

Romans - Commentaries by Henry Short

The Christian Shepherd: 1998, "Leaving the Natural Use": Part 3 (1:27)

The following is the third in a series on the subject of the "misunderstanding, misplacement and misuse of natural relationships," begun in the October 1998 Christian Shepherd.

Christ's Love A Pattern for Husbands

Let us consider the consequences of a husband not providing this love (Eph. 5:25) to his wife.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). To have the tongue of an "angel" is to speak as one who belongs to heaven. The truth of Christ and the church, of which Christ's love is the pattern and the standard for husbands (Eph. 5), is connected with "heavenly places" (Eph. 13). In nature, marriage pictures this wonderful heavenly truth. "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife" (Eph. 5:32-33). Were a husband to minister with the tongue of an "angel" these heavenly truths, while his own wife was not being loved, his ministry would be as "tinkling brass," not more than "discordant" sound.

Oh beloved, could we expect our households to embrace the high heavenly truths which we seek to teach them when they see that the very "heart" and "motive" for the existence of these truths love is missing in the husband who is ministering them?

Then, should we understand all mysteries one being Christ and the church and all knowledge and "have not [love], I am nothing." Beloved, as we seek to provide for our own household these wonderful truths we have come to "understand" and have "knowledge" of, let us remember that if our houses do not see the husband loving his wife, we will be as "nothing." "Nothing" has no value to anyone. Truth we minister but deny in practice has little effect for good upon our families. Lot is a solemn testimony to us of this.

The Role of Wives in Marriage

Now we will consider the God-ordained place of wives, their role in nature and how it must affect others. "The husband is the head of the wife.... Therefore as the church is subject [subjected] unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:23-24). Accompanying this submission, there is to be a meek and quiet spirit. For others to see the absence of a meek and quiet spirit in your professed subjection to your husband in the realm of nature has a devastating effect upon them in regards to the spiritual realm. "Teach... women... to be... obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed [evil spoken of]" (Titus 2:45).

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [manner of life] of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning... let it be the hidden man of the heart... even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:14).

Blessing Results From a Wife's Obedience

Oh what a solemn thing for a Christian wife to weigh! Her failure in her role as wife can actually cause the precious Word of God to be evil spoken of and also can be a hindrance to her husband being "won." That is, by fulfilling her role properly, her husband may be brought into obedience to the Word. Add to this the very solemn thought that a Christian wife's behavior in her marriage can actually be used to the salvation of her husband, should she have one who is not saved. Subjected and Subject Then there is one more consideration that is of importance to the beloved wives mothers. I noted that the church was "subjected," not necessarily "subject." Surely we know the church has been anything but subject to Christ and, oh, what solemn consequences.

Should you choose not to be "subject" in your given role of "subjection," consider the effect upon your house the house you are responsible to "build" (Prov. 14:1). You teach your "house" that disobedience to God's Word is without consequence. Consider, beloved wife and mother, where did the woman's being deceived lead her firstborn child? Does it not sober our hearts to have it recorded in God's Word: "Cain, who was of that wicked one [the devil], and slew his brother." What a price she paid to take the lead in the realm of nature!

Maintaining, not Misunderstanding Marriage

Finally, beloved ones, let us hear this word from God to those of us who have entered into this natural relationship of marriage. "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them [our wives] 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." To be careless in maintaining the marriage relationship in its intended beauty, that beauty of expressing the wonderful spiritual relationship of Christ and the church, is to have our "prayers hindered."

Yes, nature misunderstood and not properly held seriously affects our spiritual life. May we soberly weigh the consequences of misunderstanding our roles in nature.

H. Short

Lord willing, in the January 1999 issue of the Christian Shepherd we will continue this series with the subject of "misplaced marriages."

The following is the second in a series on the subject of the "misunderstanding, misplacement and misuse of natural relationships" begun in the October 1998 Christian Shepherd.

Misunderstanding in Marriage Relationships

We will now consider the "misunderstanding" of roles in nature. We will begin with Adam and his wife in the garden of Eden. Here all was pure, undefiled nature, and until it was neglected, man and his wife were to enjoy, not only Eden, but also visits with their God, who was a Spirit. "God is a spirit" (John 4:24). Adam was to "dress and keep it" (guard and till). This was his responsibility in this realm of nature as being the "first Adam," its head. His failure as head was devastating, the tragic consequences still being felt by the human race today, not only upon nature, but it also has affected man's relationship with his God. How did this failure by Adam as the "head" and his wife as his "body" display itself? (See Ephesians 5:23-33.)

Man's and Woman's Special Needs

Adam had a special need of a wife, even in his unfallen condition, as created by the Lord God. To meet this need of Adam, the woman was created. "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:9). However, the woman also had need of her mate. "Nevertheless neither is... the woman without the man, in the Lord." The foundation truth of marriage is that it is a relationship based upon our need of each other in our proper marriage roles the man as head and the woman as the body. It was failure relating to these relationships that led to the fall of man in Eden (meaning "delight"). Consequently, instead of enjoying the fruit of this place of delight in properly held relationships, they were driven out of Eden. Misunderstanding of and failure to fulfill their roles in nature led to sin, resulting in travail, unspeakable sorrow and eventually death. Also lost was some form of communion and joy with their Creator God. I would now desire to consider their story, which was "written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4).

The Beautiful Oneness of Marriage

Upon woman's creation, she was brought to the Man. He, as her head, named her, as he had the lower creation, for which he was also responsible. He said, "She shall be called Woman." He entered into God's mind concerning her, for "the Lord God... made... a woman." Adam said, "Woman, because she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2). She was, practically, his body; he was her head. Then the precious truth relating to the marriage union is spoken by the Lord God: "They shall be one flesh." Such harmony and beauty! And in nothing were they ashamed, for they were "one flesh."

Testing and Failure

This first "revealed" truth of "oneness" is to be tested. After stating, "They shall be one flesh," it immediately says, "And they were both naked." The oneness had to do with the man being the head and the woman being the body the two roles composing one man (Gen. 1:27).

In the marriage relationship it is so, as it is so also with Christ and the church. They are looked at as one flesh (Eph. 5): Christ the head, the church His body, one flesh. The subtle serpent approaches the woman as if she were a responsible head unto whom God had spoken. He says, "Yea, hath God said, Ye [plural] shall not eat?" The Lord God had commanded the man, "Thou [singular] shalt not eat." What might have been the result had the woman simply said, "The Lord God gave my husband those instructions; ask him!" She left her role as being his body, needing him as her head the "saviour of" her "body" (Eph. 5:23). She left her place and was deceived—or, she was deceived and left her place.

The antitype, Christ and the church, as spoken of in Ephesians 5 is drawn from this portion in Genesis, which we are here considering. Was Adam the "saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23)? Did he use God's Word, which was given to him by God, to preserve his beloved wife his body blameless (Eph. 5:27)?

Oh! how he failed in his role as head in providing for the need that Eve had of him as saviour of the body. He did not provide the care that she, as his body, required to be preserved blameless. He failed, also, by allowing the serpent access into that garden he was responsible to guard and, how solemn, access to his beloved wife.

Beloved brethren, may we realize this work of the serpent was not a one-time act, nor is it now confined to the woman. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled [deceived] Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ [or, as to the Christ]" (2 Cor. 11:3). This, notice, was in connection with our being "espoused... to one husband" (2 Cor. 11:2).

Failure of Maintaining Roles in Marriage

Now consider the one named "Woman" by her husband. He had authority to name her, as being her head. Her mind having been corrupted (2 Cor. 11:3), she leaves her special place as having been taken from her husband's body. She, being Adam's body, did not need the tree that was "desired to make one wise [intelligent]." She had a head to look to, but she lost her sense of needing him as such and wanted, for herself, to become as a god, "knowing" that is, to have her own intelligence. The thought of "god" is a place of authority. (See Psalm 82.) It was unto gods "the word of God came" (John 10:35).

This was, in truth, the role her husband had before God. He spoke to the man alone. Based on her order in creation, the Spirit of God through Paul writes, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Tim. 2:11-13). As a result of her not keeping her place as Adam's body and needing him as her head, it says, "The woman being deceived was in the transgression." Her mind had been corrupted. She had not "the mind of

Christ" (I speak of the antitype). Once there was this leaving of her place in nature, sin against their God soon followed. Failure in the realm of nature affected their proper relationship, work and communion with their God.

The Spiritual Effects of Failure

Can we, as men, relate to this? When we as husbands do not care for our beloved wives as our own bodies, allowing separation to come into this intimate relationship and broken communion with our wives, does this not affect our usefulness to the Lord? With both elders and deacons you find the expression "husband of one wife." Beloved, this is not the same as saying "having one wife." A man might be married and know nothing of what it means to be a husband.

If one did not know what being a husband meant, in the reality of life, he could not be given the spiritual responsibility of an elder, nor even the responsibility of a deacon, in God's assembly.

Violations in the realm of nature hinder one in service to the house of God. One walking disorderly in the realm of nature was to be noted, and believers were to "have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess. 3). One who provides not for his own house "hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). Again, we see failure in the realm of nature has an affect upon our spiritual state.

The Critical Necessity of Love in Marriage

In the next article, I would like to consider one thing that a man who is a husband is to provide the one who is his "one wife." The foremost provision for a wife by her husband is love: "Husbands, love" (Eph. 5:25). Yes, for a husband to fulfill his responsibility in nature to his wife, he must love her.

H. Short (to be continued)

The Christian Shepherd: 1998, "Leaving the Natural Use": Part 1 (1:27)

Preface

My opinion, like that of any, is of little importance, save as it might express God's judgment of a matter. I have had upon my heart to pen "leaving the natural use" (Rom. 1:27), because I am persuaded that the misunderstanding, misplacement and misuse of nature is a paramount contributor to assemblies growing smaller and our spiritual state weakening.

I shall seek to consider, in this article, these three failures in the natural relationships associated with marriage. I write, not to reprove, but to awaken us to an awareness of the important role I believe nature has in relationship to spiritual development.

For many, our time of participation in this life is drawing to a close. What we have seen, or not seen, from the Word regarding nature, has had its effect already. I write with the desire that the younger Christians may see the principle of this subject in the Word and, by the grace and wisdom of God, benefit from this wonderful help we have in nature. "Doth not even nature itself teach you?" (1 Cor. 11:14).

Introduction

All men, with the exception of Christ, have their first relationship with God in the realm of what Scripture calls "nature" (Rom. 1:26; 1 Cor. 11:14). In that relationship with God, man is identified as a "natural man" (1 Cor. 2:14). This is the kind of man the Lord God created when "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." This was man's original or first kind of relationship with the Lord God. Man had no existence before his creation in this manner. The earth we live on is the natural habitat of the natural man (Psa. 115:16). He was created "male and female" (Gen. 1:27), both together being called "man." "The first man is of the earth, earthly" (1 Cor. 15:47). Sin entered into the world by that man, and one consequence of his sinning was death, and after death, "the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Sin and death now mar man and his natural habitat (Rom. 8:22).

Responsibilities of Nature

As man (male and female) still on earth in this realm of nature, we have responsibilities that are proper to that condition of manhood, even though, through faith in Christ, we now belong to a new creation. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [or, there is a new creation (JND)]" (2 Cor. 5:17). Of the believer it is said, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28). How we recognize and respond to those claims of nature affects, in a very great measure, our spiritual progress in what pertains to the new creation into which we now have been brought as children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. It is of grave consequence how we address the responsibilities of nature. They clearly have an influence on spiritual progress, both in ourselves and in those that know us. I do not speak of gaining entrance into the new creation by natural means. This cannot be done, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50).

Marriage: A Relationship of Nature

The subject before me is vast and found repeatedly in Scripture. I would like to emphasize family relationships in the realm of nature, considering marriage first. We see that the Spirit of God requires our giving attention to this relationship with our spiritual understanding. "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them [wives] according to knowledge" (1 Peter 3:7). Responsibilities relating to nature will exist until the passing away of the present heavens and earth and the ushering in of the new. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.... For the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:14).

A respected servant of Christ wrote regarding the natural relationship of marriage: "God had instituted marriage woe to him who should speak ill of it! But sin has come in, and all that is of nature, of the creature, is marred. God has introduced a power altogether above and outside nature that of the Spirit. To walk according to that power is the best thing; it is to walk outside the sphere in which sin acts. But it is rare; and positive sins are for the most part the effect of standing apart from that which God has ordained according to nature" (Synopsis, 1 Cor. 7, J. N. Darby).

Our failure to understand our roles in the realm of nature and not attending to the responsibilities proper to those roles have resulted in many sorrows in Christian lives and also hampered our spiritual progress. Once a believer marries, there are obligations pertaining to that relationship that cannot be neglected without serious consequences. When we, as believers, enter into this relationship of marriage, we are acknowledging we do not have the gift Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 7:7, nor the ability to walk altogether above and outside nature. I might add, in 1 Corinthians 7, the subject is chiefly a certain need men and women may have that can only be met in the marriage union. To meet that need outside of the marriage union is sin. What is before me is not confined to that particular need, but of the many needs of nature.

Nature As a Subject in Scripture

We will see that Paul himself was properly concerned about the realm of nature, and frequently addresses it, both as regards himself and as concerns all believers. It formed an important part of his ministry. We cannot live entirely above and outside the realm of nature as long as we are alive on this earth. We still bear the image of the earthly as we shall bear the image of the heavenly one (1 Cor. 15:49 JND).

Even our Lord Jesus Christ as He lived here on earth, prior to His resurrection, met the needs of the natural claims of others. He said concerning Himself, not "man shall not live by bread," but that "man shall not live by bread alone." He hungered as a man and, because He was a man, had that natural need. But such a natural need must be fulfilled with understanding as to its proper time and place according to the Father's will. Would to God that this might be true of ourselves also.

H. Short

(to be continued)

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