

Over the destiny of woman and of man lies the dark shadow of a word of God's wrath, a burden from God, which they must carry. The woman must bear her children in pain, and in providing for his family the man must reap many thorns and thistles, and labor in the sweat of his brow. This burden should cause both man and wife to call on God, and should remind them of their eternal destiny in his kingdom. Earthly society is only the beginning of the heavenly society, the earthly home an image of the heavenly home, the earthly family a symbol of the fatherhood of God.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER,  
*Letters and Papers from Prison*, 31

## CHAPTER TWO

# NAKED AND NOT ASHAMED

*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

GENESIS 2:25

Marriage is more wonderful than anyone on earth knows. The reasons it is wonderful can be learned only from God's special revelation and can be cherished only by the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to behold and embrace the wonder. The reason we need the Spirit's help is that the wonder of marriage is woven into the wonder of the gospel of the cross of Christ, and the message of the cross is foolishness to the natural man, and so the meaning of marriage is foolishness to the natural man (1 Cor. 2:14).

For example, the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins said in an interview in 2006,

I provided . . . cogent arguments against a supernatural intelligent designer. But it does seem to me to be a worthy idea. Refutable—but nevertheless grand and big enough to be worthy of respect. I don't see the Olympian gods or Jesus coming down and dying on the Cross as worthy of that grandeur. They strike me as parochial.<sup>1</sup>

These are the tragic words of “the natural man.” Those who regard Christ and his incarnation and death and resurrection and lordship over all the universe as parochial cannot see the wonder of the gospel woven into marriage. In fact, Jesus is not parochial. He created the universe (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). He upholds it by the word of his power (Heb.

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<sup>1</sup>“God vs. Science: An Interview with Francis Collins and Richard Dawkins,” *Time*, August 5, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1555132-9,00.html>; accessed 05-05-08.

1:3). The universe was created for him (Col. 1:16), and all of reality finds its highest reason for being in relation to the greatest display of the glory of God in the universe—namely, the glory of his grace supremely manifest in the death of Christ to bring sinners to God (Eph. 1:6). Only the blind call Christ and his redeeming work parochial.

But by God's grace, even Dawkins might see the glory of Christ in the gospel and in its portrayal in marriage. It is a miracle that any of us has seen this glory in the gospel. God alone can "give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). I pray that God will reveal the glory of the gospel and the meaning of marriage to Richard Dawkins—and to you. I believe he will do so for you, if you will look steadfastly at the revelation of it in God's word and seek the help of God's Spirit to enable you to see and savor the glory of Christ and his blood-bought covenant with the church, which is reflected in marriage.

### MARRIAGE IS THE *DOING* OF GOD, TO THE *GLORY* OF GOD

In the previous chapter, we saw that the most *fundamental* thing we can say about marriage is that it is the *doing* of God. And the *ultimate* thing we can say about marriage is that it is the *display* of God. The reason it is the display of God is that in Christ, God has made a new covenant with his people. In it he promises to forgive and justify and glorify all who turn to him from sin and receive Christ as the Savior and Lord and supreme Treasure of their lives. Marriage between a man and a woman was designed from the beginning to be a reflection and display of that blood-bought covenant relationship.

That's why Paul quotes Genesis 2:24—"A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"—and then says, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31–32). Leaving parents and holding fast to a wife, forming a new one-flesh union, is meant from the beginning to display this new covenant—Christ's leaving his Father and taking the church as his bride, at the cost of his life, and holding fast to her in a one-spirit union forever.

“One spirit” is the way Paul describes the counterpart to “one flesh” in 1 Corinthians 6:16–17. He happens to be addressing the problem of prostitution, not marriage. He is arguing that our union with Christ makes union with a prostitute unthinkable. He says,

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. (1 Cor. 6:15–17)

I don’t think Paul means that a man is married to every prostitute with whom he ever had sex. Jesus said to the woman who had had “five husbands” that “the one you now have is not your husband” (John 4:18). In other words, sex by itself did not make a marriage.

Prostitution, as the name implies, is an exploitation of marriage prerogatives. As such it plays with sacred depths. Paul uses the language of “one body” and “one flesh” to show the utter betrayal of what these phrases are meant to signify.

He is saying: You are desecrating the act of sexual union. It has the meaning of “one flesh” and “one body” *in marriage*—something profound and spiritual. But you are implicitly expressing that sacred truth with a prostitute. The shell of oneness is there, but not the covenant meaning.

The main point here is simply that in Paul’s mind the covenant union between a husband and wife is designed by God to reflect and display the spiritual union between Christ and the church. So he says, “He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

So I argue that staying married is not mainly about staying in love. It’s about covenant-keeping. If a spouse falls in love with another person, one profoundly legitimate response from the grieved spouse and from the church is, “So what! Your being ‘in love’ with someone else is not decisive. Keeping your covenant is decisive.”

Now it is time to probe more deeply into what this covenant-keeping looks like and what it means.

## NAKED AND NOT ASHAMED

To lay a deeper foundation for marriage from God's word, we turn to a key verse that we passed over in the previous chapter, namely, Genesis 2:25. After saying in verse 24, "A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," the writer says in verse 25, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." What is the point of that verse?

Consider these two possible reasons why they were not ashamed. First is the reason that they both had perfect bodies. Remember, this was before the fall of creation into sin and futility. These were the very bodies that God himself had made. Therefore, since their appearance was perfect, they did not have the slightest fear that their spouse would disapprove of them. In other words, their freedom from shame was because they had absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. Is that the main point?

It is certainly a true observation. When God created man, he said that his creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). So the man and the woman were perfectly beautiful and handsome. There was no flaw and no blemish. Is that the point of Genesis 2:25? I doubt it. For three reasons.

## NOT BECAUSE OF PERFECT BODIES

*First*, no matter how beautiful or handsome your spouse is, if you're cranky or selfish or unkind, you can make comments in a way that shames the other person. Not being ashamed in a marriage relationship takes more than being physically perfect; the one who is looking at you must be morally upright and gracious. Otherwise he or she can find a way to shame you. So mere physical perfection would not be enough to eliminate the possibility of being shamed.

*Second*, Genesis 2:24–25 is intended to provide foundational wisdom for marriage long after the fall of man into sin. We can see this by the way Jesus makes use of verse 24. He makes it the basis of his statement, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9). In other words, what God is revealing in Genesis 2:24–25 has relevance long after the Fall. So it doesn't seem that the main point

would only relate to the pre-Fall situation, namely, the perfection of their bodies.

*Third*, verse 24 (holding fast in a one-flesh union) creates the relationship where verse 25 (naked and not ashamed) can happen. And the emphasis falls there on the covenant commitment in verse 24: These two are holding fast to each other in a new one-flesh union that is not an experiment. It's a new kind of lasting union rooted in a covenant commitment. That is what creates the context for a shame-free marriage—not their perfect beauty.

### BECAUSE OF COVENANT LOVE

Consider a second possibility for why they are naked and not ashamed. My suggestion is that the emphasis falls *not* on their freedom from physical imperfection, but on the fullness of covenant love. In other words, I can be free from shame for two conceivable reasons: One conceivable (but unreal) reason is that I am perfect and have nothing to be ashamed of. The other reason I could be free from shame is that even though I am imperfect, I have no fear of being disapproved by my spouse.

The first way to be shame-free is to be perfect; the second way to be shame-free is based on the gracious nature of covenant love. In the first case, there is no shame because we're flawless. In the second case, there is no shame because covenant love covers a multitude of flaws (1 Peter 4:8; 1 Cor. 13:6).

I know that in Genesis 2:25 the fall into sin has not yet happened. So there are no flaws to be covered. But my point is that verse 25 flows out of verse 24 because the covenant relationship established by marriage is designed from the beginning to be the main foundation of freedom from shame. Admittedly, until sin came into the world and all kinds of physical and moral flaws came with it, Adam and Eve did not have to exercise their covenant love to cover any sins and flaws in each other. But the eventual exercise of that covenant love *was* God's design.

Marriage was designed from the beginning to display the new covenant between Christ and the church. We have seen this in Ephesians 5:31–32. The very essence of this new covenant is that Christ passes over the sins of his bride. His bride is free from shame *not* because she

is perfect, but because she has no fear that her lover will condemn her or shame her because of her sin.

This is why the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is at the very heart of what makes marriage work the way God designed it. Justification creates peace with God vertically, in spite of our sin. And when experienced horizontally, it creates shame-free peace between an imperfect man and an imperfect woman. I hope to look more fully at this in the next chapter.

### DECLARING INDEPENDENCE

But first we need to finish looking at what Genesis 2 and 3 have to say about nakedness and shame. In Genesis 2:17, God had said to Adam, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” I take “the knowledge of good and evil” to refer to a status of independence from God in which Adam and Eve would decide for themselves apart from God what is good and what is evil. So eating from this tree would mean a declaration of independence from God.

In Genesis 3:5–6, that is what happens:

[The tempter says,] “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

The first effect of this rebellion against God and this declaration of independence is recorded in verse 7: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” What does this mean?

Suddenly they are self-conscious about their bodies. Before their rebellion against God there was no shame. Now, evidently, there is shame. Why? There is no reason to think it’s because they suddenly became ugly. That’s not the focus of the text at all. Their beauty wasn’t the focus in Genesis 2:25, and their ugliness is not the focus here in

Genesis 3:7. Why then the shame? Because the foundation of covenant-keeping love collapsed. And with it the sweet, all-trusting security of marriage disappeared forever.

### THE FOUNDATION OF COVENANT-KEEPING LOVE

The foundation of covenant-keeping love between a man and a woman is the unbroken covenant between them and God—God governing them for their good and they enjoying him in that security and relying on him. When they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that covenant was broken, and the foundation of their own covenant-keeping collapsed.

They experienced this immediately in the corruption of their own covenant love for each other. It happened in two ways. And we experience it today in these same two ways. Both relate to the experience of shame. In the first case, the person viewing my nakedness is no longer trustworthy, so I am afraid I will be shamed. In the second, I myself am no longer at peace with God, and I feel guilty and defiled and unworthy—I deserve to be shamed. Let's think about these one at a time.

### VULNERABILITY TO SHAME

In the first case, I am self-conscious of my body and I feel vulnerable to shame because I know Eve has chosen to be independent from God. She has made herself central in the place of God. She is essentially now a selfish person. From this day forward, she will put herself first. She is no longer a servant. So she is not safe. And I feel vulnerable around her, because she is very likely to put me down if that puts her up. So suddenly my nakedness is precarious. I don't trust her anymore to love me with pure, covenant-keeping love. That's one source of shame and self-consciousness.

### THE BROKEN COVENANT WITH GOD

The other source is that Adam himself, not just his spouse, has broken covenant with God. If she is rebellious and selfish, and therefore unsafe, so am I. But the way I experience it in myself is that I feel defiled and guilty and unworthy. That's, in fact, what I am. Before the Fall, what

*was* and what *ought to have been* were the same. But now, what *is* and what *ought to be* are not the same.

I ought to be humbly and gladly submissive to God. But I am not. This huge gap between what I *am* and what I *ought to be* colors everything about me—including how I feel about my body. So my wife might be the safest person in the world, but now my own sense of guilt and unworthiness makes me feel vulnerable. The simple, open nakedness of innocence now feels inconsistent with the guilty person that I am. I feel ashamed.

So the shame of nakedness arises from two sources, and both of them are owing to the collapse of the foundation of covenant love in our relationship with God. One is that Eve is no longer reliable to cherish me; she has become selfish and I feel vulnerable to her putting me down for her own selfish ends. The other is that I already know that I am guilty myself, and the nakedness of innocence contradicts my unworthiness—I am ashamed.

### THEY CLOTHED THEMSELVES

Genesis 3:7 says that they tried to cope with this new situation by making clothing: “And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” Then in Genesis 3:21, God made better clothes for them from animal skins: “And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.” What are we to make of this?

Adam’s and Eve’s effort to clothe themselves was a sinful effort to conceal what had really happened. They tried to hide from God (Gen. 3:8). They were no longer innocent but were rebels against God. Their nakedness felt too revealing and too vulnerable. So they tried to close the gap between what they were and what they ought to be by covering what is and presenting themselves in a new way. From their standpoint, this was the origin of hypocrisy. It was the first attempted—and totally unsuccessful—snow job.

### THEN GOD CLOTHED THEM

So what does it mean that God clothed them with animal skins? Was he confirming their hypocrisy? Was he aiding and abetting their pretense?

If they were naked and shame-free before the Fall, and if they put on clothes to minimize their shame after the Fall, then what is God doing by clothing them even better than they can clothe themselves? I think the answer is that he is doing something with a negative message and something with a positive message.

Negatively, he is saying: You are not what you were, and you are not what you ought to be. The chasm between what you are and what you ought to be is huge. Covering yourself with clothing is a right response to this—not to conceal it, but to confess it. Henceforth, you shall wear clothing, not to conceal that you are not what you should be, but to confess that you are not what you should be. One practical implication of this is that public nudity today is not a return to innocence but rebellion against moral reality. God ordains clothes to witness to the glory we have lost, and it is added rebellion to throw them off.<sup>2</sup>

And for those who rebel in the other direction and make clothes themselves a means of power and prestige and attention-getting, God's answer is not a return to nudity but a return to simplicity (1 Tim. 2:9–10; 1 Peter 3:4–5). Clothes are not meant to make people think about what is under the clothes. Clothes are meant to direct attention to what is *not* under them: merciful *hands* that serve others in the name of Christ, beautiful *feet* that carry the gospel where it is needed, and the brightness of a *face* that has beheld the glory of Jesus.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CLOTHING

Now we have already crossed over to the more positive meaning of clothing that God had in his mind when he clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins. This was not only a witness to the glory we lost and a confession that we are not what we should be, but it is also a testimony that God himself would one day make us what we should be. God rejected

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<sup>2</sup>In response to the question about cultures where nudity is normal, I would say two things. One is that there is a measure of relativism in what is considered modest or lewd from culture to culture. Second, total nudity as a norm is very rare among the cultures of the world. In view of what happens in Genesis 3, I would say that this state of “normalcy” in these rare cultures is not a sign of innocence or divine approval but of disorder. As they are brought into a fuller knowledge of God and his word, what felt normal will not continue to feel normal, and I don't think this will simply be owing to Western imposition.

their own self-clothing. Then he clothed them himself. He showed mercy with superior clothing.

Together with the other hopeful signs in the context (like the defeat of the serpent in Gen. 3:15), God's mercy points to the day when he will solve the problem of our shame decisively and permanently. He will do it with the blood of his own Son (as there was apparently blood shed in the killing of the animals of the skins). And he will do it with the clothing of righteousness and the radiance of his glory (Gal. 3:27; Phil. 3:21).

Which means that our clothes are a witness both to our past and present failure and to our future glory. They testify to the chasm between what we are and what we should be. And they testify to God's merciful intention to bridge that chasm through Jesus Christ and his death for our sins. He will solve the problem of fear and pride and selfishness and shame between man and woman with his new blood-bought covenant.

Amazingly in the very context of the collapse of the covenant between God and man, and the collapse of the marriage covenant between Adam and Eve, God points by his mercy to the redemption that marriage itself is designed to display. God's design for marriage as a display of covenant-keeping *mercy* was not an afterthought. After the Fall, God did not have to redesign marriage. He knew what he had created in Genesis 2:24. And he knew what would happen in Genesis 3. The design of marriage, the fall of marriage, and the implied redemption of marriage all serve to tell us what marriage is for. Marriage exists to display the merciful covenant-keeping love of Christ and the faithfulness of his bride.

What we turn to, therefore, in the next chapter is the question of how a husband and a wife embody the new-covenant gospel of justification by faith alone and so create a safe and sacred place where it can be said again, "They were both naked and were not ashamed."