

Family roles from one Father

(Part 2)

The individual roles of father and mother within a family are very important. In this second instalment of his two-part article, Mark Giordano (Norfolk, Virginia, USA) explores key Scriptural passages which establish a framework for marriage and family life and which show us what sort of parents we should be. Although under threat from the norms of society, these Divine principles remind us why Christadelphians take marriage and the family unit as seriously as they do. This second article looks at the roles of wives and mothers.

Part 2: One Spirit—The roles of bride and mother

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18).

IT WAS NOT GOOD for the man to be alone. So God created a help that would be his counterpart—suited to him. When she was taken out of him, she was meant to be recognisably like him, being of his bone—that is, having his same strengths—and of his flesh—that is, having his same weaknesses. Fostering his strengths, and sympathetic to his weaknesses, she would be in a position to create the spiritual synergy that God meant for His specific work of fruitfulness. Together they would become one flesh, and from that unified relationship would emerge another creative work of God.

When Adam and Eve were joined together as one flesh, anticipating Christ and his bride, God intended that they should become one spirit: “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). The Christ-minded husband will love his wife as himself, even when she is unworthy. He will give himself for her. She is one flesh with him, and “no man ever yet hated his own flesh” (Eph. 5:29).

Their shared roles are defined as being individual, yet they have an integral relationship. They are purposefully interdependent and reciprocal.

His role is that of a head; his calling is that of servant. Her role is that of a help; her calling is to make herself worthy. But the purpose of that union is not just for servitude or worthiness as qualities in and of themselves. Their spiritual roles are mutually supportive so that they can foster the greater work they were created to do together in Christ.

Ultimately the spiritual role of Christ and his bride will be the “work before him” (Isa. 40:10) in subjugating the nations to his authority. “In that day shall there be one LORD, and

His name one” (Zech. 14:9). That flows from the supportive reciprocity of their marriage. Neither Christ nor his bride could do that work without the other. Each fosters the qualities in the other which are required for its completion. Both recognise their roles in the light of their mission. In a very practical way, her support of his rule will produce godly seed during the Kingdom in a proportion never seen on the earth before; so vast, in fact, that it will fill the earth with God’s glory, myriads and myriads of children produced from a faithful understanding of roles. On an earthly plane now, if a husband has no spiritual direction, his wife will have nothing to do in support. On the other hand, if he tries to do a spiritual work, it will not be as productive without her support.

“The bride, the Lamb’s wife”

“And there came unto me one of the seven angels . . . and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9).

The bride of Christ is washed and served by her husband. Jesus said, “he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Mt. 23:11). It was *he* who was the greatest among them, and in the foot-washing incident recorded in John 13:1-17 he was serving his bride. In this moving setting, Jesus defined his role as both spiritual head and greater servant. The paradox of that scene is that his role as head was fulfilled at the feet of his bride. He cleansed her so that she would be equipped for his purpose.

The bride wears Christ's robe to do his work. She thinks his thoughts. She adopts his perspective. She bears his fruit in righteousness. In the end she will take her place upon his head as the very jewels of his crown. Honouring him, she is given his highest esteem as the symbol of his kingship. Her service results from his and becomes his crown. No woman can apply her support to her husband after a Scriptural model unless he is in part like Christ. Her confidence is in Christ, who is in her husband. To whatever degree the mental disposition of Christ is in him, her confidence is secure. So a wife's role is the support of her husband's work in the Lord. *The fulfilment of her role leads to the realisation of her honour.*

The bride of Christ will encompass his throne. Her eyes, which once ravished his heart at a glance (Song 4:9), will be everywhere present in the world, seeing to the fulfilment of his purposes. She will be "full of eyes before and behind" (Rev. 4:6). Therefore her perception of "before" will contain that vast collective experience from the days of her flesh, having looked forward to her participation in his throne. Looking "behind" her now from a time after her marriage to the Lamb, her experience with the things of faith is utilised by Christ for his rule. When his throne is finally established, it will function with the assistance of a bride who is collectively described as "seven lamps of fire" (v. 5); a royal administration of saints whose brightness is a direct reflection of his light and power. A sister's ability to function in a role based upon Christ's bride is diminished if her husband has no light from Christ emanating from him. Her role is to be part of her husband's spiritual vision, adding her insight to his.

The bride of Christ has the same mental disposition as her husband. In the Kingdom, this is referred to as "the seven Spirits of God" (v. 5). She will be joined in "one spirit" with her husband in the day of his great work. If Christ were to attempt to rule the world from his throne for a thousand years without her, his Kingdom could not be established. Her sameness of mind, her willingness, her acquired experience in his purpose and especially her role as a "help meet [suited]" makes the peaceful household of the Kingdom. The fruit of that marriage for a thousand years comes directly from her being one spirit with him, complete and fulfilled. Inasmuch as his role requires her submission, his headship is dependent on her willingness to align herself with his purpose. Her submission is justified by the spiritual integrity of his headship. The role of

a wife is to align herself with her husband and foster his spiritual aspirations.

Practical applications of lofty ideals

In looking at the role of Christ as a model for the husband, and his ecclesia as a model for his bride, the ideals may seem to be impossibly lofty because they apply to a perfect head and husband, and a bride that is characterised by her weakness. Yet neither picture, especially a comparison of relative strength between the two, really fits the way any of us feels about ourselves in our marriages. For us, 'he' isn't perfect in his headship or his servitude, and 'she' isn't entirely dependent for his love or mercy in weakness. So, *both* being obviously weak, *both* sharing the same spiritual aspirations, neither wanting to be dominant or enslaved, how do they apply the spiritual ideal in a natural context? How, if both are in the bride role to Christ, do they separate their spiritual roles with each other? The answer lies in the principles drawn from the ideal.

1 Applying the principle of 'suitable help'. When God provided Eve for Adam, He provided one that would be like him enough to help him in the way God meant him to be helped. They would be 'like kind', and in effect have likeness of mind. At first glance, the shared role of being married 'only in the Lord' is the first application of this principle.

Young woman, if you have an active faith in God, you know the Truth, and you hope for the Kingdom, how will you be a suitable help to a man who has no interest in the things of God? When you help him, what will you help him do? Will you assist him in worldly goals, or temporal aspirations, or vain pursuits? You may love him, you may have fun with him, you may even work well with him, but will that be a help suited to his purposes or God's? You will be much more in the role of a help suited to him if you both think alike spiritually. On Sunday morning when you wake up with your new husband, both of you would want to go to the meeting and think upon the Lord's Name (Mal. 3:16). If you do and he doesn't, there will be conflict or compromise.

On the other hand, if you are a help suited to a man of like faith, when you bear children you will help him set a family direction toward raising "godly seed" (2:15). He will need your help constantly, because neither of you will know from the outset all the things you will

need to do to raise faithful children. When he begins to fulfil his responsibilities in the ecclesia, you will add to his perspective in discerning between good and evil, and finding Scriptural solutions to spiritual problems. When the Truth, in any sense, places a sacrificial demand on his time, you will support his priorities. At times, that may mean looking after the children when you are already tired, and it may mean sacrificing your own time together with him, but you will be settled in the understanding that your sacrifice is fulfilling the help that God intended from the beginning.

2 Applying the principle of headship in service.

Sisters, even Christ's bride wasn't always inclined to accept his service. There were many times when she didn't see all that he was about. When he wanted to wash the feet of his bride, she was opposed. The principle here is that a husband can't be a spiritual head unless his wife lets him. In order for her to let him, she has to understand his reasoning behind his spiritual purposes.

This introduces a twofold responsibility in the application of the principle. Like Christ, the husband may need patiently to explain how his actions are centred on the things of God, in order for her to be more willing to submit to his service. On the other hand, she needs to be willing to accommodate his spiritual actions, however they may affect her. These are generalised principles that carry over into other areas, but the point is the same. He cannot be her head unless she allows him, any more than Christ could rule over his body without her acceptance of his rule. In effect, the relationship is entirely reciprocal and self-sacrificing. Their calling places an equivalent demand for unselfishness and patience on both sides.

For the sister who is married to a man who has not yet shown an active interest in the things of God, her role is similar. She must be willing to allow Christ in his role as head to rule over her spirit. If she is submissive to Christ, she will be patient and gentle with her husband. Her spiritual direction is set by Christ and her character is witnessed by her husband. Her faithfulness to Christ is expressed in her faithfulness to her husband. Her service to her husband and her service to Christ align in the same spiritual goal and so she may help him find his way to salvation.

3 Applying the principle of being "full of eyes".

Christ wouldn't be able to rule a global society in righteousness and peace, blessing all the families of the earth, unless he could be everywhere present. In other words, his bride will need to be everywhere in the earth, with at least 288,000 eyes, watching everything. The saints become the eyes of his administration. What they see will be reported to him. All his judgements will be integral with her witness and her insight.

The same is true for us now as his bride in an ecclesial context. The eyes of Christ are everywhere in the ecclesia where his bride applies her spiritual vision. That special spiritual perspective changes the way she sees things. Her watchfulness sees every foul expression, every downcast face, every missing member, every distant stare. The strength she applies in edification, in arrangements, in goodness, in restoration, and in works, is all guided by what she sees at the door and in the rooms of the house of God.

In the home the role is the same, and it is essential. In His wisdom, God has given the husband a responsibility of daily, generally unhappy, toil. He produces a family, but is forced to spend most of his time away from it, labouring in a secular workplace and sitting in the ecclesial gate. What can he see in the daily lives of his children? His role is to direct them toward godliness, yet most of his time is occupied elsewhere. He needs the eyes, hands and wisdom of his wife to help him fulfil his responsibility. God has placed her next to their children to watch over the major portion of their growth. She sees all the things he can't. Her perspective is the same as his, but it is direct. Along with hers, she brings his spiritual hopes and dreams to their children, and he stays close to them through the daily operation of her vision. They share judgements and they learn from shared mistakes. But his highest spiritual aspirations for his family are best realised through her eyes.

Working back toward the ideal, it should be obvious to us that God has arranged the joint roles of bride and mother in the family to reinforce the role of Christ's bride in the ecclesia, so that we would be well trained for our role as his bride in the Kingdom. When we are finally perfected in love, we will understand at all levels what we will need to do, in part from our own experience, in order for Christ

realistically to implement the will of God in a global, mortal society.

- 4 Applying the principle of “one spirit”.** When two people become “one flesh” in the Lord, their mutual goal becomes “one spirit”. Their physical relationship fosters an environment where they can share the same *mental disposition* throughout life, the acquired disposition of Christ. In Christ, this produces a reciprocal sharing of spiritual discoveries and understanding. What begins in idealistic conversation in courtship continues in practical problem-solving throughout marriage. The highest fulfilment of love in marriage comes from two people sharing the same mind—“one spirit” in Christ.

In the same way, a mutual responsibility rests with both to set their minds toward each other’s talents. He will have a certain gift-set that Christ has invested in him. She will have natural abilities that can also be applied to spiritual works. He may be inclined to spend time as a missionary in the field. She may feel fulfilled nurturing others in the Lord. Whether their time is actually spent working together or working separately, in the field or in the office, talking about the Truth or doing deeds of service, their mental disposition is “one” when they are both furthering God’s basic charge of bringing His light into a dark world.

If they share “one spirit” they will encourage the time and the labour of each other’s service. In such a symbiotic relationship, a quadriplegic wife freely gives her husband over to turning many to righteousness in foreign missionary service without any complaint. A husband fulfils his childless wife’s love of children by turning most of their time to the labours of a children’s fund. A husband consumes thousands of hours of study to write, preach or teach, that his wife unselfishly sacrifices for the benefit of those who are helped by his efforts. A husband spends more money and time than he would otherwise be inclined in creating a home where his wife can fulfil her highest spiritual service in hospitality and care.

In each of these few examples the practical application of one spirit is obvious in people who support and encourage each other. Neither stands in the way of the other’s spiritual purposes because they both have the same mind about their service to the Lord. “One spirit” applies to each helping the other find,

and supporting, their individual gift-set. Sisters, if you can encourage your husband’s abilities in the Truth, whatever they are, you will be applying your mind to his talents as profit to the Lord. Husbands, if you can foster the thing your wife can do best in the Lord you will be adding her talents to yours, and their sum will return to Christ as the fruit of his investment. That is what Christ does for us, and we do for him. He recognises our gift, and with it we support his purpose.

Conclusion

It is from the practice of all the positive principles put forward in this two-part article that the roles of father and mother are made in their example. Much more can be said about roles than we have space to consider here, so it has been our purpose to examine for fathers and for mothers a key principle for each, out of which the understanding of each role can continue to grow. In simple terms, if the father and mother never lose sight of their mission to produce godly seed in their children from godly disciplines in themselves, all the details of their roles in Christ will fall into place.

This two-part article has placed a deliberate emphasis on the role of the father. Nevertheless, in the final analysis each parent depends upon the other for their strength, their love, their faithfulness and, finally, the result of their work in spiritual fruit. It will be the salvation of many, many children. Ultimately, the purpose of our role in marriage is the same as the purpose of Christ and his bride in their role, yet to be fulfilled. Whatever we can understand about their relationship falls back on ours. Our marriages foreshadow his, and his will produce that great family of children who are of like kind with the Father.

That goal has defined the role of faithful fathers and supportive mothers from the beginning, always with Christ and his bride in mind. He was never considered in the absence of his bride. That great blessing of fruitful multiplication that began with Adam culminates in a much greater multitudinous host born and raised under the headship of Christ and the support of his bride in the Kingdom age. What begins the Kingdom as an hundred and forty-four thousand-fold bride, multiplies into a family containing myriads and myriads of children, innumerable, glorious, and unified under the love of one Father.