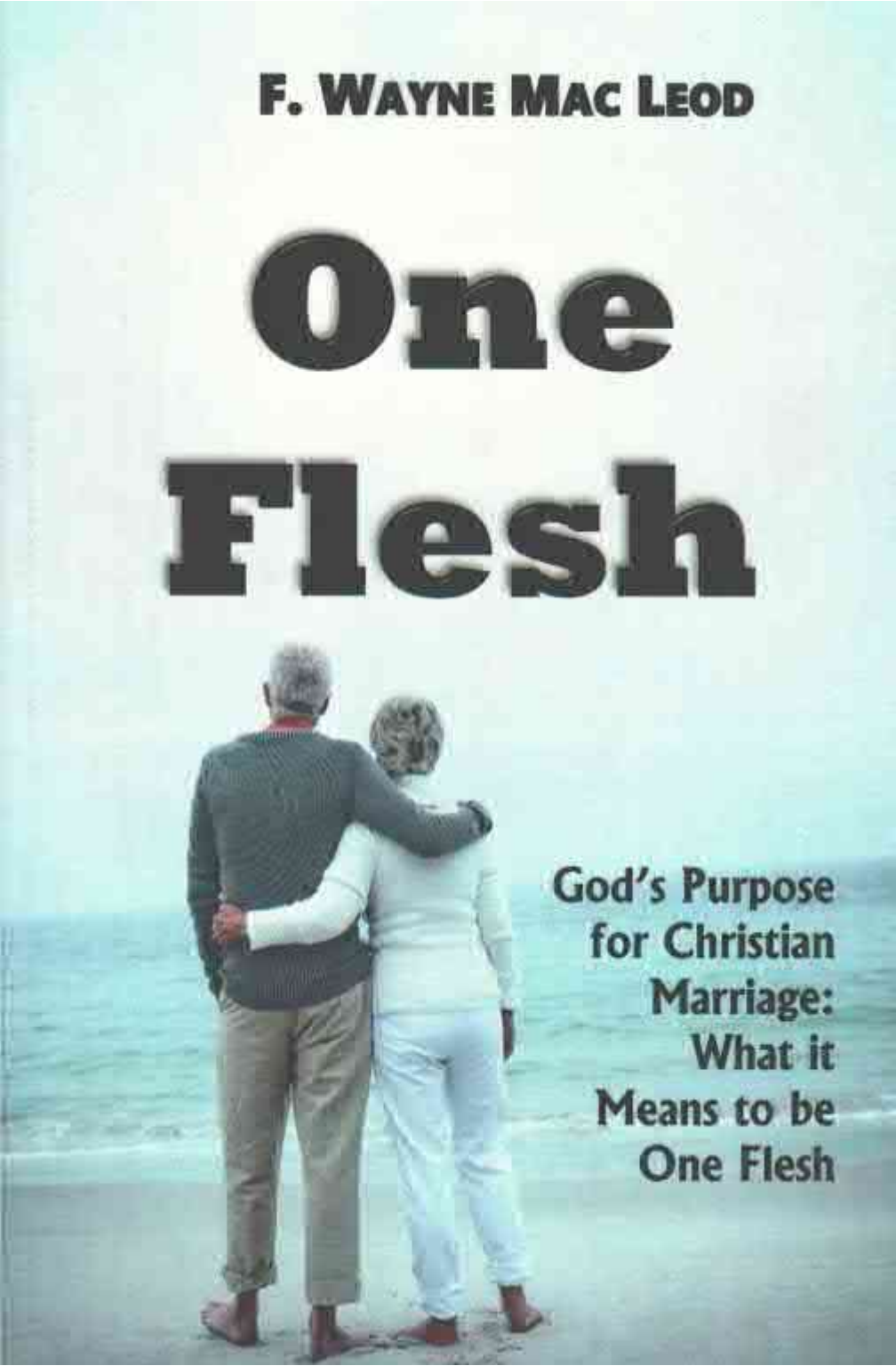


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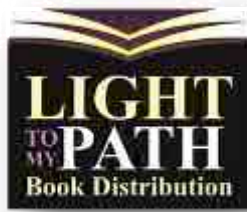
One Flesh



**God's Purpose
for Christian
Marriage:
What it
Means to be
One Flesh**

One Flesh

*God's Purpose for Christian Marriage: What it
Means to be One Flesh*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

Light To My Path Book Distribution
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One Flesh

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Preface

In Genesis 2:24 we read:

*24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
(Genesis 2)*

The purpose of God for Christian marriage is that the husband and wife be one flesh. If this is the purpose of God for marriage, it is important that we take the time to understand what it means. The concept of being one flesh goes far deeper than the sexual act. In fact, as we examine the pages of Scripture, we see that it touches every aspect of the life of the couple. In an age where we value independence, this teaching may be a challenge to many.

To become one flesh with someone demands the sacrifice of personal rights. It is an affront to our selfish attitudes. It requires taking our eyes off ourselves and our personal needs and considering the needs of our partner as if his or her needs were our very own. Not all readers will be ready to do this. I trust, however, that the passages we examine will speak to your heart as they have to mine.

It is my prayer that as you examine the teaching of Scripture on this important subject, the Spirit of God will move and bring deeper clarity to the subject. I trust that He will also bring conviction to any area of your life that needs to

be surrendered more fully to Him and the purpose of God for your marriage. May the Lord be pleased to use this study as a tool to renew and bless many couples as they learn to walk in the oneness God intended.

God bless,

F. Wayne MacLeod

Chapter 1 - Introduction and Context

This study will begin in Genesis 2 with the story of how God created man and woman. Mention is made of the creation of man in Genesis 1 but chapter 2 goes into greater detail. There are several details we need to examine in chapter 2 that set the background for our study.

Man was created from the dust of the ground

The first detail we learn in Genesis 2 is that man was created from the dust of the earth.

*7 then the Lord God formed the man of
dust from the ground and breathed into
his nostrils the breath of life, and the
man became a living creature. (Gene-
sis 2)*

The word translated “dust” here can also refer to mud or clay. Man was a product of the earth. It was into a lifeless form of mud or dust that the Lord breathed life. With the breath of God in him, the first man became a living creature. Think of the power of God that would form such a

creature from the dust of the earth and then choose to have a relationship with him.

That relationship with God, however, would become quickly strained. It would not be long before Adam and his wife Eve sinned by disobeying God. On that day God reminded man of his origin and ultimate destiny because of his rebellion:

*19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.
(Genesis 3)*

Adam was created from the earth. He would work the earth by the sweat of his face and return to the earth in death.

Speaking to God in his pain, Job would declare:

*9 Remember that you have made me
like clay;
and will you return me to the dust?
(Job 10)*

Both Adam and Job understood that these earthly bodies will one day be reduced to dust. Humankind owes its existence to the incredible wisdom of God that breathed life into the mud of the earth.

Man was blessed and given a home

The second detail we see from Genesis 2 is that God not only gave life to the dust he had fashioned into the form of a man, but He blessed that man by placing him in a beautiful garden.

8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2)

God's concern for man is evident in these verses. God planted a garden for man and placed him in that garden. This garden was filled with an abundance of trees. Notice what verse 9 tells us about these trees. They were beautiful trees that produced delicious fruit. The garden God planted for man was beautiful to behold. His eyes would have been struck by this loveliness and he would have been overwhelmed at the artistry of God.

The garden, however, was not only created to delight the man's eyes but also to delight his tastes. The fruit of this garden was good to eat. These trees produced delicious fruit that thrilled man's sense of taste. It is striking that God would bless man whom He had created from the dust of the earth in this way.

God shared with man the responsibility to work and keep the garden

Genesis 2:19 goes on to tell us that God shared with man the responsibility of caring for the garden. We need to understand that this task of working and keeping the garden would not have been as burdensome as it is today. Working with the ground would have been a pleasant occupation in those days. The curse of sin had not fallen on the earth and Adam would have marvelled at the wonderful power of God as he watched it grow and produce delightful fruit. This gave him great reason to praise the creator for the miracle of life and fruitfulness. His time would have been occupied. He had a purpose for being in the garden—to enjoy the goodness of God and to give Him praise.

God filled the Garden with Animals for Man

In Genesis 2:18 God speaks:

*18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."
(Genesis 2)*

As Adam explored the garden, his time was occupied with the beauty and wonderful taste of the fruit from the trees. He cared for this garden and gave thanks to God for its wonders and the miracle of growth and harvest. He communed with his creator and enjoyed peace and satisfaction, but this was not all God had for man.

Notice in Genesis 2:18 that the Lord God said: "it is not good that the man should be alone." What God created was very good. What we need to understand however, is

that God created man with needs. From Genesis 2:18 we understand that one of those needs was for companionship. Adam was not created to be independent and self-sufficient. He was created with a need for God and for others like himself. When God said it was not good for man to be alone, He is addressing this need He created in man—the need for companionship.

Notice also in Genesis 2:18 the response of God to this need in man: “I will make him a helper fit for him.” The word “helper” shows us that God would provide man with someone who would come alongside him to support him in his needs. This helper would be one who was “fit for him”—a perfect match and one who would stand with him to complement him and satisfy his need for companionship.

What is interesting to note here is that immediately after determining to make a helper “fit for him”, God created the animals and brought them to Adam. The context may indicate that these animals would serve as helpers in caring for the garden. Like the man, these animals were also created from the dust (Genesis 2:19). They were brought to the man who named them. The naming of these creatures, seems to show us that Adam was given dominion over them and they would be subject to him in the garden.

While the animals were helpers, they were not suitable to man. This shows us that what man needed was something more than simple help in the garden. His need was for a deeper companionship and intimacy.

To provide Adam with a suitable helper, the Lord caused him to fall into a deep sleep. While he slept, the Lord took a rib from his side and made a woman out of that rib (Genesis 2:21-22). Adam Clarke, commenting on this says the following:

“God could have formed the woman out of the dust of the earth, as he had formed the man; but had he done so, she must have appeared in his eyes as a distinct being, to whom he had no natural relations. But as God formed her out of a part of the man himself, he saw she was of the same nature, the same identical flesh and blood, and of the same constitution in all respects, and consequently having equal powers, faculties, and rights. This at once ensured his affection, and excited his esteem.” (Clarke, Adam, Commentary on the Bible by Adam Clarke (Electronic edition), Comments on Genesis 2:21: Laridian Inc., Marion Inc.)

We are not told how the man understood that the woman had come from his own body. Was he aware of the loss of his rib? We are not told. What is clear, however, is that he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was different from the animals he had just named. She was created from him to be a helper and companion for him. In his mind, she was elevated above all the other creatures in the garden. Unlike them, she was a perfect companion and helper. She was like him and came from his body.

As he did with the animals, the man would give a name to this beautiful creation of God standing before him. He would call her woman.

*23 Then the man said,
“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,*

*because she was taken out of Man.”
(Genesis 2)*

Notice how Adam said: “this at last is bone of my bones.” The words “at last” leave the impression that he had been searching for this helper and companion but could not find her. Now his search was over. He had finally found what he longed to find. In this there was satisfaction and fulfillment.

Genesis 2 concludes with the following statement:

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Notice the word “therefore.” This indicates that what follows is a result of what we have just examined about the creation of woman. Because woman was created from man, there is a special connection between them. They were created to compliment each other.

Genesis 2:24 goes on to say that when a man leaves his father and mother and marries a wife, the two become one flesh. What does it mean to be one flesh? This is the subject of our study? Over the next several chapters we will attempt to break down what the Scriptures teach about this to see how it applies to our relationships as husbands and wives.

We have seen that man was created by God from the dust of the ground. While he was created perfect, he also had a need for companionship and help. God created a helper and companion for him in the form of a woman. She was not made from the dust but from man’s side. This showed Adam that, unlike the other creation in the garden, she was

like him. This connection between a man and a woman was such that when a man grew up and left his father and mother to take a wife, they would experience true oneness – they would become “one flesh.”

As we look further into the book of Genesis, we see that this one-flesh principle would be disrupted. Sin would upset the unity between Adam and Eve and every couple after them. This means that if we are going to experience the oneness God intended for our marriages, we must fight against the sin that keeps us from enjoying this kind of relationship. May God give us wisdom, not only to understand His purpose for our marriages, but also to desire to strive for this to the glory of His name.

For Consideration:

- Genesis 2 reminds us that man was created from the dust. What does this say about how we ought to view ourselves?
- What evidence is there of the blessing of God in the garden? What does this teach us about the relationship God wanted to enjoy with man? What evidence is there of God's blessing on your life?
- God created man as a social being who needed fellowship with others of his kind. In what ways do we need each other?
- Why did God not create woman from the dust of the ground, but from the man's side. What

does this show us about the kind of relationship God intended between man and woman?

- Why do you suppose God created us with a need for companionship? Have you been a companion and helper to your spouse? What areas of your marriage have need of improvement?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to keep you mindful of the fact that you are totally dependant on Him for life and breath. Ask Him to forgive you for times when you have thought more highly of yourself than you ought.
- Consider the many blessing of God in your life. Thank the Lord for these blessings. Thank Him for the way He has cared for you.
- Thank the Lord for the people He has brought to you to support and help you in the things you face each day.
- Take a moment to pray for your marriage. Ask God to give you a willingness to be one with your partner. Ask God to reveal and remove any sin that separates you from your husband or wife.

Chapter 2 - The Environment in Which a One Flesh Relationship is Meant to Grow

*24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
(Genesis 2)*

We have seen how God created man and woman. While Adam was created from the dust of the ground, when God created woman He placed Adam in a deep sleep and took one of his ribs to form the woman. When he awoke, Adam was aware of two things. First, before him stood a woman. Second, a rib had been taken from his side to create this woman. She was not like the animals in the garden. She was part of him. She came from his body. She was intended to be a help and companion for him. She was, as he said, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23).

A conclusion is drawn in Genesis 2:24. The conclusion is this: “A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast

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to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Notice how Genesis 2:24 begins with the word “therefore.” The implication is that this is the conclusion of what was said in verse 23. Because the woman was created from man, to be a helpmate and companion for him, it was possible for them to “become one flesh”. They were created biologically, emotionally and spiritually to be compatible with each other.

In Genesis 1, we see how God created each plant and animal “after their kind.” Concerning the vegetation Genesis 1:11-12 says:

11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1)

Concerning the sea creatures and birds of the air we read:

20 And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” 21 So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird

according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1)

Writing about the animals that were created on dry land
Genesis 1:24-25:

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1)

Notice the continual repetition of the phrase "according to their kinds." The word "kind" refers to a species. In other word, God made each animal according to its species. Each species of animal was different from the other. There was a wide variety of birds, plants, sea creatures and animals. Each had their own characteristics. They were not the same. Adam recognized this wide diversity when he began to name the creatures. He also recognized that these creatures were very different from himself. It was for this reason that we read in Genesis 2:20:

20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. (Genesis 1)

There was no other creature of the same species as Adam. It was for this reason that God created woman from his rib. When he saw the woman, Adam understood that she was like him. There was a connection he could share with her that he could not with the animals around him. This was the first couple.

In Genesis 2:24 God speaks about the purpose He had for this couple and for all couples that would follow them. It was the purpose of God that Adam and Eve “become one flesh.” Before we examine further what it means to be “one flesh” let’s take a moment to consider what Genesis 2:24 tells us about the environment in which this one flesh relationship was to grow.

“A man” and “his wife”

*24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
(Genesis 2:24)*

The first detail we see in Genesis 2:24 is found in the words “a man” and “his wife.” This establishes a context for the “one flesh” relationship. It is true that God wants us to be one with our brothers and sisters but there is a unique relationship between a husband and a wife that cannot be found in any other relationship. Genesis 2:24 speaks of a man and his wife. It is only in this context that this one flesh relationship can be experienced. It is a unique and special relationship that God intends for a husband and his wife. God has established the boundaries for this one flesh relationship. It takes place in the context of marriage between a man and a woman.

“Leaving” and “Holding Fast”

The second principle we see in Genesis 2:24 is found in two other words – “leave” and “hold fast.” These words show us what needs to happen if a man and his wife are to become one flesh.

The word “leave” has the sense of forsaking or turning away from something. In this case, a man leaves the care of his father and mother. He cuts his ties to his parents to establish his own home. He would take a wife and commit himself to provide and care for her well-being. Leaving implies a new start and a whole new set of commitments and responsibilities.

The second word used in Genesis 2:24 is the word “hold fast.” There is a strong commitment here. The man is to remain with his wife. He is to commit himself to her. There will be many struggles and trials in their life as a couple but he is resolved to remain with her through them all for the rest of their lives.

The man who holds fast to his wife will not let anything come between them. He will fight anything that seeks to strip away harmony with his wife. When a man leaves his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, he will not to let her go. He will guard their relationship at all costs. The verse speaks of a committed and lifelong relationship—a relationship in which great energy is invested.

Genesis 2:24 tells us that it is God’s intention for a man and his wife to experience a “one flesh” relationship. This relationship is possible because God made them compatible with each other. It is, however, a relationship that is intended exclusively for a man and his wife. It can only

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thrive in an environment where the partners leave all others and devote themselves exclusively to each other in a lifelong commitment. This does not mean that it will be easy. Their commitment to holding fast will be tested in a sinful world. There will be temptations from inside and outside. It is the intention of the Lord, however, that the man and his wife persevere and remain faithful to each other through these times. The oneness God intended for the couple begins with a solid and lifelong commitment on their part to leave father and mother (or anyone else) and hold fast to each other. It is only in the security and exclusivity of this kind of relationship that the oneness God intended can be experienced.

For Consideration:

- How has God created men and women to be compatible with each other? What can we share with each other that we cannot share with the rest of creation?
- What does Genesis 2:24 teach us about the proper context of a one flesh relationship?
- What does it mean to leave one's parents? What other things do we need to leave for the good of our marriages?
- What do the words "hold fast" indicate about the struggles we will have in marriage? What are the obstacles and temptations you face in your marriage?

- Have you found yourself giving up in your marriage? What do the words “hold fast” mean to you? How do these words challenge you to stand up against the enemies of your marriage?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the partner He has given you. Ask Him to give you a strong commitment to your partner.
- Ask the Lord to help you to deal with the obstacles you are facing in your marriage. Ask Him to show you anything that has been an obstacle in your relationship and give you wisdom to know what to do.
- Ask the Lord to give you courage to persevere and never give up on your partner. Ask Him to give you strength when you feel hurt and rejection.
- Take a moment to ask the Lord to help you to be faithful to His purpose even if your partner is not. Ask Him to teach you to love your partner as He intends.

Chapter 3 - The Presence of God in a One Flesh Relationship

In the book of Malachi, the prophet spoke to the people of his day about how they had wandered from the Lord God and His purpose for them as a nation. While there are many details addressed in the prophecy of Malachi, of interest to us is what the prophet said in Malachi 2:13-16:

13 And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to

*the wife of your youth. 16 "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."
(Malachi 2)*

Notice what is happening in these verses. Malachi 2:13 tells us that the priests "covered the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning." The reason for this was that the Lord no longer accepted their offerings. This was quite confusing for the people of God who wondered what had happened that God would refuse their gifts. Malachi gave them the answer—they had been unfaithful to their wives (Malachi 2:14). Malachi goes on in verses 14 and 15 to describe why this unfaithfulness was such a serious matter in the Lord's eyes.

She is Your Companion

Malachi reminded these husbands that the wives they had been unfaithful to were their companions. In Genesis 2 we discovered that God gave a wife to Adam to be a companion. This was a precious gift. Eve stood with Adam in his endeavours. She supported him in the work God had called him to do. When they were driven from the Garden of Eden, she was by his side. They went through the good times and the bad times together, encouraging and supporting each other.

The wives of these men in Malachi's day also stood beside their husbands. They supported them in the raising of their children. They lived with them and worked side by side. We can be sure that there were difficult times for them as couples but these wives were their companions. By their

unfaithfulness, however, these husbands betrayed this companionship, showing great disrespect for their wives.

She is Your Wife by Covenant

Beyond the lack of common respect, the men also ignored the fact that these women were their wives by covenant. In marrying these woman, the husbands had placed themselves under an oath before God to be faithful, provide and to love their wives. This was not something to take lightly. They made these vows not only to their wives but also in the presence of God. God would hold them accountable to these vows.

In this case, the Lord refused to receive the gifts these men brought to Him. Because of their unfaithfulness to the covenant with their wives, there was a barrier between themselves and their God. The apostle Peter warned husbands in 1 Peter 3:7:

7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3)

The relationship between husbands and wives is bound by a covenant. God expects a husband to honour his wife and take his vows seriously. To disregard these obligations is to hinder his relationship with God. God will not receive his offerings nor would He listen to his prayers.

God Made You One with a Portion of His Spirit on Your Union

Notice a third detail about this relationship between the husband and the wife from Malachi 2:15:

15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? (Malachi 2)

Malachi reminded these unfaithful husbands that the Lord had made them one with their wives. He did this by placing a portion of His Spirit on their union. This statement of Malachi is very important in the context of our study. Let's take a moment to consider the implication of what Malachi is saying here?

By giving a portion of His Spirit to this couple, God is placing His blessing on their union. For an agreement to be official and binding, it needs to have the signature or stamp of a person in authority. The Spirit of God is the stamp of God on the marriage union, making it official. With this portion of God's Spirit on the union, the husband and wife are joined together in the eyes of God and from that point on will be accountable for each other and live as one. Their union as husband and wife is legal and recognized by God. He seals this by placing a portion of His Spirit on their union.

This portion of the Spirit on the union is not only to recognize and legitimise the marriage union but also to empower it. God gives a portion of His Spirit to this married couple to enable them to live as husband and wife. He is in their marriage and blesses it with the enabling of the Spirit. He will guide them and keep them as they look to Him. He

does not leave us alone to work out the obstacles. He walks with us to enable us to live as one.

With a portion of the Spirit on the union between husband and wife, the relationship becomes a holy or sacred relationship. It is not only blessed and empowered by God but it is also indwelt by God. This is confirmed by the second half of verse 15:

*15 ...And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your Spirit and let none of you be faithfulness to the wife of his youth.
(Malachi 2)*

Because the union between this man and woman is blessed, empowered and indwelt by God, it is a holy and sacred relationship. The children born to this union are “godly offspring” (Malachi 2:15). This does not mean that the children born to this relationship are automatically believers and guaranteed a place in heaven but rather that they are legitimate children born to parents who are in a relationship blessed and indwelt by God.

Malachi goes on to tell his readers:

16 For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless. (Malachi 2)

Unfaithfulness and divorce are serious matters before the Lord. Notice that Malachi tells us that the man who divorces his wife covers his garment with violence. These

are strong words. Imagine for a moment a man who violently murders another human being. As he returns home from the scene of the crime, his clothes are soaked in the blood of his victim. These clothes witness to the terrible deed that was done. This is the picture painted here by Malachi. By divorcing their wives, these men had covered their garments with violence.

The violence done here was in the betrayal of their wives. They had been unfaithful to them and by casting them out, they were depriving them of their support and means of income. The violence was not limited to the wives, however, but also to the offspring of that union. The children would be caught in the middle of this bitterness and insensitivity. Beyond this, however, was the violence done to the community as it dealt with these broken families. Strong families meant a strong community.

As if the violence mentioned above was not enough, there is also the insult done to God and to the Spirit of God who indwelt this union. The betrayal of a covenant relationship and the disregard for the holy things of God would shake the family and the community. Consider this for a moment. What happens when a society ignores its obligation to God? What happens when it no longer respects obligations toward God and the vows made to God? Can such a society be healthy? This disregard for the promises made to God is a great violence, destroying the very fabric of our society and removing the blessing of God from our midst.

There is a sacredness to the union of a husband and wife. This union is recognized and blessed by God. This one flesh relationship is so important to God that He gives a portion of His Spirit to seal and empower it. What God seals, He also indwells. There is great hope in this reality. The power to live as one flesh is available to us, for the

God who makes us one, will also enable us to live as one through His indwelling Spirit.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about how unfaithfulness in marriage hinders our walk with God?
- How does marital unfaithfulness do violence to the society?
- How does God show His blessing on the relationship between a husband and wife according to Malachi 2:15?
- God has given the husband and wife a portion of His Spirit to bless and enable their oneness. What does this tell us about how important this relationship is to God?
- How is defiling the marriage relationship or showing disrespect for one's partner a sin against God?
- Take a moment to examine your marriage. How does knowing that it was God who joined you and placed His Spirit on your relationship affect how you see your relationship with your partner?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for how He has blessed the union between you and your partner. Thank Him that He has given a portion of His Spirit to enable and sanctify this union.

- Ask God to help you to take this union with your marriage partner seriously. Ask His forgiveness for times when you treated this relationship with disrespect.
- Ask God to give you a more positive attitude toward your husband or wife. Take a moment to thank the Lord that you are one in His eyes. Ask Him to teach you more of what this means in your marriage.
- Thank the Lord that because He joined you, you can approach Him with assurance that He will hear you when you come to Him about any aspect of this relationship that is hindering oneness.

Chapter 4-

What God has Joined Together

*6 But from the beginning of creation,
'God made them male and female.' 7
'Therefore a man shall leave his father
and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8
and the two shall become one flesh.'
So they are no longer two but one
flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined
together, let not man separate."
(Mark 10)*

We move now to the New Testament teaching of Jesus as found in the gospels. Particularly in Matthew 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12. We have seen already that the Lord God calls for the husband to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. In this we learned that the context of a one flesh relationship is a committed relationship between a husband and a wife. We also saw that when a husband and wife choose to leave all others and commit themselves to each other, the Lord God blesses that union with a portion of His Spirit, sanctifying and making the couple one flesh. This is confirmed by what Jesus says in Mark 10:8:

*8 and the two shall become one flesh.
So they are no longer two but one
flesh. (Mark 10)*

Let's take a moment to examine the context of this statement of Jesus in Mark 10.

As Jesus ministered in the region of Judea, the Pharisees approached Him with a question about divorce. According to them, Moses permitted a man to divorce his wife and send her away. This is likely a reference to Deuteronomy 24 where it says:

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, 2 and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 24)

Notice how Moses speaks about a certificate of divorce being given to a woman in whom some indecency was

found. The term “indecency” was interpreted by religious scholars of the Jewish faith in different ways and caused a great amount of controversy in Jesus’ day. This may have been the reason the Pharisees brought this question to Jesus. They wanted Him to take a side in this long-standing debate between religious scholars.

The response of Jesus to this question of divorce is important. Jesus recognized that the Law of Moses permitted divorce but went on to explain why divorce was permitted:

5 And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. (Mark 10)

The reason divorce was permitted in the Law of Moses, according to Jesus, was because of the hardness of the human heart. Sin and rebellion against God and His purposes causes great hardship in this world. This hardness of heart affects even the most intimate of relationships. We don’t have to look far to see the abuse that takes place in the marriages of our day. Wives have been emotionally, sexually and physically abused. Husband also have suffered abuses. These abuses and evil are such that they cause great damage not only to the marriage partners involved but also to the children and society. Moses was aware of the sin that was being committed against wives and husbands in marriages. Jesus told the Pharisees that divorce was permitted by Moses to prevent an even greater evil from taking place.

Jesus went on, however, to make it clear that this was not God’s intention for marriage.

*6 But from the beginning of creation,
‘God made them male and female.’ 7*

*‘Therefore a man shall leave his father
and mother and hold fast to his wife’
(Mark 10)*

Quoting from Genesis 2:24 the Lord Jesus reminded the Pharisees that God’s intention was that a man leave his father and mother and “hold fast” to his wife. We have already examined this phrase. The words “hold fast” imply doing everything in one’s power to maintain a healthy and positive relationship with one’s partner and opposing everything the seeks to hinder that union. God’s intention from the beginning was that a husband and wife “hold fast” to each other. Divorce was only permitted because of the sin of the human heart and the greater evil that would take place if the couple remained in an unhealthy and broken relationship.

Jesus told the Pharisees that when a man and a woman are joined in marriage they become one flesh:

*8 ...So they are no longer two but one
flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined
together, let not man separate.”
(Mark 10)*

Notice first that Jesus says, “they are no longer two but one flesh.” We will examine this more fully at a later point. For now, what we need to see is that when a couple marries, they must give up thinking only of themselves. They must now consider each other in everything they do. The decisions and actions they take will no longer affect themselves alone but also their partner. The two begin to function as one, complementing and strengthening each other. They live and act as one. Every decision they make will now be filtered through their relationship with a husband or wife. Every action they take will have an impact on their

relationship. Every word they speak will either build up or break down that relationship.

Notice second from Mark 10:9 it is God who joins marriage partners together— “what therefore God had joined together.” We need to see that when we commit ourselves to each other in marriage, God is part of that decision. Remember what we saw in Malachi 2:15:

*15 Did he not make them one, with a
portion of the Spirit in their union? (Mal-
achi 2)*

God blesses our decision to take a marriage partner. He sanctifies this by His Spirit on the union. His blessing of this union makes it legitimate and holy in His eyes. Because He has accepted this and sealed it with His Spirit, to break the union between a husband and a wife is to break what God has joined together. Divorce is not just a sin against the husband or wife but also against God who has joined the couple. It is also a sin against the Spirit of God who seals this relationship and makes the couple one.

Finally notice that Jesus told the Pharisees that what God joined together no man was to separate. When a man and a woman marry, they are to remain married. When they become one before God, they are to remain in that condition and cultivate that oneness for the rest of their lives. This is the intention of God for them as a couple.

The Pharisees came to Jesus with an important question about divorce. Jesus did not refute the fact that the Old Testament law permitted divorce. What He does emphasize, however, is that fact that when God joins a man and woman together it is His intention that they live as one flesh (see Mark 10:8). There is a difference between living

together and living as “one flesh.” Many marriages are not “one flesh” marriages. The couple lives under the same roof but they are not living as one. Just because a couple stays together does not mean that they are living as God intended. It is not just divorce that breaks up a one flesh relationship. The one flesh relationship can be broken even in the lives of the couple who remain married and live under the same roof.

When Jesus told the Pharisees: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” he was not just speaking about someone or something outside of the marriage. He was also including the couples in the marriage. He was reminding them that God had joined them together as one. Because God had joined them together in this one flesh relationship, their lives would be forever changed. They were no longer to live as two separate people. They were to take their partner and his or her wellbeing into consideration in every decision they made and every action they took.

It is not just a certificate of divorce that separates what God has joined. Even more subtle is the selfishness and independent spirit that sprouts up in the marriage. To live as one is not just about living in the same house and sharing the same bed, it is about considering each other in every action and decision. It is about blessing and supporting each other. You may not have given your wife a certificate of divorce but perhaps in your heart you are no longer considerate of her. You have separated yourself from her emotionally, physically, sexually and spiritually. To husbands and wives who live together in this way, the words of Jesus speak: “What God has joined together, let no man separate.”

God has sealed our marriages as believers with His Spirit. This union is intended to last for life. Sin is our greatest obstacle. As it was in the days of Moses, so it is today. The hardness of the human heart is what will keep us from experiencing this oneness in marriage. We must open our hearts to God and allow Him to soften them. This involves humbling ourselves and submitting to God's purpose for our marriages. It means recognizing that I am responsible for my partner and his or her well-being. I am to banish selfish thoughts and actions from my marriage and consider my partner in everything I do. We must do everything in our power, not only to keep what God has joined together intact but also to insure the health of that relationship, for we are accountable to God for it.

Marriage will change your life. You will no longer be the same person. From the time God joins you as husband and wife, you are to banish any thought of yourself alone. From that point on, to neglect your partner is to disregard the command and purpose of God that you live as "one flesh".

If we are to experience the purpose of God for us to live as one flesh, we must first accept what Jesus is saying here. It is God's intention that a couple live as "one flesh." We must never allow ourselves to do or say anything that would break the oneness God intends for us as a couple. No man or woman is to separate what God has joined together as one. The greatest offenders of this command of Jesus are couples themselves. Instead of cultivating oneness we find ourselves drifting apart. We allow things to come between us. We do not make it our priority to maintain what God has joined.

For Consideration:

- Why was divorce permitted by Moses? What was the intention of God for marriage according to Jesus?
- Is it possible for a couple to live together but not live as “one flesh”? Explain
- Jesus said, “they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:8). How does this impact the decisions we make as married couples and how we need to live as husbands and wives?
- Take a moment to examine your marriage relationship? Have you been living as one flesh or have you been living your own life?
- What changes took place in your life when you were married? Are there any changes you found particularly difficult to make?
- What kinds of things can break the oneness God intended for a Christian marriage?
- If God has joined you as one, what have you been doing to maintain that oneness in your marriage? Are you willing to be one with your partner or do you prefer independence and freedom to do as you please?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to hold fast to your partner. Ask Him to show you anything that has been coming between you and your oneness?

- Thank the Lord that He has blessed your marriage union. Ask God to help you to be faithful to the partner He has given you.
- Ask God to help you to deal with any hardness of heart, selfishness or stubbornness that would break the oneness He intends you to have with your partner.
- Ask God to show you if there is anything you can do to encourage greater oneness with your partner.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for separating what He has joined. Ask Him to give you a greater burden to seek this oneness with your partner in all things.

Chapter 5 - Counterfeit One Flesh Relationships

13 You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 17 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. (1 Corinthians 6)

In the last few chapters we have been examining what Scripture teaches about God's purpose for a husband and wife. It is the desire of God that a couple experience oneness of body, soul and spirit in a committed lifetime relationship. Satan has another plan. His influence was seen

in the city of Corinth in the days of the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 6:13 Paul spoke about this when he addressed the pagan philosophy found there:

13 You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (1 Corinthians 6)

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." This appears to be a common saying in the city of Corinth. What did this saying mean and what was the philosophy behind these words? On a very basic level, the words simply remind us that while God made the stomach to enjoy the pleasures of food, the day is coming when He will destroy both food and the stomach in death. There are two important ideas behind this phrase.

First, the pleasures of life are temporary. The food we eat is pleasing to our taste and satisfies our bodies. This pleasure, however, will one day come to an end. What is true of our pleasure in food is also true for other pleasures of life. Death, old age or sickness will strip these pleasures from us. None of earth's pleasures will last forever.

Second, the body is designed to enjoy these temporary pleasures. God has given us a stomach to digest our food. He has given us eyes to enjoy the beautiful scenery around us or to enjoy the sounds of nature. He has also given us the capacity to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh.

What was the conclusion of the people of Corinth to these two elementary truths? If God has created us to enjoy the pleasures of life but this enjoyment is only for a time, then

we must take advantage of the time we have to revel in these pleasures. If the stomach is made for food, then we need to eat and enjoy our food before this pleasure is taken from us. If God created us as sexual beings who can enjoy the pleasure of the body, then we should take advantage of this and enjoy it while we can, for the day is coming when this pleasure also will be taken from us.

While there is an element of truth in this Corinthian philosophy the culture failed to see that there was also a proper context for the enjoyment of these pleasures. Notice that Paul went on in verse 13 to tell the Corinthians that the body was not meant for sexual immorality. By using the words, “sexual immorality” Paul is showing us that the Corinthians were engaging in sexual activity outside the purpose of God. Their idea was that since God had given them the capacity to enjoy a sexual relationship, then they could do so with anyone they pleased. This, of course, was not the purpose of God. What these Corinthians failed to understand was that there was a higher principle that governed their lives— “the body is meant for the Lord and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:13)

God created us for Himself. We are accountable to Him for how we use our bodies. Paul made this clear when he said:

*20 For you were bought with a price.
So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6)*

The philosophy of this world says that I belong to myself and can do with my body what I please. Paul reminds us, however, that as God’s people we are not our own. The Lord Jesus laid down His life to rescue us from the curse of sin. We now belong to Him. This work of Christ now

places us under an obligation –we are to glorify Christ in our bodies. This means that we are to live for Him, according to His principles. God has a purpose for our sexual lives. He intends that those desires be satisfied in the context of a committed marriage relationship.

Paul told the Corinthians that not only were our bodies meant for the Lord but the Lord was meant for our bodies.

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own. (1 Corinthians 6)

Just as our bodies were meant to glorify the Lord, so it is the purpose of the Lord to fill those bodies with His Holy Spirit. He wants to indwell us, enable us and fill us so that through us, the great purpose of the Father will be accomplished on this earth.

There is a wonderful union between the believer and the Lord. As the Spirit of God fills us, we become one with Him.

17 But he who is joined with the Lord, becomes one spirit with him. (1 Corinthians 6)

What does it mean to become one spirit with the Lord? It means that my heart is joined to His –His desire is my desire. I want to please Him. I want His will. I live for Him. Everything I do takes His will and purpose into account. I am in communion with Him. His strength is my strength. I depend on His wisdom. I choose not to walk independent of Him but to bring Him into every part of my life. I seek Him in every decision I make. I want His presence in every

step I take. I cannot imagine being without Him. I will sacrifice everything for Him. I will deny myself to do His will. I want what He wants, I do what He does. I belong to Him and He belongs to me. We are one in purpose, heart and will. My identity is found in Him.

It is from this perspective that Paul moves on to describe the evil of sexual immorality in Corinth. It appears that this immorality took the form of prostitution. Listen to what Paul says about this:

16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." (1 Corinthians 6)

Notice how Paul connects the "one flesh" relationship of Genesis 2:24 to a sexual relationship with a prostitute. In other words, one expression of this one flesh relationship can be found in a sexual relationship. In this context, however, to "become one body" or "one flesh" with a prostitute was to misrepresent God's purpose. It was a counterfeit expression of a "one flesh" relationship. The one who sleeps with a prostitute may become one body with her but this is hardly what God is speaking about when he speaks about a one flesh relationship between a husband and wife. There are many people who experience a work of the Lord but who are not one with the Spirit.

In Jesus' day, many people were healed of their sickness. They were also touched by His teaching but they did not surrender to Him. The Lord may speak to your heart in a certain situation but this does not mean that you are one with Him. In fact, God speaks to, heals or may even use the unbeliever even though that person does not choose

Him or walk with Him. In a similar way, a man may have a sexual relationship with a prostitute and become one body with her but have no interest in her apart from the gratification of his flesh. He may never see her again. He may even despise her in his heart.

There are many counterfeit expressions of a one flesh relationship. These relationships are selfish at the core. You cannot be one flesh if everything is all about you. You cannot be one with another person if you are only using that person to meet your own needs. A one flesh union demands the melting together of the wills and hearts of two people in a permanent relationship.

What we see here is that God's intention for a one flesh relationship is much deeper than using each other to satisfy our needs or earthly desires. The one flesh relationship God intends is one in which the needs of your spouse are as important as your own. It is a sacrificial relationship that willingly surrenders everything to minister to the needs of its partner. It is a lifelong commitment to that partner. It is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the philosophy of the people of Corinth? Is there evidence of this same philosophy in our culture today?
- What did Paul mean when he said that body was meant for Christ and Christ for the body? How does this impact what we do with our bodies?

- What does Paul teach us about sexual relationships outside of a committed marriage relationship? How is such a relationship sinful?
- What is the difference between a relationship with a prostitute and a godly one flesh relationship?
- Is it possible to see our partner as someone we use to meet our needs? How does this demonstrate selfishness? What is God's greater purpose for you as a couple?

For Prayer:

- Do you see evidence of the philosophy of Corinth in your society? Take a moment to pray that God would cleanse your society of this mentality and help us to see His intention for godly one flesh relationships.
- Ask God to help you to live life with the realization that He indwells you and that it is His desire to use your body for His glory.
- Ask God to teach you to be more selfless in your relationship with your spouse. Ask Him to help you to be committed to his or her needs and not to yours alone.
- If you are married, take a moment to pray about your relationship with your husband or wife. Ask the Lord to bless this relationship so that it not only meets the needs of your partner but brings great glory to the Lord.

- Are there areas of division in your marriage? Ask the Lord to help you to see that it is His great purpose that you be one flesh with your partner. Ask Him to show you if there are things you need to sacrifice for him or her so that there will be greater harmony between you. Thank God for the example He gave us in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for us.

Chapter 6 - One Flesh and the Surrendering of Personal Rights

1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Corinthians 7)

In the previous chapter, we looked at an example of a counterfeit one flesh relationship. We saw that being one flesh goes far deeper than being united sexually. The oneness of flesh God intends can only be found in the context

of a sacrificial relationship between a husband and wife committed to each other for life.

1 Corinthians 6:13 speaks about the fact that the body was made for the Lord and the Lord for the body. Paul is making an important point here and one we must not miss if we are to understand God's intention for Christian marriage. When Paul said that the body was made for the Lord, he is reminding us that our bodies are not ours to do with as we please. Because our bodies are for the Lord, we have an obligation to use them for His glory and honour.

As believers in the Lord Jesus, we have dedicated our body and soul to Him. We recognize that we are His servants and that all we have should be devoted to Him and His purpose. The apostle Paul is a wonderful example of this. Listen to what he told the Corinthian believers:

*25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.
26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9)*

Paul disciplined his body. He chose to keep it under control. He did this for a very particular purpose—to complete the race God had given him. In other words, he devoted his body not to serve his own purposes but the purpose of his Creator and Saviour.

Paul willingly suffered hardship for the cause of the Lord. He was stoned and beaten. He pushed himself to continue when it would have been much easier to give up. He did this because he had given himself, body and soul to the Lord. He saw his body no longer as his own but the Lord's. The body he lived in had one purpose—to serve and honour the Lord.

How easy it is for us to consider our bodies as our own. Paul reminds us, however, that our bodies are for the Lord. Are you willing to devote your body completely to the Lord and His purpose? Will you surrender your right to your comfort for the Lord and His pleasure? Will you give the Lord the right over your body, to use it as He sees fit? Will you discipline your body and use it for your Saviour even when that means suffering on your part?

The principle Paul speaks about here applies not only to our relationship with the Lord but also in our marriage relationships. Consider what he said in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Corinthians 7)

We are living in an age that rebels against the principle of anyone having authority over us. In recent months, I have listened to interviews with women who felt that they had the right to kill the baby in their womb if they didn't want it – they saw this as a right they had over their own bodies. The fact of the matter is this; God is calling us not to fight for our personal rights but to surrender them to a higher purpose. It is only in the context of surrendered rights that

we can experience the oneness God intends. You cannot spend your life fighting for your own rights and experience oneness with God. To do so, will only hinder your relationship with God. The same principle applies to marriage.

When a man and woman join in marriage, they surrender themselves to each other. In this relationship of trust, they choose to offer themselves to each other. While Paul speaks here in 1 Corinthians 7 about a sexual relationship, the principle of offering our bodies is much more than this. As husbands and wives, we must come to understand that the body the Lord has give us is not only for the Lord but also to be used to support and bless our spouse. Listen to what the apostle said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34:

32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. (1 Corinthians 7)

The apostle Paul was not married and could devote his entire life to the cause of the Lord. Notice in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, however, that he recognized that a married man could not offer himself to the ministry in the same way. His interests were divided—he was anxious about how to please his wife. The wife also was concerned about how to please her husband. Paul recognized this as a fact of

life. It was the obligation of the husband and wife to minister to and support each other. God expected nothing less.

In a marriage, we cannot afford to be selfish and self-centred. No marriage can survive when the partners are focused on themselves alone. For a marriage to be healthy, both partners need to be willing to sacrifice the right to their own bodies, time, and interests, for the sake of the other partner.

What did Paul mean when he said that the wife had authority over her husband's body and the husband had authority over his wife's body? There are two sides to this question.

The Right of Expectation

First, to have authority over something means that I have the right to expect something from my partner because we are one. When I am tired and overworked, I have the right to expect help. When I am discouraged, I have the right to expect comfort and assurance. This expectation, however, must be balanced.

On the one hand we understand that having the right does not mean that we will always receive what we have a right to receive. Nor does having the right to something mean that I will always demand that right. There are times when I will need to surrender my rights to minister to my partner. There are those who would use 1 Corinthians 7:4 to demand satisfaction of their every need to the hurt of their partner. In essence, they become demanding and self-centred. This is not Paul's intention.

On the other hand, there are those who do expect anything from their partner. They live their lives taking care of their

own needs, and ultimately shut each other out of their daily routine. This unwillingness to recognize or accept what is rightfully theirs will only hurt the relationship in the end.

Partners in a marriage have the right to expect the support and encouragement of their husband or wife. This is how God intended things to be. If you demand your right at all costs, however, your relationship will suffer. If you refuse to accept what is rightfully yours, you will distance yourself from your partner and quickly drift from the path of oneness God intended. We must have a healthy sense of expectation if we are to experience the oneness God intends for us to experience.

The Obligation of Responsibility

We often see authority in a very selfish way. For many, to have authority implies having the right to use what I have authority over, for their own desires. We should not see authority in this sense. Those who have been given authority have a great responsibility. A king who has authority over a nation is obligated to care for that nation. When a CEO is given authority over a company, he or she has the responsibility to do all they can to see that the company succeeds. If a husband has been given authority over his wife's body he has been placed under an obligation to do all I can to minister to her needs. The same is true for the wife. She is to actively minister to her husband, for she has been given authority to care for him and his needs.

In the context of a one flesh relationship, we must learn to accept this responsibility to care for each other. We must willingly surrender our own interests, time and rights to care for our partner. This is the teaching of Paul not only for marriage but for all believers:

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2)

God has given me authority to please and care for my partner. This means that I must be willing to adjust my schedule or make an extra effort to support my partner. It may mean putting aside something I would like to do to help my spouse. It will mean seeking to understand my companion and his or her needs. We must commit ourselves to blessing our partners and actively reach out to meet their needs because we have been given authority and responsibility by God to do so.

Are we willing to surrender our rights? Will we confess the selfishness of the attitude that looks only to our own needs? Will you die to the right over your own body and devote yourself to ministering to the needs of your partner? If we are to experience oneness of flesh as husband and wife, we must first surrender our rights to think only of ourselves and make it our priority to be responsible for the needs of our partners.

We have mentioned those who have been hurt and no longer have any expectation of their partners. The partners in these relationships have died to their rights and expectations but in the process, they have lost all connection with each other. They do not experience the oneness God intends because they no longer receive from each other or support each other. In fact, they do even expect support from each other. Paul reminds these couples that they do have rights. In fact, if they never allow themselves to re-

ceive what it rightfully theirs, they will only hurt their relationships. A one flesh relationship can only thrive if both partners, while more than willing to die to their rights, gratefully receive with humility and thankfulness what is rightfully theirs.

For Consideration:

- When you surrender your body to the Lord, how does this change your priorities in life?
- What is authority? Does authority mean that you have the right to do as you please, or the obligation to care for and minister to those for whom you have authority?
- If husbands and wives have authority over each other's body what obligation does this place them under?
- Is it possible to experience oneness as God intended if we are unwilling to surrender our time, effort and strength to one another as marriage partners?
- Have you taken the responsibility of caring for your husband or wife? What obligation has God given you toward your partner?
- Are you willing to surrender your right to your own body, time, effort and strength to serve your partner? What keeps you from complete surrender, placing their needs above your own?

- Have you lost all sense of expectation from your partner? What led to this? What has been the result in your marriage?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for feeling that authority meant privilege more than obligation. Ask Him to forgive you for using your authority for selfish means.
- Ask the Lord to help you to die to focusing on your own comfort and ease so that you can be more disciplined and focused on the needs of your partner. Ask God to show you how you can be a blessing to your partner.
- If you have lost all sense of expectation from your partner, ask the Lord to reveal the cause of this. Ask the Lord to heal the hurts this has caused in your heart.

Chapter 7 - He Who Loves His Wife Loves Himself

28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5)

In Ephesians 5:22-33 the apostle Paul speaks to husbands and wives about the relationship God intends for them. To do so He compares the relationship of a husband and wife to the relationship that exists between Christ and the church. He begins by reminding believers that the husband has been given the responsibility to be the head of the home just as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:22-24).

This authority as “head of the wife” (Ephesians 5:23) carries with it a great responsibility. The apostle goes on in Ephesians 5:25 to tell the husband that he is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. Paul gives an example of the love of Christ for the church in verse 25 – he “gave Himself up for her.” The demonstration of Christ’s headship is seen in how He cared for and continues to care for His bride, the church. He laid His life down and died for her.

Jesus taught that the greatest expression of love is found in the willingness of one partner to die for the other:

*13 Greater love has no man than this,
that someone lay down his life for his
friends. (John 15)*

The authority God gives a man over his wife is not the authority to demand his desires from her but the responsibility to care for and love her as Jesus loved the church. This involves a willingness to sacrifice everything for her.

While not many husbands will be required to die for their wives, this principle is still applicable to everyday life. There are many ways God will call us to die for our partners. We may need to die to our comforts to minister to the needs of our husbands and wives. We will need to put the interests of our partner above our own.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 5:28 to say:

*28 In the same way husbands should
love their wives as their own bodies, He
who loves his wife loves himself.
(Ephesians 5)*

This idea of loving our wives as our own bodies is based on two important principles.

First, it is based on the relationship of Christ with the church.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church 30 because we are members of his body (Ephesians 5)

Paul reminds us that we are all part of the body of Christ. Because we belong to Christ and are part of His body on this earth, He takes a special interest in us. He willingly laid down His life to save us from sin. He intercedes for us before the Father. He placed His Holy Spirit in us to guide and empower us. He knows every hair on our head and every need we have, even those we have never expressed to Him. He knows us better than we know ourselves. This is the kind of interest He takes in us. He does so because we belong to Him and are members of His body. Marriage is a great example of the relationship of Christ and His church. Just as the church is one with Christ, so the husband and wife have been joined as one. Husbands and wives take as their example for oneness, the person of Christ and His relationship with the church. To love Christ, we must love the members of His body. An example of this is found in Matthew 25 where Jesus says:

35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer

him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25)

Jesus blessed those who had ministered to Him. They could not recall having fed the Lord. Jesus reminded them, however, that they did feed His children and in doing so, they had done it to Him. When we care for those who belong to the body of Christ we care for Christ Himself. When we touch a brother or sister who belongs to Christ we touch Him. Jesus feels the needs of those who belong to Him as if their needs were His own. To minister to these needs is to minister to Him. God is calling us as husbands and wives to have the same attitude. Being one flesh involves feeling the needs of each other as if they were our very own.

Secondly, the idea of loving our wives as our own bodies is based on the principle of Genesis 2:24 which Paul quotes in Ephesians 5:31:

31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. (Ephesians 5)

In the eyes of God, when a man takes a wife, they become one flesh. They are joined in such a way that the need of one member is also the need of the other. If one partner in

the marriage suffers, the other also suffers. God has given couples to each other so that they can minister to each other. Their hearts and minds are to be joined in such a way that they are no longer two but one.

How does this oneness work itself out in everyday life? The apostle Paul explains it this way:

*29 For no one ever hated his own flesh,
but nourishes and cherishes it, just as
Christ does the church. (Ephesians 5)*

What happens when you are hungry? Do you not eat? What happens when you are in pain? Do you not do whatever you can to ease that pain? What happens when you are tired? Do you not rest? The natural impulse of the body when it is in need is to care for that need. What Paul is saying is that every couple needs to come to this point in their relationship. We need to see the needs of our partner as our own needs. We need to care for each other as we care for our own body. If I am one flesh with my wife, then I will see her needs and minister to them as if they were my needs for before God they are my needs.

In our day there is such an emphasis on the rights of the individual that we have lost this sense of interdependence. This has come into our marriages as well. It is easy to live under the same roof and share the same bed but not be living as one flesh. Instead of learning to live as one, we seek to maintain our own identity and fight for our individual rights. This becomes a source of great division and quarrels.

What is true in marriage is also true in the church. Many problems develop when we fail to see that God has called us to live and function as one body and not as individuals.

We are strongest when we are one. Our unwillingness to sacrifice our rights and needs for the good of the body has often been our downfall.

What do we learn here about the principle of one flesh? When a husband takes a wife, he commits himself to become one with her. To be one with someone is to take on their needs as your own. It is to minister to them when they are struggling. It is to care for them when they are unwell. It is to reject selfish ambition and pride. It is to die to self and an independent spirit and learn to care for each other. It is to make the needs, desires and ambitions of my partner my own.

This one-flesh principle is one we need to learn in marriage. Because of sin, we struggle with pride and selfishness. This must be overcome if we are to experience the oneness God intends for us. Paul challenges us to look to Christ as our example of oneness. Listen to his words to the Philippians church:

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing

to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
(Philippians 2)

Notice how the apostle challenges the Philippians to be of the “same mind,” having the “same love,” and being in “full accord.” There is to be oneness of mind and heart. This is not always easy to achieve in a marriage or in the church. This, however, is the desire of the Lord God for us.

Notice also that Paul challenges the Philippian believers to do nothing out of selfish ambition but to count others as being more important than themselves. They were to learn to look out for the needs of each other and see them as being more significant than their own needs. They were to die to their own comforts and rights to care for their brother and sister. If this seemed to be unreasonable they were to look to Jesus and what He had done for them. He is God, yet He willingly took on the form of a man, humbled Himself as a man to become a servant and then laid down His life to die for those who had rejected Him.

The oneness God intends can only be found by following the example of Christ. Husbands and wives must put aside their own interests to care for their partners. They must crucify pride and selfish ambition. They must take their minds off themselves alone and make it their ambition and goal in life to see and minister to the needs of their partner with whom they have become one before God. For to love them in this way is to love themselves.

For Consideration:

- Jesus taught that there is no greater expression of love than to lay down one's life for a friend. How much are you willing to sacrifice of your husband or wife?
- If I am one with my husband or wife, how does this impact how I see their needs? What is my response?
- Take a moment to examine your marriage. Are you living as one flesh or are you living as two individuals under the same roof?
- What is your obligation toward your husband or wife? Have you been caring for them and reaching out to their needs? Consider the example of Christ and His attitude? Do you have the mind of Christ in your marriage?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to recognize His purpose for your relationship with your marriage partner. Ask Him to help you to put aside selfishness and pride so that you can be one with him/her.
- Ask God to give you grace to consider the needs of your partner more. Ask Him to open your eyes to see their needs. Ask Him to humble you and give you more of a servant attitude.
- What are the barriers to oneness in your marriage? Take a moment to pray that God would help you remove those barriers. While you cannot change

your partner, you can be what God has called you to be. Ask God for grace to follow His example even if your partner does not change.

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