

From *A Sacred Bond: A Marital Relationship Designed By God*  
By Romey F. Swanson, Jr.  
Edited by Ken Walker  
Published by New Start Ministries, October 2013

# *Introduction*

## *Setting the Scene*

Picture this with me if you will. The place: family court. The gavel lowers and the sound of wood hitting wood echoes with a “wham” as the judge says, “Divorce granted.” A marriage that began with delight has ended with disillusionment. What began with excitement and expectation has culminated in bitterness and hostility.

There is another tragedy (not discussed often enough) that is just as tragic as a legal divorce—a psychological divorce. That is where a couple continues to live together, but with minimal communication. Their relationship is shattered. For all practical purposes, the marriage is dead. In both cases a Christian family has been destroyed because two people have failed to recognize the sacredness of marriage and what love is really all about.

All around us we see shattered promises and broken relationships. In marital relationships in society, as well as in Christian marriages, husbands and wives have lost sight of the pledge: “‘Til death do us part.” Love is often defined in all kinds of terms—except commitment. Despite discouraging societal trends, we who call ourselves Christians must keep this awareness of the seriousness of our commitment before us. Marriage is a permanent covenant and thus contains an eternal quality, regardless of the circumstances. Through the concept of a marriage covenant we need to understand that in marriage one must be a person of one’s word. We need to uphold our vows and the marriage covenant stipulations. However, in today’s society (and in the church) it is relatively easy to get in and out of promises. People make such excuses as, “I changed my mind,” or “I just don’t feel that way about you anymore.” We have allowed our word to become cheap. However, Jesus considered one’s word equal to one’s promise.

Biblical Hebrew has no special term for “promise.” Rather, the term *dabar*, often translated “word,” “speech,” or “commandment,” is also used for “promise” (see Joshua 21: 45). In Scripture *debar* carries a broad range of meanings. For example, *debar* may refer to a concrete “act” or “event” (see 1 Kings 11:41 and 1 Chronicles 29:29). Thus, when *dabar* is rendered “promise,” it implies something of substance. It is a pledge of one’s good faith or a promise to keep that word through dedicated action. Only when the vows spoken at the marriage altar reflect a deeper understanding of the “word” conveyed by *dabar* will the marriage survive.

The essence of marriage—the resulting content, bonds, and relationship—is a lifelong covenant. From the Hebraic perspective, marriage is a “sacred bond,” a “holy relationship,” “an act of being set apart unto God and each other.” To understand biblical marriage is to understand the biblical concept of covenant.

Because these words were not dreamed up by human reason or emotion, but were spoken by God, the Jewish idea of covenant entails much more than a contractual arrangement. It is about *holy* matrimony. One’s wife is not merely an *ishah*, or *woman*, but an *eshet brit*, a “woman of the covenant,” where “covenant” refers to the covenant of marriage.

God designed marriage and He has specifications for this relationship. Therefore, would it not be wise to take a strong look at marriage through spiritual eyes? In order to do this, we must start at the beginning where God instituted marriage and performed the first marriage.

### **Marriage is the apex of God’s creation**

Marriage is God’s final and finest creative act. He made man and woman to be one flesh: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:26-27, KJV). Spiritually, God created man and woman equally—in His image. This was the final creative act of God’s creation on the sixth and final day of His work. Humans represent his crowning achievement. Since it is by design, it is good. As soon as He finished creating them, God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply” (verse 28).

Now look at the second account of the creation of man and woman: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18, KJV). Some Hebrew scholars think this would be better translated that it is not good that man “be *lonely*.” God put Adam into a sleep and took from him his counterpart. The word for *help meet* in Hebrew

(or *helper* in other translations) is *ezer kenegdo*. The term basically means one who is the exact counterpart, set opposite the other. It literally means physical and spiritual equality and adequacy. Man and woman are symbolically matched to one another in a mutually dependent relationship—hence the expression, “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Thus, when God said He would make a “helper suitable for him (i.e., the man),” He likely meant that woman would be a power equal to a man. She is his match and corresponds to him in every way.

A woman is a help mate. Not in the sense that God gave her to the man so that she could help him meet his bills, do the dishes, and do the laundry. It has to do with a woman’s very personhood. Indeed, God did not intend for a woman to function merely in the helping role, He created her to be his partner in every sense of the word.

Adam is thrilled when he sees what God has made for him and has brought to him. God did not give her a name, but allows Adam to name her. After declaring: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23, NIV), Adam names her “woman,” or *esha* in Hebrew, because she came from a man (*esh* in Hebrew). This is the first sentiment in the scriptures in regards to romance.

What do they become? This is the key verse: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). The King James Version puts it: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.”

According to God, the man must leave behind his previous social environment, his family, and you create a new environment with his wife and you cleave to her. “Cleave” means to “be glued together.” As you come together physically, emotionally, and spiritually, you become one flesh. In a very real sense, you come by God’s plan into a wholeness and completeness as one person in the companionship of marriage.

An important concept of marriage in the Bible is the concept of partnership, or togetherness. This union is of great consequence to God. In this sense the husband and wife are divinely sanctioned—by God. In a marriage, which is divinely sanctioned, the couple sanctifies the divine and brings honor to God and to His name.

The union of marriage involves certain transcendent values. It is far more than joining body and emotions, establishing a joint checking account, owning cars together, or bearing children. There is something of great spiritual significance, which is hinted at in a number of Scriptures. To repeat Genesis 1:27 (KJV): “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” When the Christian man and woman

unite into one flesh in marriage, in the spiritual sense they are reconstituting the original Adam and Eve. They are back in the Garden of Eden again; man is whole and complete because he is no longer lonely.

When a male and female come together in the covenant of marriage, they become the oneness here on earth that reflects the oneness of God in heaven. God is far above and beyond us, yet incorporates the masculine and the feminine. So when we combine the male and female in holy marriage, we reflect the oneness of God and his name on this earth. This honors Him and sanctifies Him. This is why the word for marriage in Hebrew is the word *kiddushin*, from the word, *kaodsh*, which means holy. A Christian marriage is holy, sanctified, and God honoring. It is a lifelong covenant.

### **God does have a plan for marriage**

Marriage is not an afterthought on the part of God. Nor is it an accommodation to some lustful impulses that you may have. Marriage is the apex of God's creation. As I stated earlier, God has specifications for the marriage relationship. Any attempt to build a marriage without following His plans is to invite failure. In Ephesians 3:17 Paul says that we are to be rooted and grounded in "love." What this says to me is that love is the soil in which we are to grow—the foundation on which we are to build our lives. Genuine love is the foundation of all relationships, but particularly marriage.

Ephesians 5:21-33 contains what I believe is a complete biblical picture of what God intended for husbands and wives. The instructions contained in this portion of the Bible are of utmost importance. Understanding this passage is necessary in order to comprehend how God has designed the marriage. And, to grasp the principles on which a husband and wife can enjoy the heavenly Father's expressed desire for their union. With this declaration in mind, let us begin our journey through Ephesians 5:21-33.