

# *The* Marriage Ring



*How to Make Home Happy*

John Angell James  
(1785-1859)

# THE MARRIAGE RING

*How to Make Home Happy*

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# THE MARRIAGE RING

## *How to Make Home Happy*

### PREFACE

**T**HIS short manual for those just entering into marriage is composed primarily of selections from the works of a beloved author who is esteemed for his many practical writings. This author justly remarked:

“It is an unquestionable truth that if a man be not happy at home, he cannot be happy anywhere. He who is happy there need be miserable nowhere. ‘It is the place of all the world I love most,’ said the interesting author of *The Task*, when speaking of home. We ought to appreciate anyone who can say the same. The secret of happiness lies folded up in the leaves of the Bible and is carried in the bosom of godliness. I know no other way to happiness and do not profess to teach any other. If a married couple are believers in Christ Jesus and possess the peace that passes understanding; if they, when they become a father and mother, bring up their children in the fear of God; and if happiness is to be found upon earth, it will be enjoyed in that holy family circle united by love and sanctified by grace.”

Most of the books published on this subject have been light and insignificant, but the compiler of this volume has aimed to produce a work that might be an appropriate gift from the hand of a pastor or Christian friend.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE FORMATION OF THE MARRIAGE UNION

*Happy they! The happiest of their kind!  
Whom gentler stars unite; and in one fate  
Their hearts, their fortunes, and their being blend.*

**I**T should be clear to everyone that marriage is a step of enormous importance. Such a step ought always to be taken with great consideration and utmost caution. The duties of marriage are many and weighty. The right performance of these duties, the happiness of our lives, and even our safety for eternity, depend in no small measure upon the choice we make of a husband or wife. Reason, then, demands that we proceed to marriage with great carefulness. No decision of our whole earthly life requires more calm judgment than this; and yet observation proves how rarely the judgment is allowed to give counsel, and how generally the imagination and the passions settle the business.

Much of the misery and crime that depraves and afflicts society is the result of ill-formed marriages. To use the beautiful language of another, “Those who enter the marriage state cast a dice of the greatest uncertainty, and yet of the greatest effect in the world, next to the last throw for eternity. Life or death, happiness or lasting sorrow, are in the power of marriage. A woman indeed risks the most, for she has no safe place to run to from an evil husband. She must dwell upon the sorrow her own folly has produced; and she is worse off because her tormentor has rights and privileges. The woman may complain to God, as subjects do of tyrants, but otherwise she has no appeal for the unkindness done her. And though the man can run from many hours of sadness, yet he must return to it again. When he sits among his neighbors, he remembers the pain in his bosom, and he sighs deeply.”

If, however, it were only the comfort of the married pair themselves that was concerned, it would be a less significant matter. Rather, the wellbeing of a family and their later descendants, for this world and the next, depends upon this union. In the excitement of passion, few listen to

the counsels of prudence. Perhaps there is no advice more often thrown away than what is offered on the subject of marriage.

Most people who are already attached to someone, even though they have not committed themselves by a promise or declaration of marriage, will continue the desperately determined to accomplish their purpose, if possible. Reasoning is wasted upon such people, and they must be left to gain wisdom in the only way some will get it—painful experience. I offer the following remarks to others who are not yet committed to marrying a particular person and who are disposed to listen to advice.

### **Be guided by the advice of parents or guardians.**

Parents have no right to select for you, but neither should you select for yourself without consulting them. How far a parent's authority may go in prohibiting you from marrying a person they disapprove of is a point of casuistry<sup>1</sup> very difficult to determine.

If you are of age<sup>2</sup> and able to provide for yourself, or are likely to be well provided for by the spouse you are about to be united to, it is questionable whether parents can do anything more than advise and persuade. But before you are of age, they have positive authority to forbid; and it is a violation of your duty to them to form connections without their knowledge and to maintain them against their prohibitions.

Parents' objections ought always, I admit, to be founded on reason, and not on caprice<sup>3</sup> or pride. Where [parents' objections are not founded on reason] and children are of full age and are guided in their choice by prudence, godliness, and affection, they certainly may and must be left to decide for themselves. Where, however, parents rest their objections on sufficient grounds and show plain reasons for prohibiting a marriage, it is the plain duty of sons, and especially of daughters, to give it up. Very seldom does such a marriage prove to be anything other than a source of wretchedness. The frown of an affectionate, wise father and mother fell on it from the beginning, and God seems to rise up in judgment and

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<sup>1</sup> **casuistry** – science or art of reasoning that applies the general rules of religion or morality to particular instances where circumstances matter or where there appears to be a conflict of duties. Here the conflict would be between young people's right of marriage and duty to honor their parents.

<sup>2</sup> **of age** – age at which one's mind and body are fully developed; cultural norms play a significant role in determining what that age is considered to be in a particular society.

<sup>3</sup> **caprice** – unreasoned opinion or whim.

support the parents' authority by confirming their displeasure with His own.

### **Marriage should always be formed on the basis of mutual attachment.**

If there is no love before marriage, it cannot be expected after it. People looking forward to being united in marriage are supposed to be lovers. Lovers without love have no right to expect happiness. Cold indifference is likely to change soon to aversion. There ought to be *personal* attachment. If there is anything, even external, disgusting about the one person to the other, proceeding to marriage is forbidden by the voice of nature.

I am not saying that a beautiful face or elegant form is necessary. By no means! A pure and strong attachment often exists in the absence of these. And I will not take it on myself to determine whether it is absolutely *impossible* to love *deformity*. But we certainly ought not to unite ourselves with deformity unless we can love it, or, at least, unless we can be so enamored with the mental qualities that accompany that deformity, that we lose sight of the body in the charms of the mind, heart, and manners. All I am arguing for is that to go ahead and marry someone whom we absolutely dislike and are repulsed by is irrational and sinful.

But love should respect the *mind* as well as the body. To be attached to an individual simply because of beauty is to fall in love with a doll, a statue, or a picture. Such an attachment is lust or whim, but certainly not rational affection. If we love the body but do not love the mind, the heart, and the manners, our regard is placed upon the inferior part of the person. It is placed upon what may, by disease, be next year very different from what it is now. Nothing fades so quickly as beauty. It is like the delicate bloom of an attractive fruit. If there is nothing valuable underneath, it will be thrown away in disgust when the petals are brushed off. It will be thrown away by the very hand of the one who plucked it.

It is so commonly remarked as to be proverbial that the charms of mind increase by acquaintance, while those of the body diminish. While inner charms easily reconcile us to a plain countenance, charms of body excite, by the power of contrast, a distaste for the tastelessness, ignorance, and heartlessness of the person with whom they are united. It is like gaudy, scentless flowers growing in a desert. Instead of deciding to risk our happiness on gathering these blooming weeds and placing them in our bosom, let us ask how they will look a few years from now, or how they will adorn and bless our home.

Let us ask: will the understanding that is united to that fair face make its owner fit to be my companion and the instructor of my children? Will that temper patiently bear with my weaknesses, kindly consider my tastes, affectionately study my comfort? Will that person's manners please me when I am alone with them as well as when I am in society with them? Will those habits render my dwelling pleasant to myself and to my friends? We must test these matters and hold our passions back. We must seek counsel from our good judgment and allow reason to come down and talk with us in the cool of the evening.

Such, then, is the love on which a marriage should be formed: love to the whole person. It is love of the mind, heart, and manners, as well as of the face and form. It is love tempered with respect. This is the only attachment that is likely to survive when the novelty of marriage wears off, when disease spoils, and time passes. This is the only attachment that is likely to support the tender sympathies and acute sensitivities of a marriage. This is the only attachment that will make man and wife what was the intention of Him Who instituted the marriage union: the help and the comfort of each other even to old age.

Young people should be extremely careful to let no persuasion from others, no impulse of their own covetousness, no anxious desire to be their own master or mistress, no ambition for secular honor, induce them to enter into a marriage to which they are not drawn by the call of pure and virtuous love. What will a large house, splendid furniture, and fashionable entertainments do for you in the absence of marital love? "Is it for these trinkets, these toys?" exclaims the wretched heart as it awakens—alas, too late!—to some sad scene of domestic woe. "Is it for this I have bartered away myself, my happiness, my honor?"

*How ill the scenes that offer rest,  
And hearts that cannot rest, agree!*

Oh, there is a sweetness, a charm, and a power to please in pure and mutual affection, though it is enjoyed in the humblest house, is maintained among the plainest circumstances, and contends with many difficulties. Let the man nobly determine to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow and sweeten his daily task by the thought that his labor is for the woman he loves, rather than ride around in his chariot and live a life of splendid laziness and misery with the woman he does *not* love! Let a woman as nobly and heroically determine to rely on her own energies, and especially on God's gracious providence, rather than marry without affection for the sake of financial benefit.

Then there is another error some commit: having been disappointed in a relationship which they hoped would end in marriage, they become reckless for the future, and, in a state of mind almost like revenge, accept the first individual who may present himself, whether they love him or not. This is great folly; it is such an act of suicidal violence to their own peace that we cannot find terms strong enough to describe or reprove it. This is like the enraged scorpion that turns its sting on itself. In an act of anger, they sacrifice their happiness to folly.

### **Marriage should always be entered into with strict attention to prudence.**

Discretion is a virtue at which none but fools laugh. Discretion is set aside most frequently in reference to marriage, which of all things most needs its sober counsels. Some romantic and silly young people think it is altogether out of place for love to seek counsel of wisdom. If their folly only hurt them, we might leave them to be punished by its fruits; but imprudent marriages, as we already considered, spread their bad consequences far and wide, even down to posterity.

God gave us our understanding to control the passions and imagination. They who set aside the testimony of the understanding in such an important choice as a life companion and listen only to the advice of their passions have, in that instance, forfeited the character of a rational being and sunk to the level of creatures wholly governed by appetite, unchecked by reason. Prudence would prevent a very large portion of human misery, if it were allowed to guide the conduct of mankind.

In the business before us, prudence would allow none to marry till they had *an expectation of financial stability*. It is perfectly obvious to me that the present generation of young people are not distinguished by this kind of discretion. They are too hasty to enter marriage and place themselves at the head of a family before they have any reasonable hope of being able to support that family. Almost as soon as a boy reaches manhood, whether he is in business or not, before he can tell whether his business will succeed or not, he looks round for a wife and makes a hasty and perhaps unwise selection. Let young people exercise reason and foresight. If they will not, but are determined to rush into the expenses of housekeeping before they have opened the sources to supply them, let them hear the voice of faithful warning in spite of the alluring song of their imagination. Let them prepare to eat the bitter herbs of useless

regrets for many a long and weary year after the wedding feast has passed away.

Prudence forbids all *unequal* marriages. There should be an equality as near as may be in *age*. How unnatural and repulsive it is to see a young man fastened to a piece of antiquity. A stranger would have a hard time determining whether he is living with his wife or his mother! No one will give the younger party (woman or man) the credit of marrying for love. And the world will be unkind enough—and it would be hard for anyone to help joining in the criticism—to say that such matches are mere financial speculations. Usually, the old party in the union is a rich one, and just as usually they carry a whip for the other in their purse. A fortune has often thus been a misfortune for both.

Equality of *rank* is desirable, or as near to it as possible. It is much safer for a rich man to descend into the vale of poverty for a wife, than it is for a rich woman to go down for a husband. He can much more easily raise his companion to his own level than she can. Society will much more readily accommodate themselves to his error than to hers. Much of the happiness of the conjugal state depends upon the relatives of the parties. If the marriage has offended the relatives, if it has degraded them, it is in their power to throw much bitterness into the cup of enjoyment! Many a wife has carried to her grave the stinging insults of her husband's friends; and in all such cases, he must receive part of the venom.

To my brethren in the *ministry*, I recommend the greatest caution in this most delicate and important affair. I have no language emphatic enough to express the earnestness with which I recommend this caution. The effects of a minister's imprudent marriage are felt in the church of the living God. If the wives of the deacons are to be "grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things" (1Ti 3:11), what less can be required of pastors' wives? "A bishop...must be blameless...one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1Ti 3:2, 4-5). But how can he manifest in his home the beautiful order and harmony that should prevail in every Christian family, and especially in every minister's house, without the intelligent and industrious cooperation of his wife? And how can this be expected of a wife who *has* no intelligence or industry? Not only much of the comfort, but much of the character, of a minister depends upon his wife. What is even more consequential is that much of his usefulness depends upon his wife as well.

## **Marriage should always be formed with a due regard to godliness.**

A godly person should not marry anyone who is not also godly. It is not desirable to be united to an individual even of a different denomination who, as a point of conscience, attends her own place of worship. It is not pleasant on a Sunday morning to separate and go to different places of worship. The most delightful walk that a holy couple can take is to the house of God together, when they take sweet counsel together about the high themes of redemption and the invisible realities of eternity. No one would willingly lose this.

But, oh, to walk separately in a still more important and dreadful sense! To part at the point where the two roads to eternity branch off, the one to heaven, the other to hell! For the believer “to travel on to glory with the awful consciousness that the other party is journeying to perdition!” This is indeed dreadful and is enough to greatly diminish marital happiness.

If, however, the *comfort* of the parties only were concerned, it would be less important; but it is a matter of *conscience*, and an affair in which we have no option. “She is at liberty to be married to whom she will,” says the apostle, speaking to the case of a widow, but “only in the Lord” (1Co 7:39). Now, though this was said about a female, all the reasons of the law belong with equal force to the man. This appears to me to be not only advice, but law, and is as binding upon the conscience as any other law that we find in the Word of God. The incidental way this command is given is, as one appropriately remarked, to the intelligent reader of Scripture, the strongest confirmation that this rule applies to all prospective marriages where there has been no engagement prior to conversion.

As to the other passage, where the apostle commands us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, it does not apply to marriage except by inference. It applies to church fellowship or rather to association and conduct in general. Professing Christians are not to unite with unbelievers. But if this uniting is improper in other matters, how much more in marriage, which has such a powerful influence over our character as well as our happiness! For a Christian, then, to marry an individual who is not decidedly and evidently a pious person is to directly oppose the Word of God.

And as Scripture is against it, so also is reason, for how “can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). A difference of taste in minor matters is an obstacle to domestic comfort; but to be opposed to each other on the all-important subject of religion is a risk, even to our

comfort, that no thinking person should take for any reason. How can the highest reasons for the family be met where one of the parents does not have the spiritual qualifications for accomplishing them? How can the work of religious education be fulfilled, and the children be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

Regarding personal assistance in spiritual things, do we not all need help instead of hindrance? A Christian should make everything bend to spiritual things, but allow spiritual things to bend to nothing. This is the one thing needful, to which everything should take second place; and, surely, to ignore your eternal salvation in such an important affair as marriage shows either that your religion is only a profession or likely soon to become so.

No one should contemplate marriage without the greatest and most serious thought, nor without the most earnest prayer to God for direction. For prayer to be acceptable to the Almighty, it must be sincere and offered with a real desire to know and do His will. Many, I believe, treat God as they do their friends. They make up their minds beforehand and then ask to be directed. They have some doubts—very often strong ones—about the step they are about to take, but these are gradually dispelled by their supplications, till they have prayed themselves into a conviction that they are quite right in the decision they already made.

To pray for direction about something we know to be in opposition to God's Word, and on which we have already resolved to act, is adding hypocrisy to rebellion. If there is reason to believe that the young man who asks a Christian to unite herself with him in marriage is not truly godly, what need is there for her to pray for direction? This seems like asking the Almighty for permission to do what He has already forbidden!

## **Widows and widowers**

In the case of widows and widowers, especially where there are children, special prudence is necessary. I have known of some who sacrificed all their own tastes and preferences and selected a spouse with reference only to the children. Such a sacrifice is indeed generous, but I doubt whether it is prudent. It puts their own comfort and even character in danger, and neither comfort nor character can be lost without much damage to the very children they have so heroically considered. But this is a rarer and more pardonable error than that of the opposite extreme—[marrying without any regard for the children]. How inappropriate and inconsiderate is it for a sixty-year-old to bring home a young wife and place her over daughters older than her! He introduces into the family

circle aunts and uncles younger than some of the nephews and nieces. Such unadvisable marriages often destroy both reputation and comfort in the family. Such men should not be surprised if their daughters from the first marriage are driven away from home by the consequences of the second marriage. They might be led to form imprudent matches both by their parent's example and the consequences of his folly.

In selecting a second companion for life where the first was talented or virtuous, take much care not to select a strikingly inferior spouse. In such a case,

*Busy, meddling memory,  
In barbarous succession, musters up  
The past endearments of their softer hours,*

forming a contrast always present and always painful. The man who never knew by experience the joy of a happy marriage can never know the pain of an imprudent one, at least not as it could be augmented by the power of comparison. Let him that has thus known the joys beware how he exposes himself to such helpless, hopeless misery.

Due care should also be exercised in reference to the children's needs. What if the woman about to be selected also becomes a mother? Does she have the principle, prudence, self-control, and good temper that will help her conceal her bias for her own children? To suppress her bias is impossible and would be unnatural. Can she seem no less kind to her adopted offspring than to her own? That man acts a most cruel and wicked part toward the memory of his first wife who does not provide for her children a kind and judicious friend in his second wife. Let me become the advocate of fatherless or motherless children and entreat, for the sake of both the living and the dead, a due concern for the comfort of these orphans.

Nor should the person who is about to take the care of another person's children take any less deliberate thought. Do you have enough love for the parent to bear the burden of care for his sake? Do you have kindness enough, discretion enough, for such a situation and office? It is easier when the children are sweet and kind. But when they have no personal attractiveness, no mental charm, no endearing character, then is evident the truth of the remark, "A wife may be supplied, a mother cannot." The man or the woman who can act a parent's part toward a rebellious and unlovely child must have more than nature (for this belongs only to a real parent). They must have principle and kindness—and need to have grace. Let all who are invited to take the oversight of a family ask themselves if they possess what is needed for the comfortable

and satisfactory fulfilment of its duties. Let them ask whether they will likely be happy in such a situation themselves. If not, they had far better never enter it, as their unhappiness must inevitably fill the whole family circle with misery.

It is truly deplorable that all appropriate preparations for marriage are usually put aside for the busy activities of vanity. These are like mere dust on the scales of marital destiny. Every thought, anticipation, and anxiety is too often absorbed in the selection of a house, furniture, and matters even more insignificant and frivolous. It is too common for the bride-to-be to spend hours, day after day, week after week, talking to her milliner,<sup>4</sup> debating and discussing the color, form, and material in which she is to shine forth in wedding-day splendor, when she ought to be occupied with meditating the eventful step that will fix her and her husband's destiny for life. It is as if the great object were to *appear* as a finely dressed and fashionable bride rather than to *be* a good and happy wife! But

*Joy, serious and sublime,  
Such as doth nerve the energies of prayer,  
Should swell the bosom, when a maiden's hand,  
Filled with life's dewy flowerets, girdeth on  
That harness, which the ministry of death  
Alone unlooseth, but whose fearful power  
May stamp the sentence of eternity.*

“Study,” said an old author, “the duties of marriage before you enter into it. There are crosses to be borne, there are snares to be avoided, and manifold obligations to be discharged, as well as great happiness to be enjoyed. And should no provision be made? The lack of this provision brings frequent disappointments in that honorable condition. From this comes the repentance that is at once *too soon* and *too late*. The husband knows not how to rule; and the wife knows not how to obey.”

*Women are not for rule designed,  
Nor yet for blind submission. Happy they  
Who, while they feel it pleasure to obey,  
Have yet a kind companion at their side,  
Who in the journey will his power divide,  
Or yield the reins, and bid the lady guide;  
Then points the wonders of the way, and makes  
The duty pleasant that she undertakes;  
He shows the object as they pass along,*

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<sup>4</sup> **milliner** – maker and seller of headdresses, hats, or bonnets for ladies.

*And gently rules the movements that are wrong;  
He tells her all the skillful driver's art,  
And smiles to see how well she acts her part;  
Nor praise denies to courage or to skill,  
In using power that he resumes at will.*

## CHAPTER 2

# THE FAMILY CIRCLE

*Home! There's magic in that little word;  
It is a mystic circle which surrounds  
Comforts and virtues, never known  
Beyond the hallowed limit.*

A family! How delightful the associations we form with such a word! How pleasing its images that fill the mind, and how tender the emotions it awakens in the heart! Who can be surprised that the happiness of home should be a theme dear to poetry, and that it should have called forth some of the sweetest strains of imagination and feeling? Or who can be surprised that of all the aspirations of those setting out on life's journey, this should excite the most ardent desires and active pursuits? But, alas! Of those who start in youthful zeal for the possession of this dear prize, how many fail! And why? Because their imagination alone is engaged on the subject. They have no definite ideas of what it means, nor of the way in which it is to be obtained. It is merely the lovely creation of a romantic mind, and oftentimes with such people fades away.

I believe it will be useful, therefore, to describe the sources of family happiness and to show that these are to be found not in the flowery regions of imagination but in the sober realities of piety, chaste love, prudence, and well-formed family ties. These precious springs of happiness are within the reach of all who will take the path to them—and this is the way of knowledge. We must acquaint ourselves with the nature, purposes, and importance of the family covenant. We must analyze this union to know its elements, laws, and purposes. Who can be a good citizen without knowing the nature of his country's constitution and laws? It is equally vain to look for domestic happiness without a clear insight into the purposes and laws which Providence has laid down in the formation of the household.

In popular discussions about the form of civil government best adapted to the welfare of the human race, the *family constitution* has been too much overlooked. Authors have confidently speculated and theorized about the larger bodies of society, while, at the same time, they

have evidently forgotten how much the well-being of nations is dependent on the well-being of the families that compose them all.

If there is any truth in the comparison of a nation to a pillar, we should remember that, while individuals are the materials of which it is formed, it is the good condition of families that constitutes the cement to hold it together and give its fine form solidity and durability. If this cement is lacking, the pillar contains in itself a principle of decay and an active cause of dilapidation and ruin. It matters not how excellent the materials are in themselves, how elegant its shape is, how ornamental the base, the shaft, or the capital<sup>5</sup> may be.

The family is a divine institution. God formed it Himself. He taketh the solitary and setteth him in families (Psa 68:6). Like all the rest of His works, it is well and wisely done. As a system of government, it is quite unique; neither below the heavens nor above them is there anything precisely like it. In some respects, it resembles the civil government of a state; in others, the ecclesiastical rule of a church. The church and the state may be said to meet in the family. This meeting, however, is only on a very small scale, and under very particular circumstances. When directed as it should be, every family has a sacred character, inasmuch as the head of it serves as both the prophet and priest of the household, by instructing them in the knowledge and leading them in the worship of God, while at the same time he discharges the duties of a king by supporting a system of order, subordination, and discipline.

The family's purpose is agreeable with its nature. Beyond the benefit of the individuals who comprise it (its first and immediate purpose), it is intended to promote the welfare of the national community it belongs to and is a part of. Every nation has placed a great value on the family covenant and guarded it with the most powerful sanctions. Well-instructed, well-ordered, and well-governed families are the springs that, from their secret sources, send forth the streams that flow together to make up the majestic flow of national greatness and prosperity. No state can be prosperous where family order and subordination are generally neglected. Any nation will be prosperous, whatever its political forms are, where family order is generally maintained.

A son becomes a good citizen under the wise instruction and impartial scepter of a father within the little family circle. Loyalty, patriotism, and every public virtue grow by the fireside and on the family hearth. It is in disordered families that divisive demagogues, turbulent

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<sup>5</sup> **capital** – top of a pillar.

rebels, and tyrannical oppressors are trained up to be their neighbors' torment or their country's scourge. It is there that the thorn and the brier, to use the prophet's simile, or the myrtle and the fir tree are reared, which in future time will be the ornament and defense or the deformity and misery of the land.

But does the family constitution have reference only to the present world and its perishable interests? By no means. All God's arrangements for man are chiefly intended for his relation to eternity. The eye of God is upon the immortality He has destined the human race for. Every family has a sacred character. Its sacred character may be forgotten or disdained, but the family is constituted and ought to be conducted with the prospect of the next generation following its parents not only to the grave but to eternity.

Every member of every household is an immortal creature. Everyone that leaves the circle by death goes into an eternity of torment or of bliss. Now, since all God's institutions look to another world as their ultimate reference, surely the most powerful institution for the formation of character must be considered as intended to prepare its subjects for glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life (Rom 2:7).

Where godliness does not serve as the basis of the marriage union, its happy fruits cannot be expected. There are many households where merely social virtues are carefully cultivated, where family kindness flourishes, and public excellence is cherished, but because they lack vital godliness are losing the highest purpose of their union. They are not carrying on any preparatory course of education for the skies. They are destined to be swept away with the wreck of the nations that knew not God, and with the wicked who shall be turned into hell. Alas, alas, that from such sweet scenes of marital love and peace, where learning, science, wealth, elegance have been admitted, religion should be excluded. While many wise and interesting guests are continually welcomed to the house, He only is refused Who blessed the little family of Bethany. He only is refused Who brings salvation with Him wherever He goes and gives immortality to the joys which would otherwise perish forever.

Precious, indeed, are the joys of a happy family! But, oh, how fleet! How soon must the circle be broken up! How suddenly may it be! What scenes of delight have all been unexpectedly wrapped in shadow and gloom by misfortune, sickness, or death! The last enemy has entered paradise, and, by expelling one of its tenants, has embittered the scene to the rest. The ravages of death have been in some cases followed by the

desolations of poverty. Those who once lived happily together have been separated and scattered to meet no more. But if they possess religion, true religion, it will gather them together again after the destruction of their earthly ties and conduct them to another Paradise where no calamity can enter and where no joy can ever depart.

It would be happy then for all who are related by these household ties if nature's bonds were made holy and permanent by the bonds of God's grace. To establish our union on any basis that omits religion in its formation is to erect it on quicksand and to expose it to the fury of a thousand billows that may destroy our comfort in a moment. To rest our union upon religion is to establish it upon a rock, where we will still find refuge individually even when the nearest and dearest relations are swept away by the tide of death.

It is important to remember that the family constitution does not depend for its existence, laws, right administration, or rich advantages upon family possessions or the form of national government it is under. It may live and flourish in all its tender love, all its sweet happiness, and all its moral power in a cottage as well as in a mansion, under the shade of liberty as well as under the scorching heat of tyranny. Like the church that it represents in some ways, it accommodates itself to every changing form of surrounding society, to every nation, and to every age. It forms with the church the only two institutions ever set up by God, as to their framework. Like its kindred institution, the church, the family remains amid the ruins of the Fall, the lapse of ages, and the changes of human affairs—the monument of what has been and the standing prediction of what will be.

Family happiness, in many respects, resembles the manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness. Like that precious food, it is the gift of God from heaven. It is not to be purchased with money. It is dispensed alike to the rich and to the poor. It accommodates itself to every taste. It is given with an abundance that meets the needs of all who desire it. To be obtained, it must be religiously sought in God's own way of bestowing it. It is granted to man as a refreshment during his pilgrimage through this wilderness to the celestial Canaan.

*By thee*  
*Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,*  
*Relations dear, and all the charities*  
*Of father, son, and brother first were known.*  
*Far be it that I should write thee sin or blame,*  
*Or think thee unbecoming holiest place,*  
*Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets!—Milton*

## CHAPTER 3

# MUTUAL DUTIES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

*“See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”—1 Peter 1:22*

**M**ARRIAGE is the foundation of the family. This, says the apostle, “is honorable in all” (Heb 13:4); and he has condemned as a “doctrine of devils” (see 1Ti 4:1-3) the opinions of those who forbid marriage. It was instituted by God, established in Eden, and honored by the personal attendance of Christ. It furnished an occasion for the first of His splendid miracles by which He proved Himself to be the Son of God and Savior of the world. But the Holy Ghost distinguishes marriage by another mark where He says, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32).

Many think the term *mystery* has no allusion to marriage but applies exclusively to the union of Christ and the church. If this is the case, it seems difficult to account for the mention of marriage at all, or to explain what it has to do with the subject in hand. Besides, the apostle twice references the mediatorial work of Christ when he enforces the duties of husband and wife, which seems to confirm that he views the marriage union as a type or symbol of the close and dear relation of the church to her divine Redeemer. Such a view of marriage gives it the greatest sanctity and honor.

Marriage distinguishes man from brutes. It provides not only for the continuance of mankind but also for his comfort. It contains at once the source of human happiness and all those virtuous emotions and generous sensibilities that refine and beautify human character. As a general subject, marriage can never be guarded too carefully; and, in each individual instance, it cannot be entered into with too much prudence and care.

In proportion to the importance of the marriage relation itself must be a right view and a due performance of its obligations.

## Love

The first obligation, and the ground of all the rest, is love. If love is missing, marriage is degraded at once into a brutal or mean compact.

*Love is a plant of holier birth  
Than any that takes root on earth;  
A flower from heaven, which 'tis a crime  
To number with the things of time.*

Love is especially required of the husband for reasons we shall consider in its own place, but it also belongs equally to the wife. Love must be mutual, or there can be no happiness—none for the party which does not love and none for the party that does. How dreadful is the idea of being chained for life to an individual we have no affection for, to be almost always in the company of a person who drives us away by revulsion, yet driven back upon a bond which prevents all separation and escape. Nor can there be any happiness for the party that does love: such an unrewarded affection must soon expire or live only to consume the wretched heart it burns in.

A married couple without mutual affection is one of the most pitiable things to be seen on earth. They cannot, and, indeed, in ordinary circumstances, ought not to separate, and yet they remain united only to be a torment to each other. They serve one important purpose, however, in the history of mankind: to be a beacon to all who are yet unmarried, to warn them against the sin and folly of forming this union upon any other basis than that of a pure and mutual affection, and to admonish all that are married to watch with most diligent vigilance their mutual affection, that nothing be allowed to damp the sacred flame.

As the union should be formed on the basis of love, so should great care be taken, especially in the early stages of it, that nothing might arise to unsettle or loosen our affection. Whatever knowledge we may obtain of each other's tastes and habits before marriage, it is neither so accurate, so comprehensive, nor so impressive, as that which we acquire by living together. It is tremendously important that when little defects are first noticed, and trivial faults and oppositions first occur, they should not be allowed to produce an unfavorable impression on the mind.

Both man and wife must equally avoid all offences toward each other in the beginning of their life together. Every little thing can wither an infant blossom. The soft south wind can shake the little rings of the vine when first they begin to curl like the locks of a new-weaned boy; but when by age they stiffen into the hardness of a stem, and have, by the warm rays of the sun and the kisses of heaven, brought forth their clusters, they

can endure the storms of the north, and the loud noises of a tempest, and yet never be broken. So, in the early period, a new marriage tends to be watchful and observant, jealous and busy, inquisitive and careful, and apt to take alarm at every unkind word.

People's weaknesses do not manifest themselves in the first scenes, but only after being together for some time. When weakness first appears, it is not seen as chance or weakness; rather it is understood to be a lack of love or prudence. And what appears evil at first usually affrights the inexperienced man or woman who draws unfair conclusions and imagines mighty sorrows by the proportions of the new and early unkindness.

After the hearts of a man and wife are endeared by mutual confidence and experience, longer than pretending could last, the many memories and present experiences dash all little unkindnesses to pieces.

Let every man and wife be careful to suppress little annoyances. As fast as they spring up, they must be cut down and trodden under foot. If they are allowed to grow and multiply, they make the spirit irritable, spending time together troublesome, and the affections weak and uneasy by habitual estrangement.

Some men are more distressed by a fly than by a wound. When the gnats disturb our sleep, and the reason is disturbed, but not perfectly awakened, he is often fuller of trouble than if he had to fight off a powerful enemy in a state of alertness. In the frequent little events of a family, a man's reason cannot always be awake; and when his words are imperfect, and a small trouble makes him even more restless, he is soon drawn into a violent passion. Certainly, a man or woman is in a state of weakness and folly when they can be troubled with a little event; and, therefore, it is not good to tempt them when they are in such a dangerous condition.

In such a case, the remedy is to not add any fuel to the sudden flame. Even though stubble might be quickly kindled, it is soon extinguished if no one blows on it persistently or feeds it with new fuel. Add no new provocations to the event, and do not inflame this one, and peace will soon return. The discontent will pass quickly, as the sparks from a flint and steel. Always remember that discontentment based on daily little things breeds a secret disease that is extremely dangerous.

If they would preserve love, let them make an accurate and careful study of each other's tastes and dislikes, and most carefully abstain from whatever they know to be contrary to their tastes, even in the smallest things. The ancients, in their marital allegories, used to represent

Mercury standing by Venus to signify that kind language and sweet requests should unite spouses' minds to each other.

If they would preserve love, let them carefully avoid all overly precise and frequently repeated distinctions of *mine* and *thine*. This [selfishness] is the reason for all the laws, lawsuits, and wars in the world. Let them who have only one person [before the law] have also only one interest [in what they own]. There might be situations where spouses need separate ownership of property. In some cases, a woman might need the independent right to manage her property. In such a case, the husband should be very careful not to invade her right, and the wife should not boast of her right, obstinately lay claim to it, nor selfishly exercise it.

In ordinary cases, "They should be heirs to each other, if they die childless; and if there are children, the wife should be with the children a partner in the inheritance. But during the husband and wife's lifetime, the use and employment [of their goods] is common to both their needs, and in this they have the same rights, except that the man has the administration of it all. He *may* keep it from his wife, just as the governor of a town may keep it from the right owner; he hath the *power* but not the *right* to do so."

## Mutual Respect

Mutual respect is a duty of married life. Though, as we will later consider, special reverence is due from the wife, yet respect is due from the husband also. Since it is difficult to respect those whose only claim to it is their superior rank or common relationship, it is tremendously important that we should treat each other with conduct that deserves respect.

Moral esteem is one of the strongest supports and protections of love. Excellent character always produces esteem. We are more accurately known to each other in marriage than we are to the world or even to our own servants and children. The privacy of this relationship lays open our motives and all the interior of our character, so that we are better known to each other than we are to ourselves. Therefore, if we would be respected, we must be respectable.

Charity covers a multitude of faults, it is true; but we must not presume too far upon the gullibility and blindness of affection. There is a point beyond which even love cannot be blind to the red stain of a sinful action. Every piece of real sin tends to sink us in each other's esteem and thus removes the safeguards of affection. Perhaps this has not been thought of sufficiently in married life. Husbands and wives tend to be

anxious to hide their faults from the world, forgetting that it is a dreadful thing to lose the respect of their partner. It is delightful to observe how some noble couples regard each other—what reverence is blended with their love, and how they appear to one another like angel forms in heavenly excellence.

In married life, then, there should be clearest and most unwavering mutual respect, even in little things. There must be no searching after faults, nor examining with microscopic scrutiny faults that cannot be concealed. There must be no name calling, no rude contempt, no discourtesy, and no cold neglect. There should be courtesy without ceremony, politeness without formality, attention without slavery. It should, in short, be the tenderness of love supported by respect and guided by politeness.

And, then, we must maintain our mutual respectability before others. Strangers, friends, servants, and children must all be led to respect us from what they see in our behavior. It is most improper for either party to do an action, say a word, or assume a look that might have the remotest tendency to lower the other in the esteem of others.

## **Mutual Attachment**

Mutual attachment to each other's society is a common duty of husband and wife. We are united to be companions, to live together, to walk together, to talk together. The husband is commanded to dwell with his wife "according to knowledge" (1Pe 3:7). This, says Mr. Jay, intends nothing less than residence, in opposition to absence and roving. It is absurd for those who have no prospect of dwelling together to marry. Those who are already married should not be unnecessarily away from home. Of course, circumstances of various kinds will make occasional excursions unavoidable, but let a man return as soon as the purpose of his absence is accomplished. Let him always travel with the words of Solomon in his mind: "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place" (Pro 27:8). Can a man discharge the duties he owes to his household while he is away from home? Can he discipline his children? Can he maintain the worship of God in his family?

I know it is the duty of the wife to lead the devotions in the absence of the husband; and she should take it up as a cross, if not, for the time, as a privilege. Few wives, however, are disposed to do this, and so one of the sanctuaries of God is shut up for weeks and months at a time. I am sorry to say that there are some husbands who seem fonder of any society than that of their wives. It appears in how they use their leisure hours.

How few of these are given to the wife! The evening is the best time of the day for the family. The wife is especially entitled to that evening time with her husband. She is now most free from her numerous cares and most at liberty to enjoy reading and conversation. It is a sad reflection upon a man when he is fond of spending his evenings away from home. It implies something bad, and it predicts something worse.

And to ensure, as far as possible, her husband's presence at his own fireside, let the wife be "a keeper at home" (see Ti 2:5) and do all she can to make that fireside as attractive as good character, neatness, and cheerful, affectionate conversation can make it. Let her strive to make his home the soft green on which his heart loves to rest in the sunshine of family happiness.

We can easily imagine that even in Paradise, when man had no visions of crime, no voice from a troubled conscience to make him dread solitude and flee from it, that even then, Adam preferred, on his return from his laboring in the garden, not to find Eve absent from their bower. He would desire the smile of her countenance to light up his own and the music of her voice to be the melody of his soul. Think, then, how much more in his fallen state, with guilt on his conscience and cares pressing on his heart, does man now need the aid of woman's companionship when he comes in from his anxious toil. He needs her to drive away the swarm of buzzing cares that light upon his heart to sting it. He needs her to smooth his brow ruffled with sadness and to bring tranquility to his bosom agitated with passion. He needs her at once to reprove and comfort his mind that has in some measure yielded to temptation.

O woman, you know what time the "goodman of the house" will return at midday, when the sun is yet bowing down the laborer with his fierce beams, or at evening, when the heat and burden of the day are past. Do not let him come to his home weary and faint and find that the foot that should hasten to meet him is wandering at a distance or that the soft hand which should wipe away the sweat from his brow is knocking at the door of other houses. Nor let him find a wilderness where he should enter a garden, confusion where he should see order, or anything disheartening where he could hope to see delightful and attractive neatness. Who would be surprised at the anguished disappointment and bitterness of a neglected and heart-stricken husband? He turns away from his own door for that comfort which he wished to enjoy at home, and he longs for the companionship he hoped to find in his wife. He puts up with substitutes for both in the houses of others.

United to be companions, let man and wife be as much in each other's company as possible. I thank God I am a stranger to the taste that leads a man to flee from his own comfortable parlor and the company of his wife, from the instruction and recreation of a well-supplied library, or from the evening rural walk when the day's business is over, to scenes of public amusement for enjoyment. To my judgment, the pleasures of home and of home company, when they are what they should be, are such as never weary a person and need no change—only maybe from one family scene to another. I sigh and long, maybe in vain, for a time when society will be so elevated and purified—when the love of knowledge will be so intense and the habits of life will be so simple, when religion and morality will be so widespread—that men's homes will be the center and circle of their pleasures. I long for the time when each man will find his greatest earthly delight in the company of an affectionate and intelligent wife and of well-educated children. I long for the time when men will feel it unnecessary to leave their own fireside to seek their happiness in the ballroom, concert, or theater. Then we will no longer have to prove that public amusements are improper, for they will be found to be unnecessary.

But the pleasures of home must not be allowed to interfere with the calls and claims of public duty. Wives must not ask, and husbands must not give, that time which is demanded for the cause of God and man. This is an age of active charity, and the great public institutions cannot be maintained without great sacrifices of time and leisure by very many people. Those who, by their wisdom, talents, rank, or property, receive the trust of the public must stand prepared to fill and conduct the executive departments of our societies. Nor should they allow the soft allurements of their own homes to draw them away from the obvious post of duty.

We have known some, who, before they entered wedded life, were the props and pillars of our institutions, then yield so far to the calls of their new and dearest earthly friend as to leave their position of management forever after. I admit it is a costly contribution to the cause of religion or humanity to give the evening hours that could be spent so pleasantly in a country walk or in reading together some interesting book. But who can do good without sacrifices? I know a very holy and useful minister who told the lady he was about to marry that one of the conditions of their marriage was that she should never ask him for the time that, on any occasion, he felt to be his duty to give to God. Surely, any woman could feel herself more blessed in having to occasionally endure the loss of her husband's company, when his presence and talents are coveted by

all public institutions, than in being left to the undisturbed enjoyment of the company of one who no one looks to for help.

## Mutual Forbearance

Mutual forbearance is another duty. We owe it to all, even a stranger or an enemy. Most certainly, it must not be denied to our nearest friend. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1Co 13:4-7). There is both need and room for this charity in every relation of life. Wherever sin or imperfection exists, there is an opportunity for the forbearance of love. There is no perfection on earth. True, lovers often imagine they have found perfection, but the more sober judgment of married life generally corrects the mistake. First impressions of this kind usually pass away with first love.

We should all enter marriage aware we are about to be united to a fallen creature. In every case, it is not two angels that have met together, but two sinful children of Adam, from whom must be expected much weakness and waywardness. We must make up our minds to put up with some imperfection; and, remembering that we have no small share of our own imperfection that calls for forbearance from our partner, we should exercise the patience that we ask of them. Husband and wife both have weaknesses, and they are so constantly together that innumerable occasions for contention will arise. If we are eager, or even willing, to be contentious, these occasions will lead to love's temporary interruption if not its permanent suppression. We should simply overlook many things; others we should pass by with a calm mind; and, in all things, most carefully avoid even an apparently innocent argument.

Affection does not forbid, but actually demands, that we should point out our faults to each other, but this should be done in all the meekness of wisdom with all the tenderness of love. Otherwise, we might increase the evil we intend to remove, or replace it with a greater one. Both justice and wisdom require that we always set the good qualities against the bad ones. In most cases, we shall find *some* redeeming excellences that, if they do not reconcile us to the failings we deplore, should at least teach us to bear them with patience. The more we contemplate these better aspects of a person's character, the brighter they will appear. It is true

that, while faults diminish, virtues magnify in proportion as they are steadily contemplated.

As for bitter language and violent conduct, these are so utterly disgraceful that we scarcely need to mention them, even by way of cautioning against them. The ancients, we are informed, took the gall bladder from their marriage sacrifices and cast it behind the altar, to signify the removal of all bitterness from marriage.

## **Mutual Assistance**

Mutual assistance is the duty of husbands and wives. This applies to *the cares of life*. Women are not usually so familiar with matters of trade, but still their counsel may be sought in a thousand cases to a husband's advantage. The husband should never begin anything important without communicating the matter to his wife. On her part, instead of avoiding the responsibility of a counsellor and leaving him to struggle alone with his difficulties, she should invite him to communicate freely all his anxieties. If she cannot counsel, she can comfort. If she cannot relieve his cares, she can help to bear them. If she cannot direct the course of his trade, she may direct the current of his feelings. If she cannot open any source of earthly wisdom, she can spread the matter before the Father and Fountain of lights. Many men try to protect their wives by keeping all their difficulties to themselves; this only prepares them to feel the stroke more heavily when it does come.

And, then, as the wife should be willing to help the husband in matters of business, he should be willing to share with her the burden of domestic anxieties and fatigue. Some go too far and utterly degrade the female head of the family by treating her as if her honesty or ability could not be trusted in the management of the home economy. They keep the money and dole it out as if they were parting with their life's blood, grudging every shilling they dispense and requiring an account as rigid as they would from a suspected servant. They take charge of everything, give out everything, interfere in everything. This is to steal the woman's authority, to push her down from her proper place, to insult and degrade her before her children and servants.

Some, on the other hand, go to the opposite extreme and take no share in anything. My heart has ached to see the slavery of some devoted, hard-working, and ill-used wives. After laboring all day amidst the ceaseless toils of a young and numerous family, they have had to pass the hours of evening alone. Their husbands, instead of coming home to cheer them by spending time together or relieving them for only half an hour

of their fatigue, have been either at a party or a sermon. Then these hapless women have had to wake and watch the whole night long over a sick or restless babe, while the men, whom they accepted as the partners of their sorrows, were sleeping by their side, unwilling to give a single hour of their slumber, though it would allow a little rest for their work-worn wives.

Even animals put such men to shame. It is a well-known fact that the male bird takes his turn on the nest during incubation to allow the female time to renew her strength by food and rest. With her, he goes in diligent search of food and feeds the young ones when they cry. No man should think of marrying who is not prepared to share with his wife, as far as he can, the burden of domestic cares.

They should be helpful to each other *in their spiritual lives*. This duty is clearly implied by the apostle: "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" (1Co 7:16). Where only one is a true believer, that one should exert the most anxious, careful, and affectionate efforts for the other's salvation. And where both spouses are real Christians, they should exercise a constant care and watchfulness for each other's spiritual and eternal welfare.

*How blest the sacred tie that binds  
In union sweet accordant minds!  
How swift the heavenly course they run,  
Whose hearts, whose faith, whose hopes are one!*

One of the purposes a believer should have in mind when entering marriage is to secure a faithful friend: a friend who will be his helpmate in reference to another world, will assist him in the great business of his soul's salvation, and will pray for him and with him. Such a spouse will affectionately tell him of his sins and defects viewed in a Christian light. Such a spouse will draw him by the power of a holy example and the sweet force of persuasive words. Such a spouse will warn him in temptation, comfort him in dejection, and in every way assist him in his pilgrimage to the skies.

The ultimate purpose of marriage is lost if it is not helpful to our spiritual lives; and yet this purpose is too often neglected even by professors of religion. Do we talk with each other as we should on the high themes of redemption by Christ and eternal salvation? Do we study each other's dispositions, snares, troubles, and spiritual declines that we may apply suitable remedies? Do we exhort one another daily, lest we should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin? Are we faithful to

reprove, but without a critical spirit? Do we praise, but without flattery? Do we invite one another to the most quickening and edifying public means of grace, and recommend such books as have been beneficial to ourselves? Do we openly express the state of our minds on spiritual things to each other? Do we state our perplexities, our joys, our fears, our sorrows? Alas, alas, who must not blush at their neglects in these particulars? And yet such neglect is as criminal as it is common. Fleeing from the wrath to come, and yet not doing all we can to aid each other's escape! Contending side by side for the crown of glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life, and yet not doing all we can to ensure each other's success! Is this love? Is this the tenderness of marital affection?

This mutual help should extend to *the maintenance of all the habits of family order, discipline, and piety*. The husband is to be the prophet, priest, and king of the family—to instruct their minds, to lead their devotions, and to govern their tempers. But in all these important objectives, the wife is to be of one mind with him. They are to be workers together in all this, neither of them leaving the other to labor alone, much less opposing what is done. “When the sun shines, the moon disappears; when he sets, she appears and shines. So, when the husband is at home, he leads domestic worship; when he is absent, the wife must always take his place.”

Some men leave the instruction of young children exclusively to their wives, and some wives, as soon as the children are too old to be taught upon the knee, think that they are exclusively the subjects of the father's care. This is a mistake in the important economy of the family: family members are never too young to be taught and disciplined by the father, nor too old to be admonished and warned by the mother. He may sometimes have a great influence in awing the rude spirits of the younger branches; while her soft, persuasive accents may have delightful power to melt or break the hard and stubborn hearts of older ones. Thus, since the family belongs to both, both must care for the family.

They must be helpful to each other *in humanitarian generosity and religious benevolence*. Their influence on each other should not restrain but stimulate zeal, compassion, and liberality. What a beautiful picture of family life is drawn by the pen of the Old Testament historian! “And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber...on the wall; and

let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there” (2Ki 4:8-11).

Every part of this scene is lovely. The generous and godly wish of the wife to accommodate a needy prophet; her prompt and prudent effort to include her husband in her benevolent plan; her modest keeping of her place by not acting without his permission; her dignified claim of a right to be associated with him in this work of mercy. She said, “Let *us* make a little chamber on the wall.” All is delightful and appropriate on her part; and no less so on the part of the man. He gave no surly refusal, no proud rejection of the plan because it did not originate with him; no covetous plea for setting it aside as too great of an expense.

Every husband should be delighted to gratify the benevolent wishes and support the generous plan of his wife, as far as prudence will allow. So he consented. The little chamber was erected and furnished by this holy pair and soon occupied by the prophet. And never was a generous action more speedily or more richly rewarded. Elisha had no means of his own to acknowledge the kindness, but He Who said in after times, “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward” (Mat 10:41), took upon Himself, as He does in every instance, the cause of His needy servant and most generously repaid the generous deed.

No lovelier scene is to be found on earth than that of a godly couple employing their influence on each other and the hours of their time together to stir up each other’s hearts to mercy and religious generosity. Not even Adam and Eve in Paradise, in their unspotted robes of innocence, engaged in propping the vine or trailing the rose of that holy garden, gave the eyes of angels a more interesting spectacle than this. What a contrast such a couple is to the pairs who are almost everywhere, who spend time calculating not what they can save from unnecessary expense to give to the cause of God and man, but what they can withhold from the claims of benevolence to lavish on fine furniture or luxuries in the home.

Many wives try to chill the fervor, limit the generosity, and restrict the charities of their husbands. Some incessantly complain that he is doing too much for others and too little for his own family. They drive the good man, even though he is lord of his own property, to exercise his liberality in secret. And what is often the objective of such women? Nothing more than ambitious pride or vain folly. They want to spend what they save from charity on dress, furniture, and parties.

Someone might ask whether it is proper for a wife to give away the property of her husband in acts of humanity or religious benevolence. This question should be unnecessary. No woman should be compelled to choose between doing nothing for God and man or doing what she can by stealth. Her husband should place a sufficient sum at her disposal to enable her to enjoy the luxury of doing good. Why should not she appear in her own name on the honorable list of benefactors, and shine forth in her personal and separate glory, instead of being always lost in the radiance of our recorded mercy? Why should she have no sphere of benevolent effort? Why should we monopolize to ourselves the blessings of those that are ready to perish?

It is a degrading of a married woman to give her no say in this matter, no liberty to share, no power to give, even in cases that are more appropriate for her as a woman. It is degrading to compel her to beg first from her husband what others have come to beg from her. If, however, she is unhappily united to a Nabal, a miser, whose mean, grasping, covetous character will give nothing for humanity or religion, may she then make up for her husband's deficiency and disburse his property without him knowing? I am strongly tempted to answer this question in the affirmative. The man solemnly uttered at marriage, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," which may invest the wife with joint ownership and the right of distribution. If in any instance we may deviate from the ordinary rule and take the man at his own word, it is in such a case as this.

But still, we must not sacrifice general principles to special cases; and, therefore, I say to every woman in such circumstances, obtain if you can a separate and fixed allowance for charitable distribution. If even this is not possible, obtain one for general personal expenses, and by a most rigid frugality save all you can from dress and decoration for the holy purpose of relieving people's misery.

## Mutual Sympathy

Sickness may call for this, and women seem naturally formed and inclined to give it.

*Oh woman, in our hours of ease,  
Uncertain, coy,<sup>6</sup> and hard to please,  
And variable as the shade  
By the light, quivering aspen made,*

---

<sup>6</sup> coy – modest; reserved.

*When pain and anguish wring the brow,  
A ministering angel thou!*

Unwilling, and, indeed, unable to agree with the first part of this description, I readily assent to the truth of the latter part. If we *could* do without her and be happy in health, what are we in sickness without her presence and tender care? Can a man smooth, as woman can, the pillow on which the sick man lays his head? No. We cannot administer the medicine or the food as she can. There is a softness in her touch, a lightness in her step, a skill in her arrangements, a sympathy looking down upon us from her beaming eye that ours lacks. Many a woman has won back to herself a man's cold and alienated heart by her devoted and kind attentions in a season of sickness, when neither her charms could hold him nor her claims recover him before.

I entreat you, therefore, married women, to put forth all your power to soothe and please in the season of your husband's sickness. Let him see you willingly sacrifice pleasure, ease, or sleep to minister to his comfort. Let there be a tenderness in your manner, a wakeful attention and sympathy in your look, a something that seems to say your only comfort in his affliction is to employ yourself in alleviating it. Listen with patience and kindness when he talks about his lighter, or even imaginary, woes.

But this sympathy is not exclusively the duty of the wife; it belongs equally to the husband. It is true, he cannot perform the same work for her that she can discharge for him; but much he *can* do, and all he can he *should* do. Her sicknesses are generally more numerous and heavy than his. She is likely, therefore, to make more frequent calls on his tender interest and attention. Many of her ailments are the consequence of becoming his wife. Maybe she was in full health until she became a mother. From that time she has never had a moment's perfect ease or strength again. The event that brought his heart the joy of being a parent took from her the comforts of health. Should he then look with discontent, indifference, or insensitivity on the delicate flower that, before he transplanted it to *his* garden, glowed in beauty and fragrance to everyone's admiration? Shall he *now* cease to look on this flower with any pleasure or sympathy, and seem as if he wished it gone to make room for another, forgetting that *he* was the one who sent the worm to the root and caused its head to droop and its colors to fade?

Husbands, I call upon you for all the skill and tenderness of love on behalf of your wives, if they are weak and sickly. Watch by their couch, talk with them, pray with them, wake with them. In all their afflictions,

be afflicted. Never listen inattentively to their complaints. Their imaginations can be unusually sensitive at such a season. And, oh, by all that is sacred in marital affection, I implore you to never give them cause to fear that the disease that destroyed their health has done the same for your affection. Avoid any hint of cold neglect, impatient expressions, or discontented looks. Oh, spare their bosom the agonizing pangs of disapproving that they are living to be a burden to your disappointed heart.

The man who denies his sympathy to a suffering woman, whose only sin is broken health and whose calamity is the result of her marriage, is unutterably cruel. I know of no name sufficiently emphatic for him. Such a man does the work of a murderer without his punishment, and sometimes without his reproach, but not always without his intent or his remorse.

But sympathy should be exercised by man and wife, not only in reference to their sicknesses, but to all their afflictions, whether personal or relational. They should share all their sorrows in common. Like two strings in unison, the chord of grief should never be struck in the heart of one without causing a corresponding vibration in the heart of the other. Like the surface of the lake reflecting heaven, it should be impossible for calmness and sunshine to be on one while the other is stormy. Heart should answer to heart, and face to face.

## CHAPTER 4

### SPECIAL DUTIES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

*“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord...Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”—Ephesians 5:22, 25*

#### The Husband’s Duty of Love

**I**N stating the duties especially required of the two parties in the marriage union, I shall begin with those of the husband. He is commanded to *love* his wife.

*Why love?*

As we have already shown that love is a duty of both parties, the question very naturally arises, “Why is it so especially required of the

husband?" Why is *he* so particularly bound to the exercise of affection? Perhaps for the following reasons:

1. Because he is naturally most in danger of failing in his duty. Placed by the Creator as the "head of the wife" (Eph 5:23) and invested with a certain right to govern his household, he is more in danger of losing his tender sensitivity in his stronger consciousness of superiority.

2. Because a husband tends to be more deficient in this duty than a wife. This has always been the case in pagan and Muslim countries. In heathen nations, especially, marital love has always been very weak. Probably even in the more civilized countries of Greece and Rome it was not so generally strong and steady as it has been made by Christianity. But without even going beyond the limits of Christendom, it may truly be said that husbands are usually more deficient in love than wives. Wives, in my opinion, excel husbands in tenderness, strength, and constancy of affection.

3. Because a lack of love in the man is likely to cause more misery to his partner [than a lack of love in her might cause to him]. A man can be more violent, more cruel, and more depraved. The lack of this tender love in him is likely to have a still worse effect on his own character and his wife's happiness than the lack of it in her. In either case, a lack of love is a terrible thing; but in him it is more dreadful for many reasons.

### *Christ's love a model*

The apostle lays down two models or rules for a husband's affection. The one is *the love Christ has shown for His church*, and the other is *the love a man has for himself*.

For the first, I will show the properties of Christ's love and show in what way our affection should be like His.

Christ's love was *sincere*. He did not love in word only but in deed and in truth. In Him there was no pretending, no endearing words from feigned lips, no actions varnished with the mere appearance of love. We must be like Him and keep real esteem for our spouse in our heart as well as a show of it in our actions. It is a miserable thing to have to act the part of love without feeling it. Hypocrisy is despicable in anything, but next to religion, it is most despicable in love. Besides, how difficult it is to act the part well and keep on the mask so as to escape detection! Oh, the misery of the woman's heart who at length finds out, to her cost, that what she received and valued as the attentions of a lover were only the tricks of a cunning deceiver!

The love of the Redeemer was *ardent*. If we would form a correct idea of what our hearts should be like toward the woman of our choice, let us think of the affection that glowed in the breast of the Savior when He lived and died for His people. It is true that we cannot have the same kind or degree of esteem. But surely, such an Example before us serves as a wonderful motive, if not altogether as a model. It teaches us that no weak affection is due or should be offered to the wife of our bosom. Our Savior Himself tells us that, if He laid down His life for us, it is our duty to lay down ours for the brethren. How much more for the “friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:24)! And if it is our duty to lay down our life, how much more to employ it while it lasts in all the duties of a strong, steady, and inventive affection. She has forsaken her comfortable home and the watchful care and warm embrace of her parents. She has a right to expect from our love for her what should make her “forget her father’s house” (see Psa 45:10) and cause her to feel that she is no loser by the exchange with respect to happiness. Happy the woman who can look back without a sigh upon the moment when she left forever the guardians, companions, and scenes of her childhood! Every husband should strive to make his wife such a happy woman.

The love of Christ to His church was *supreme*. He gives to the world His benevolence, but to the church His delight. “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee,” said the prophet, “is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zep 3:17). So must the husband regard his wife above all else; he must “rest in his love.” He should esteem her not only above all outside his home, but above everyone within it. She must take precedence, both in his heart and conduct, not only of all strangers, but of all relatives, and also of all his children. He ought to love his children for her sake, rather than her for theirs. Is this always the case? On the contrary, we have often seen men who appear far more interested in their children than in their wives. Men often pay far less attention to their wives than to grownup daughters. How especially inappropriate it is for a man to be fonder of the society of any other woman than that of his wife, even where nothing more may be intended than the pleasure of her company. Nor ought he to forsake her in his leisure hours for any of his male friends, however interesting might be their activities or their conversation.

The love of Christ is *uniform*. Like Himself, it is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). A husband’s love should have a uniform character. It should be the same at all times and in all places—the same at home as abroad, in other persons’ houses as in our own. Has not many

a wife to sigh and exclaim, “Oh, that I were treated in my own house with the same tenderness and attention as I receive in company”? With what almost loathing and disgust must such a woman turn from shows of affection that she can consider as nothing but hypocrisy because of the circumstances. Home is the primary place for fond and close attention. A wife who has plenty of attention at home will seldom feel the need or inclination to complain of a lack of it abroad—except for those silly women who would degrade their husbands by demanding not merely what is really kind but what is actually ridiculous.

The love of the Redeemer was *practical* and *laborious*. He provided everything by His mediation for the welfare and comfort of the church. He did all this at a cost and by exertions we can form no idea of. We have already mentioned that both parties are to assist in the cares of life. A good wife cannot be an idle one. Beautiful is her portrait drawn by the wise man: “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life...She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy...Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land...She openeth her mouth with wisdom: and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates” (Pro 31:10-31). This exquisite picture, combining as it does industry, prudence, dignity, meekness, wisdom, and piety, cannot be too frequently or carefully studied by those who would attain to high degrees of female excellence. The business of providing for the family, however, belongs chiefly to the husband. It is his responsibility to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of carefulness, and to drink, if necessary, the waters of affliction, that he may earn by the sweat of his brow comfortable support for the family circle. This is probably what the apostle meant when he commanded us to give *honor* to the wife as to the weaker vessel. It is the honor of support that she is not so well able to get for herself because of her bodily weakness and the frequent infirmities that being a mother brings.

In general, a family benefits most when a married woman devotes her time and attention almost exclusively to her household. Her place is in

the center of domestic cares. What is gained by her in the shop is often lost in the home for lack of her careful motherly management. Comfort and order are domestic wealth as well as money. Can these be reasonably expected in the absence of female management? The children always need a mother's eye and hand—and should always have them. Let the husband, then, have the care of providing, and let the wife have the care of distributing to the family's needs. This is the rule both of reason and revelation.

And as Christ labored for His church, not only during His abode upon earth, but made provision for its welfare when He departed from our world, in like manner should the husband take care of his wife. I never could understand the propriety of the common custom of men's providing in their wills more for the children than they do for the mother. Does this look like supreme love? It is indeed most cruel to leave a wife to be deprived at once of both her dearest earthly friend and her usual means of comfortable subsistence.

Practical love for a wife extends to everything. His love should show itself in the most careful attention to her comfort and her feelings. He should oblige her tastes, conceal her failings, never do anything to degrade her, but do everything to exalt her before her children and servants. He should acknowledge her excellences and commend her efforts to please him. He should meet and even anticipate all her reasonable requests. In short, he should do whatever ingenuity can invent for her happiness and general comfort.

Christ's love to His church was *durable* and *unchangeable*. "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end" (Joh 13:1) without lessening or change. So ought husbands to love their wives, not only at the beginning, but to the end of their union. Husbands must love their wives when beauty's charms have fled before the withering influence of disease, when the lively frame has lost its elasticity and the step has become slow and faltering, when the wrinkles of age have replaced the bloom of youth, and the whole person seems rather the monument than the resemblance of what it once was. Has she not gained in mind what she has lost in external charm? Have not her mental graces flourished amidst the ruins of personal attractiveness? If the rose and the lily have faded on the cheek, have not the fruits of righteousness grown in the soul? The blossoms that the eye of youthful passion gazed on with so much ardor have departed. Have they not given way to the ripe fruit of Christian excellence? The woman is not what she was, but the wife, the mother, the Christian are better than they were. For an example of married love in all its power and

excellence, do not point me to the bride and bridegroom, full of watchfulness and tenderness of affection during the first month of their marriage. Rather let me see a husband and wife in their fifties, whose love has been tested by the passing and changes of a quarter century, and who, through this period have grown in attachment and esteem. Their affection, if not glowing with all the heat of a midsummer's day, is still like the sunshine of an October noon, warm and beautiful, as reflected amidst autumnal tints.

*Love for himself a model*

But, before I leave my focus on the husband's special duty, I must address another rule for his love laid down for him by the apostle. "So ought men to love their wives *as their own bodies*. He that loveth his wife loveth himself" (Eph 5:28). A man's children are parts of himself. His wife *is* himself: "for they two shall be one flesh" (Eph 5:31). "This is his duty and the measure of it, too. This is so plain, that if he understands how he treats himself, nothing else needs to be added about his treatment of her. What mighty care does a man take of his body! He treats it with delicate tenderness, cares for it in all situations, watches to keep it from all evils, and studies to make fair provision for it. He is very often led by its inclinations and desires. He never contradicts its appetites except when they are evil, and then not without some trouble and sorrow!" So let a man love his wife as his own body.

Can it be necessary to apply the force of motives to produce appropriate attention to such a duty? If so, I appeal to your sense of honor. Husbands, remember the wakeful carefulness and the tender attention by which you won the affection and confidence of the woman who forsook her father, mother, and childhood home to find a resting place for her heart in your love. And will you falsify the vows you made to her and disappoint the hopes you raised in her? Is it a disgraceful stigma on a man's reputation to forfeit the pledges of a lover? Oh, how much more dishonorable to forget those of a husband! That man has disgraced himself who makes his life partner draw a sigh as she contrasts the affectionate attention she received as a lover with what she receives as a wife.

I urge you to love your wife because of *that solemn moment*, when, in the presence of heaven and earth, you committed yourself by the deeply serious formality of a kind of oath to throw open and keep open your heart as the fountain of her earthly happiness and to devote your whole life to her wellbeing.

I appeal to your respect for *justice*. You have sworn away yourself to her and are no longer your own. You have no right to that individual, separate, and independent way of life that would lead you to seek your happiness in opposition to hers or in neglect of hers. You twain are one flesh (Mat 19:5).

*Humanity* puts in its claim on behalf of your wife. It is in your power to do more for her happiness or misery than any other being in the universe but God Himself. An unkind husband is a first-class tormentor. His victim can never elude his grasp nor go beyond the reach of his cruelty till she is kindly released by the king of terrors. Death, in this instance, becomes to her an angel of light and conducts her to the grave as to a shelter from her oppressor. For such a woman there is no rest on earth. The destroyer of her peace has her always in his power, for she is always either in his presence or in the fear of being in his presence. The circumstances of every place and every day give him occasions for cruel neglect or unkindness. I doubt there is a case of greater misery on earth, except it be that of a wretch tortured by remorse and despair, than a woman whose heart daily withers under the cold looks, chilling words, and repulsive actions of a husband who loves her not. Such a man is a murderer, though he escapes in this world the murderer's doom. By a kind of refined cruelty, he spends years leading his victim to her end by the slow process of a lingering death.

If nothing else can prevail, *self-interest* should, for no man can hate his wife without hating himself, for she is "his own flesh" (Eph 5:29). Love, like mercy, is a double blessing; and hatred, like cruelty, is a double torment. When we love a worthy person, we rejoice in the reflected beams of our own affection. Supreme love to God is the affection that gives ultimate blessedness to the lover; when we exercise it, we hold communion with angels in the joys of heaven. Married love is next to it in the blessedness it gives. To transform this love into unkindness is to open a source of poison at the very center of our soul. Before it exudes to torture others, it torments us.

## The Wife's Duties

*Oh! blest with temper, whose unclouded ray  
Can make tomorrow cheerful as today;  
She, who never answers till a husband cools,  
Or, if she rules him, never shows she rules;  
Charms by accepting, by submitting sways;  
Yet has her humor most when she obeys.*

## *Subjection*

The first duty which I would mention is *subjection*. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Eph 5:22-24). The same thing is commanded also in Colossians. Peter unites with Paul in the same strain: “Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands” (1Pe 3:1). Before I state the kind of subjection here commanded, I must state the nature of the authority to which it yields.

The authority to which this subjection yields is such as is *compatible with religion* and the claims of God. No man has a right to require, and no woman is bound to obey, any command that opposes the letter or spirit of the Bible. It is such an authority as *agrees with sound reason*. Its requirements must all be reasonable. Surely it is too much to expect a wife to become the slave of folly any more than of cruelty. It is an authority that *agrees with the idea of companionship*. An ancient writer very beautifully observed that when Adam tried to shift the blame of his transgression to his wife, he did not say, “The woman thou gavest to me.” No such thing! She is none of his goods, none of his possessions. She is not to be reckoned among his servants. Rather, Adam said, “the woman thou gavest to be *with* me” (Gen 3:12), that is, to be my partner and companion in my joys and sorrows.

Let a husband’s authority be based on love, never exercised in opposition to revelation or reason, and regulated by the idea of companionship, and then there will be no need for particular rules for its guidance. For within such limits, it can never degenerate into tyranny, nor can it ever oppress its subjects. Any woman may bow to such a power without being degraded, for its yoke is easy and its burden light. In every society—from the family centered around the father’s chair to the nation whose wider rule rests on the throne—there must be precedence for its authority vested somewhere. Some ultimate authority, some last and highest court must exist from whose decision there can be no appeal.

In the family, this superiority rests on the husband. He is the head, the lawgiver, the ruler. In all matters regarding the little world in the house, he is to direct. He must not direct without taking his wife’s counsel, but in all disagreements, he is to decide, unless he chooses to waive his right. His wife should yield to his decision and yield with grace and cheerfulness. No man ought to resign his authority as the head of the family, and no woman ought to wish him to do it. He may give up his

preferences and yield to her wishes, but he must not abdicate the throne nor resign his scepter. Usurpation is always hateful; and it is one of the most offensive displays of it where the husband is degraded into a slave of the queen-mother. Such a woman looks contemptible even upon the throne.

I admit it is difficult for an intelligent woman to submit to an incompetent husband, but she should have thought about that before she united herself to him. Having committed one error, let her not fall into a second, but give the strongest proof of her good sense that circumstances will allow her to offer. She should concede to her husband's position of superiority, even though she has no opportunity to concede to any superiority of mind on his part. She may reason, she may persuade, she may ask, but if the ignorant man cannot be convinced, nor his obstinacy turned, nor his kindness won, she has no resource left but to *submit*. One of the finest scenes ever to be seen in a family is that of an intelligent woman employing her talents and graces, not to subvert, but to support the authority of a weak husband. Such a woman prompts, but does not command. She persuades, but does not dictate. She influences, but does not compel. She carefully conceals her gracious interference, and then submits to the authority which she has both supported and guided.

The opposite approach is very destructive. When the wife is constantly contrasting her superior judgment to her husband's weakness, he realizes something of his own defects. His consciousness of inferiority unites with his position as husband to give rise to jealousy, and he can become watchful and resentful of any interference with his right to exercise authority.

So, a wife must submit; and, where she cannot yield to superior talents, because there are none, she must concede to superiority of position. But husbands should be cautious not to severely test the submission of their wives. It is hard, very hard, to obey a rash, indiscreet and silly ruler. "If you will be the head, remember the head is not only the seat of government, but of knowledge. If you will have the management of the ship, see that a fool is not placed at the helm. Shall the blind offer themselves as guides?"

The *reasons* for submission are many and strong. Omitting all motives from the comparative strength of mind with which the two sexes may be gifted, I refer my female friends to less questionable matters. Look at the creation. Woman was made after the man, "for Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1Ti 2:13). She was made out of man, "for the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man" (1Co 11:8). She was made

for man; “neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man” (1Co 11:9). Look at the Fall. Woman occasioned it. “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1Ti 2:14). She was thus punished for it: “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen 3:16). Look at her history. Have not the customs of all nations, ancient and modern, savage and civilized, acknowledged her submission? Look at the light this subject is placed in in the New Testament. How strong is the language of the text: “The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church...Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Eph 5:23-24).

Let me then, my respected female friends—as you would submit to the authority of Christ, as you would adorn the place that Providence has called you to occupy, as you would promote your own peace, the comfort of your husband, and the welfare of your family—admonish you meekly and gracefully to be subject in all things, not only to the wise and good, but to the foolish and ill-deserving. You may reason, as I have said before. You may discuss. But you must not rebel or refuse. Let it be your glory to see how much you can endure, rather than despise the institutions of heaven or violate the commitment you voluntarily and solemnly entered. Let your submission be characterized by cheerfulness, and not by reluctant sullenness. Let it not be preceded by a struggle but yielded at once and forever. Let there be no holding out to the last extremity, and then a mere compulsory agreement. Rather give a voluntary, cheerful, undisputed, and unreserved yielding.

### *Reverence*

Reverence is another duty enjoined upon the wife. “Let...the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Eph 5:33). This duty is closely related to the last but is still somewhat different. By reverence, the apostle means nothing slavish or cringing, but that respect and submission which are due to one we are commanded to obey.

Your reverence will be evident in your *words*. For instance, in your manner of speaking about him, you will avoid what might lower him in the esteem of others. You will avoid all exposure of his faults or minor weaknesses, all depreciation of his understanding or domestic rule. Such gossip is detestable and mischievous. Can anything tend to irritate him more than to find out you have been sinking him in the esteem of the public? Reverence will be displayed in your manner of speaking to him. “Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1Pe 3:6). All flippant insolence, contemptuous consciousness of superiority, any bossiness,

unnecessary contradiction, obstinate argumentation, scolding accusation, angry and reproachful complaint, and clamorous arguing should be avoided.

Almost all domestic quarrels begin in words. And it is usually in a woman's power to prevent them by causing the law of kindness to dwell upon her lips. She can calm the gusts of her husband's passion by those soft answers which turn away wrath. She should be especially careful how she speaks to him, or in his presence, in the company of her family or of strangers. She must not talk him into silence, nor talk at him, nor say anything intended to wound or degrade him. A sting in public has a double dose of venom. She must not try to eclipse him, to get the attention of the company to herself, to reduce him to a valueless nothing till she stands before him. This is not reverence. On the contrary, she should do all in her power to sustain his respectability and dignity in public esteem. Her way of talking to him with both affectionate kindness and respectful submission is very important for this.

And should her husband at any time reprove her, even if it is causeless or unjustly severe, let her be careful not to forget her position and be led into abusive counter-accusation, contemptuous silence, or moody sullenness. I know it is difficult to show reverence and respect where the only reason for it rests on one's position. It is just as easy to pay respect where wisdom, dignity, and godliness support the claims of relationship. But in proportion to the difficulty of a virtuous action is its excellence; and indeed, she has superior virtue who yields to the position of her husband the reverence that his conduct forbids.

Her reverence will extend itself to her *actions* and lead to a constant desire to please him in all things. The apostle assumes as an indisputable and general fact "that the married woman careth...how she may please her husband" (1Co 7:34). All her conduct should be built upon this principle, to give him contentment and to increase his delight in her. Let her appear contented with her lot, and that will do much to help him be content with his. On the other hand, nothing is more likely to generate discontent in his heart than the appearance of discontent in her.

Let her diffuse an air of pleasantness through his home by cheerful good humor. Let her guard, as much as possible, against a gloomy and moody disposition that would make her move about with the silence and cloudiness of a ghost. Who likes to live in a haunted house? She should always welcome him at the door with a smile. She should always use all her ingenuity to please him, by consulting his wishes, by surprising him

occasionally with unlooked-for inventions of affection. Though small in themselves, these are the proofs of a mind intent on giving pleasure.

The greater acts of reverent and respectful love can seem as matters of course, and, as such, produce little impression. But the smaller acts of attention that come not into the usual routine of marriage duties and into the everyday expected responsibilities, these free-will offerings of an inventive and active affection, these extra tokens of respect and esteem have a mighty power to attach a husband to his wife. They are the cords of love, the bands of a man. In all her personal and family habits, her first care then, next to pleasing God, must be to please him, and thus hold to herself that heart that cannot wander from her without carrying her happiness with it—the heart that, once departed, cannot be restored by any power short of Omnipotence itself.

### *Meekness*

Meekness is especially mentioned by the apostle Peter as a disposition every wife has a duty to cultivate. He has distinguished and honored this quality by calling it “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit” (1Pe 3:4). Among virtues that preeminently suit the female character, meekness holds a high place. No one stands in greater need of this disposition than the female head of a family. Either the irritation and waywardness of children, or the neglect and misconduct of servants, or the sharp words of a husband are almost sure, if she is easily provoked, to keep her in a state of irritation all day long.

How trying is an irritable woman! How odious a brawling one! “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman” (Pro 21:19).

It is astonishing the influence which meekness has sometimes had in a family. It has quenched the sparks and even coals of anger and strife that, apart from the woman’s meekness, would have set the house on fire. It has mastered the tiger and the lion and led them captive with the silken thread of love.

The strength of woman lies not in resisting, but in yielding. Her power is in her gentleness. There is more of real defense, yes, and more of that aggressive operation, too, which disarms an enemy in one mild look, or one soft accent, than in hours of flashing glances and of angry tones. When, in the middle of a family quarrel, a woman has been enabled to keep her temper, the storm has been often scattered right as it began. Her meekness has served as a lightning rod to carry away the dreadful flashes that otherwise would have destroyed the dwelling.

## *Modesty*

Put on, then, “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.” Pay less attention to the decoration of the person, more to that of the mind. Your adorning is not to be “that outward adorning, of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But...the hidden man of the heart...which is not corruptible” (1Pe 3:3-4). The language of another apostle on this subject is no less striking. “In like manner, also, [I will] that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided<sup>7</sup> hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But, (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1Ti 2:9-10). Two apostles, who both wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, have declared that a taste for immodest, expensive, or highly decorative dress is improper and unsuitable for a profession of godliness.

Surely, then, the subject is worthy the most serious attention of all Christian women. One cannot explain away the letter, much more the spirit, of two such plain passages of holy Scripture. But that these passages are set aside is evident by the appearance of almost every congregation we could enter on the Sabbath day.

It is high time for Christian teachers to call back the women “professing godliness” from their wanderings in the regions of fashionable folly to the Holy Scriptures. Remember, in the Scripture is laid down a general law for regulating the dress of the body as well as that of the mind. I do believe, then, that these passages of Scripture are still part of God’s revelation. As such, they are still binding on the conscience. If not, show me when they were cancelled.

I argue that Christian females ought to abstain from expensive, showy, and extravagant fashions in dress, jewelry, and all kinds of unsuitable personal decoration. I am not arguing for a sectarian costume, a religious uniform, or shapes and colors prescribed by the church—nothing of the sort—but for simplicity, neatness, economy. I am arguing for what the apostle calls modest apparel, shamefacedness, and sobriety; for the spirit of the passages if not the very letter; for a distinction between those who profess godliness (in their comparative inattention to such things) and those who make no such profession; for a proof that their minds are not so much engaged on these matters as the minds of the people of the world are.

I am not for extinguishing good taste—alas, in matters of dress, this is already done! Rather, I am for resisting the lawless dominion of folly

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<sup>7</sup> **broided** – braided.

under the name of fashion. I am not for calling back the age of Gothic barbarism or vulgarity. No, I will leave ample room for cultivating both taste and genius in every lawful department. But I am protesting against the desolating reign of vanity. I am resisting the entrance of frivolity into the church of God. I am contending against the terrible inconsistency of making our religious assemblies look like the audience gathered in a theater.

The evils of an improper attention to dress are great and many:

1. Much precious time is wasted in its study, arrangements, and decisions.

2. Attention is taken off the improvement of the mind and the heart to the decoration of the body.

3. The mind is filled with pride and vanity, and the view of the true dignity of the soul is degraded.

4. The love of display infects the character.

5. Money is wasted that should have relieved misery and improved mankind's condition.

6. Examples are set for the lower classes, in whom the tendency is often damaging in many ways.

I am aware that some say that there can be the pride of personal distinctiveness, as well as of fashion; the pride of being covered with sober autumnal tints, as well as of displaying the bright colors of the rainbow; the pride of quality and of texture, as well as of color and of form. I know it, and I do not justify the one more than I do the other. I condemn all kinds. But, at any rate, there is a little more dignity in one kind than in another. I will leave room for the distinctions of rank, for the inventions of true taste, and for the modest and unobtrusive displays of natural elegance and simple beauty. But I cannot agree to the appropriateness of Christian females yielding themselves to be guided by fashion, however expensive, extravagant, or gaudy.

As to the fashion industry employing our artisans by the various changes of fashion, I have nothing to do with this in relation to the apostolic command. The silversmiths who made shrines for the worshippers of Diana might have pleaded the same objection against the preachers of the gospel, who certainly ruined their trade to some degree. I am only speaking to professors of godliness, who form such a small portion of society that their abstinence from folly would diminish the employment of work-people only a little. And if it did, let them make it up in some other way. What I am arguing for, then, is not meanness nor

uniform sameness, but neatness opposed to gaudiness, simplicity and comeliness to extravagance, modesty opposed to indecency, economy opposed to expensiveness.

Whether what I contend for is characteristic of the age in which we live, let any spectator determine. I am anxious to see professors of godliness displaying seriousness and spirituality, dignity and sobriety of mind, simplicity of habits, and calmness of manners appropriate for their high and holy profession. I want all this united with frugality in their personal expenses that will leave them more funds for relieving the miseries and promoting the happiness of their fellow man.

But, maybe, after all, some women may plead that the gayety and expensiveness of their dress is more to please their husbands than themselves. Even this must have its limits. And I really pity the folly of the man who concerns himself too much in the arrangement of his wife's wardrobe and makeup. He would rather see her go forth in gorgeous clothes to display herself to her fashionable friends, than, in dignified neatness, to visit the cottages of the poor as a messenger of mercy. He rejoices to contemplate her moving through the circles of fashion, the admiration of other men, and the envy of other women. Rather he should rejoice to see her holding to her radiant course in the orbit of benevolence, clothed in inexpensive simplicity, and, by saving from her personal expenses, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, healing the sick. Such a wife will bring upon herself the blessings of him who was ready to perish and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy.

Remember that both the clothing and the person it adorns are corruptible. Accidents may distort the finest form, diseases fade the loveliest coloring, time disfigure the smoothest surface, and death, the spoiler of beauty, works a change so awful and appalling as to turn away the most devoted admirers in disgust. How soon will every other dress be displaced by a shroud, and every other decoration be stripped off to make way for the flowers that are strewn in the coffin on the corpse as if to hide the deformity of death.

But graces of heart and beauties of character are imperishable. A wife must be continually seeking to put these on. "She who has a wise husband must entice him to an eternal dearness by the veil of modesty and the robes of chastity, the ornaments of meekness, and the jewels of faith and charity. She must have no paint but blushing. Her brightness must be her purity, and she must shine round about with sweetness and friendship. Then she shall be pleasant while she lives and desired when she dies."

### *Economy and order*

Economy and order in the management of her personal and family expenses are the obvious duty of a wife. You are to preside in the direction of household affairs; and much of the prosperity and comfort of the little community will depend upon your skillful and prudent arrangements. There is an obvious tendency in this age for all classes of society to come as close as possible to the habits of the classes above them. The poor are imitating the middle classes, and the middle are copying the upper ranks. A showy, luxurious, and expensive taste is almost universally cherished; it is displayed in countless instances where there are no means to support it.

A large house, a country residence, splendid furniture, a carriage, a retinue of servants, and large parties are the aim of many. Their creditors pay for all. Christian families are in most imminent danger of worldly conformity in the present day, and the line of demarcation between the church and the world is fast wearing out. It is true, Christians have no cards, do not frequent the theater or the ballroom, and perhaps they have no midnight parties. But this is all. Many Christians are as anxious about the splendor of their furniture, the fashion of their clothing, the expensiveness of their entertainments as the worst worldling can be.

Now a wife has great influence in restraining or promoting all this. Some think this increasing tendency for showiness can be attributed primarily to female vanity. Women generally are the masterminds of such a scene. The woman receives the praise and compliment for the whole, and she therefore is under the strongest temptation to promote it. But let her consider how little all this has to do with the happiness of the family, even in its most prosperous state. Let her consider that when a reverse takes place the memory of all this will increase the misery of adversity. When hard times come, it will be all the harder to be in debt for fine clothes or furniture, to have it said that her wastefulness helped to ruin her husband, to not have for bread what was formerly wasted on luxury. It will be painful then to hear the whispered reproach of having injured others by her own thoughtless expenses!

Dear women, avoid these miseries. Do not go on to prepare wormwood and gall to further embitter the already bitter cup of adversity. Endeavor to acquire skill in managing the home, the skill of frugality, prudence, love of order and neatness. Find a midway course between meanness and luxury, suitable to your station in life and to our Christian profession, an economy that spares more for God's cause and man's miseries. Rather restrain than stimulate your husband's taste for expense.

Tell him it is not necessary for your happiness, nor for the comfort of the family. Draw him away from these unnecessary things to the mental improvement, moral culture, and religious instruction of your children. Let knowledge, piety, good sense, well-formed habits, harmony, and mutual love be the sources of your family's pleasures. How do expensive furniture, dress, or entertainments compare to these?

### *Care for the children*

A wife should be very attentive to the children's welfare and comfort. For this purpose, she must be a *keeper at home*. "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home" (Ti 2:4-5). And how can the duties that rest on the female head of a family be well done if she is not a keeper at home? I have already emphasized this in a former chapter, but its importance will justify my return to the subject. She has so much to attend to, so many cares to sustain, and so many activities to support where there is a young family. Whoever has leisure for gossiping, she has none. Whoever may be found wandering from house to house, hearing or telling some new thing, she must not.

A mother's place is among her family. A mother's duty is to take care of them. Nothing can excuse a neglect of this, yet we often see such neglect. Some love books, and the welfare of the household is neglected for it. I would never debar a woman from the luxury of reading. Far from it. But her taste for literature must be kept within due bounds and not be allowed to interfere with her household duties. No husband can be pleased to see a book in his wife's hands while the house is in confusion and the children's comfort unprovided for. Much less should a love of company be allowed to draw a wife too much out of the circle of her care and duties. It is certainly disgraceful to be wandering from house to house in the morning or to be out at parties till a late hour evening after evening, while the family at home are left by themselves or with servants.

Even attention to the public duties of religion must be regulated by a due regard to the family's needs. I am aware that many make their family's needs an excuse for neglecting the public means of grace almost entirely. They do not frequent the house of God. Sermons, the Lord's Supper, and all other religious meetings are given up for an absorbing attention to household affairs. This is one extreme. But the other is an extreme devotedness to religious meetings, so that the needs of a sick family, the cries of a hungry infant, or the circumstances of some unusual case of family care are not allowed to detain a mother from a midweek sermon, a prayer meeting, or the anniversary of some public institution.

It is no honor to religion for a wife to be seen in the house of God at such a time. Duties cannot be set in opposition to each other. At such a time her duty lies at home. It must be always distressing and even disgusting for a husband to come home to a scene of confusion, where he sees a neglected child in the cot, and, when he asks about the mother, to be told that she is attending a sermon or public meeting. There is great need for watchfulness in the present age, when woman's involvement in society is in such demand, lest attention to public institutions should harmfully interfere with her duties as a wife and mother.

I know very well that an active woman may, by habits of order, punctuality, and diligence, so arrange her immediate duties at home as to allow sufficient time to assist the noble societies that solicit her patronage without neglecting her husband and children. But where this cannot be done, no society, whether human or religious, should be allowed to take her away from what is, after all, her first and more appropriate sphere. She must be a keeper at home if anything at home demands her presence.

Such appear to me to be the primary duties of a wife. High and sacred motives call for their diligent performance. Her own comfort and that of her husband depend on her fulfilling her obligations, and her children's welfare is also deeply involved. And then, her character shines forth more brightly. *A good wife* is a pinnacle of female excellence; it is woman in her brightest glory since the Fall.

### *Spiritual influence*

But there is another supremely important consideration, mentioned by the apostle, that I will direct your attention to: "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 of the wives, while they behold your chaste conversation, coupled with fear" (1Pe 3:1-2). Powerful and yet tender consideration! Notice, dear women, the implied commendation the apostle passes on you, where he seems to take it for granted that if one party is destitute of religion it would be the husband. Facts prove that this assumption was correct.

Religion flourishes most among the female part of humanity. In our churches, the greater number is of women. Can we account for this by natural causes? Partly. They are more at home, and, therefore, more within reach of the means of grace. They are more impressionable; they are less exposed to those temptations that harden the heart through the deceitfulness of sin. They are subject to more affliction that softens the heart and prepares it for the seed of the kingdom. But all this is not

enough, for without grace all these advantages are ineffective. We must explain it, therefore, by God's purposes, God's involvement, and the arrangement of God's wisdom.

Female influence in all civilized nations is great. And God has generally made much use of this, wherever the gospel has come, as one of the means for spreading true religion. He pours His grace on them that their influence may be useful to others, especially their husbands and their children. If then, in any case a Christian woman is united to an unconverted man, she must cherish and display a deep, tender, and careful concern for his salvation. "What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?" (1Co 7:16). I do not encourage unequal marriages. I would never tell a single woman to try the doubtful and dangerous experiment of marrying an irreligious man in the hope of converting him. The "conversion" usually goes the other way in such cases. But where a couple is already married, there, I say, nourish the concern and exert yourself in every way for his eternal welfare.

Many instances have occurred in which the unbelieving husband has been sanctified by the wife. She has drawn him with the cords of a tender and careful love to consider the subject of personal religion. Think of the value of his soul, and of the unspeakable glory of being the instrument of his salvation. Oh, to be the means of saving his soul! Think how it will strengthen the bond—sanctify and sweeten it—that unites you on earth and in time. At the same time it will add a tie that will ensure you shall "not lose one another in the valley of the shadow of death," but be reunited as kindred spirits (though not as man and wife) in heaven for all eternity.

Think, O wife, of the happiness and honor that await you. What is the triumph you have gotten over him by your charms compared with the victory you will have over him by your godly life? What pleasure will you experience all your days now that you are of "one heart and one mind," now that you "take sweet counsel *together*" (Psa 55:14)? The privileged language of prayer now is, "*Our* Father." Of every suggestion made to go and seek the Lord of Hosts there is a ready acceptance: "I will go also" (Zec 8:21). And what will be your joy and crown of rejoicing in that Day, when, before assembled men and angels, your husband will say, "Oh, blessed be the Providence which attached us in yonder world and has still more perfectly united us in this world! The woman thou gavest to be with me led me not to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but to the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

But how is this concern to be employed? The apostle tells us that they may “be won by the conversation of the wives; while they *behold* your chaste conversation coupled with fear” (1Pe 3:1-2). Your religion must be seen embodied in your whole character and conduct. It must commend itself as sincere to your husband’s judgment. It must be consistent. A lack of consistency, however earnest it may appear in many ways or at many times, will produce disgust. You must let your light shine before them, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify God (Mat 5:16). You must always appear clothed with all the beauty and living eloquence of a lovely example, even though your tongue may be silent.

Your religion must spread its brightness over your whole character and impress itself deeply on your relation as a wife and a mother. It must be a new motive to all that respect, reverence, devotion, and meekness that we have mentioned to you. It must lead you to carry every marital and maternal virtue to the highest degree of perfection. It must be attended with profound humility. If there is any spiritual pride, any conscious and manifest sense of superiority, anything approaching the pharisaic temper that says, “Stand by...I am holier than thou” (Isa 65:5), anything like contempt of your husband as an unconverted sinner, you will stir up in him a deep prejudice against both you and your religion. He will hate religion for your sake, and you for religion’s sake.

When you attempt to speak to him about spiritual things, it should be as remote as possible from all lecturing, arrogance, reproach, or conscious superiority. You must speak with all possible tenderness, meekness, humility, and persuasive affection. Never talk to him about his state in front of others, and never talk *at* him. Nor is wearying him by continual repetition likely to accomplish what you want. Many defeat their own purpose by incessantly bringing up the subject—sometimes with a harshness that increases his revulsion. By its own nature harshness tends to produce revulsion in such a mind. An occasional tender, respectful, and delicate hint is all that you should attempt, and then leave your example to speak. Occasionally, you may put an instructive volume in his way, and when an opportunity comes, ask him to give it a read.

Do not bring your religious friends around you so much that you annoy him. Especially, keep away as much as possible any that may have less discretion than the rest. Confine yourself to the wiser and best informed. Never rudely interfere with his pursuits, his reading, or his company, although they may not be what you can gladly approve. Until he is enlightened from above, he will not see the evil of these things, and

to attempt to interrupt him in any other way than by the mildest and most respectful reasoning will only do harm.

If he tries to draw you away from the high pursuit of eternal life, you must not, of course, yield to his persuasion. Do not concede in anything where your conscience is decidedly concerned in the matter. You must be firm, but mild. Your giving one concession would only lead to another. But still, even in an extreme case, you must resist his attempts to interfere with your religion with all the meekness of wisdom. Your resisting him must be attended with fresh efforts to please him in all things that are lawful. If your conduct brings his reproach, anger, and persecution on you (very painful but unfortunately common), you must possess your soul in patience and commit your way to Him Who judges righteously. Many a persecuting husband has been subdued, if not to conversion, yet to kinder conduct, by the meek and uncomplaining temper of his wife.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, let us all seek after more of the spirit of true Christianity—the spirit of faith, hope, and prayer. This is the spirit of faith that really believes the Word of God, looks habitually to the cross of Christ where we obtain salvation, and looks to the eternal world where we shall fully and forever enjoy that salvation. This is the spirit of hope that lives in the expectation and desire of glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life. This is the spirit of prayer that leads us daily and hourly to the throne of God’s grace for all the Holy Spirit’s help that we need, not only for the duties related to another world, but for those which rest on us in this world. “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8). The same principle of divine grace that unites us to God will bind us closer to each other.

Christianity contains in it not only the seeds of immortal virtues, but also of such as are mortal. It contains, not only the seeds of excellence that will flourish in heaven’s temple, but that grow up in our pilgrimage house on earth to enliven with their beauty and to refresh with their fragrance the domestic circle. A good Christian cannot be a bad husband

or father. Other things being equal, he who has most piety will shine most in all the relations of life.

A Bible placed between man and wife as the basis of their union, the rule of their conduct, and the model of their spirit will make up many a difference, comfort them under many a cross, guide them in many a difficulty where flesh and blood would be at a loss, support them in their last sad parting from each other, and reunite them in that happy world where they will go no more out.

“Those married couples who live remembering that they must part again and give an account how they treat themselves and each other will, at the day of their death, be admitted to glorious espousals. When they live again, they will be married to their Lord and partake of His glories. All that now pleases us will pass from us, or we from it. But the concerns of the other life are as permanent as the numbers of eternity; and although at the resurrection there will be no relation of husband and wife, and no marriage will be celebrated but the marriage of the Lamb, yet then will be remembered how men and women passed through this earthly life, which is a type of the eternal. From this sacramental union, all holy pairs shall pass to the spiritual and eternal union where love will be their portion, joys will crown their heads, and they will lie in the bosom of Jesus and in the heart of God to eternal ages.”

*Far, far beyond the reach of mortal ken,<sup>8</sup>  
No eye hath seen it, nor hath human pen  
Portrayed the glories of that world above,  
Whose very atmosphere is holy love!*

*There Christians, who in union dwell on earth,  
Heirs of its mansions by celestial birth,  
In blest society shall meet and blend  
In love and fellowship that never end.*

*Oh, 'twill be passing sweet, to meet the friend  
We loved on earth, and there together bend  
Before the throne eternal, and rehearse  
Its untold glories in exalted verse.*

*To walk in company the golden streets,  
To sit, but not apart, on shining seats;  
To trace the beauties of each dazzling gem,  
Or pluck the fruit of some unfading stem!  
To sip the waters of the sparkling fount,  
To crop the flowers that deck the holy mount,*

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<sup>8</sup> ken – knowledge.

*To breathe the fragrance of the balmy gale,  
Or on the crystal river spread the sail!  
But most to adore the wonders of His grace,  
To see the unveiled splendors of His face,  
Who bought us with a price immense, unknown,  
And raised us from a prison to a throne!*

