

Marriage - a physical union and a divine institution (Pt. 1)

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The gospel message is the good news of the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). It points to a time when we will be born as Sons in the God Family Kingdom. Before this human potential is realized in our lives, God is using the time *now* to prepare and mold us so that we can develop the character needed to be born into His family. Once the Kingdom is set up we will be ruling with, and under, Jesus Christ. God's Kingdom is a *family* administering His government.

God established and ordained the physical family unit to be the Kingdom of God in *embryoso* our families are to symbolize this future Kingdom! The physical family is fashioned after the God family because that is our potential! The family is a God-plane relationship; it is a physical union but a divine institution ordained of God.

In the recent US Presidential campaign very little was said about preserving the family unit. The increasing disregard of the most important institution on this earth – the family - has led to many aspects of today's society to contribute to an anti-family culture including illicit sex, teenage pregnancy, divorce, same sex marriage, lack of masculine leadership, undisciplined children, disrespect towards parents and elders, mothers entering the work force and more. This is the anti-family culture that is pervading our society because of sin and because society refuses to keep God in its knowledge (Rom 1:28). Civilization as we knew it is on the way out and God is very angry (Isaiah 1:4)!

Because of our potential and what the physical family represents, Satan primarily targets the marital institution. He wants to *destroy* family because *God is Family!* He wants to undermine it, fight it, turn it upside down, destroy it - and he is increasingly having success in doing so, using to the cultural terrorism we see around us (Is. 3:12)! Satan is subjecting his worst wrath ever on the family unit! We in God's Church must be thoroughly aware of this reality if we are going to resist becoming callused to the depravation we see around us. God wants us to condemn what is going on in society, and we do this first and foremost by implementing godly law in our families (Eph. 5:22-25).

As already alluded to, it is imperative that we *go out of our way* and get out of our comfort zones and strictly apply and adhere to the knowledge that will be discussed. God's knowledge is very encouraging and will always result in the reaping of manifold blessings. Conversely, the bible gives dire warnings against rejecting, or not using, knowledge: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:6). God desperately wants us to increase our knowledge on this subject because applying it will bring true happiness in our lives now! Family will also be the foundation of society in the World Tomorrow. Deepening our understanding on this vital subject will help us to further develop His mind and reap the resulting blessings that come with its implementation. The degree to which we apply it or not apply it reveals to God the degree to which we embrace it or reject it. Importantly, the degree to which we apply God's Word is the degree to which God gives us more knowledge and deeper understanding. A lack of new and deeper understanding is the result of rejection or a failure to implement God's Word (2 Tim 2:7). Our families must be different! God wants us to strive for excellence in family matters, exemplifying what God's family is really all about!

In the book of Timothy, God lists qualifications and gives admonishment on how the ministry must lead their household. However, these are qualifications *all of God's people* need to improve upon, and strive for, since we will all be helping Christ to serve in the Kingdom: "A bishop then *must*...rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all

gravity..." (1 Tim. 3:2, 4). If ministers cannot lead their own household, how can they lead congregations of God's Church? Similarly, if husbands in God's Church don't lead their families the way they should, what business do they have leading in the Kingdom (1 Tim 3:5)? Strong family structure is what gives the Church the foundation it needs, and this includes a *husband leading* his wife and being a good father to his children, his *wife submitting* to her husband as she would to Christ, and obedient children in submission to the loving authority of their parents (Titus 1:6). This is the theocratic government, from the top down, which God has placed in the family.

The bible gives clear, detailed instruction on how individuals are to *lead* and *submit* in a family. All family members applying their god-given roles will strengthen unity, keep peace and exude happiness (1 Cor. 12:25). We each have responsibilities within our family so we will each have to give an account as to how we conducted ourselves in those roles! 2 Corinthians 5:10 tells us: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad". God will bring us into judgment for what we have done or not done in our lives – and that includes how we perform or don't perform in our family unit. Right now, judgment is upon the house of God – that means that judgment is upon *us* (1 Peter 4:17)! God is watching us individually; He is scrutinizing our marriages and our families to see how we are faring (Mal 3:2-3). We must glorify God in every aspect of our lives – including how we relate to each other within the confines of our own homes (1 Cor. 6:20).

We stand at the threshold of being born into the spiritual Family of God! Do our physical marriages reflect this? Have we taken on the urgency needed to strive for the perfection God is looking for within our marriages and families? Christ does not want a lackadaisical bride (Mat. 24:46)!

God has placed positions of authority in the family. This has been done so that the family can be edified and united. God wants to see *perfect unity* in our families (Eph 4:16)! Anything less is the beginning of the undermining of this most sacred institution! While we are going through birth pangs now, we must focus on the end result for encouragement and strength – we must constantly keep in remembrance the fact that our physical families will soon culminate in our spiritual marriage to our husband, Jesus Christ. Right now, the Church is at the center of God's family project. God has given us direction in His Word which, when properly applied, will ensure happiness, love and unity in our families. It is up to us to apply the biblical instruction on marriage!

For the purpose of this series of articles on this subject, we will take a brief look at the various roles within the institution of marriage and family (i.e. husbands, wives, children etc). We will endeavor to understand God's mind on this most vital subject, *firstly delving into the role of a husband and father*.

As already pointed out, the husband is the head of the family (Eph 5:25). God the Father guides His people (Jer 3:4; Psalm Ps 32:8 etc); Christ guides His Church through His inspired Word (*the bible*) and the ministry. Without this direction and guidance, the Church would fragment and fall apart. Similarly, husbands have the responsibility to lead and guide their wives and families. Without this guidance, the family will fall apart.

1 Peter 3:7 tells us: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving *honor* unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered". There is much that can be gleaned from this scripture. First of all, husbands are instructed to 'honor' (Strong's 5092) their wives! Strong's concordance demonstrates that this scripture is admonishing husbands to *esteem* their wives, treating them as you would something valuable and precious. Husbands must respect

their wives even by using proper decorum at all times. Husbands should talk over family plans, seek council and advice from their wives, get feedback, views and opinions from her *before* family decisions are taken. Once in an informed position, it is then the husband's responsibility to take the final decision on a given subject which should then remain uncontested by other family members. The wife must acknowledge her husband's authority in the family, submit to his decisions and then support him (Eph 5:22). God ordained this framework to give the family stability and unity, ensuring that the children have the correct, loving, stable environment needed to for positive physical and spiritual upbringing and development.

Husbands must set a good example in right living (Prov. 25:28)! If the right example is given by the head of the household, he will *earn* the respect and submission that is due. The head of the family has the responsibility to *lead, direct and protect* the family both physically and spiritually and in so doing will often have to exercise extra control over his desires. This is a living example in true leadership. Christ was able to keep His every desire under control, living a perfect and upright life. A husband has the responsibility to do the same and set the example and tone for his wife and family (1 Peter 2:21). Selflessness and outgoing concern must come into play if the right example is to be set! In leading his wife spiritually, a husband is encouraged to occasionally pray with his wife and also study with her. A father must encourage family bible studies which will help develop healthy and structured fellowship. This is needed for the edification of the family in the things of God. A husband must lead by example!

God provides for, and maintains, the Church. He has a responsibility toward the Church which He always fulfills: "But my God shall supply all your *needs* according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Christ sets the example and husbands must follow. Husbands must do the same for their wives and families as Christ does for the Church (1 Timothy 5:8). Although a husband is not required to provide luxuries, he is responsible for providing the basic needs and requirements for life such as food, clothing, shelter and some comforts and conveniences. A basic need that a wife has, and which mustn't be overlooked, is to also fulfill her spiritual obligations towards God. Especially in a family with young children, a husband must ensure that his wife doesn't get so engulfed with duties related to the children, home and more, that she doesn't have time to attend to her spiritual obligations. The husband is duty bound to ensure that his wife has time to study and pray – even if he is to step in and help with the children etc., to ensure she has time to carry out her spiritual obligations!

It is important to note that Christ corrects His Church (or His bride). Likewise, husbands must also lovingly correct wives when the situation requires it. Correction must never be done out of vanity or frustration but out of love, patience and in a spirit of meekness; this must never be done out of anger or in the form of 'lashing out' or 'crushing' their wives. Husbands must always remember how merciful God is with them, and they must strive to exercise that same mercy toward their wives!

1 Peter 3:7 indicates that the wife is the 'weaker vessel'. This is only referring to physical strength and demonstrates that the husband should take care of the heavier manual jobs around the house and pertaining to the family. This part of the scripture also indicates that there is a difference between the roles of a husband and that of a wife. Both the husband and the wife are equal in that they are both members of the physical family with the same spiritual potential, but they are not equal in authority or roles in the physical family unit. Just as God the Father and Christ are both in the God Family, they are not equal in authority. This is the same in the physical family: we are all members of our respective families, but we do not have equal roles or authority. The husband is the head of the wife and family (Eph 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3), he must lead in love and also protect his family. Men

mustn't fail in this god-given responsibility as this will lead to an upside down family which is predominantly what we see happening in the world around us. A woman needs a strong man that can lead and protect her, but men need to be careful not to abuse or usurp the authority given to them (Col 3:19).

Genesis 3:16 tells us: "Unto the woman he said...thy desire shall be to thy husband and *he shall rule over thee*". The word 'rule' in this verse does not imply a 'hard or harsh rule'. Men are not to lord it over their wives! This scripture is to be taken in conjunction with 1 Peter 3:7, Ephesians 5 and others. Christ leads with love, concern, and gentleness but He is also firm! If any husband is to be a success in the home, he must follow Christ's example and the admonition given in the bible. Ephesians 5 defines the clear example set by Christ which husbands are to follow: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it...so ought men to love their wives *as their own bodies*. He that loves his wife loves himself...for no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church" (verses 25, 28-29). These scriptures demonstrate how husbands are to love their wives – with the same love that Christ had for the Church. A husband and father must guide (nourisheth) and encourage (cherisheth) his wife and children as God and Christ do with the Church. Men must rule their wives and their children in love, encouraging them and fostering the right environment for them to reach their physical and spiritual potential!

When husbands do not fulfill their god-given role within marriage, the marital relationship does not function the way it should, resulting in a forfeiture of the blessings that would normally be assigned to the family. Apart from the negative effects this would have on the spouses and children within the family, Satan uses marital troubles to disrupt our relationship with God our Father! Marital and family problems hinder our spiritual course: "...husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife...*that your prayers be not hindered*" (1 Peter 3:7). When a husband does not lead his wife the way he should, his prayers are not as effective as they should be which causes obstacles in our relationship with God. We must be concerned about this otherwise we are treading dangerous ground: "...whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment...therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*" (Matt. 5:22-24). Family reconciliation is so important, that if it is not dealt with it will hinder our spiritual progress and relationship with God! This scripture tells us that we must solve any problems in the home if we are to be spiritually effective. Husbands, fathers, must take the lead!

Once the newness of marriage wears off, it is easier to find, and pick at, faults that a spouse might have. This is human nature playing its game – something we must be weary of (Rev 2:4). If this does happen, husbands have a responsibility to lead and perform the *first works* for love to continue and grow (Rev 2:5)! James 2:20 tells us that 'faith without works is dead'. Similarly, love without works is dead, and husbands must also lead in this area, doing the *first works* that are normally found in a romantic relationship, including spending time together, talking a lot about everything, engaging in activities together, sacrificing and giving to each other! If we are not constantly working at the love in our marital relationship, it will die! Anything that has no works will die!

Lots of hard work has to be put into a marriage – marriages do not just "work out" (Heb 2:1)! In fact, if we only do what comes naturally, our marriages are bound to deteriorate. We must not let human nature run its course. Marriages require plenty of hard work to be built and must be led by the husband. For a marriage and family to work, the supreme love must be between a husband and a wife first, setting the example and creating the right atmosphere for children within the family.

A husband has a tremendous responsibility, yet he has the awesome opportunity to be the representative of God over his marriage and family. Knowing what God expects from husbands is the first step to true family happiness. It is then the responsibility of the husband to apply the knowledge, set the example in studying the bible and prayer, self-discipline and more. A husband that works at his marriage by applying God's laws, teaching, leading, providing and protecting his family will live to see abundant divine blessings bestowed upon him, his marriage and family!

(To be continued)