

“JOINT-HEIRS OF THE GRACE OF LIFE”¹

THE best foundation for marriage is God, the Rock of Israel. The best principles for the conduct of married life are to be found in Christ, the Chief Cornerstone. At first sight, it might seem that such thoughts are too high-flown and are far removed from day to day living in the marriage bonds. This is not so.

Take for example, if you are a husband or a husband-to-be, the simple question: do you regard yourself as the redeemer in your relationship with your partner? Sister, if you are a wife, or a wife-to-be, do you see yourself in the marriage yoke as the bride of Christ? In other words, does each see the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ as the very essence of a sound marriage?

If the husband works always for his wife's eternal salvation in the everyday things of marriage, and the wife fulfils her calling as part of the bride of Christ, then, together, they will truly be “joint-heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7, R.V.). Words and deeds will be governed by the sole desire to work together for eternity, and to make the home a place where saving truth is the touchstone.

In the context of Christlike life and of marriage, Paul exhorts: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (Eph. 5:1). We begin by submitting one to another (v. 21). It is not simply that the wife submits to the husband; both submit to one another. This is the spirit of service, the very core of how Christ has redeemed us. Marriage becomes infinitely sweeter when we learn this secret.

Submission

It is not only submission one to another, it is submission “in the fear of God”. All submission is to God, even within the marriage ties. The husband-redeemer's love and the wife-bride's willing response are strong bands by which to hold one to another by jointly holding fast to God.

When, therefore, wives are commanded to submit to their own husbands as unto the Lord, we are being taught that faithfulness in marriage is based upon faithfulness to God. Indeed, the unity of marriage should be a reflection of the oneness of God. To be truly of one flesh, we need first to be of one mind. Our unity is assured when that mind is the mind of Christ.

Scripture teaches us that man is the head of woman (1 Cor. 11:3). This does not mean that man has the advantage and woman the disadvantage, or that man's priority gives him preferential status thereby making woman inferior. Instead we should learn that man has a particular obligation and responsibility whereby his over-arching protection and provision establish a stability and unity by which the woman may fulfil her equally important function of building within her husband's care that which he could never accomplish of himself.

¹ From the second of a series of addresses on the theme “The Family: The Divine Perspective” at the Swanwick Family Gathering in September.

The Meaning of Headship

The headship of the husband derives from the headship of Christ and is not separable from it. It is of the same kind. The headship of Christ is “to the church” (Eph. 1:22). Christ is head for the well-being and salvation of the ecclesia which is one with him. So it is in marriage. Man is head by divine appointment for the well-being of his wife and family. It is therefore not simply a status of which to boast, but a function to be performed whereby a wife is made glad and secure, and never oppressed or down-trodden.

A thoughtless or domineering, masterful husband is as far removed from the divine pattern as would be a ruthless or unsympathetic Christ. Such is unthinkable. Tenderheartedness is the key to this kind of leadership. Moreover, such leadership always engenders the very best qualities which a godly woman can produce.

Speaking to the Heart

There must be true communication within marriage. Marriages are under threat when there is little or no communication. In another connection, Peter was said to have “words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). This is how it should be within marriage. Each partner should use that manner of considerate speech which encourages and upholds the other.

We should not sharpen the edges of our words in order to injure or threaten each other. We should not seek always to be “right” or to “win” an argument. Not even the sinless Christ was forever asserting his authority or discouraging his disciples by proving their insufficiencies or errors. Words which do not improve our marriage should not be used. A war of words or constant sniping or words shot like arrows and designed to hurt and wound debase the user, and are destructive of the very foundations on which harmony in Christ may exist and thrive.

The best source of guidance—indeed, the *only* source—in the exercise of proper speech is to be found in the Bible. Marriages are immediately in jeopardy when the Word of God is not central to the home. When the Word is read every day, preferably together as a family, our hearts are open to divine influence. By this means we are taught how best to communicate with one another. Anger, wrath, bitterness, clamour, arrogance, calculated hurtfulness and countless other evils of speech are removed by divine tuition and the good examples within the pages of God’s Word.

Giving

We live in a world where self-centredness is highly esteemed. What is best for me is taken to be my right; and, the exercise of my right is regarded as normal and sensible. Sympathy has been replaced by empathy. To proceed on these lines in the partnership of marriage is to be on course for disaster.

Giving is the principle endorsed by the Lord Jesus who said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Supremely this was exhibited when the Lord loved the ecclesia and “gave *himself* for it”. It is what we put into marriage and not what we seek to take out of it that ensures its stability. Divorce is the ultimate of “taking”. Both partners seek to extract that which is theirs. They succeed in securing material rights but they leave the essence of marriage and the true rights of the children in ruins.

True marriage is larger than either partner or than both of them put together. It is for this reason that when each of us seeks to give, then both of us receive more than we have contributed in total. This is the wonder of divine arithmetic made possible by the blessing of the Lord himself.

Some of us may think that these ideals are right for the newly weds and for those who are young, but are beyond those of us who would like to practise them yet feel it is too late. This is altogether untrue. Improvement is always possible whatever our state. A deep desire, faith and prayer coupled with repentance and confession where necessary will work wonders. If we truly lay everything before the Lord and promise to endeavour more warmly to apply His principles in daily living, we shall receive His blessing.

No one can accomplish everything at once. Take one or two steps at a time and persist in right-doing. Try not to look for changes in one's partner without first making them in one's own way of life. We can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us.

How to be a better husband

It is given of God that husbands are to provide strength, leadership, initiative and, to the best of our ability, the wherewithal to sustain the family. We are to provide the source of authority within the home by making sure that God's law runs everywhere and that we ourselves are examples of its application in life. In these things we show forth the unity of God in a united home. And we must be consistent and reliable in ourselves.

Together with love we must demonstrate respect and loyalty towards our wives and to the family. To have respect for the person and body of one's wife is to increase her sense of security and care. To be loyal in every way—in speech, in behaviour and in thought—will ensure our own chastity and the integrity of the family as a whole.

Continual acts of tenderness keep the heart of the marriage aglow. It does not require extravagant, unreal demonstrations of feeling or lavish gifts, but rather the true and warm expressions of our hearts which evoke understanding and thankfulness.

Peter tells us by the Spirit that we are to dwell with our wives “according to knowledge” (1 Peter 3:7). This knowledge is that of divine principles and of the nature of man and of woman as revealed by the Lord. “According to knowledge” is followed by “giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel”. “Honour . . . unto the weaker vessel.” There is a wealth of meaning here for husbands to contemplate. Every husband should honour his wife. This is the antidote to selfish indulgence whether in things intimate or in the duties within the home. The woman's weakness is not spiritual. God has created her with a particular sense of need within marriage and it is man's responsibility to meet that need in every possible way. Such is the husband's privilege.

How to be a better wife

The best guidance is to be found in the good examples in the pages of Scripture—Sarah, Ruth, Abigail, and Priscilla, for example, and the many women who are included in the well-being of their children by the Old Testament expression, “and his mother's name was”. The effect of womanhood on the destiny of whole families can never be over-estimated. A good wife is dedicated to providing by the God-given qualities of grace and graciousness the home in which her husband's and her children's best spiritual interests are served. As the husband is exhorted to give honour to his wife, so the wife graces her husband and the home which he has provided.

Our ability to create a home is priceless. No other person within the family has the privilege of spending so much time in building the very framework in which all other members live together. We live

in an age when home-building has been replaced for many women by self-fulfilment in careers and other activities away from home. There are profound dangers here for all of the family. It may be that economic factors or illness of one's partner make this necessary. It can be that we choose this other way of life for other reasons. We read that "even Christ pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3). All of us assume responsibilities when we marry: the husband to provide and the wife to "do him good and not evil all the days of her life" and to look well "to the ways of her household" (Prov. 31:12, 27). These are our prime activities.

Wives have the threads of immortality in their hands and must seek to weave them into the minds of husband and children alike. Woman is the binder of family life. As she tends the injuries and harm of her children, so she applies her soothing balm to the life of the whole home. It is a gift which above all others God has placed in her heart and hands.

It is good to ensure that the family has its meals together. The microwave oven and the television set can be divisive influences. A family which eats together talks together. Mealtimes are times of fellowship. Cares are shared, difficulties aired and the day's events rehearsed. Some homes have the daily readings immediately afterwards and all of the children (even the very youngest by repeating words after father or mother) are involved. We must also have our spiritual food together.

Because we are home builders we have to strike a balance between our wants for the home and our true needs. Our husband needs to be aware of what is required but not burdened by insatiable demands. In this regard it is good to teach our children the proper use of money and its sub-ordinate place in the life of people of God.

Finally

Joint-heirs have equal spiritual standing before the Lord God. Therefore, each of us has responsibility before God and our Saviour, the royal Bridegroom. If we dwell together in grace, love and trust; if we pray together to the God of heaven; then, in the age to come we will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb.

HARRY TENNANT

¹. *Vol. 123: The Christadelphian : Volume 123*. 2001, c1986. The Christadelphian, volume 123. (electronic ed.). Logos Library System . Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association: Birmingham