

NEIGHBOURLY LOVE IN GENESIS 2:18–25:  
THE ROOT OF THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT

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To love one's neighbour as oneself, matching closely Lev 19:18b, is one of the two great commands (Matt 22:34–40). Jesus says, “[a]ll the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt 22:40, NIV) However, as an individual text, Lev 19:18 is hardly a prominent verse. Henry Kelly even writes, “[i]t is not only not prominent, it is the very opposite of prominent.”<sup>2</sup> Still, as Kelly exhibits, it is clear that Jesus and the New Testament authors considered neighbourly love as foundational to Old Testament ethics (e.g., Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14; Luke 6:27–36; 10:25–37; 1 John 4:11).<sup>3</sup> It is not uncommon for Old Testament quotations in the New Testament to serve as allusions to broader principles or theological concepts.<sup>4</sup> Often, the individually cited passages are quotable expressions of the principle or allusions to contexts where that principle is recognizable. Given Lev 19:18's lack of prominence and granting that

1. Many thanks to the MJTM team for their valuable comments and support as well as Dr. Ashley Hibbard for her helpful remarks and encouraging words.

2. Kelly, “Love of Neighbor,” 267.

3. See Kelly, “Love of Neighbor,” 274–79.

4. For example, Matt 2:18 quotes Jer 31:15 after Herod's genocide. Though the exact quote speaks to the grief of God's people, the context is a declaration of hope amidst immense tragedy and suffering, making clear that God is bringing his salvation through the worst of circumstances, a theme that is prominent in stories like the Flood or the Exodus.

Jesus and the apostles understood the Old Testament as designed, this is almost certainly the situation.<sup>5</sup>

If there is a foundational Old Testament law of neighbourly love rooted in broader principles, one would expect to find it in Gen 2:18–25. However, the love of neighbour is rarely considered central to the scene. Rather, commentary is frequently limited to its importance for marriage.<sup>6</sup> The text's relevance to marriage is no doubt correct, as made clear by the narrator in Gen 2:24 and confirmed by both Jesus (Matt 19:3–9) and Paul (Eph 5:25–33). However, the chief purpose of this essay is to contend that Gen 2:18–25 establishes an ethic of neighbourly love, concluding with brief reflections on the implications for friendship and the lives of those who are single.

After briefly reviewing why Lev 19:18 in itself is unlikely to be the second great command, four mutually reinforcing propositions will be defended to argue for neighbourly love in Gen 2:18–25: (1) Gen 1–2's idyllic nature lends credence to the passage's societal implications; (2) the interrelated elements of Gen 2:17–18 imply a need for, and call to, universal, neighbourly love; (3) Gen 2:23's body language establishes a covenantal value of loving one's neighbour as oneself, and (4) both the Old Testament and New Testament refer to the scene in non-marital contexts suggesting the text serves to establish neighbourly love.

#### *Neighbourly Love Summing the Law*

From a grammatical-historical standpoint, Lev 19:18 as an isolated command cannot bear the weight of the New Testament's emphasis. As Kelly defends well, “[o]nce the importance of love

5. On New Testament authors' understanding the Old Testament as designed, see Pickup, “New Testament Interpretation.”

6. For example, Andrew Steinmann comments that the text “defines marriage as God's establishment for the proper relationship of the two sexes to each other” (*Genesis*, 67). Gordon Wenham says, “Here the ideal of marriage as it was understood in ancient Israel is being portrayed, a relationship characterized by harmony and intimacy between the partners” (*Genesis 1–15*, 69). See also Waltke, *Genesis*, 90; von Rad, *Genesis*, 82.

was realized, the Levitical verse was emancipated from its narrow limits and elevated to a place of honor.”<sup>7</sup>

The whole verse reads, “[d]o not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” (Lev 19:18, NIV) The entire law can hardly be hung on not being resentful towards one’s people. Loving as oneself does reappear later (vv. 33–34), applying it to foreigners as well (cf. Deut 10:17–19). Still, though this hints at a universalized love ethic, it is difficult to see it as the foundation for it.

Though some suggest love could be central to the holiness laws of Lev 18–20,<sup>8</sup> the context of the verse gives little hope for it summing the whole of Old Testament ethics, surrounded by a variety of Decalogue, ceremonial, and other miscellaneous laws.<sup>9</sup> Further, the broader literary structure of Leviticus does not highlight Lev 19:18 but emphasizes the atonement rituals.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the title the NIV gives the chapter sums up the verse’s prominence: “Various Laws.”

However, much like answers to once confusing riddles, that love should summarize all Old Testament ethical instruction is intuitive, at least after it is pointed out as Paul does in Rom 13:8–10. He quotes much of the Decalogue pertaining to the treatment of others and says the love of neighbour both sums and fulfills these and all other commands. For Paul, lived love is the value summarizing the covenant as expressed in the values of the Decalogue, the “tablets of the covenant” (Deut 9:11, NIV).

Shortly after the Decalogue, Exod 21–23 shows concrete examples of love in specific situations before the covenant is affirmed in Exod 24. Similarly, the Shema comes immediately following the restatement of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy, and a justification for keeping God’s commands is repeatedly “so it will go well” for them and those around them (e.g., Deut 5:16,

7. Kelly, “Love of Neighbor,” 280.

8. E.g., Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?* 207–13.

9. For a summary of Lev 19:18’s immediate context, see Kelly, “Love of Neighbor,” 267–69.

10. See Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?* 23–38.

29; 6:3, 18; 8:16; 12:25, 28). After Moses recounts the remaking of the tablets, he summarizes, “[a]nd now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today *for your own good?*” (Deut 10:12–13, NIV; emphasis mine). Echoes of the Shema are clear in v. 12, and, in v. 13, the goodness or wellness of the people is a key purpose of observing God’s laws, which are the ways of living according to the covenant expressed by the Decalogue. This implies keeping God’s commands is for the good of oneself and those around them. In other words, “[l]ove does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:10, NIV).

Paul regularly saw the values underlying laws (e.g., 1 Cor 9:8–12). The laws are concrete, paradigmatic expressions of values in their context. To Jesus and Paul, these values are loving God and neighbours. It is the value of neighbourly love, *most quotable* in Lev 19:18, that, along with loving God, all the Law and Prophets hang on. The true root of this value, however, is Gen 2:18–25, as will be argued below.

#### *Proposition 1: Genesis 1–2 as Idyllic*

In the epic of the biblical plot, Gen 1–2 describes an idyllic state where the line between heaven and earth is blurred. This is recognizable once Eden is seen as a temple sanctuary. Genesis 1–2 presenting creation as a tabernacle or temple has been extensively documented and is widely held amongst scholars.<sup>11</sup> In his book on the biblical theology of Leviticus, L. Michael Morales summarizes:

the early chapters of Genesis were not composed merely to rehearse origins, but to inform the worship of ancient Israel, explaining the

11. See especially Beale, “Eden”; Davidson, “Earth’s First Sanctuary.” Other examples include Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 210; Hinckley, “Adam”; Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?* 39–74; Sailhamer, *Pentateuch*, 99; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 90; Waltke, *Genesis*, 85.

rituals of the tabernacle cultus. Genesis 1–3 conforms to the general priestly categories of sacred space (the cosmos as a tabernacle, Eden as the holy of holies), sacred time (the Sabbath) and sacred status (Adam’s priestly role), all of which will inform our understanding of the tabernacle cultus.<sup>12</sup>

Much more is being established, however. Humanity is called to both fill and subdue the earth (Gen 1:26–28) and to work and keep the Garden (Gen 2:15). Gregory Beale argues persuasively that this implies humanity’s role is to extend the Garden-Temple to all the earth:

The intention seems to be that Adam was to widen the boundaries of the Garden in ever increasing circles by extending the order of the garden sanctuary into the inhospitable outer spaces. The outward expansion would include the goal of spreading the glorious presence of God. This would occur especially by Adam’s progeny born in his image and thus reflecting God’s image and the light of his presence, as they continued to obey the mandate given to their parents and went out to subdue the outer country until the Eden sanctuary covered the earth.<sup>13</sup>

Genesis 1–2, then, describes a state in the presence of God designed for God’s vice-regents, humanity (Gen 1:26–28),<sup>14</sup> to continue God’s creative work by spreading his heavenliness throughout the earth. Therefore, it would be natural for it to be showing, and implicitly commanding, an idyllic ethic which all the Law and the Prophets hang on. Indeed, it is perfectly appropriate to consider narrative as law or instruction. As Gordon Wenham says, “[t]he narratives in Genesis teach ethics and theology just as much as do laws and theological sermons found elsewhere in the Pentateuch, and for this reason these also belong to the Torah.”<sup>15</sup>

A hint at the ethical role Gen 1–2 plays is found in Matt 19:3–9. Jesus appeals to both Gen 1:27 and 2:24 as trumping the later

12. Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?* 53.

13. Beale, “Eden,” 11.

14. See Middleton “Image of God”; Clines, “Image of God.” See especially Middleton, *Liberating Image*.

15. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 5.

allowance of divorce certificates, noting that “it was not this way from the beginning.” (Matt 19:8b, NIV). Because of the standard set narratively by the pre-sin texts, Jesus recognized divorce certificates were only a practice of harm reduction. As R. T. France puts it:

Jesus therefore refuses to allow a necessary concession to human sinfulness to be elevated into a divine principle. The ideal is rather to be found in going back to first principles, to what was in the beginning . . . Jesus’ appeal to first principles has the effect of apparently setting one passage of Scripture against another, but this is not in the sense of repudiating one in favour of the other, but of insisting that each is given its proper function, the one as a statement of the ideal will of God, the other as a (regrettable but necessary) provision for those occasions when human sinfulness has failed to maintain the ideal.<sup>16</sup>

Genesis 2:18–25 reflects the ethical ideal. Not only that, but it is the only story in the biblical narrative of humans interacting within the ideal prior to the ruin of sin. It should be expected for neighbourly love to be a first principle found there.

*Proposition 2: Genesis 2:17–18 and Neighbourly Love*

Moving to the text itself opens a veritable floodgate of famously debated, interrelated topics, including the significance of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the precise problem that aloneness presents, and the meaning of עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, among others. These debates will be briefly waded into so a cumulative case can be made for Gen 2:18–25’s import to neighbourly love. In short, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the problem of solitude, and the solution of help are neither gendered nor unique to marriage. The text displays a marriage in the context of the general need for robust, faithful friendship and community—pivotal to marriage but not unique to it—and readers are to see Adam and Eve as both an archetypal couple and archetypal neighbours.

16. France, *Matthew*, 284.

*The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad*

As the scene begins immediately following the prohibition against the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, understanding the tree's function will be beneficial.<sup>17</sup>

As for good and evil (טוב and רע), each has a range of meanings beyond moral good and evil. Morality can be in view (e.g., Ps 14:1; 140:1–2) but also the generally positive, pleasant, or beneficial and the generally negative, unpleasant, or harmful (e.g., Lev 27:10; Josh 23:15; 2 Kgs 2:19; Jer 24:2).

Together, the phrase טוב ורע (“good and evil”) is a common Hebrew merism. John Walton categorizes its usages by the verbs used with it, giving four categories.<sup>18</sup> First, when used with speaking (e.g., Gen 24:50), “good and evil” suggest that the speaker pass judgment, issue a decision, or, when negated, to not do so. Secondly, when used with hearing, it means to listen with discernment (e.g., 2 Sam 14:17). Thirdly, when used with knowing or its synonyms coupled with prepositions, it refers to the capacity to be discriminating, discerning what is in their or others' best interests. There are only three occurrences from this category in the Old Testament. They associate lacking knowing good and evil with a childlike state (Isa 7:15–16), an inexperienced state also compared to childhood (1 Kgs 3:7–9) or being too elderly to discern wisely (2 Sam 19:35). Finally, there is one instance, outside of Gen 2–3, that uses the merism with knowing but without prepositions (Deut 1:39). There, it is also speaking of children, referring to their inability to be discriminating, make decisions, or live independently. Walton goes on to say, “[t]he common denominator of these references is ‘discernment or discriminating wisdom.’”<sup>19</sup>

Though there are only four Old Testament passages after Gen 2–3 related to knowing good and evil, three link the idea to being like a child, lacking wisdom, and it is no stretch to think the way

17. For a summary of viewpoints on the trees, see Wallace, “Tree of Knowledge.”

18. Walton, *Genesis*, 171.

19. Walton, *Genesis*, 171.

in which the elderly come to lack discernment is a return to childlike dependency. It is, therefore, a reasonable inference to think lacking the knowledge of good and evil is to be like a child, lacking wisdom.<sup>20</sup>

As such, it is most likely that the tree represents wisdom in a full sense, relating to wellbeing, pleasantness, and morality, though it is too far to say taking the fruit was a grasp for omniscience. Just as children must learn not only to choose good over evil, but also general, healthy communal and individual functioning, humanity needs to trust God for wisdom in and for all things.

Given this understanding, it is most likely that humanity was to gain the knowledge of good and evil, growing up into wisdom. It is surely true that women and men would need to know what is good and bad in their governance of the creatures (Gen 1:26–28; 2:19–20). Additionally, to be able to discern good and evil is roundly positive in the remainder of the Old Testament. Contrary to popular caricatures, the tree was no trick or trap, but a gift. God created the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil for humanity to gain the knowledge of good and evil; that is, to gain wisdom.

Yet the tree was prohibited. Some believe the fruit was barred only temporarily, and the first sin was to take it prematurely.<sup>21</sup> However, as Peterson says, “[t]he syntax of the sentence (negation אֵל plus the imperfect verb) is a permanent prohibition. They were never to partake of the tree.”<sup>22</sup> Rather, as argued by Keil and Delitzsch, God wished for humanity to gain the knowledge of good and evil by means of *not taking* the fruit, gaining it through trusting him instead.<sup>23</sup> Note that it is the *Tree* of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, not the *Fruit* of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; the tree could very well impart wisdom, via the

20. See also Buchanan, “Old Testament Meaning.”

21. E.g., Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 73–75. See also Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*, 112–15.

22. Peterson, *Genesis*, 43. Likewise, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 67–68.

23. See Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary*, 86.



LORD, apart from its fruit.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the tree's existence itself need not imply the fruit was to be eaten, as is sometimes suggested.<sup>25</sup> The plot tension is not whether humans should gain wisdom, but *how* they will gain wisdom. Will they trust God for his wisdom (cf. Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 2:6; 11:30; Jas 1:5–8), or take it for themselves?

Eventually, after perceiving the fruit as desirable for gaining wisdom (Gen 3:6), the humans take the knowledge of good and evil. Now having wisdom, they are like God in a tragic new way (Gen 3:22; cf. 1:26). That said, humanity having wisdom is best understood as a half-truth, underscoring the serpent's crafty deception (Gen 3:4–5), for it is not God's true wisdom imparted, but their own wisdom taken. Claiming what could awkwardly be called "wisdom autonomy," humanity and God now both share similar, though rival, self-understandings as to their authoritative status to pronounce what is wise. Indeed, the woman saw that the fruit was good (Gen 3:6), taking the role of God, who saw what was good seven times in Gen 1. This human pride and pseudo-wisdom will only lead to exile and death (Gen 2:17; 3:22–24).

#### *Aloneness and Help*

Immediately following the risk of death apart from obedience, Gen 2:18 establishes a plot tension: it is not good that the human is alone. Commentators are varied regarding the precise problem solitude presents. Iain Provan thinks it is related to humanity's vocation—rulership (Gen 1:26–28) and the priestly gardening duties (Gen 2:15)—writing that, without community, the strength of the first human is insufficient for these tasks.<sup>26</sup> Others (e.g., D. J. A. Clines) believe the problem is procreation. Man needs woman to produce children, and he asserts woman is no help regarding ruling or gardening.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, Wenham

24. Compare the Tree of Life imparting healing through its leaves, not only its fruit (Rev 22:2).

25. E.g., Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 73–75; Eiselen, "Tree of the Knowledge," 106.

26. Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 77.

27. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?* 34–35.

proposes, “[t]he help looked for is not just assistance in his daily work or in the procreation of children, though these aspects may be included, but the mutual support companionship provides.”<sup>28</sup>

Here, a much narrower understanding shall be offered, though the result can hold the core principles from the views above simultaneously. As this plot tension follows immediately after the forbidden fruit, the problem of aloneness is most likely to be understood considering the preceding verse. The human, when alone, would tend towards eating the fruit, taking wisdom autonomy, choosing death. Humans need communal help not to.

As the solution to a problem is to solve the problem, this view can be tested by a study of the solution: a “helper” (עֹזֵר).<sup>29</sup> Space does not permit a robust word study, but a brief review of the noun’s twenty-one Old Testament occurrences shall show that rescue or support against death is well within the term’s possible undertones.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, there is remarkable consistency towards that end. Although a word in any given context can be used in a unique sense, it is perfectly plausible for help in Gen 2 to carry this nuance, as Gen 2:17 notes a risk of death.

Only three instances of עֹזֵר outside Gen 2 do not refer to God (Isa 30:5; Ezek 2:14; Dan 11:34). None of these refer to women, procreation, or marriage, but are military in nature. Indeed, most occurrences of עֹזֵר picture God as military help (e.g., “and the other [son of Moses] was named Eliezer, for he said, ‘My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh’” [Exod 18:4, NIV]). Of note is the connection of עֹזֵר with shields found in Deut 33:26–29; Ps 33:20; 89:18–19; Ps 115:9–11:

O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—  
he is their help and shield.  
O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD —

28. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 68. See also von Rad, *Genesis*, 80.

29. For more on עֹזֵר, see Bergmann, “עֹזֵר”; Hawkins, “Help”; Koehler and Baumgartner, “עֹזֵר”; Lipiński, “עֹזֵר”; Renn, ed., *Expository Dictionary*, 486.

30. See Hamilton (*Book of Genesis*, 176), who writes, “the verb behind ‘ezer is ‘āzar, which means ‘succor,’ ‘save from danger,’ ‘deliver from death.’ The woman in Gen 2 delivers or saves man from his solitude” (emphasis mine).

he is their help and shield.  
 You who fear him, trust in the LORD —  
 he is their help and shield.

Whether a reinforcing army or a military official, military help, at its most basic, keeps allies from death. The image of shields continues this anti-death theme, as well as such Psalms containing עזר as Ps 70, 121, and 124. In Ps 70, there are those who would wish to take the psalmist's life (Ps 70:2), but the LORD is his help and deliverer (Ps 70:5). Psalm 121 affirms the LORD, the helper coming down the hillside like a reinforcing army (Ps 121:1–2), watches over the lives of his people, keeping them from harm (Ps 121:7). In Ps 124, if God, in whose name Israel finds their help (Ps 124:8), is not on their side, they would be swallowed alive (Ps 124:2–3).

It is similar in Ps 20 and 146. Psalm 20 speaks of the help as military given the mention of military banners (Ps 20:5), alongside horses and chariots (Ps 20:7). Because the help is in a military context, its usage is consistent with an anti-death connotation. Similarly, Ps 146 explores life and death, and mentions God's help directly after the inevitable deaths of untrustworthy humans, offering the psalmist robust hope (Ps 146:2–5).

Indeed, in nearly every usage of עזר in Scripture, the helper either has, explicitly or implicitly, rescued from death, is called upon to do so, or there is a declaration of God as helper in contexts where life and death are juxtaposed. Although, again, any one context can use a word distinctly, this is remarkable consistency, and Gen 2 fits this model well with the juxtaposition of the trees of life and death. Coupled with the simple observation that the problem of solitude is expressed immediately following the trees, naturally connecting them, it is most probable that humans cannot be alone because they need shields: communal help to not take the prohibited fruit, claiming wisdom autonomy.<sup>31</sup> This makes good sense within Gen 2 itself but is also the most

31. עזר as anti-death in Gen 2 accords well with R. E. Freidman's translation of עזר כנגדו as "strength corresponding to him," though it arguably loses the elements of assistance and companionship (see Friedman, *Commentary*, 19).

expected understanding of עֹזֵר after surveying its scriptural usages.

It is often claimed that women are men's helpers or, at least, a wife is a husband's helper. Certainly, the woman is the first example of a human helper or, perhaps, the first human to be God's means of being a helper, as humans, male and female, are to be his delegated representatives on earth (Gen 1:26–28). However, the nature of עֹזֵר as a counter to taking from the tree resists a sex-specific understanding. Indeed, that the עֹזֵר turned out to be a woman was probably a shocking twist, especially since military help would not normally be applied to women and “the extant literature of the ancient Near East has preserved no other account of the creation of primordial woman.”<sup>32</sup> Humans are humans' helpers—“even women!” an ancient, patriarchal reader could be imagined saying—for it is not good for all humans, regardless of sex, to be alone, and all humans, regardless of sex, tend to take the knowledge of good and evil, claiming wisdom apart from God, seeing for themselves what is good.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Adam as Archetype*

Adam's archetypal nature reinforces a gender-neutral understanding of Gen 2:18 and, thus, a non-marital application. Borrowing from Walton, an archetype “refers to a representative of a group in whom all others in the group are embodied. As a result, all members of the group are included and participate with their representative.”<sup>34</sup> This function flows naturally from Adam's eventual name, אָדָם; that is, Human. Walton, affirming Adam and Eve were historical persons, reports the Hebrew language did not exist until the second millennium BCE. Therefore, Adam and Eve would not have spoken Hebrew or called each other by

32. Sarna, *Genesis*, 21.

33. Comparably, Sarah Moore Grimké (1792–1873) took the need for a helpmeet to apply, not just to married couples, but to all men and women as equals, though she believed women are men's helpmeet (Taylor and Weir, *Let her Speak for Herself*, 42–46).

34. Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 240.

those names. Instead, their names were assigned to them for interpretive purposes.<sup>35</sup>

The remainder of Scripture confirms Adam's archetypal purpose, easily inferable from his eventual name. Adam is used archetypally for both men *and women* in Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15.<sup>36</sup> Although Adam is the only character in the Bible formed of dust (Gen 2:7), Abraham, David, and Job all affirm either themselves or humanity are also of dust (Gen 18:27; Ps 103:14; Job 10:9; 34:15). Similarly, Adam's naming of the animals is most probably a picture of the gender-neutral image of God, showing humanity's royal authority and imitating God's naming from Gen 1.<sup>37</sup> Of course, Adam's freedoms and prohibitions regarding the trees (Gen 2:16–17) also applied to the woman (Gen 3:2–3), again reinforcing his generally non-gendered archetypal function.

Adam's non-gendered function includes his priestly duties of working and keeping the Garden (Gen 2:15).<sup>38</sup> This is inferable from the other ways Adam is an archetype for women, but also the image of God and the work of Gen 1:26–28, alongside simple practicality in a garden sanctuary. Furthermore, as the biblical plot continues, the whole nation of Israel was called to fulfill this work, the spreading of God's Garden-Temple as a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6; cf. Isa 42:6; 49:6). The kingdom of priests, Adam's task to spread the Garden over all the world, included the women. That women were not priests in Israel is not a challenge to this hypothesis, just as it could not be argued any non-priestly male is not archetypally represented by Adam. Eventually, this image begins to be fulfilled in the church, male and female (see 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:4–6; 5:9–10; 20:6; 22:1–5).<sup>39</sup> Women being included when the priestly theme of working and keeping fully flowers in the biblical plotline suggests women were in-

35. Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 58–59.

36. He is also used in other ways (see Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 92–95).

37. See Davidson, *Genesis 1–11*, 37; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 176; Middleton "Image of God"; Steinmann, *Genesis*, 67.

38. See Walton, *Genesis*, 172–74.

39. For more on this fulfillment, see Beale, "Eden."

cluded in the tasks of Gen 2:15. As a result, everything God pronounces to Adam in Gen 3:17–19 applies to women, highlighting his typically gender-neutral archetypal function.

Even more, the common noun אָדָם either refers collectively to humanity or an individual human.<sup>40</sup> Like English’s “humanity” or “human,” both usages are gender neutral. The term is grammatically masculine and therefore calls for grammatically masculine pronouns, but this is only a grammatical construction.<sup>41</sup> Further, the proper name “Adam” most likely does not appear until Gen 4:25 in the original text.<sup>42</sup> In short, there are no definite indicators of Adam’s sex until Gen 2:23, when the term for a male human (אִישׁ) is used.<sup>43</sup> Not only does the ambiguity at Gen 2:18 (and 2:15) directly reinforce a gender-neutral understanding,<sup>44</sup> it again highlights Adam’s generally non-gendered archetypal function.

That Adam is continually described simply as the human, eventually named Human, is used archetypally throughout Scripture for all humans regardless of sex, and the lack of knowledge of his sex until Gen 2:23 all reinforce Gen 2:18 should be understood in a gender-neutral light. Though help should certainly be a part of marriage, humans need humans to help them choose life, as Moses did: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.” (Deut 30:19b–20a, NIV).

40. On אָדָם, see Hendel, “Adam,” 18–19; Koehler and Baumgartner, “אָדָם,” 14; Maass, “אָדָם”; McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 12; Motyer, “Adam”; Wallace, “Adam”; Westermann, “אָדָם,” 31–42.

41. See Steins, “Grammar”; Hess, “Adam.”

42. See Lussier, “Adam”; Maass, “אָדָם,” 79; McKenzie, *Dictionary*, 12; Wallace, “Adam,” 62–63; Westermann, “אָדָם,” 34.

43. This is not to say Adam was not a male (Gen 1:27; 2:22–23) (see Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 177–78). Rather, the storyteller has intentionally and strategically not revealed his sex for interpretively significant reasons.

44. Hendel agrees (see “Adam,” 18).

*Genesis 2:25, 17:12, and Final Thoughts on Genesis 2:17–18*

Genesis 2:25 provides further support for understanding Gen 2:18 to be outlining humanity's need for, and call to be, deeply enriching community. In the closing verse of the scene,<sup>45</sup> there are no children, no description of working and keeping the Garden, and no interaction with the animals, as would be expected if these are the direct problems associated with solitude. Because the one-flesh relationship that Gen 2:24 describes is a narrator's commentary,<sup>46</sup> there is not even any indication of intercourse between the first couple.<sup>47</sup> Rather, the scene closes with the two naked, a sign of "openness and trust,"<sup>48</sup> and without shame. The solution to the problem is, thus far, successful. They have not taken fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and therefore have no reason for shame, resulting in a well-rounded plot for Gen 2:18–25.

The nakedness could be viewed as something unique to marriage. However, there are several reasons to view this as a picture of the ideal for all humans, in addition to it aligning with previously argued plot points. First, at this stage of the plot, this is either all of humanity or the representatives of all of humanity. Therefore, the picture *is* of all humanity naked and without shame together. Secondly, both Gen 2:25 and Gen 3:6–8 associate nakedness with shamelessness and being clothed with covering shame. Within the immediate plot, sexual intimacy is not the image nakedness procures, but innocence and honour.<sup>49</sup> Thirdly, since the phrase "the knowledge of good and evil" suggests an initial childlike state for humanity, it would be more narratively congruent for the depiction of nakedness to also be a childlike state, frolicking freely, unashamed.<sup>50</sup> The Eden story is a move-

45. Though Gen 2:25 pivots the plot to Gen 3, it primarily closes the previous section, contra Turner-Smith, "Naked."

46. See Tosato, "On Genesis 2:24."

47. This does not necessarily mean they did not have sex, merely that this is not the focus of the narrative.

48. Waltke, *Genesis*, 90.

49. See Davidson, *Genesis 1–11*, 38; von Rad, *Genesis*, 83.

50. Wenham agrees by saying, "[t]hey were like young children unashamed of their nakedness" (*Genesis 1–15*, 71).

ment from childlike innocence to childlike folly. Fourth, Jesus instructed to become like a child (Matt 18:3) and emphasized the fatherhood of God (e.g., Matt 6:9; Luke 15:11–32), a theme prominent in the New Testament (e.g., Rom 8:16–17; 1 John 3:1). That Jesus and the New Testament authors recognized a childlike state—being born again (John 3:3)—was an Eden-like, New Creation state would be unsurprising.

Some may suggest the oft-debated qualifier for the help (כנגדו) relates to the relationship between women and men, and therefore Gen 2:18 cannot be gender neutral. However, confident claims from the clause alone, other than the most general, outstrip the evidence available. Walton says its “profile leaves so much room that it is useless for giving us direction.”<sup>51</sup> He even candidly writes, “[t]he best procedure from a methodological standpoint in this kind of situation is to find something sufficiently vague to cover the territory.”<sup>52</sup> The phrase עזר כנגדו boasts a vast array of translations, including “a helper suitable for him” (NIV, NASB), “a helper fit for him” (ESV, RSV), “a companion for him who corresponds to him” (NET), “helper—as his counterpart” (YLT), “a helper as his partner” (NRSVue), “a helper who is just right for him”(NLT), and “a helper that is perfect for him” (CEB). Woodenly, כנגדו could be rendered “as in front of him (according to what is in front of him)”<sup>53</sup> or “like opposite him.”<sup>54</sup> As Provan says, “That is: the help must be both similar to the earthling (‘like’ him) and yet also different from him (‘opposite, over against, at a distance from him’).”<sup>55</sup> This is, indeed, rather vague.

Considering the context set by the observations and arguments above, and other supporting texts soon to be observed, it is unlikely the difference envisioned by כנגדו is the sexes per se. Rather, the human needs another human with different giftings. Other humans, whether male or female, are necessarily different

51. Walton, *Genesis*, 176.

52. Walton, *Genesis*, 177.

53. Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 175.

54. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 68; Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 78.

55. Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 78.



in at least some senses. An animal, among which there was not an עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, could very well offer limited companionship or even save someone's life, but they would not be like opposite him. That is, they would not be a mirror image; a different human endowed with the richness God has endowed the first human, yet gifted in other ways, so that together they may have life to the full and be robust rescue for each other.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, this view makes the greatest sense of the animal parade. That the parade is the first event following the establishment of solitude as a plot tension and that an עֹזֵר was not found among the other creatures (Gen 2:20) highlights they were considered a possible solution to the problem of aloneness, at least by the human. However, Gen 1 notes *ten times* that creatures reproduce according to their kind. It would be odd that God would want Adam to consider bestiality, even if only to reject it. Some solve the puzzle by arguing it was for Adam to become aware of his own loneliness.<sup>57</sup> This is likely correct, but even so, the animals failing to be the loving companions that call humans to faithfulness is a more natural fit in the plot, including if God's two stage process is partly for Adam's ability to recognize his loneliness for himself. Indeed, even the married and sexually active can be lonely and still in need of help.

A paraphrase of עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ worthy of consideration is “a strengthening companion as a mirror image of him.” Though it is difficult to translate עֹזֵר to make the connection with the forbidden fruit explicit, this captures key elements of the phrase and would draw English readers' minds back to the image of God, something עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ and the scene is surely intended to do. This, of course, would still be a radical claim about women and their equality to men, jointly made in the image of God. Reflections

56. Some may question the gender-neutrality of Gen 2:18 based on 1 Cor 11:9. For the best explanation of 1 Cor 11:2–16, see Peppiatt, *Women*. Her arguments that 1 Cor 11:4–5, 7–10; 14:21–22, 33b–35 refer to Corinthian positions that Paul is refuting are convincing and bolstered by the arguments presented herein. If 1 Cor 11:9 does reflect Paul's view, most likely Paul would be referring to Eve as the *first* helper.

57. See Davidson, *Genesis 1–11*, 37; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 68; von Rad, *Genesis*, 81.

upon the כנגדו (or כנגדה) relationship between men and women need not be hindered by this take. However, the above paraphrase captures how it can apply to any other human as well.

The widely applicable need for help and calling to be helpers naturally lead to neighbourly love. An עזר in the Gen 2 sense simply *is* someone who loves their neighbour as themselves—as bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh—helping others choose life in the most profound sense, acting like Jesus, who came to bring life, and to the full (John 10:10).

*Proposition 3: Genesis 2:23 as Covenantal, Neighbourly Love*

When this strengthening companion as a mirror image of Adam finally arrives, he declares—with the only pre-sin sentence uttered between humans—that she is his own bone and flesh. Comparable declarations can be found in Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 1 Chr 11:1; and 2 Sam 19:12–13. In every instance, it is a statement of kinship, though this can range from extended family to tribe or nation. The phrase never refers to the unique relationship between males and females elsewhere in Scripture. The point is easy to ascertain: one can say the other is themselves since they share a body. Coupled with the biblical narrative painting all humans as ultimately one family (e.g., Gen 10; Acts 17:26)—sharing bone and flesh—loving another as oneself is a simple inference. Other humans are family, sharing bodies, so love them that way.

As expected from a creation story, the familial image in Gen 2:23 doubtlessly serves as the narrative foundation for much of the familial language in both the Old Testament and New Testament. In countless laws, the people of Israel are referred to as siblings (e.g., Lev 19:17; 25:35; Deut 15:11; 22:1–4), as are God's people in the New Testament (e.g., Gal 5:13; Heb 3:1; Jas 2:1; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 3:14). Within God's covenant community—those who are to most approximate God's ideal in their contexts—people are bone of bone and flesh of flesh.

Interestingly, every Old Testament story containing a person or party declaring another as their bone and flesh eventually

results in an agreement or covenant.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, on one level, Gen 2:23 can be seen as the husband’s marriage vow, to love his wife as his own body. However, it also likely establishes the covenantal kinship relationships demanded by the law, which is summarized by love. Further, as Adam and Eve either represent all of humanity or are all of humanity, it suggests that there is, or ought to be, a universal covenant to love one another as each loves themselves, precisely what is expected given the role of Gen 1–2 as an idyllic picture, the meaning of Gen 2:17–18, and love summing the law. Loving another as oneself flows naturally from sharing bone and flesh, marking each in covenant kinship with their neighbour, as helpers.

*Proposition 4: Reinforcing Texts in the Old and New Testaments*

The Old Testament itself refers to Gen 2:18–25 in non-marital contexts. For example, when Boaz praises Ruth, he notes that she left her father and her mother (Ruth 2:11–12), a clear allusion to Gen 2:24, reinforcing the more subtle reference when Ruth chose to hold fast (דבק) to Naomi (Ruth 1:14), the same verb used in Gen 2:24.<sup>59</sup>

Remarkably, Ruth and Naomi’s relationship is the only human relationship the Old Testament directly references Gen 2:24 to mark it as being demonstrated in the relationship. Clearly, readers are not supposed to refer to Ruth and Naomi as married. The text marks them as being in-laws (Ruth 1:8–18, 22), Ruth marries Boaz, and a marital union between Ruth and Naomi would go against the very definition of marriage implied by Gen 2:24 itself.<sup>60</sup> Instead, the allusion is to show that Ruth loved Naomi as her own body, joining her in covenant kinship. Indeed, Ruth’s famous declaration, “[w]here you go I will go, and where

58. E.g., the marriages of Laban’s daughters to Jacob (Gen 29); Abimelech made king (Judg 9); David made king (2 Sam 5; 1 Chr 11), David re-established as king (2 Sam 19).

59. Compare Warner, “Therefore a Man Leaves his Father and his Mother.”

60. See also Matt 19:3–9; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9.

you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16–17, NIV), considering the other references to Gen 2, typifies the mantra of Gen 2:23. Readers, therefore, can infer she was an embodiment of an עזר for Naomi, loving her mother-in-law as her own bone and flesh.

Another plausible intertextual allusion to Gen 2:18–25 is in Exod 18. Moses is the lone arbiter for the people—the pronouncer of what is wise—being severely overworked. Jethro sees that it is not good that he is alone (vv. 14–18) and instructs Moses to appoint capable God-fearers to help him, so there can be peace (שלום; vv. 19–23). Then, in a redeemed echo of Gen 3:17a, Moses listens to the voice of Jethro, and the workload is successfully relieved (vv. 24–27).

Although עזר is not directly used to describe the appointed judges, the use of key Eden vocabulary and themes is striking. With it being not good that Moses determined wisdom on his own, the judges were helpers for Moses, again suggesting the problem of being alone and the concept of help are not gendered and have societal implications beyond marriage.

The New Testament also references Gen 2:18–25 in non-marital ways, especially if it is accepted that Paul’s frequent use of the body metaphor—used of both marriage (Eph 5:25–33) and, as is more often, non-marriage (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:4, 12, 16, 25; 1 Cor 12:12–31)—is, in fact, an allusion to Gen 2:18–25, particularly 2:23. Indeed, Paul even appeals to being one body in relation to how to treat a neighbour in Eph 4:25 (“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body,” NIV).

That Paul’s body metaphor is rooted in Gen 2:23 can be verified from his discourse to the husbands in Eph 5. There, body imagery refers both to the body of Christ and the spousal relationship and is clearly linked to Gen 2:18–25. Not only is Gen 2:24 directly quoted in v. 31, Christ presents the church to himself, mirroring the presentation of the woman to the man in Gen 2, among other things,<sup>61</sup> but Christ plays the position of both

61. Many commentators note connection with Ezek 16:10–14. See Bock, *Ephesians*, 180; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 189–90; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 376–77.

God and the human: the presenter and the presented to.<sup>62</sup> Paul references Gen 2:22 in v. 27 and Gen 2:24 in v. 31. One would expect, therefore, a reference to Gen 2:23 in between, precisely where he calls the husbands to love their wives as their own body, as Christ does the church (vv. 28–30).<sup>63</sup>

It should be emphasized that the body metaphor used here is a development of the body theme earlier (Eph 4:4–6; 1:10), but *newly* applying it to husbands and wives. As such, Paul reflects a complex understanding of Gen 2:18–25 that can see it as both foundational for marriage and foundational for the life of the Body more generally.<sup>64</sup> As Paul says in Rom 12:4–5, “[f]or just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (NIV). The church shares bone and flesh, each an עֶזֶר, and each, with their different gifts (כְּנִגְדֵי) for each other.

Furthermore, Jesus was single and approved it as an available life choice (Matt 19:10–12). Paul conceded that he wished everyone would stay unmarried (1 Cor 7:6–9, 32–38), and there will be no marriage in the new heavens and new earth (Mark 12:25). Indeed, when Jesus describes, and models, the ultimate expression of love—to lay down one’s own bone and flesh—he does not use the example of dying for a spouse or even family, but for friends (John 15:13). Considering this, it would be shocking to find Gen 2:18–25 has such narrow applicability as to pertain to marriage alone. Indeed, if it is speaking uniquely to marriage, then the not-goodness of Gen 2:18 is not a reality for humans generally, for it could hardly be said of Jesus, Paul, or those they

62. Notably, God is Israel’s עֶזֶר, like the woman, throughout the Old Testament.

63. Bock connects Lev 19:18, Gen 2, and Eph 5, saying, “[t]he one-flesh idea of Genesis 2:23–24 is present (Eph. 5:31) . . . In this oneness comes the unity that Paul is urging for the marriage. For a husband to love his wife is an extension of his loving and caring for himself. It also reflects the love he is to have for any person, what Scripture calls one’s ‘neighbour’ (Lev. 19:18)” (*Ephesians*, 180). See also Wintle, *Ephesians*, 135.

64. This is consistent with Midrashic exegesis (see Pickup, “New Testament Interpretation”).

taught, that it was not good for them to remain unmarried. Readers, therefore, should not be finding enduring significance in Gen 2:18. This is highly implausible given Adam's archetypal role, the connection between helping, wisdom, and morality, and the Garden's idyllic function.

As both the Old Testament and New Testament utilize Gen 2:18–25 in ways beyond marriage, the text carries broader implications. It is also unsurprising, given the theses of this paper, that the other ethical command of Jesus said to be foundational to all the Law and the Prophets is the Golden Rule, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12, NIV). Notice it also appeals to oneself, just as Lev 19:18 does. Do to others like they are your very bone and flesh, one may say.

#### *Some Implications*

The scene's applicability to marriage should not be considered compromised by the view presented herein, though the assumption the text is *only* defining marriage or gender ideology must be rejected. This is dense literature designed to be meditated on day and night (Ps 1:2), fully capable of speaking to both marriage and broader relationships. Helmut Thielicke explains it well, saying, “[l]ife presents such a wealth of possibilities to love, serve, and suffer with other people that even the person who lives his life without a married partner is given the same opportunity to find and fulfil himself in devotion to others. Marriage, to which the text refers, constitutes only a kind of model for the fulfilment of love in our life.”<sup>65</sup>

One could think of it as a foundation story for cooks. This would apply to both professional chefs and home cooks. In many respects, the two are identical—and home cooking can sometimes be better than at restaurants! There need not be two stories. However, professional chefs—who, presumably, cook also at home—have unique and formal responsibilities to certain persons. Within the story, it could be discerned what these are,

65. Thielicke, *How the World Began*, 91–92.

but it does not follow there would be nothing to be gleaned about home cooks.

Reading Gen 2:18–25 to include non-marital implications does, however, compromise unhelpful views of singleness. It is often difficult to side with 1 Cor 7:6–9 which says it is good to remain unmarried. In much of the world, to be single and celibate is a death sentence—to be condemned to loneliness and depression—and even a sign of shame on oneself or the community. But Jesus was single and lived the fullness of what it means to be truly human. One can hardly say it was not good for him to be single. One could say, however, that it would not have been good for him to be alone, to have lived a purely solitary life, without family, friends, or community. Jesus was indeed the second Adam, for whom it was likewise not good to be alone.

Perhaps one of the reasons a celibate life, for whatever underlying reason—one's calling, lack of mates, sexual orientation, or some other reason (Matt 19:10–12)—is considered a death sentence in Western culture is because the profound, lifegiving, covenant, רֵעִיר-*friendship* humans are called to be for one another has been relegated to marriage. When truly loving and relational depth—bone of bone and flesh of flesh, members of one another—can only be achieved via marriage, of course, singleness should be avoided! But if the natural human desire for intimate relationships—and this is not the same as sexual relationships—can be fulfilled outside romance, then singleness truly can be a good and fulfilling option. One may even find themselves agreeing with Paul that, though each has their gift, it is truly good to remain unmarried (1 Cor 7:6–9, 38).

There are certainly trends toward greater acceptance of singleness in some pockets of the West. Still, for an environment where neither singleness nor marriage is a default, but each a calling, both fully recognized as a worthy gift capable of relational fulfillment, it would require a momentous shift in many parts of the Western church towards a richer sense of community, alongside the elimination of singleness shaming. Will each be members of one another (Eph 4:25), bone of bone and flesh of flesh? Will each be so committed to one another in covenant friendship that no one would ever be unknown or lonely, with no

love lost for singles? Could the picture of the Church in Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35 truly be modelled here and now?

These values must also be taught from the pulpit, which must start with Christian scholars. One of the biggest influences on how Christian leaders, pastors or otherwise, lead and shape the values of Christian communities is the scholars training, teaching, and providing resources. Though reflections and debates on marriage or gender should continue, the pertinence of the pre-sin human story to neighbours, friends, and singles deserves greater treatment from Christian scholars, which will shape pulpit teaching. Commentators should make intentional efforts to include reflections on the universally relatable significances of the text, regardless of sex or relationship status, grounding communities in the covenant friendship they are called to.

### *Conclusion*

Leviticus 19:18 is not weighty enough to be the second great commandment. However, Gen 2:18–25, as the ideal picture of heavenly earth, would be expected to be the foundation for it and, indeed, contains several elements suggesting as much. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the gender-neutral problem and solution in Gen 2:18, and the covenantal, kinship body language of Gen 2:23 problematize the text as a purely marital story. Alongside non-marital allusions to the story in both the Old Testament and New Testament, it is most likely that the true root of neighbourly love is this one and only pre-sin human interaction, providing a richness to the story beyond even its depth when narrowed to marriage. Gen 2:18–25 can now consistently be seen as foundational as expected, and the obscure Lev 19:18 is no longer out of place, for it is itself not the commandment per se, but rather the best example of the commandment in propositional form within the Old Testament.

C. S. Lewis claims, “[a] man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.”<sup>66</sup> The straight line for all human relationships, modelled perfectly only by Jesus, is the

66. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 41.



second great commandment, quotable in Lev 19:18 but rooted in Gen 2:18–25. The Western church struggles to see neighbourly love in Gen 2. This is possibly because, in part, it struggles with the type of deep, lifesaving friendship humanity is called to.

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