

Synopsis of Man and Woman in Biblical Law

Man and Woman in Biblical Law, by conservative Evangelical Christian author Tom Shipley, is a veritable *tour-de-force* of pro-patriarchal, pro-polygamy biblical exposition. Shipley's *Man and Woman in Biblical Law* brings to the surface an issue which has been simmering as an undercurrent of Christian thought for a very long time and defended over the centuries by such Christians as St. Augustine, Milton (*de Doctrina Christiana*), Martin Madan (*Thelyphora*, 1781) and others over the centuries. The long-standing traditional position of the Church has been one of endorsement of monogamy exclusively and rejection of polygamy. Shipley's work and the movement it represents within the conservative, Bible-believing Evangelical world, is probably going to change all that. The cat, as they say, is out of the bag in this age of instant global communication.

Man and Woman in Biblical Law is a systematic exposition of virtually all of the biblical material related to the subject. What Tom Shipley has done that may be his unique contribution to the subject, is to demonstrate from Scripture that patriarchy (and therefore polygyny) is embedded in the **creation** narrative of Genesis. The debate over this issue can never be the same again. Shipley has essentially swept away the monogamy-only proponents from their presumed monopoly of the creation argument. This is new and earthshaking. This is the doctrinal equivalent of a hydrogen bomb with the monogamy-only camp being at ground zero.

Shipley argues forcibly that **there is a direct connection between patriarchy and polygamy** (more precisely polygyny, multiple wives), and that since patriarchy was established by God in creation that polygyny is necessary as a morally valid expression of that patriarchy. One may get the flavor of this from a quote from Augustine that Shipley marshals in support of his thesis:

“For by a secret law of nature, **things that stand chief love to be singular**; but things that are subject are set under, not only one under one, but, if the system of nature or society allow, even several under one, not without becoming beauty. **For neither hath one slave so several masters, in the way that several slaves have one master. Thus we read not that any of the holy women served two or more living husbands; but we read that many females served one husband**, when the social state of the nation allowed it, and the purpose of the time persuaded it: for **neither is it contrary to the nature of marriage**. For several females can conceive from one man: but one female cannot from several men (such is the power of things principal) **as many souls are rightly made subject to one God.**” —from “A Selected Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,” Ed. by Philip Schaff, Vol. III, pg. 407-408 (pg. 22 of *Man and Woman in Biblical Law*)

Man and Woman in Biblical Law is broken down into 58 articles and begins with seven articles expositing various passages in Genesis, and New Testament commentary upon Genesis, demonstrating that patriarchy was the will of God **prior to the fall** of Adam and Eve into sin. Shipley proceeds from there to defend polygyny as a direct consequence and inference from patriarchy (Article 8).

Shipley defends the pronouncement of Christ in Matthew 5:17-19 of the continuity of the moral law (of which marriage law is an aspect) with no change in the New Testament. Shipley argues that provisions in the Law of Moses instituting polygyny (e.g., Exo. 21:10-11, Deut. 21:15-17, Deut. 22:28-29, Deut. 21:10-14 and Deut. 25:5-10) carry over into the New Testament without abrogation or annulment. Shipley argues vehemently for the unity, harmony, and non-contradictory nature of Scripture and biblical ethics. Shipley argues against the common view of many commentators that Scripture contains “antinomies,” or “contradictions” or “tensions” in this regard between the Old and New Testaments and even between the creation narrative of Genesis and the Law of Moses. Hence, the status of polygyny under the New Covenant is the same as it was under the Old Covenant. Shipley points out that **his opponents position on this subject is premised upon the contradiction view.**

A whole section of the book, called “All the Polygamists of the Bible” (Articles 15 through 38), is devoted to analysis of every biblical example of polygamy (Shipley counts 40 examples), with much specific exposition, culminating in the example of the Lord Himself who metaphorically portrays Himself as a man with two wives (Ezekiel 23 and Jeremiah 3). This section is where the reader will find much of the “meat and potatoes” of the book. Shipley demonstrates that there is not a single instance in all of Scripture of any condemnation of polygyny. Shipley wants to know how this can possibly be if polygyny constitutes adultery, or is otherwise sinful in the eyes of God. There does not seem to be anyone with any kind of an answer to Shipley’s question.

Man and Woman in Biblical Law goes on from there to critique and challenge, one after another, some of the shining stars of Christian “orthodoxy” in his polemic against the exposition of thirteen authors who have had something to say about polygamy. Shipley takes on the likes of Princeton’s Charles Hodge, John Murray, Jay E. Adams, and Rousas J. Rushdoony (Articles 43 through 55). Shipley’s critique of these authors’ faulty exposition is utterly devastating to the foundations of the traditional monogamy-only tradition.