

For a
GLORY
and a
COVERING

A Practical Theology of Marriage

Douglas Wilson

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Special thanks to John & Donna Grauke for the glorious bed.

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For the four households,
and all the others to come.

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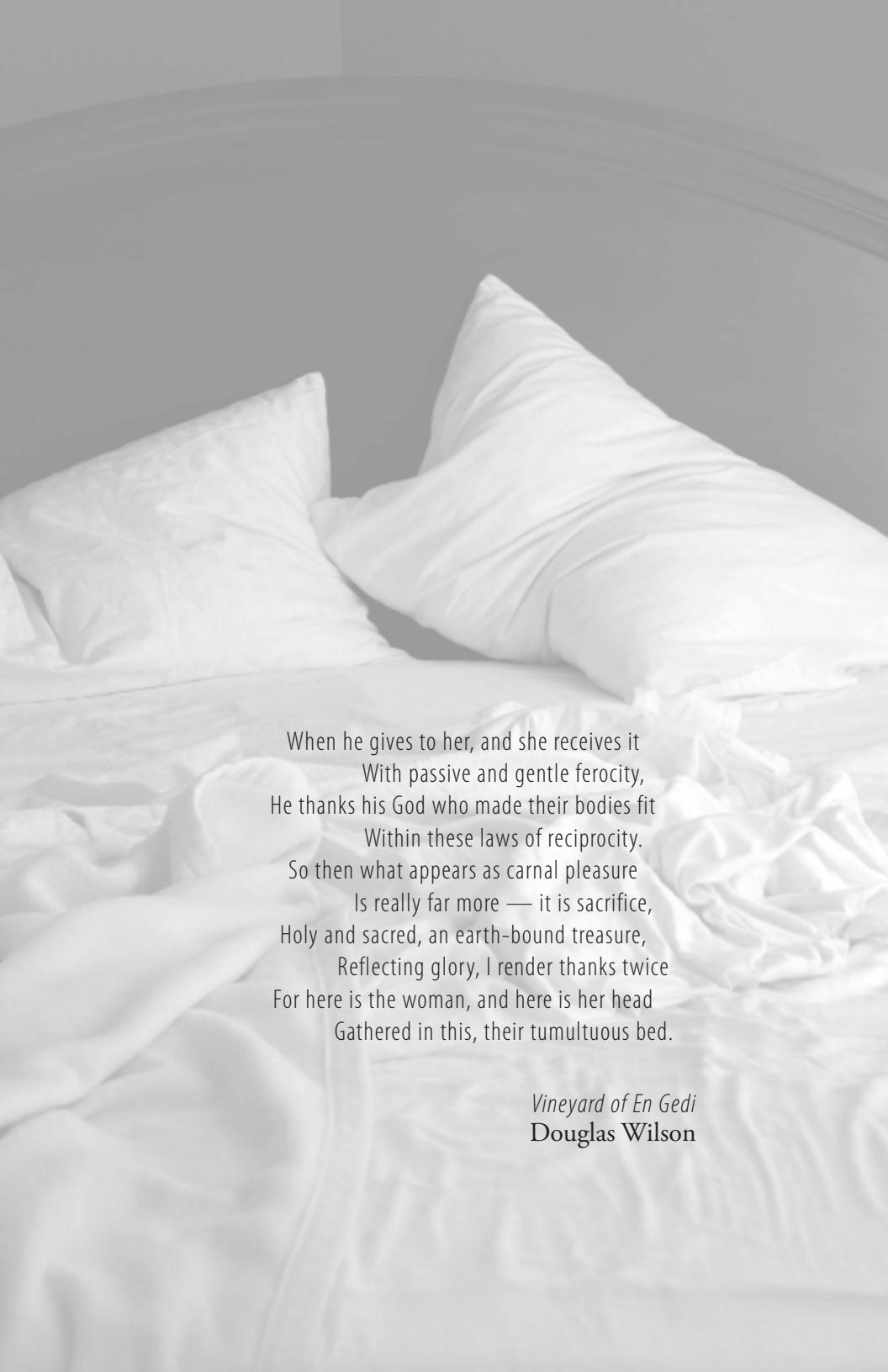
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When he gives to her, and she receives it
With passive and gentle ferocity,
He thanks his God who made their bodies fit
Within these laws of reciprocity.
So then what appears as carnal pleasure
Is really far more — it is sacrifice,
Holy and sacred, an earth-bound treasure,
Reflecting glory, I render thanks twice
For here is the woman, and here is her head
Gathered in this, their tumultuous bed.

Vineyard of En Gedi
Douglas Wilson

PREFACE

I began my second book on marriage, *Federal Husband*, somewhat apologetically:

Anyone who undertakes to add to the number of modern books on marriage had better have some good reason. This is particularly true if the author in question is doing for the second time and all apparently unprovoked. One would think our interest in marriage books would be waning by this time; like the woman in the gospels, the more our doctors treat us, the worse we get.

But as the years go by, I become less apologetic for repeating myself. This newest book began as a series of sermons for the saints at Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. The reason for yet another set of messages on this subject was a pastoral one. As our church had grown significantly in numbers, we have wanted to go over the importance of godly marriage regularly. And as our children have grown up and married in our midst, we recognize they may not remember the messages that were preached when they were in junior high. We have consequently seen a constant need to repeat certain things over again: “To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe” (Phil. 3:1).

At the same time, while it is important to go over certain principles repeatedly, there is a danger to this as well. That danger is to simply repeat verbatim what has been said before, and in the same way it has been said before. After a little bit of that, the saints

will be begging for messages on supralapsarianism. So what I have sought to do here is develop more detailed applications for some of the principles set down in *Reforming Marriage*, *Federal Husband* and *My Life for Yours*, and to do so in a way that explicitly grounds those principles in the nature of our triune God. Those who have read the previous books will encounter some echoes, but nevertheless there is a large amount of new material here. Those who have not read the previous books should be able to read this one as a stand-alone treatment of biblical marriage.

Of course, I have to thank God for Nancy. She is the kind of wife that makes it possible for a man like me to write a book on marriage.

Why This Book Might Not Do You Any Good

Marriage is instituted by the triune God, and when rightly understood it is one of the most glorious pictures of the gospel ever given to man. And of course, when it is abused (as it often is), it presents a potent false gospel as well. That false gospel either seduces people into a sentimental mess, attracting them on false grounds and with false promises, or it presents an unwelcome caricature that causes people to be repelled. But as Christians who want to structure all of our lives on the bedrock of the Scriptures, we should certainly do the same with marriage, and we will quickly discover that this way of living presents the world with a *stark* alternative.

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (Heb. 13:4–5)

The author of Hebrews tells us that marriage is an honorable state and that marriage does not somehow become dishonorable because of the marriage bed—a thought that some with prudish tendencies might be tempted to embrace. Marriage is honorable, and the bed is undefiled and undefiling. This does not mean the marriage bed cannot be defiled, for God will judge those who defile marriage by means of adultery or other forms of immorality.

Having said this, he goes on to say that our “conversation” (i.e., our way of life) needs to be free of covetousness (v. 5a). It is not an accident that this exhortation immediately follows the verse on marriage. Be *content* with what you have, he says—and this includes the spouse you have been given. God will never leave or forsake us (v. 5b), and that is grounds for comfort and contentment.

So why begin our discussion of marriage here? We can easily see how discontent leads to certain obvious sins, including sins that can plague a marriage. For example, a man’s discontent can breed lust, causing him to violate the tenth commandment by desiring another man’s wife. Or discontent can breed financial disaster and debt-slavery, which in turn places a great deal of pressure on a marriage. But these are not the central reasons I want to begin this book on marriage at this point. The great problem with discontented people (and that means discontented husbands and wives) is that they are the most *unteachable* people on earth.

It is important therefore for us to begin all our considerations with this basic lesson. All of us must thank God for our condition and estate: “Giving thanks always *for all things* unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20). “Giving thanks for all things” is one of the prerequisites for understanding *anything* that St. Paul says in the following verses about marriage between a man and a woman, or between Christ and the Church. The one thing that discontented people cannot do is give thanks, and therefore they cannot have the wisdom that contentment brings.

Very often, discontented married people are former discontented *unmarried* people. In other words, discontent is very rarely fixed by rearranging the furniture or by walking from over here to over there. Wherever you go, *there you are*. And if you are unteachable, marriage does not alter what you are, but rather amplifies what you are. If you are discontented, marriage will provide you with little more than newer and more complex ways of getting into sin.

There are three kinds of unmarried adults. The first are called to that station by God and are uniquely gifted for it. The apostle Paul was in this category (1 Cor. 7:7). Almost by definition, contentment is not an issue here. The second group consists of those who are dealing with a hard providence, such as single parents. They want to be married, and they don't like being unmarried, so the temptation to discontent is very real. The third category consists of lazy people who need to get off the dime. The problem here is a spurious discontent—being discontent with all the lack of potential spouses out there. (But as we consider these categories from a distance, let us be careful to mind our own business—we shouldn't be trying to assign every single person we know to a particular category.) My primary exhortation is for those in the second category. Often unmarried people in this station are afraid of contentment “because if I get content with my condition, then God will make me *stay* this way, and because I am content, I won't *care* anymore!” But remember that being discontented is like taking ugly pills, and they are addictive—you will find yourself still taking them even after you get married.

The word of the Lord is this: If we are discontent in our marriages, we are not capable of learning anything fundamental about marriage, and the more we refuse to learn, the more we *think* we know, because we have all kinds of “stories.” The irony is that today so much material on marriage is actually used (whether the authors or seminar speakers intend this or not) to inflame *discontent*: “Lord, here am I. Change *him*.” And if someone calls us on our own discontent, we will display that unteachable spirit mentioned earlier: “The Scripture doesn't apply here”; “He doesn't know my situation.” But God does know your situation, and He is the one who inspired St. Paul to introduce his teaching on marriage by saying that we should give thanks for *all* things.

Marriage is a glorious thing, and this truth has ramifications. There were two aspects of the Israelite camp in the wilderness that ought never go together: the Shekinah glory in the sky and the grumbling on the ground. Far too many Christian marriages are

like that. Husbands and wives complain and moan in the midst of glory, in the very shadow of stupefying glory.

Another reason couples do not profit from teaching on marriage is their confusion of letter and spirit. We have seen how discontent is a universal corrosive and how those who are discontent *cannot* learn to live biblically in the married state. But discontent is not the only sin in the world, and we have to consider a few other reasons why many professing Christians might not be able to learn what it means to be a godly husband or wife. We are not yet building the house of marriage; we are simply trying to get the foundation lines straight.

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. . . . Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech. (2 Cor. 3:1–3, 12)

There is a basic principle here that has a profound application to marriage. Paul doesn't need to commend himself (v. 1), because the Corinthians already are that commendation (v. 2). The Corinthians themselves are written, not with ink, and not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart (v. 3). Paul trusts in God for all this and not in himself at all (v. 4–5). God has made him a minister of "the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit." And this is the point where he says the Spirit gives life *and the letter kills* (v. 6). Now if the glory of the older testament was too glorious to look at, and *it* was temporary (v. 7), how much more will the ministry of the Holy Spirit be even more glorious (v. 8)? If condemnation is glorious (rightly understood), how much more will the ministry of righteousness be glorious (v. 9)? The glory that came makes the older glory seem inglorious by comparison (v. 10).

The old was glorious, the new even more so (v. 11). This being the case, the apostles used “great plainness of speech” (v. 12).

Now what does he mean when he says the “letter kills”? Paul is clearly *not* arguing against ever writing things down, for his argument that the letter kills and the Spirit gives life is an argument that he himself wrote down. *The issue is therefore not “the letters” in themselves.* The issue is not paper and ink. Paul is addressing a hermeneutical issue—do we interpret words in the power of the Spirit, or do we just blunder clunkily through the literal meanings of some of the words, sharpening and flattening as we go? Rightly understood by faith, the older covenant was glorious. Wrongly understood, the letters were letters of condemnation, and those letters were letters of death. Rightly understood by faith, the New Testament realities are far more glorious. Wrongly understood, the higher the letters go, the greater the fall when the Spirit of God does not give understanding. This means that in the time of the New Covenant, the consequences for hearing the Word in a distorted way are far more severe than they ever were in the Old Covenant.

So, how does this apply to marriage? As St. Paul might say, “Much in every way.” Those who want to learn how to be married—to be “the wife of a happy husband” or the husband who “loves his wife as Christ did the church”—must understand how quickly the standards involved can turn into a newer, better, and higher *law*. But the law (taken in this sense) only increases and provokes transgression (Rom. 3:20; 5:20). Understood by faith, it of course does not do this, but when the Letter is there and the Holy Spirit is not, the results are condemnation and the very impiety that “the high standards” are vainly trying to keep away. “Standards,” including very high standards, by themselves do not provide any power for living up to them. It follows that any “standards for marriage” are powerless in themselves as well.

There are many familial issues that readily fall into this category: headship, decision-making, submission, home schooling, bread baking, domesticity, Christian schools, dress standards, head

coverings, entertainment standards, curriculum decisions, and much, much more. As Tom Hovestol once memorably put it, “It struck me that something about rightness is wrong.”¹ Conservative Christians have a consistent problem that comes from the desire to “be right,” and this includes “being right” on traditional family issues. But as my father faithfully taught me, there is a deeper right than being right. As a marriage counselor, I have seen more than a few marriages in which husbands and wives had “high standards” for Christian conduct, and yet tolerated and advanced amazingly toxic attitudes in the home.

As Paul taught this fundamental principle of Christian living, he was consistently misrepresented as one who was attacking the law itself. This distortion of his position even continues down to the present, and the same thing happens when someone offers any lesser criticisms on the same principle. The conversation goes something like this:

“Excuse me, but I think you are holding that book upside down.”

“What do you have against Jane Austen?”

“Nothing, but I think you would get more out of it if you held it right side up.”

“Well, I cannot believe the arrogance! What’s with your hostility to classic literature?”

Clearly, criticism of holding the book upside down *is not a criticism of the book*. In the same way, pointing out misuses of the law is not the same as attacking the law itself.

This brings us to the need for “great plainness of speech” that Paul mentioned. This particular sin is not automatically impossible just because we live in the New Covenant era. The same patterns of temptation arise again and again in every era, and they afflict us down to the present. The apostle addresses the problem, in talking to New Covenant saints, and he speaks to them bluntly. It’s as if he is saying, “You need to get this straight, and if you do

¹ Tom Hovestol, *Extreme Righteousness* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 20.

not get it straight, the *higher* the standards you have for your marriage, the *worse* your marital condition will be. It's for this reason I use great plainness of speech." The hardness such pietism causes in marriage requires a jackhammer, not a feather duster.

The only high standards that are at all spiritually safe are standards that are born from gratitude, thanksgiving, and gladness and simplicity of heart (Acts 2:46). Grace is foundational, and so the higher you want the structure to go, the more necessary it is for that foundation to be solid and straight. From a thankful heart, all things may be received, including the great gifts of discipline and standards (1 Tim. 4:4–5). But without that gratitude pervading everything, strict views on marriage will simply create an earthly hell for yourself and others.

There is a third reason why this book might not do you any good. The first reason we considered was discontent, because discontented people are profoundly unteachable. The second stumbling block is our tendency to trust in the letter of the law instead of trusting in the Spirit of God. This leads to death, even if the "law" concerned is made up of a great deal of good advice about marriage. And we now come to the third major hindrance, which is the temptation to "fix the other one first."

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.
(Mt. 7:12)

This fundamental orientation that the Lord requires of us is commonly called the Golden Rule. The Lord teaches that we should take whatever we desire to have done for us and use *that* as the guide and standard for how we undertake to treat *others*. Moreover, He tells us that this *is* the law and the prophets—it sums up what God requires of all of us in all our dealings with others.

Now let's bring this teaching into marriage. Our problem is that the husband knows what verses his wife ought to be heeding, and if we were to ask her, she would probably be able to point out

the passages that he is neglecting. In short, when it comes to marriage, we neglect the fundamental biblical demeanor of Christian living. In other words, a man needs to remember that his wife is his *neighbor*, and a wife needs to understand that her husband is her neighbor. To love our neighbor as ourselves is *another* summary of the law and the prophets (Mt. 22:38–40). That husbands should love their wives as they love themselves is the apostle Paul’s profound application of this same basic principle (Eph. 5:28–29). The point is that the general principle for all Christian demeanor *does* in fact apply to marriage. How could it not?

All of us are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. The responsibility all of us have as Christians to love others as ourselves and to put the interests of the other person first is a universal responsibility. This means a godly Christian man is of necessity going to be a godly Christian husband, and a godly Christian woman is going to be a godly Christian wife. But when it comes to marriage, far too many Christians believe they have the right to be rude, thoughtless, tacky, bitter, demanding, or angry—as though marital closeness eradicated all responsibility to live as a civil human being. When called on this, we defend ourselves by saying that the *other* one is not obeying the Golden Rule: “*She* started it”; “*He* won’t listen.” But to do this (and in some cases, even to *see* it) is a violation of the Golden Rule. The rule is *not* to “do unto others as you imagine they are doing unto you.”

Many marriages are in bad shape because people assume that good marriages can somehow be separated from a basic godly demeanor throughout the course of our lives. As long as husbands and wives commit this particular error, the words of life with regard to marriage will just bounce off them—like a ping-pong ball off the forehead of a bronze statue.

Another problem is this: Rather than live in the high mountain air of the Golden Rule, mankind has sought out many devices. We alter the words of the Lord, with some of the alterations being just as true as the original, although the overall standard has been adjusted a tad lower. For example, there is a difference

between “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” and “Do *not* do unto others what you do *not* want done unto you.” The latter is just fine, and is biblical as far as it goes, but the former expression involves considerably more. You don’t want to be murdered, so don’t murder—but this, by itself, is too low a bar.

In this regard, C.S. Lewis once commented that men think that love means not giving trouble to others, while women think that it means taking trouble for others.² In this difference, the women appear to have the advantage. Men need to learn this: “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Eph. 5:28–29). Note what St. Paul is basically saying here: “Husbands, take trouble. Take time. Nourish. Cherish. Sacrifice. *Die*.” Too many husbands imitate a Christ who never took on flesh, who stayed in heaven, leaving us alone. But this is not what Christ did. The Lord Jesus took on flesh, and in doing so, took *trouble* for us.

If husbands underachieve here, wives frequently overachieve. Deep within every wife lurks the heart of a missionary and reformer. The basic orientation of wives is generally healthy; wives are geared toward taking trouble for others, which is the biblical definition of love. But the point of wisdom here is to learn where the brakes are. There is such a thing as excess, even here. Lewis also once described a woman “who lived for others”—and you could tell who those others were by their hunted expression.

A godly marriage does not consist of this marital technique or that one. A godly marriage occurs when a man and a woman both *die to themselves*, and are raised to the life that seeks the best interest of the other in all things. This is the only kind of godly marriage there is. And when we give all away in this manner, we discover that we receive all. We learn to give in order to receive, in order to be able to give some more. And we are married to someone who is doing the same thing.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 121.

Now it is not possible to live this way without an applied incarnational knowledge of what the Holy Trinity is like. As we turn away from these sins, we must necessarily turn toward God Himself. And in turning toward Him, we are learning to imitate Him, as dearly loved children (Eph. 5:1). This leads us to the first topic we must consider, which is the connection between marriage and the very nature of God.

Part I:
Marriage and the Nature of God

Marriage, Trinity, and Incarnation

So let us suppose that, by the grace of God, we have repented of our discontent and want to be teachable. We want to hear the word of truth *in* truth, and make applications according to the Spirit and not according to our idea of what the letter ought to have been. We also want to apply whatever we learn to ourselves first and not to our spouse first. Finally, we want to live as married couples *within* the triune life of God. But how are we to understand the significance of God's triune life in our marriages? Consider these two passages:

And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. (Mal. 2:15)

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (Jn. 17:20–23)

Malachi tells husbands that they must take heed to their spirits so that they will not deal treacherously with the wife of their youth, their wife by covenant. God made husband and wife, not for a seed, but for a *godly* seed, and so the *oneness* between husband and wife must be preserved (2:15). In His great prayer of John 17, the Lord Jesus is praying for oneness among all believers. Oneness between husband and wife is just one application of this, but it is a very important application. First, Jesus prayed for this result, and this obviously means that such a result between believing husband and wife is the will of God (v. 20). Jesus wants believers to be one *in the same kind of way* that the Father and Son are one, and He wants us to be one by means of *participation* in *their* unity (v. 21). We are not to imitate the triune unity from a distance. We are to imitate it from within. The result is a powerful statement of the gospel (v. 21). The glory that the Father gave the Son, the Son has given to believers, so that they might be one (v. 22). Christ is in us, and the Father is in Christ, with the result that we are “made perfect” in one (v. 23). Again, the world knows from this that the Father sent the Son into the world, and the world also knows that the Father loves believers just as He loves His Son (v. 23).

In order to grasp this rightly, we first have to grasp a point of grammar: the difference between indicatives (statements) and imperatives (commands). The pattern of godliness in Scripture is to build *imperatives* on the foundation of *indicatives*. God in His word says that something is true. We hear, and believe, and therefore are enabled to reckon in our lives the truth that this is so. We hear, in order to be able to do, by faith alone. Only faith hears this rightly. “You have died to sin in Christ. Therefore, die to sin”: this is gospel. “Die to sin, and you will therefore die in Christ to sin”: this is false gospel. The gospel is all about what God *has done*, and what we must therefore do as a consequence. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12b–13). We are to work out what God works in, *and nothing else*.

But what is God *not* working in? Too many Christians read this as saying that God is working in “nice” things, and that therefore we are to work out “nice” things. But this is nothing but superficial moralism. We are not told to work out what we think would be pleasant for God to have worked in had we been consulted. We are told to work out our *salvation*, for God is working in us to will and to do for His good pleasure. This transcends the nature of a spiritual backrub—it’s more like spiritual boot camp.

So what is He working in? In short, God is “working in” *trinitarian realities*. He is working *Himself* into us. He is our salvation, and He is triune. So what does this mean in marriage? Please remember, again, that the message of this chapter is not telling you what you ought to be working in. This is a description of what God *is* doing in you, whether you ever read a book like this or not. I am urging you to stop fighting it, and I am exhorting you to gladly embrace what God is doing anyway. He is doing it, so just come along quietly. “Work it out” is another way of saying “deal with it.”

This is trinitarian glory. We are to understand what God is already doing and then live accordingly. In the married state, we are to *indwell* one another as the Father indwells the Son and the Son the Father (Jn. 17:21). Husbands are to bestow glory on their wives, and wives are to render glory to their husbands (v. 22). Why exchange glory? Why not leave the glory where it was? Why rearrange the furniture? The answer is, “In order to be one as God is one.” God is not a static unit with static glory. The triune God is the One in whom there is an eternal and mutual bestowal and receiving of glory. As the Father loves the Son, and has loved us, so husbands and wives love one another (v. 23). We will pursue this further later, but this is Trinitarian imitation—but never from a distance. We do not imitate God from fifty million miles away. God has ushered us into communion with Himself, and so we worship God from within that fellowship.

We should remember that these truths are for all believers, and not just for married couples. But given what Scripture teaches us

about marriage, the gospel, and oneness, we know that all these general truths about believers can be manifested in marriage first, in a clearer, more heightened way—marriage is the showcase of Christian unity. This will be made even more evident when we address what Scripture teaches us about the Incarnation.

It is not possible to talk about the Trinity without talking about the one who fully revealed the triune nature of God to us—the Lord Jesus. He is the eternal Word of God, the one who took on our flesh in order to bring us to salvation, revealing the Father to us. This is why the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation must be considered together. In the Incarnation, the eternally begotten Son of God became the son of Mary, and, through her, a genuine son of Adam. This also has a profound impact on what it means to be human, and it cannot help but affect our marriages.

Consider what Paul says about Christ:

... he raised [Christ] from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Eph. 1:20–23)

We are picking up this text in mid-sentence. The apostle Paul has been recording his prayer for the Ephesians, in which he requests that they would begin to comprehend the nature of what had been bestowed on them in Christ. In Christ, certain realities have been given to us as redeemed creatures, and it is possible for these creatures to begin to grasp the ungraspable—by the grace of God. The essence of this gift is that God took a ragtag bunch of sinners and transformed them into the *fullness* of His Son.

There are many truths worth pondering in this text, but the one we need to note here is that Christ is described as the “head over all things to the church,” His body, the fullness of Him who fills all things. By becoming a bridegroom, Christ received fullness

from His bride, even though He was the one who filled all things. This “dependence” on His bride does not challenge His headship; rather, it is the *basis* for it. In the limited, bounded space of human marriage, how would this translate? “The husband is the head over his house for the wife, to the wife, who is his body, who is his fullness, even though his authority fills the house.”

Thinking about this rapidly brings us to the point where thought staggers. We have trouble (understandably) talking about the Trinity “raw.” It is not possible for us to grasp what the Trinity is like (by obtaining, say, the schematic diagrams) and then go off and apply that to our marriages. Even though we might say that the Trinity is “logically” prior to the Incarnation, because the Trinity describes the way God is apart from creation or redemption, we cannot “access” the Trinity unless the triune God *reveals* Himself to us, and He has chosen to do this in the Incarnation of His Son. Jesus says that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father (Jn. 14:6–9).

But there is another step to take as well. God has revealed the Trinity to us *through a marriage*. We learn about the triune God through an understanding of Christ and the Church, but we are also called to understand Christ and the Church by applying what we are taught about *that* to our own marriages. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). “As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Eph. 5:24). We don’t really learn anything “raw” in a systematics class; rather, we are to learn everything in what might be called *an incarnational loop*—applying what theology we know results in greater understanding of that theology, which in turn results in better application, and so on.

Of course, I must emphasize that husbands and wives are not called to *duplicate* or *reenact* the precise relationship between Christ and the Church. We cannot do anything of the kind. Husbands are not called to die for their wives as a sinless substitutionary atonement, for example. The emphasis of this teaching

is not marital hubris. Nevertheless, we are explicitly commanded to pattern our lives after His example, and we are given many things that we can imitate.

One very common problem is a superficial or thoughtless imitation of Christ's example. We read Ephesians 5, see that husbands and wives are like Christ and the Church, and immediately translate this into a minimal "nice thought for the day": "Husbands, love your wives 'a lot.'" It is somewhat better if we pay close attention to what Christ is described as actually doing in that chapter, and so we see that this involves sacrifice, teaching, nourishing, cherishing, and so on. This is important in its place, but we forget that the entire book of Ephesians is crammed with teaching about Christ and the Church, including the text we have just been considering.

Recall that in our discussion of the Trinity, we talked about mutual indwelling. The Father and the Son are one, for example. They are not one because they have merged, but rather because the distinct Father indwells the Son, and the Son indwells the Father, while remaining fully and completely Themselves. The Spirit indwells the Father and the Son as well; each Person of the Trinity fully indwells the others (without confusion of the Persons). Theologians call this mutual indwelling *perichoresis*. We have the same kind of thing in marriage. Husbands must say, "I am the head of my body, my wife. I am the head of the one who fills me." The wife must say, "I am the fullness of the one who is my head." Anyone who comes away from a careful reading of the apostle Paul's teaching on marriage with the idea that the husband is "the boss" and the wife is "the slave" is someone not to be trusted with *any* text. In his fine book *Trinity and Reality*, Ralph Smith puts it this way:

[There is a] slander that says because Christianity teaches that man is the head of his home, it permits men to abuse their wives. What the Bible really teaches is very different. According to the Bible, to be the leader means to sacrifice oneself for the other, as

Christ sacrificed Himself for the Church. If Christ is the pattern for the husband—and He is—then what the Bible calls for is self-sacrificial love that glorifies the wife. This is not a view that promotes abuse of any kind.¹

The first chapter of Ephesians therefore helps us to make sense of the fifth chapter. If you come to the fifth chapter with the wrong assumptions about what has been going on, you will be hopelessly overwhelmed by a rigid Marriage Law. If all that Christ's coming did was raise the ethical standard to a higher level, then our condition is hopeless. But if we have received the grace revealed in the Incarnation—the grace St. Paul prayed that we might have in Ephesians 1:17–18—what then? If you have the spirit of wisdom and revelation, how will you think of your husband or wife? If the eyes of your understanding are enlightened, and you know how the saints are a glorious inheritance for Christ, then you know what a husband and a wife are. And you will not know it until then.

¹ Ralph Smith, *Trinity and Reality* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2004), 66.