Her husband has great confidence in his wife to make decisions and manage the home while he is gone. He has an implicit trust in his wife. She has earned that trust through faithfulness.

d. *"And lacks nothing of value."* She manages so well the funds given to her by her husband that he has no fears she will misuse the money or cheat him. That indicates that some women handle finances very well and can be entrusted to do so.

e. *"She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life."* The woman's life is oriented towards her husband and she seeks always his best interests because she is his helper. She is willing to live for her husband.

3. The Wife's Activities (vv. 13-27).

a. *"She selects wool and flax."* A good wife goes out of her way to find bargains and money-saving devices to better her family. The Hebrew wife found the best deals on wool and flax and the modern woman is to find ways to save money for the family.

b. *"And works with eager hands."*

(1) Much of a woman's work is with her hands and she is to learn to do her daily chores with "eager hands" (i.e., with a willing heart), realizing this is God's will for her life.

(2) She finds creative ways to make boring tasks more exciting and she comes to grips with her basic attitudes and abandons self-pity about doing the menial tasks around the home. A creative woman seeks to get the daily chores done so she may have free time to do many other things that she would rather be doing.

c. *"She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar."* A good portion of every day for a Hebrew woman was meal planning. There were no modern devices and she had to look for food bargains and still maintain quality. Food and meal planning is to be done in a creative manner by the ideal woman.

d. *"She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family."* She is up before the sun rises to make sure her family is properly fed. Women should be early risers and make sure, if possible, that the husband and children have had a nutritious breakfast before going to their daily activities.

e. *"And provides for her servant girls."* The Hebrew housewife often had servants to help her get the chores done, and she made sure these servants were taken care of well (i.e., she did not abuse them).

f. *"She considers a field and buys it."* A woman may work in real estate or other occupations if her husband approves. He does not squelch her in some business ventures because she is doing it to better her home.

g. *"Out of her earnings she plants a vineyard."* On her real estate earnings she plants a vineyard and makes a profit. She had a small business she could operate out of her home.

h. *"She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks."* She takes care of her health because she knows she cannot take on any extra-curricular activities if she cannot give her best to husband and family.

i. *"She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night."* She is pleased with her ability to take care of her family but she must put in long hours to accomplish her goals. She works hard and long.

j. *"In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers."* She works at sewing and other things when she can.

k. *"She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy."* The ideal woman

makes a profit, but she shares her profits with those in need beyond her family because she knows it is more blessed to give than to receive.

l. *“When it snows, she has no fear for her household, for all of them are clothed in scarlet.”*

(1) She has made provision for the winter by sewing.

(2) The reference to “scarlet” indicates fine quality clothing.

m. *“She makes covering for herself; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.”*

(1) She sews her own clothes and she dresses beautifully. She is in style and is able to wear fine clothing because she makes it herself (no labor costs or middleman profits).

(2) That does not require a wife to make her own clothes, but does require her to dress well, within her means.

(3) Scripture does not forbid a wife from looking good and dressing well. 1 Tim 2:9-10 only forbids making outward appearance more of a concern than godly character.

n. *“Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.”* The “gates” refer to the city hall, the place of local government. The idea is that her husband, in part, because he has such a good wife, has risen to a place of prominence in the city.

o. *“She makes linen garments and sells them and supplies the merchants with sashes.”* She is a professional seamstress and sells her wares to make extra money for the family.

p. *“She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.”*

(1) She is a woman of spiritual strength and moral quality and she laughs at the future because she has made preparations for her family.

(2) She trusts God for the future, but also prepares for the future.

q. *“She speaks with wisdom.”*

(1) She is a woman of wisdom (i.e., she has ability to apply knowledge practically). She has common sense.

(2) She is creative and intellectually alive. She is aware of life around her and is a challenge to her husband.

r. *“And faithful instruction is on her tongue.”* She is shrewd and yet a very sensitive person to others.

s. *“She watches over the affairs of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.”* The ideal woman is not lazy. She is productive and is always concerned about the welfare of her family.

4. The Wife’s Praise (vv. 28-31).

a. *“Her children arise and call her blessed.”*

(1) The children know their mom loves them and is doing everything within her power to help them.

(2) Her children will be influenced to follow Christ because of her example.

b. *“Her husband also, and he praises her.”*

(1) The husband senses he has the greatest wife in the world and is very proud of her.

(2) Men, do we praise our wives privately to them and publicly to others?

c. *“Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.”* A man sees that his wife is his perfect counterpart and he praises his wife for her many-sided personality.

d. *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”*

(1) Beauty, while nice, is only skin deep.

(2) The most important thing in a wife is her love for Christ and her willingness to do the will of God. The ideal woman’s secret to life is her commitment to Christ who empowers her for her multiple ministries in and through the home.

e. *“Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.”*

The ideal wife does not have to praise herself. Her works will be well known and others will praise her.

4. GOD’S WILL FOR HUSBANDS

I. Foundational Basis for the Role of Husbands

A. *The role of husbands is generally learned from role models to whom we are exposed: our culture; our own fathers; relatives; friends; mass media, etc.*

Our tendency—either consciously or subconsciously—is to imitate our primary role models or to react against them.

B. *The only stable and secure foundation for the proper role of husbands is God’s Word*

1. Good and bad role models, or information in the mass media, may be *helpful*, or *illustrative*; however, they cannot be *foundational*.
2. We must test every role model and idea about husbands by the Scripture, because “*There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death*” (**Prov 14:12**).

II. Major Scriptural Texts

The major texts dealing with husbands we will consider are: **Gen 2:24-25; Eph 5:25-33; Col 3:19; and 1 Pet 3:7**.

A. Gen. 2:24-25—“*For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*”

1. “*For this cause [Therefore] a man shall leave*” indicates:
 - a. The “*For this reason [Therefore],*” which begins this verse, relates back to the account of the creation of the woman (**Gen 2:18-23**). It indicates the reason, importance, and significance of the woman to the man, according to God’s created order. The man must change his closest human relationship—his most intimate, most personal, most revealing, most caring, most connected, most revealing and vulnerable relationship—from his parents to his wife.
 - b. *Marriage* is the *primary* social relationship; the *parent-child* relationship is *secondary*, and is *derivative* from the marital relationship.
 - c. Marriage is to be a *permanent* relationship (see also **Mal 2:13-16; Matt 19:3-8**).
2. To “*leave his father and his mother*” implies that the husband and wife:
 - a. *Establish a separate household*. The married couple needs to establish their own identity, and thus separate, to a certain degree, from the parents:
 - (1) Physically—create some space for liberty, i.e., privacy and individuality. It may not always be possible to live in completely different living quarters from the parents, although that is probably preferable. Even when the married couple continues to share living quarters with the parents, however, there should be an area reserved and “separate” for the married couple and an area reserved and “separate” for the parents.
 - (2) Emotionally—be weaned from parental attachment for one’s sense of security and acceptance.
 - (3) Intellectually—think independent of parents for the good of one’s spouse.
 - (4) Decisionally—the husband and wife need to be a separate “decision-making unit” from one’s parents; the good of one’s wife and new family now becomes primary.
 - (5) Financially—provide for one’s wife and new household.
 - b. *Cease being dependent on the parents in the way that minor children are dependent on their parents*. This implies that the married couple may certainly receive “advice,” but not “commands,” from the parents.
 - c. “*Leaving*” one’s parents does not mean that we are to stop loving, honoring, or caring for them. Those aspects of the parent-child relationship are permanent (see **Luke 18:18-20; 1 Tim 5:8**).
 - d. *Parents must raise children to make this change—to leave them and cleave to their spouse*.
 - (1) You must prepare your children to leave, separate, depart, and be independent of you.
 - (2) You must prepare your children to cling to their spouse (as opposed to you).
3. To “*cleave to his wife*” implies that:
 - a. *The man has a new “identity,” which is (after our relationship with Christ) based primarily upon, and nurtured by his relationship with his wife, not his parents*. This implies:
 - (1) One’s wife should be the primary and most intimate relationship in one’s life—not the relationship with one’s children, parents, friends, peers, job, hobbies, etc.
 - (2) If children or others attempt to force you to “take sides” (i.e., “wife versus children”), they should know in advance that you will chose your wife over your children, if necessary.
 - b. *The man is to have one wife, not multiple wives*. In **Gen 2:24** “wife” is singular, not plural

(indeed, God created “a woman,” not “women” for Adam—see **Gen 2:22-23**). In **Matt 19:5-6** Jesus quotes “*and they shall become one flesh*” as “*and the two shall become one flesh.*” Thus, God’s ideal concerning marriage is monogamy, not polygamy.

(1) The ideal of monogamy is based on, among other things, the relationship between Christ and the church (**Eph 5:31-32**). Just as Christ has only one bride (the church—see **Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9**), so a man is to have only one wife. This ideal is reflected in the qualifications to be an elder or overseer in the church; since the church is the living manifestation of Christ on the earth—the church leader is to be the husband of “one wife” (**1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6**). God draws a connection between spiritual infidelity to Him and marital infidelity (see **Hosea 1-7**).

(2) Although polygamy was practiced by several men in the Old Testament including some of the leaders of Israel, the first polygamist in Scripture was Lamech, a man of disreputable and violent character (**Gen 4:23-24**).

(3) Polygamy uniformly caused division in the family and had other harmful effects including leading to spiritual infidelity to God (see **1 Kgs 11:1-8**).

c. *If a Christian man already is in a polygamous relationship, here are some principles to consider:*

(1) He should continue to care for all wives and children so as not to worsen consequences.

(2) He should not divorce all of his wives except one, because God “*hates divorce*” (**Mal 2:16**). However, if any wife chooses to leave, he may let her go; that is, grant her a divorce if she chooses.

(3) He should do all he can to lead all wives and children to Christ.

(4) Although such a man cannot serve as a church leader (**1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6**), he can have a vital ministry as an individual to individuals (with an attitude of “Do not follow my example regarding marriage to more than one wife”).

4. To “*become one flesh*” implies more than simply becoming one during the act of sexual union.

Instead, becoming “one flesh” is referring to the depth of the relationship.

a. “*The two shall be one flesh*” is not referring primarily to the sexual act. “Flesh” is equivalent to “person” (see **Gen 6:17; Joel 2:28**). In **Matt 19:5-6** (**Mark 10:8-9**) Jesus quoted this verse in the context of divorce, not sex. In **1 Cor 6:15-17** this verse was quoted in the context of spiritual union with Christ—one should glorify God in one’s body, not engage in immorality with the body. In **Eph 5:28-32** this verse was quoted to indicate the spiritual union between Christ and the church.

b. *All of these uses of this verse indicate its profound, and ultimately spiritual, significance.* It means that the two people should be united spiritually, mentally, emotionally, financially, and in all other ways, as well as physically. The wife fills that which is lacking in the husband, just as the female’s attributes complement those of the male (see “Men and Women: The Image of God and Human Nature”). In a marriage where the husband and wife are united in these ways, it is as if a new, “whole” person has been formed, with the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

c. *Practical aspects of becoming “one flesh” include:*

(1) Physical—her life and health are to be as valuable to you as your own body.

(2) Emotional—feel and express all levels of love for her; rejoice and sorrow with her.

(3) Intellectual—reason for her good and for the good of the marriage.

(4) Decisional—decide for her welfare and for the welfare of the marriage.

(5) Financial—provide for her.

(6) Verbal—what you say to her, about her, and around her should edify her and should always express the truth in love.

(7) Taking her wholeheartedly as your suitable helper for your life tasks in all aspects of your life—Keeping secrets from your wife, such as financial secrets, not only prevents husband and wife from becoming “one,” but also makes it impossible for the wife to fulfill her role as her husband’s “helper” (**Gen 2:18**). Consequently, when men act in ways that inhibit closeness, unity, and “oneness” in marriage, they are acting contrary both to the essence of what *marriage* is designed to be, and also to God’s will for *wives*.

5. “*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*”

a. *Adam and Eve are described in their pre-fall relationship.* What is being described is God’s ideal for the marriage relationship which existed before the fall. Now, given our regenerate natures and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word, we are to aspire to, and strive for, this condition in our marriages.

b. *Nakedness*

- (1) A physical description signifying a broader concept; nothing is between the husband and wife to separate them in their relationship.
- (2) Indicates that the husband and wife are fully exposed, with no pretenses.
- (3) Indicates that the husband and wife have nothing to hide, and have no need for any cover-up.
- (4) Implies that the husband and wife are able to be perfectly open, honest, transparent and vulnerable with one another.

c. *Not ashamed*

- (1) Speaks to a conscience, a moral-emotional response.
- (2) The husband and wife were not ashamed because they had not sinned against self or one another.
- (3) This also indicates that physical nakedness of a husband and wife is neither sinful nor shameful.

B. Eph 5:25-33—²⁵*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,* ²⁶*so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* ²⁷*that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.* ²⁸*So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;* ²⁹*for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,* ³⁰*because we are members of His body.* ³¹**FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.** ³²*This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.* ³³*Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”*

1. Context of Eph 5:25-33.

a. **Ephesians 5** is Paul’s most extensive discussion of the roles of husbands and wives.

b. *The passage arises out of Paul’s discussion of the proper way for Christians to “walk” [live] (Eph 4:1; 5:1-2, 15).* The more specific context stems from Paul’s exhortation to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). “Being filled with the Spirit,” in turn, is characterized by four participles: “speaking” (5:19); “singing” (5:19); “giving thanks” (5:20); and “submitting [submitting] to one another” (Eph 5:21). Paul then describes the concept of *submitting* [submitting] in the context of marriage—he first applies it to wives (Eph 5:22-24), and then to husbands (Eph 5:25-33).

(1) We know that the passage which begins with Eph 5:22 relates back to Eph 5:21 (and thereby back to Eph 5:18) because there is no verb in 5:22. Although most translations of 5:22 say something like “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord,” the words “be subject” are actually not in the Greek of 5:22; they are only found in 5:21.

(2) Nowhere in Ephesians 5, or elsewhere, does the Bible tell husbands to “make” or “force” their wives to “submit” or “be subject” to them, or even to “make sure” that they submit. A wife’s submission is a choice she makes, and ultimately is an issue between her and God. Hence, Paul’s instructions to wives to submit to their husbands are instructions *to the wives, not to the husbands.*

(3) The emphasis of the passage is on the husband’s responsibility, not his position as “head of the wife.” We are accountable to Christ for what we do or fail to do in meeting our responsibilities as husbands, not for what our wives do or fail to do in meeting their responsibilities as wives. Indeed, our responsibility as husbands is probably greater (and, consequently, our accountability to God is greater) because our position is that of “head.” See Luke 12:48b—*“And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”*

2. Analysis of Eph 5:25-33.

a. *“Husbands, love your wives”*

(1) Loving one's wife is a command, not an option. We are to love our wives despite the pressures of culture and problems in the relationship. The importance of this is emphasized by the fact that it is repeated three times (**Eph 5:25, 28, 33**).

(2) We to love "your" wife (**Eph 5:25**), your "own wife" (**Eph 5:28, 33**), not someone else's wife.

(3) Greek had at least three verbs for "love": *eros*—"ardor, fondness," often indicating sexual passion; *phileo*—"affection, to like, friendship," often indicating the affection of close friends, siblings, etc.; and *agapao*—"to have warm regard for and take interest in, cherish, have high esteem for or satisfaction with, take pleasure in" (Danker 2000: 395, 1056, 5).

(4) Paul uses *agapao* in 5:25, 28, and 33. It is a very rich term. It implies putting someone or something first in your life; working for, serving, and making time for the object of your love. Thus, it implies an act of the will, proving and demonstrating such love, as well as "feelings" of love, affection, or esteem.

(5) The putting someone or something else first/serving/demonstrating aspect of *agapao* is seen in several verses where this is the verb used for "love": *God's love for lost mankind*—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (**John 3:16**); *Christ's command to his disciples*—"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (**John 13:34**); *the proof of one's love of Christ*—"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose myself to him" (**John 14:21**); "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (**1 John 4:20**); *the impossibility of serving two mutually incompatible masters*—"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (**Matt 6:24**); *and also man's love for position, power, and the things of this world*—"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places" (**Luke 11:43**); "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil" (**John 3:19**).

b. "Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" How did Christ love the church? Among other things, Christ loved the church:

(1) Uniquely—Christ is the good shepherd for the particular sheep that the Father gave to him (**John 6: 37; 10:14-17; 17:6-9**). They have been chosen before the foundation of the world (**Eph 1:3-4**). As was said earlier, Christ has only one bride (the church—see **Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9**). Thus, a man is to have only one wife. This ideal is reflected in the qualifications to be an elder or overseer in the church; since the church is the living manifestation of Christ on the earth, the church leader is to be the husband of "one wife" (**1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6**). In a special way, Christ's love for his bride is unlike his love for anyone or anything else. Our love for our bride must therefore also be an exclusive love, deeper, more intimate, and unlike our love for anyone or anything else.

(2) Sacrificially—This is the heart of the passage as it pertains to the husband's responsibility to his wife.

(A) *Consider the different ways in which Christ loved us sacrificially:* (i) He humbled himself and set aside his own glory in heaven and equality with the Father in order to take the form of a bond-servant—*for the sake of his bride* (see **Phil 2:5-7**); (ii) He gave his time, possessions, thoughts, emotions—all that he had—for his disciples (his bride); (iii) He suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually for the sake of his bride; (iv) He resisted temptation for the sake of his bride (**Luke 4:1-13**); (v) He bore his bride's grief, pain, and, ultimately, her sin; (vi) He lay down his very life for his bride.

(B) *Consider the manner in which Christ loved us sacrificially:* (i) He took the initiative—he took the first step (**Phil 2:5-7**); (ii) He took the initiative to love us sacrificially when we were rebellious and unlovable (**Rom 5:8; 1 Tim 1:15**); (iii) This means that we should love our wives in spite of their faults, failures,

and sins. We can do this by: overlooking her sins and bad habits most of the time; seeking her happiness, welfare, and best interest; not pointing out her faults in front of the children or in public, but, when necessary, offering constructive criticism privately, with respect and humility, and with the pure motive of desiring to help her; not using her as an example in sermons without her express permission; never leaving or forsaking her (and not threatening to do so), because Christ never leaves or forsakes us (and does not threaten to do so) (**Heb 13:5**).

(C) *Christ, both by precept and example, instructed us how to love sacrificially:*

(i) Christ specifically commanded us to “*love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*” (**John 13:34**).

(ii) Although husbands frequently point to their position as “head of the family” or “head of the wife” to try to “lord it over” their wife/family” and coerce compliance with their wishes, Christ dealt with this attitude in **Matt 20:25-28**, when he told his disciples: ²⁵*But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

(iii) In **John 13:5, 12-15** Christ then gave a specific demonstration of what it means to be a “servant leader”—and coupled it with a command to his followers to do likewise: ³*Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. . . . ¹²So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”*

(iv) Did Christ lose his power, position, or authority because he humbled himself and served his disciples (washing feet is something that the lowest slave in that society would do)? No. Did Christ somehow become “less of a man” for doing what he did? No—if anything he became “more” of a man, because it takes a man of uncommon strength and character to humble himself and serve those who are lower in rank, position, or authority than he is. Did Christ lose the respect of the disciples—or of us—because he did what he did? No.

(v) Since Christ did not lose his power, position, authority, manhood, or respect by serving his disciples, and since he specifically told his followers (including husbands) to do as he did and emulate his style of leadership, why do not husbands demonstrate sacrificial love toward their own wives who are closer to them (“one flesh”) than even Christ’s disciples were to Christ? How can we express such sacrificial love to our wives? The ways of doing so are as unlimited as our circumstances and imaginations; examples of such sacrificial love include: cutting the firewood; getting the water from the well; helping her cook; helping clean up the dishes; taking care of the children so that she can rest or go out with friends, etc.

c. “*So that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.*”

(1) Christ had a purpose in sacrificially loving his bride:

(A) *to sanctify her*—to separate her from others, for His divine ends.

(B) *to cleanse her*—to make her fit for divine intimacy.

(C) *that He might present her to Himself*—in all her glory (He wanted her to be

worthy of glory, to radiate with the glow of divine goodness, of godlikeness); not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and without blemish (i.e., that his bride should be like Him).

(2) Just as Christ sanctifies and cleanses his bride through the gospel, his word, influence, example, and Spirit, so a husband is to set the spiritual tone in the household. He is to model Christ, and thereby help his wife to become more like Christ herself. Unfortunately, in many homes the wife and mother sets the spiritual example. Many husbands shirk their spiritual responsibilities. If we are to love our wives “as Christ loved the church,” we need to remember that there is an ultimate purpose to our marriage and to our lives which transcends us.

d. *“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, because we are members of His body.”*

(1) Paul is adding a new metaphor here to show the depth of intimacy and oneness that should characterize marriage—you should love your wife as much as you love, nourish, and cherish *your own body*.

(2) Paul is implying the original metaphor for marriage—that “*the two shall be one flesh*” (**Gen 2:24**).

(3) *“No one ever hated his own flesh”*—since a man does not beat himself, he cannot beat his wife. Indeed, to be a wife-beater makes him unqualified to be a leader in the church since, by definition, a wife-beater is not “above reproach, temperate, prudent, or respectable” (as are required in **1 Tim 3:2**), is “pugnacious” and is neither “gentle” nor “uncontentious” (in violation of the requirements of **1 Tim 3:3**), and does not “manage his household well” (in violation of the requirement of **1 Tim 3:4**).

(4) *“Nourishes”*—to nourish up to maturity. The root idea is to feed, to bring up; a man nourishes his body so that it will live and grow—and not merely continue to live or exist, but to thrive, live well, be healthy and strong. Similarly, a husband should nourish his wife so that the marriage will thrive, grow, be healthy and strong.

(5) *“Cherishes”*—to foster with tender care. The root idea is to warm or keep warm; men keep their bodies warm and well cared for because they value them. Likewise, husbands need to value their wives, care for them and warm them physically, emotionally, spiritually, and in all other ways.

(6) *“Just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.”*

(A) Paul now raises the “body” metaphor to a “higher level,” by referring to *Christ’s* body, and links the “body” metaphor back to Christ and the church (with which he began this passage).

(B) The “body of Christ” is the most developed of all the New Testament metaphors for the church (see **Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 6:15; 10:17; 12:12-27; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col 1:18, 24; 2:19**).

(C) *The “body” metaphor is primarily used in Scripture for relational reasons:*

(i) The relationship of Christians to Christ—Christ nourishes and cherishes His body; as the Bridegroom he tenderly cares for His bride. Further, He brings us to maturity with His Word, His Spirit, and His Sacraments. We are to be as united with, and caring for, our wives (who are to be “one flesh” with us) as Christ is with his own body, his own bride.

(ii) The relationship of Christians to each other—We are all “members” of Christ’s body. As such, each member is of *great value*. In fact, each member is *necessary* if the body is to function properly.

(D) *Paul’s “body” metaphor, particularly his reference to Christ’s body also highlights the “oneness” that is to characterize the relationship between husband and wife in a Christian marriage.*

(i) In **1 Cor 1:13** Paul rhetorically asked, “Has Christ been divided?” The answer, of course, is “No.” Therefore, Christians—most especially Christian husbands and wives—are not to be divided among themselves. Indeed, in **John 17:22** Christ prayed that we would be one, just as Christ and the Father are one. If such oneness should be seen

anywhere or between anyone, it should be seen in that most intimate of all relationships, that of husband and wife.

(ii) In fact, when Christian husbands and wives are divided, they are misrepresenting Christ to the world. Marital discord and division is a form of separating what God has joined together (**Matt 19:6**), and is a form of dividing the body of Christ. Consequently, marital disunity among Christians has serious spiritual implications.

(iii) Christian husbands therefore need to have, and demonstrate, a high regard for their wives: (a) because they have a high regard for their own bodies which, in turn, is related to Christ's high regard for the "members" of his own body the church; and (b) because, both physically and mystically, there is a unity between husbands and wives analogous to the unity existing between Christ and the church.

e. *"FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church."*

(1) Paul concludes by explicitly linking **Gen 2:24** with Christ and the church.

(2) By linking the "oneness" of husband and wife with Christ and the church, Paul is also making clear that the husband is not to be independent of his wife. Many men think that they are free to live their lives however they choose to, independent of the thoughts, feelings, concerns, input, or wishes of their wives. A Christian husband does not have the right to do that. His is a special relationship with his wife, as integrally related as are a head with a body, or Christ and the church; the two cannot be separated.

(3) The explicit statement that marriage really is about Christ and the church demonstrates that, at its root, *marriage is spiritual—it is a spiritual institution.*

(4) Christians in particular must contemplate with care the tremendous importance of marriage, given the fact that it is, in its essence, spiritual and is a representation of Christ and the church.

C. **Col 3:19**—*"Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them."*

1. As in **Eph 5:25-33** Paul again:

a. Places the obligations of husbands (and wives) in the context of our new life in Christ, and instructions about how, generally, we as Christians should live.

b. *Commands* (not suggests) husbands to love your wives.

c. Uses the word *agapao* for "love."

d. Commands husbands to love "*your*" wives (not someone else's wife).

e. Emphasizes only the husband's obligations and responsibilities, not his authority or rights.

2. "Do not be embittered against them."

a. The verb "embittered" (*pikraino*) comes from a word which meant "pointed" or "sharp," and thereby gained the sense of "sharp" or "bitter to the taste," "ill-tempered" or "harsh" (Dunn 1996: 249).

b. *Many versions translate **Col 3:19** as "do not be harsh with them."* However, as Dunn observes, "embittered" is in the *passive* voice. Consequently, as used here, "embittered" implies that "the bitterness is experienced by the husbands. What is in view, therefore, is probably the feeling of the dominant partner who can legally enforce his will on his wife but who will not thereby win her love and respect and can thus feel cheated and embittered at not receiving what he regards as his due. . . . This is the likely outcome for anyone who stands on his rights alone and who knows and exercises little of the love called for in the first half of the verse." (Dunn 1996: 249)

c. *In a very real way, therefore, **Col 3:19** points up the negative consequences which can easily occur (and which must always be avoided) if husbands do not adopt the correct attitude toward their wives, and do not demonstrate the love toward their wives like Christ loved the church.* In fact, if anyone is a "dominant partner who can legally enforce his will on his wife," it is *Christ*. However, Christ does not "stand on his rights alone" toward his bride, the church; he does not "force" his bride to do his bidding. Therefore, if anyone has the right to be "embittered" against his bride, it is Christ. Yet, he is not embittered. He acts toward his bride, at all times and in all ways, as the model husband. He calls upon us to do likewise—and thereby avoid the bitterness

toward our wives which can occur when they fail to meet our expectations (because if there is one thing that can prevent two people from becoming “one,” it is bitterness).

D. 1 Pet 3:7—“*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*”

1. Context of 1 Pet 3:7.

a. **1 Pet 3:7** is structurally similar to Paul’s discussion of the role of husbands in **Eph 5:25-33**.

(1) Both passages contain Paul’s (**Eph 5:22-33**) and Peter’s (**1 Pet 3:1-7**) most detailed discussions of the roles of husbands and wives.

(2) Both of those discussions, in turn, are specific applications of the nature of Christian submission which, in turn, is an aspect of the more basic manner of how Christians should live:

(A) *The Ephesians passage arises out of Paul’s discussion of the proper way for Christians to “walk” (Eph 4:1; 5:1-2, 15).* The more specific context stemmed from Paul’s exhortation to “be filled with the Spirit” (**Eph 5:18**).

“Being filled with the Spirit,” in turn, was characterized by four participles: “speaking” (**5:19**); “singing” (**5:19**); “giving thanks” (**5:20**); and “submitting [submitting]” (**Eph 5:21**). **Eph 5:22** then begins applying the concept of subjecting [submitting] to wives and husbands.

(B) *The 1 Peter passage similarly arises out of the proper way for Christians to live, i.e., “abstaining from fleshly lusts” and “keeping your behavior excellent” (1 Pet 2:11-12).* The more specific context is Peter’s instruction to all believers to “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (**1 Pet 2:13**). Peter then uses three participles—servants “*be submissive* [the same participle Paul used in **Eph 5:21**] to your masters with all respect” (**1 Pet 2:18**), “wives, *be submissive* to your own husbands” (**1 Pet 3:1**), and “husbands *live with your wives in an understanding way*” (**1 Pet 3:7**)—which draw their imperatival force from the verb in **2:13**. Peter also uses the example of Christ’s suffering to illustrate the concept of Christian submission (**1 Pet 2:21-25**); he specifically exhorts us to follow this example: “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps” (**1 Pet 2:21**). In **1 Pet 3:1, 7** specifically applies these concepts of submission and the example of Christ to wives and husbands by use of the same adverb (“likewise”).

Consequently, our obligations and responsibilities as husbands must be seen as specific ways in which we demonstrate submission and Christ-likeness—which are at the heart of “excellent [Christian] behavior” (**1 Pet 2:12**).

b. *The word “likewise” or “in the same way” (1 Pet 3:1, 7) renders the responsibilities of the husband and wife reciprocal.*

(1) As was true in Eph 5:22-24, the instructions to the wife (to be submissive) are given only to the wife; the husband is *not* told to “make” his wife be submissive, or to “make sure” that she is—that is ultimately her responsibility to God.

(2) In one sense, the wife’s responsibility to submit can be said to be “relativized” by the corresponding responsibilities of the husband. As McKnight says, “What submission means can only be understood by asking the question of what love means” (McKnight 1996: 189n.33). The wife is not told to “make” her husband live with her in an understanding way, or grant her honor, or to “make sure” that he does those things—that is ultimately the husband’s responsibility to God. However, the “submission problem” *invariably* has “a controlling husband at its root” (Ibid.: 189). McKnight adds this: “When the Christian wife is seeking to love her husband with her whole being and the husband is seeking to love his wife with his whole being, the issue of submission never emerges. . . . The focus of biblical marriage is on love and service of one another. . . . Husbands too frequently resort to demanding submission when they are unable to ‘get their way’; that indicates selfishness, not loving and devoted service to one’s wife (which is the way Christ loved the church). What the husband ought to be saying to himself is, ‘Why do I have to use force to get this done?’ Often he has decided that his own desires and ideas have to be fulfilled and that his wife’s do not matter. Such

behavior is not loving. Marriages that are full of love, respect, and honor rarely, I believe, need to resort to the issue of submission.” (Ibid.: 189-90)

(3) As the “dominant” partner, the husband’s responsibility—and therefore his accountability and judgment—are greater.

2. Analysis of 1 Pet 3:7.

a. *“You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way”*

(1) Husbands are to live with their wives, not apart from them. This is one aspect of “cleaving to” one’s wife and becoming “one flesh” with her.

(2) The word for “live together” (*sunoikountes*) implies both the sexual and social aspects of a marriage relationship. The Christian husband “is neither demanding nor selfish in his sexual and marital relations; he is instead considerate, sensitive, and serving” (McKnight 1996: 186).

(3) “In an understanding way” indicates that living with your wife “is not a mere physical function but something a man must know how to do” (Michaels 1988: 168). In the Greek, the phrase literally is “*according to knowledge.*” Such “knowledge” preeminently is the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, because only by such knowledge can a man rightly understand the nature of men and women, the significance of marriage, and can rightly order his life. Grudem observes: “The ‘knowledge’ Peter intends here may include any knowledge that would be beneficial to the husband-wife relationship: knowledge of God’s purposes and principles for marriage; knowledge of the wife’s desires, goals, and frustrations; knowledge of her strengths and weaknesses in the physical, emotional and spiritual realms; *etc.* A husband who lives according to such knowledge will greatly enrich his marriage relationship—yet such knowledge can only be gained through regular study of God’s Word and regular, unhurried times of private fellowship together as husband and wife.” (Grudem 1988: 143).

b. *“As with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life”*

(1) “Woman” translates a rare word meaning, literally, “the feminine one.” This indicates that “Peter looks to the characteristic nature of womanhood or femininity and suggests that a wife’s ‘femaleness’ should itself elicit honour from her husband” (Grudem 1988: 143).

(2) “Weakness” typically refers to the relative physical weakness of women compared to men; this is also indicated by the use of the word “vessel” which often refers to a body. However, “the context also shows that women are ‘weaker’ in terms of authority in the marriage (vv. 1, 5-6), and Peter therefore directs husbands that instead of misusing their authority for selfish ends they should use it to ‘bestow honour’ on their wives” (Ibid.: 144).

(A) *Husbands should remember that “honor in God’s sight belongs to those who are (or who make themselves) ‘last’ or ‘least,’ in the eyes of the world”*—see **Matt 5:3-12; 18:1-4, 10-14; 19:30; 20:16; 23:11-12; 25:40, 45; Mark 9:33-37; 10:42-45; Luke 14:7-11; 1 Cor 1:26-30; 12:22-25; Jas 2:5; 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5-6** (Michaels 1988: 170). Hence, both because of her status *under* you, and her difference *from* you, husbands must adopt God’s attitude toward those who are less in man’s eyes (i.e., God’s pattern throughout the Bible of showing favor to those who are, or who make themselves, lesser).

(B) “In this case such honour ought to include kind and affirming words both privately and in public, and high priority in choices regarding the use of one’s time and money” (Ibid.).

(3) “Fellow-heir of the grace of life.” Just as her status as a woman (her femaleness, and relative weakness—i.e., her status *under* you, and her difference *from* you) was one reason, in and of itself, for showing honor to one’s wife, Peter now provides a second (and essentially opposite) reason for showing honor to one’s wife: her status as an *equal* to you, and her everlasting *similarity* to you. This essential similarity and equality is indicated by the use of the term “*fellow-heir,*” which is also used in **Rom 8:17, Eph 3:6; and Heb 11:9** to show the equal inheritance and participation together of all of the promises and benefits that come with being members of Christ’s body and family. Because God has chosen and honored her *on exactly the same basis* as he has chosen

and honored you, a husband must accord honor to his wife. Otherwise the husband will be dishonoring that which God honors.

c. “So that your prayers may not be hindered.”

(1) How you treat your wife is a sign of, and affects—either positively or negatively—your own relationship with God and your spiritual development.

(2) The “your” may refer only to husbands, or to the prayers of husbands and wives together.

(A) Michaels believes that the final “your” “draws together the whole unit dealing with marriage (vv 1-7) so that even wives married to unbelieving husbands (vv 1-2) may have a glimpse of what marriage can become in Christ—a household church, with husband and wife living together as a praying community and ‘co-heirs’ of salvation” (Michaels 1988: 171).

(B) The other view is stated by Grudem: “‘Your’ must refer to the ‘you’ to whom Peter is writing, namely, the husbands, and the reference therefore is to the husbands’ prayers generally. . . . No Christian husband should presume to think that any spiritual good will be accomplished by his life without an effective ministry of prayer. And no husband may expect an effective prayer life unless he lives with his wife ‘in an understanding way, bestowing honour’ on her.” (Grudem 1988: 145-46).

(3) Regardless of whether “your” refers to husbands alone, or to husbands and wives together, this last clause of 3:7 again demonstrates the essentially spiritual nature of marriage. As Grudem concludes, “To take the time to develop and maintain a good marriage is God’s will; it is serving God; it is a spiritual activity pleasing in his sight” (Ibid.: 146).

III. Advice for Husbands

Carol Arnold, in her book *The Liberation of a Resentful Wife* (2006), gives the following hints to husbands to have a successful marriage:

A. You are needy. You need to understand that God created you incomplete and with needs. It is foolish to think that you don’t need your wife. Recognizing your needy state makes you realize your dependence upon God’s help and creative design to complete you and give you what you need to meet your needs. It will help you develop a grateful heart and appreciate what God did in meeting those needs by giving you a wife.

B. Your wife is a gift from God. A wife is a gift from God (**Prov 19:14**). She is valuable, the crown of her husband, and a good thing (**Prov 12:4; 18:22**). She is said to be more precious than jewels (**Prov 31:10**). How is a costly and valuable gift treated?

C. You are to love her as Christ loved the church. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked his Father to change the whole plan of redemption so that he would not have to go to the cross to die for the sins of the church; however, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father and obeyed, because it was the right thing to do. God is asking husbands to love their wives in the same way—sacrificing, obeying, even when it is hard, because it is the right thing to do, and because it is a picture to the world of what an intimate union involves. Intimacy involves sacrifice, unselfishness, and the forfeiting of rights for the benefit of another.

D. Would you want to submit to you if you were the wife? A wise husband will know that his wife is smarter in many areas than he is, and has an understanding of the home and family that he does not have. Therefore, he will listen to her. A wife—like you do—wants to be in charge of her own life. Treating your wife the way you want to be treated (see **Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31**), showing mercy, love, and compassion, will make it easier for her to submit to you, respond to you, and meet your needs in return. If you were her, would you really want to submit to you, the way you are now?

E. Help your wife if you want her to respond to you. Wives react to the treatment they receive. A wise husband will give his wife affection, hugging her with no ulterior motives, telling her “I love you,” but also showing it by his actions. If you want your wife to respond physically to you, then help her out. Do whatever is necessary to keep her from becoming so tired that she has nothing left for you at the end of the day. One wife said, “For me, sex begins in the kitchen. If my husband helps me with the dishes, I’m more likely to respond to him.” Most

women are willing to work hard if they know their husband is working hard also—but if you sit around while she does chores, don't be surprised when she doesn't respond very well to your advances.

F. *Take care of your body.* Men like an attractive wife. Similarly, no woman wants to respond to a man who is sloppy, significantly overweight, or who smells bad.

G. *Give your wife time with other women.* There are some things about women that only other women can understand. A wise husband will give his wife time for herself and will create opportunities for her to get together with other women—including going to the expense necessary to facilitate her time away from you and the children. Doing this will pay off in the long run with a happier, more contented, and more submissive wife.

5. THREE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION THAT UNIFY

I. Introduction: Eph 4:25-32

A. *Unifying communication is that which brings us together, rather than divides*

B. *Unifying communication is essential for us to experience doctrines of unity we preach*

1. In the church, we desire the unity of the Spirit (**Eph 4:3-6**).
2. In marriage, we are to strive for the unity of “one flesh” (**Gen 2:24**).

C. *Unifying communication is so important an issue that it is the first specific topic Paul addresses when he writes of the practical applications in his letter to the saints at Ephesus*

II. Organization of Ephesians

A. *The Position of the Christian (Ephesians 1-3)*

1. Praise for redemption (**1:1-14**).
2. Prayer for Divine enlightenment (**1:15-23**).
3. Our position in Christ, both individually (**2:1-10**) and corporately (**2:11-3:13**).
4. Another prayer (**3:14-21**).

B. *The Practice of the Christian (Ephesians 4-6)*

1. Unity in the church (**4:1-16**).
2. Holiness in life (**4:17-5:21**).
3. Responsibility at home and work (**5:22-6:9**).
4. Conflict to be overcome (**6:10-24**).

C. *Our walk with others is to reflect the unity of one body*

1. Paul transitions from “position” to “practice” with the words, “Therefore . . . walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (4:1).

- a. From **4:7-5:21**, Paul's remarks are focused on our individual walk.
- b. From **5:22-6:9**, Paul writes about our “walk” in various everyday relationships:
 - (1) Husbands and wives.
 - (2) Parents and children.
 - (3) Employees (slaves) and employers (masters).
- c. Even our individual walk is not done alone, but is a walk of one believer with others.

2. Our walk with others is to reflect the unity of one body, “one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4-6).

- a. Church officers were given individual gifts to equip the saints to build up the body of Christ into one whole mature body over which Christ is the head (**4:7-16**).
- b. To do this, we must “lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with lusts of deceit, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in [the likeness of God] has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (**4:22-23**).
- c. In order for this to happen, unifying communication is essential. Paul follows his call to unity with “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you with his neighbor” (**4:25**).

III. The First Principle of Unifying Communication—Speak Truth

A. *Truth is that which reflects actual reality*

1. Truth is the state of real things, events or facts, that which corresponds to actuality. Truth concerns total reality, not just religious things.
2. A Christian definition must add that truth is that which is defined and revealed by God in His Word and as is incarnated in Jesus Christ who is the Truth (**John 14:6**).
3. Defending truth is part of our Christian apologetical task.

B. *Truth is the opposite of falsehood*

1. Our sinful self is corrupted by “lusts of deceit” (Eph 4:23).
 - a. The heart is deceptive, wicked, and hard to know (**Jer 17:9**).
 - b. Lusts and desires are at root of deception
2. Many times we hide the truth, in whole or part:
 - a. to feel secure, accepted.
 - b. to feel important, worthy, significant, and valuable.
 - c. for false joy/pleasure, to avoid pain or suffering.
 - d. to avoid suffering.
 - e. to gain pleasure.
3. Fears, real or imagined, produce falsehoods.
4. On receiving traumatic news, or when we grieve, we may:
 - a. deny reality, events and messages;
 - b. become angry, (i.e. we want to “kill the messenger” of the traumatic event);
 - c. use rationalizations, half-truths or whole-lies;
 - d. deny responsibility, or attempt to shift the blame to someone else.
5. Denying truth may result in false reality, disunity, and breakdown of communication.

C. *The new self has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph 4:23)*

1. It is impossible for God to lie (**Num 23:19; Heb 6:18**).
2. Jesus is “the Truth” (**John 14:6**), and “*we have the mind of Christ*” (**1 Cor 2:16**).
3. The Spirit that dwells in us is “Spirit of Truth” (**John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13**).
4. Therefore, believers can and should speak truth.

D. *Truth must be spoken in all areas*

1. It is essential to be truthful about:
 - a. What we think.
 - b. What we say.
 - c. What we do.
 - d. What we feel and experience emotionally.
 - e. What we will, desire, want, hope to achieve, and expect.
2. No truth or half-truth = no reality or half reality = no unifying communication.

E. *We need caution as to how (skill) and when (timing) to speak the truth*

How and *when* you say something can be as important as *what* you say and *why* you say it. In fact, saying something in an inappropriate way or at an inappropriate time can cause the other person to misinterpret what you are saying and why you said it.

F. *We need wisdom—truth is to be spoken in love (Eph 4:15)*

Love must be coupled with truth because “*God is love*” (**1 John 4:8**). If we do not have love as our motive for speaking, we are misrepresenting God. Even when the truth requires us to say hard things, we must be motivated by love.

IV. The Second Principle of Unifying Communication—Reconcile Daily

A. *Truth is not easy to speak or accept, even when spoken with in love.*

People are easily hurt, and can become offended or angry, when we speak the truth to them, particularly if it is a truth that they do not want to hear or admit. That is so even when our motives are based on love, and our

tone of voice is not confrontational. The reason for this may include the following:

1. Truth makes us confront realities we often deny. These realities include the truths about ourselves, others, our situation, the world, and God.
2. We fear and feel loss of false reality. We hang onto false ideas and reality because we (falsely) think that they give us security, significance, and pleasure.

B. In cases of extremely bad news, people can even go through “five stages of receiving catastrophic news.”

1. Denial (“this cannot be”; we blame others, rationalize, and justify).
2. Anger (we want to “shoot the messenger”; we name call and counterattack).
3. Bargaining (we try to “save face”).
4. Depression/Silence (we ask “now what am I to do?” and say “I don’t care anymore”).
5. Acceptance (we finally come to the point of accepting that it is time to adjust to new reality and move on).

C. The Bible calls for people to keep “short accounts” and reconcile daily.

“Be Angry and Sin not; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26).

1. Anger is not sinful in itself.
2. God, who does not sin, does get angry:
 - a. He is angry with the wicked everyday (**Ps 7:6, 11; Rom 1:18**).
 - b. Jesus got angry at sin (**Mark 3:5; John 2:13-17**).
3. Anger and feelings should be acknowledged, not denied.
4. The important issues are what we get angry about and how we respond to our anger.
 - a. *Test your reason for anger: is it appropriate?*
 - (1) Are we angry because of “old man” standards of security, value, pleasures, agenda?
 - (2) Are we angry because of fear of losing security, significance, wealth, or health?
 - (3) Are we unrighteousness and, therefore, hindering the gospel?
 - (4) Are we dishonoring Lord?
 - (5) Are we angry by “new man” standards?
 - (6) Are we being persecuted for Christ?
 - b. *Test your response to anger: is it godly?*
 - (1) Losing one’s temper or becoming verbally or physically violent is sinful (**Prov 29:11; 12:16; 25:28**).
 - (2) Storing up resentments day after day is sinful; therefore, *“do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26).*
 - (3) Delaying reconciliation with someone who has offended you is sinful; reconciliation should be done promptly (**Matt 5: 23-24; 18:15-17**).
 - (4) Not admitting one’s own fault is sinful; therefore, we need the humility to recognize that we also are sinners (**Matt 7:3-5**).
 - (5) We are to take responsibility for problems in our relationships, and do our best to make them right.

V. The Third Principle of Unifying Communication—Make Your Goal to Build Up the Other

A. *Unifying Communication edifies and builds up others in the Lord*

1. Unifying communication is not self-centered but other-centered, because love is not self-seeking (**1 Corinthians 13; Rom 15:1-2**).
2. Unifying communication is not satisfied with maintaining status quo, but is growth oriented.

B. *We should choose our words carefully; thinking of what is best for the other*

1. Unifying communication does not “run the mouth before shifting the mind into gear.”
2. Words have the power of “death” and “life” (**Prov 18:21**).
3. Words have different meanings and effects—not all equal or beneficial; what we say, and how we say it, depend upon the hearer’s knowledge, experience, emotions, and agenda.

C. *Do not speak unwholesome words (Eph 4:29)*

1. The Greek word for “unwholesome” is *sapros*, which means “putrid, rotten, unfit for use.”
2. This verse applies to the use of non-beneficial words, but also can apply to non-verbal

communication, such as face and body language.

D. *Speak only that which is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to the hearer (Eph 4:29)*

1. Edifying communication requires up-to-date knowledge about a person's:
 - a. Reasoning.
 - b. Feelings and felt needs.
 - c. Goals and expectations.
 - d. Spiritual condition and what is really needed to build up the individual.
2. The “need of the moment” requires an accurate assessment of the situation and context.
 - a. This can be gained before or during the communication by observation and questions.
 - b. This is also based on an accurate understanding of God's Word.
 - c. Further, accurately assessing the situation and context are important for properly *applying* God's Word.

E. *Unifying Communication requires self-denial*

Our overriding concern should be to glorify God in our communication, and to edify the persons with whom we are communicating, not to glorify ourselves. With those things as our focus, we can fulfill the two greatest commandments of loving God and loving our neighbor (**Mark 12:28-31**).

VI. Conclusion

Unifying communication is possible by God's grace in Jesus Christ through whom we are being changed daily in righteousness, holiness and truth (**Eph 4:23**).

6. COMMUNICATION: UNDERSTANDING; LISTENING; AND EMPATHY

I. Understanding⁹

A. *Communication is the lifeblood of a relationship.*

Only by understanding the other person and what is important to him or her, can we begin to “connect” with that other person. True “connection” with another person involves *feeling* as well as just *intellectual understanding*. Understanding takes effort. It involves setting aside your own issues and agenda (i.e., what you want) in order to truly appreciate the other person's point of view and feelings.

B. *“The couple who seeks to understand each other will value what it takes for genuine communication to occur”* (Campus Crusade 1993: 76).

It takes at least the following four things for *genuine communication* to occur:

1. Time. Spending quality time with someone is one of the five primary ways we demonstrate love to that person (Chapman 1995: 59-78). It takes time to get to know a person. Getting to know the person enables the barriers to genuine communication to be overcome.
2. Trust. The barriers to genuine communication will not be overcome unless there is trust between the two parties. No one wants to be hurt. Things said in confidence, secrets that are exposed, must remain confidential. Nothing can so harm a relationship as to betray a trust. On the other hand, nothing can so foster trust as to expose your own vulnerabilities to the other person, and thereby demonstrate that you trust him or her.
3. Commitment. Commitment may be an aspect of trust. In a marriage, however, commitment—to the spouse, to the marriage, to the idea of marriage itself—is fundamental. A marriage partner needs to know not only that his or her secrets are secure, but that his or her marriage is secure—that the other spouse is committed to him or her. The word “divorce” should therefore never be uttered during periods of anger and conflict.
4. Transparency. Transparency includes: openness; honesty; and vulnerability (i.e., exposing secrets, weaknesses, failures, needs, and fears). This seems to be particularly difficult for men to do. Transparency really cannot occur unless the other conditions for genuine communication exist.

⁹Unless otherwise noted, much of sections I and II are taken from Campus Crusade 1993: 76-81.

C. *There are different levels of communication that get progressively deeper and more intimate*

The purpose of the contact and the nature of our relationship with the person will usually determine what level or levels are appropriate and important for the particular interaction.

1. Cliché (a trite, stereotyped expression). This is really “non-sharing.” It is the least transparent mode of “communication,” and is safely used with the largest number of people (e.g., “How are you?” “Fine”).
2. Fact. Sharing what you *know* is slightly less opaque and typically is done with slightly fewer people.
3. Opinion. Sharing what you *think or believe* becomes more personal. Therefore, it is more transparent and people tend to become more selective with whom they share their opinions.
4. Emotion. Sharing what you *feel* is approaching transparency and, therefore, is generally done with a much more restricted group of listeners.
5. Transparency. Sharing *who you are* is open, honest, and vulnerable. Only those who have taken the time, established trust, and demonstrated commitment are those to whom a person will be transparent.

D. *To communicate well you need to determine several things*

1. What you want to say;
2. How you want to say it (tone of voice, volume, with excitement, sadness, conviction, disappointment, encouragement, etc.);
3. Why you want to say it (to express love or affection, anger, to hurt or embarrass the other person, to make him or her aware of your need, desire, belief, dream, etc.); and
4. When you want to say it (during or after a meal, during recreation, at bedtime, in the presence of children, etc.). *How* and *when* you say something can be as important as *what* you say and *why* you say it. In fact, saying something in an inappropriate way or at an inappropriate time can cause the other person to misinterpret what you are saying and why you said it.

E. *Understanding includes both the content of what the other person is telling you, and his or her feelings*

1. Communication is both verbal (what we say) and nonverbal (tone of voice, body language, gestures, facial expressions, etc.). When the verbal and nonverbal do not agree, people tend to believe the *nonverbal*.
2. Practical suggestions for having quality conversation with your spouse.
 - a. *Maintain eye contact when your spouse is talking*. That keeps your mind from wandering and communicates that he/she has your full attention.
 - b. *Don't listen to your spouse and do something else at the same time*. Quality conversation includes giving your spouse your full attention. If you cannot do that immediately, tell your spouse the truth. Tell him or her that you are interested in what he/she has to say, but explain why you can't give him or her your undivided attention. Tell him or her when you will be able to do so. Most spouses will respect that.
 - c. *Listen for feelings*. Ask yourself, “What emotion is my spouse experiencing?” Then, confirm for your spouse what you understand him or her to be saying and feeling. That gives your spouse a chance to clarify, and communicates that you are listening intently.
 - d. *Observe body language*. Clenched fists, trembling hands, tears, furrowed brows, and eye movement may give you a clue as to what the other is feeling.
 - e. *Refuse to interrupt*. If I give you my undivided attention while you are talking, I will refrain from defending myself, or hurling accusations at you, or dogmatically stating my position. My goal is to *understand you*, to understand your thoughts and feelings. (Chapman 1992:67-69)

II. Listening

A. *Many people want nothing more than for someone to care enough to listen to them*

To take the time to listen and pay attention to someone is to show that you value what that person has to say, and thereby that you value the person himself or herself.

B. *Listening well is a skill that can be learned*

Many people are, in fact, poor listeners. Poor listening stifles communication and fosters misunderstanding. There are different *types of listening*.

1. Four types of listening, based on the listener's attitude:
 - a. *False listening*—fakes interest.

- b. *Selective listening*—tunes in only for points of interest.
 - c. *Protective listening*—doesn't hear any threatening messages.
 - d. *Good listening*—manifests an attitude that encourages communication (Campus Crusade 1993: 77).
2. Three types of listening, based on the listener's style:
- a. *Competitive or Combative listening*. This happens when we are more interested in promoting our own point of view than in understanding or exploring someone else's view. We either listen for openings to take the floor, or for flaws or weak points we can attack. As we pretend to pay attention we are impatiently waiting for an opening, or internally formulating our rebuttal and planning our devastating comeback that will destroy their argument and make us the victor.
 - b. *Passive or Attentive listening*. This occurs when we are genuinely interested in hearing and understanding the other person's point of view. We are attentive and passively listen. We assume that we heard and understand correctly, but stay passive and do not verify it.
 - c. *Active or Reflective listening*. This is the single most useful and important listening skill. In active listening we are also genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, wanting or what the message means, and we are active in checking out our understanding before we respond with our own new message. We restate or paraphrase our understanding of their message and reflect it back to the sender for verification. This verification or feedback process is what distinguishes active listening and makes it effective (Nadig n.d.).

C. *Good, active, reflective listening*

1. The attitude of a good listener. A good listener should demonstrate the following:
 - a. Listen with an attitude that your mate's comments are top priority; give focused attention—prove you care by suspending all other activities.
 - b. Listen with an attitude of acceptance and willingness to understand.
 - c. Listen with an attitude that your mate is not your enemy, but is a gift from God to you.
 - d. Listen with an attitude of willingness to hear what God may be saying through your mate.
2. Listening effectively is difficult because people differ in their communication skills and in how clearly they express themselves. People often have different needs, wants, and purposes for interacting. As a listener we attend to the *level of communication* that we think is most important. However, failing to recognize the level most relevant and important *to the speaker* can lead to a kind of crossed wires where the two people are not on the same wavelength. If we don't address the appropriate elements we will not be very effective, and can actually make the situation worse. For example: If your wife is telling you about her hurt *feelings* and you focus on the *facts* of the situation and don't acknowledge her feelings, she will likely become even more upset.
3. Listening actively—listening is an active process. To listen effectively, we must be actively involved in the communication process, and not just listen passively. There are several techniques that may be used as an active listener:
 - a. *Reflecting back*. A good technique to aid your understanding of the other person is to “reflect back” what the other person says to you. This helps to clarify, both for yourself and for the other person, exactly what you understand the other person to be saying as he is proceeding through his or her narrative of events. When reflecting back what the other person has said, it is usually important to paraphrase and use your own words in verbalizing your understanding of the message. Parroting back the words verbatim is annoying and does not ensure accurate understanding of the message. Depending on the purpose of the interaction and your understanding of what is relevant, you could reflect back the other person's: account of the facts; thoughts and beliefs; feelings and emotions; wants, needs, or motivation; or hopes and expectations. Further, you can “reflects back” by making summary statements, such as: “You're feeling _____”; “As I understand it _____”; “_____ is that right?,” etc. This may prompt the other person either to agree with your summary or to say something like, “no, what I mean is _____” Either way, the goal of mutual understanding is furthered.
 - b. *Clarifying questions*. Listen with an attitude of clarification. That helps one to understand the meaning of the message. You can ask such clarifying questions as: “Are you telling me that _____?” and “What did you mean when you said _____?”
 - c. *Summary questions*. You want to know what is most important to the other person, what the real intent of her perhaps lengthy and convoluted message may be. You can ask summary

questions such as these to help learn this: “Of all that you just said, what do you most want me to understand?” and “What do you need from me most right now?”

d. *Proper focus.* A good listener focuses on: the meaning, rather than just the words; clarification of valid points, rather than defense of incorrect accusations; questions, rather than indictments; understanding, rather than judgment.

4. There are several benefits of active listening.

- a. We all act and respond on the basis of our understanding. Too often there is a misunderstanding of which neither of party is aware. With active listening, if a misunderstanding has occurred, it will be known immediately, and the communication can be clarified before any further misunderstanding occurs.
- b. Sometimes a person just needs to be heard and acknowledged before the person is willing to consider an alternative or soften his or her position.
- c. It is often easier for a person to listen to and consider the other’s position when that person knows the other is listening to and considering his or her position.
- d. It helps people to spot the flaws in their reasoning when they hear it reflected back without criticism.
- e. It also helps identify areas of agreement so that areas of disagreement are put in perspective and are diminished rather than magnified.
- f. Reflecting back what we hear each other say helps give each a chance to become aware of the different levels of communication that are going on below the surface. This helps to bring things into the open where they can be more readily resolved.
- g. If we accurately understand the other person’s view, we can be more effective in helping the person see the flaws in his or her position—and the flaws in our own position.
- h. If we accurately understand the other person’s view, we can be more effective in helping the person solve the problem he or she may have or resolve any difficulties.

5. Additional tips for good, active listening.

- a. *Don’t respond to just the meaning of the words; look for the feelings or intent beyond the words.* The dictionary or surface meaning of the words may not be the message the other person really wants to communicate.
- b. *Inhibit your impulse to immediately answer questions.* Sometimes people ask questions when they really want to express themselves and are not open to hearing an answer.
- c. *Know when to quit using active listening.* Once you accurately understand the sender’s message, it may be appropriate to respond with your own message. Don’t use active listening to hide and avoid revealing your own position.
- d. *If you are confused and know you do not understand, either tell the person you don’t understand and ask him or her to say it another way, or use your best guess.* If you are incorrect, the person will realize it and will likely attempt to correct your misunderstanding.
- e. *Active listening is a very effective first response when the other person is angry, hurt or expressing difficult feelings toward you, especially in relationships that are important to you.*
- f. *Use eye contact and listening body language.* Avoid looking at your watch or at other people or activities around the room. Face and lean toward the speaker and nod your head, as it is appropriate. Be careful about crossing your arms and appearing closed or critical.
- g. *Be empathic and nonjudgmental.* You can be accepting and respectful of the person and his or her feelings and beliefs without invalidating or giving up your own position, or without agreeing with the accuracy and validity of their view.
- h. *When you don’t know what to do, try to understand more.* Be slow to give answers; invest in understanding (not just of the “problem” to be “solved” but of the person [what it is like to be him or her]).

Become a more effective listener. Listening to and acknowledging other people may seem deceptively simple, but doing it well, particularly when disagreements arise, takes true talent. As with any skill, listening well takes plenty of practice, so practice the active listening techniques and make them part of your communication skills.

III. Empathy

A. *There is a real distinction between merely hearing the words and really listening for the message*

When we listen effectively we understand what the person is thinking and feeling *from the other*

person's perspective. It is as if we were standing in the other person's shoes, seeing through his or her eyes and listening through the person's ears. Our own viewpoint may be different, and we may not necessarily agree with the person, but as we listen we understand and gain empathy.

B. What empathy is

Empathy has been described as follows, especially as it relates to communication: “Empathizing is about spontaneously and naturally tuning into the other person's thoughts and feelings, whatever these may be. It is not just about reacting to a small number of emotions in others, such as their pain or sadness; it is about reading the emotional atmosphere between people. It is about effortlessly putting yourself into another's shoes, sensitively negotiating an interaction with another person so as not to hurt or offend them in any way, caring about another's feelings. . . .

Empathizing leads you to pick up the phone and tell someone you are thinking about them and their current situation, even when your own life demands are equally pressing. Empathizing leads you to constantly search people's tone of voice and to scan people's faces, especially their eyes, to pick up on how they might be feeling or what they might be thinking. You use the “language of the eyes,” and intonation, as windows to their mind. And empathizing drives you to do this because you start from the position that your view of the world may not be the only one, or the true one, and that their views and feelings matter. . . .

Empathy is a defining feature of human relationships. For example, empathy stops you [from] doing things that would hurt another person's feelings. Empathy makes you bite your lip, rather than say something that may offend someone or make them feel hurt or rejected. . . .

Empathy also makes real communication possible. Talking at a person is not real communication. It is a monologue. If you talk for significantly more than 50 per cent of the time every few sentences, it is not a conversation. It is venting, or story telling, or lecturing, or indoctrinating, or controlling, or persuading, or dominating, or filling silence. . . . In hijacking the conversation the speaker does not stop to consider that if they are doing all the talking this is only fulfilling *their* needs, not the listener's. Empathy ensures this risk is minimized by enabling the speaker to check how long to carry on, and to be receptive to the listener's wish to switch to a different topic.

Real conversation is sensitive to *this* listener at *this* time. Empathy leads you to ask the listener how *they* feel and to check if they want to enter the dialogue, or what *they* think about the topic. Not to check just once, and then ignore their thoughts and feelings while you focus on your own. Rather, to keep asking, frequently, in the dialogue.

Why check? Because otherwise you might be pouring words all over your listener without them being interested. Worse still, they may actually find your torrent of words unpleasant in some way. . . . Empathy leads you not just to check, but to be able to follow through on what they say, so that they do not feel that you showed an insincere, shallow interest in them. Empathy allows for a reciprocal dialogue, because you are constantly making space in the conversation for the other person, through turn-taking. Empathy allows you to adjust your conversation to be attuned to theirs. . . .

Empathy is the glue of social relationships. It motivates you to find out and care about the other person's experience. It leads you to ask about their own problems, to make them feel supported, rather than simply offloading your own difficulties on to them.” (Baron-Cohen 2003: 21-25)

C. There are different levels of empathetic responses

For example, if a husband is having a conflict with his father, different levels of empathy the wife could show might be as follows:

1. Level 1—“*It will all work out in the end.*” This response really misses the husband's situation. It is merely a denial or reassurance. There is certainly no recognition of his feelings, and little or no explicit recognition of the content of the problem.
2. Level 2—“*You're having a bad time with your dad.*” Here, the wife has highlighted at least a general awareness of the *content* of the husband's message, but has ignored his *feelings*.
3. Level 3—“*You're feeling discouraged because you're not getting along with your dad.*” Here, the wife exhibits greater understanding of both the specific content *and* the feelings of the husband's message. This opens up the possibility of further discussion.
4. Level 4—“*You're feeling discouraged because of your dad's harshness; you want him to let up on you.*” Here, the wife manifests understanding of the specific problem, and of the husband's feelings, and identifies the deficit or need (i.e., what the husband would like to see happen to solve the deficit or meet the need).
5. Level 5—“*You're feeling discouraged because of your dad's harshness and your inability to reach*

*him; you want him to let up on you. Maybe you should talk to him.” This includes everything in level 4, but now includes an *action step*. You may never get to level 5 in all situations (the husband may see what to do once the true situation has been clarified for him).*

D. Empathy is a form of respect and an indication that you take the other person seriously

It seldom helps to tell someone, “I appreciate your position” or “I know how you feel.” You have to prove it by being willing to communicate with others at their level of understanding and attitude. We do this naturally by adjusting our tone of voice, rate of speech and choice of words to show that we are trying to imagine being where they are at the moment. To genuinely communicate with your spouse—to reach understanding, effectively listen, and demonstrate empathy—is an important part of what it means to “become one” (**Gen 2:24**) as God intended for husbands and wives to be.

7. SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE: THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

I. The Importance of Love

A. Paul describes the manner in which we speak the truth in Eph 4:15 as “speaking the truth in love”

1. The word used here is *agape* which usually carries the idea of affection; a concern for the well-being of others.
 - a. This word, infrequently used by others in classical Greek, was adopted by Christian writers and filled with Christian content.
 - b. It meant primarily a God-like love characterized by sacrifice.
 - c. It is a self-giving love that is not merited.
 - d. It is a reflection of an attribute of God since “*God is love*” (**1John 4:8**).
 - e. The true meaning of Biblical love is what Christ did on the cross for you and for me.
2. We can only understand Biblical love by understanding God’s love.
3. From a human perspective, this love is basically not a feeling, but rather an action; it is not primarily emotional, but volitional.

B. Love is the summary of the Law

In **Matt 22:34-40**, a lawyer asked Jesus the question, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*” *Jesus said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF’.* On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

C. Love is the goal of apostolic instruction.

“*The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, good conscience and a sincere faith*” (**1 Tim 1:5**).

D. Speaking truth in love is to speak in a manner that reflects your self-giving love for God.

- If you have a self-giving love for God, you necessarily will have a self-giving love for:
1. Your neighbor.
 2. Your brothers and sisters in Christ.
 3. Your wife or husband.

II. The Characteristics of Love are set forth in 1 Cor 13:4-8a.

“*Love suffers long and is kind; loves does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely; does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*” (**1 Cor 13:4-8a**)

A. “Love is patient” (NASB)—(“love suffers long” NKJV)

1. The term denotes being long-spirited, as if your passion in long lasting.
2. Therefore, speak in such a way as to not communicate impatience.
3. When you communicate to others, and certainly to your spouse, don’t rush or demand something that stirs up fear of failure.

4. However, there are times when you do need to hold people accountable.

B. “Love is kind”

1. Love is kind is more active and the first phrase is more passive.
2. The term denotes showing oneself to be useful.
3. Speak truth in love is to speak in such a way as to offer to be useful; to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.
4. **Luke 6:35** states, *“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.”*

C. “Love does not envy”

1. The term denotes a hot zeal that can be for or against. Here it is in the negative.
2. One who does not envy does not think that he/she is inferior or superior to another.
3. Such a person does not have a desire to be someone else or wish they had someone else’s gifts or opportunities.
4. To “not envy” means to not be jealous.
 - a. Jealousy is often associated with the reaction to loss of a relationship.
 - b. It is the emotion that feels as if a loyalty has been violated and another should not have it.
5. Two examples from Scripture help clarify envy and jealousy:
 - a. In **Acts 7:9** we read, *“the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. And yet God was with him.”*
 - (1) Joseph’s brothers felt as if they had lost their father’s loyalty, love, respect.
 - (2) Consequently, they acted very wrongly toward him.
 - b. In **Acts 17:5** we read, *“But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.”*
 - (1) The Jews felt as if they were losing loyalty of Jews to Paul and Silas (**17:4**).
 - (2) Therefore, they were fearful of being exposed as less than they thought they were in their self-righteousness, and reacted violently.

D. “Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up”

1. The phrase means essentially to inflate, blow-up. Speaking the truth does not attempt to puff up oneself by bragging.
2. Love is not focused upon talking about all one’s own achievements or how you are better or did it better.
3. Proud people enjoy putting others down, but a loving Christian should try to build others up.

E. “Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil”

1. Part of this verse comes from a bookkeeping term (i.e., “does not take into account a wrong suffered”—NASB).
 - a. Speaking the truth in love is to speak without reference to an inventory of evils.
 - b. It deals with issues day by day and forgives and does not bring the issue up again.
2. This verse means that one does not take advantage of or ride roughshod over others.
3. Instead, one is sensitive to other and doesn’t attempt to build “his/her empire.”
4. Speaking the truth in love is not self-serving; it is not about what you can get; it is not about one’s own agenda, unless that agenda is to love the person to whom you are speaking.
 - a. Some of the time we try to protect ourselves, looking for our own security and significance.
 - b. Too often our communication is manipulative to get the other person to agree with us.
5. Love does not attribute bad motives to others.
6. Love produces a guileless person.
7. Speaking truth in love adjusts speech to fit the occasion of speaker.
 - a. In **1 Tim 5:1-2** Paul states, *“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”*
 - b. Speech needs to be adjusted to every person, make it appropriate.
 - c. To the church at Colossae, the Apostle admonishes, *“Let your speech always be with grace,*

seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person”
(Col 4:6).

8. The sense of the verse might be summed up in “Love wipes the slate clean.”

F. “[Love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth”

1. Paul lists five positives in **vv. 6-7**; this is the first.
2. The evil [iniquity] referred to would seem to be untruthfulness.
 - a. To speak the truth in love is to refuse to take any joy in unrighteousness.
 - b. It does not reward, accept, or approve unrighteousness in behavior.
 - c. When we gossip, we are rejoicing in someone else’s sin (even though the gossip may be true).
 - d. Sometimes we take pleasure in someone else’s failing because it makes us feel superior.

G. “Bears all things”

1. The idea of this phrase is to cover by roofing over.
2. Speaking truth in love allows us to sometimes cover tough emotions with silence, to quietly endure, until the time is right.
3. Some things just need to be endured, covered over, and allowed to roll off our backs without comment.
4. Paul expresses this idea in **1 Cor 9:12**, *“If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”*
5. *“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions” (Prov 10: 12).*

H. “Believes all things”

1. This does not mean that we are gullible or easily fooled.
2. It does not mean we have no standard of truth, or anything is truth if someone thinks it is.
3. It probably means that we are positive and accepting, unless it is proven otherwise.
4. Some think it means that we believe all things from the word of God (i.e., take on a Biblical worldview).
5. To “believe all things” does not accept a bad report of another, unless it is substantiated clearly.
6. Paul states in **Phil 4:8**, *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.”*

I. “Hopes all things”

1. Hope is a confident expectation, an assurance of something to come, not simply wishful thinking, with no real assurance or confidence.
2. The great Puritan preacher John Gill wrote that the Christian: “hopes all things; that are to be hoped for; hopes for the accomplishment of all the promises of God; hopes for the enjoyment of him in his house and ordinances; hopes for things that are not seen, that are future, difficult, though possible to be enjoyed: hopes for heaven and eternal happiness, for more grace here and glory hereafter; hopes the best of all men, of all professors of religion, even of wicked men, that they may be better and brought to repentance, and of fallen professors, who declare their repentance, and make their acknowledgments; he hopes well of them, that they are sincere, and all is right and will appear so.”

J. “Endures all things”

1. Speaking the truth in love is to speak with the courageous character of endurance.
2. Endurance is not being a complainer who exudes a “woe is me” attitude.
3. To endure is to speak without focusing on always trying to get out of a bad situation.

K. “Love never fails”

1. To speak the truth in love is to speak as one who will not give up on God, His work, His people, because we should understand that God will never leave us nor forsake us.
2. John Gill wrote: “Charity never faileth, &c. It may fail as to the exercise of it, as other graces do; it may be left, but not lost; the fervor of it may be remitted and abated; it may wax cold through the prevalence of sin; it may be greatly damped by the growth of error and heresy, which eat as do a canker; and may be much obstructed by an anxious and immoderate care and concern for worldly things; which

are very pernicious to all the branches of vital religion and powerful godliness, and particularly love to God, Christ, and the brethren: but this grace never fails as to its principle; it is an immortal and an incorruptible seed; it lives throughout the most violent temptations, as in Peter; and under the greatest deserts and sorest afflictions, still there is an affection for God; Christ is he whom such a soul loves; and the saints are the excellent in the earth, in whom is all his delight: and it also continues as to its use, and will do so, when faith and hope will loose theirs, even in the other world; for faith will be changed into vision, and hope into enjoyment; but love will be the same, only act in a higher sphere, and to a greater degree, and in a perfect manner.”

3. We are instructed in **Gal 5:6** that faith works through love, “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*”

4. In **John 13:34-35** love demonstrates that we are truly Christ’s disciples: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

III. The Five Love Languages¹⁰

A. *The failure in so many marriages is that we have unrealistic expectations concerning love.*

1. The need to feel loved is a primary human emotional need.

a. *With an adequate supply of affection, a child will likely develop into a responsible adult.*

Without that love, he or she will be emotionally retarded. That same need for love and affection continues throughout all of life.

b. *“At the heart of mankind’s existence is the desire to be intimate and to be loved by another. Marriage is designed to meet that need for intimacy and love” (22).* Further, “the need to feel loved by one’s spouse is at the heart of marital desires” (22).

2. “Falling in love” is not the same as real love.

a. *At its peak, the “in love” experience is euphoric.* We are obsessed with each other and have the illusion that our beloved is perfect. We cannot see our beloved’s faults, and think that the feelings we are now experiencing will last forever. The “in love” experience gives us the illusion that we have an intimate relationship and that we and our beloved will never hurt each other, but will always only meet each others needs and desires.

b. *In fact, long-range studies of the “in love” phenomenon indicate that “the average life span of a romantic obsession is two years” (30).*

c. *The “in-love experience” is a particular emotional-sexual experience, a temporary emotional high.* It is not real love at all, because:

(1) It is not an act of the will or a conscious choice. No matter how much we may want to fall in love, we cannot make it happen. It may happen to us at inopportune times and with unlikely people.

(2) It is effortless. Whatever we do in the “in love” state requires little discipline or conscious effort on our part.

(3) It is not genuinely interested in fostering the personal growth of the other person. The “in love” experience does not focus on our own growth nor on the growth and development of the other person, but rather produces a sense that we have “arrived.” Our only desire is to stay there.

d. *If we treat the feeling of “falling in love” as the model for a life-time of marriage, we will not succeed in our marriage.*

e. *After we come down from the high of the “in love” experience, the emotional need for love resurfaces because it is fundamental to our nature.* We needed love before we “fell in love,” and we will need it as long as we live.

3. Real love demonstrates characteristics different from the temporary “in love” experience.

a. *Real love:* “is emotional in nature but not obsessional. It is a love that unites reason and emotion. It involves an act of the will and requires discipline, and it recognizes the need for personal growth. Our most basic emotional need is not to fall in love but to be genuinely loved by another, to know a love that grows out of reason and choice, not instinct. I need to be loved

¹⁰This section is based on Christian psychologist and marriage counselor Gary Chapman’s *The Five Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield, 1992). Numbers in parentheses are the page numbers from which quotations from the book are found.

by someone who chooses to love me, who sees in me something worth loving.

That kind of love requires effort and discipline. It is the choice to expend energy in an effort to benefit the other person, knowing that if his or her life is enriched by your effort, you too will find a sense of satisfaction—the satisfaction of having genuinely loved another. It does not require the euphoria of the ‘in love’ experience. In fact, true love cannot begin until the “in love” experience has run its course.” (35-36)

b. *Real love demonstrates the characteristics of 1 Corinthians 13.*

B. There are five primary ways in which love is expressed and received—“the five love languages”

“There are basically five emotional love languages—five ways that people speak and understand emotional love. . . . The important thing is to speak the love language of your spouse. . . . Seldom do a husband and wife have the same primary emotional love language. We tend to speak our primary love language, and we become confused when our spouse does not understand what we are communicating. We are expressing our love, but the message does not come through because we are speaking what, to them, is a foreign language. . . . Once you identify and learn to speak your spouse’s primary love language, I believe you will have discovered the key to a long-lasting, loving marriage.” (15-17)

1. Words of Affirmation. Words that affirm, compliment, build up, and encourage, are one way to express love emotionally. The “emotional climate” of a marriage is enhanced when a husband and wife use affirming words regularly (i.e., something affirming each day).

a. *Set a goal to give your spouse a different compliment each day for a month.* When we receive affirming words we are far more likely to be motivated to say or do something that our spouse desires. When we look for our spouse’s strengths and tell him or her how much we appreciate those strengths, our spouse is likely to work hard to live up to the reputation we have verbalized.

b. *Words of encouragement require that we empathize with our spouse, learn what is important to him or her, and see the world from his or her point of view.* With verbal encouragement we are trying to communicate, “I know. I care. I am with you. How can I help.” To be “encouraging,” however, the spouse must *first desire* what you are encouraging him or her to do. For example: “Some husbands pressure their wives to lose weight. The husband says, “I am encouraging her,” but to the wife it sounds like condemnation. Only when a person wants to lose weight can you give her encouragement. Until she has the desire, your words will fall into the category of preaching. Such words seldom encourage. They are almost always heard as words of judgment, designed to stimulate guilt. They express not love but rejection.” (44)

c. *To be true words of affirmation, what you say must be said with kindness and tenderness.* Further, love makes requests, not demands. “When you make a request of your spouse, you are affirming his or her worth and abilities. . . . When, however, you make demands, you have become not a lover but a tyrant. Your spouse will not feel affirmed but belittled.” (49)

d. *You can give indirect words of affirmation by saying positive things about your spouse when he or she is not present (eventually, someone will tell your spouse, and you will get full credit for love).* Also, affirm your spouse in front of others when he or she is present.

2. Quality Time. “Quality time” refers to giving someone your focused, undivided attention. Quality time can include looking at each other and talking while sitting together, taking a walking, eating together, or simply being with each other, doing something you know the other person likes.

a. *A central aspect of quality time is togetherness.* Togetherness is not just physical closeness, but *focused attention.* “When I sit on the couch with my wife and give her twenty minutes of my undivided attention and she does the same for me, we are giving each other twenty minutes of life. We will never have those twenty minutes again; we are giving our lives to each other. It is a powerful emotional communicator of love.” (60)

b. *Quality time often includes quality conversation—i.e., “sympathetic dialogue where two individuals are sharing their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and desires in a friendly, uninterrupted context”* (65). Quality conversation is different from words of affirmation: words of affirmation focus on what we are *saying*; quality conversation focuses on what we are *hearing*.

c. *Quality time can include quality activities—i.e., anything in which one or both of you have an interest.* The emphasis is not on what you are doing but why you are doing it. “The purpose is to experience something together, to walk away from it feeling, ‘He cares about me. He was willing to do something with me that I enjoy, and he did it with a positive attitude.’ That is love,

and for some people it is love's loudest voice." (73-74)

3. Giving and Receiving Gifts. A gift is something tangible that shows you have been thinking of the other person. It doesn't matter whether it cost money; you can make a gift. What is important is that you have thought of the other person, obtained a gift, and gave that gift as an expression of love.

a. *If receiving gifts is your spouse's primary love language, being a good gift-giver is an easy love language to learn.* Make a list of the gifts your spouse has expressed excitement about receiving over the years (whether those gifts were given by you, or other family members, or friends). The list will give you an idea of the kind of gifts your spouse would enjoy receiving. If necessary, recruit the help of family members who know your spouse, for help in selecting good gifts.

b. *Don't wait for special occasions to give gifts to your spouse.* If receiving gifts is his/her primary love language, almost anything will be received as an expression of love. (If he/she has been critical of your gifts in the past, and almost nothing you have given has been acceptable, then receiving gifts is probably not your spouse's primary love language.)

c. *Your physical presence with your spouse in a time of crisis or other important time can be the most powerful gift you can give to him or her.* If your spouse says that he or she would like you to be with him or her for some event, take that request seriously.

4. Acts of Service. Acts of service are doing those things you know your spouse would like you to do. They can include cooking a meal, setting a table, washing dishes, taking out garbage, changing a baby's diaper, or cleaning the house. They require though, planning, time, effort, and energy. You seek to please your spouse by serving him or her. If done with a positive spirit, such acts are acts of love. That is particularly so when the acts of service you do are things that your spouse might normally do (e.g., a husband washing the dishes after a meal to show his appreciation for the meal and his love for his wife).

a. *What we do for each other before marriage is no indication of what we will do after marriage.* Before marriage we are carried along by the force of the "in love" obsession. After marriage we revert to being the people we were before we "fell in love." Therefore, if your spouse's primary love language is acts of service, he or she may expect you to continue performing acts of service after your marriage. Your spouse may feel unloved if you stop performing acts of service.

b. *Love is a choice that cannot be forced.* Criticism and demands for performance drive wedges between people; they do not promote loving acts of service. Your spouse may do what you demand, but it probably will not be an expression of love. Requests are better than demands. Ultimately, however, love is a choice. "Each of us must decide daily to love or not to love our spouses. If we choose to love, then expressing it in the way in which our spouse requests will make our love most effective emotionally." (107)

c. *Your spouse's criticism of your behavior provides a clear clue as to his or her primary love language.* "People tend to criticize their spouse most loudly in the area where they themselves have the deepest emotional need. Their criticism is an ineffective way of pleading for love. If we understand that, it may help us process their criticism in a more productive manner." (107)

d. *You can make a list of all the requests your spouse has made of you over the past few weeks.* Look at those requests as indications of what is really important to him or her. Choose to do one each week as an expression of love. Or, you could ask your spouse to make a list of 10 things he or she would like you to do during the next month, and number them in order of importance. Use the list to plan your strategy for a "month of love." Or, from time-to-time as your spouse, "If I could do one special act of service this week, what would you request?" Your spouse will notice these things. By doing this you will be filling his or her "emotional tank." Your spouse will be happier, and will, in turn, start acting in ways to make you happier.

5. Physical Touch. Physical touch, including holding hands, kissing, embracing, massage, gently stroking the face, and having sexual intercourse, are all powerful ways of communicating emotional love to one's spouse. For some individuals, physical touch is their primary love language. Without it, they feel unloved. With it, they feel secure in the love of their spouse.

a. *Touch receptors are located throughout the body, so lovingly touching your spouse almost anywhere can be an expression of love.* However, some will bring more pleasure to your spouse than others. Your spouse is your best guide. Do not insist on touching him or her in your way and in your time. If your spouse finds some manner of touching uncomfortable or irritating, continuing to do it communicates the opposite of love, and shows that you care little about his or her feelings. Do not make the mistake of believing that the touch that brings pleasure to you

will also bring pleasure to your spouse.

b. *Physical touch can be particularly important in times of crisis.* It communicates closeness and solidarity with the person who is suffering.

c. *Men and women tend to have different needs for sexual touch.* For most wives, the desire to be sexually intimate with their husbands grows out of a sense of being loved by their husbands. If they do not feel loved, they often feel “used” in the sexual context. Men’s desire for sex has a more physiological root—the buildup of sperm cells and seminal fluid in the seminal vesicles: when the seminal vesicles are full, there is a physical push for release. Most spouses need to recognize these differences. However, as Chapman says: “When, in fact, his wife speaks his primary love language and his emotional love tank is full, and he speaks her primary love language and her emotional tank is full, the sexual aspect of their relationship will take care of itself. Most sexual problems in marriage have little to do with physical technique but everything to do with meeting emotional needs.” (136)

C. When you speak the correct love language to your spouse, your efforts at producing a successful marriage will be most productive

1. What makes one person feel loved emotionally (i.e., his or her primary love language) is not always what makes another person feel loved emotionally. The challenge is to speak each other’s love language. That is important because, in the context of marriage, “if we do not feel loved, our differences are magnified. We come to view each other as a threat to our happiness. We fight for self-worth and significance, and marriage becomes a battlefield rather than a haven.” (154)

2. What is your love language? What makes you feel most loved by your spouse? What do you desire above all else? (You can have more than one love language, although most people tend to have a primary language and a secondary one). Chapman suggests three ways to discover your own primary love language:

a. *What does your spouse do or fail to do that hurts you most deeply?* The opposite of what hurts you most is probably your love language.

b. *What have you most often requested of your spouse?* The thing that you have most often requested is likely the thing that would make you feel most loved.

c. *In what way do you regularly express love to your spouse?* Your method of expressing love may be an indication that that would also make you feel loved.

3. What is your spouse’s love language? Think about the ways in which your spouse has indicated that he or she feels most loved. Apply the above three questions to your spouse. If you still don’t know, ask him or her. Discuss the subject. Finding his or her primary love language will be finding the way that most communicates, “I love you.”

4. Long-lasting emotional love is a choice. Deep, emotional love can be reborn in a marriage, even after many years of neglect. You can fill your spouse’s emotional tank, and he or she can fill yours, once you discover your primary love languages, and consciously begin speaking and acting to communicate love to your spouse through those love languages.

8. BEING A BLESSING TO YOUR FAMILY

⁸*To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For,*

*"THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,
MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.*

¹¹*HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;
HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.*

¹²*FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS,
AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,*

BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL." (1 Pet 3:8-12)

I. Context

A. 3:8-12 summarizes what Peter has been saying in the previous section

“Finally”; “To sum up”; “The sum of the matter” in 3:8 makes that explicit. However, we need to see the context clearly, and then apply it to our family lives.

1. The immediate context is 3:1-7. Peter had been discussing the responsibilities of wives and husbands.

2. **3:1-7**, in turn, is the specific application of the general principles of **2:11-12** (“abstain from fleshly lusts” and “keep your behavior excellent”), which began this entire section, and of the example of Christ of **2:21-25**.

B. Peter’s language in 3:8-12 is broad enough to include all believers, but has particular application to the relationship between wives and husbands and the family; the application to marriage is reinforced when we note the complementary structural similarities between Eph 5:18-33 and 1 Pet 2:11-3:12

1. Both passages contain Paul’s (Eph 5:22-33) and Peter’s (1 Pet 3:1-7) most detailed discussions of the roles of husbands and wives.

2. Both of those discussions, in turn, are specific applications of the nature of Christian submission which, in turn, is an aspect of the more basic manner of how Christians should live:

a. *The Ephesians passage arises out of Paul’s discussion of the proper way for Christians to “walk” (Eph 4:1; 5:1-2, 15). The more specific context stemmed from Paul’s exhortation to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). “Being filled with the Spirit,” in turn, was characterized by four participles: “speaking” (5:19); “singing” (5:19); “giving thanks” (5:20); and “submitting” (Eph 5:21). Eph 5:22 then begins applying the concept of subjecting to wives and husbands.*

b. *The 1 Peter passage similarly arises out of the proper way for Christians to live (1 Pet 2:11-12). The more specific context stemmed from Peter’s instruction to servants to “be submissive [the same participle Paul used in Eph 5:21] to your masters with all respect” (1 Pet 2:18). Peter then discussed how “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). 1 Pet 3:1, 7 then applies those concepts to wives and husbands by use of the same adverb (“likewise”).*

3. Both passages conclude on a broader basis than simply that of instructions to husbands and wives; further, both conclusions include quotations from the OT.

a. *Ephesians 5 quotes from Gen 2:24 to demonstrate from creation itself why husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and then concludes by saying that what is really at issue is “Christ and the church.”*

b. *1 Peter 3 concludes by admonishing believers to live rightly “so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet 3:7), and pointing to our calling to give blessing to others in order that we might inherit blessing from God; he quotes from Ps 34:12-16 to demonstrate the nature of God’s relationship with mankind (i.e., the fact that God is sovereign, and attends to the prayers of the righteous, but is against those who do evil).*

C. Consequently, our marriages should be seen as an integral and important part of our relationship to the Father and to Christ

Important spiritual and practical consequences flow from this:

1. Marriage is built into the creation order (**Gen 2:24**).

2. Because marriage is built into the creation order, it is an institution of great value, a part of creation that God called “very good” (**Gen 1:31**).

3. Because marriage is an institution of great value to God, we must value our own marriage as a relationship of great value—and therefore give them the time, attention, and effort necessary to demonstrate that we consider our marriage to be of great value to us.

4. Marriage is a reflection of the relationship between Christ and his church (**Eph 5:22-32**).

5. Because marriage is a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church, marriage, at root, primarily is a *spiritual* relationship.

6. Because marriage is a reflection the relationship between Christ and the church, our attitude toward, and how we relate to, our spouse really is a reflection of our attitude toward and relationship with *Christ* and the Father.

7. Because our attitude toward and relationship with our spouse is a reflection of our attitude toward and relationship with Christ and the Father, we may expect to see *practical outworkings* of God’s chastisement or blessing in our lives, depending on how we treat our spouse (**1 Pet 3:7-12**).

II. Living a Life of Marital Blessing

A. The center of 1 Pet 3:8-12 is 3:9b: “For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing”

1. That phrase gives the reason why believers should live the way Peter instructs in 3:8-9a. We are to live a life of blessing because that is the purpose for which God has called us.
2. 3:10-12 then explain the practical and spiritual consequences and implications of the life of blessing of 3:9b. In order to receive God's blessing we must be a blessing to others.

B. 1 Pet 3:8

1. Peter begins by listing five attitudes that should characterize believers (and should characterize spouses in their marriages): “harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.”
2. These are all inner attitudes that have outward manifestations. This is consistent with Jesus' recognition that the person's inner self is the source of defilement. See **Mark 7:14-23**. Thus, our marriages should be based on an inner oneness (“they shall become one flesh”—**Gen 2:24**), not simply on outwardly correct behavior. The corollary to this is that the Christian life is about changed *lives*, not merely changed beliefs or attitudes—our beliefs don't matter if they don't affect how we live, and if we are not devoted and determined to live them out.
3. Peter heads the list of attitudes with the word “harmonious.”
 - a. The Greek word translated “harmonious” (Greek = *homophrones*) means “being like-minded; united in spirit; harmonious” (Danker 2000: 709-10). Harmoniousness is *mutually enriching*. In essence, Peter is calling for *unity* or *oneness* to head the list of characteristics that describe a marital relationship. Indeed, the other four terms Peter uses might be seen as defining or describing “harmoniousness” or “like-mindedness” itself. The other four characteristics certainly will be present when a relationship is harmonious or when two people are like-minded.
 - b. This unity/harmoniousness/like-mindedness also highlights the spiritual nature of marriage. Indeed, Jesus' “high priestly prayer” of **John 17** stressed the importance of the unity of believers (“that they may be one, just as we are one”—**John 17:21-22**). Since our marriages are a reflection of Christ and his church, the unity, the harmonious attitude of “oneness” between a husband and wife is necessary, important, and must be cultivated.
4. “Sympathetic” implies addressing the “feelings” more than simply agreement of mind.
5. “Brotherly” is important in that it is the language of family. Families care for, and take care of, each other. Family relations should be different, closer, more intimate, than relations with the outside world. There is something unique about a family that cannot be duplicated by those outside the family. It is significant, therefore, that God has not merely “saved” his people, but also has “adopted” them into his family (see **Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7; Eph 1:5**).
6. “Kindheartedness” extends the ideas of “sympathy” and “brotherliness” by implying actions of a kind nature motivated by oneness and sympathy. Consequently, God's plan for marriage encompasses togetherness of thought, feeling, and behavior.
7. None of the foregoing characteristics can be achieved without “humility of spirit.” Humility does not vaunt oneself or seek to dominate the other; rather, humility first seeks the best welfare of the other. One who exhibits “humility of spirit” has the spirit of Jesus who “did not come to be served, but to serve” (**Matt 20:28**).

C. 1 Pet 3:9a

1. Peter then goes on to show the *practical outworking* of the Christ-honoring marital attitude discussed in **3:8**.
2. That practical outworking represents a stark contrast between the nature of human (including marital) interaction according to the world, and the nature of human (including marital) interaction according to Christ. The two natures are two separate, and opposed, principles.
 - a. The world's plan for relationships (including the marriage relationship) is a “performance-based” relationship. Acceptance is based on *performance* (“you do your part; I'll do mine”); giving is based on *merit* that is *earned*—affection is given only when one feels that it is *deserved* (“you do/don't do, then I'll do/not do”), or in order to get something from the other; motivation is based on how one *feels*. The world's plan is destined to self-destruct, especially in marriage, because of:
 - (1) my inability to meet unreal expectations;
 - (2) the impossibility of knowing my mate has done his/her share;
 - (3) my tendency to focus on weaknesses in my mate;
 - (4) my disappointment in my mate which paralyzes my performance.The result is, as indicated in **3:9a**, an “evil-for-evil” and “insult-for-insult” relationship, which

focuses on “my rights” and “my feelings.” Such a relationship is rooted in an unforgiving and hardened heart. Such a relationship naturally follows where acceptance and affection are based on performance and have to be earned, and where the focus is on oneself (and, thereby, the necessity to always “get even” when a perceived slight occurs) (Campus Crusade 1993: 20, 156).

b. *Christ’s plan for relationships (including the marriage relationship) is a “grace-based” relationship.* It is based on the nature of God himself, is rooted in creation, and reflects the relationship of Christ and his church. The marriage relationship is therefore predicated on the subordination of the self to the needs and best interest of the spouse, and of the marriage relationship as a whole, primarily out of love for and gratitude to Christ, and secondarily out of love for the spouse (who is recognized to be God’s gift to the other spouse). In such a relationship, love, and acceptance, and affection are *freely given*, not earned, because Christ has first loved us and the other person is worthy of such love, acceptance, and affection merely because he or she is a child of God and bears the image of God. When the spouse does not meet our expectations, we can *freely forgive* because we were forgiven by Christ and reconciled to God while we were his enemies (**Rom 5:8-10**). The result is a “blessing-for-insult” relationship which has its focus on God and his Word, draws upon his strength, and responds with grace and forgiveness when wronged. Such a relationship is destined to succeed, because it flows out of the character and commands of God himself (Ibid.: 157).

3. Thus, 3:9a tells us to “stop living the way the world lives; stop living according to the basis upon which the world orders its relationships—and live according to how Christ lived and how he orders relationships.” How we actually *act* (especially how we *react* when provoked, insulted, or are subjected to evil) is the outward, visible sign of whether we have the attitudes Peter called for in **3:8**. To consistently give a blessing when insulted and exhibit the attitudes stated in **3:8** means that we *are* a blessing.

D. 3:10-12

1. In these verses Peter describes what “giving a blessing” (3:9a) looks like when practically applied, and comments on the “inherit a blessing” (3:9b) phrase with which he ended 3:9. These verses all constitute a quotation from **Ps 34:12-16**.

2. A family blessing in the Old Testament involved five elements (see **Gen 17:1-8; 27:26-29; 32:24-32; 48:9-20; 49:1-27**):

- a. *Meaningful touch.* Kissing, hugging, or the laying on of hands provided a caring background to the words that were to be spoken; touch communicates warmth, personal acceptance, and affirmation.
- b. *A spoken message.* Words of love, acceptance, and affirmation are vital for communicating blessing to others.
- c. *Attaching “high value” to the one being blessed.* The words of the blessing itself must convey that the person is valuable and has redeeming qualities, based on *who they are*, not simply based on their performance.
- d. *Picturing a special future for the one being blessed.* Although we cannot predict someone’s future, we can encourage and help them, give them hope and security by assuring them that we are for them and will be with them.
- e. *An active commitment to fulfill the blessing.* This is the responsibility that goes with giving a blessing. It is said that “actions speak louder than words.” However, when your actions confirm your words and help to put them into effect, the result can be very powerful—especially when the words and actions are ones of affirmation, love, and blessing given to a member of your family. (Smalley and Trent 1986: 21-116)

We should do these things in order to convey the love and acceptance we have for our family.

3. The specific nature and context of “giving a blessing.” 3:9a is somewhat different from an Old Testament family blessing, and is perhaps more difficult to do. Peter says we are to “give a blessing” when we have been subjected to evil conduct or insulted. As described in **3:10-11**, “giving a blessing” involves our *speech*, our *actions*, and our *motives* and *goals*. Regarding *speech*, we are to refrain from speaking evil or speaking with guile (i.e., speaking with treacherous cunning, deceitfully, craftily in order to trick others). Regarding *actions*, we are to “turn away from evil and do good.” Regarding *motives and goals*, we are to “seek peace and pursue it.”

4. The goal of “peace” requires effort—“pursuit.” Living a life of blessing is not easy in the face of

conflict and others who are focused only on themselves. Nevertheless, true peace—peace that is internal as well as external, the peace that flows from two people who both are living the attitudes listed in **3:8** and are doing the things listed in **3:9-11**, best captures the divine quality of a Christ-centered relationship. Dallas Willard states: “When Saint Augustine comes to the very end of his book *The City of God*, he attempts to address the question of ‘how the saints shall be employed when they are clothed in immortal and spiritual bodies.’ . . . [H]e settles upon the word *peace* to describe it, and develops the idea of peace by reference to the *vision* of God . . . In words so beautiful that everyone should know them by heart, he says, ‘There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise’ . . . And yet, for all their beauty and goodness, these words do not seem to me to capture the blessed condition of the restoration of all things—of the kingdom come in its utter fullness. Repose, yes. But not as quiescence, passivity, eternal fixity. It is, instead, peace as wholeness, as fullness of function, as the restful but unending creativity involved in a cosmoswide, cooperative pursuit of a created order that continuously approaches but never reaches the limitless goodness and greatness of the triune personality of God, its source.” (Willard 1997: 399-400, *emph. in orig.*) It is those qualities that God has designed into marriage itself—an intimate relationship that reflects his own nature, that leads to wholeness, fullness of function, and restfulness in a world conspiring against such things—that make marriage both a temporal picture of heavenly eternity, and a relationship in which the participants may experience a taste of God’s kingdom here on earth.

5. **Peter concludes in 3:12 with a promise and a warning.** Wayne Grudem explains: “The phrase *the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous* implies not merely that God sees what the righteous are doing . . . but that he is looking after them for good, recognizing and meeting their needs . . . By contrast, the statement *But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil* is, in the context of Psalm 34, clearly a verdict of judgment, for the verse continues, ‘to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth’ (Ps. 34:16).

3:8-12 as a whole should not be taken as evidence for final salvation by good works, for they are addressed to those who are already Christians and already have an imperishable ‘inheritance’ kept for them in heaven (1:4). Yet this passage does present a bold affirmation of the relation between righteous living and God’s present blessing in this life. As such it provides a needed corrective to careless, half-hearted Christians living in any age, and a powerful motivation to the kind of holy living to which Peter says all Christians have been ‘called’ (v. 9).” (Grudem 1988: 150)

E. Thus, marriage has a serious and important spiritual dimension

1. Marriage also has important practical implications for our living on this earth. God takes our marriages seriously.
2. If we take our marriages just as seriously as God does, we will experience the joy that God intended to be a part of a God-honoring marriage.

9. SEXUAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN MARRIAGE

I. The Importance of Sex and Biblical Sexual Ethics

A. Sex is extremely important because it goes to the nature of what it means to be a human being

The Bible’s discussion of sex is based upon God’s design for human beings and human relationships. Bible not only deals with deep spiritual truth, but also deals with the most important practical aspects of life, including the issue of sex. If the Bible’s advice is followed, there will be strong, dynamic, and happy marriages among Christians.

B. Human beings are ontologically dualistic, but functionally holistic

1. “Ontology” relates to our essence or being; “function” relates to what we do or how we live.
2. To say that human beings are ontologically dualistic means that we are composed of two essential parts: a *material* part (the physical body), and an *immaterial* part (the mind, soul, spirit). This ontological dualism means that there is nothing inherently “bad” or “sinful” about the body. The body and its appetites is not something that is to be denied or “overcome.” Instead, the body was created by God. Its appetites (including sexual appetites) are normal and are to be satisfied, as long as that is done in the way God has prescribed (i.e., in the context of marriage).
3. To say that human beings are functionally holistic means that in all of our life activities we function as *unities*: what happens to our body affects our soul, and *vice versa*; what happens to us physically

affects us spiritually, and *vice versa*. Recognition of our functional holism guards us against the idea that the body is separate from “ourselves,” or is only a tool for us to use, or that only the mind is important, so it doesn’t matter what you do with the body. If that were true then (some people think) you could indulge in any kind of sensual experience you desire without adverse consequences to yourself. Again, we are to operate within the way God has prescribed for us.

C. *The Bible sets forth a consistent sexual ethic*

1. God designed people to have sex only in permanent, monogamous, marriages.

a. *The Bible consistently sets forth God’s ideal.* Sexual relations are only to take place within the context of a permanent (i.e., life-long), monogamous, marital relationship (see **Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6; 1 Cor 7:1-2, 8-14, 36; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:9, 11, 14; Titus 1:6; Heb 13:4**).

b. *God’s ideal of sex only within the context of a monogamous marriage is related to the way God designed humanity.* In **Gen 2:18** God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Consequently, he made the woman out of the man to be a helper suitable for him (**Gen 2:18-23**). As a result, “a man shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (**Gen 2:24**).

c. *The “incompleteness” of a man or a woman apart from the other combines with human functional holism to find ultimate physical completion only in the context of monogamous marital sex.* Christian philosopher J. Budziszewski states: “We’re *designed* for our bodies and hearts to work together. We human beings really do have a design, and I mean that literally—not just a biological design, but an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual design. The human design is the *meaning* of the ancient expression ‘human nature.’ Some ways of living comport with our design. Others don’t. . . . The sexes are designed to complement each other. Short of a divine provision for people called to celibacy, there is something missing in the man, which must be provided by the woman, and something missing in the woman, which must be provided by the man. By themselves, each one is incomplete; to be whole, they must be united.

This incompleteness is an incredible blessing because it both makes it possible for them to give themselves to each other, and gives them a motive to do so. The gift of self makes each self to the other self what no other self can be. The fact that they “forsake all others” is not just a sentimental feature of traditional Western marriage vows; it arises from the very nature of the gift. You cannot partly give yourself, because your Self is indivisible; the only way to give yourself is to give yourself entirely. Because the gift is total, it has to exclude all others, and if it doesn’t do that, then it hasn’t taken place.

We can say even more about this gift, because the union of the spouses’ bodies has a more-than-bodily significance; the body emblemizes the person, and the joining of bodies emblemizes the joining of the persons. It is a symbol that participates in, and duplicates the pattern of, the very thing that it symbolizes; one-flesh unity is the body’s language for one-life unity. . . . Mutual and total self-giving, strong feelings of attachment, intense pleasure, and the procreation of new life are linked by human nature in a single complex of purpose. If it is true that they are linked by human nature, then if we try to split them apart, we split ourselves.” (Budziszewski 2005: n.p.) Only a life-long monogamous marriage relationship, therefore, fulfills God’s *design* of human nature (our longings and needs, both physical and non-physical).

d. *In addition to fulfilling God’s design of human nature, a life-long monogamous marital relationship is designed to reflect spiritual realities.* It is the best physical manifestation of the *nature of God*: in marriage the man and woman, although remaining individuals, “become one flesh” (**Gen 2:24**), just as there is a plurality-within-unity within God himself (i.e., the members of the Trinity are distinct persons, yet there is only one God). Further, life-long monogamous marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and the church (**Eph 5:28-32**). Just as Christ has only one bride, the church (see **Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9**), so a man is to have only one wife. Just as Christ will never leave us or forsake us (see **Heb 13:5; Rom 8:35-39**), so we never are to leave or forsake our spouses.

e. *The spiritual nature of marriage and sex is also reflected in the fact that sexual immorality is symbolic of spiritual idolatry.* The Bible equates sexual immorality with forsaking God to pursue other gods and ungodly practices (see **Jer 3:6-10; Ezek 16:15-22; Hos 2:2; 4:12; 1 Cor 6:15-20; Jas 4:4; Rev 2:18-22; 14:8; 17:1-5; 18:1-3; 19:1-2**).

f. *Although some of the OT patriarchs practiced polygamy, that practice was rare. Further, it was never prescribed in the Bible, but simply was described.*

(1) Significantly, the first polygamist in Scripture was Lamech, a man of disreputable

and violent character (**Gen 4:23-24**). Polygamy involving taking two sisters as wives was specifically prohibited in the OT (see **Lev 18:18**). Polygamy invariably caused division in the family and had other harmful effects including leading to spiritual infidelity to God (see **Gen 21:9-11; 1 Kgs 11:1-8**). The fact that polygamy is contrary to God's ideal, and is contrary to the spiritual nature of marriage as a picture of Christ and the church, is seen in the fact that, in order to be a leader in the church, a man may be the husband of only "one wife" (**1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6**).

(2) These truths are borne out sociologically. Rhoads states, "Monogamy is preferable to polygamy, which leaves many more men without a woman, thus promoting violence among men competing for women." (Rhoads 2004: 146). One commentator adds this, "Societies that have been unable to establish monogamy have also been unable to create working democracies or widely distributed wealth. No society that domesticates too few men can have a stable social order. People who are incapable of monogamy are probably incapable of many other things as well." (Tucker 1993: 38)

2. Human functional holism relates to sexual ethics.

a. In **1 Cor 6:12-20** Paul discusses the bodily functions of eating and sex. With respect to sexual relations he states: ¹⁵*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!* ¹⁶*Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."* ¹⁷*But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.* ¹⁸*Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.*

b. In that passage, Paul is showing us that we are integrated human beings. We cannot do something with our bodies that does not affect our spirits. That is true for all people, but is especially acute for Christians. The reason is that we have been joined with Christ, both spiritually and physically (we are his body—**1 Cor 12:12-27**). Consequently, when we engage in sexual immorality, it is as if we were making Christ engage in immoral acts. In his commentary on this passage, James Davis puts it this way: "For some of the Corinthians, it followed from their freedom to eat that they were also free to indulge their sexual appetites in prostitution. For Paul, however, this action and the logical analogy that lies behind it are fundamentally wrong, because they involve the believer's body as a physical, psychological, and spiritual whole in an action that unites the Christian (whose body in this sense belongs to the Lord [v. 14] and, as such, is already 'united' to Christ [vv. 15, 17; 12:27]) with the active presence and enslaving power of immorality." (Davis 1989: 970)

c. *The Bible elsewhere recognizes that the mind affects the body (functional holism) by condemning lust and immoral thoughts as well as immoral actions.* Immoral actions arise out of immoral thoughts (see **Prov 6:24-33; Job 31:1; Matt 5:27-30; 15:15-20; Mark 7:14-23; 1 Thess 4:3-5**). As further evidence of God's design that a monogamous marriage be the context for engaging in sexual activity, human beings are the only creatures who experience guilt and feelings of shame over committing immoral sexual acts.

3. The Bible's sexual ethic is: fidelity in marriage; abstinence outside of marriage.

a. *Because of the above reasons—God's design of human nature and the spiritual nature of marriage—the Bible constantly calls for sexual fidelity within marriage (**Heb 13:4**), and requires sexual abstinence outside of marriage (see **Matt 19:11-12; 1 Cor 7:7-9; Rev 14:4**).* The Bible condemns all forms of sexual immorality (**1 Cor 6:18; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3-5; Heb 13:4**). That includes: sex by unmarried people (fornication) (**Deut 22:13-21; 1 Cor 7:2, 8-9; 1 Thess 4:3**); sex by married people with persons other than their spouse (adultery) (**Exod 20:14; Lev 18:20; 20:10; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Jas 2:11**); prostitution (**Lev 19:29; Deut 23:17-18**); homosexuality (**Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10**); incest (**Lev 18:6-17; Deut 27:20, 22-23; 1 Cor 5:1**); rape (**Deut 22:23-27**); and bestiality (**Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15-16; Deut 27:21**).

b. *Adhering to the Bible's sexual ethic of fidelity in marriage and abstinence outside of marriage has additional spiritual and physical results:* (1) Sexual fidelity keeps an open channel of fellowship with God which is not blocked or quenched by sin (see **Isa 59:2; Mal 2:13-16; 1 Thess 5:19**); and (2) Sexual fidelity prevents the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS (see **Prov 3:1-8; 5:1-11; 7:1-27; 1 Cor 7:34**).

II. The Basic Purposes of Sex According to the Bible

A. To Reproduce the Human Race—Gen 1:27-28

1. God has given the sex drive as one of the most potent of human drives so that men and women would reproduce the human race. Procreation is the basic or underlying purpose of sex. In every other biological function (e.g., seeing, eating, walking, speaking, hearing, eliminating waste) only one body is required to do the job. Procreation is the only vital function of life that no one person can perform by himself or herself. Sexual differences between male and female are designed with procreation in mind, and sexual powers both actually bring about, and are necessary to, procreation.

2. God's plan to populate heaven includes populating the earth. One reason for populating the earth is that human beings were made in the "*image of God*" (**Gen 1:27**). "Image" (*tselem*) is defined as, "man, God's likeness, God's image, i.e. he is God's viceroy, representative or witness among the creatures" (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001: "*tselem*" 2:1029). Thus, the image of God is not just something we *have*, but is something we *are*. The concept of man as the *image* or *likeness* of God "tells us that man as he was created was to *mirror* God and to *represent* God" (Hoekema 1986: 67). Since God's mandate to people was to "*fill the earth*" (**Gen 1:28**), God's image and glory would be spread over all the earth as his representatives obeyed the mandate.

3. With sex comes children, and with children come relationships, roles, and the responsibilities of parenthood and family life. As is true with marriage, God has *designed* human beings for family life. Budziszewski explains: "We aren't designed like guppies, who cooperate only for a moment. For us, procreation requires an enduring partnership between two beings, the man and the woman, who are different but in complementary ways. But this implies that union isn't a *different* purpose, *independent* of procreation; rather, it arises in the *context* of procreation and characterizes the way we procreate.

A parent of each sex is necessary to make the child, to raise the child, and to teach the child. To make him, both are needed because the female provides the egg, the male fertilizes it, and the female incubates the resulting zygote. To raise him, both are needed because the male is better designed for protection, the female for nurture. To teach him, both are needed because he needs a model of his own sex, a model of the other, and a model of the relationship between them. Mom and Dad are jointly irreplaceable. Their partnership in procreation continues even after the kids are grown, because then they are needed to help them establish their own new families.

Sociologists Sara S. McLanahan and Gary Sandefur remark in their book *Growing Up with a Single Parent* that 'if we were asked to design a system for making sure that children's basic needs were met, we would probably come up with something quite similar to the two-parent ideal.' Of course—for it *is* designed, though not by us.

Another sociologist, René König, explains in the *International Encyclopedia of Comparative Law* that children, young ones especially, thrive less in orphanages than in the average family—even when care is taken to make the institutions homelike, and even when, to sociological eyes, they are better organized than an average family *in every respect*, hygienically, medically, psychologically, and pedagogically.

All this explains why the longing for unitive intimacy is at the center of our design. Without it, procreative partnerships could hardly be expected to endure in the way that they must endure to generate sound and stable families." (Budziszewski 2005: n.p.)

4. As with marriage, the family has a spiritual significance. Family is a motif used by our heavenly Father to explain our relationship to Him (see **Rom 8:14-17; 2 Cor 6:18; Gal 3:26; 4:1-7; Eph 1:5; Heb 2:9-17; 1 John 3:1-2**).

B. To Enjoy and Enhance Mutual Love—Gen 2:18-25

1. God created sex. **Genesis 2** suggests Adam and Eve were enjoying the sex act long before there were any children or before there was sin. One level of meaning of husband and wife becoming "*one flesh*" (**Gen 2:24**) is sexual union. Therefore, sex is not sinful. God intended it for pleasure for His creatures. By God's design, the physiology of both the male and female bodies includes highly sensitive areas that produce erotic pleasure. When those body parts are stimulated in a "*naked and unashamed*" relationship, there is an enhancement and a deeper enjoyment of the relationship that contributes to the one-person intimacy of the relationship.

2. The analogy that Paul drew in 1 Cor 6:12-20 between food and sex also suggests why God designed sex for our pleasure and to enhance our marital relationships. Frederica Mathewes-Green comments on this: "The 'meaning' of sex is pretty obvious. It's reproduction. Every living creature has two primary

drives: first, to sustain its own life (which includes seeking food, shelter, and safety), and second, to pass on that life to a new generation. Creatures reproduce in many different ways, but humans and other mammals do so by sexual reproduction.

It seems that the reason sex feels good is so we'll want to do it, and be motivated to give birth to that new generation. It's the same way with food: The reason our taste buds register some flavors as delicious and others as bitter is so we'll eat things that are good for us and avoid others that might be poisonous.

These flavor preferences are something we're born with; they're not learned. Researchers have found that if they add a bit of sweetener to amniotic fluid, the unborn child will gulp it down more quickly. We're designed to like sweets, I suppose so that our earliest ancestors would keep going back to those brightly colored, vitamin-filled fruits hanging so conveniently within reach.

It's the same way with sex: It feels good so we'll want to reproduce. But there are some interesting ways that humans are different from other mammals, even from other primates. For us, sex feels good at any time in the fertility cycle. Other mammals mate only during fertile periods.

What's more, researchers suspect that only among humans is the female capable of orgasm. Of course, orgasm has nothing to do with conception; it's not related to the reproduction process at all. So both men and women are motivated to have sex for reasons that other animals, and even other mammals and primates, don't have. It looks like the "meaning of sex" for humans is something broader than simply reproduction.

You can see the same analogy with food. As far as I know, animals only eat what they need to, for the sake of nutrition. But humans eat for all kinds of reasons. We eat birthday cake, have a cup of coffee with a friend, munch popcorn during a movie. We eat for social reasons, or for comfort, or just out of habit. We don't eat solely for nutrition. Likewise, we don't have sex solely for reproduction." (Mathewes-Green 2005: n.p.)¹¹

3. The fact that sexual activity is designed, in part, to enhance our marital relationships is further seen in the fact that human beings are one of the very few beings capable of, and perhaps the only kind of being which in fact has sex face-to-face. Mathewes-Green notes that, because of the manner in which human beings customarily have sex, "sex means something more to us than to most mammals, something that has to do with humans forging a deep connection with each other. The connection is not just physical or reproductive but involves the whole person. It seems that the "meaning of sex" is related to the profound human need to bond with another person in love, in trust, and to forge a relationship that will last for a lifetime" (Mathewes-Green 2005: n.p.).

4. True pleasure, in the highest sense of the word, is to bring complete satisfaction to the one being loved. The Bible treats the subject of sex with great realism. God included in the Bible the **Song of Solomon**, which is a story celebrating human love, including its sexual aspects in marriage. One thing the Bible affirms is that sex in itself is good and pure. The sexual drive in any normal man or woman is God-given, and it is certainly nothing of which to be ashamed. God put His stamp of approval upon sex in marriage, and He expects His creatures to enjoy it immensely in marriage. Sex is a gift from God to be celebrated and enjoyed. Consequently, the *quality* of sexual relations is important. Each partner should prepare, learn from the other, teach the other, and do his or her best to arouse the other and help the other have as satisfying an experience as possible. The Lord certainly would not have included the **Song of Solomon** for our reading if sex were something of which married couples should be ashamed.

5. Sexual relations is very "relational," and has many meanings:

- a. *It is a means of thanksgiving*, by which a couple can express thankfulness for the other's presence;
- b. *It is the language of hope*, by which a couple can reassure each other that they are wanted and appreciated and that they would like to stay together in the future;
- c. *It is a means of reconciliation*, by which a quarrel is fully or partially resolved;
- d. *It is the most powerful way of reinforcing a person's masculinity or femininity*;
- e. *It is a recurrent confirmation of the personhood of each other*;
- f. *It is a means through which sustaining, healing, and growth are affirmed*;
- g. *It is a means of reinforcing the permanence of the relationship.* (Dominian 1982: 96)

¹¹The fact that some cultures subject women to female circumcision (aka, female genital mutilation—the removal of the clitoris) interferes with the God-designed provision for human sexuality. In these circumstances women must constantly remember the creation design of the wife, to help and fulfill the husband, which is a satisfying and God-given ministry. Husbands must demonstrate the love of Christ to their circumcised wives. They need to demonstrate love, especially in bed, by words of love and affirmation, and by spending quality time with their wives by cuddling, massage, and loving touch.

6. One good resource to help understand and appreciate the sex act from God’s perspective: See Ed Wheat and Gaye Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1997).

III. Application of the Biblical Purposes of Sex—1 Cor 7:1-5

A. Healthy sex in marriage prevents sexual immorality

“¹Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. ²But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (7:1-2).

1. In 7:1 Paul is saying that the condition of being single is a good and proper state. He makes the same point in 7:7-8, 26, and 40. However, he stresses that those who are single must abstain from sexual activity, and remain sexually pure (“it is good for a man not to touch a woman”).

2. In 7:2 Paul recognizes that all kinds of sexual immoralities and temptations, both heterosexual and homosexual, exist for Christians. Therefore, “because of immoralities,” i.e., to keep unmarried people from fornicating and the married from committing adultery, men and women should get married and have a normal, healthy, good sex life. The word “have” in 7:2 is a euphemism for “have sexual relations with” (one’s own wife or husband). A healthy and satisfying sexual relationship with your own husband or wife reduces desire to look elsewhere for such satisfaction.

3. Consequently, one reason for marriage is to avoid sexual immorality. Although that might seem like a low motive for marriage, it is a good motive if Christian values are to be maintained. In fact, Paul makes the same point again in 7:8-9.

4. 7:2 indirectly teaches two additional concepts:

a. *Monogamy, not polygamy.* Paul says that “each man” is to “have his own wife,” and “each woman” is to “have her own husband.” Note that those commands of Paul are: (1) *singular* (i.e., only one wife or one husband is involved); and (2) *reciprocal* (neither party is entitled to more than one spouse).

b. *Sexual fulfillment is exclusively derived from your spouse.* The way to prevent premarital and extramarital sexual relationships is for a person to have “his own” wife or “her own” husband. Married people should not covet someone else’s wife or husband, or have lustful fantasies about others. This relates back to the concept of the wife’s fulfilling the incompleteness of the husband, and *vice versa*. In making these statements, Paul is saying that our spouse is to be the object of our love, our fantasies, and our desire. In doing this Paul raised the state of womanhood to that of full partnership with the man. In the Roman world, a wife often was seen as a chattel or servant. Apart from having children with his wife, a man generally went to the temple of Aphrodite for sex. Paul prohibits that and says that we should find our sexual desire and satisfaction in our spouse.

B. Marriage partners have a sexual duty to one another

“Lest the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband” (7:3).

1. Sex is not only a marital pleasure but a marital duty. The husband owes his wife a debt. Here, the word “duty” refers to meeting the wife’s or husband’s sexual needs. As in 7:2 the obligation is equal and reciprocal (the similar wording of the two clauses, and the words “likewise also” make that clear).

2. Recognizing the mutual obligation of husband and wife to meet each other’s sexual needs entails recognizing and responding to the differences between the sexual needs of the husband and wife which may exist.

a. *A husband is to sacrifice himself, just as Christ loved the church (see Eph 5:25).* Such sacrifice includes meeting his wife’s sexual needs. That involves much more than simply performing a physical act. For a woman sexual satisfaction tends to have a greater emotional component than it does for a man. Consequently, a husband must spend time with his wife. He must communicate with her. He must listen to her. He must provide security for her. A woman’s sex life is tied up with her psyche, and her needs must first be met in a caring and understanding way before she can respond and find fulfillment in the sex act. Further, women tend to take longer to become sexually aroused than do men. Therefore, a husband needs to take the necessary time in foreplay and cuddling with his wife. Sex, as Paul conceives it, ultimately is a form of giving, not taking.

b. *Similarly, a wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord (see Eph 5:22).* Such submission includes meeting his sexual needs. To do that she must psychologically prepare herself, set time

in her busy schedule for it, not become overly tired, and give attention to her husband over her children. Men tend to have a greater desire for more frequent sexual release than do women, because of men's greater testosterone levels and larger sex-related centers in their brains. Wives need to appreciate that about men. Many men who do not have their sexual needs met become preoccupied in seeking to have them met, morose, and frustrated when such needs are not met. Such frustration may result in "angry" behaviors.

3. Sex is not only an exciting experience to be entered into when one feels like it, but also it is a spiritual/moral obligation. Marital infidelity can be overcome when husbands and wives recognize that marriage is a contract in which husband and wife owe it to each other to be sexually responsible. Calling marriage a contract may not sound very romantic, but that is how the Scriptures look at it. Sex is a duty, and is as much a Christian duty as reading the Bible, praying, or witnessing. To fail to pay a sexual debt to our partner is sin.

4. Infidelity takes many forms. There is a non-adulterous form of infidelity which undermines a marriage. Christian love is as much a matter of the mind and will as the emotions. For one partner to turn away the other simply complicates the problem. To ignore one another, and one another's sexual drives and needs, drives a deep wedge between husband and wife. Men or women who do not realize that meeting the sexual needs of their partner is a moral obligation are guilty of non-adulterous unfaithfulness.

5. The sexual aspect of marriage is vitally linked with our spiritual walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. A husband or wife's happiness in his or her sex life has a great effect on the spiritual life. Healthy married love is essential for a happy marriage. In fact, sexual union is a physical picture of our intimate and joyful union with Christ.

C. Marriage partners have mutual sexual rights

"The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (7:4).

1. Before marriage, a person does exercise authority over his body as to how it will be used sexually. The person is to honor the body as the temple of God and keep it sexually pure. Yet, the moment a person says in the marriage ceremony, "I do," the body belongs to the person he or she marries. At that moment, a person forfeits his rights to exercise exclusive authority over his or her own body, and has surrendered that authority to his or her marriage partner.

2. As in 7:2 and 7:3, the authority given to the husband and wife over the other's body is mutual, equal, and reciprocal. That is consistent with the two being "one flesh" (**Gen 2:24**), and both parties being "subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (**Eph 5:21**).

3. 7:4 does not say marriage partners are to demand their rights at all costs, but rather are to give up their rights to meet the sexual needs of their partner. This is a spiritual law of life—self-denial leads to finding life. The only way to get your needs met and yourself fulfilled is to fulfill another's needs. In the process of devoting yourself to the enjoyment of your mate, and to giving him or her the most exquisite sense of pleasure that you can, you find your own needs met. That is not to say that you are slaves to one another, each demanding his or her rights. Rather, the power to give fulfillment to your mate lies in you, and in so doing, your needs will be met. To have this kind of attitude demands you have an adult kind of love. A child's concept of love is getting, but an adult's is giving. There are entirely too many "child marriages" these days when adults behave like children. They value marriage only because of what it does for them, but they do not see it as a means of investing in the one loved. Nevertheless, the difference between giving and getting is actually the major difference between love and lust. Christian love always seeks the highest good of the person loved, not merely its own satisfaction.

4. There are times when it may not be possible to meet your spouse's sexual needs. If your mate is sick, physically dysfunctional, overly tired, or fasting and praying, those are reasons not to meet sexual needs. However, if you fail to meet your mate's sexual needs on Monday because you have a toothache, on Tuesday because of a backache, on Wednesday because of a toe ache, and Thursday because of a finger ache, that is quite another problem; that appears to be a spiritual problem, which must be dealt with before God.

5. The breakdown of many marriages can be directly traced to the bedroom. The reason is that Jesus is not Lord of the bedroom. Divorce occurs when we want to get instead of give. We need to understand God has made us with the capacity to meet someone else's need sexually. That is why unresponsiveness and frigidity in marriage causes deep psychological problems and a rift occurs. God has given us the ability to give a gift of love and response to another person, and the joy of doing so is what creates the

ecstasy of sexual love in marriage.

D. Marriage partners are not to deprive one another of sexual relations

“Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (7:5).

1. Both “depriving” and “come together” in this verse refer to sexual relations. The word “deprive” actually means “to rob” or “to defraud.” Christians have no right to deprive their mates of sexual fulfillment and enjoyment. If sexual rights are withheld, the Christian is actually robbing his or her mate of what rightfully belongs to the mate.
2. A husband and wife may agree to a cessation period for the sex act for a definite spiritual purpose—to concentrate on prayer to God. The word “devote” means “to have leisure; to cease from labor.” Cessation is done so a couple may give themselves leisurely to prayer and perhaps fasting, without distractions. However, according to Paul cessation of sexual activity is acceptable *only if* it is: a. by mutual consent; b. temporary in nature; and c. for a spiritual purpose.
3. This verse highlights one of the most frequent causes for disaster in marriage—the unilateral refusal to grant the gift of enjoyment and pleasure to one’s mate. If a cessation period is agreed upon, do not refuse each other too long lest Satan gets the advantage, temptations arise, and marital discord or even adultery occurs.
4. This verse also tells us who is the power behind the scenes in the break-up of many marriages—Satan himself. Satan is out to destroy Christians and Christian marriages. That is why we are told in Scripture to beware of the wiles or strategies of the devil (see **Eph 6:11**). Note that Satan uses *sexual deprivation of one spouse by the other* as one of his strategies to tempt the marriage partners to anger, discord, and infidelity. Consequently, Paul recognizes that not only sexual fidelity has spiritual implications, but sexual responsiveness does as well.

10. BIBLICAL PARENTING

I. The Family is the Primary Life-Molding Institution.

God ordained the family in the Garden of Eden. The truly Christian family is the answer to the threat of a deteriorating society.

II. Obstacles to having a Biblical Family

A. Following a secular/humanistic worldview or a failing to follow a Christian worldview

1. A Christian worldview teaches that from the beginning God created individuals to live in relationships.
2. God established the marriage relationship, the institution of the family, and sexual and familial roles.
3. Nonbiblical worldviews often distort these relationships and roles.

B. The concept of “romantic love”

1. Having a romantic love for your spouse is a wonderful thing.
2. However, when a man and a woman think solely in terms of “romantic love,” such a view distorts mutual love and a permanent union.
 - a. That incorrect view of a marriage elevates the physical features of the spouses as the primary reason for the continuation of the relationship.
 - b. The mutual obligations and responsibilities necessary for lasting marriages are not part of romantic love.
 - c. *Thus, when the romantic love fades, separation and divorce occur because of:*
 - (1) Mental cruelty;
 - (2) Irreconcilable differences;
 - (3) Incompatibility; and
 - (4) Other reasons.
3. Popular entertainment consistently portrays divorce and adultery as forms of liberation. Divorce is common in the West and is an increasing problem in the rest of the world.

C. The idea of the “unencumbered self” (Colson and Pearcey 1999: 322)

1. This notion holds that the individual’s happiness is supreme—any obligation, either to one’s spouse

or children, should be secondary to what the individual desires.

2. The idea of the unencumbered self has caused both men and women to view family relationships as arbitrary.
3. Under this worldview both men and women seem to think that traditional role relationships no longer allow them to reach their full potential.

D. *The idea of egalitarianism within the family structure*

1. According to the Bible, all members of the family are equal in essence.
 - a. God has specifically given to the husband and father to be head of the family (**Eph 5:22-23**).
 - b. The wife and mother is to be subject to her husband (**Eph 5:22-23**).
 - c. Different functions does not imply inequality of essence.
2. Some husbands and wives claim that they have an “equal,” or “fifty-fifty,” relationship.
 - a. *Under an egalitarian family structure all members of the family are to a great extent uncertain and unhappy with their roles.*
 - (1) The husband and father is not sure he wants to exert the sort of leadership responsibilities he should, and is under pressure not to do so.
 - (2) The wife and mother is not certain she wants to be a wife and mother, particularly if that means being subject to the authority of her husband.
 - (3) The children growing up in this environment have no authority figures or role models to follow.
 - b. *Such a structure is inherently unstable because there can never be two different authority figures—in the case of conflict one ultimately must yield.*

E. *Thinking of our homes as “filling stations”*

1. Families are designed to take time to meet emotional needs and share with other members of the family.
2. However, some people view our houses as a place where each member simply eats (i.e., “fills up”) and sleeps, instead of thinking of our homes as a place where love, belonging, and communication enrich the lives of each member of the family.
3. When the home is thought of primarily as a place to eat, sleep, and dress, the Biblical purpose of the family unit is unfulfilled.

III. Four Basic Types of Parenting (Smalley 1984: 49)

A. *Dominant Parents*

1. These parents usually have high standards and expectations for their children.
 - a. While this may be a good thing, many such parents don’t offer warm caring support.
 - b. In addition, they usually give few explanations for their rigid rules.
2. In a significant number of cases, these parents tend to produce the most negative qualities in children—the rigidity of the parents can break “the spirit” of the child.
3. Typical statements and actions by dominant parents might be:
 - a. “You don’t need to know why, just do what I say.”
 - b. “How many times have I told you stop that. Get in there or you’re going to get it.”
4. Some reactions by the children of dominant parents might be:
 - a. They don’t have good self-esteem.
 - b. Resistance, “clamming up,” and rebellion.
 - c. Attraction to other children who rebel against their parents and even against the general rules of society.

B. *Neglectful Parents*

1. These parents tend to lack both loving support and control over their children.
2. They show an uncaring or immature attitude.
 - a. At times, they lash out at children when pushed or irritated.
 - b. They tend to isolate themselves from their children and consequently rob their children of one of the most important factors in their lives—emotional accessibility.
3. There are four main reasons why children are being neglected in today’s world (Gangel 1972:11):
 - a. The high divorce rate.

- b. The increase of mothers in the work force.
- c. Excessive TV viewing and the increased use of computers (particularly true in the western world).
- d. An increasingly mobile society.

C. *Permissive Parents*

1. Permissive parents tend to be warm, supporting people, but weak in establishing rules and limits for their children.
 - a. This may seem like an ideal situation for children to be able “do their own thing.”
 - b. However, children are more likely to feel secure and loved if the parents take the time to communicate limits and boundaries, and give them guidance for proper behavior.
2. Permissive parents can be very giving, very understanding, and very comforting to their children.
 - a. Such parents accept the idea that “kids will be kids.”
 - b. They allow children to express their thoughts and feelings.
 - c. They sometimes emphasize that they are “good friends” with their children rather than simply being parents
3. The motives behind the permissive parent may seem admirable, but because of children’s ego, willful behavior, and basic sin, children need guidelines:
 - a. Children raised in this environment can develop a sense that they are in charge.
 - b. Instead of producing security it can breed insecurity.
 - c. Children may learn that because standards are not firm, they can manipulate situations and their parents.
 - d. If permissiveness is taken too far, it can allow for undesirable acts.

D. *Loving and Firm Parents*

1. Loving and firm parents reflect the Biblical instruction for parenting.
 - a. Loving and firm parents seem to have a healthy and balanced combination of the dominant and permissive parents.
 - b. They always follow the greatest instruction in Scripture—to love one another.
2. Loving and firm parents usually have clearly defined rules, limits, and standards for their children.
 - a. They take time to train their children to understand their limits.
 - b. They give clear warnings about the consequences of transgressing their standards.
 - c. They give support with physical affection if discipline becomes necessary.
3. The results of such parents will demonstrate the following characteristics in their children:
 - a. Self-respect will be demonstrated by the children.
 - b. Children are more content when they have learned to control themselves.
 - c. There is greater security and the spirit of the child is open, not closed.
 - d. The lines of communication will remain open with the parents.

IV. The Issue of Discipline

A. *There is a fine line between breaking the will of a stubborn child and breaking his spirit*

1. Failing to appreciate the difference between the two produces a “closed spirit” (Smalley 1984: 19).
2. The most prevalent cause of disharmony in the home may be a closed spirit.
3. Parents who attempt to break the “will” of their children end up breaking their spirit.

B. *Parents need to exercise proper discipline in trying to break willful misbehavior of their children*

1. Parents must discipline their children, part of which means setting clearly defined limits in their home.
2. Discipline always should be done in love, not anger, and should be appropriate and proportional to the child’s age, responsibility, and the nature and seriousness of the offense (see **Prov 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15; Heb 12:5-11**).

C. *A comprehensive view of discipline*

1. One authority describes discipline this way: “In the realm of child rearing, discipline is *training* a child in mind and character to enable him to become a self-controlled, constructive member of society. What does this involve? Discipline involves training through every type of communication. Guidance

by example, modeling, verbal instruction, written instruction, verbal requests, written requests, teaching, providing learning and fun experiences. The list is quite long.

Yes, punishment is on this list, but it is only one of the many ways of discipline and is the most negative and primitive factor.” (Campbell 1977: 87)

2. Discipline is related to love. As Campbell says: “In order to have a well-disciplined child . . . *making a child feel loved is the first and most important part of good discipline. . . . Discipline is immeasurably easier when the child feels genuinely loved.* This is because he wants to identify with the parents, and is able to do so only if he knows he is truly loved and accepted. He is then able to accept his parents’ guidance without hostility and obstructiveness.

If a child does not feel genuinely loved and accepted, however, he has real difficulty identifying with his parents *and their values.*” (Ibid.: 86-88, emph. in orig.)

3. With respect to the “rod” referred to in the above verses, parents need to remember that: “the shepherd’s rod referred to in Scripture was used almost exclusively for *guiding* the sheep, not beating them. The shepherds would *gently* steer the sheep, especially the lambs, by simply holding the rod to block them from going in the wrong direction and then gently nudge them toward the right direction. If the rod was (or is) an instrument used principally for beating, I would have a difficult time with Psalm 23 ‘Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me’ (v. 4, KJV).” (Ibid.: 93)

D. In disciplining children parents should not:

1. Provoke their children to anger. “Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (**Eph 6:4**).

2. Use cruel words. “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up” (**Eph 4:29**).

3. Be inconsistent with discipline. “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent (i.e., consistent) to discipline him” (**Prov 13:24**).

4. Make them feel unwanted. “Train the young women to love their husbands and children” (**Titus 2:4**).

V. Major Scriptural Texts

The major New Testament texts concerning parenting are **Eph 6:1-4** and **Col 3:20-21**.

A. Biblical background regarding children and parenting

1. God’s Word makes it plain that children are a blessing from God (**Ps 127: 3-5**).

2. When He first called the Hebrews to be His chosen people their responsibility was to promulgate God’s truth and pass it on to their children (**Deut 6:7**).

3. Parents were to continually speak about the things of God, so that knowledge and love of Him would become a way of life for the family (**Deut 6:7-9**).

4. The book of **Proverbs** is full of truths to guide parents in the training of their children (see, e.g., **Prov 1:8; 13:1; 15:5, 20; 17:25; 19:13; 20:20; 22:6; 23:22, 24**).

B. Eph 6:1-4—¹“Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ³‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’ ⁴And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” (NKJV)

1. Structure of Eph 6:1-4.

a. **6:1-3** focus on the obedience of children.

b. **6:4** focuses on the responsibility of parents.

2. Analysis of Eph 6:1-3.

a. “Children obey your parents.”

(1) “Children” (*techna*) does not refer particularly to young children but to all offspring.

(2) Sons and daughters still under their parents’ roof are to obey their parents.

(A) “Obey” (*hupakouo*) literally means “to hear under.”

(B) To “obey” means that children are to listen with attentiveness and respond positively to what is heard.

(3) Thus, children are to put themselves under the words and authority of their parents.

b. “In the Lord.”

(1) This refers to the sphere of pleasing the Lord by obeying the parents.

- (2) Children are to obey their parents to reflect their obedience to the Lord.
- (3) The context seems to be clear that “*in the Lord*” applies to “*honor*” as well as to “*obey*.”
- (4) Parents are God's stewards—in a sense, they stand in the gap between children and God.
- (5) The only exception to a child’s obedience to parents would be when asked or told to do that which obviously is a violation of Scripture.

c. “*This is right.*”

- (1) This is the basic reason for children to obey their parents.
- (2) “Rightness” is not based on psychological studies, human preference, or theory, but on God's standard of rightness, and His declaration.
- (3) “Right” (*dikaion*) refers to that which is correct—i.e., exactly what it should be.

d. “*Honor your father and mother.*”

- (1) This speaks of the attitude behind a child’s obedience of his parents.
- (2) The word for “*honor*” (*tima*) means to “value highly.”
- (3) In both its verb form and noun form the word is often used as a term of reverence, preciousness, and respect.
- (4) When God first introduced His written law in the form of the Ten Commandments, the first law relating to human relationships was “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Exod 20:12).

(A) That is the law that Paul reiterates in this text.

(B) It is the only one of the Ten Commandments that relates directly to the family.

- (5) This one principle of obedience based on respect and honor, when obeyed, is enough to secure the right relationship of children to their parents.

(A) Respect for parents needs to be done with loving personal involvement—that might include providing financial and other support for parents in their old age.

(B) Children have to be trained to honor and obey their parents—it will not come naturally to children who are born in sin.

e. “*That it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth,*”

(1) That phrase probably means that children will live to prove that such obedience is for their true welfare.

- (2) In a sense, the principle of honoring one’s parents is the key (or prime) principle behind all right human relationships in society.

(A) A person who grows up with a sense of respect for and obedience to his parents will have the foundation for respecting the authority of other leaders and of the rights of other people in general.

(B) Perhaps that explains the phrase in **Eph 6:2**, “*this is the first commandment with a promise.*”

3. Analysis of Eph 6:4.

a. *Structure*—A negative command (“*fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath*”), is followed by a positive command (“*but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*”).

b. *Historical context.*

(1) In Roman society mutual love among family members was not practiced frequently, or at all; fathers did not generally demonstrate love or affection.

(2) By the Roman law of *patria potestas*, a father had virtual life and death power, not only over his slaves, but over his entire household.

(3) Paul’s instruction to fathers is a profound departure from the culture in which he lived, because, unlike in Roman society, **Eph 6:4**: “is a demand for fathers to act with a view to the best interests of their children. Further, it demands that the dignity and desires of the children be considered, for provocation to anger would result from fathers frustrating the goals and desires of their children, acting only in the perceived best interest of family honor and exploiting the weaker position of their children [as typically was done in Roman society]. Instead of taking advantage of their powerful

position, fathers must train their children in the way of the Lord, another reminder of the stewardship given to fathers and of their accountability to the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Gombis 2005: 328-29)

c. “*Fathers*”

(1) The word “*fathers*” (*pateres*) usually refers to a male parent, but sometimes refers to parents in general.

(2) **Heb 11:23** supports this notion since the same word refers to the “*parents hiding Moses.*”

(3) Since Paul has been speaking about both parents in the preceding three verses, mothers likewise shouldn’t “provoke their children to wrath.”

d. “*Do not provoke your children to wrath.*”

(1) This suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment.

(2) Such action gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment which usually boils over in outward hostility.

(3) Actions that exasperate, frustrate, or incite your children to anger include:

(A) Smothering children by being overly strict and never trusting them.

(B) Continually questioning their judgment.

(C) Practicing favoritism (e.g., Isaac favoring Esau and Rebecca preferring Jacob over Esau)

(D) Continually comparing one child with another, and exhorting one child to “be like your brother or sister.”

(E) Humiliating the child, especially in front of others.

(F) Pushing achievement beyond reasonable bounds (i.e., their children’s abilities or interests).

(i) Parents (particularly fathers) can fantasize their own achievements through the athletic skills of their sons.

(ii) Parents (particularly mothers) might fantasize their desire for glamorous careers through the beauty or lives of their daughters.

(iii) Some children feel they can never satisfy their parents’ expectations.

(G) Children can easily be discouraged when parents seldom, if ever, compliment, praise, or encourage their children.

(H) Provocations can easily occur when children feel unwanted—children may feel they’ve intruded on their parents’ plans and happiness.

e. “*But bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*”

Bringing up children in the training and admonition of the Lord can include:

(1) Keeping God’s Word, God’s perspective, and God’s ways before our children all the time (Deut 6:6; Prov 22:6).

(A) By family devotions and prayer.

(B) By ensuring that they have a good church experience.

(C) By walking the talk (modeling Christ-likeness).

(D) By teaching them the Bible and how the Bible applies to real-life situations.

(2) Praying for your children, including praying for:

(A) Salvation and after, that they might have a growing faith.

(B) Their being strong and healthy in mind, body, and spirit.

(C) Their having a sense of purpose and a desire for excellence that pleases God.

(D) Their acquiring wisdom, since “*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” (**Ps 111:10**)

(E) Protection from injury, illness, harm from others, and corruption from within.

(F) The strength to resist temptation from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

(G) Their future marriage partner.

(H) Godly principles to be taught to their children.

(I) Their using their gifts to serve others within and without the Church.

(J) Their serving God faithfully and happily all the days of their lives.

C. Col 3:20-21—²⁰“Children obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” (NKJV)

1. Three truths are emphasized in 3:20:

a. *Children must obey constantly.*

- (1) The imperative “obey” (*hypakouete*) indicates that obedience is not optional.
- (2) The present tense indicates that obedience is to be habitual.
- (3) A child who obeys is one who puts himself under the authority of his parents.
- (4) The child listens to the parental directives, and does as he is told, without complaint and rebellion.

b. *Obedience must be toward both parents.*

- (1) Again the word translated “fathers” sometimes refers to both parents.
- (2) If the father and mother give contradictory commands, it is impossible for the child to comply with the divine imperative.

c. *Obedience extends to “all things.”*

- (1) This includes all aspects of daily life, whether it is work, play, church, or any other social activities.
- (2) As indicated earlier, the exception to “all things” would be where a parent requests or demands something that obviously is unbiblical and contrary to God’s revealed will.

d. *“For this is well pleasing to the Lord.”*

- (1) Several commentators feel that this refers specifically to a Christian family.
- (2) To some, the language presupposed Christian attitudes on the part of parents.

2. 3:21—“Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

- a. The same theme that was discussed in **Eph 6:4** is reiterated in **Col 3:21**.
- b. The warning is given to “fathers” (parents) in the imperative (i.e., it is a command).
- c. Parents are not to embitter their children.

VI. Additional Advice for Parents

A. *The “five love languages” apply to your children, as well as to your spouse* (Chapman 1992: 177-86)¹²

Parents should demonstrate the “five love languages” to demonstrate their love for, the value of, and their acceptance of, their children. Those are:

1. Words of affirmation for their children.
2. Spending quality time with their children.
3. Giving meaningful gifts (which do not have to cost much money) to their children.
4. Doing acts of service for their children.
5. Physically touching their children in appropriate ways to demonstrate love and affection.

B. *Maintaining good communication with your children*

1. One noted author on parent-child relationships states the following: “Eye contact is crucial not only in making good communicational contact with a child, but in filling his emotional needs. Without realizing it, we use eye contact as a primary means of conveying love, especially to children. A child uses eye contact with his parents (and others) to feed emotionally. The more parents make eye contact with their child as a means of expressing their love, the more a child is nourished with love and the fuller is his emotional tank. . . . It is easy for parents to develop the terrible habit of using eye contact primarily when they want to make a strong point to a child, especially a negative one. We find that a child is most attentive when we look him straight in the eye. We do this mainly to give instructions or for reprimanding and criticizing. This is a *disastrous* mistake. . . . Remember that eye contact is one of the main sources of a child’s emotional nurturing. When a parent uses this powerful means of control at his disposal in a primarily negative way, a child cannot but see his parent in a primarily negative way. And though this may seem to have good results when a child is young, this child is obedient and docile because of fear. As he grows older, the fear gives way to anger, resentment, and depression. . . . Our ways of showing love to a child should not be controlled by our being pleased or displeased. . . . What we must understand at this point is that parents must use eye contact as a continuous love-giving route,

¹²These five “love languages” are described in more detail in the lesson in this series entitled “SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE: THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES.”

and not merely as a means of discipline.” (Campbell 1977: 42-44)¹³

2. It is particularly important to maintain open lines of communication after children enter their teenage years and beyond. The teenage years and beyond is a time when children have to make their faith “real” to them. They tend to “test the limits” they have grown up with, and often make poor choices as they assume greater responsibility over their own lives and activities. During these crucial years, if children know that they are still loved, and the parents are still there for them, they are more likely to return to faith and decent lives than if parents “cut them off” and refuse to communicate with them as a result of choices they have made and actions they have done with which the parents disapprove.

C. Spend time with your children on a regular basis

Small increments of time regularly devoted to your children are more valuable, and help to foster your relationship with them, than large blocks of activity that occur only sporadically. The principle of regularity applies to most areas of life. Developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships, physical exercise, learning a foreign language, learning to play a musical instrument, or learning any new thing, all require devoting some time regularly (ideally, every day) to the task. A large block of irregular time does not compensate for frequent and regular activity with your children, even if the time spent with your children is of relatively short duration. That is why we have to get control of our time, rather than having our time subject to the “tyranny of the urgent” and to other people’s agendas. All parents are busy. That is why parents have to be sure to spend at least some time with their children regularly. Doing that shows the child that, despite the parents’ busyness, the child is an important priority to the parents. If the parents demonstrate that, child knows it, the relationship will be on a much more solid foundation, and is more likely to weather the storms that growing up and separation from home will bring.

11. FAMILY PLANNING

I. “Family Planning” is Not Merely Identical to “Birth Control” or Limiting the Size of One’s Family, but is a Part of Our God-Given Responsibilities as Stewards

A. God has given us stewardship over everything that we responsible for, including our families

1. Gen 1:26-28 reflects the beginning of mankind’s stewardship over all of creation. ²⁶*Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”* ²⁷*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* ²⁸*God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

a. God’s command to Adam and Eve is often called the “dominion mandate” (because mankind is told to rule or have dominion over creation), or the “cultural mandate” (because mankind is to fill and subdue the earth).

b. The stewardship over nature which God gave to humanity was given equally to men and women (**Gen 1:28**).

c. *“Filling the earth” and the fact that the stewardship mandate was given to both men and women gives a relational component to our stewardship.* In other words, we are not just stewards over the “things” of the earth, but are also stewards over the people with whom we are involved and our relationships with those people.

2. As God’s stewards, we will be held accountable by God for how we exercised our stewardship (see **Matt 25:14-46; Luke 12:35-48; 16:1-13; Heb 9:27-28; 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 20:11-15**).

B. One important aspect of our stewardship is planning and acting thoughtfully and responsibly in all areas of our lives, including our families.

1. It has been truly said that “the person who fails to plan, plans to fail.” Most people have no plans to guide them. All people have the same amount of time in each day. However, if we do not run the day, the day will run us. If we do not control our money, our money will control us. If we do not plan our time and our actions we will be at the mercy of other people and events. Successful people (those

¹³Additional aspects of good communication skills are discussed in more detail in the lesson in this series entitled “COMMUNICATION: UNDERSTANDING; LISTENING; AND EMPATHY.”

successful in any field, including business, and those successful spiritually, relationally, and physically) have plans, then set goals, then consciously act on them and apply them. As we do this we find that it is empowering. As we take greater charge of our lives we find that all aspects of our lives improve.

2. To plan all other areas of our lives, but to fail to make any plans regarding our families is irresponsible and not good stewardship. We plan our daily activities. We make plans concerning our jobs, meal preparation, and all sorts of other activities. To fail to plan concerning our families—which is the most important set of relationships we will ever have—including planning concerning the size of our families, is highly irresponsible and cannot be justified on any ground.

3. The nature of “family planning.”

a. *“Family planning” is a part of our general responsibilities as stewards, and is more particularly related to economic stewardship.* “Family planning” relates to the quality of life of ourselves, our spouses, and the children we propose to bring into the world. Family planning involves planning one’s family and planning for the family. Planning is thinking ahead and providing for one’s family. Planning is an aspect of *“managing [one’s] own household well”* (1 **Tim 3:4**). We must remember that we are responsible, both legally and before God, for every child we beget.

b. *Everything has side effects and consequences.* Eating too much, drinking too much, doing anything to excess, have adverse side effects and consequences. We all recognize this, and plan accordingly. The same is true for having too many children—i.e., children we cannot afford to properly care for, nurture, educate, and prepare for adulthood with reasonable prospects of living a decent life. We therefore should take that into account, and plan accordingly.

4. When we plan concerning our families—including planning the size of our families—we should take into account several things. These things include:

a. *The political and economic condition of our country.* The peace, prosperity, resources, and opportunities in the country and area in which you live directly affect your own prospects and those of your family. Further, family size affects the prosperity, resources, and opportunities of others and of society as a whole. For example, the average Ugandan woman has 6.9 children (December 2000). “This figure adds up to a growth rate that is higher than that of the GNP . . . producing more mouths than we are creating resources to feed” (*The Daily Monitor*, Feb. 16, 2002). Creating large families in such circumstances may therefore be an act of selfishness, which contributes to social instability, poverty, and other problems.

b. *Our ability to afford land, and the size of our house.* If you cannot afford a house adequate to meet the needs of a certain number of children, then you are irresponsible to produce those children.

c. *Our ability to adequately provide for children, including being able to meet their health and nutrition needs, pay for their educational needs, and meet their spiritual and other needs.* You must make sure that you can properly take care of the children you have now, and have the resources to properly care for additional children, before you decide to produce more children.

(1) To beget children but then not be able to pay for their education even through senior 6 means that you are willfully sentencing those children to bad jobs, poverty, ill health, and extremely limited opportunities.

(2) To beget children but then not be able to afford mosquito nets or their other basic health needs is to sentence them to a life of misery.

(3) To beget children but then not be able to provide for them financially is a very serious sin. In fact, Paul says that *“if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 **Tim 5:8**).

(4) To beget children but then not have the time for them is failing them in their important need for spiritual, intellectual, and relational development, for which God will hold you accountable.

d. *The age and health of the wife.* Is she put at risk by having more children?

e. *The age and health of the husband.* Many men continue to produce children when they are too old to have any real relationship with the children, or when they are no longer able to work and support the children. Such men also risk dying while the children are young. Producing children in those circumstances amounts to selfishness. It also sentences the wife and children to the real prospect of having to suffer hard lives of grinding poverty.

f. *Potential risks to children.* Is there the possibility of some genetically transmitted illness?

II. A Christian Approach to Birth Control

A. Birth control is widely discussed and practiced, and is advocated by most governments

1. The world is abusing the use of birth control and is encouraging immorality.
2. The church must speak up or this generation may become hopelessly lost in sexual immorality

B. There is no specific passage of Scripture that prohibits or even specifically discusses birth control

1. The Bible is silent on the issue of birth control.
2. When the Scriptures do not speak clearly and positively on a definite subject, conclusions must be drawn on the basis of Biblical principles derived from a Scriptural view of the nature of mankind, marriage, and sexual intercourse.
3. Because the Bible does not speak for or against birth control, it is not a primary moral issue.

C. Certain biblical passages and principles have some relevance to the issue of birth control; they indicate that the Bible does not prohibit a Christian couple from practicing contraception

1. The command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28).
 - a. *Neither in this verse nor anywhere else does the Bible command us to have “as many children as you possibly can.”* This verse does not specify to what extent the human race should reproduce; it does not prohibit family planning or birth control.
 - b. *When this command was given to Adam and Eve, no one else in the world existed.*
 - (1) In this command God did not say, “fill the earth with people as full as you possibly can.” Further, when this command was given, Adam and Eve had abundant space (i.e., the entire world), and all of the world’s resources, in which to take care of many children.
 - (2) Now, however, the command has been fulfilled. Approximately six billion people in the world exist. People have spread over all parts of the globe.
 - (3) Further, many people live in conditions of crowding, poverty, lack of resources, and lack of opportunities that are totally different from the situation which Adam and Eve faced. Many people live only in small huts or apartments, and have no ability to properly care for large numbers of children. It is not proper biblical interpretation to take the command given to Adam and Eve and apply it as if it were a “personal command” to each married couple today to have a large family.
 - c. *The Bible indicates that different biblical characters had different size families. Those with large families were not commended as being “more biblical” or “more faithful” than those who had small families.* Some examples of different sized families from the Bible include:
 - (1) The Bible does not say how many children most people had (e.g., the apostles were all married, but the Bible does not say that they had any children—**1 Cor 9:5**).
 - (2) Some biblical characters had large families (e.g., Ishmael—12 sons, **Gen 25:12-16**; Jacob—12 sons and one daughter, **Gen 29:31-30:24; 35:16-18**).
 - (3) Some biblical characters had small families (e.g., Joseph—2 sons, **Gen 41:50**; Noah—3 sons, **Gen 5:32**; Lot—2 daughters, **Gen 19:30**).
2. The command to “subdue the earth” (Gen 1:28).
 - a. Mankind was given authority over nature, including the liberty to use his God-given abilities and capacities for the glory of God and for man’s own highest well-being.
 - b. *In no area of life has God ordered that people be “slaves to nature” (i.e., not permitted to use scientific and technological means to control and “subdue” nature).* Examples of mankind’s subduing or acting “contrary to nature” include the following:
 - (A) Doctors use anesthesia in operating;
 - (B) Farmers dehorn and emasculate their cattle;
 - (C) Gardeners prune their grapes;
 - (D) Homeowners cut their grass;
 - (E) Men and women cut their hair and shave their beards or legs.
 - (F) Milk is pasteurized; medicines are manufactured; plants and animals are cross-bred; soap is made; and the earth’s resources are mined and converted into new things, all for mankind’s health, well-being, and benefit.
 - c. *There is no more basis to say that contraception by scientific or technological means is wrong because it “interferes with nature” than there is to say that any other activity of mankind*

done by scientific and technological means is wrong. In fact, if it is morally wrong to prevent life, then it must also be wrong to prolong life by surgery, hospitals, or medicine that defy natural law.

3. The case of Onan who “wasted his seed on the ground” (Gen 38:8-10).

a. *The context of that passage is the ancient Israelite law of the “levirate marriage” (Deut 25:5-10).* The law required a man to marry the wife of his brother if the brother died childless. The firstborn son of a leviratical marriage was, by legal fiction, considered to be the son of the deceased brother in order to maintain clan “wholeness” and for purposes of inheritance of property.

b. *In Onan’s case, his brother Er died childless. Er had been Judah’s firstborn son, so would have inherited a double portion of his father’s estate (as would any “fictional” son of his produced according to the law of levirate marriage).¹⁴ Onan devised a trick: he ostensibly undertook his levirate responsibility, and had sex with Er’s widow Tamar. However, he made sure that no child could result from the union. By doing that (i.e., performing his legal duty in form but not in fact) he hoped to gain for himself his dead brother’s inheritance as well as his own. Greed for property was thus Onan’s motivation.*

c. *God judged Onan for his greed and failure to obey the covenantal law of the levirate marriage, not for practicing contraception per se.* This passage has nothing to do with contraception generally.

4. The statement that God hates “hands that shed innocent blood” (Prov 6:16-17).

There is a fundamental moral distinction between *contraception* and *abortion*:

a. *Contraception does not “shed innocent blood.”* Contraception simply prevents a new life from being conceived. It does not take a life that is already in existence.

b. *Abortion does “shed innocent blood.”* Abortion takes the life of a person already living. Consequently, abortion is a moral evil which the Bible does not permit. Contraception is not a moral evil like abortion.

5. The requirement that one must “provide for his own, and especially for those of his household” (1 Tim 5:8).

a. *Family members are responsible for taking care of each other physically, materially, and financially. When children are being raised, the primary responsibility for their care rests with the parents.* Such care includes meeting the physical, material, and financial needs of the children. This responsibility is so important that failure to properly meet those needs means that the parent “has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

b. *If anything, particularly given the radically different circumstances that face people today compared with those that faced Adam and Eve, 1 Tim 5:8 logically “trumps” or controls Gen 1:28, not the other way around.* If a married couple have the space, resources, and ability to properly care for a large family, then they certainly may have a large family. However, if they do not have the space, resources, and ability to properly care for a large family, then they should not have a large family.

6. The purposes of marriage.

a. *Procreation is not the only reason for marriage or for sexual intercourse.* Consequently, the command of **Gen 1:28** to “*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth*” does not control, or “trump,” or supersede the rest of the Bible relative to marriage and children (see also the discussion above concerning **Gen 1:28**).

b. *Other purposes of marriage include companionship (Gen 2:18), unity (Gen 2:24), pleasure (Gen 3:16; Eccl 9:9; 1 Cor 7:3-5), protection from sexual immorality (1 Cor 7:9), and personal or progressive sanctification (Eph 5:26).*

(1) Adam and Eve were experiencing companionship, unity, and pleasure in sex before there were any children.

(2) The Apostle Paul encouraged Christians to have a healthy sex life because married couples have sexual duties to one another, and advised against long periods of abstinence (1 Cor 7:1-5). We may conclude that Paul is approving sex for mutual pleasure and satisfaction in marriage. If that is true, then contraception may be used to cultivate a strong love life in marriage.

(3) Since pleasure, companionship, and unity are basic purposes for marriage,

¹⁴The person who married the widow of the childless man was called the *levir*—hence the term “levirate” marriage.

contraception may aid these things. Contraception may add to the freedom of lovemaking and the stability of a marriage. It may preserve the marriage from unwanted children or economic disaster.

III. Types of Birth Control

A. General considerations

1. A scientific contraceptive must be:
 - a. *Harmless.* There should be no injury to the wife, husband, or future children.
 - b. *Protective.* The contraceptive must provide a high degree of protection or it will cause great frustration because of fear of pregnancy.
 - c. *Practical.* The technique or instrument of birth control should be aesthetically satisfying to both partners, practical to use and economical to purchase.
2. The purpose of this lesson is not to discuss the pros and cons of each method, but to deal with the moral and spiritual aspects of contraception.
3. If you desire a detailed discussion of modern techniques of birth control, you should talk with your pastor and/or physician. The medical pros and cons of different methods of birth control are issues for a medically-trained doctor or nurse to discuss. Some government agencies may also have information concerning the different types of birth control.

B. Different methods of contraception which do not involve killing the unborn

There are many different methods of contraception, including but not limited to those discussed below. Some require a contraceptive device or procedure; others do not. The following methods do not involve destruction of a fertilized egg, as do “emergency contraception,” “morning after pills,” and abortion. Consequently, there does not appear to be any biblical prohibition of their use, if the couple’s motives and other circumstances are in accord with biblical principles.¹⁵

1. Abstinence. Abstinence from sexual relations prevents pregnancy but it also will cause much frustration to both partners. It defeats the whole purpose of cultivating physical love in marriage. Abstinence is a moral issue because it is failing to do your duty in meeting the sexual needs of your mate. Although temporary abstinence is permitted by mutual agreement for purposes of prayer, total abstinence is actually forbidden by the Bible (**1 Cor 7:3-5**). Many African wives decide on abstinence because of the frustration of unwanted pregnancies. Men then go outside marriage for sex which is obviously sin.
2. Withdrawal (*coitus interruptus*). When the man senses that he is about to ejaculate (come), he pulls his penis out of the vagina. He ejaculates outside of the vagina. This takes a lot of discipline! If the woman has not had an orgasm, the man can stimulate her in other ways after withdrawal. It works best if the couple has agreed to use this method in advance. Among typical couples who initiate use of withdrawal, about 27 percent of women will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. If withdrawal is used consistently and correctly, about 4 percent of women will become pregnant.
3. Fertility Awareness (Rhythm). Fertility awareness is a means of understanding a woman's reproductive cycle by observing and writing down fertility signs. These signs determine whether or not she can become pregnant on a given day. A woman is actually fertile during only about a fourth of her cycle. This method is a great way for a woman to learn more about her body, but it is not recommended for teens. What are the three primary fertility signs? They are a woman's temperature when she first wakes up; her cervical fluid (the fluid at the mouth of a woman's womb); and the position of her cervix. The fertility awareness method permits a woman to use this information so that she may abstain from intercourse when she is most fertile. The failure rate among women who use this method perfectly is two to three percent; while the failure rate among most women who use this method is 13 to 20 percent.
4. Condom (for men). Effective condoms are made of latex or polyurethane. Unrolled, condoms look like long, thin balloons. They prevent body fluids from mixing when two people have sex. The condom is put onto the penis before the penis comes into contact with the vagina. Among typical couples who initiate use of latex male condoms, about 15 percent of women will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. If condoms are used consistently and correctly, about two percent of women will experience pregnancy. Condoms are most effective when they are used in combination with another

¹⁵Information concerning methods 2-11 in this section come from the article “Contraceptives: What Are Your Choices?” found at <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/health/contraceptives/index.htm> (accessed 27 October 2008).

method of contraception, such as the pill or foam.

5. Female condom. FC female condoms (previously known as *Reality Condoms*) are made of a thin plastic called polyurethane. This is NOT latex. The condom is placed into the woman's vagina. It is open at one end and closed at the other. Both ends have a flexible ring used to keep the condom in the vagina. Among typical women use of FC condoms, about 21 percent will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. If these condoms are used consistently and correctly, about 5 percent of women will experience pregnancy.

6. Diaphragm (for women) and spermicidal jellies and foams. A diaphragm is a latex disc a woman places into her vagina. It should be left in the vagina at least 6 hours but no more than 24 hours after intercourse. The diaphragm blocks a man's semen from entering the cervix (the opening to the womb). A spermicide placed onto the diaphragm kills sperm. A diaphragm and the spermicide keep sperm from getting to the egg. Among typical couples who initiate use of the diaphragm, about 16 percent of women will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. If the diaphragm is used consistently and correctly, about 6 percent of women will experience pregnancy.

7. Patch. The contraceptive patch is a lightweight, thin, flexible, beige-colored patch. It has three layers: the outer, protective, polyester layer; the medicated, adhesive layer; and a protective liner which is removed prior to applying the patch. The patch can be applied to the skin of the buttock, abdomen, upper torso (but not the breasts), or the outside of the upper arm. Each patch lasts seven days. Women replace the patch each week for three weeks, then have a seven-day patch-free week, during which time they begin their menstrual bleeding. During a year of typical use, eight women will experience pregnancy; with perfect use, only three in 1,000 women will experience pregnancy.

8. Implants. The contraceptive implant is a single implant inserted into the upper arm. After a woman is given a local anesthetic, insertion takes only a few minutes. Usually it does not hurt. Implants give off very small amounts of a hormone much like the progesterone a woman's body produces during the last two weeks of each monthly cycle. Among typical couples who initiate use of implants, five women in 1,000 will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year.

9. Injections. Injectables stop the woman's ovaries from releasing an egg and have other contraceptive effects. The type of shot most used is called Depo-Provera. It is a shot given every three months. It is a hormone, much like the progesterone a woman produces during the last two weeks of each monthly cycle. Among typical couples who initiate use of injectables, about three percent of women will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year.

10. Intra-uterine device (IUD). An intrauterine device (IUD) is a small device which is placed into the uterine cavity. There are two highly effective intrauterine contraceptives available in the United States: the Copper T IUD and the LNG-IUS. In the horizontal arms of the Copper T 380A IUD there is some copper. The IUD slowly gives off copper into the uterine cavity. This does several things. Most importantly, it stops sperm from making their way up through the uterus. Among typical couples who initiate use of this IUD, just less than 1% will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. The LNG-IUS contains some levonorgestrel in its vertical arm. This hormone is a progestin much like the progesterone a woman's ovaries produce each monthly cycle. Each week the LNG-IUS gives off about the same amount of levonorgestrel as a woman gets when she takes one or two of the minipills called Ovrette. The levonorgestrel causes the cervical mucus to become thicker so sperm cannot get to the egg. Among typical couples who initiate use of the LNG-IUS, just one in 1,000 women will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year.

11. Birth-control pills. Combined birth control pills contain two hormones, an estrogen and a progestin. They work by stopping ovulation (release of an egg) and by inhibiting the movement of sperm. Among typical couples who initiate use of combined pills about eight percent of women will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. But if pills are used consistently and correctly, just three in 1,000 women will become pregnant.

12. Sterilization. A vasectomy for a male or tubular ties for a woman are the most radical forms of birth control. For a male—surgical removal of a small portion of the vas deferens which carries the sperm from the testicles. This has no adverse effects on man's sex drive or performance. For a female—surgical cutting and tying of tubes that connect the ovary to the uterus preventing contact of the ovum and sperm. This has no adverse effects on the woman's sex drive or performance. Normal risks for surgical procedures apply. Sterilization is usually permanent and therefore is not recommended for single people.

IV. Final Considerations Regarding Birth Control

A. Liberty

1. Family planning, and the decision to use or not to use contraceptive methods, has important implications for the family and for the individuals involved. The issues should be dealt with after obtaining sound medical and other information, and in the spirit of prayer for wisdom and grace.
2. Because the Bible does not specifically speak out against birth control, it is a matter of conscience. A Christian couple is at liberty to practice birth control and to use natural as well as scientific means of contraception.
3. Liberty is not a license to sin. Although some will abuse contraception for their own selfish ends, that does not negate their proper use.

B. Children

1. Children are a gift and a blessing from God (**Ps 127:43-5**).
2. A selfish refusal to have any children clearly violates the spirit of God's Word.
3. Birth control helps space children, not avoid the responsibility of children.
4. Birth control also enables married couples to have wanted children who will be loved and instructed in the gospel of Christ.

C. Adoption

1. God in His divine providence sometimes does not allow some couples to have children. In such cases a happy home can still be established. Adopting children may be the most sensible solution if a couple is unable to have children of their own.
2. Adoption also may be done where a couple is able to produce children of their own.
3. Adoption meets a great social need. It helps to relieve poverty and overpopulation. There are thousands of orphans who need to be adopted into loving, Christian homes.
4. Adoption shows the love of Christ to "the least of these" (**Matt 25:40, 45**). Adoption is the essence of "*pure and undefiled religion*" (**Jas 1:27**). God has adopted us into his family (**Rom 8:15-17; Eph 1:5; Gal 4:5**). Consequently, to adopt children into our families as our own is to do a Godly act.

D. Birth control and single people

1. The Bible absolutely forbids premarital and extramarital sex. They are violations of God's moral law. Consequently, single people have no legitimate biblical need for contraceptive devices.
2. Contraceptive devices should not be provided to men or women who are single. By taking away the fear of pregnancy, they encourage immorality.
3. Some Christians rationalize away human responsibility by saying, "the world is going to exercise free sex and this will bring many unwanted children into this world; therefore, we should equip single people with contraceptives." People who reason this way are guilty of supporting sexual immorality and are failing to let people suffer the moral consequences of sin.

12. WHAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES ABOUT DIVORCE

I. God Hates Divorce.

A. *Divorce defined*

A divorce is an official, legal severance of a marriage, initiated by one or both of the marriage partners, designed to terminate the marriage and free the marriage partners from all rights and obligations to each other, and enable them legally to remarry other people.

B. *God's view of divorce*

1. In **Mal 2:13-16** God states that he hates divorce:¹³ *"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.*¹⁴ *"Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.*¹⁵ *"But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.*¹⁶ *"For I hate divorce," says the*

LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

2. Note the very harsh language that God uses about divorce. Three times he calls it “treachery”; he calls it “wrong”; and he says that he “hates” it.

C. Divorce has spiritual implications

1. In Mal 2:13-16, God is lamenting how Israel, God’s people, accepted the standard of the unsaved world and were divorcing their wives in order to marry pagan, unsaved, Gentile wives. The Israelites were weeping and wailing at God’s altar because He no longer responded to them. They wanted to know why and God says it was because of their practice of divorce.

2. Note the spiritual implications of divorce from the above passage:

a. *God “no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand” (2:13).* To divorce out spouse directly affects our spiritual relationship with God. This same concept is stated in **1 Pet 3:7** which admonishes husbands in particular to honor their wives “*so that your prayers may not be hindered.*”

b. *Divorce is the violation of a covenant of which God is both a witness and a party (2:14).* Consequently, in a real way to divorce one’s spouse is also a severing of one’s relationship with God. This same concept flows from the fact that, according to **Eph 5:22-32**, marriage is a representation of Christ’s relationship with the church. Thus, at its root, *marriage is spiritual—it is a spiritual institution.* God tells us, “I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you” (**Heb 13:5**). Thus, when Christian husbands and wives divorce, they are *misrepresenting Christ to the world.* Divorce separates what God has joined together (**Matt 19:6**), and is a form of dividing the body of Christ.

c. *God specifically says that “not one has done so [divorced his wife] who has a remnant of the Spirit” (2:15).* Twice he admonishes his people to “take heed to your spirit” (**2:15, 16**). Thus, in a very direct way God is saying that divorce is a reflection of one’s spiritual state.

3. The seriousness and spiritual significance of divorce is further seen in the fact that God viewed marital infidelity as a metaphor for OT Israel’s spiritual faithlessness in pursuing other gods. In **Jer 3:8** God said that “for all the adulteries of faithless Israel [referring to the northern kingdom, as opposed to the southern kingdom of Judah], I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce.”

4. God’s standard, his ideal, is no divorce. However, we live in a sin-cursed, fallen world and divorce happens. God also has the ideal of no sin, but sin happens. When divorce happens (which is outside of God’s perfect, moral will), we must be prepared to deal with it in a Biblical, Christ-centered way. Christians must have a healing, redemptive ministry to those who have gone through the tragedy of divorce. We must point people to the Savior who can forgive them of their sins, remove their guilt, and heal them spiritually and psychologically so they might live moral lives before a holy God. Consequently, both Jesus and Paul taught about divorce and its relation to our lives.

II. Christ’s Teaching About Divorce—Matt 19:3-12

A. The Challenge of the Pharisees (19: 3)

“Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

1. A group of Pharisees who believed in very liberal reasons for divorce came with the specific purpose to test Jesus concerning divorce. They were trying to get Him to make a choice between the two views on divorce that were held in that day among the Pharisees and people.

a. *The School of Shammai was very strict and felt the words “find something indecent about her” in Deut 24:1-4 meant adultery only.* They felt the only legitimate reason for divorce was adultery and this alone broke the marriage bond.

b. *The School of Hillel believed it was right for a man to divorce his wife for almost any reason.* If the wife burned the toast or socially embarrassed the men, this was a basis for divorce. That view was the popular view in Christ’s day; all a man had to do was write out a bill of divorcement to his wife for any reason.

2. The Pharisees knew Christ taught on divorce earlier in his ministry in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:31-32). In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ contrasted the Pharisees’ perverted views of the OT law with his own correct interpretation of the law.

B. The Ideal Marriage (19:4-6)

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “That at the beginning the Creator made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

1. In response to the Pharisees’ challenge, Christ takes them back to the original design for marriage. In the very first marriage of Adam and Eve, God’s plan, desire, and moral will was to have one man marry one woman for a lifetime.
2. God’s standard for marriage is very high. His desire for people is that they should establish marriages for a lifetime; this brings the special blessing of God.
3. Divorce is sin. Divorce is the breaking of God’s moral law.

C. The Second Challenge of the Pharisees (19:7)

“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man gives his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” The Pharisees felt they had trapped Christ, because if the ideal is no divorce why did Moses allow for divorce in the OT? They tried to get Christ to speak against the Mosaic Law. That would discredit him with the people.

D. Why Moses Allowed Divorce (19:8)

“Jesus replied ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.’”

1. The Pharisees alleged that Moses commanded divorce as if God approved it. That was not true. Moses *permitted* divorce, indicating allowance and sufferance due to sin. Divorce is not in God’s directive (prescriptive) will, although is allowed by his “permissive will.”
2. Divorce was permitted because of the hardness of the Israelites’ hearts. The word “hard” means “stubborn” or “callused.” That shows that Moses allowed divorce because of the Israelites’ disobedience.
3. Jesus said, “It was not this way from the beginning.” This refers back to Adam and Eve, God’s ideal marriage. Again, God’s ideal is no divorce, because man and wife are to be one flesh in an indissoluble union. Divorce is permitted just as any sin is permitted in God’s plan. However, divorce was not part of the original marriage law before the Mosaic Law ever came into existence.

E. Christ Allowed For Divorce On The Basis Of Sexual Immorality (19: 9)

“I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery.” Christian scholars disagree over the word “immorality” [Greek = *porneia*]. There are three schools of thought:

1. View 1: *porneia* refers to Jewish marriage customs. Some scholars believe Jesus taught no divorce for any reason, not even adultery. They believe the word *porneia* refers either to sexual unfaithfulness during the engagement period, or marriage of close relatives, or marriages to unbelieving Gentiles. This has been the position of the Roman Catholic Church and a few Protestants.
2. View 2: *porneia* refers to adultery only.
 - a. *The Greek has a word for adultery (moicheia), and sometimes the word porneia, means adultery. “Let her remove the adulterous look (moicheia) from her face and the unfaithfulness [porneia] from between her breasts” (Hos 2:2, LXX).*
 - b. *The Apocryphal book Sirach says. “So it is with a woman who leaves her husband and provides an heir by adultery [porneia]. Historically, the RC Church has taken this view.*
 - c. *In AD 413 Augustine wrote, “Nor is it clear from Scripture whether a man who left his wife because of adultery, which he is certainly permitted to do, is himself an adulterer if he remarries again.”*
 - d. *The Jesuit scholar Theodore Mackin, in his book Divorce and Remarriage, said: Christian writers on the subject of adultery, divorce and remarriage, beginning in the middle of the second century and continuing at least until Augustine, never call the following persons adulterers: (1) A husband who remarries after dismissing an adulterous wife; (2) A husband who remarries after being abandoned by his wife; (3) A woman who marries a man in either of these two cases.*
 - e. *The Eastern Orthodox Church recognized porneia to mean adultery and extended it even to abortion and attempted murder.*
 - f. *The Reformers acknowledged adultery (porneia) as a ground for divorce and remarriage. The*

Westminster Confession of Faith says: “Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrates, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: where in, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.” (WCF, sections XXIV-VI)

3. View 3: *porneia* is a more extensive term than *moicheia* and refers to various sexual immoralities.
 - a. *Porneia* and *moicheia* are separate terms, indicating that *porneia* is a broader term for sexual immoralities. “For out of the heart came evil thoughts, murder, adultery (*moicheia*), sexual immorality [*porneia*]” (**Matt 15:19**).
 - b. *Porneia* may refer to sexual sin before marriage. “Marriage should be honored by all . . . God will judge the adulterer [*moicheia*] and all the sexually immoral [*porneia*]” (**Heb 13:4b**).
 - c. It may refer to incest “It is actually reported there is sexual immorality [*porneia*] among you, and a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife” (**1 Cor 5:1**).
 - d. It refers to adultery “Let her remove the adulterous look (*moicheia*) from her face and the unfaithfulness [*porneia*] from between her breasts” (**Hos. 2:2**).
 - e. To sexual sin in general “Flee from sexual immorality [*porneia*]” (**1 Cor 6:18**).
 - f. *Porneia* thus may be broad enough to include any kind of sexual immorality, including prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism, and bestiality. All of those sexual acts break the marriage union and all of these sins called for the death penalty in the OT.
4. If the third view of *porneia* is correct: then Jesus did not take the strict view of divorce held by the School of Shammai, which said divorce for adultery only; nor did He take the liberal view of the School of Hillel, which said divorce for any reason. Instead, Jesus took a mediating position and said that divorce was permissible, but not mandatory, for “sexual immorality,” which could include adultery, incest, prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism and bestiality.
5. Since sexual immorality is a basis or ground for divorce between two professing Christians, it does not mean divorce is to be automatic when unfaithfulness occurs. There should be every attempt to put the marriage back together. Marriage is holy and sacred, and every marriage is worth fighting for even if there has been marital unfaithfulness.
6. Jesus did not state that incompatibility, failure to produce children, substance abuse, verbal abuse, or physical abuse, are legitimate grounds for divorce. However, cases of abuse may be grounds for legal separation with no intent to remarry or be sexually promiscuous. No one has to live with an abusive person. No one has to simply put up with sin (which substance abuse, verbal abuse, and physical abuse certainly are). No one has to put their lives or the lives of their children in jeopardy by remaining in the same house with an abusive person.

III. Paul’s Teaching About Divorce—1 Cor 7:10-16

A. Concerning a believer married to another believer (7:10-11)

¹⁰But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband¹¹(but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”

1. The word “leave” in this passage is the same word that Christ used in **Matt 19:6**, those whom “God has joined together, let no man separate.” The term is broader than simply meaning “divorce.” Similarly, the word translated “divorce” in **7:11b** usually is translated “leave” or “send away,” not merely “divorce.” The terms are basically synonymous. In both cases the context suggests a permanent marital separation or divorce.
2. Paul’s teaching is consistent with Christ’s that remarriage to another following a divorce is adultery (see **Mark 10:9-12; Luke 16:18**).
3. Paul does not specifically discuss the “exception clause” of divorce for the reason of “sexual immorality” (see **Matt 5:32; 19:9**). This suggests that Paul was not addressing those who divorce for valid reasons. If a person divorces because his or her spouse was sexually immoral, the innocent spouse may remarry and would not be guilty of adultery in the eyes of God. Instead, Paul only appears to be addressing those who wish to leave their spouses *unjustifiably*. In such a case the one who initiates the divorce has only two options: reconciliation to one’s spouse or remaining single.
4. Reconciliation, of course, is a preferred option in all cases of marital discord, including those caused by sexual immorality. God would prefer that the couple reconcile, rather than that they divorce.

B. Concerning a believer married to an unbeliever (7:12-16)

1. A believer married to an unbeliever who wants to continue the marriage (7:12-14): ¹²*But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.* ¹³*And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.* ¹⁴*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy*”

a. The key is **7:14** concerning “sanctifying” an unbelieving spouse and children:

(1) According to **Ezra 9-10**, the Israelites were told to divorce their unbelieving mates they had married while in captivity in Babylon and any other Gentile partners they had acquired from the surrounding nations (see also **Neh 13:23-29**).

(2) According to **Hag 2:11-14**, defilement was carried through touching a dead body. Jew and Gentile believers interpreted this to mean defilement is communicated or transmitted.

(3) Consequently, Corinthian Christians were concerned that they were being defiled by their marriages to unbelievers. They were probably asking whether they should divorce their unbelieving spouses in order to remain pure and undefiled.

b. *Paul’s answer rejects and reverses the OT injunctions and rules regarding cleanness.*

(1) Under the New Covenant, the clean (i.e., the believer) exerts a power to sanctify (i.e., set apart or cleanse) the unclean (i.e., the unbeliever), rather than the other way around. That same phenomenon had been demonstrated by Jesus. He touched and cleansed a leper (**Matt 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45**), but did not become “unclean” in doing so (see **Lev 5:2-3; 13:45-46**).

(2) Consequently, the believer in Christ is not to leave the unbeliever as long as the unbeliever chooses to stay in the marriage relationship. It may be difficult to live with an unbeliever but God’s grace is sufficient. If the unbeliever is willing to remain in the marriage, the believer should work at maintaining the marriage.

(3) When Paul says that unbelieving spouses are “sanctified,” he does not mean that they become part of the people of God, or are guaranteed salvation, because of their marriage to a believer. Instead, that indicates that the unbelieving spouse has been placed in a holy sphere of influence because of his or her marriage to a believer. The unbeliever is now subject to the godly influences of the believer in ways that would not be possible absent the marriage. There is special blessing and privilege which comes to unbelievers because of their Christian mate.

2. A believer married to an unbeliever who refuses to continue the marriage (7:15-16): ¹⁵*Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.* ¹⁶*For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”*

a. *If the unbelieving spouse desires to break off the marriage and divorce the believer, the believer is under no obligation to continue the marriage.* To be “not under bondage” (or, “not enslaved”) means that believers are not required in such circumstances to devote all their efforts to preserving the marriage. The reason is that the divine standard and way of life cannot be imposed on the unregenerate. An overriding principle is that God has called us to peace (see also **1 Pet 3:11**).

b. *Believers should not initiate divorce (note that the unbeliever in 7:15 initiates the marital separation).* However, if the unbelievers insist on ending the marriage, the believers should not be filled with despair. Again, God’s grace should be sufficient. He alone frees believers from anxiety and gives them the “peace that passes all understanding” (**Phil 4:6-7**).

c. *The word “bondage” comes from the root word *doulos* from which we get the word “slave.”* Paul is not talking about legal separation but divorce and the right to remarry. In **1 Cor 7:39** he says, “A woman is bound [*doulos*] to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry another she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” Therefore, Paul’s reference to the unbeliever’s “leaving” refers to a legitimate divorce and, with it, the right to remarry on the basis of desertion.

IV. Practical Aspects of Divorce

Much thought and prayer should be given before divorce is undertaken. Divorce has traumatic effects upon the two partners mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Divorce always leaves permanent scars. It creates people who are cynical about marriage. It affects people and relationships in addition to just the husband and wife. It often does not solve the problem, but can create new problems. Consequently, even when divorce is scripturally permissible, it should not be entered into lightly.

A. Particular considerations regarding the husband, wife, and children of a divorce

1. Husband.

- a. *A man loses the comfort and security of his home*, and must take up the rigorous task of being a bachelor (cook, dishwasher, housecleaner, loneliness, abundance of time, etc.) and setting up separate housing.
- b. *A man usually loses custody of his children, for the courts almost always award the children to the mother*. The man may also lose the respect and affection of his children.
- c. *A man may also lose financially, for the cost of a divorce can be devastating*. Alimony and/or child support can cripple his finances for years. A man must ask himself whether he can afford a divorce.
- d. *A man may find that a divorce will hinder his business or profession*.
- e. *A man will most certainly lose some friends*, for in marital breakups, people tend to take sides.

2. Wife.

- a. *A woman suffers greatly from a divorce*, for it affects her mentally and emotionally because of the guilt of failure.
- b. *A woman suffers terribly because of loneliness*. A man has his work to fall back on; a woman often does not.
- c. *A woman must become the breadwinner for her family and must do the work of a man (discipline of children, fixing the plumbing, repairing cars, etc.)*. A woman usually must go to work to support the family. She comes home dead tired and cranky. She operates on much guilt because of the way she acts towards her children.
- d. *A woman's standard of living declines greatly in the first year of divorce*. Income tends to plummet, and anxiety increases over making ends meet.
- e. *A woman usually gets a stigma because she is a divorcee*. People judge her or consider her to be sexually promiscuous. Friendships tend to stagnate because she has to play the roles of both mother and father, has to work, is tired and depressed, etc.

3. Children.

- a. *Children suffer the most in a divorce*. All children are traumatized by divorce during the first two to five years; most are affected for a lifetime.
- b. *The only security a child really has is his parents*. If they divorce, the child may become bitter and rebellious. He cannot understand why this had to happen to him. Divorce usually produces insecure and unstable children who cannot cope with life effectively. Symptoms in children which are normal byproducts of a divorce include: (1) sadness, depression, fatigue, daydreaming, bursting into tears, withdrawing from friends, difficulty concentrating and overachieving to prove one's worth; (2) denial; (3) embarrassment, which brings loss of self-esteem; (4) intense anger; (5) guilt because of conflict of loyalty; (6) fears about being cared for even if the family is affluent; (7) regression and lack of normal development; (8) forcing of abnormal maturity by circumstances; (9) difficulty sleeping, stomachaches, headaches, etc.
- c. *Children of divorced parents are more likely to divorce when they marry than are children of non-divorced parents*. One reason is that both children of divorced parents, and children of non-divorced parents, have different models to follow. Further, children of divorced parents are often afraid to make a deep commitment in marriage because they fear they will have kids and the marriage will end in divorce, which brought them such hurt and pain. That lack of deep commitment itself promotes the type of marriage in which divorce is more likely.
- d. *Children are forced to take sides between their parents in a divorce and this causes tremendous guilt and other emotional problems*. Some psychiatrists and medical doctors feel children of divorced parents may do better psychologically if they are removed from the bickering and infighting of incompatible parents who are living together but show no love. That may be true, but divorce and parental squabbling are both sinful and damaging to children.

e. The effects of divorce are not only damaging to younger children but to older children who understand the reason for divorce in their parents.

B. Divorce hurts the parties to the divorce in unseen ways, and hurts others

1. Divorce hurts the persons getting the divorce in unseen ways:
 - a. It brings out selfishness, hostilities, anger and vindictiveness.
 - b. It ruins one's idealism about marriage and leaves emotional scars from which one can never be free.
 - c. It forces the divorcee to be hardened, or to be on the defensive against people he or she once loved dearly.
2. Divorce hurts others who are not parties to the divorce:
 - a. It devastates children.
 - b. It hurts the in-laws by splitting the family and causing them to take sides.
 - c. It hurts friends by forcing them to take to take sides. That usually results in the termination of friendships because of the divorce.
 - d. It hurts grandparents who want the privilege of being with their grandchildren and children desperately need grandparents for stability.
 - e. Divorce hurts society at large by detracting from the stability of society, and adding to the instability, lack of continuity, lack of connection, and despair many people feel.

C. Divorce rarely solves the problem

1. Many divorcees will admit they were no better off in the single state.
 - a. Most would confess that the single state brought different and more problems.
 - b. Also the second marriage had many of the same problems as the first marriage.
 - c. Divorcees often say that with patience and understanding they could have worked out the first marriage without divorce.
2. After a divorce, people remain the same.
 - a. After divorce, people continue to have the same poor problem-solving skills, cloudy values, and inadequate styles of relating to others, that led to the marriage problems and divorce in the first place.
 - b. The result is that most often those who have been divorced end up shaping their new relationships into a duplication of their spoiled first marriage.
 - c. The problem is the selfishness of individuals (which is tough to admit).
3. Subsequent marriages are even less likely to succeed than the first marriage. In the United States approximately 40% of first marriages, but 60% of second marriages and 75% of third marriages, end in divorce (Chapman 1992: 35).

D. Things to consider before marrying a divorcee

1. You may well inherit children who are not your own. It is much easier to love and cope with your own children than with someone else's children.
2. You may have contact with the divorcee's husband or wife because of the children. This can produce jealousy and other problems.
3. If a wife, you may have a large portion of your husband's income going out each month for alimony or child support. This could easily lead to much resentment, especially if your own family needs the money.
4. You may be marrying a person who is unstable or has other problems, and who may have difficulty making a marriage work.
5. You may have to live with the stigma of marrying a divorcee, especially in circles where divorce is looked upon as sin.
6. You will have a difficult time explaining to your children the reason for your divorce.
7. You will marry a person who has been to some degree psychologically damaged because of a divorce. There will be difficult times of adjustment.
8. You may be marrying a person who has had many sexual affairs with the opposite sex as a divorcee, which may make it difficult for the divorcee to settle down with one person.

E. Hope in the context of divorce

1. Fulfillment of God's ideal for marriage is always the number one aim—no divorce.

2. God's ideal is one man for one woman for one lifetime.
3. Divorce is always a sin because it is a transgression of God's moral law and ideal.
4. God is loving and compassionate, and is always seeking to make a bad situation into a good one through forgiveness.
5. God's grace is always available to restore, reinstate, and surmount the obstacles of divorce if there is true repentance and faith.
6. Divorce, even wrongful divorce, can be forgiven through Christ's gracious redemption.
7. Forgiveness restores the relationship but may not change the situation a divorced person has brought upon himself or herself because of sin. The person needs to be willing to accept the inevitable consequences of wrong acts, but at the same time be free from guilt.
8. A divorced person can remarry in Christ and find a meaningful, useful and satisfying existence, but may have to experience the effects of sin and the discipline of God for a lifetime.

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APPENDIX

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR HUSBANDS AND WIVES

- 1. Take an interest in each other's work and problems.** Husband and wife may have separate jobs and responsibilities, which cause each of them different kinds of problems, frustrations, and concerns. Each one needs to know that the other understands. You need to be both a "shoulder to cry on" for your mate, and a source of help and encouragement.
- 2. Remember the "five love languages" and practice them.** Words of affirmation, spending quality time with each other, giving and receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch show your love for your mate and help to keep the fires of love burning.
- 3. Remember the "little things."** Most of life is lived in customary routines. We may look forward to "big things," but most of our lives revolve around "little things." Doing things like keeping a neat home, remembering birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions, taking time to do something your mate likes, doing something to "break the routine," are like oil that keeps the relationship running smoothly.
- 4. Keep yourself well-groomed and physically fit.** Both men and women like an attractive mate. It is easy to keep ourselves fit and well-groomed before we are married. To continue to do so after we are married is not only good for us, but shows that our mate is still important to us.
- 5. Keep communicating with your spouse.** Remember, communication is the life-blood of any relationship. Many couples virtually stop talking to each other after they have been married for some time. Consciously keep communicating, not just talking with your mate but reading interesting things with each other. Do not criticize or embarrass your spouse in public. Don't yell or shout at your spouse even when angry, but remember that your spouse is a gift to you from God and is the love of your life.
- 6. Avoid the following problems which can ruin your marriage.**
 - A. Jealousy.** Jealousy is a poison that can destroy a marriage. There must be complete trust between husband and wife. Openness and communication can help to prevent this from arising, or can resolve it before it gets too big.
 - B. Controlling.** Control, manipulation, domination, excessive possessiveness can stifle a person and a marriage. Again, trust of and respect for your mate can help prevent this.
 - C. Threats.** Neither partner should ever threaten the other in order to get something. Threats (e.g., "If you don't buy me that dress, I won't fix breakfast any more," or "If you don't clean house, I'm leaving home") always break a partner's trust and confidence in one's mate. The word "divorce" should never be uttered, or even considered as an option when a couple is going through rough times.
 - D. Stubbornness and pride.** Stubbornness and pride are the marks of selfishness, not relationship-building. The "magic words" in a marriage are, "I was wrong," or "I have sinned," and "Please forgive

me.”

E. In-laws. The scriptural principle is to leave one’s parents and cleave to the married partner. In-laws must not be allowed to interfere with or control one’s marriage and home life. If necessary, a couple may have to “speak the truth in love” to interfering in-laws.

F. Money and finances. There has to be trust between husband and wife concerning finances, and open communication, discussion, and, wherever possible, agreement over the way money is spent. The person who is best at handling money should be in charge of the finances and “keep the books.” If the husband handles the money, the wife must be given adequate sums of money to meet the household needs and have some personal spending money. The following should be done to make sure that money is handled in a responsible and God-honoring way: (1) There should be an agreed-upon and written budget; (2) Give regularly to the Lord’s work; (3) Do not spend money on things you do not need; (4) Live on less than you make, and save at least 10% of your income.

7. Problem solving

A. Wrong ways to solve problems:

- (1) Deny that there is a problem.
- (2) Avoid or run away from the problem.
- (3) Endure the problem without trying to solve it (i.e., “suffer in silence”).
- (4) Make threats, yell, and demand your own way.

B. Biblical bases for solving problems:

- (1) Recognize that both you and your mate have the power of indwelling sin within you (see **Romans 6-7**). Every person has particular areas of weakness and sin. We are all “unfinished works” in whom God is working. We must therefore be careful to confess our own sins and be sure to take the “log out of our own eye” so that we can see clearly to take the speck out of our mate’s eye (see **Matt 7:3-5**).
- (2) Recognize that, as a member of the other sex, your mate’s approach to things, his/her needs, the way he/she looks at things and communicates, may be somewhat different from yours. God made men and women different in many ways, and we must be careful not to try to force our mate into our own mold.
- (3) We must be long-suffering, slow to anger, and quick to forgive, because God has been patient with us and has forgiven us (see **Prov 14:29; 15:13; 16:32; Matt 6:9-15; 18:21-35; Gal 5:2; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; 1 Tim 1:16**).
- (4) Remember that God is sovereign. Nothing is too hard for him. There is no problem that he cannot solve (see **Luke 1:37**). God never promised to keep us from problems, but has guaranteed us his grace to help us through problems. The spiritually mature person is the one who can solve his or her problems through God’s grace in dependence on Christ.

C. A biblical way to approach problems:

- (1) *Determine what the problem is*—honestly assess what the problem is, and face it truthfully.
- (2) *Determine how to solve the problem in a Christ-honoring way:*
 - a. Pray with your spouse for grace, wisdom, God’s guidance, and a humble, helpful spirit.
 - b. Study the Bible individually and together.
 - c. Use biblical principles, common sense, and logic, all grounded in love for your spouse and the desire to preserve and strengthen your relationship with him/her.
 - d. Be honest with your mate in everything. Don’t be deceitful with your partner. Speak the truth in love, and try to keep your emotional reactions down.
 - e. Have complete freedom of discussion. Always keep communication open and speak to one another in kindness. Be an active, reflective listener. Try to have empathy for the other person’s perspective.
 - f. Give every problem to Christ and ask yourself what he would do (or, better, what he would have you do) in this situation.
 - g. Be quick to forgive. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Every problem should be solved, or at least be agreed to be solved, before the couple retires for the night. Nothing that remains unforgiven, unsettled, or unresolved should be carried over to the next day.
 - h. Seek biblical counseling if necessary.

THE AUTHOR



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