

Two Become One: God's Blueprint for Couples

Summarizing concepts in the book by Donald and Robbie Joy
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From slow reflection across 56 years of marriage, we want to bring together here a record of how we have come to see the bold and empowering vision of Creation—how Man and Woman came into being to create a mystery in the image of God with an echo of Trinitarian mystery→ two become one! And we will construct here the unfolding pieces of that discovery, how God's original creation "male and female in the image of God" descended into the pain of deformity as the Woman's worship focused on the Man, and the Man responded by ruling over the Woman. The long-term goal of the Gospel includes healing that universal human deformity and pointing us toward the ultimate wedding and the heroic Bride and Groom at the end of Scripture.

Slow Learners

I, Don, grew up, as Robbie did, in a home punctuated by prayer and Bible reading for the whole family. I enjoyed life in a family which fairly glowed with parents who lived and worked together in a glorious harmony and synchrony. It was clear that all of us in our home and extended family lived under the lordship of Jesus. The wall motto in my grandparents' house, visible to the dining table participants said it all:

Christ is the head of this home,
The unseen guest at every meal,
The silent listener to every conversation.

But at Sunday school the Bible text seemed to place a priority on being born male. So, by the age of six, my cousin Rex and I were theologians and were eager to put our theology to work. Occasionally, on hot Sunday afternoons our talk would turn to how lucky we were to be born male—just like Adam. Rex would ask me to count his ribs, then he would count mine as we lifted our shirts to expose our skinny bodies for the count. On our lucky days we had an uneven number of ribs—and we were ecstatic to think that even now God had created our women, and they would be "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh."

Robbie, too, grew up in a Bible reading home and Bible teaching church. She accepted that the man came first, that the man was the designated master. She took comfort in knowing that a man would always think she was special and would take care of her.

If you could have watched the closing ceremony at the Joy breakfast table in the first seventeen years of my life, you would have seen Dad reaching for his well-worn KJV Bible where it rested on the deck of the dining buffet. Inserted in the Bible was a Sunday-school quarterly left open to next Sunday's lesson. Retrieving the Bible, he would turn back to all of us at the table. Dad would then consult the fine print below the title to identify today's brief Scripture reading. He would locate the passage and read it. He would then reinsert the quarterly in the open Bible, returning it to the buffet again for tomorrow's use.

We would then fall on our knees at our chairs and pray. Dad or Mother would open the prayer, then each of us kids would pray in birth order—three of us. When the last voice went silent, we began the cadence of the Lord's Prayer, closed with "Amen," and were on our feet to face a new day. On school days, there was sometimes a visible rush because the school bus driver was honking

the horn in our front yard, trying to get the delinquent three off our knees to board his bus.

Those mornings, listening to Scripture and falling on our knees blur into one solid memory of our family's priorities during those decades. Work or other pressures never cancelled that ritual. Only one repeating memory of content sticks in my mind. Much too often, it seems in retrospect, Dad would announce the Scripture passage and begin to read with a wide smile on his face. He was delighted, too pleased it seems now, to tease our Mother with a passage which began with Ephesians 5:22. In the KJV it said:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

The three of us would see Dad's grin and then would turn to look at Mother. She would typically smile right back at him and let him read on.

Wives Submitting to Husbands

At that breakfast table, we knew that Dad and Mother were not adversaries, and we knew that any demand that one of them do all of the submitting was ridiculous. Instead, we experienced our parents in that amazing paradox of "two become one." The generations have rolled forward by more than sixty years, and I now suspect that the International Council of Religious Education who planned those daily readings broke into a passage and started with the wrong verse—and in memory I am certain that it was selected much too often. I also know that the old KJV was careful about many things, but careless about the key word in this passage. Notice, above, that the words *let* and *be* are in italics because they were not actually in the Greek text. Remarkably, they failed to italicize *submit yourselves*, yet the word for "submit" is only in Ephesians 5:21—the previous verse. It looks suspicious that the ICRE Uniform Sunday School Committee consistently and knowingly avoided 5:21 with the only use of "submit." "Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God."

Better yet, the Committee could have begun with 5:15 or 5:18—either of which grounds submission in the context of being wise or being "filled with the Spirit." What follows in 5:19-21 are three "ing" words denoting the effects of being filled with the Spirit:

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns"

"Giving thanks always for all things"

"Submitting yourselves one to another"

The only culture in which men demand that women unilaterally submit to men, and where men control women is the culture of evil—of the original sin described in Genesis 3.

This early home and church environment set me up to pursue love and to marry in the "rule over her" mode, even though Robbie and I thought we were marrying in the Creation model. And the deformed idea worked fairly well because Robbie had grown up in a home reading the same texts and accepting a mental model that fell far short of the love and marriage our hearts were leading us to pursue. So the quality of our marriage became a part of the contradiction to the deformed messages handed to us from Scripture. We were creating the

mystery of “two become one” in our better moments, but when there was tension we both reverted to the tragic distortions in which Robbie worshipped me instead of God, and in that vulnerability, I made “lone-ranger” decisions. In the full text of *Two Become One—God’s Blueprint for Couples*, we explore all of the Bible texts which have been used to devalue women and to exploit the power temptations of men.¹

Adam as Source of Both Man and Woman: One Becomes Two

The mystery of “two become one” starts with Adam. Long ago the King James Version of the Bible in Genesis 5, called the human “male and female” creation “Adam.” The more recent translations consistently translate the term as “man” and use singular masculine pronouns to refer to Adam. Among them, the New International Version has begun to make restitution by confessing the truth in a footnote to Genesis 5:2. There the word “man” turns out always to be a translation of “*adam*.” So if we insert “Adam” everywhere “man” shows up in the Creation narratives, we have the truth. They, Man and Woman, are Adam. “Let them have dominion” of Genesis 1:26 and 28. In Genesis 5:1-2, the text has always been clear. Look at how clearly it presents the Adam if we use the noun where “man” occurs: “In the day that God created Adam, in the likeness of God, God made the Adam; male and female God created them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.” How did all of us miss the Adam of this passage since the KJV of 1611? God “called their name Adam in the day they were created.”

And Genesis 2, the second gospel of Creation, tells the story in detail. First there is the Adam into which God “breathed the breath of life,” the Holy Spirit. Then, before the human creation is complete, God observes that “it is not good that the Adam should be alone; I will make him a companion facing him.” The old King James Bible tells us “as before him” is the literal meaning when Woman faces the Man. Man and Woman both come out of Adam, so before “two became one,” “one became two.”

I have capitalized Man and Woman here just as KJV and most other versions capitalize them in Genesis 2. When they are capitalized they denote specific names for Man and Woman: *Ish* is Man; *Isha* is Woman. These capitalized Hebrew language names are in the center column of the old KJV and show up in the center column of the New American Standard Version as well. They are the words which show up in the traditional marriage ceremonies, “For this cause *Ish* leaves father and mother and cleaves to his *Isha*. So the Creation formula is Adam=*Ish+Isha*. One becomes two. And immediately in the Genesis 2 account *Ish* cleaves/clings to/reweaves with *Isha* and they become one flesh. The marital formula is set: *Ish+Isha*=Adam. A footnote early in Genesis 5 [but why not in Genesis one?] declares “Man” to be “adam.”

We didn’t notice it at first, but the couple’s names were not Adam and Eve. The names were Man (*Ish*) and Woman (*Isha*). Woman did not become “Eve” until after the tragedy of Genesis 3, and then it was the man who grasped power to himself and reduced her to her functional value: sexual object and reproductively valuable “Mother.” “Eve” was never the name God gave Woman.

In the Image of God and Mystery of the Holy Trinity

¹ For the autobiography of our marriage and a full treatment of the biblical material dealing with husband and wife roles and relationships see our *Two Become One—God’s Blueprint for Couples* Nappanee, Ind., Evangel Publishing House, www.evangelpublishing.com, 2002. The book is a revision of *Lovers: Whatever Happened to Eden?* published in 1987 by Word Books, Waco, Texas.

The Genesis One foundational Gospel of Creation offers Creation as the “design.” “God said, ‘Let us create them in our image and our likeness.’” The plural Trinity pronouns declare by their “us,” “our,” and “our” that the community of Holy Trinity is One! “So God created them male and female. . . . And God said, ‘Let them rule over . . .’ and ‘Let them have dominion’” The design was co-regency, not one of dominance and submission—no benevolent headship husband and no gracious submission of the woman. If any couple disagrees on any decision, it is time to wait, not a time for one to dominate the other and push through alone.

The Genesis 2 Gospel of Creation offers the mystery of two humans formed out of one, and closes with the design feature, “two become one.” Like the Trinity, two-become-one are designed for community, celebration, and creative and productive work.

The Gospel solution in Jesus re-establishes the “two become one” as the profound commentary on the pathos of divorce. The detail of Jesus’ exchange with the scribes and Pharisees is recorded in Matthew 19. He is re-establishing exclusive, life-long monogamy as God’s order, but uses no submission or headship language: “For this cause a man leaves father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and the two become one. What, therefore, God joins together, let no one put asunder.” Solution: Two become one.

The solution in Paul’s teaching on marriage and family appears in several places, all necessarily reconcilable with Creation and Jesus, but none more badly taught than the Ephesians passage. To begin with, the “submit” statements flow out of a grand teaching begun in 5:15: “Be careful how you live. . . .” The high road commanded is, “Do not get drunk with wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” A list of wonderful life markers then flows to describe what a person filled with the Spirit will be doing. Most translations honor the participle forms translating them with “ing” words. These high goals for living flow from a list of Christian practices--being “filled with the Spirit” emerges when we are speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks, and submitting to one another.

The confusion of Paul’s teaching passage in Ephesians is even more complicated because the NIV translators inserted the heading “Wives and Husbands” between Ephesians 5:21 and 22. This offense is a felony when you discover by the italics in more careful versions and translations that the word “submit” is not even in the text about women in 5:22. The sense is there, but the verb, evidently by inspiration from the Holy Spirit, appears only in 5:21 where it says elegantly, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Now, there is a doctrinal statement to enhance the quality of family life and that of the entire faith community. What follows in 5:22, says of this submission, “wives, to your husbands.” Then in 5:25, the teaching flows to the husband’s sacrificial submission even to the death if necessary to protect his wife’s holiness and sanctity. The grand finale of this Spirit-filled kind of life, however, in this Christ+Church, husband+wife symphony is the entirely missing piece in traditional distorted teaching about God’s design—“two become one.” Carried forward from Genesis 2 and from Jesus in Matthew 19, the Ephesians picture is finished in 5:31-32: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.” So, Paul is using the mystery of a “two become one” marriage to illustrate Christ’s relationship to the church! I wonder whether we can accept the challenge to live out that mystery or whether we will stoop to blaspheme if we insist on ruling over women and

sending them silently into inferiority and unilateral submission. Dorothy Sayers once commented that Jesus' leaving His entire mission to the church—His bride—is the “scandal of Christianity.” Paul suggests that the “two become one” mutual dependency is visible both in the mystery of Christ and the Church, and in the Creation mystery of husbands and wives.

What Are the Losses?

God warned the woman in Genesis 3, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Walter Kiser, in his *Problem Texts of the Old Testament*,² gives the chilling and painful word about “desire” as used here. It is, he says, the woman’s capacity to “worship” that is distorted. Once having depended on God, worshipped God alone, she has a central tendency now to “worship her husband.” Indeed, the word for “husband” emerges from that time to the present moment into the Hebrew “*Baal*,” my idol!

God’s warning to the woman about man, is pretty straightforward: His central tendency is that “he will rule over you.” These deformities are cross-culturally accurate, up-to-date. These parallel “central tendencies” mark us, everywhere, as caught in the grip of Original Sin! And leave it to the heathen to catch us red-handed in our male dominance and the tendency for women to cry themselves to sleep with feelings of inferiority. In North America, men and women tend to continue to play out the “drama of distortions” in the ugliness of their mistrust, harassment, hostilities, divorces, and power plays, but also in their sadness and depression that the vision has crashed and they are playing out roles by which everyone loses. In traditional cultures this Original Sin game tends to show itself in abuse, violence, prostitution, and polygamy. And for most of history there has rarely been a Gospel cry for “justice” calling men and women to the Creation and Redemption vision of Trinitarian co-regency and “two-become-one” ways of working with each other.

In a remarkable parable found in other sixth-day creatures, the animals and birds, some 85% of them are polygynous—one male with a cluster of females for short term mating. Males use their size, power, and armor in some cases to display their superiority and to dominate a harem as they compete for females and then turn aggressively to ward off other males. About 13% of animal and bird species are exclusively and life-long monogamous. The pairs are indistinguishable in appearance, are of the same size, and both parents feed and care for the young. A tiny 3% of animal and bird species are polygamous with a larger female in those species recruiting and dominating a harem of males. Among the majority, the 85% with dominant males, most are “tournament species” whose males engage in the competitive rituals to win and keep their harems. They are dangerous with their own young, often cannibalizing them or at least killing them to bring the females into estrus and to sexual availability again. You may see in this parable some pair arrangements that you discover among your neighbors or even in your extended family. The tendency of tournament males to dominate females, to proudly display their symbols of male superiority, and to be predators of the young may remind you of moral and legal battles we even now are grieving because males who tend to lust for power often seize it and dominate the weak. These male power mongers are not only dangerous to women, they are characterized by sexual exploitations and multiple

² For careful reflection on “desire” and Woman’s tendency to worship a man as a result of the disobedience recorded in Genesis 3, see Walter C. Kaiser, “Your Desire Will Be for Your Husband,” Chapter 6, in *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Colorado Springs: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), pp. 33 ff.

sexual partners. John Wesley, in his sermon on “The Brute Creation” suggests that human sin, recorded in Genesis 3, seems to have ricocheted through the other species of Creation’s sixth day, damaging the relationships between male and female in most animal and bird species, and alienating most of them from humans.³

A Time for Grieving?

It is time to salute efforts to cure the plague of brokenness in American families and to offer blueprints for healing and restoring families. But it is urgent, too, that we sort out those efforts and blueprints which re-invent the tragic distortions which linger like a curse from the consequences of sin in Genesis three, and resoundingly expose and reject them. Remember that painful warning: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” If we want to have truly Christian families it may be time for both men and women to “own” their tendencies to revert to broken and deformed ways of relating to each other. And many of us are ready to grieve that we too easily slip back into the prehistoric patterns of distorted “central tendencies.” I am one man who, more often than I like to admit, needs to name his tendency to “control,” to take away the “image of God” gift of sovereignty God invested in woman and man alike in Creation—“Let them have dominion!” And I am close enough to one wife, two daughters-in-law, and three grand-daughters who occasionally seem vulnerable to “leaving it to the men,” and in their distorted “central tendencies” expect a man to be their “god” and “miracle worker” on demand.

At the community and denominational level, I grieve that men tend not to find ways to re-visit Creation. Instead they tend to speak for everyone, legislate for everyone, and interpret for everyone based on the visible bias of the painful “central tendencies” of Genesis 3 males. It is little wonder that males so often construct power-based organizations, then compete for highest rank within them. And the record of male power exploiting the powerless is persistent around the world and in virtually every subculture, including the church. Ironically, such “tournament males” are high risks, rarely capable of exclusive life-long marital bonding or keeping vows of chastity and celibacy.

Finding Our Way Together

We offer these summary reflections from our book and our story. It was originally titled *Lovers: What Ever Happened to Eden?* Now revised, and updated it has been released in 2002 as *Two Become One—God’s Design for Couples*. We offer it as a “work in progress.” Once we began to discover the “big picture” of Scripture—from Genesis through Revelation, it set us up to ask serious questions about isolated phrases and verses that have been used to establish as “gospel” the role of women as passive worshippers of men, and of men as willing and able “masters” to rule over women.

We are eager not to offend any husband and wife who find that a Genesis 3 marriage fulfills their present longings, but we are eager for everyone to keep their faces in Scripture and their eyes turned toward Jesus. We are confident that Scripture opens up best through pain and failure. Many couples will discover, as they search Scriptures, the glory of becoming co-regents, the mystery of “two becoming one,” and the fulfillment of “having dominion” as sovereigns in the image of God. If they do, they will have gotten themselves “a

³ I was startled to read the documentation about animal and bird species. See Melvin Konner, *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982, pp. 261-290.

new marriage” with the same lifelong marriage partner. They will be living out the Trinitarian image of God and will be wise stewards as they “have dominion over” God’s good creation.



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