

Marriage a physical union but a divine institution (Pt. 3)

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So far, we have taken a look at the role of a husband and a wife in marriage and family. As we did that, we very briefly touched upon their roles as father and mother, but need to do this in greater detail as we look into the roles of children within the family.

When we deeply understand the role of parents, it should help us understand God's plan in a more profound way. The role of parents should help us to better understand God the Father, Christ the Son and the purpose of His Church. A careful study of John 3 shows that the human reproductive process points to a wonderful spiritual parallel. On the spiritual level, God begins the process by calling us: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Once God calls, the individual is nourished through the Church (our spiritual mother). The Church is the *spiritual organism* that feeds spiritual food to begotten children as they are being trained to be future God beings. It is the function of the Church, the spiritual mother, to help develop holy righteous character in those whom God has called. In the *physical family*, the father impregnates, then the child is fed in the womb through the mother – who, in turn, is nourished by her husband the father in the family! Both parents have active roles and responsibilities, physically and spiritually, in raising and nurturing their children. The main goal for parents is to prepare their children to enter the family of God.

The concept of fatherhood comes out of the mind of God the Father; he is *central* to the family unit. John 1:18 states: "No man hath seen God at anytime; the only begotten Son, *which is in the bosom of the Father...*". Christ is in the bosom of His Father! This demonstrates the *most intimate relationship* a father and his child could hope for! It is a relationship that God so desires to extend to us, *if we allow Him*. God the Father has a strong desire and a craving for this intimate relationship. This is what the fulfillment of His plan looks forward to. Physically speaking, this should be the kind of relationship and intimacy that a father wants with his sons and daughters. However, how many fathers are able to inspire this kind of devotion from their children? How many strive for this level of intimacy? This strikes right at the heart of what it means to be good parents. Again, this is what God's master plan is about – family, and intimacy within that family!

Ever since the beginning of the creation of man, the family has increasingly been under attack. Satan has tried many different tricks to chip away at the responsibilities of fatherhood within the home. He has consistently tried to diminish the role and effectiveness of the father. He does this because of the spiritual parallel that fatherhood represents. The father is the center point of the family and this is what Satan is trying to destroy by developing upside-down families! In this end time, Satan has even managed to deceive the Laodiceans into rejecting their spiritual Father by rejecting His voice (Mal 1:6)! We must constantly be alert and vigilant and not allow this to happen to us! God the Father must be esteemed greatly and the way we teach our children to do this largely depends on how the (physical) father fulfills his role within the family! If a father is to be effective, he should aspire to fulfill the physical role of God the Father in his family unit. A father must remember that he is in the place of God the Father to his children. His positive example helps them relate to, and honor, God. This is the reality and responsibility fathers are faced with! The better fathers do their job, the easier it is for their children to relate to, and come to know, God! Matthew 5:48 should be the standard that fathers aim for: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect".

The love relationship within a family begins with the love of a father. If administered properly, a father's love will flow through to his wife (the mother) and to his children -- and back! God's law of love is the foundation of a strong family unit. Parents cannot force their children to love them, but children will naturally love their parents back if their parents love them first! This

principle is outlined in 1 John 4:19: "We love Him because He first loved us". Parents must set the example first! God's way of life is encapsulated in the law of love (1 John 4:7-9) which must be exemplified by the parents! If a child 'loves' one of his/her parents more than the other, the parents should question the proper implementation of the law of love within the family unit – from the top down.

Disciplining children in love is a most important ingredient of the law of love. Without discipline children are alienated from their parents and also from God! It is important for parents to strike the right balance between love and discipline. If there is too much discipline, children will grow to be hostile and resentful. For this not to happen, parents must be careful not to correct out of frustration, but out of love. Fathers must not be unjust in their disciplining: "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, *lest they be discouraged*". Punishments should fit the crime! This demonstrates parents implementing godly *love in action*. Children need to recognize this quality in parenting skills as it points them to God!

John 1:18 is an important scripture which parents must meditate upon: "No man hath seen God at anytime; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, *He hath declared Him*" (Strong's 1834). Christ 'declared' His Father! Strong's concordance tells us that the word 'declared' means 'to consider, rehearse, and tell'! Christ 'considered' His Father! This means He thought about His Father and believed Him! He 'rehearsed' and applied His Father's will! We could clearly see this in the example Christ set before us (1 Peter 2:21). Importantly He 'told' others about God and His plan and was able to advise those He came into contact with because of the wisdom obtained from His Father! How do we, as fathers, measure up to this example of teaching and loving our children? Do we, as fathers, ensure that we do our utmost to set the right example? Do we advise with godly wisdom? How intimately do we love our children? Also, how close do our children come to fulfilling their part of John 1:18? Do they 'declare' us, as fathers, by considering our counsel, applying it and setting the right example for others to see? It all begins with how well fathers are fulfilling their roles! As the children's link to their forefathers, fathers have to set the example and point children to God *first* (1 John 4:19; Mal 4:6), the rest will follow. Fathers are commanded to teach and declare the law of God to their children (Ps. 78:5-7). Family Bible Study a number of times a week is important to achieve this, while parents should constantly outline and explain biblical principles with their children as they arise in daily life situations.

God the Father asks us to talk to Him as much as possible and as often as possible. He wants us to talk to Him *without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17; Matt. 7:7)! He wants us to take our petitions, grievances, hopes and desires to Him. God wants to hear everything we have to tell Him! This indicates a high level of intimacy – one which physical fathers should strive to attain with their children. How attentive are we, as fathers, to our children, their needs and requests? Do we say 'no' to our children before they even finish their requests, or because they always seem to have so much to say and ask? Are we understanding parents, giving good advice, consolation and comfort (2 Thess 2:16-17)? Do we give our children the attention they need to feel loved and secure? If we lack in these areas, the results could be quite negative. (*More on this later*).

As already mentioned, the Church is a spiritual organism that nourishes the begotten members of His family. The Church is instrumental in the development of the begotten children of God. On the physical level, a mother's role is also *instrumental* within the family. She is responsible for nourishing, comforting (Is. 66:13), and teaching her children (Prov. 1:8, Prov. 29:15; Prov. 6:20). This is emphasized in Proverbs 10:1 where it states: "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother". Ultimately this responsibility falls on both of the parents! A mother must fulfill her responsibilities under the direction and guidance of her husband. She is the primary nurturer, helping the father to raise future God beings and royalty (Ps. 45:16). The mother carries much authority, more so when the father is away from the

home, and children disrespecting her in any way must be corrected. If and when this happens, fathers should step in immediately! In ancient Israel, unrepentant children falling into this pitfall were stoned (Deut. 21:18-21)! This is how serious God views children disrespecting their parents! The father must support the mother's role because her role is honorable and irreplaceable (Prov. 30:11). Each member of the family must understand this.

Spiritually speaking, the ministry has the responsibility to feed the membership, otherwise it results in 'heaviness of the mother', or the Church (Prov. 10:1). There is a wonderful parallel between the physical and spiritual family from which there is so much to glean and learn! What kind of example do we set for our children spiritually (John 13:15)? Do we think and act like Christ (Phil. 2:5)? The positive, Christ-like, example which we set is a gift that we can give them. Giving our children time and a positive example is the most powerful demonstration of love that we could offer them (Prov. 22:6). If they are neglected or not given positive examples, the results will be negative: "And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, everyone by another, and every one by his neighbor: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable" (Is. 3:4-5).

God instructs children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1). "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Ex. 20:12). This law establishes strong, united, happy families. Because parents represent God within the family, they are given an exalted office, and as such, children are commanded to 'honor' or esteem them. Children must never neglect their duties towards their parents whatever their age or situation (Matt. 15:3-6). Children who apply the fifth commandment are promised a wonderful reward: "That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Exodus 20:12). It is right for children to obey their parents (Eph 6:1), and God always rewards good!

God's people have an awesome responsibility, honor, and privilege to have such a deep understanding of marriage and family! Through His inspired Word He has ensured we have detailed instruction on the roles of every family member. It is our responsibility to continue digging into the Bible to find out what more is expected of us and, importantly, to ensure we apply His instruction with His help! This will lead to the edifying the family unit.

Family points to something so meaningful and significant on the spiritual plain. It is something we should never take lightly! God requires strong, healthy families that can teach 'family' to others, especially in the World Tomorrow! We not only need to be skilled in 'family', we must be *experts* in this field if we are to teach it successfully – and now is the time to get it right!