



Script of Episode 3. Genesis 2:21-25, The Marriage Model, by Bruce C. E. Fleming

Intro:

Welcome to The Eden Podcast where we think again about the Bible on women and men and we start with a correct understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden back in the beginning.

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The focus of this episode is Genesis 2:21-25, The Marriage Model

Let's get started.

Body:

While my wife Joy and I were doing our doctoral studies in theology in Strasbourg, France, I gained access to a centuries-old Bible that had been used by John Calvin.

It is very different from modern Bibles in the way it is laid out on the page. There are no verse numbers. Instead, in the left and right side margins there are the letters A, B, C and D to set off each quarter of the page. That's not all that I found strange. In a copy of Calvin's *Commentaries*, I saw that he had misinterpreted the Hebrew word, *'ezer*, in Genesis 2:18 that means "partner."

How could he have done *that*? Calvin was a reformer of the false doctrines and practices that had grown up over the centuries within the late medieval Church. He managed to address, and set right, many things. But not everything.

The Roman Catholic theologians of his day operated in a world of hierarchies in the church and in the home. Like these theologians, John Calvin promoted the false doctrine that woman had been created to be subservient to man; she had been created to be the man's junior partner. I was surprised to read Calvin's comment on Genesis 2:18. He described the woman as being "like a cook's helper."

Calvin's incorrect understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew word *'ezer* was passed on to his followers. The results of this fundamental mistake gave a false tilt to much of the rest of the theology he wrote. This incorrect theology persists among many of his adherents to this day. But it must not stand!

In the Garden of Eden, when the Lord puts the man into a deep sleep and makes the woman from his side, she takes her first breath and meets God. The man is asleep. The man and the woman each know the companionship of God before they meet each other.

After that, God introduces and marries the man and the woman. Then, they both know the one-flesh companionship of one another. Genesis 2:24-25 describes their wonderful relationship in the presence of God: "... a man shall ... be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. ... the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

From Genesis chapter 2, when the man and woman were in their ideal situation in the presence of the Lord God their creator, we gain a very complete description of what God had in mind for marriage. And how God had in mind that a man and a woman in any and all of the later generations after Adam and Eve should marry. These verses are very important for the understanding of what marriage is and how God intended we get married is a very fuzzy idea in the minds of many people.

Let me tell of an experience I had that drove me to study these verses in Genesis 2 more closely. One weekend, in Africa, I went for one ceremony but attended two. Seven students were going to graduate the next day from a small two-year Bible school in the rain forest on the banks of the Ubangi River in NW Congo. It was a good Bible school. All involved were dear believers in the body of Christ.

I had been specially flown there in a small plane to be the speaker at their graduation ceremony the next day. There were six men and one woman who would receive their diplomas. But first they had another ceremony to attend, and that one surprised me.

Not long after we landed in the late afternoon, the pilot and I were invited to walk up to the local church that doubled as a chapel building to attend a wedding ceremony. Into the church in slow procession walked all seven students dressed in Western fashion to get married.

There were six couples in all. It was pointed out to me that among the 12 people who filed into the church there were the seven graduating students. Five of the students had brides who were not students. And two of the students would marry each other.

The couples happily stood up front, ready to be *married*. There they gathered, along with their many children! Some of them were six or seven years old. Perhaps I was utterly naïve but I was totally confused.

I tentatively asked the dignitary next to me if this was the regular practice of their churches. "Oh yes! Before their graduation ceremonies from Bible school the prospective graduates take part in a Christian marriage, white dresses and all." To my eyes, these couples obviously had been *united* long before this ceremony.

Why did they do it? I asked. "Oh, they want to start their ministry careers having church-recognized Christian unions." That was good intent. But somehow, I reasoned it was preferable for their unions to have been recognized by their families and their churches long before their relationships had gotten this far.

Later the next day, I was winging my way over the rainforest of NW Congo returning to my wife and child. We had gotten married in an obviously Western ceremony too. That's when I doubled down to look for the ideal pattern from Eden for any and all marriages.

Man and woman. In Genesis 2:18, God observes that something is "not good," in other words, the man is alone. So God will make another human. They will be a matched pair.

In Genesis 2:19-20, it is observed that there is no counterpart to the man to be found among the animals, even though they were created beings which are somewhat similar (also made from the ground) but different from him (they do not have the divine breath of life). The man recognizes that he is unique and alone as a human being.

In verses 21-22, God creates a corresponding human being, but not from dust. Woman is specially and carefully made by God's hands, created from the very material of man.

She is the resolution to the situation that was "not good." In 2:23, the man joyfully recognizes that she appropriately corresponds to him and that she is the companion he was without. He is the *male* human, the Hebrew word is *'ish* and she is the female human, the Hebrew word is *'ishshah*. God's work reaches completion with her creation. Together, they are the pinnacle of God's creative work.

The ideal pattern. This first marriage, and the description of marriages to come, is the ideal pattern for all men and women to follow. I found the pattern has four points. I started out with just three, but then I realized that there are four points to the marriage model in Genesis 2.

1. Each member of the union to be, separately, knows God personally.
2. The man leaves his birth family and together with his wife they establish a new family unit. His primary allegiance is no longer to his parents but to her.
3. When the man leaves his parents to join his wife, his parents and all in his local society are put on notice that here is a new family unit.
4. Because they are joined together in the presence of God, the church, the body of believers, recognizes their new family unit.

Let's look into these four points a bit more. Each member of the union to be, separately, knows God personally. In the beginning, when the man opens his eyes for the first time he knows God and is known by God. In the beginning, when the woman opens her eyes for the first time she knows God and is known by God. Each knows God in a personal and lively way.

This should be very easy but it's very hard for *us* to consider in a world filled with rebellion and death.

We might ask, well, are they Christians? Or at least, do they know God in the way that an Old Testament believer knows God? The short answer is yes. Yes, they do. Each is in a perfect relationship with God, knowing God.

In this sense, we have two believers in God who will be coming together in marriage. This is the ideal. To first know God and then, when it comes to marriage, to join together with another believer in God.

The man leaves his birth family and together with his wife they establish a new family unit. His primary allegiance is to her.

The Hebrew word for "to-leave" is *azav*. It can carry the meaning of "to abandon." First, the man is the one who is the "abandoner." He is the one who "forsakes" and "leaves" his own family unit. Such "abandoning" or desertion "of his father and mother" is observed and recognized by others. Reciprocal action on the woman's part is not required.

In the Garden of Eden there was nobody else around. And nobody had parents yet. Verse 2:24 is referring to everybody else after the first man and woman, who had no parents. The man's marriage is to be a public affair. His family and the rest of society with them all know that the man is leaving his parents.

In cultures around the world when there is a moment when all recognize that here is the beginning of the life of a new family unit they are following the example set down in Genesis 2. When such a beginning is not clearly established, when an intimate relationship is started between a man and a woman without a publicly recognized launching point, people are not following the ideal pattern from Eden.

I encountered this as a practical issue where - I'll call them - trial marriages were practiced. A new family unit was not publicly acknowledged, for example, until a first child was produced. Or perhaps until two or three had been born and had survived early childhood. This is not in the pattern from Eden. What if there never is a child produced? What is their relationship then?

Churches lived in confusion. No church wedding had been held. No cultural ceremony had been held either. The parents had not definitively been left by the man. Yet here was a couple living together. Were they married? Was the woman to be recognized as a wife of a certain man? Was that man considered to be married at all?

The next part of the ideal pattern is that the man "cleaves," "clings," or "keeps close" (the Hebrew word is *dabaq*) to his woman. The verb expresses strong attachment in personal loyalty and commitment.

The same verb is used in Ruth 1:14 where Ruth clings to her mother-in-law. Not wanting to part, Ruth adopts the people of Israel, her mother-in-law's people, as her own.

Here, the man's devotion, affection and allegiance changes from two parents to one woman. He becomes loyal to her above all others. The expression "his woman" is not to imply possession or ownership, but rather expresses the exclusivity of the marriage commitment. The loyalty and strong emotional attachment of marriage are designed exclusively for one man and one woman.

The final part of the pattern involves both the man and the woman who in concert "become one flesh." Physical union consummates the marriage. With these four points in the pattern from Genesis 2 a couple is married. There is no need for a Western-style ceremony years later.

But don't they have to get married western-style, with a white dress for the bride and a formal church wedding? No they don't. But these are serious questions in non-Western cultures.

Adam and Eve didn't wear formal clothes to their wedding. They wore no clothes at all. They had no church building to get married in. They had no buildings. Yet their marriage is fully a model for all ages and cultures.

At the creation when God builds the woman from part of the man, what has been one, becomes two. Then, in marriage what is formerly two becomes one. When the words "one flesh" are used, "flesh" emphasizes the physical; "one" emphasizes their oneness or their unity. This Hebrew word for "one" stands for a unity with different parts.

It's the word that is used in Deuteronomy 6:4. There it is written, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD IS ONE.

In some countries, for various reasons, up to 25% of a population may be unable to have children. According to traditional cultures, these marriages are incomplete. They are not valid marriages. It is possible to dismiss a so-called barren spouse, or one can add an additional spouse in order to have children.

But even though the first couple was blessed by God to be fruitful and multiply, having children was not listed as a necessary part of creating a successful new family unit for those who would be married after them.

The fact that Genesis 2 does not contain any requirement to have children was *not* communicated to the villagers in Congo where my wife and I used to work. As a result, church members were still breaking up, or re-ordering, their Christian family units. We have to learn the expectations of each local culture and point out what the Bible requires and does not require of us in a Christian home.

In the beginning, God could have made the two humans simultaneously from dust. But God chose instead to make one from the other, underlining their common essence. God could not have made that point more effectively. And marriage underscores this fact once again. God took one and made two. In marriage, two join to become one.

Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is written out in the structure of a chiasm, which is like a rainbow. The high point of it all comes in what came to be numbered as verse 25 of chapter 2.

In verse 25, creation is complete. God has made a beautiful world. There is completion and harmony in all realms. Verse 25 sums up the situation regarding the man and the woman. They were naked and not ashamed.

Some people add to what Genesis tells us about the beginning. They take what happened later on in our sinful history and project that back into the Garden of Eden. I'm sure you've come across this. I'm thinking specifically of the ideas of "hierarchy" and "authority."

In the beginning in Genesis up to this point, God makes only two references "to human relationships that involve authority."

First, *God* has authority and rules over humans in all that God commands and instructs, and God prohibits one tree from consumption. This is not to trap or trip up the man and woman. Rather, it serves a positive function for it is a visible reminder of their dependence on their Creator. By their obedience, they acknowledge God's governing right in their lives. By their disobedience, they would declare their independence from God.

Second, one other authority structure is clearly spelled out. God tells man and woman to subdue the earth and to have dominion over its animal inhabitants (1:26).

Conspicuously absent in Genesis 1-2 is any advice or command from God for man to exercise authority over woman. This is such an important subject that had such an authority structure been part of the creation design, God would have clearly stated it along with the two other ruling relationships. The total absence of such a commission indicates that it was not part of God's intent.

Only God was in authority over Adam and Eve. Neither of them had the right to usurp God's rulership rights over either of them. Any teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve in God's creation design is to be firmly rejected since it is not founded on the biblical text.

The two partners complement one another. Their relationship is characterized by mutuality as they live harmoniously with each other as equal partners. And each lives in communion with the Creator, the superior of them both.

Close:

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