

Genesis 2.15-25: The Design for Marriage

The Duty of Adam [vv.15-17]

v.15: Adam was not created for a life of *rest* and *relaxation* in a garden paradise. Rather, he was enabled to use his body and mind for God. He was given the occupation of “dressing” and “keeping” (guarding) the garden. The word “dress” means to ‘work’ or ‘serve’, implying physical labour in service for God. Adam was also to ‘guard’ (exercise *great care* over) the garden (cf. 3.24), a word often used to describe observing spiritual duties or keeping commandments (Leviticus 18.5). Adam could ‘guard’ the garden in the sense of obeying the commandment of God (cf. vv.16-17). The word may also be a hint at the future encroachment of Satan. Both “dress” and “keep” are words used to describe the work of the priests and Levites in the tabernacle (cf. Numbers 3.7-8). There is therefore a sense in which Adam was engaged in *priestly* activity, maintaining the order and sanctity of the garden. This was a careful stewardship.

Clearly *work* was an important part of representing God and serving Him, even before the Fall. Work is a gift of God, not a punishment for sin. *Manual* and *mental* labour is part of God’s character (John 5.17) and a divine institution for the good of man. It was only after the Fall that work was coupled with *toil* and *sweat* (3.19). Sinful man needs to be fully occupied and thus Christians should be industrious (unto the Lord) and occupy their time properly, buying up opportunities to serve Him for His glory. The trouble today is not believers who won’t work, but those that work too much – often with the wrong priorities (secular rather than spiritual).

v.16: This is the first time the word “commanded” is used in Scripture. Only Adam, Noah (6.22; 7.9, 16) and Abraham (21.4) are recorded as being commanded of God in the book of Genesis. Adam was obviously created with a capacity to obey God. FB Hole notes, “*He was put under law in the simplest way, for the law consisted of only one commandment and that commandment concerned with only one tree. The Divine command was cut down to the barest minimum, just sufficient to keep before him that as the creature he must be subject to the Creator and walk in obedience.*” Adam was a strict vegetarian. He was encouraged to eat of “every” tree in the garden for his own nourishment and enjoyment, and to do so “freely”, i.e. to his heart’s content. **v.17:** But one tree was forbidden, the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”. The purpose of the prohibition was to test Adam’s devotion to, and love for, God. Would he be satisfied with his role and place or seek, as Satan, to ascend to God (Ezekiel 28.2)? This tree is a contrast to the ‘tree’ of Calvary. Because God forbade man to eat of the first tree, Satan used every artifice to *get* man to eat of it. Contrariwise, because God now invites men to eat of the fruit of the tree of Calvary, Satan uses all his powers to *prevent* men eating of it (AW Pink). The consequences for disobedience were severe. The expression “in the day” implies a *fixed certainty* rather than *absolute immediacy* (though promptness is indicated, cf. 1 Kings 2.37, 42). Death was certain if Adam disobeyed God. “Thou shalt surely die” is literally, ‘dying you will die’ using the same Hebrew root word *twice* to make the meaning emphatic. In this form it appears *fourteen* times in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Genesis 20.7; 1 Samuel 14.44; 1 Kings 2.37, 42; Jeremiah 26.8) and describes the announcement of a death sentence by royal decree. Physical death would be the eventual, but fixed outcome of Adam’s sin (5.5). In scripture, death has the basic idea of *separation*. **Physical** death involves the separation of spirit and body (James 2.26). In addition, immediately that Adam sinned, he also died **spiritually** – meaning he damaged his relationship with God (*and* his wife) and was separated from unhindered communion with Him.

The Design for Marriage [vv.18-25]

v.18: In a contrast to the “very good” of 1.31, it was “not good” (or ‘fitting’) that Adam should be “alone”. He lacked a corresponding companion and was therefore unable to fulfil the design of creation to be “fruitful” and “multiply” (1.22). “I will make him” can be translated “I will make *for* him” (cf. 1 Corinthians 11.9). God would make Adam “an help” that was “meet” for him. As a helper she would not be his subordinate, but a supplier of strength in that which was lacking, that his duties might be fulfilled effectively. Woman was made by God to meet man’s deficiency. The word “help” is used 19 times in the OT, 16 of those times it describes God! It suggests *spiritual help* and *strength* (Psalm 20.2), *wisdom* (2 Chronicles 26.15), *encouragement* (Psalm 28.7), *support* in difficult times (Deuteronomy 33.7) *comfort* (Psalm 121.1-2), *counsel* (Hosea 13.9), *care* (1 Chronicles 15.26) and *companionship* (2 Chronicles 32.8). The Hebrew word for “meet” literally means “according to the opposite of him”. She would be his *counterpart* and *complement*, corresponding to all Adam was. This verse is a beautiful reminder of the relationship of Christ to His bride (the church). Indeed, the church is described as “the fulness” (complement) of Christ (Ephesians 1.23). She is a companion to “answer perfectly to Him” in mind, in affections and in moral state (CA Coates). LM Grant comments, “*The Lord Jesus, in becoming Man, has a nature that is not satisfied without the companionship of one who has the closest relationship to Him, that is, the church of God, the bride who is dear to His heart and who shares in the position and blessings that are His.*”

v.19: To emphasise that a suitable counterpart to Adam was lacking in the animal creation, we are reminded that the LORD God (had) “formed every beast” out of the ground – the same source as Adam (2.7). These animals were brought to him that he might “call” (name) them. This was the first exercise of Adam’s dominion and authority. **v.20:** Adam gave names to *three* categories of animals; the “cattle” (domesticated), “fowl” (birds) and “every beast of the field” (wild). The marvellous intellect of unfallen man is suggested in his discerning something about the creature to appropriately name it. Amongst the whole animal kingdom, there was no fitting companion for Adam. He was now keenly aware of his own uniqueness, and ready to appreciate the gift of the woman. If they were created together, Adam may have thought that he was better off without her, but now he knew better!¹

v.21: In order to make the woman, God caused Adam to fall into a “deep sleep” (cf. 15.12; 1 Samuel 26.12). The same word is used to describe the condition of Israel today (Isaiah 29.10, cf. Romans 11.8). It would almost seem as if Adam had died in order that he might obtain a bride to share his life (cf. Revelation 13.8). The word translated “rib” is better translated “side”. God took a part of Adam’s side, which presumably contained both flesh *and* bone (cf. v.23). Matthew Henry famously said, “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.” Eve was made to stand at Adam’s side and be his helper. **v.22:** From this flesh and bone, God “made” a woman. The word means to ‘build’ or ‘construct’ as a *city* (4.17) or *altar* (8.20) and implies patient labour. Note that Eve was not *born*, but *built*, like the church which is the body of Christ. It had a commencement (on the day of Pentecost) and is presently in building (Matthew 16.18). The woman was “brought” to the man as God’s gift to Adam indicating that the institution of marriage was originated and established by God Himself. **v.23:** After the procession of animals, “this is now” conveys Adam’s delight in ‘now, finally, at last!’ setting eyes on a suitable complement. The phrase “bone of my bones” and “flesh of my flesh” is used elsewhere of blood relatives (29.14) or expressing a close, enduring relationship (bond) of loyalty and commitment (2 Samuel 5.1). The image of shared flesh implies that what affects one affects the other (Ephesians 5.28-29). Adam, the man (*ish*), names her “woman” (*ishah*).² This is a *generic* name which he derives from his own thus acknowledging the woman to be his equal. He will later give her a *personal* name (3.20). Adam’s twofold naming of his wife implies headship and authority. Note the perfection of the type. The woman was part of Adam’s body before she became his wife. Likewise, the church is the “body of Christ” but awaits her formal presentation to Christ as wife (Ephesians 5.27). As Eve found her beginning, life, purpose, dignity and security in Adam so we find the same in Christ.

v.24: The word “therefore” is not an extension of the quotation from Adam. Rather, Moses is adding an editorial comment to explain how the events of vv.22-23 provide the foundation for contemporary practice in marriage. For a marriage to be established, a man must “leave his father and his mother”. This does not mean *abandoning* parents (cf. Matthew 15.4), but rather ‘to loosen’ or ‘depart’ from his parents’ home (authority) to establish his own sphere of headship. He has a new and primary responsibility towards his wife – a new obligation (loyalty) that overrides even duty to one’s parents. This does not necessarily require *geographical* separation as in ancient Israel, sons did not move away when they married, but lived near their parents and inherited their father’s land.

The man will “cleave” to his wife. The word has the basic idea of *sticking like glue*, or ‘clinging’ describing the intended *inseparable* and *permanent* nature of marriage. The word “cleave” is also used to describe the keeping of a covenant – which marriage is (Malachi 2.14). The actions of “leaving” and “cleaving”, i.e. marriage (not sexual intercourse), constitute husband and wife as “one flesh” – a phrase which describes their *physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional* union. In heaven’s arithmetic, one plus one equals one! The word describes a compound unity - although these two are different individuals, they think and act as one complete person.

v.25: The reference to “nakedness” is introduced as a precursor to the events of the next chapter (3.7, 10-11). The word is generally used in a *negative* sense – as a description of the *poor* (Job 24.7), a sign of *shame* or *guilt* (Genesis 3.7; 7.10-11) or as a reference to *birth* (Job 1.21). Here, however, in innocence and before the entrance of sin they were “not ashamed”. Not only was there no embarrassment, but there was also no fear of exploitation or evil. They could look upon each other’s nakedness without any lust being involved. Sadly, with the loss of innocence in the Fall, they would feel shame and temptation and so need to protect their vulnerability by the barrier of clothing (3.7).

¹ The creating of “the man” *before* “the woman” is related to the truth of headship and noted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.8-9 and 1 Timothy 2.13.

² There are a number of words in the OT translated “man”. Amongst them are: *enōš* (frail, mortal man), *geber* (strong man) and *ish* (a man of high degree, worth and dignity). The first occurrence of the word *ish* is here in Genesis 2.23. In other words, there could be no man of worth, dignity, wisdom and energy apart from *ishah* (the woman) being there to complement, balance and perfect him.