

5 Reasons Genesis 3:16 Is Not a Model for Christian Marriages

I was driving along, listening to a Christian radio station on the car radio. A well-known pastor came on and announced that he would be speaking about God's plan for marriage.

I was shocked to hear him read Genesis 3:16b (NKJV) as his text. This passage, in our English Bible, reads, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. I found myself exclaiming aloud, "No! No! This passage is not about Christian marriage. This passage is describing the distortion of marriage as a result of sin coming into the world."

Here are five reasons Genesis 3:16 should never be used as a basis for Christian marriage.

1. **Genesis 3:16 describes conditions in a fallen world.**

This verse has its setting in the fall of our first parents and the entry of sin into the world. It is part of a list of the negative ramifications humanity will suffer because of that fall. It is not a prediction of how things ought to be, but a description of how things will be because of sin coming into the world.

This verse is not about redeeming grace and salvation. It is part of a narrative describing the curse coming into the world because of sin. It is a portrayal of human conditions in a fallen world and should never be applied to a redeemed child of God.

2. **The verse describes a destructive turning from God.** In addition to the historical setting of this verse, the

words themselves demonstrate that this verse portrays a sinful and ungodly situation. For example, the word “desire” in this verse is a poor translation of the Hebrew word *teshuqua*, which means “to turn.” That this is a destructive turning from God is confirmed by the Septuagint (LXX) translators who translated *teshuqua* with *apostrophe*.

The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew produced around 275 B.C. by 70 Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. It became very popular, especially with the Jews of the diaspora, and is the text almost always quoted by New Testament writers.

The Analytical Greek Lexicon defines *apostrophe* as “to turn away,” “to desert,” “to turn a people from allegiance to their sovereign” and to “incite to revolt.” Paul uses this word in 2 Timothy 1:15a where he says to Timothy, “For you know that all those in Asia have *turned away* from me” (emphasis added).

This meaning of “turning away” is also born out of its use in the Old Testament. Although it is used of a spatial turning or moving from one location to another, it is also used of a spiritual turning away from God: an apostasy.

3. The word “rule” is a description, not a prescription.

The man, in turn, will be a willing participant in this fallen situation. He will take advantage of the situation and “rule” over her. The word “rule” is translated from the Hebrew word *mashal*, which the LXX translators translated with the Greek word *kuriousei*.

Kuriousei is the future indicative form of *kurios*, which is a word for deity in both the Old and New Testaments. The LXX translators used *Kurios* to translate *Yahweh*, the personal name of God in the Old Testament. *Kurios* is translated “Lord” in the New Testament and used as a designation for Jesus Christ—the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Analytical Greek Lexicon defines *kurieusei* as meaning “to be lord over,” “to be possessed of mastery over” and “to exercise sway over.” This flies in the face of everything Jesus taught about humility and servant-hood and obviously describes conditions in a fallen world.

The passage seems to be saying that in a fallen world, the woman will turn to the man for security and identity and the man will take advantage of her need and play god in her life, lording it over her. The man ruling the woman is not a prescription of how things ought to be, but a description of how things are going to be in a fallen, sinful world. Again, it is not a model for Christian marriage.

4. **Not so in the beginning.** Genesis 3:16 is the first sign of hierarchy in the Bible. In the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, there is perfect mutuality and partnership between the sexes. Both the original Hebrew and the LXX translation make it clear that Genesis 1:26 is about the creation of the human species, not the creation of the first man.

The word “man” in Genesis 1:26 (NKJV) is a poor translation of the Hebrew word *adam*. *Adam* is gender-inclusive, carrying the meaning of “people” or “humanity.” This meaning was confirmed by the LXX translators who chose *anthropoi* to translate *adam*. *Anthropoi* is also gender-inclusive meaning “people” or “humanity.” The NIV and NRSV thus got it right by translating *adam* as “mankind” and “humanity.” The NLT also got it right by translating *adam* as “people.”

Confirming that Genesis 1:26a-28 is about the creation of the human species, the plural “they” and “them” is used throughout this account. Both man and woman are given the same blessing and the same authority. Genesis 1:26a, 28a (MEV) says,

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,

and over the birds of the air, ... God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it.'"

5. Jesus confirmed Genesis 1 as the model for Christian marriage. In Matthew 19:3-8, the Pharisees ask Jesus a question about the relationship of husband and wife, particularly about divorce. In response to their inquiry, Jesus pointed them to marriage as it existed before the fall, before Genesis 3:16. He replied,

"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matt. 19:3-5).

Jesus thus points them to how it was *in the beginning* as the model for male and female relationships. The Pharisees respond with their own Scripture. "They said to Him, 'Then why did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to send her away?'" referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Jesus replied "Moses, for the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8).

The model Jesus presents for marriage is not based on Genesis 3:16. How could it be? Genesis 3:16 is a model based on sin and the Fall. Jesus came to reverse the cursed effects of the fall. He came to destroy the works of the devil.

Dr. Eddie Hyatt recently presented this message as part of the "*Think Biblically*" series. Click this link to hear it.

For the rest of this article, click here. {eoa}

Dr. Eddie Hyatt and his wife, Dr. Susan Hyatt, *have been married 44 years. They have established the Int'ernational Christian Women's Hall of Fame on Main Street in Grapevine, Texas. Both are prolific authors and have written numerous*

books on church, spiritual awakening and issues related to male/female relationships. Their books are available from Amazon and their websites at and .