

## 11 THE ANTITHESIS IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Unfortunately, God's structural principles for family and marriage have become disrupted by sin, both original and actual. In fact, in no other sphere of human life does Satan try so hard to put asunder what God hath joined together. Satan knows that marriage and family are the bedrock of Christian -civilization, so he does his utmost to sow his evil seeds of suspicion, strife, and discord between husbands and wives, parents and children. The antithesis is operating within married and family life as it does in all other spheres of life.

In the first human family Adam's sin opened the way for the sin of his firstborn son, Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel. Strife in the family is ultimately due to man's rebellion against God (Gen. 4:1-16). Thanks to the Lord's temporal conserving grace, not even sin can destroy the normative principle of the family. As Dooyeweerd makes clear, "Sin solely affects its human formation and positivization in accordance with the historical situation of a society and the entire subjective side of family life. There could even be no question of a sinful factual family life, if the structural principle of this natural community were itself affected by sin; a sinful family life presupposes a violation of the structural law of the family. God's law, as manifested in the structural principles of social relationship, is holy and good, untainted by evil (Rom. 7:12)."<sup>81</sup>

Fortunately, God's grace is always more than a match for man's sin. The vision of Mary sorrowing at the foot of the cross reminds us of one of the most terrible consequences of sin, namely, that it breaks up homes, breaks up hearts, and tortures the innocent. We have seen what sin does to people's homes. Homes have been sacrificed to the passion for drink, betting, and gambling. Innocent children have gone hungry, dirty, and in rags, suffering because of their parents' wanton self-indulgence. Parents grieved and shamed on account of their children. Husbands or wives anguished by the faithlessness or selfishness of a partner in marriage. Problem children visited with the sins of their parents. Brothers and sisters burdened or disgraced by the vicious conduct of a member of their family.

To all such sufferers on behalf of other people, the Lord addresses His great word from the cross: "Woman, behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother." The home of Nazareth had been shattered by the sin of man. But now as He hangs on the cross Christ found a new home. For here at the foot of the cross is formed the first cell in the worldwide family of families, the Body of Christ, the Church of God, which is to restore holiness, joy, love, and peace to the earth. Through our Lord's sacrifice for our sin we are given the grace to suffer gladly for the

sake of Christ and for others (I Cor. 8:11). The death of our Savior is the means of grace whereby His new redeeming spirit of love becomes operative in us to heal the poisoned entail we call original sin. In his sufferings on our behalf we begin to see how our sufferings on other people's behalf can begin to bear good rather than evil fruit. Such vicarious suffering can form, perhaps, the closest bond between God and us. Whatever form vicarious suffering may take, we are assured of the understanding and the grace of God to help us through the valley of the shadow of despair. As we learn to carry our own cross we begin to realize something of the eternal cross that man's sin down the ages has planted in God's heart.

When our marriage is threatened with breakdown, let us call upon our God to help us solve the problems caused by sin. Every marriage is involved in tension and often in crisis because of the outworking of sin in our hearts. At such moments the Christian wife no less than the Christian husband will throw themselves upon God's mercy, grace, and help. Only God himself can create in us "new and contrite hearts." Only He can help us to get the better of our fears of being hurt and give us the strength to swallow our wounded pride when our spouses trespass against us. The secret of stable and noble married and family life is thus God's own spirit of forgiveness in human hearts.