

Husband and Wife (Andrew Walker)

WORKING TOGETHER IN THE LORD

WE live together in a society which has ever greater social problems and it is inevitable that they will affect us in our lives as brethren and sisters in the Lord. The difficulties of bringing up children, of finding secure work, of drug abuse and its consequences—these and other problems are all greater than they were a generation ago because the world is becoming a more godless place.

But we see these problems most clearly within marriage. When fewer than 40% of weddings in the UK take place in church and the divorce rate is over 50%, we know that the solemnity and permanence of marriage is being debased and that we shall not remain untouched by this within the brotherhood. As we struggle with the practical issues raised, then perhaps at times we have become preoccupied with coping with failure rather than positively teaching our young brethren and sisters the beauty of the divine ideals about marriage in the Lord which are so wonderfully set out in Scripture. We see these at the very beginning of the book of Genesis.

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The Primary Loyalty

We are told that it was on the 6th day when the LORD made both Adam and Eve. As Adam opened his eyes, the first being he would see would be the Angel of the LORD who had breathed into him the breath of life. His first relationship then was to be with the LORD who had made him, and nothing which followed should supersede that. So also with Eve, Adam was deeply asleep whilst she was formed; she too would see the Angel of the LORD before anyone else, would speak her first words to him, and would recognise her responsibility to the God who formed her. How simple these things are, yet they speak to us of the fundamental principle of marriage: it is to be in the LORD. When man and woman came together in the beginning they each brought to their new relationship a primary loyalty and responsibility to God which they then shared with each other.

The Lord Jesus, in Matthew 19:5, tells us that it was God who first said the words, “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh”. God spoke those words in the beginning when He brought Eve to Adam. This first marriage was a formal affair; there was a solemnity about it as God brought the bride to her husband and presented her to him. The idea of just living together, as practised in the world, has no Scriptural basis at all. We see also from the New Testament what Eve’s reaction was to the occasion, when we compare the following passages:

“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and *brought her unto the man*. And Adam said, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman.*”
([Genesis 2:22–23](#))

“He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. *And he brought him to Jesus*. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, *Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas.*” ([John 1:41–42](#))

We know that this passage in John is a prophecy which was fulfilled later in the ministry of Jesus.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church”. ([Matthew 16:15–18](#))

It was when Peter confessed that Jesus was the Son of God that the Lord changed his name. The rock was not Peter himself but the faith he showed when he said these words: in a sense in these two passages he represents the faithfulness of all true disciples when they discern the Son of God. When we then put these Scriptures together, perhaps we see what Eve thought when she was brought to Adam: she saw him as the Son of God, the one to whom she should look for leadership and guidance in their relationship together. She recognised him as the one who was to be her Lord, as the ecclesia recognises Jesus.

We need now to think about the sequence of events on this 6th day: we can put them together like this:

- Adam is first formed.
- He is given the commandment of chapter 2:17 which defines his position as one who must obey the God who made him.
- All is not yet very good, for he needs a help suitable for him. It is not good that the man should be alone.
- Eve is made and brought to Adam.
- God gives them both the commandment to be fruitful and fill the earth (1:28).
- The first day of their life together begins that evening.

Faith and Worship First

This timing is of profound importance—their coming together was on the very first Sabbath which commenced at 6pm on the day of their marriage. Their life together began with a day of worship and praise to the Almighty who had made them; it did not begin with daily work but with the things of the LORD . This is why marriage in the Truth should be so different from that in the world. Husband and wife each bring to marriage a personal faith in the Almighty which is enriched by sharing it together as we worship with each other and live the Truth together. Our marriage becomes stronger and more healthy the more we share together a common faith, the more we read the Word of God together, the more we discuss it, meditate on it, and pray about it together. One of the finest privileges we have is to pass the bread and wine to our own husband or wife on a Sunday, to share the unique intimacy of being at the Lord’s table together: it helps, more than anything else we do, to make us spiritually one as husband and wife.

But we also see from this timing the different responsibilities of husband and wife in marriage. That first commandment from the LORD was made to Adam; Eve was not yet formed. Who would tell her not to eat of that tree? Who would explain why? Surely it was Adam’s responsibility to do this. His failure to pass on God’s word to his wife explains, in part, why the responsibility for sin was his and not Eve’s. On the other hand, the fact that the man is the head of the woman does not mean that husbands should be domineering, non-listening heads of their households, with the wife subservient in every way. It means that the responsibility for ensuring that God’s word is read and expounded in their home rests ultimately with the husband as it did in the beginning. The teaching of the Apostle Paul on this subject makes it quite clear that this responsibility for leadership goes back before the fall to creation itself. It should be a matter

of concern to us when modern thinking about the equality of the sexes influences us both at home and in the ecclesia to lay aside this principle.

However, Adam needed help in his work; he could not achieve these things alone. We know from a comparison of Genesis 1 and Malachi 2 what this help was needed for.

“Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed.” ([Malachi 2:14–15](#))

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (fill) the earth, and subdue it.” [Genesis 1:27–28](#))

The work of man and woman was to have children in their marriage and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD . Their offspring were to be sons of God also, a godly seed, brought up to honour and worship God in their lives. Neither could do this alone; each provided what the other could not supply; a single parent family by choice was not the divine ideal. In turn these children were to leave the Garden of Eden and spread out progressively until the whole earth was filled with the praise and honour of God, and it needed Adam’s spiritual leadership with Eve’s support and help to achieve this.

So the whole emphasis on marriage in Genesis 2 is on working and worshipping together in the LORD . If we can teach our youngsters this and they see us practising it ourselves, then the institution of marriage amongst us will become far healthier. Conversely, if worship is simply an add-on to the everyday things of life and marriage, then we are impoverished in our relationships. Today there are more ways than ever in which husbands and wives can work together:

- Sunday School teaching
- Correspondence work for the CBM or CIL
- Pastoral work within the ecclesia or Homes
- Bible reading and study (this writer benefits greatly as a speaker from his wife’s input).
- Campaigns or CBM visits.

—to name but a few.

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Discipleship through Marriage

But above all we know that our relationship in marriage speaks to us of the relationship of Christ and his ecclesia. It is in marriage that we learn to practise the things of Christ, to practise forgiveness and selflessness, to learn the true depths of love, to put someone else first, to subdue anger, to restrain a hasty word. If in our marriage we cannot learn these things then where else can we practise these qualities of discipleship? It is in the sharing of these things, which help each of us to be Christ-like in our lives, that we become truly one with our partner in our marriage.

The Lord Jesus himself alludes to these things, and looks back to the divine principle given in the beginning, in his great prayer in John 17 :

“I have glorified thee on the earth: *I have finished the work* which thou gavest me to do.”

“For *I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me* ; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”

“ *That they all may be one* ; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

Unlike the first Adam, the last Adam did not neglect the work given to him by his Father, of sharing the commandments of God with his bride. They were shared perfectly, absolutely, given in total selflessness that the bride may be one with the bridegroom.

This, then, is the divine ideal of marriage, the principle we should share with all who contemplate this life-long partnership, that their marriages might be enriched and strengthened by worshipping and working together in the LORD . These are the positive things we need to concentrate on in order to uphold and strengthen the principle of marriage which is so much under attack from the world we live in.

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PAUL, in a passage of great beauty, lifted the marriage law to a higher dimension when he added to the figure of God as the husband of Israel, that of Christ as the bridegroom of the ecclesia.

In clear terms he showed that as Christ is the head of the ecclesia so must the man be the head of the wife: the husband who fails to realize his spiritual responsibility in this respect, and the wife who fails to be dutiful to her husband, are disobedient to the teaching of Jesus. But neither must dominate the other; neither must live his life, even in the service of the Truth, regardless of the other.

The husband who gives himself to spiritual service without regard to the possible psychological and spiritual consequences to a wife who has to pursue her lonely task of caring for a family, is guilty of a lack of spiritual proportion; and the wife who throws herself so completely into spiritual activities as to neglect both husband and family, is likewise guilty.

Jesus gave his life for the ecclesia; that is how the husband, even though he is the head, should love his wife; the ecclesia is the bride of Christ, and that is how the wife should love her husband ...

Marriage, properly understood and lived, is a part of the divine fellowship in which love, patience, sympathy, understanding and service can be truly learned, and happy is the couple from whom these flow to the rest of the household of faith, for their reward will be the eternal blessing of God, the Father.—

JOHN MARSHALL , *The New Life* , page 89

¹. Vol. 136: *The Christadelphian : Volume 136*. 2001, c1999. The Christadelphian, volume 136. (electronic ed.). Logos Library System . Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association: Birmingham