I am Tom Shipley, the author of *Man and Woman in Biblical Law*, and *They Shall Be One Flesh*.

My task here is to give you a brief synopsis and overview of what I have written. So you’ve gotten here and are now wondering to yourself, “Where is this Shipley guy coming from? What’s his angle? And what are these two books all about?”

Well, I’ll tell you. Let me say, first of all, if you have come this far in your search for truth, then you are here by Divine appointment. You have prayed and asked God to give you knowledge and understanding. He heard you. You have diligently sought to know the true meaning of many confusing things you have been taught about the Bible. God sees your seeking and earnest desire. You have knocked on the door of heaven seeking to bring clarity out of confusion. Many things that you have been told are so don’t make sense to you. There is a reason for this: much of what you have been taught is *not* so. I did not begin my Christian journey in January of 1978 being taught the things that you will read in my books. I came to them after years of diligent and prayerful study of Scripture.

You will notice in a few spots in the book some ire and…well…let’s call it a lack of graciousness towards a couple other commentators. I was particularly hard on Walter Kaiser and Ruth Tucker. May God forgive me if I am wrong but I deemed their argumentation as something less than earnest, particularly that of Tucker. I don’t abide what I regard as deliberate distortion of Scripture very well. So, yes, there is a bit of anger in my work. I would compare it to the movie *Sling Blade* where the character Carl Childress, played by Billy Bob Thornton, after being released from the State mental hospital, visits and confronts his father, saying, “I learned to read some. I read the Bible quite a bit. I can’t understand all of it but I reckon I understand a good deal of it. Those stories you and Mama taught me: They ain’t in there! You ought notta done that to your boy!” I feel very much like Carl. My spiritual parent, the church, told me stories about the Bible that ain’t in there. And they ought notta done that their boy!

So just who is Tom Shipley? I am an Evangelical Christian. I am a “conservative” Evangelical Christian, meaning that I truly believe the Bible is the Word of God, in contrast to many who use those words but actually mean something entirely different. (They are called “liberal Christians.”) I believe the Bible is inerrant. It is “God-breathed” to use the Bible’s own
terminology. I believe in the unity, the continuity, and the harmony of Scripture. It comes ultimately from a single Author, God Himself. I do not believe the Bible contains “contradictions” and “tensions” and “antinomies.” I do not believe God changes. He is eternal and cannot change. This is my starting point. Everything else flows from that.

Excuse me for blowing my own horn here but I believe *Man and Woman in Biblical Law* is a veritable *tour-de-force* of pro-patriarchal, pro-polygyny biblical exposition. In *Man and Woman in Biblical Law* I bring 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. My 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 I have done that may be my unique contribution to the subject, is to demonstrate from Scripture that patriarchy (and therefore polygyny) is embedded in the creation narrative of Genesis. In other words, polygyny is a creation principle. The debate over this issue can never be the same again. I have 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.

I demonstrate in *Man and Woman in Biblical Law* 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 I cite 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)

Polygyny as a creation ordinance is implicit in Augustine’s commentary here. I made it my task to make this connection explicit. To my knowledge, no one else has made an explicit and systematic case for polygyny as a creation principle.

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. I proceed from there to defend polygyny as a direct consequence and inevitable inference from patriarchy (Article 8).

I defend 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.

17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

I argue that provisions in the Law of Moses instituting polygyny are consistent with Genesis 1 -2 (i.e., Exo. 21:10-11, Deut. 21:15-17, Deut. 22:28-29, Deut. 21:10-14 and Deut. 25:5-10) and carry over into the New Testament without abrogation or annulment. Or have heaven and earth passed away? I argue for the unity, harmony, and non-contradictory
nature of Scripture and biblical ethics. I argue against the pervasive view of a whole army of 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 Moses in 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. My opponents’ position, almost without a single exception, is premised upon the contradiction view. Every Christian committed to a high view of Scripture should pause and meditate upon that fact at length.

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 (I count 40 examples, although one of those examples references thousands of polygynists), 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. I demonstrate that there is not a single instance in all of Scripture of any condemnation of polygyny. I want 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 even remotely sensible answer to my question. And while I am asking questions: if monogamy-only is such an obvious inference to be deduced from Genesis 1 – 2, then why did this idea never dawn on biblical Israel in all their history? Something’s wrong with this picture!

*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 my polemic against the exposition of thirteen authors who have had something to say about polygamy. I take on the likes of Princeton’s Charles Hodge, the eminent John Murray, scholar Jay E. Adams, and the “one man university” Rousas J. Rushdoony (Articles 43 through 55). I believe my critique of these authors’ faulty exposition is utterly devastating to the foundations of the traditional monogamy-only tradition.