



FEED MY SHEEP

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Husband versus Wife or Husband and Wife? *Part 21—The Covenants of the Bible*

At the end of the previous issue, we were considering (hypothetically, of course) what kind of husband-wife relationship existed between Adam and Eve *before* the Fall (i.e., before the entrance of sin). And how that relationship most likely suffered a great change after the Fall. This discussion is provoked by the puzzling and curious second half of Genesis 3, verse 16, which reads:

Genesis 3:16b ...and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, [or “for thy husband”] and he shall rule over thee.

From that verse, we were setting the stage to quote from a letter I received from a woman on our audio lecture ministry. I have changed names and any other information which could personally identify the couple, because I do not wish to cause them embarrassment in any way.

Dear Sir, I have been very remiss in the support of your ministry. Life throws us curves sometimes and mine is in upheaval and turmoil. My marriage of 40-plus years is probably not going to survive. I have reached the end of my rope. I am not able to continue receiving your lectures in good conscience.

{Here is the key paragraph now}

I have always been a strong believer in the headship of the husband in the home. In my case, though, it has fed my husband’s tyrannical bent, his critical spirit, and his verbal abuse towards me. He uses the Scriptures as ammunition to tell me how short I fall. I no longer have love or respect for him.

I have put off writing for too long, in part because I

just have felt too overwhelmed by all that is going on right now. Writing also means I must face the issues at hand. Thank you for your generous spirit in sending your messages with receiving nothing in return. Should I find that I can support your ministry in the future, I will write to have me placed back on your audio teaching ministry mailing list. Thank you. [signed] End of quotation.

Do you see how this relates to the verse under discussion? Let me elaborate. First of all, I learned a long time ago, that no matter how terrible the situation sounds—and this certainly qualifies—I am only hearing one side of the story. Sometimes the truth is quite different when both sides are heard.

At the same time, I am not in any way, saying *this* woman is not telling the truth. Because I have also found over the years that in the *majority* of the cases, that although the wives certainly have some faults, more often than not, the men are exactly as she described: tyrannical, and with a critical spirit, and with verbal—if not physical abuse—and even trotting out a Bible verse when they can use it to beat the woman into submission.

That is tragic, totally reprehensible and ungodly. A marriage ought not to be that way. And anybody that has been married longer than a week knows that it takes constant effort and unconditional agape love of your partner to make a marriage work.

Oh, and before I forget to mention it, especially to the much larger audience of the FMS and CD Ministries, that this is *not* a pitch for business. Because I have also learned over the years that my gifting is in teaching and writing, not marriage counseling.

There are a couple of marital counseling cases that I have worked with for many years, and I will not abandon those couples; but I cannot take on any more. If you have marital problems, please find someone locally who can get to know you much better in face-to-face meetings.

Now this goes to the heart of the husband-wife relationship: just what does verse 16 b mean?

16 b and thy desire shall be to thy husband, [or “for thy husband”] and he shall rule over thee.

This was part of the punishment, the judgment for sin, remember? So does the fact that the husband shall rule over the wife suggest that before the Fall, that Adam did not rule over Eve?

Well, I don’t know if we can even frame it in those terms when conjecturing what it was like before the Fall. We simply are not told. I would contend, however, that everything in Scripture on this subject points to the unmistakable fact that Adam was the responsible head from the beginning.

Remember Adam was lonely and he did not see anything in all of creation that was suitable for him as a helper and companion. The King James Version uses the term “help meet.” That does not mean a helpmate. The word meet means “suitable.” The word “help” is the Hebrew word H5828 עֵזֶר {ay'-zer} which in fact does mean ...1b) one who helps.

So I think it is clear that from the beginning—i.e., before the Fall, the ordained order by God was that Adam had the headship responsibility and Eve was created as a helper and companion. This relationship does not change throughout the Bible, because Paul in the New Testament speaks of the same relationship, with the husband as head of the wife.

But you see, this is where the problem arises—because of the Fall, to be sure! The problem is that both men and women are prone to sin. Men are prone to use their God-ordained position as head to force the wife to submit, by threats, and meanness, verbal abuse or worse, all manner of unkindness, harshness, and a demanding attitude that he is king and everyone else is there to serve him. That is ungodly! It is just the opposite of what a godly husband should be.

He should be self-denying, caring for his wife and family in all their needs to the best of his ability; self-sacrificing, always seeking to serve their needs first, not his own. His attitude should mirror that: he should be loving, tender, kind, gentle, and above all, patient and humble.

It is a tall order and that is because we are still suffering the results of the Fall. Until we are awarded actual perfection in resurrected bodies, we Christian believers have been given the earnest (as in “earnest money;” i.e., a down payment) of the Holy Spirit, and that includes the grace to go a very long ways towards perfection in our marital relationships.

Now, to look at it from the woman’s perspective. Before the Fall, I believe I am correct when I imagine that Eve was overflowing with happiness and that she was one hundred percent content to not be the head but to be the perfect helper and companion for Adam, ...her m-a-a-a-an!

But after the Fall, it became a different story. In my studying, reading and researching for this lecture, I came across an article on this very topic in a well-known theological journal from over 40 years ago.

I will share parts of it with you. I will skip some of the more technical or difficult passages and I will summarize and/or paraphrase other parts for you. And I hope in doing so, you find it as enlightening as I did. Now keep Genesis 3:16b in mind as you also ponder this.

The article is called “What Is the Woman’s Desire?” That is a direct reference to the phrase “and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband.” The author begins by giving several traditional and standard interpretations of what that word translated “desire” means.

“The translation of תִּיקָה tesh-oo-kaw’ causes a large part of the difficulty. There are three typical interpretations.

“(1) תִּיקָה is frequently equated with sexual desire. The woman’s craving for her husband “will be so strong that to satisfy it she will be ready to face all the pains and sorrows of childbearing.” ...

“The woman still desires marital intercourse though the result, conceiving and bearing children, brings pain. This interpretation closely links verse 16b with verse 16a, and so fits the immediate context.

“(2) תִּיקָה ‘slave of man.’ It is that ‘immense, clinging, psychological dependence on man.’ Seeing no reason to limit the scope of ‘desire’ to sexual appetite, Clarence J. Vos would not exclude from it the woman’s desire for the man’s protection. Keil and Delitzsch see ‘desire’ as a morbid yearning; the woman ‘...was punished with a *desire* bordering upon disease’... [I am almost embarrassed to read that; I find it that idea repugnant, don’t you?—JWB]

“(3) Calvin states that Gen 3:16b means that the woman will desire only what her husband desires and that she will have no command over herself. The woman’s desires are wholly subservient to her husband’s, as a result of God’s judgment.” [Here also, I have to comment that I think Calvin is out to lunch on this one. The author continues...]

“Despite the differences in the interpretation of תַּקַּוָּה {tesh-oo-kaw’}, all of the commentators cited above agree that, through the woman’s desire for her husband, he rules her. In other words, because the woman desires the husband in some way, he is able to rule over her.”

The author then proceeds to present several reasons why none of those interpretations fit the bill. Included in that discussion are the following remarks:

“The other more frequent method of dealing with this problem is to differentiate between the husband’s God-ordained headship and his ‘rule’ in Gen. 3:16. The woman was subordinate to her husband from the beginning, but the ‘supremacy of the man was not intended to become a despotic rule, crushing the woman into a slave...’ as it does after the fall. Before the fall, man’s rule was gentle; afterwards it is tyrannous. ‘Rule’ (רָבַד) (in Gen 3:16) is said to suggest suppressing or overcoming.

“(3) The preceding solution satisfies the demands of the over-all context, i.e., the tyrannous rule of the husband seems an appropriate punishment for the woman’s sin. However, if the woman’s desire makes her a willing slave of her husband or if she has no desires except for husband’s (which is Calvin’s view, you recall), then the hardship of punishment is absent, because the woman willingly submits herself to her husband’s rule.

But willing submission contradicts the context of judgment and clashes with the New Testament commands to submit to the husband’s authority (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1), as well as [clashing with what we observe in life] experience.”

The author then presents a new interpretation. It is pointed out how this Hebrew word for desire {tesh-oo-kaw’} appears in only two other places in the Bible. One is in the seldom-read book, The Song of Solomon.

Song of Solomon 7:10 I am my beloved’s, and his desire {tesh-oo-kaw’} is toward me.

And the other is only 15 verses away from the verse under our Bible microscope. Look at Genesis

4:7. This is where Cain and Abel presented their respective offerings to the Lord and the Lord did not accept Cain’s offering. Cain started sulking and the Lord said to him, ...

Genesis 4:7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

That last part is key, but difficult to understand, so let me give it to you from the RSV and I will insert the nouns with their respective pronouns.

RSV Genesis 4:7...its [meaning: sin’s] desire is for you, but you [Cain] must master it.

Now quoting the article once more:

“In Gen. 4:7 sin’s desire is to enslave Cain—to possess or control him, but the Lord commands, urges Cain to overpower sin, to master it. An active struggle between Cain and sin is implied:...

“The woman **has the same sort of desire for her husband that sin has for Cain, a desire to possess or control him.** This desire disputes the headship of the husband.

“As the Lord tells Cain what he should do, i.e., master or rule sin, the Lord also states what the husband should do, rule over his wife. The words of the Lord in Gen 3:16b, as in the case of the battle between sin and Cain, do not determine the victor of the conflict between husband and wife.

“These words mark the beginning of the battle of the sexes. As a result of the fall, man no longer rules easily; he must fight for his headship. Sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband.

“The woman’s desire is to control her husband (to usurp his divinely appointed headship, and he must master her, if he can. So the rule of love founded in paradise is replaced by struggle, tyranny and domination.

“Experience corroborates this interpretation of God’s judgment on the woman. If the words ‘and he shall rule over you’ in Gen 3:16b are understood in the indicative [meaning, a statement of fact], then they are not true.

“As Cain did not rule over sin (Gen 4:7b), so not every husband rules his wife, and wives have desires

contrary to their husbands' and [sometimes] have no desire (sexual or psychological) for their husbands.

“As we have stated earlier on the basis of context, the woman’s desire does not contribute to the husband’s rule; the opposite is the case.”

The author then provides this summary:

“Contrary to the usual interpretations of commentators, the desire of the woman in Gen 3:16b does not make the wife (more) submissive to her husband so that he may rule over her. Her desire is to contend with him for leadership in their relationship. This desire is a result of and a just punishment for sin, but it is not God’s decretive will for the woman. Consequently, the man must actively seek to rule his wife. The reasons for preferring this interpretation are:

“(1) It is consistent with the context, i.e., it is judgment for sin that the relation between man and woman is made difficult. God’s words in Gen 3:16b destroy the harmony of marriage, for the rule of the husband, part of God’s original intent for marriage, is not made more tolerable by the wife’s desire for her husband, but less tolerable, because she rebels against his leadership and tries to usurp it.

“(2) It permits a consistent understanding of תַּקְוָה {tesh-oo-kaw’}, [the word for *desire*] and (3) It recognizes the parallel between Gen 3:16b and 4:7b. The interpretation of 4:7b is clearer; we know from the context that sin’s desire to Cain involves mastery or enslavement and that Cain did not win the battle to rule sin.

“(4) It explains the fact that husbands do not rule their wives [well] as a result of God’s proclamation in Gen 3:16b. (Further support is implied by the New Testament commands for wives to be submissive to their husbands and the requirements for elders to rule their families.)”

I hope you were able to understand the basic premise of the author’s theme. I realize that articles from theological journals are not exactly easy reading, but I hope that I have been able to massage it, paraphrase it, and excerpt it so that you catch the basic ideas.

In the next issue, we will continue in our study of the covenants of the Bible, and as far as I can determine, it gets even better as we go on. But before I conclude this issue it is very important that I apprise you of two things:

(1) It is especially necessary that you—especially my beloved *sisters-in-Christ* in the audience—but I want you all to be aware, that the author of this article in the Autumn 1975 issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal* was Susan T. Foh. That’s right; a woman wrote that piece! And I think that her interpretation is substantially correct, as far as I can see.

(2) And finally, I will close for this month with my tongue tightly ensconced in my cheek as I confess to you that my wife approved this lecture. (*grinning*)

(*Series to be continued.*)

Resources Available

The FMS essays which comprise this series are drawn from a series of 48 lectures which were originally presented in audio format with each lecture being nearly one hour long. The entire series, called *The Covenants of the Bible*, is still available in six albums of 8 CDs per album, all for \$139 + \$7 shipping. This price is a savings of \$101 compared to buying them as individual CDs.

Many people find they learn better by hearing than by reading the material. Those who often spend hours on the road commuting or on long drives will find that listening to the CDs makes the time fly by—and as I myself have found—helps prevent the tendency to “road rage!”

So instead of a near accident, when some bozo cuts in front of you, instead of our old Adamic-man, carnal nature blurting out: “Go ahead, cut me off, you @#%!” we will find our self saying to ourselves something like, “Go ahead, cut me off, you @#%—oops! I mean, go ahead, you who are still learning patience, cut me off. I will take a deep breath, thank the Lord that no accident ensued as I continue to relax in this traffic mess and continue to learn more wonderful biblical truths!”

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