

# MARRIAGE AND THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD

## Study Five

### BEING GOOD HUSBANDS AND WIVES

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#### A RIGHTLY-ORDERED RELATIONSHIP

For a body to function well, it needs to be in unity and well-ordered. Many of us will have experienced being part of an organisation or a workplace that runs well and does what it is supposed to do in a cheerful and efficient manner. Much of that will come back to having in place good leadership that is uncontested. Many of us may also have had the frustrating experience of being part of an organisation or workplace where there is an absence of good leadership, where others, sometimes at cross-purposes with each other, feel obliged to try and fill the vacuum, or where there is a rivalry that divides and dissipates the energies of the organisation. Most of us would have in mind desirable qualities that we would look for, or may have experienced, in a good leader that we would be happy to work with.

The same may well apply to marriage. Yet, because it is such a close one-on-one relationship, we may be more hesitant to think of it in these terms. Such a close relationship can be fraught with perils, and we don't want to upset anyone. Bad experiences of the use of power in relationships may have put us on our guard. Better to try and muddle through without raising issues that could be counter-productive. Yet few of us may really enjoy the struggle, or the balancing-act, that ensues when expectations differ over the ordering of relationships in a marriage. Could it be that there is a right ordering of relationships in a marriage that, like the gift of marriage itself, is part of what is given? How could we find and follow that?

#### ***Questions for discussion***

- *What kinds of leadership, good or bad, have we experienced in our workplaces or other organisations?*
- *What sort of qualities do we look for in a good leader that we would be happy to work with?*
- *How have we seen differences resolved, or not resolved, in a marriage, especially when important decisions are to be made?*

## MAN AND WOMAN AS CREATED

We return to how God made us in the beginning:<sup>1</sup>

the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).

What does that tell us about the man? First of all, we are of the earth. We are made up of the same chemicals as the rest of creation. This also means that, of ourselves, we are not worth much.<sup>2</sup> It also tells us we are much more than that: God has breathed into us the priceless gift of ‘the breath of life’, in a way that sets us apart from all other creatures. Without this breath from God, we are nothing. One of the apostles said: ‘he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things’ (Acts 17:25). As human beings, we are entirely dependent on God for every breath we take and every move we make.

This breathing into us the breath of life also indicates how we are in intimate relationship with God—it is like a kiss, or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation! The apostle went on to say: ‘In him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). We are reminded of what was said in Genesis 1 about us being in God’s image and likeness: as children of God our Father, we have been made to be related closely with God, and to take after Him.

The Genesis account goes on:

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8–9).

We will come back to what ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ means. We note for the time being that there is no shortage of beautiful provision for the man in the garden. It goes on to say that the garden was well-watered by a wonderful river, which then flowed out to the whole earth, and that precious stones and minerals were there (Genesis 2:10–14).

The man was given good work to do:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Genesis 2:15).

While this means that the man was to cultivate and care for the garden, there are hints elsewhere in the Bible that this also has overtones of heading up the worship of God in His garden-sanctuary<sup>3</sup>—which means showing forth the glory of God in everything we do.<sup>4</sup> This includes knowing who we are as human beings, and knowing who God is, and not confusing the two. God gave the man a command as to what he should and should not do:

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<sup>1</sup> Some take the Genesis accounts of the creation of human beings as picture language; others as literal history. Either way, they tell us truth about God, the world, and ourselves. Here we seek to discern the meaning of what is said for relationships with God and each other.

<sup>2</sup> The human body is made up mostly of oxygen, carbon and hydrogen, with small amounts of nitrogen, calcium and phosphorous, miniscule amounts of potassium, sulphur, sodium, chlorine, magnesium, iron and chlorine, and traces of fluorine, silicon, manganese, zinc, copper, aluminium and arsenic. The monetary value of all of these amounts to less than one dollar. Source: U.S. Bureau of Chemistry and Soils. < <http://www.coolquiz.com/trivia/explain/docs/worth.asp> > accessed 8th July 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See Ezekiel 28:13–14, where ‘Eden’ is called ‘the garden of God’ and ‘the holy mountain of God’; and Numbers 3:5–8, where for the Levites in the tabernacle to ‘do service’ and ‘be in charge’ are the same words used of the man in the garden to ‘till’ and ‘keep’.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:1 indicates that our ‘spiritual worship’ is everything we do in our living bodies.

And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’ (Genesis 2:16–17).

What is the significance of ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’? It is not something evil in itself, since it is part of everything that God had made that was ‘very good’ (Genesis 1:31). Sometimes it is translated ‘the tree of the knowledge of everything’<sup>5</sup>—perhaps the knowledge that God has to be able to run the universe. This is knowledge we do not need to have, because we are not God, and we can get directly from God everything we need to know to do what we need to be doing, without having to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong.<sup>6</sup> To want to have that knowledge would be to want to be God ourselves—without God, and over against Him. Why would we want to do that, especially when God has given us all the other trees in the garden, and commanded us to eat of them freely?

God was aware that the man should not be left to do all this on his own:

Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner (Genesis 2:18–20).

None of the animals are satisfactory as a life-partner for the man, since they are not of the same order as he is: he is in the image and likeness of God, and has been given dominion over all of them (see Genesis 1:26–28). God engages in a special act of creation to provide a suitable companion for the man:

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man (Genesis 2:21–22).

We will come back to the significance of the rib being a rib and not some other part of the man’s body. The main point is that the woman, unlike the animals, is made of the same stuff as the man—they have a belonging, a oneness, a total affinity with each other:

Then the man said,  
‘This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of Man this one was taken’ (Genesis 2:23).

The man is delighted that the woman is inseparably part of him: they are made *from* one to be one with each other. So they want nothing more than to be with each other as one:

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

This union of the man and the woman is total, open, uninhibited, and free—they have nothing to hide, and there is nothing that comes between them:

And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed (Genesis 2:25).

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<sup>5</sup> *Good News Bible*, Genesis 2:17, footnote.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29 says: ‘The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law’.

### **Questions for discussion**

- *When have we sensed our total dependence on God, and His determination to be intimately related with us?*
- *Woman and man are ‘of the same stuff’ and ‘made from one to be one with each other’: what are the implications of this for such statements as ‘women are from Venus and men are from Mars’—different planets—or for the so-called ‘battle of the sexes’?*

## **A PROFOUND MYSTERY**

When Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24, he said that these were the very words of God:

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh (Matthew 19:4–6).

We have seen that when He said this God had more in mind than just the setting-up of the arrangement of marriage between male and female. The apostle Paul calls it ‘a profound mystery’, that points to the very goal of the purpose of God in creation:

‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31–32).

The one-flesh union of a husband and wife is a sign pointing to the oneness that God purposed from the beginning that would be between Christ and his people. It tells us how closely God intends to be related with us, above all other relationships. Every marriage between a man and a woman is to be a reflection of, and a participation in, that great reality to come.

### **Question for discussion**

- *What differences might it make to our marriages to know them not just as a convenient arrangement but as a foretaste of the great union of God with His people in Christ?*

## **THE ONENESS, THE HEADSHIP, AND THE GLORY**

Why in this account of the making of the woman did God make her out of a rib of the man, and not some other part of his body? We are not told. But one commentator has come up with an explanation that reflects accurately the subtle and tender way in which the Bible understands men and women to be related with each other:

the woman was *made of a rib out of the side of Adam*; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.<sup>7</sup>

There is a profound equality and mutuality here, which includes a particular ordering of responsibility within the relationship. The woman comes from ‘under his arm to be protected’

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Henry (1662–1714), *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1991, p. 10.

by the man, indicating that there is a responsibility that the man has for the woman that the woman does not have in the same way for the man. We could call this the responsibility of leadership, or of heading up the relationship.

When we think back to what we said before about ‘the greatest marriage of all time’—between Christ and us—does not this reflect the reality of our relationship with him? He is one flesh with us—we are a part of him—and yet as our Lord and Saviour he takes a responsibility for us that we could never take on for him in the same way. It could be that the sort of qualities we look for in a good leader that we would be happy to work with are what we find supremely in Christ.

In one of his letters, the apostle Paul sets the relationship of husband and wife firmly in the context of Christ and of God:

I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3).

We see here how the relationship of husband and wife is bracketed within the relationship of Christ with us, and of God with Christ. When we know how ‘Christ is the head of every man’, and how ‘God is the head of Christ’, then—and not otherwise—will we begin to understand what it means that ‘the husband is the head of his wife’.

How is God ‘the head’ of Christ? The Father gives all He is and all He has to the Son, holding nothing back:

just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself (John 5:26).

The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing (John 5:20).

The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands (John 3:35).

he gives the Spirit without measure (John 3:34).

We see this coming out in Jesus’ earthly life, but Jesus spoke of himself as having been ‘sent’ from the Father (John 5:30; 20:21; compare 16:28), and he looked to the Father for ‘the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed’ (John 17:1, 5). What we see in Jesus’ earthly life characterises his eternal relationship with the Father.

How did Jesus relate to having the Father as his ‘head’? He fully and gladly received and lived in all that the Father gave him to be and to do:

the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise (John 5:19).

My Father is still working, and I also am working (John 5:17).

the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him (John 8:29).

when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘ . . . I have come to do your will, O God’ (Hebrews 10:5, 7).

Jesus was able to say both ‘The Father and I are one’ (John 10:30) and ‘the Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28). The oneness was governed and made possible and workable by the Son having the Father as his ‘head’.

How then is Christ the ‘head’ of us? He does only what he sees the Father doing; so he acts towards us as the Father acts towards him: he gives all that he is and all that he has for us:

He [the Father] who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Romans 8:32).

I am the good shepherd . . . I lay down my life for the sheep . . . I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father (John 10:11, 15, 18).

Jesus . . . said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30).

Jesus saw the Father giving all He had—His only Son—in His love for us. So Jesus, in that same love for us, gave all he had—his very life. That is how in love he exercised his headship of us.

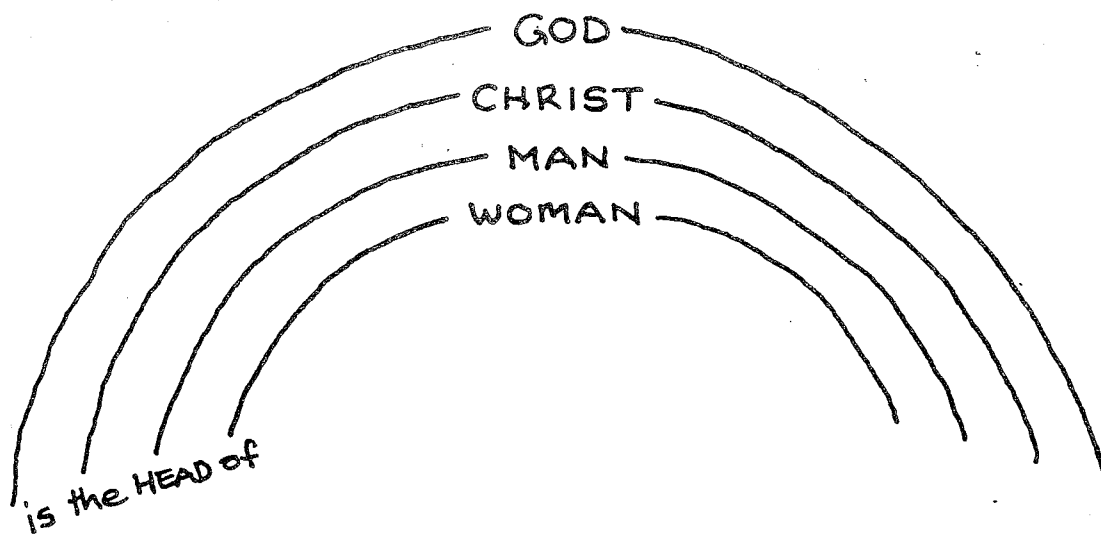
How then is a husband to be 'head' of his wife? It is determined by the way God is the head of Christ, and Christ of us:

the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:23, 25).

This self-giving is expressed in the marriage service when the bridegroom says to his bride:

with all that I am and all that I have  
I honour you.<sup>8</sup>

What we have seen so far may be depicted as follows:



God is the head of Christ, who is the head of the man, who is the head of the woman. Each provides to the next this wonderful covering of love and wholesome self-giving.

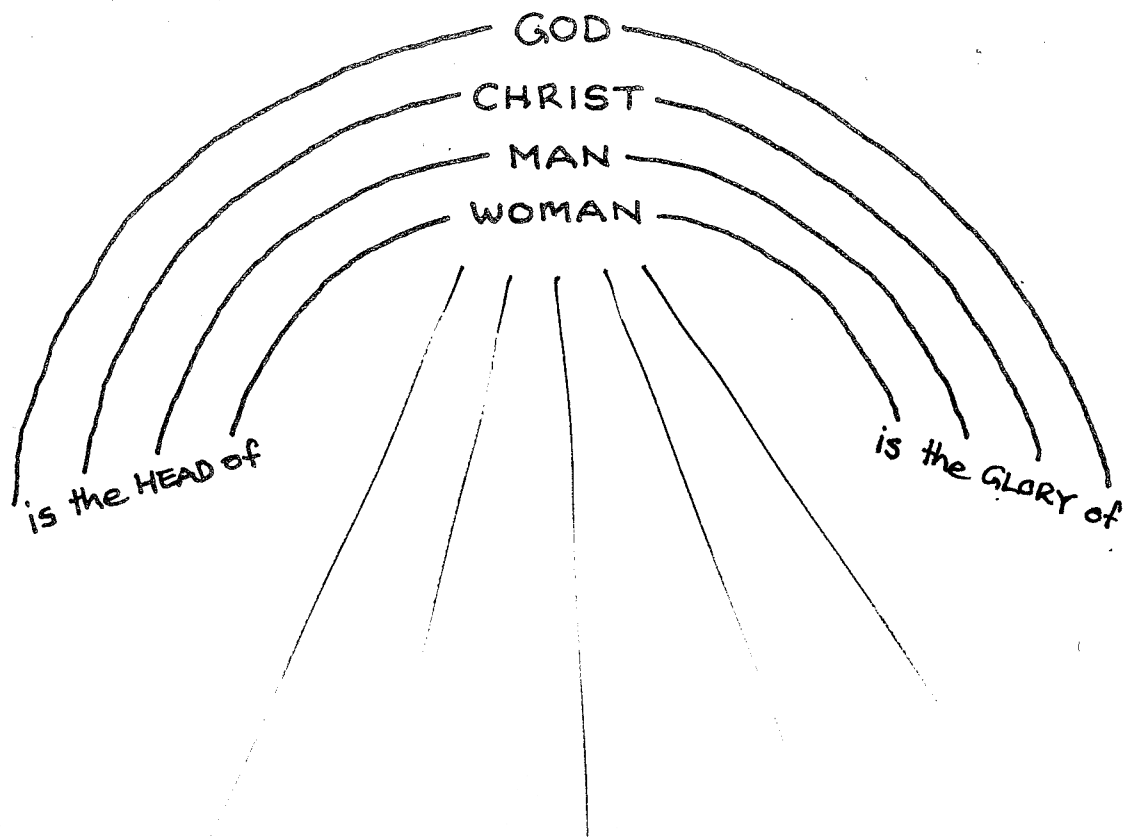
The result of this, as we might expect, is great glory all round. We have seen Jesus looking to the Father to give him the glory he had with the Father before the world existed (see John 17:5). The Father has indeed given to the Son all that the Father Himself is and has—all His glory—'so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father' (John 5:23). And so we see 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6). This comes to us as 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of

<sup>8</sup> *An Australian Prayer Book*, p. 551.

God' (2 Corinthians 4:4). Because of all that God has done in and for Christ, we can say of him: 'He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being' (Hebrews 1:3). God is the head of Christ, and Christ is the glory of God.

Jesus prayed to the Father for us, as he was about to lay down his life for us: 'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one' (John 17:22)—the oneness and the glory. So Paul is able to say of a man: 'he is the image and glory of God' (1 Corinthians 11:7, RSV)—just as we were created in the beginning to be in God's image, according to God's likeness (see Genesis 1:26, 27; 5:1–3). Christ is the head of a man, and the man is the glory of Christ who is the glory of God.

What then does Paul go on to say about the woman? In the context of the man being head of the woman, he says: 'woman is the glory of man' (1 Corinthians 11:7, RSV; compare Proverbs 12:4: 'A good wife is the crown of her husband'). Thus the man, in self-giving love, is the head of the woman, and so the woman is the glory of the man who is the glory of Christ who is the glory of God. Where, then, on all the earth, are we most likely to see the glory of God shining out? In the woman!<sup>9</sup> The full picture of the oneness, the headship and the glory, then, is as follows:



God is the head of Christ, who is the head of a man, who is the head of the woman. The woman is the glory of a man, who is the glory of Christ, who is the glory of God. All of this is without any diminution of the interdependent mutuality and equality between the woman and the man. Paul goes on to say, referring to the account of the creation of woman in Genesis 2:

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps there is some justice in this message seen on a fridge magnet: 'Sure God created Man before Woman, but then you always make a rough draft before the Final Masterpiece'!

man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man . . . Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman<sup>10</sup> . . . (1 Corinthians 11:8–9, 11–12).

This interdependent mutuality and equality is maintained because, as Paul concludes, ‘all things [that is, including the woman and the man together] come from God’ (1 Corinthians 11:12).

### **Questions for discussion**

- *What does the relationship between the Father and Christ, and between Christ and us, teach us about the relationship between a wife and a husband?*
- *What is the relationship between the oneness, the headship, and the glory? What would be the result of trying to have any one of those without the other?*

## **THE GLORY OF A WOMAN**

Let us look at how this can work out in practice, by reading the description of ‘a capable wife’ that comes at the end of the Book of Proverbs:

- <sup>10</sup> A capable wife who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.
- <sup>11</sup> The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.
- <sup>12</sup> She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life.
- <sup>13</sup> She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands.
- <sup>14</sup> She is like the ships of the merchant,  
she brings her food from far away.
- <sup>15</sup> She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her servant-girls.
- <sup>16</sup> She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- <sup>17</sup> She girds herself with strength,  
and makes her arms strong.
- <sup>18</sup> She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.
- <sup>19</sup> She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.
- <sup>20</sup> She opens her hand to the poor,  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- <sup>21</sup> She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
- <sup>22</sup> She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- <sup>23</sup> Her husband is known in the city gates,  
taking his seat among the elders of the land.

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<sup>10</sup> While this appears to be saying that everyone, male or female, is born of a woman, there may also be an oblique reference here to the promise in Genesis 3:15 that the true man, who would crush the serpent’s head—finally deal with all evil—would come as the offspring of the woman, bringing salvation to women and men alike.

- <sup>24</sup> She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
- <sup>25</sup> Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.
- <sup>26</sup> She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- <sup>27</sup> She looks well to the ways of her household,  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- <sup>28</sup> Her children rise up and call her happy;  
her husband too, and he praises her:
- <sup>29</sup> ‘Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all.’
- <sup>30</sup> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
- <sup>31</sup> Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the city gates (Proverbs 31:10–31).

She is a remarkable woman. She respects and supports her husband (v. 12), and he trusts and relies on her (11). She is clearly a key factor in his success (11, 23), and he greatly appreciates her (28, 29). She cares well and effectively for her family (14, 15, 27), and richly provides for them under all circumstances (21). No doubt her children, as well as her husband, benefit from her wise teaching (26), and they too recognise her happiness and worth (28, 29).

She is a competent, diligent and astute business-woman: in trade (14, 18, 24), real estate (16), primary production (16), and cottage industry—manufacturing and value-adding with a view to merchandising (13, 18, 19, 24); also in small business and personnel management (15).

In addition to this, she is active in the community: in her care for the poor and needy (20), in the salutary advice she has to offer (26), and in the public recognition that is due to her (31).

She is able to do all this without neglecting herself: she keeps herself fit (17), she dresses well (22), and has an inner strength and dignity by which she faces the future with cheerful assurance. Hers is no put-on or superficial beauty: the secret of her inner strength and beauty is that she ‘fears the LORD’—she has a personal relationship of respectful trust and obedient love towards God (30).

Just reading this through is enough to make us feel exhausted! Who ever said that the Bible puts women down, or says that a woman’s place is only in the kitchen or the nursery? This woman is no wimp, and no doormat. She is a person of great stature and attractiveness.

She is a woman of true glory, and her glory comes in the context of a rightly ordered relationship with God and with her husband.

### **Questions for discussion**

- *How surprised are we to find in the Bible such a range of highly developed skills and activities in the person of a woman?*
- *What does this tell us of the substantial nature of a woman’s glory?*
- *What connection is there between the woman’s glory and her relationship with her husband, and with God?*
- *What difference might it make if these relationships were disordered?*

## WHAT HAS GONE WRONG?

The Bible's account of how all the world's troubles began is in Genesis 3, just after what we have read of the coming-together of the woman and the man:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' (Genesis 3:1–5).

The temptation is for the man and the woman to go against what God has said in order to be God themselves—to decide for themselves what is right and wrong, apart from God, and over against Him:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).

The fatal decision is made in a reversal of the God-given order of relationships. The man and the woman had been given dominion over all the animals—including the serpent. The man had a particular responsibility for the woman, and the task of caring for and protecting the garden from evil intrusion. Both the man and the woman were subject to their Creator–Father God, under His blessing, to serve His good purpose for the creation. Now that order has been reversed: the woman has listened to the serpent and taken him at his word. The man has listened to the woman and gone with her against what God has said. The man and the woman together seek to defy and set themselves above God.

In particular, the man has abrogated the responsibility that he had. He was there, and he should have stopped it from happening, but instead he went right along with it. Paul later says: 'Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor' (1 Timothy 2:14). In other words, she was vulnerable, and he did not protect her; instead he saw clearly what was happening and went right into it deliberately with his eyes wide open. Ever thereafter in the Bible, what happened there is called the sin of Adam, not the sin of the woman (see Romans 5:12–21). Though the woman initiated it, at the instigation of the serpent, the man is rightly held responsible for what they both did.

Later in the Bible 'the serpent' is identified as 'that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world' (Revelation 12:9)—a mighty angelic being, created by God, who had sought to set himself on the throne of God.<sup>11</sup> Jesus called him 'a murderer from the beginning . . . a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44), one who came 'only to steal and kill and destroy' (John 10:10). This is the one we subjected ourselves to, just when we thought we were striking a blow for our own 'freedom'.

From this came all the troubles that we are heirs to:

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves (Genesis 3:7).

Where before they had nothing to be ashamed of, now that they have both sinned against God, there is something displeasing about themselves which they feel obliged to keep hidden

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<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:1–2, 11–19 tell us something of the dynamic that was operating here.

from themselves and each other. In particular their genital organs, formerly part of their one-flesh union with each other, have now become a source of potential division and harm, as we shall see:

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8).

Not only do they feel they must they hide something from each other; they also now feel they have to hide themselves from God, against whom they have sinned. When God comes for their customary walk together in the garden, instead of rushing gladly to meet Him, they run and hide:

But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ (Genesis 3:9).

God does not say to the woman, ‘What have you done?’ He says to the man, ‘Where are you?’ It’s a good question. The man is responsible for what they have both done, and he is not where he should have been:

He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ (Genesis 3:10–11).

This is the man’s opportunity to own up and confess. Instead he refuses to accept the responsibility that is his, and seeks to shift the blame—to the woman, and to God who gave her to him—to anyone but himself:

The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate’ (Genesis 3:12).

We can imagine what that did for the relationship between the woman and the man. Something would have died in that moment. Nonetheless, the woman is no less accountable to God for what she has done:

Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent tricked me, and I ate’ (Genesis 3:13).

‘The devil made me do it’ is an excuse we have used ever since to evade our own responsibility for what we have done wrong.

God then brought His good judgement on us all. The serpent first:

The LORD God said to the serpent,  
‘Because you have done this,  
cursed are you among all animals  
and among all wild creatures;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.  
I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel’ (Genesis 3:14–15).

Inherent in this judgement is a promise of rescue and blessing. The offspring of the serpent/Satan will always be at war with the offspring of the woman. But there will come an offspring of the woman who will tread down the serpent/Satan with his heel, while at the same time suffering the venom of the serpent to enter into him. You could not find a more succinct picture of what was to happen on the cross than that: Christ, the promised offspring born of a woman, took into himself all our sin—the devil’s poison—and bore it out to death, thereby disempowering Satan for ever and sealing his doom. As soon as we sinned against God, God already had His rescue plan in place, ‘the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago’ (2 Timothy 1:9, RSV).

Meanwhile God’s judgement had implications for the now-distorted relationship between the woman and the man, and their family life:

To the woman he said,  
‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you’ (Genesis 3:16).

Having children and bringing them up will now be a painful exercise—as the man and the woman were to find in the next chapter, when their eldest son murdered his younger brother. In their relationship with each other, the man will still be the head of the woman, and the woman will not be able to do anything about that, but she will want to control and manipulate him in any way she can (‘desire’ here is not so much physical desire as the desire to control; compare Genesis 4:7), and he will now try to use his position and strength to dominate her and put her down. This is where ‘the battle of the sexes’ began.

For the man, things will now be much harder. The earth itself will suffer and be unable to reach its full potential because of what the man has done:

And to the man he said,  
‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
and have eaten of the tree  
about which I commanded you,  
“You shall not eat of it,”  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
until you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return’ (Genesis 3:17–19).

God had said: ‘in the day that you eat of it you shall die’ (Genesis 2:17). Relational death towards God the Giver of life issued in death of the body.

Even so, God’s care for the human race was not over:

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them (Genesis 3:20–21).

In the face of death, the man still knew God’s promise of life, and by faith named his wife accordingly. And God in His care for them accommodated their need for covering by providing something more substantial than fig leaves. Even so, this was now at the cost of the lives

of other creatures. Furthermore, in His mercy, God chose not to perpetuate forever the monstrosity human beings had now become:

Then the LORD God said, ‘See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:22–24).

The ‘good life’ was now closed off to them. To bring them to His promised purpose of eternal life with Him, God would now need to bring them round another way—the way of the offspring who would conquer death and sin, and rise again to life, bringing us with him.

### **Question for discussion**

- *How much do we see this as our own story—for each one of us, and for the whole human race?*

## **CHRIST OUR TRUE HUSBAND**

What has God done to put us right? In the face of our original failure as a husband and wife, God has given His own Son to be the true and faithful husband to us, His wayward bride. Here is what Paul says about him:

Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior . . . Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish . . . For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body (Ephesians 5:23, 25–27, 29–30).

We are ‘one flesh’ with him—by his love in identifying with us and laying down his life for us, and by our faith and baptism into him and into what God has done for us in him.

Christ, then, models what husbands are to be in marriage:

the husband is the head of the wife *just as* Christ is the head of the church . . . Husbands, love your wives, *just as* Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . *In the same way*, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, *just as* Christ does for the church . . . ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself (Ephesians 5:23, 25, 28–29, 31–33; emphasis added).

If a husband is ‘one flesh’ with his wife, then the best thing he can do for himself is to love her!

See also what Paul says about the church in relation to Christ:

Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior . . . the church is subject to Christ . . . Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:23, 24–25).

The church then, as Christ’s bride, becomes the model of how a wife is to conduct herself in relationship with her husband:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands *as you are to the Lord* . . . Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands . . . a wife should respect her husband (Ephesians 5:21–22, 24, 33).

Wives and husbands will not come to this of their own accord. Only by being together in relationship with Jesus Christ will they know what the reality is, and be able to live freely and gladly within it.

A young woman, whose relationship with her father had not been good, was now faced with a relationship with her fiancée, and she was struggling with this teaching. Even though she wanted to be loved in that way, she could not come at it. Then she heard about the forgiveness and cleansing that Christ effected for her on the cross. She received it and believed it, and this relationship issue was no longer a problem for her.

### **Question for discussion**

- *What difficulties do we have with this teaching? How much does this have to do with our willingness to know Jesus as our Saviour and Lord?*

## **LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE IN YOUR HEARTS**

In this age, which is still not the final age to come, we still live with the propensities of the judgement and the curse in Genesis 3, even when we belong to Christ. In particular, we will still find our fleshly selves wanting to revert to Genesis 3:16, where the wife wants to control her husband, and the husband wants to dominate his wife. With this in mind, Paul has some wise words to say to Christian husbands and wives:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly (Colossians 3:18–19).

A wife will still have a tendency to want to make her husband do what she wants him to do, but she does not need to do that any more. A husband will find in himself a tendency to put undue pressure on his wife at her expense to suit himself, but he is to recognise this and replace it, as he can now do in Christ, with tenderness and love.

All of this is in the context of an exhortation to the whole church, which applies no less to the married state:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:12–17).

The apostle Peter similarly sets the relationship of husband and wife in the context of all that God has done for us in Christ:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing (1 Peter 2:24–3:9).

There are parallels here with what we saw of the 'capable wife' in Proverbs 31. Even though she may be in a 'weaker' position than the man perhaps physically, she has no shortage of inner strength and beauty. In the mutuality of their 'unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind', they are indeed a couple under the blessing of God.

### **Question for discussion**

- *How can we encourage one another to be realistic about our fleshly tendencies while living together in the fullness of the blessing of Christ?*