

The Making of Woman

by Ray C. Stedman

In a series on *Understanding Man* it would be folly to omit a study on understanding women. Yet as a man who lives with a wife, four daughters, and a mother-in-law, I understandably approach this subject with considerable timidity. In our home I am even grateful for a mailbox out front! But for our consideration of this subject I do not turn to experience but to the wonderfully helpful words of Scripture. In the latter part of Genesis 2 we have this theme brought before us, the making of woman. I have covered this section in a previous message dealing primarily with the matters of sex and developing the four great facts about sex which God wants everyone to know. I shall not dwell on that aspect of this subject now but our theme will be the role of woman in marriage, for when God made a woman, marriage was born.

In these latitudinarian days we read occasionally in the papers of the "marriage" of homosexuals. What a pathetically shabby imitation of what God intended marriage to be! Marriage involves a man and a woman, and this passage reveals to us three very helpful things in relationship to women and to marriage. In the first part we shall deal with the intent of God in making woman; then there follows a description of the process which he followed, revealing some very interesting things; and then the qualities of true marriage that result from the making of woman.

Let us first turn to **the intent of God.**

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. {Gen 2:18-20 RSV}

1. It is obvious that the first thing clear from this passage is that woman was made to be man's companion. "It is not good that the man should be alone." We know today that one of the most shattering emotions of which human beings are capable is that of loneliness. When God pronounced a sentence of "not good" upon man's condition it was the interjection of the first negative element in the story of creation. Up to now everything had been pronounced "good" and on the sixth day of creation God said that everything he had done was "very good." But now we read that it was "not good for man to be alone," indicating that it never was God's intention for man to be alone, that from the

very beginning he intended to make two sexes in the making of man.

For a human to exist, whether man or woman, in loneliness is always a shattering threat to the happiness and welfare of that individual. Loneliness is now reckoned to be the single greatest cause of suicide in this country, and it is undoubtedly the most widespread source of human misery in the world today. Yet it is a perfectly human experience. Each of us has felt at times the need for human companionship. There is nothing wrong with that; God made us that way. We need one another. We were not made to exist in loneliness.

I heard John R. W. Stott point out from the close of Paul's second letter to Timothy how lonely Paul was. Mr. Stott described the apostle as he sat in his tiny dungeon in Rome, with a circular opening in the ceiling above him as the only access, and how he informed Timothy that all had forsaken him and begged the young man to come to him soon, before winter if possible, and to bring with him certain articles of clothing and books and parchments, because he was cold in body, bored in mind, and lonely in spirit. Mr. Stott brought out what a perfectly human reaction this was. Despite the fact that the apostle could look beyond to the fact that his departure was near at hand, and he was about to join the Lord in glory, and though he was thrilled with the possibilities that opened before him, yet this did not cancel out the human element of loneliness.

God knows that we need one another, and he provides others for us. It is clear from this passage that the chief, although not the sole answer, to the loneliness of man is the making of woman; man and woman together in marriage. One of the primary purposes of marriage is to provide companionship, a sharing of life together.

I read recently that one of the famous actresses of the stage, the skilled and popular Gertrude Lawrence, once announced to her friends that she would like to get married. They said, "Why? You have everything that anyone could want. You have fame, close friends, abundant social life. What could marriage add to you?" She said, "It is because I want so desperately to have someone to nudge." Thus she highlighted the need for

companionship and the fact that this is an elementary hunger in human life.

2. The second intent expressed here on the part of God was that woman should be a helper to man, someone to share not only his life as a companion but his work and responsibilities as well. It is interesting that this has been true from the very beginning of man's existence: men and women designed to work together. Perhaps there is nothing more destructive to marriage than the attitude that commonly exists in many homes which regards the man as having his area of responsibility, his realm of life, such as his office, his work, etc., and the woman having hers, the home, the children, etc., and there is little or no sharing together in these areas. It is always a destructive element in any home or marriage, for either mate to feel that they have a private realm to the exclusion of the other. The man has nothing much to say around the home; the woman has nothing to do with her husband's work. This is terribly wrong.

It is clear from this passage that God made woman to be a helper to man and to share with him a mutual concern and responsibility, though necessarily they might have different assignments because of the nature of their work. The nature of the work that supports a home and the level of living is to be primarily determined by the husband, but the decisions by which these are carried out and the labor involved, is shared equally by the wife. This is made clear in this reference to woman as man's helper. But it is made even clearer by the remarkable verse that follows, Verse 19.

Here we have what logicians call a *non sequitur*, something that apparently has no relationship to that which has gone before, it does not seem to follow. In Verse 18 we see the declaration of God that he intends to make a woman, "a helper fit for him." Then in Verse 19 we read,

So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. {Gen 2:19 RSV}

What has that to do with making a woman? How does that follow God's declaration of intent to make a helper to man? Obviously there must be a connection here. God set Adam to the task of studying the animals. He gave him a project to work out before he was ready for marriage. Doubtless it was in order to show him that his wife was to be quite different than the animals. Many men have not learned that yet, but it is clear that this was the intent of God in setting man upon this search.

Now what did he learn as he examined the animals? I have pointed out in a previous message on this passage that Adam could not possibly have given names to the animals without knowing the character of each, because a name always reflects a characteristic. In the giving of a name to each of the animals Adam had to understand, whether by a revelation from God or by searching and examining on his own, something of the character of each animal. Now what did Adam learn by this? There are several things immediately evident:

a) Perhaps he learned first that woman was not to be a mere beast of burden as so often she has become in the history of the race since. There are societies where women are treated exactly like animals, where the price of a woman is approximately the price of a cow, and where women are sometimes traded for cows. But this is a violation of what Adam learned in the beginning, that woman is not like the animals. Adam did not find in the animals a helper fit for him. His wife, when she appeared, was quite different. Therefore woman is not to be treated as a slave, there to do so much work in a household.

One of the most devastating things to feminine personality is to have a man treat his wife as though she were but a servant or housekeeper, there only to keep everything in order. Perhaps the most frequent cause of complaint from women in marriage is a variation on the theme: "He looks upon me just as another thing around the house. I'm like part of the furniture." This is terribly destructive to a woman's psychological make-up.

b) Second, Adam unquestionably learned in his search that woman is not to be merely a biological laboratory for the producing of children. Obviously it is women who bear children, but they are not to be like the animals who bear progeny as almost their sole reason for existence. Women are not to be like that. Sex has a much higher function in human life than the mere reproduction of children. Again, one of the most destructive ideas that has been spread among mankind has been this essentially Catholic teaching that the first and primary reason for marriage is the production of children. The Bible does not reflect that at all. There is in the Bible ample justification for birth control when circumstances warrant, and man has come to understand this under the terrible pressure of an exploding population that has made him face up squarely to the fact that woman was never intended to be merely a biological factory for the producing of children.

c) Third, Adam probably learned, in his search, that woman is not a thing outside himself to be used as he sees fit and then disposed of, as man uses animals. Women are not beasts of burden, they are not simply for producing children, and they are not something to be used at the whim of man and then disposed of. They are to be a helper fit for him, corresponding to him. The philosophy of *Playboy Magazine* reflects the idea that woman is nothing more than a plaything for man – disposable women – you use them like you would a Kleenex and then toss them away. Wring out the juices and then on to another. But this passage directly contradicts that. Woman is to be a helper and a companion, fit for man, corresponding exactly to his needs, and continuously so, constantly able to adjust to the changes that come in him. She is therefore not to be treated as some mere disposable thing.

That gives us a look at the intent of God in making woman.

Let us move on to **the process which he followed** in this. We will not dwell long on this, but in Verses 21 and 22 we have it set before us.

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. {Gen 2:21-22 RSV}

This is a most interesting account. It has been derided and laughed at as being crassly literal, yet those who deride it forget that they are reckoning with an almighty God. A scientist told me once that it is quite possible for any cell of the body potentially to reproduce, not only itself, but the member of which it is a part and even ultimately the whole body. I have not looked into that further, but, if that is the case, then there is certainly no problem involved in God actually taking a rib and using it to make a woman. It is absurd to argue, as some have, that this could not have happened because men have the same number of ribs as women do today. After all, if you cut off your finger it does not mean that your children will be born minus a finger.

But there are two things about this that are very significant:

1. First, there is the revelation that man was caused to fall into a deep sleep and during this period of unconsciousness woman was made. These things are reported to us not only because they actually happened but because they also are suggestive of certain continuing relationships that obtain. This period of unconsciousness strongly suggests what modern psychology also confirms – that the relationships of marriage, the ties between a man and his wife, are far deeper than mere surface affection. They go much more deeply. They are a part, not only of the conscious life of man, but of the unconscious, the subconscious.

This explains what any marriage counselor soon recognizes: why it is that men and women are so puzzled by one another's reactions at times. They know that they themselves are often upset or angry or hurt at something the other one has done, but they can't put their finger on the reason. It is, of course, because the

other person has violated a basic drive which God himself has built into the feminine or masculine nature and which are thus rooted in the basic nature of each individual. Though we cannot put our finger on what it is that is bothering us, we know there is something wrong. This is why in First Peter the Scriptures exhort the man to dwell with his wife "according to knowledge" {1 Pet 3:7 KJV}. The responsibility of the man in marriage is to understand what the Scriptures teach about women, and to help his wife to understand herself as well as to understand him. She will have a much easier task understanding him than she does herself.

2. The second revelation here is that woman was made from a rib. Again, as we have seen, skeptics laugh at this, but God knew what he was doing. It is most significant that a rib was chosen from which to make woman. I know it is dangerous to teach from a metaphor or an allegory because it can be abused.

For instance, it might be suggested here that because a rib is one of the few bones in the body that is curved, this is why women have more curves than man. Someone has pointed out that it is much better to dwell with 200 pounds of curves, than with 100 pounds of nerves. But I rather think that is pressing the figure a bit.

There are, however, two matters connected with the rib that are genuinely applicable here:

- a) One is that it emphasizes the essentially emotional nature of woman. Ribs are the bones nearest the heart, and are thus closely linked with the heart, which is always throughout Scripture the center of emotional life. You know that this emotional character of woman is confirmed by psychology today. Tears, fears, and cheers come more easily to women than they do to men. It is designed to complete man for she is to be a helper fit for him, completing him. It is this very emotional nature which adds color and warmth to life. How drab life would be without it. Anyone who has visited a bachelor's apartment knows what I mean.

- b) The second thing that is brought out here is that a rib emphasizes the protective instinct in women. It is the rib which protects the vital organs of the chest and notably the heart. In fact, the Hebrew word for “helper” is the word *azar*, which means “to surround.” Just as the rib cage surrounds the heart and protects it, so there is in woman an instinctive reaction of protectiveness. Anyone who has tried to come between a man and his wife, or to abuse a man to his wife, knows what I mean. C. S. Lewis has pointed this out in asking the question, “If your dog has bitten a neighbor’s child, would you rather face the mother or the father to discuss the issue?”

So we have the process of God in making woman. She is to be a companion and a helper, and does so by utilizing to the full her inherent emotional and protective instincts.

Now we come to **the qualities of marriage** that result from the union of man and woman:

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.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. {Gen 2:23-25 RSV}

This is a very remarkable passage because it gathers up in very brief compass (as so often happens in Scripture) the great concepts of marriage that run throughout the rest of the Bible. They are all condensed and encapsulated in this brief account here. When God had finished making woman and Adam had slept off the deep unconsciousness into which he had fallen, God brought the woman to Adam. What a scene that must have been! Here is the first of a long, long series of boy meets girl stories. Out of this highly condensed account of this encounter there emerge four factors that are essential to true marriage.

1. The first and most fundamental of all is that marriage is to involve a complete identity. The

two are to be one. Adam’s first reaction when he saw his wife was, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” i.e., she is one being with me. This is strengthened in the latter part of Verse 24 where it adds, “and they become one flesh.” It is not without reason that this has become part of the marriage service, this recognition of unity. As someone has well said, the one word above all that makes marriage successful is “ours.” Things belong to “us.” “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Thus, as the New Testament so wisely points out, the man who hurts his wife is hurting himself. He may not feel it directly, but down the line the result of it will show in his life, because she is really, genuinely, and factually sharing one life with him. They become one flesh. This is not poetry; it is reality.

While I was working on the closing phases of this message yesterday in my study there was a marriage going on out here in the auditorium. I was struck by the fact that as I was studying this matter, the miracle was occurring, to the tune of Lohengrin’s Wedding March. Two people were becoming one. As their life went on together, it would become more and more experimentally true. There is a blending of psyches, a merging of lives, and the creating of a single history. It is for this reason that divorce is such a terrible thing, especially after years of marriage. It is the severing of a person. It is butchery, the dividing up of a single life, much as you would take an ax and split a body in two. No wonder it is so terribly painful, much more deeply felt than those who experience it understand at the time.

2. The second thing that is brought out here is the Biblical principle of headship, which is developed at much greater length in the New Testament. “She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Paul enlarges on this in his letter to Timothy, to point out that man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man. It is the man who is ultimately responsible before God for the nature and character of the home. It is the man who must exercise leadership in determining the direction in which the home should go, and must therefore answer for that leadership, or its lack, be-

fore God. The woman's responsibility is to acknowledge this leadership.

Again, in my judgment, one of the most serious threats to marriage and one of the reasons that is producing this terrible incidence of divorce in our day, is the fact that men are abdicating the role of leadership in the home, leaving it up to the wife to raise the children. They are refusing to be fathers to their children and husbands to their wives, wanting rather to be sons to another mother and to have their own needs ministered to.

3. Then the third factor indicated here which strongly characterizes true marriage is permanence. "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife." This is a strong word. In the Hebrew text it is the word *dabag*, which means "to adhere firmly, as if with glue," to be lovingly devoted to a wife.

In the days of Henry Ford (the first) and the Model T, someone asked him to what formula he attributed his successful marriage. He said, "The same formula as the making of a successful car: stick to one model."

That is exactly what is said here. A husband is to cleave to his wife. He forsakes all others and adheres to her. Whatever she may be like, he is to hold to her. He is to stay with her, and she with him, because marriage is a permanent thing.

4. Finally the fourth factor is set forth in Verse 25, "And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed." This speaks clearly of openness between man and wife, literally, nothing to hide. They have no secrets, nothing that they do not share with each other, an openness. It is the failure to achieve this kind of openness that lies behind so much breakdown in marriage today, the utter breakdown of communication, where two sit and look at one another and say nothing, or talk about merely surface trivialities, reporting what happened to the children, etc., but with no discussion of their problems, or what they are thinking on various issues. Oftentimes this is why they are so judgmental with one another, each one trying to get the other to agree and not being willing to allow differences of viewpoint to exist. But openness does not mean agreeing

or feeling the same. It means a readiness to share with one another, completely, without insisting that the other reflect the same attitude. There is room here for ultimate decisions and the submitting of a wife to the leadership of the husband. Openness does not cancel that out. But there is to be a complete freedom of communication, one with the other. Marriages shrivel, wither, and die when this is not true.

What is the result of all this? In Eden these four principles were at work. Adam and Eve were united as one. There was the recognition of the principle of headship. Adam had the right to make ultimate decisions in all matters. They intended to be together permanently and Adam was responsible for this. There was an openness between them so that they hid nothing from one another. What was the result? The text says, "they were not ashamed." Well, if they were not ashamed, what were they? What is the opposite of being ashamed? It is to be relaxed. We would use the term well adjusted. They felt at ease with each other. There was no strain in their marriage. They were fully at ease with one another. Is that not what we strive for in marriage? Then here are the principles that produce it.

Let me share with you some helpful words in this respect from a recent magazine article. These words are addressed to a husband and wife, and they reflect these principles from the Scriptures:

To a husband and wife:

Preserve sacredly the privacies of your own house, your marriage state, and your heart. Let no father or mother or sister or brother ever presume to come between you, or to share the joys or sorrows that belong to you alone. With mutual help build your quiet world, not allowing your dearest earthly friend to be the confidant of aught that concerns your domestic peace.

Let moments of alienation, if they occur, be healed at once. Never, no, never speak of it outside, but to each other confess and all will come out right. Never let the morrow's sun find you still at variance. Renew and renew your vow; it will do you good and thereby your minds will grow together, contented in that love which is stronger than death, and you will be truly one.

There is God's design for marriage. As we hold it before us we can see by contrast the reasons why so many marriages are failing in California today. What we need desperately is to return to this Biblical pattern, for here are revealed the secrets of happy married life.

Prayer:

As always, Father, we feel the searching quality of your word as it seeks us out and exposes to us the weakness of our lives and the wrongness of our attitudes. But it sets before us also, so beautifully, the great

possibilities of our lives, the potential that awaits us when we are willing to submit ourselves to the wisdom that is reflected in your word. Grant to us now submissive hearts and restored confidence in one another. Make of this church, Lord, a community of happy homes, where children are delighted to stay home and share times of fellowship with their father and mother, where friends look forward to coming, where peace, harmony, and joy prevails, and grace is manifest in every day's activities. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.