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MARRIAGE

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THE EXCELLENCE OF MARRIAGE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

*“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge”—
Hebrews 13:4.*

AS God hath knit the bones and sinews together for the strength-ening of our bodies, so He has ordained the joining of man and woman together in wedlock for the strengthening of their lives, for “two are better than one” (Ecc 4:9). Therefore, when God made the woman for the man, He said, “I will make him a help meet for him” (Gen 2:18), showing that man is advantaged by having a wife. That such does not actually prove to be the case in all instances is, for the most part at least, to be attributed unto departure from the Divine precepts thereon. As this is a subject of such vital moment, we deem it expedient to present a fairly comprehensive outline of the teaching of Holy Writ upon it, especially for the benefit of our young readers, though we trust we shall be enabled to include that which will be helpful to older ones too.

It is perhaps a trite¹ remark, yet nonetheless weighty for having been uttered so often, that with the one exception of personal conversion, *marriage is the most momentous of all earthly events in the life of a man or woman.* It

¹ trite – lacking interest because of overuse.

forms a bond of union that binds them until death. It brings them into such intimate relations that they must either sweeten or embitter each other's existence. It entails circumstances and consequences that are not less far-reaching than the endless ages of eternity. How essential it is then that we should have the blessing of Heaven upon such a solemn yet precious undertaking; and in order to this, how absolutely necessary it is that we be subject to God and to His Word thereon. Far, far better to remain single unto the end of our days, than to enter into the marriage state without the Divine benediction² upon it. The records of history and the facts of observation bear abundant testimony to the truth of that remark.

Even those who look no further than the temporal happiness of individuals and the welfare of existing society are not insensible to the great importance of our domestic relations, which the strongest affections of nature secure, and which even our wants and weaknesses cement. We can form no conception of social virtue or felicity,³ yea, no conception of human society itself, which has not its foundation in the family. No matter how excellent the constitution and laws of a country may be, or how vast its resources and prosperity, there is no sure basis for social order or public as well as private virtue, until it be laid in the wise regulation of its families. After all, a nation is but the aggregate⁴ of its families, and unless there be good husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, there cannot possibly be good citizens. Therefore, the present decay of home life and family discipline threaten the stability of our nation today far more severely than does any foreign hostility.

But the Scriptural view of the relative duties of the members of a Christian household portrays the prevailing effects in a most alarming manner, as being dishonoring to God, disastrous to the spiritual condition of the churches, and as raising up a most serious obstacle in the way of evangelical progress. Sad beyond words is it to see that professing Christians are themselves largely responsible for the lowering of marital standards, the general disregard of domestic relations, and the rapid disappearance of family discipline. As, then, marriage is the basis of the home or family, it is incumbent⁵ on the writer to summon his readers to a serious and prayerful consideration of the revealed will of God on this vital theme. Though we can hardly hope to arrest the awful disease that is now eating out the very vitals of our nation, yet if God is pleased to bless this article to a few individuals, our labor will not be in vain.

We will begin by pointing out the excellency of wedlock: "Marriage is honourable," says our text, and it is so first of all because God Himself has placed special honor upon it. All other ordinances or institutions (except the Sabbath) were appointed of God by the medium of men or angels (Act 7:35), but marriage was ordained immediately by the Lord Himself—no man or angel brought the first wife to her husband (Gen 2:19). Thus, marriage had more Divine honor put upon it than had all the other Divine institutions because it was directly solemnized by God Himself. Again, this was the first ordinance God instituted, yea, the first thing He did after man and woman were created, and that, while they were still in their unfallen state. Moreover, the *place* where their marriage occurred shows the honorableness of this institution: whereas all other institutions (save the Sabbath) were instituted outside of paradise, marriage was solemnized in Eden itself!—intimating how happy they are that marry in the Lord.

"God's crowning creative act was the making of woman. At the close of each creative day, it is formally recorded that God saw what He had made, that it was good (Gen 1:31). But when Adam was made, it is explicitly recorded that God saw it was not good that the man should be alone (Gen 2:18). As to man, the creative work lacked completeness, until, as all animals and even plants had their mates, there should be found for Adam also a help, meet⁶ for him—his counterpart and companion. Not until this want⁷ was met did God see the work of the last creative day also to be good.

"This is the first great Scripture lesson on family life, and it should be well learned...The Divine institution of marriage teaches that the ideal state of both man and woman is not in separation but in union, that each is meant and fitted for the other. God's ideal is such union, based on a pure and holy love, enduring for life, exclusive of all

² **benediction** – blessing.

³ **felicity** – happiness; state of well-being.

⁴ **aggregate** – sum total.

⁵ **incumbent** – necessary as an obligation or duty.

⁶ **meet** – suitable; fitting.

⁷ **want** – lack; need.

rivalry or other partnership, and incapable of alienation or unfaithfulness because *it is a union in the Lord*—a holy wedlock of soul and spirit in mutual sympathy and affection.”⁸

As God the Father honored the institution of marriage, so also did God the Son. *First*, by His being “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4). *Second*, by His miracles, for the first supernatural sign that He wrought was at the marriage of Cana in Galilee (Joh 2:8), where He turned the water into wine, thereby intimating that if Christ be present at your wedding (i.e., if you “marry in the Lord”) your life shall be a joyous or blessed one. *Third*, by His parables, for He compared the kingdom of God unto a marriage (Mat 22:2) and holiness to a “wedding garment” (Mat 22:11). So also in His teaching: when the Pharisees sought to ensnare Him on the subject of divorce, He set His imprimatur⁹ on the original constitution, adding “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mat 19:4–6).

The institution of marriage has been still further honored by the Holy Spirit: For He has used it¹⁰ as a figure of the union which exists between Christ and the church: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph 5:31, 32). The relation, which obtains between the Redeemer and the redeemed, is likened again and again unto that which exists between a wedded man and woman: Christ is the “Husband” (Isa 54:5), the church is the “Wife” (Rev 21:9). “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you” (Jer 3:14). Thus, each person of the blessed Trinity has set His seal upon the honorableness of the marriage state.

There is no doubt that in true marriage, each party helps the other equally; and in view of what has been pointed out above, any who venture to hold or teach any other doctrine or philosophy join issue with the Most High. This does not lay down a hard and fast rule that every man and woman is obliged to enter into matrimony: there may be good and wise reasons for abiding alone [and] adequate motives for remaining in the single state—physical and moral, domestic and social. Nevertheless, a single life should be regarded as...exceptional, rather than ideal. Any teaching that leads men and women to think of the marriage bond as the sign of bondage and the sacrifice of all independence [or] to construe wifeness and motherhood as drudgery¹¹ and interference with woman’s higher destiny, any public sentiment [that cultivates] celibacy as more desirable and honorable or [that substitutes] anything else for marriage and home not only invades God’s ordinance, but opens the door to nameless crimes and threatens the very foundations of society.

NOW IT IS CLEAR THAT MARRIAGE MUST HAVE PARTICULAR REASONS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF IT. Three are given in Scripture:

First, for the propagation of¹² children: This is its obvious and normal purpose. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen 1:27)—not both males or both females, but one male and one female. To make the design of this unmistakably plain, God said, “Be fruitful and multiply” (1:28). For this reason, marriage is called “matrimony,” which signifies *motherage* because it results in virgins becoming mothers. Therefore, it is desirable that marriage be entered into at an early age, before the prime of life be passed: twice in Scripture we read of “the wife of thy youth” (Pro 5:18; Mal 2:15). We have pointed out that the propagation of children is the “normal” end of marriage; yet there are special seasons of acute “distress” when 1 Corinthians 7:29 holds good.

Second, marriage is designed as a preventive of immorality: “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1Co 7:2). If any were exempted, it might be supposed that kings would be given dispensation¹³ because of the lack of a successor to the throne should his wife be barren; yet the king is expressly forbidden a plurality of wives (Deu 17:17), showing that the endangering of a monarchy is not sufficient to countervail¹⁴ the sin of adultery. For this cause, a whore is termed a “strange woman”

⁸ Arthur Tappan Pierson (1837-1911) – American pastor and writer.

⁹ *imprimatur* – official approval.

¹⁰ The author here refers to the Spirit’s use of the relation of husband and wife as a *type* or figure of Christ and the church in Holy Scripture. In this way He honors marriage.

¹¹ *drudgery* – dull, distasteful work.

¹² *propagation of* – the act of producing.

¹³ *dispensation* – exemption from the rule.

¹⁴ *countervail* – offset the effect of.

(Pro 2:16), showing that she should be a stranger to us; and children born out of marriage are called “bastards,” which under the Law were excluded from the congregation of the Lord (Deu 23:2).

The third purpose of marriage is for the avoiding of the inconveniences of solitude: [This is] signified in the “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18), as though the Lord had said, “This life would be irksome¹⁵ and miserable for man if no wife be given him for a companion.” “Woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up” (Ecc 4:10). Someone has said, “Like a turtle which has lost his mate, like one leg when the other is cut off, like one wing when the other is clipped, so had man been if woman had not been given to him.” Therefore, for mutual society and comfort, God united man and woman that the cares and fears of this life might be eased by the cheer and help of each other.

LET US NEXT CONSIDER THE CHOICE OF OUR MATE. *First, the one selected for our life’s partner must be outside those degrees of near kinship prohibited by the Divine law (Lev 18:6–17).*

Second, the Christian must wed a fellow Christian. From earliest times, God has commanded that “the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be numbered among the nations” (Num 23:9). His law unto Israel in connection with the Canaanites was, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deu 7:3 and *cf.* Jos 23:12). How much more, then, must God require the separation of those who are His people by a spiritual and heavenly tie than those who occupied only a fleshly and earthly relation to Him. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2Co 6:14)...

There are but two families in this world: the children of God and the children of the devil (1Jo 3:10). If then a daughter of God marries a son of the evil one, she becomes a daughter-in-law to Satan! If a son of God marries a daughter of Satan, he becomes a son-in-law to the devil! By such an infamous step, an affinity is formed between one belonging to the most High and one belonging to His arch-enemy. “Strong language!” Yes, but not too strong. O the dishonor done to Christ by such a union! O the bitter reaping from such a sowing! In every case, it is the poor believer who suffers...As well might an athlete attach to himself a heavy weight and then expect to win a race, as for one to progress spiritually after marrying a worldling.¹⁶

Should any Christian reader be inclined or expect to become betrothed,¹⁷ the first question for him or her to carefully weigh in the Lord’s presence is will this union be with an unbeliever? For if you are really cognizant¹⁸ of and heart and soul be impressed with the tremendous difference which God, in His grace, has put between you and those who are—however attractive in the flesh—yet in their sins, then you should have no difficulty in rejecting every suggestion and proposal of making common cause with such. You are “the righteousness of God” in Christ, but unbelievers are “unrighteous.” You are “light in the Lord,” but they are darkness. You have been translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, but unbelievers are under the power of Belial. You are a son of peace, whereas all unbelievers are “children of wrath.” Therefore, “Be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2Co 6:17).

The danger of forming such an alliance is *before* marriage or even betrothal, neither of which could be seriously entertained by any real Christian unless the sweetness of fellowship with the Lord had been lost. The affections must first be withdrawn from Christ before we can find delight in social intimacy with those who are alienated from God, and whose interests are confined to this world. The child of God who is keeping his heart with all diligence (Pro 4:23) will not, *cannot* have a joy in intimacies with the unregenerate. *Alas, how often is the seeking or the accepting of close friendship with unbelievers the first step to open departure from Christ.* The path that the Christian is called upon to tread is indeed a narrow one; but if he attempts to widen it or leave it for a broader road, it must be in contravention¹⁹ of the Word of God and to his or her own irreparable damage and loss.

Third, “married...only in the Lord” (1Co 7:39) goes much further than prohibiting an unbeliever for a mate. Even among the children of God there are many who would not be suitable to each other in such a tie. A pretty face is an attraction, but O how vain to be governed in such a serious undertaking by such a trifle. Earthly goods and social

¹⁵ **irksome** – troublesome; tedious.

¹⁶ **worldling** – a person more interested in material things rather than spiritual matters.

¹⁷ **betrothed** – engaged or pledged to be married.

¹⁸ **cognizant** – aware.

¹⁹ **contravention** – violation.

position have their value here, yet how base and degrading to suffer them to control such a solemn undertaking. O what watchfulness and prayerfulness is needed in the regulation of our affections! Who fully understands the temperament that will match mine, that will be able to bear patiently with my faults, be a corrective to my tendencies, and a real help in my desire to live for Christ in this world? How many make a fair show at the start, but turn out wretchedly! Who can shield me from a host of evils that beset the unwary, but God my Father?

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband” (Pro 12:4): a pious and competent wife is the most valuable of all God’s temporal blessings; she is the special gift of His grace. “A prudent wife is from the Lord” (Pro 19:14), and He requires to be definitely and diligently sought unto (see Gen 24:12). It is not sufficient to have the approval of trusted friends and parents, valuable and even needful as that (generally) is for our happiness: for though they are concerned for our welfare, yet their wisdom is not sufficiently far-reaching. The One who appointed the ordinance must needs be given the first place in it if we are to have His blessing on it. Now prayer is never intended to be a substitute for the proper discharge of our responsibilities: we are ever required to use care and discretion and must never act hurriedly and rashly...

“Whoso findeth a wife (a real one) findeth a good thing, and obtained favour of the Lord” (Pro 18:22). “Findeth” implies a definite quest. To direct us therein, the Holy Spirit has supplied two rules or qualifications. First, *godliness*, because our partner must be like Christ’s spouse, pure and holy. Second, *fitness*, “a help, meet for him” (Gen 2:18), showing that a wife cannot be a “help” unless she be “meet,” and for that she must have much in common with her mate. If her husband be a laboring man, it would be madness for him to choose a lazy woman; if he be a learned man, a woman with no love of knowledge would be quite unsuited. Marriage is called a “yoke,” and two cannot pull together if all the burden is to fall upon one—as it would if one weak and sickly was the partner chosen.

Now for the benefit of our younger readers, let us point out some of the marks by which a godly and fit mate may be identified. First, *the reputation*: a good man commonly has a good name (Pro 22:1). None can accuse him of open sins. Second, *the countenance*: our looks reveal our characters, and therefore Scripture speaks of “proud looks” and “wanton looks”—“the show of their countenance doth witness against them” (Isa 3:9). Third, *the speech*: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34). “The heart of the wise teach-eth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips” (Pro 16:23). “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Pro 31:26). Fourth, *the apparel*: a modest woman is known by the modesty of her attire. If the clothing be vulgar or showy, the heart is vain. Fifth, *the company kept*: birds of a feather flock together—a person may be known by his or her associates.

A word of warning is, perhaps, not quite needless. No matter how carefully and prayerfully one’s partner be selected, he will not find marriage a perfect thing. Not that God did not make it perfect, but man has fallen since, and the fall has marred everything. The apple may still be sweet, but it has a worm inside. The rose has not lost its fragrance, but thorns grow with it. Willingly or unwillingly, everywhere we must read the ruin which sin has brought in. Then let us not dream of those faultless people that a diseased fancy²⁰ can picture and novelists portray. The most godly men and women have their failings; and though such be easy to bear when there is genuine love, yet they have to be borne.

A few brief remarks now on the home-life of the wedded couple. Light and help will be obtained here if it be borne in mind that marriage pictures forth the relation between Christ and His church. This, then, involves three things.

First, the attitude and actions of husband and wife are to be regulated by love. That is the cementing tie between [the] Lord Jesus and His spouse: a holy love, sacrificial love, an enduring love which naught can sever. There is nothing like love to make the wheels of home life run smoothly. The husband sustains to his mate the same relation as does the Redeemer to the redeemed, and hence the exhortation, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church” (Eph 5:25): with a hearty and constant love, ever seeking her good, ministering to her needs, protecting and providing for her, bearing with her infirmities, thus “giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (1Pe 3:7).

²⁰ fancy – imagination.

Second, the headship of the husband. “The head of the woman is the man” (1Co 11:3). “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church” (Eph 5:23). Unless this Divine appointment be duly heeded, there is sure to be confusion. The household must have a leader, and God has committed its rule unto the husband, holding him responsible for its orderly management. Serious will be the loss if he shirks his duty and turns the reins of government over to his wife. But this does not mean that Scripture gives him license to be a domestic tyrant, treating his wife as a servant: his dominion is to be exercised in love toward the one who is his consort. “Likewise ye husbands dwell with them” (1Pe 3:7): seek their society after the day’s labor is over...

Third, the subjection of the wife. “Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Eph 5:22). There is only one exception to be made in the application of this rule, namely when he commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands. “For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands” (1Pe 3:5). Alas, how little of this spiritual “adornment” is evident today! “Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement” (1Pe 3:6). Willing and loving subjection to the husband out of respect for the authority of God is what characterizes the daughters of Sarah. Where the wife refuses to submit to her husband, the children are sure to defy their parents—sow the wind, reap the whirlwind...

From “Marriage 13:4” in *An Exposition of Hebrews*.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author of *Studies in the Scriptures*, *The Sovereignty of God* (both reprinted by and available from Chapel Library), and numerous others. Born in Great Britain, immigrated to the U.S., and later returned to his homeland in 1934. Born in Nottingham, England.

MUTUAL DUTIES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES

John Angell James (1785-1859)

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

MARRIAGE is the foundation of the domestic constitution.²¹ This, says the Apostle, “is honourable in all” (Heb 13:4); and he has condemned as a “doctrine of devils” the opinions of those by whom it is forbidden (1Ti 4:1). It is an institute of God, it was established in Eden, [and it] was honored by the personal attendance of Christ and furnished an occasion for the first of that splendid series of miracles by which He proved Himself to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world...Distinguishing, as it does, man from brutes; providing not only for the *continuance*, but for the *comfort* of our species; containing at once the source of human happiness and of all those virtuous emotions and generous sensibilities that refine and adorn the character of man, it can never as a general subject be guarded with too much solicitous²² vigilance, nor be contracted, in particular instances, with too much prudence and care...My first object will be to state those duties which are common to both husband and wife:

1. The first that I mention and that is the ground of all the rest is love: Let this be wanting,²³ and marriage is degraded at once into a brutal or a sordid compact. This duty, which...is especially enjoined on the husband, belongs equally to the wife. It must be mutual, or there can be no happiness. None for the party that does *not* love: For how dreadful the idea of being chained for life to an individual for whom we have no affection, to be almost ever in the company of a person from whom we are driven back by revulsion, yet driven back upon a bond that prevents all separation and escape. Nor can there be any happiness for the party that *does* love: Such an

²¹ **domestic constitution** – household arrangement; family structure.

²² **solicitous** – extremely careful or attentive.

²³ **wanting** – lacking.

unrequited²⁴ affection must soon expire or live only to consume that wretched heart in which it burns. *A married couple without mutual regard is one of the most pitiable spectacles on earth.* They cannot, and indeed in ordinary circumstances, ought not to separate; yet they remain united only to be a torment to each other. They serve one important purpose, however, in the history of mankind: that is to be a beacon to all who are yet disengaged, to warn them against the sin and folly of forming this union upon any other basis than that of a pure and mutual attachment, and to admonish all that are united to watch with most assiduous²⁵ vigilance their mutual regard, 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 attachments. 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. And it is of prodigious²⁶ consequence, that when little defects are first noticed and trivial faults and oppositions first occur, they should not be allowed to produce an unfavorable impression upon the mind.

If they would preserve love, let them be sure to study most accurately each other's tastes and distastes, and most anxiously abstain from whatever, even in the minutest things, they know to be contrary to [their tastes]...If they would preserve love, let them most carefully avoid all curious and frequently repeated distinctions of MINE and THINE: for this hath caused all the laws, all the suits, and all the wars in the world...

2. MUTUAL RESPECT IS A DUTY OF MARRIED LIFE: For though, as we shall afterwards consider, especial reverence is due from the wife, yet is respect due from the husband also. As it is difficult to respect those who are not entitled to it on any other ground than superior rank or common relationship, it is of immense consequence that we should present to each other that conduct which deserves respect and commands it. Moral esteem is one of the firmest supports and strongest guards of love, and a high degree of excellence cannot fail to produce such esteem. We are more accurately known to each other in this connection than either to the world or even to our own servants and children. The privacies of such a relationship lay open our motives and all the interior of our character, so that we are better known to each other than we are to ourselves. If therefore we would be re-spected, *we should be respectable.* Charity covers a multitude of faults, it is true. But we must not presume too far upon the credulity²⁷ and blindness of affection: there is a point beyond which even love cannot be blind to the crimson coloring of a guilty action. Every piece of real sinful conduct, the impropriety of which cannot be mistaken, tends to sink us in each other's esteem, and thus to remove the safeguards of affection...In all the conduct of the conjugal²⁸ state then, there should be the most marked and unvarying mutual respect even in little things. There must be no searching after faults, no examining with microscopic scrutiny such as cannot be concealed, no reproachful epithets,²⁹ no rude contempt, no incivility,³⁰ no cold neglect. There should be courtesy without ceremony, politeness without formality, attention without slavery. *In short, it should be the tenderness of love, supported by esteem, and guided by politeness.* Then, we must maintain our mutual respectability before others...It is in the highest degree improper for either party to do an action, to say a word, or [to] assume a look that shall have the remotest tendency to lower the other in public esteem.

3. 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 the wife according to knowledge (1Pe 3:7). "This," says Mr. Jay,³¹ "intends nothing less than residence, opposed to absence and roving. It is absurd for those who have no prospect of dwelling together to enter this state, and those who are already in it should not be unnecessarily abroad. Circumstances of various kinds will doubtless render occasional excursions unavoidable, but let a man return as soon as the design 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 while from home discharge the duties he owes to his household?"

²⁴ **unrequited** – not returned in the same way; one-sided.

²⁵ **assiduous** – attentive.

²⁶ **prodigious** – enormous.

²⁷ **credulity** – gullibility; disposition of being too ready to believe.

²⁸ **conjugal** – relating to the marriage; marital.

²⁹ **reproachful epithets** – critical or blameful abusive words or phrases.

³⁰ **incivility** – rudeness; impolite behavior or language.

³¹ **William Jay** (1769-1853) – English Nonconformist theologian and author.

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 devotion in the absence of the husband; and she should take it up as a cross, if not for the time as a privilege. Few, however, are thus disposed, and hence *one of the sanctuaries of God* for weeks and months together is shut up. I am sorry to say that there are some husbands who seem fonder of *any* society than the company of their wives. It appears in the disposal of their leisure hours. How few of these are appropriated to the wife! The evenings are the most domestic periods of the day. *To these the wife is peculiarly entitled*: 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 abroad. It implies something bad, and it predicts something worse.”

To insure as far as possible the society of her husband at his own fireside, let the wife be a keeper at home (Tit 2:5) and do all in her power to render that fireside as attractive as good temper, neatness, and cheerful, affectionate conversation can make it. Let her strive to make his own home the soft green³² on which his heart loves to repose in the sunshine of domestic enjoyment...

United to be associates then, let man and wife be as much in each other's society as possible. There must be something wrong in domestic life when they need the aid of balls, routes,³³ plays, card parties to relieve them from the tedium produced by home pursuits. I thank God, I am a stranger to that taste that leads a man to flee from his own comfortable parlor and the society of his wife, from the instruction and recreation contained in a well-stored library, or from the evening rural walk when the business of the day is over to scenes of public amusement for enjoyment. To my judgment, the pleasures of home and of home society, when home and home society are all that could be desired, are such as never cloy³⁴ and need no change, but from one kindred scene to another. I am sighing and longing, perhaps in vain, for a period when society shall be so elevated and so 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 generally diffused that men's homes will be the seat and circle of their pleasures; when in the society of an affectionate and intelligent wife and of well educated children, each will find his greatest earthly delight; and when it will be felt to be no more necessary to happiness to quit their own fireside for the ballroom, the concert, or the theatre, than it is to go from the well-spread table to the public feast to satisfy the cravings of a healthy appetite. *Then* will it be no longer imposed upon us to prove that public amusements are improper, for they will be found to be unnecessary...

4. MUTUAL FORBEARANCE IS ANOTHER DUTY: This we owe to all, not excepting the stranger or an enemy. And most certainly it must not be denied to our nearest friend. For the charity that “suffreth long and is kind; [that] envieth not; [that] vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; [that] 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; [that] beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1Co 13:4-7), for *this* charity there is both need and room in every relation of life. Wherever sin or imperfection exists, there is scope for the forbearance of love. There is no perfection upon earth. Lovers, it is true, often fancy they have found it; but the more sober judgment of husbands and wives generally corrects the mistake. First impressions of this kind usually pass away with first love. We should all enter the married state, *remembering that we are about to be united to a fallen creature...* Affection does not forbid but actually demands that we should mutually point out our faults. But this should be done in all the meekness of wisdom, united with all the tenderness of love, lest we only increase the evil we intend to remove or substitute a greater one in its place...

5. MUTUAL ASSISTANCE IS THE DUTY OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES: This applies to the cares of life...The husband should never undertake anything of importance without communicating the matter to his wife, who, on her part, instead of shrinking from the responsibility of a counsellor and leaving him to struggle alone with his difficulties and perplexities, should invite him to communicate freely all his anxieties. For 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 be 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, under the idea of delicacy to their wives, keep all their difficulties to themselves, which only prepares them to feel the stroke the heavier when it does come.

³² **green** – a grassy ground or spot.

³³ **routes** – fashionable gatherings; large evening parties.

³⁴ **cloy** – cause disgust by overloading with something that was pleasant at first.

And 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 domestic economy. They keep the money and dole it out as if they were parting with their life's blood, grudging every shilling³⁵ 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 despoil a woman of her authority, to thrust her 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, hardworking, 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 in solitude, while the husbands, instead of coming home to cheer them by their society or to relieve them of only half an hour of their fatigue, have been either at a party or a sermon. And then have these hapless³⁶ women had to wake and watch the livelong night over a sick or restless babe, while the men whom they accepted as the partner of their sorrows were sleeping by their side, unwilling to give a single hour of their slumber, though it was to allow a little repose to their toil-worn wives. *Why, even the irrational creatures shame such men.* For it is a well-known fact that the male bird takes his turn upon the nest during the season of incubation to allow the female time to renew her strength by food and rest and with her also goes in diligent quest of food and feeds the young ones when they cry. *No man should think of marrying who does not stand prepared to share, as far as he can do it with his wife, the burden of domestic cares.*

They should be helpful to each other in the concerns of personal religion. This is clearly implied in the Apostle's language: "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 both parties are unconverted or only one of them is yet a partaker of true piety, there should be the most anxious, judicious, and affectionate efforts for their salvation. How heathenish a state is it to enjoy together the comforts of marriage and then travel in company to eternal perdition; to be mutual comforters on earth, and then mutual tormentors in Hell; to be companions in felicity in time, and companions in torment through eternity! And where both parties are real Christians, there should be the exercise of a constant reciprocal solicitude,³⁷ watchfulness, and care in reference to their spiritual and eternal welfare... Do we converse with each other, as we ought, on the high themes of redemption by Christ and eternal salvation? Do we study each other's dispositions, snares, troubles, and decays in piety that we may apply suitable remedies? Do we exhort one another daily, lest we should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin? Do we practice fidelity without censoriousness³⁸ and administer praise without flattery? Do we invite one another to the most quickening and edifying means of grace of a public nature and recommend the perusal of such instructive and improving books as we have found beneficial to ourselves? Do we mutually lay open the state of our minds on the subject of personal religion and state our perplexities, our joys, our fears, our sorrows? Alas, alas! Who must not blush at their neglects in these particulars? *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 connubial³⁹ affection?

This mutual help should extend to the maintenance of all the habits of domestic 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 that relates to these important objects, the wife is to be of one mind with him.* They are in these matters to be workers together, neither of them leaving the other to labor alone, much less opposing or thwarting what is done... A lovelier scene is not to be found on earth than that of a pious couple, employing their mutual influence and the hours of their retired companionship in stirring up each other's hearts to deeds of mercy and religious benevolence. Not Adam and Eve in Paradise, with the unspotted robes of their innocence about them, engaged in propping the vine or trailing the rose of that holy garden, presented to the eyes of angels a more interesting spectacle than this.

³⁵ **shilling** – an English coin.

³⁶ **hapless** – unfortunate.

³⁷ **reciprocal solicitude** – mutual concern for the well-being of each other; care given by each side of the couple.

³⁸ **censoriousness** – the character of being harshly critical; finding fault.

³⁹ **connubial** – marital; pertaining to husband and wife.

6. MUTUAL SYMPATHY IS REQUIRED: Sickness may call for this, and females seem both formed and inclined by nature to yield it. “O woman!...A ministering angel thou!”...If we *could* do without her and be happy in health, what are we in sickness without her presence and her tender offices? Can we 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, which ours wants...

Nor is this sympathy exclusively the duty of the wife, but belongs *equally* to the husband. He cannot, it is true, perform the same offices for her that she can discharge for him. But much he *can* do; and all he can, he *should* do...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 you afflicted*. Never listen heedlessly to their complaints. And oh, by all that is sacred in conjugal affection, I implore you, never, by your cold neglect, or petulant⁴⁰ expressions, or discontented look, to call up in their imaginations, unusually sensitive at such a season, the phantom of a fear that the disease which has destroyed their health has done the same for your affection. Oh! Spare their bosom the agonizing pangs of supposing that they are living to be a burden to your disappointed heart. The cruelty of that man wants a name, and I know of none sufficiently emphatic, who denies his sympathy to a suffering woman...Such a man does the work of a murderer without his punishment, and in some instances, without his reproach, but not always without his design 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 relative; all their sorrows should be 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. Or like the surface of the lake answering to the heaven, it should be impossible for calmness and sunshine to be upon one, while the other is agitated and cloudy: heart should answer to heart and face to face.

From *A Help to Domestic Happiness* reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

John Angell James (1785-1859): English Congregationalist preacher and author; author of *Female Piety, A Help to Domestic Happiness, An Earnest Ministry*, and many others. Born at Blandford, Dorsetshire, England.

A HUSBAND’S LOVE FOR HIS WIFE

Richard Steele (1629-1692)

“Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself”—*Ephesians 5:33a*.

THE great duty of every husband is to love his own wife. This is the foundation of all the rest, this must be mixed with all the rest, this is the epitome of all the rest of his duty...

I. FOR THE FIRST, THE NATURE AND PROPERTY OF THIS LOVE: It is conjugal, true, and genuine, such as is peculiar to this relation. [It is] not that fondness which is proper [towards] children, nor the brutish lust which is peculiar to beasts, but that which is right and true.

1. For the ground of it...The ordinance of God hath made her one flesh with me, and the law of nature obligeth me to love my own flesh. Therefore, though her beauty be decayed, her portion spent, her weaknesses great, and her usefulness small, yet she is a piece of myself. Here the wise God hath determined my affection. When all is said, this is the only sure foundation and [it] holds perpetually.

⁴⁰ **petulant** – foolish, irritated, annoyed.

2. **This love must be right for the *extent* of it:** It reaches the whole person, both soul and body. Every man should choose such an one, whose outward features and proportion he can highly esteem and affect... True conjugal love to a wife reaches her soul, so as to see an amiableness in her mind and disposition, so as to study how to polish her soul more and more with wisdom and piety, and to endeavor that her soul may prosper as her body prospers.

3. **Right for the *degree* of it:** It must be transcendent, above your love to parents: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Gen 2:24). The husband must honor his parents, but he must love his wife as himself and must (yet with all prudence) prefer her in his respects, whenever they come in competition... He must prefer her in his affection before his children and rather love them for her sake, than her for theirs, and before all others in the world. In short, he must so love her as to delight in her company above all others: “Be thou ravished always with her love” (Pro 5:19).

4. **The husband’s love must be right for the *duration* of it:** And the last named Scripture clears that: “Be thou ravished always with her love,” not only kind before other folk and then cold in private, but *always*—not for a week, or month, or the first year, but while life lasts. Yea, as he hath experience of her virtue and sweetness, his love should daily increase... You have had her beauty and strength; why should you not also have her wrinkles and infirmities, yea, and give the more respect to her tried fidelity?⁴¹... And if there be less comeliness in the body, yet usually there is more beauty in the mind, more wisdom, humility, and fear of the Lord, so that still there are sufficient arguments in her, or arguments in the Bible, to perpetuate your conjugal affection.

II. LET US TRACE THE HUSBAND’S LOVE TO HIS WIFE IN ITS PATTERN, LAID DOWN IN THE SCRIPTURE, AND PARTICULARLY IN THE CONTEXT AND WORDS THAT I AM HANDLING: 1. **The husband ought to love his wife, as our Savior Christ loveth His church:** “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church” (v. 25). He must “nourish and cherish her, even as the Lord the church” (v. 29). Now these texts direct us to the *quality* of our love, though we cannot reach to an *equality* with Christ herein... His love is represented here to be,

(1) **Heartly, without dissimulation:**⁴² He “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (v. 25). His love was real, for He died of it. The husband must write after this copy. Not to love his wife in word and tongue only, but in deed and in truth, that if his heart were opened, her name might be found written there...

(2) **Free, without [expectation of reward]:** For He gave Himself that He might cleanse His church (v. 26), which implies that she was in ill plight⁴³ when He began His motions.⁴⁴ She was no beauty. No. We loved Him *because* He loved us first (1Jo 4:19). The husband must precede and by his love draw out the love of his wife. For love is the whetstone of love. If she appears weak, as their sex by constitution is—in wisdom, strength, and courage, or prove unlovely and negligent of her duty—yet he must love her, for love seeketh not her own (1Co 13:5). *True love doth more study to better the object beloved, than to advantage the subject that loveth.* To love a wife only in hopes of some advantages by her is unworthy the heart of a husband and no way like the example of Christ.

(3) **Holy, without impurity:** For He “loved the church... that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (vv. 25, 26)... The husband cannot have a better copy and is taught hereby to endeavor, at any cost and pains whatsoever, to further the sanctification and salvation of his wife.

(4) **Great, without comparison:** For “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Joh 15:13), and so did our Savior. He gave Himself for His church (v. 25)... The husband must herein imitate his Lord and Master by preserving a singular and superlative respect for his wife because she is a member “of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”...

(5) **His is an active and fruitful love:** For He “nourisheth and cherisheth” His church (v. 29). His poor church is always wanting; He supplies her. She is in trouble; He protects her. She is ready to sink; but He awakes to save her. Such must be a husband’s love. He must spare no cost, no pains, to do his wife good... Thus the husband must love his wife as Christ loveth His church.

2. **The husband ought to love his wife as himself:** So saith my text. The Apostle had said, “So ought men to love

⁴¹ **tried fidelity** – tested and proven faithfulness.

⁴² **dissimulation** – hypocrisy.

⁴³ **ill plight** – a distressing situation or condition.

⁴⁴ **motions** – activities or movements in pursuing something.

their wives as their own bodies” (v. 28) and, lest that should not be sufficient, he goes on in my text and says, “Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself”...he that doth not know with what manner of love Christ doth love His church, yet knows with what love he loves himself. And that is,

(1) *Tenderly*: No one can touch or handle a man’s sores and griefs so tenderly as himself: “No man ever yet hated his own flesh,” how unlovely soever, but nourisheth and cherisheth it (v. 29). Such ought the husband’s love to be toward his wife, accompanied with the greatest tenderness. For they are like crystal glasses, soon broken if not tenderly handled...

(2) *Cheerfully*: No man is so ready to help a man as himself. His best friends sometimes falter and are weary at length; but every man [helps] himself. Let the business be never so hard or hazardous, a man will venture when it is for himself. So must the husband most readily and cheerfully assist, comfort, and help his wife. If a cloud arises between them, the husband’s love must dissolve it quickly; for no man is long angry with himself...he should have his ear open, his hand, his heart ready to pity, help, and gratify her, even as he is ready to help himself.

III. THIS BRINGS US TO THE EFFECTS OF THE HUSBAND’S LOVE TO HIS WIFE, WHICH IS THE THIRD THING TO BE DESCRIBED. And they are 1. **In word:** (1) *By diligent instruction of his wife, wherein she is ignorant*: He ought to “dwell with his wife according to knowledge” (1Pe 3:7). And she ought to “ask her husband at home,” when she would learn and not “speak in the church” (1Co 14:35)...For this the husband hath excellent opportunity, and woe to him if he [lacks] will or skill!...This is certain: if he can do her soul good, he lays an eternal obligation upon her to love and honor him. If he neglects his endeavors, she will be likely to curse him forever in hell!

(2) *The husband demonstrates his love by gentle reproof of his wife, when she doeth amiss*: He must indeed overlook many infirmities, for love “shall cover the multitude of sins” (1Pe 4:8). As he that is always using his sword will make it dull at length, so he that is continually reproofing shall have the less regard given to his reproofs. Yet he cannot love her, if he do not, when need is, reprove her. But, *let it be with all the wisdom and tenderness imaginable*: not before strangers and rarely before the family; not for natural defects, seldom for inadvertencies.⁴⁵ When he does it, let him make way for his reproof by commending in her what is good; and when he hath done, back it with a reason. He must be sure to mingle the oil of kindness with the myrrh of reproof. For if he gives her this potion too hot, the operation is hindered and his labor worse than lost...Sooner or later, if she be not brutish, she will be thankful and amend.

(3) *The husband’s love must be demonstrated by ready encouragement of his wife, when she doeth well*: “Her husband also, and he praiseth her” (Pro 31:28). He that is discreet and faithful herein perhaps taketh the readiest way to do her good...

2. The effects of a husband’s love to his wife must be in deed also:

(1) *By making provision for her of what is necessary and also of what is convenient for her according to his ability*: “Her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish” (Exo 31:10). Not that she hath any privilege to be maintained in idleness or, like a drone, live upon the industry of her husband without adding her helping hand. But the main care hereof must lie upon her husband...As he hath the strongest obligation upon him and the greatest advantages, he must lay about him by all lawful means to support and provide for her. Not only for her maintenance while he lives, but he ought to make provision for her, as far as he is able, after his departure hence. For so did Jesus Christ for His church.

(2) *This conjugal love is to be showed in the tenderness of the husband towards the wife*: And this duty is incumbent on him, as he is the head of the wife: “The head of the woman is the man” (1Co 11:3). Hence, the husband is bound to protect his wife from dangers and to sympathize with her in them...Upon this account he must protect her soul from temptation, her body from harm, her name from reproach, and her person from contempt either of children, servants, or others. In short, his whole carriage to her should be full of tenderness and composed of love and pity.

(3) *The husband’s love is showed to his wife in giving her a good example*: Namely, of piety, gravity, charity, wisdom, and goodness, which will be the most constant and effectual lecture that he can read unto her...If he be holy, quiet, and industrious, she cannot for shame, be wicked, froward, and idle. His discourses will direct hers. His prayers

⁴⁵ **inadvertencies** -- forgotten or ignored responsibilities.

will teach her to pray. His justice, temperance, and charity will be a law, a rule, a motive to make her just, and sober, and charitable. If he be an atheist, an epicure, a Pharisee, it undoes her. He is to go before her, and usually she follows him either to hell or to heaven.

(4) *The effects of a husband's love to his wife are to be seen in his behavior towards her:* that is, in the mild use of his authority...Herein lies an act of the husband's love: (i) *Wisely* to keep, (ii) *Mildly* to use this authority. (i) *He must keep it by a religious, grave, and manly carriage...* If his behavior be light, she will be apt to set lightly by him. If he be weak and effeminate, it loses him...But then, (ii) Herein shines his love, to use the same with all sweetness...He is not to rule her as a king doth his subjects, but as the head doth the body. Though she was not taken out of Adam's head, so neither out of his foot, but out of his side near his heart. Therefore, his countenance must be friendly, his ordinary language to her mild and sweet, his behavior obliging, his commands sparing and respectful, and his reproofs gentle...He should never imagine that a rude insolency or perpetual bitterness is either the way to keep or use his authority aright...If meekness of wisdom will not prevail with thy wife, thou art undone in this world and she in the world to come.

From "What Are the Duties of Husbands and Wives Towards Each Other?" in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate*,
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Richard Steele (1629-1692): Puritan preacher and author; remembered as "a good scholar, a hard student, and an excellent preacher"; author of *The Character of the Upright Man* and others. Born at Bartholmley, Cheshire, England.

A WIFE'S RESPECT FOR HER HUSBAND

Richard Steele (1629-1692)

"And the wife see that she reverence her husband"—Ephesians 5:33b.

THE great duty of every wife is to reverence her own husband. She stands obliged to many other duties, as you have heard, which lie common between them; but she is still signalized⁴⁶ by this. This is her peculiar qualification as she is a wife. Let her have never so much wisdom, learning, grace;⁴⁷ if she does not reverence her husband, she cannot be a good wife.

Look to her creation: She was made *after* man; he has some honor by his seniority. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1Ti 2:13). She was made out of man; he was the rock whence she was hewn. "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). So that it is not man that hath set this order, but God Himself. Look again to the Fall, and there you hear what God saith: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen 3:16). See in the New Testament, lest Christ's being "made of a woman" should seem to alter this inviolable law: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Col 3:18). "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands" (1Pe 3:1). "Your chaste conversation" must be "coupled with fear" (v. 2). "The holy women of old adorned themselves in subjection to their own husbands" (v. 5). And so in my text. Let her be never so great, never so good, and though her husband be never so mean and never so bad, yet this is her indispensable duty to reverence her husband...it is neither agreeable to nature nor decency to set the head below or no higher than the rib. And when she is resolved in this, then will she with much delight and ease go through her duty. A wise God hath ordered it thus, and therefore it is best.

⁴⁶ **signalized** – characterized; marked conspicuously.

⁴⁷ **Let...grace** – no matter how much wisdom, learning, and grace she may have.

I. FOR THE FIRST, THE NATURE OF THIS REVERENCE: It is a true, cordial, and conjugal reverence, such as is peculiar to a good woman. And I conceive it is made up of,

1. The wife ought to honor and esteem her husband: “All the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both to great and small” (Est 1:20). To this end, she ought to contemplate all the excellencies of his person, whether of body or mind; to set a due value upon them and not to think meanly⁴⁸ of everything in her husband...And if the husband be but meanly accomplished,⁴⁹ yet she ought highly to value the excellency of his place, seeing the Holy Ghost hath in this very respect stiled him “the image and glory of God” (1Co 11:7). Whatever he is in himself or to others, yet to the wife he is a nonesuch.⁵⁰ Such you esteemed him when you chose him, and so you ought still to esteem him...The wife ought to consider that her honor and respect among her family and neighbors doth very much rise and fall according to that which she bears to her husband, so that in honoring him she honors herself.

2. This reverence is made up of love: Which though it be most pressed upon the husband, yet is also the duty of the wife: “Teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children” (Tit 2:4). Thus Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel left parents, friends, and country out of their entire love to their husbands...And indeed there is no better means to increase the husband’s love than the wife’s reverence, and that alone will make this sweet and easy.

3. Fear⁵¹ is the third ingredient into the reverence that the wife owes unto her husband...this is required: “A chaste conversation⁵² coupled with fear” (1Pe 3:2). The one is not sufficient without the other. This...is no more than a cautious diligence to please him and care lest she should offend him...

II. NOW, LET US TRACE THIS REVERENCE OF THE WIFE TO HER HUSBAND IN ITS PATTERN, LAID BEFORE HER IN THE CONTEXT OF THESE WORDS. Here I affirm these two things:

1. That the wife ought to reverence her husband, as the church doth Jesus Christ: So, verse 22: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord,” and verse 24, “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” Examples are prevalent, especially of wise and good people. Here is the example of all the wise and godly people in the world to persuade the wife to reverence her husband. The Apostle seems to say that it is as much a duty in the wife to be subject to the husband, as it is in the church to be subject to Christ...Two things proclaim the reverence that the church bears to Christ:

(1) *The matter of her subjection:* That is in everything...She doth not yield to him only so far as her interest or appetite permits her, but when he requires it...So saith the Apostle: “Let the wives be subject to their own husbands in every thing” (v. 24), that is, *in everything that is not forbidden by a higher power, even the Law of God.* Indeed, if a thing be only inconvenient, the wife may mildly reason and show the inexpediency⁵³ of it; but if she cannot convince and satisfy her husband, she must, if there be no sin in the case, submit her reason and her will to his.

(2) *The manner of her subjection speaks her reverence:* and that is free, willing, and cheerful. Thus, the church yields up herself to the will of her Husband, insomuch as it is made a kind of proverbial pattern: “With good will doing service, as to the Lord” (Eph 6:7), implying that the subjection and service that we perform to the Lord is with a goodwill. Such ought to be the subjection of the wife, most free and willing; so, as if there were but one will in two breasts...Therefore, a contradicting or grudging spirit is very unsuitable to the religious wife and ever leaves a sting in his heart and guilt in hers. For usually it is a sign of unmortified pride and self-conceit and entails the curse of unquietness upon the family...If the husband’s government be too heavy, it is better for you to leave him to answer for his severity than for you to answer for your contempt.

2. The wife ought to reverence her husband, as the members do the Head. So, Ephesians 5:23: “For the husband is the head of the wife.” He is a head for influence and sympathy: that is her privilege. He is a head for eminence and rule: that is his. And how should she expect *benefit* from her head, if she do not *honor* her head? To dishonor a

⁴⁸ **meanly** – poorly; as having little worth.

⁴⁹ **meanly accomplished** – poorly skilled.

⁵⁰ **nonesuch** – a person who has no equal; a model of excellence.

⁵¹ **fear** – a cautious diligence and care, not a slavish, cowering fear.

⁵² **chaste conversation** – holy, pure conduct.

⁵³ **inexpediency** – disadvantages; unprofitableness.

man's head is always ranked among unnatural sins (1Co 11:4)...She must not cross the purposes of her head. It is preposterous for the head to go one way and the rib another. She must readily follow the directions and counsels of her head, for the members must not teach the head which way to go. They support it, but they do not direct it... it will be the wisdom and duty of the wife to be subject to the husband as unto her head (except cases wherein the head is crazed or notoriously distempered⁵⁴).

III. THIS HATH BROUGHT US TO THE THIRD THING, BY WHICH THE REVERENCE OF THE WIFE IS DESCRIBED AND THAT IS BY THE EFFECTS THEREOF. And they also are,

1. In word: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speak-eth" (Mat 12:34). If there be that inward fear and respect in the heart, which God requires, it will be legible in the words of their mouths. The same law that binds the heart in this case doth also govern the tongue. "In her tongue is the law of kindness" (Pro 31:26). And here certainly "a wholesome tongue is a tree of life," whereas "perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit" (Pro 15:4.)

Now this reverence in the wife is showed,

(1) ***In her words of her husband:*** Which should always be composed of respect and honor. Thus Sarah is brought in by the Apostle: "Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well" (1Pe 3:6). And this was the language of her heart, as you heard before out of Genesis 18:12. And no wife is too great or good to imitate her example in the main by giving respectful titles and expressions of her husband...all the reproach and ignominy⁵⁵ that they pour out on their husbands doth infallibly redound⁵⁶ to their own shame, their honor and respect standing and falling together.

(2) ***The words of the wife to her husband ought to be full of reverence.*** She should beware, (i) *Of an excess in the quantity, not preposterously interrupting her husband while he is speaking, nor answering ten words for one.* For silence doth more commend the wisdom of a woman than speech; and she that is wise spareth her words. Though she seem to be religious, yet if she do not bridle her tongue, her religion is vain. And, (ii) *She must beware of a defect in the quality of them, namely, of meekness and respect.* For the great study of the wife should be to get a "meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God," yea, and of man too, "is of great price" (1Pe 3:4). When the heart is once meekened⁵⁷ by the grace of God, then her words will savor⁵⁸ of it, and not until then...Hath not God said, "A soft tongue breaketh the bone" (Pro 25:15)? [This] is more than any virulent⁵⁹ tongue can do...It will be an unspeakable comfort at death and judgment to reflect upon the victories that their patience hath gotten and how oft their quiet silence and mild answers have kept the peace...This is certain: if meekness and respect will not prevail, anger and passion never can...

2. The effects of a wife's reverence to her husband must be in deed also. *And that by obedience to his directions and restraints...* The wife is bound in conscience to obey her husband in every thing that is not contrary to the will of God. Indeed, if he command her to do any thing that is sinful by the Law of God—if he should bid her tell a lie, bear false witness, or the like—*she must modestly and resolvedly refuse it.* If he forbid her to do anything, that is by God's command made an indispensable duty unto her—if he should absolutely forbid her to pray, to read the Scripture, to sanctify the Lord's day, or the like—*then she must "obey God rather than men"* (Act 5:29). But in all other cases, though she may respectfully persuade with him, yet if he insist upon it, her obedience will be her best sacrifice and her compliance will be the means to make her yoke the more easy...

The house is her proper place: for she is the *beauty* of the house. There her business lies, there she is safe...When sun and moon both disappear, the sky is dark; and when both husband and wife are abroad, many disorders breed at home; and you know whose character it is: "She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house" (Pro 7:11.)

⁵⁴ **distempered** – mentally disordered.

⁵⁵ **ignominy** – dishonor.

⁵⁶ **redound** – return as a consequence.

⁵⁷ **meekened** – made submissive; humbled.

⁵⁸ **savor** – show traces of the presence or influence of.

⁵⁹ **virulent** – violently bitter; spiteful.

So also where the husband judges most convenient to dwell, there the wife must cheerfully consent to dwell with him, though it may be, either in respect of her friends or of his, more uncomfortable to her. Thus...He that appoints them to “love their husbands” (Tit 2:4) doth in the next verse enjoin them to be “discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (2:5). For though even good women be put to silence, yet good works never can...

Few husbands [are] so bad, but the discretion and respect of a wife would reform them; and few wives [are] so ill-tempered, but the wisdom and affection of a husband would make them better.

From “What Are the Duties of Husbands and Wives Towards Each Other?” in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate*, Vol. 2, reprinted by Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers. This sermon is available in an abridged booklet from Chapel Library.

Duties That Preserve Marriage

William Gouge (1575-1653)

THE first, highest, chiefest, and most absolutely necessary common mutual duty between man and wife is matrimonial unity, whereby husband and wife do account one another to be one flesh and accordingly preserve the inviolable⁶⁰ union whereby they are knit together. This is that duty which the Apostle enjoins to husbands and wives in these words, “Let not the wife depart from her husband: Let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Cor 7:10-11). He there speaks of renouncing each other and making the matrimonial bond frustrate⁶¹ and of no effect. [This] bond he would have to be kept firm and inviolable and they two who are thereby made one, constantly to remain one and not to make themselves two again. This matrimonial unity is so necessary as it may not be disunited or dissolved though one be a Christian and the other a pagan. “If any brother,” says the Apostle, “hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him” (1 Cor 7:12-13)...

Of Mutual Peace Between Man and Wife: Among other means of maintaining an inward loving affection between man and wife, *outward mutual peace, concord,*⁶² *and agreement* is one of the principal. Whereupon, the Apostle exhorts to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3); for peace is a bond that tieth one to another and makes them to be as one, even one in spirit. On the contrary side, outward discord disunites men’s spirits. We are enjoined to follow peace with all men: how much more of all persons ought husbands to have peace with their wives and wives with their husbands? They are nearer than brothers and sisters. Behold then how good and pleasant a thing it is for them to dwell together in unity (Psa 133:1)! Dwell together they must: but without peace, there is no dwelling together. It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a contentious woman in a wide house (Pro 21:9, 19; 25:24). Persons at variance [would be] far better out of sight and place, than present together. Out of sight and place, man and wife must *not* be; at peace, therefore, they *must* be. Mutual peace between them is a great refreshing to their minds, being beaten with the discords of others. It is said that a wife is in this respect a haven to man: *how much more man to his wife?*...

For maintaining peace: 1. Avoid Offence: All offences, so much as possibly may be, must be avoided. The husband must be watchful over himself that he give no offence to his wife, and so the wife on the other side. Offences cause contentions.

2. Take Not Offence: When an offence is given by the one party, it must not be taken by the other, but rather passed by. Then will not peace be broken. The second blow makes the fray.⁶³

⁶⁰ **inviolable** – not to be violated.

⁶¹ **frustrate** – useless; fruitless.

⁶² **concord** – harmony or agreement of interests.

⁶³ **fray** – noisy fight.

3. Offer Reconciliation: If both be incensed together, the fire is likely to be the greater. With the greater speed therefore must they both labor to put it out. Wrath must not lie in bed with two such bedfellows; neither may they part beds for wrath's sake. That this fire may be the sooner quenched, they must both strive first to offer reconciliation. Theirs is the glory, who do first begin, for they are most properly the blessed peacemakers. Not to accept peace when it is offered is more than heathenish; but when wrath is incensed, to seek atonement is the duty of a Christian and a grace that comes from above.

4. Take No Part with Others: Neither children, servants, nor any other in the family must be bolstered up by the one against the other. The man's partaking with any of the house against his wife or the wife against her husband is a usual cause of contention between man and wife.

5. Make Not Comparisons: They must forbear to twit one another in the teeth⁶⁴ with the husbands or wives of other persons or with their own former husbands or wives (in case they have had any before). Comparisons in this kind are very odious. They stir up much passion, and cause great contentions.

6. Be Not Jealous: Above all, they must take heed of rash and unjust jealousy, which is the bane⁶⁵ of marriage and greatest cause of discontent that can be given between man and wife. Jealous persons are ready to pick quarrels and to seek occasions of discord. They will take every word, look, action, and motion in the worse part and so take offence where none is given. When jealousy is once kindled, it is as a flaming fire that can hardly be put out. It makes the party whom it possesses implacable.⁶⁶

7. Please One Another: In all things that may stand with a good conscience, they must endeavor to please one another and suffer their own will to be crossed rather than discontent to be given to the other. Saint Paul notes this as a common mutual duty belonging to them both and expresses their care thereof under a word that signifies more than ordinary care and implies a dividing of the mind into divers thoughts, casting this way, that way, and every way how to give best content...

Of Husbands' and Wives' Mutual Prayers: The matter whereabout husbands' and wives' mutual providence ought to be conversant is in general the good of one another. Each of them [ought to] do that for the other, which Solomon in particular applies to a wife, viz.,⁶⁷ good and not evil all the days of their life. Now the good of man extends to his soul, body, good name, and goods.

Prayer a Mutual Duty: A general duty tending to the good of all these is prayer. Saint Peter requires such a carriage of man and wife one towards another, as their prayers be not hindered. He takes it for grant[ed] that prayer is a mutual duty that one owes to the other, which duty Isaac performed for his wife (Gen 25:21). Herein may man and wife be helpful each to [the] other in all things needful to either of them. It is the means that God in wisdom has sanctified for the obtaining of every needful blessing for others or ourselves. By many it is counted but a slight duty and of small use; but the truth is that to perform it aright in truth and faith is both difficult in the deed and powerful in the effect. It is the best duty that one can perform for another and the least to be neglected. We heard before that Isaac prayed for his wife: to show the good he did to her thereby, it is noted that the Lord was entreated of him. So she, being barren before, by that means conceived. All the physic⁶⁸ in the world could not have done her so much good. *Always, therefore, without ceasing is this duty to be performed.* Whensoever man and wife make any prayer, therein they must be mindful of one another: yea and often must they of purpose take occasion to make prayers in special one for another, and that both in absence and in presence of one another.

This latter does especially concern the husband, who is as a priest unto his wife and ought to be her mouth to God when they two are together...

Of the Things for Which Husbands and Wives are to Pray Alone: There are sundry needful blessings which husbands and wives are to pray for that appertain only to themselves and are most meet to be mentioned in private prayer between themselves, as—

⁶⁴ **twit...in the teeth** – harassing with persistent criticism.

⁶⁵ **bane** – ruin; fatal injury.

⁶⁶ **implacable** – impossible to pacify; irreconcilable.

⁶⁷ **viz.** – from the Latin *videlicet*, that is to say; namely.

⁶⁸ **physic** – medical treatment; medicine.

1. That as they two are one flesh, so they may be also one spirit: that their hearts may be as one, knit together by a true, spiritual, matrimonial love: always delighting one in another, ever helpful one to another, and ready with all willingness and cheerfulness to perform all those duties which they owe one to another.

2. That their marriage bed may be sanctified: As it is by God's ordinance, so it may remain to them by their well using it, a bed undefiled. There is no other thing for which mutual prayer in private between man and wife is more needful...because of the natural heat of lust which is in most. If it be not by prayer assuaged⁶⁹ (the best means for that purpose), it may prove a defilement of the undefiled bed and man and wife [may] become adulterers one to another. As other things, so this also is sanctified by the Word and prayer. The Word gives a warrant and direction for the use of it. Prayer both seasons it and procures a blessing upon it.

3. That they may have children and those such as may be heirs of salvation and live in this world to their own and others' good...

4. That God would give them competency of this world's goods, and other good means to nourish, nurture, and place forth their children well: and a sufficiency for the maintenance of their family and of that estate wherein God sets them.

5. That such needful gifts and graces as are wanting in either of them may be wrought: and such vices and infirmities as they are subject unto may be redressed.⁷⁰

These and many other like things give occasion to man and wife in special manner to pray one *for* another and one *with* another...

OF HUSBANDS' AND WIVES' MUTUAL CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER'S SALVATION:

Of the Particular Duty of Husbands in This Respect: From the general duty of prayer which is profitable to all things, I come to the particular branches of man and wife's mutual provident⁷¹ care. [I] will first begin with that which is first to be sought: the good of one another's soul. [This] the Apostle intimates to be a thing to be sought after, where he says, "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). Saint Peter enjoins wives to do their endeavor to win their husbands (1Pe 3:1-5). And Saint Paul sets before husbands the pattern of Christ's love, which had especial respect to the soul and the salvation thereof (Eph 5:22-32). This is a mutual duty appertaining to them both, which Saint Peter further implies where he styles them coheirs of the grace of life (1Pe 3:7).

It is the greatest good that one can possibly do for another, to be a means of helping forward his salvation. And there is nothing that can more soundly and firmly knit the heart of one to another than to be a means thereof.

Of Husbands' and Wives' Care to Win One the Other When One of Them Is Not [a Believer]: That the salvation of the soul may be the better effected, respect must be had to the present and particular estate of husband or wife. If one be a believer [and] the other not, the believer must use all the means that may be to draw on the other also to believe. If both be believers, their mutual care must be to edify one another in their most holy faith.

For the first, it is the main drift of Saint Peter's exhortation to believing wives about their conversation⁷² to draw on their unbelieving husbands to the true faith...Now if this duty appertain to a wife, much more to a husband, who is appointed a head to his wife and a savior. To this end does Saint Paul advise believing husbands and wives that are married to unbelievers to dwell with them...

Means of Conversion the Best Cause of Love: If it please the Lord to give such a blessing to the endeavour of a husband or wife, as to be a means of the conversion of their bedfellow, then will the party converted both entirely love the other and also heartily bless God...that ever they were so nearly linked together...

OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES EDIFYING ONE ANOTHER: The second duty tending to the soul's salvation is that two believers being married together endeavor mutually to build up one another more and more. One Christian owes this duty to another, much more man and wife...A spiritual edifying of one another is the best use that we can

⁶⁹ **assuaged** – made less intense; diminished.

⁷⁰ **redressed** – made right; corrected.

⁷¹ **provident** – exercising foresight; making provision for the future.

⁷² **conversation** – conduct.

make and ought to make of those joints and bonds whereby we are knit one to another. By virtue of them, the body (namely the mystical body of Christ) receiveth increase to the edifying of itself and increaseth with the increase of God (Col 2:19). Now the bond of marriage being of all other the firmest and that whereby we are nearest knit together, by virtue of what bond should we edify one another, if not by virtue of the marriage bond?...

Man and Wife to Prevent Sin in One Another: That it is a mutual duty for husbands and wives, so much as they can, to prevent sin one in another is evident by that reason that the Apostle uses: to keep them from defrauding⁷³ one another in these words: "That Satan tempt you not" (1Co 7:5). For out of the scope and matter of those words, this general doctrine may be gathered: Husbands and wives ought to be careful to keep one another from the temptations of Satan, that is, from sin, whereunto all his temptations tend...

Direction for Preventing Sin: For the better effecting of this duty, husbands and wives must be watchful over one another and observe what sins either of them are given unto or what occasions are offered to draw either of them into sin...If both should be testy and hasty to wrath, when the one sees the other first moved, the party whose passion is not yet stirred ought the rather to be settled and composed to all meekness and patience, lest, if both together be provoked, the whole household be set on fire...

Of Husbands and Wives Redressing Sin in One Another: When either husband or wife is fallen into any sin, a mutual duty it is for the other to use what redress may be of that sin. As if one of them were wounded, the other must take care for the healing of that wound. Abigail performed her duty in this kind, when after she had heard what churlish entertainment her husband gave to David's servants, she hastened to carry store of provision to David, and humbled herself before him. [This] so moved David to assuage his wrath. Yea, she took a seasonable time also to tell her husband his fault and the danger whereinto he brought himself thereby. More directly and with better success did Jacob redress the superstition or rather idolatry of his wife Rachel, as may be gathered by comparing Genesis 31:19, 34 and 35:2, 4. A brother at large must not suffer sin to lie on his brother: much less may husband or wife the one upon the other.

It is a Branch of Hatred to Suffer Sin to Lie on Any: Thou shalt not hate thy brother (says the Law) and suffer sin to lie on him (Lev 19:17). To do this then is a token and fruit of hatred. If a husband should see his wife or a wife her husband lying in the fire or water, ready to be burnt or drowned, and not afford their best help to pull them out, might they not justly be thought to hate them? But sin is as fire and water, which will burn and drown men in perdition. This duty may be performed by meek instructions, pithy⁷⁴ persuasions, and gentle reproofs, yea, and by the help of some good minister or other discreet and faithful friend...

How Growth in Grace May be Helped Forward: This duty may be the better effected by these means following:

1. *By taking notice of the beginning and least measure of grace and approving the same.*
2. *By frequent conference about such things as concern the same:* mutually propounding questions one to another thereabouts and answering the same.
3. *By their mutual practice and example:* making themselves each to [the] other a pattern of piety.
4. *By performing exercises of religion, as praying, singing psalms, reading the Word, and the like together.*
5. *By maintaining holy and religious exercises in the family:* Though this duty especially appertains to the husband, yet the wife must put her husband in mind thereof, if he forget it, and stir him up, if he be backward...No man's persuasion in this kind can so much prevail with a man as his wife's.
6. *By stirring up one another to go to the house of God, to hear the Word, partake of [Christ's ordinances], and conscionably perform all the parts of God's public worship.*

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and Still Waters Revival Books.

William Gouge (1575-1653): minister for 46 years at Blackfriars, London; mighty in Scripture and prayer, Gouge preached for thirty years

⁷³ **defrauding** – depriving by dishonest means; cheating.

⁷⁴ **pithy** – condensed and forcible in expression or style.

THOUGHTS ON FINDING A MARRIAGE PARTNER

John Angell James (1785-1859)

MARRIAGE is a step of incalculable importance and ought never to be taken without the greatest consideration and the utmost caution. If the duties of this state are so numerous and so weighty, and if the right discharge of these obligations as well the happiness of our whole life and even our safety for eternity depend, as they necessarily must do, in no small measure upon the choice we make of a husband or wife, then let reason determine with what deliberation we should advance to such a connection.

*It is obvious that no decision of our whole earthly existence requires more of the exercise of a calm judgment than this, yet observation proves how rarely the judgment is allowed to give counsel and how generally the imagination and the passions settle the business. A very great portion of the misery and of the crime with which society is deprived and afflicted is the result of ill-formed marriages. If mere passion without prudence or covetousness without love be allowed to guide the choice, no wonder that it is improperly done or that it is highly disastrous in its consequences. How often are passion and covetousness alone consulted...If it were merely the comfort of the married pair themselves that was concerned, it would be a matter of less consequence, a stake of less value. But the well-being of a family, not only for this world, but for the next, and equally so the well-being of their descendants, *even to a remote period*, depends upon this union. In the ardor of passion, few are disposed to listen to the counsels of prudence. Perhaps there is no advice, generally speaking, more thrown away than that which is offered on the subject of marriage. Most persons, *especially if they are already attached to a selected [person]*, although they have not committed themselves by a promise or even a declaration, will go on in the pursuit, blinded by love to the indiscretion of their choice...Upon such individuals, reasoning is wasted. They must be left to gain wisdom in the only way by which some will acquire it: *painful experience*. To others who may be yet disengaged and disposed to hearken to the language of advice, the following remarks are offered.*

IN THE AFFAIR OF MARRIAGE, BE GUIDED BY THE ADVICE OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS. Parents have no right to select for you, nor ought you to select for yourself without consulting with them. How far they are vested with authority to prohibit you from marrying a person whom they disapprove is a point of casuistry,⁷⁵ very difficult to determine. If you are of age and able to provide for yourselves or are likely to be well provided for by those to whom you are about to be united, it is a question whether they can do anything more than advise and persuade. But until you are of age, they have positive authority to forbid. It is an undutiful⁷⁶ act in you to form connections without their knowledge and to carry them on against their prohibitions. Their objections ought always, I admit, to be founded on reason and not on caprice,⁷⁷ pride, or cupidity.⁷⁸ For where this is the case and children are of full age and are guided in their choice by prudence, piety, 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 and palpable⁷⁹ reasons for prohibiting a connection, there it is the manifest duty of sons and especially of daughters to give it up. A union formed in opposition to the reasonable objection of a discreet father or mother is very rarely a happy one. The bitter cup is rendered additionally bitter, in such a case, by the wormwood and gall of self-reproach. What miseries of this kind have we all seen! How many beacons are set up, if young people would but look at them, to warn them against the folly of giving themselves up to the impulse of an imprudent attachment and following it to

⁷⁵ **casuistry** – the application of rules and principles to questions of what is right and wrong.

⁷⁶ **undutiful** – lacking respect.

⁷⁷ **caprice** – unpredictable change of mind; whim.

⁷⁸ **cupidity** – greed for material wealth.

⁷⁹ **palpable** – obvious.

a close against the advice, remonstrance,⁸⁰ and prohibition of their parents! Very seldom does that connection prove otherwise than a source of wretchedness, on which the frown of an affectionate and wise father and mother fell from the beginning. God seems to rise up in judgment and to support the parents' authority by confirming their displeasure with His own.

MARRIAGE SHOULD IN EVERY CASE BE FORMED UPON THE BASIS OF MUTUAL ATTACHMENT.⁸¹ If there be no love before marriage, it cannot be expected there should be any after it. Lovers, as all are supposed to be who are looking forward to this union, without love, have no right to expect happiness. The coldness of indifference is soon likely, in their case, to be changed into aversion.⁸² There ought to be personal attachment. If there be anything, even in the exterior, that excites disgust, the banns⁸³ are forbidden by the voice of nature. I do not say that beauty of countenance or elegance of form is necessary—by no means. A pure and strong attachment has often existed in the absence of these. I will not take upon me to determine that it is absolutely impossible to love deformity. But we certainly ought not to unite ourselves with it unless we *can* love it or at least are so enamored with the fascination of mental qualities that may be united with it, as to lose sight of the body in the charms of the mind, the heart, and the manners. All I contend for is that to proceed to marriage against absolute dislike and revulsion is irrational, base, and sinful.

But love should respect the mind, as well as the body. For to be attached to an individual simply on the ground of beauty is to fall in love with a doll, or a statue, or a picture. Such an attachment is lust or fancy, but certainly not a 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, and therefore, only upon that which by disease may be next year a very different thing to what it is now. *Nothing fades so soon as beauty.* It is like the delicate bloom of an attractive fruit and, if there be nothing agreeable underneath, will be thrown away in disgust when that is brushed off and thrown away too, by the very hand of him that plucks it. It is so commonly remarked as to be proverbial, that the charms of mind increase by acquaintance, while those of the exterior diminish. While the former easily reconciles us to a plain countenance, the latter excites, by the power of contrast, a distaste for the insipidity,⁸⁴ ignorance, and heartlessness with which they are united, like gaudy,⁸⁵ scentless flowers, growing in a desert. Instead of determining to stake our happiness upon the act of gathering these blooming weeds, to place them in our bosom, let us ask how they will look a few years hence or how they will adorn and bless our habitation. Let us ask, will the understanding, united with that countenance, render its subject fit to be my companion and the instructor of my children? Will that temper patiently bear with my weaknesses, kindly consult my tastes, affectionately study my comfort? Will those manners please me in solitude, as well as in society? Will those habits render my dwelling pleasant to me and to my friends? We must try these matters, and hold our passions back, that we may take counsel with our judgment, and suffer reason to come down and talk with us in the cool of the evening.

Such then is the love on which marriage should be contracted: love to the whole person; love to the mind, heart, and manners, as well as to the countenance and form; love tempered with respect. This only is the attachment that is likely to survive the charms of novelty, the spoliation⁸⁶ of disease, and the influence of time. [This only] is likely to support the tender sympathies and exquisite sensibilities of the conjugal state and render man and wife to the verge of extreme old age, what it was the intention of Him Who instituted the marriage union they should be—the help and the comfort of each other.

By what language then, sufficiently strong and indignant, can we reprobate⁸⁷ those compacts, so disgraceful and yet so common, by which marriage is converted into a money speculation, a trading enterprise, a mere business of pounds, shillings, and pence?⁸⁸ ...Young people themselves should be extremely careful on their own part to let no persuasions of others, no impulse of their own covetousness, no anxiety to be their own masters and mistresses, no ambition for secular splendor induce them to enter into a connection to which they are not drawn by the

⁸⁰ **remonstrance** – earnest opposition or protest.

⁸¹ **mutual attachment** – affection between both parties.

⁸² **aversion** – feeling of intense dislike.

⁸³ **banns** – public announcements of a proposed marriage.

⁸⁴ **insipidity** – dullness; lacking character.

⁸⁵ **gaudy** – brightly colored.

⁸⁶ **spoliation** – damage; injury.

⁸⁷ **reprobate** – reject as invalid.

⁸⁸ **pounds, shillings, and pence** – terms for English money and coins.

solicitations⁸⁹ of a pure and virtuous love. What will a large house, splendid furniture, a gay equipage,⁹⁰ and fashionable entertainments do for their possessor in the absence of connubial love? “Is it for these baubles, these toys,” exclaims the wretched heart as it awakens, alas! too late, in some sad scene of domestic woe, “Is it for this I have bartered away myself, my happiness, my honor?”

O there is a sweetness, a charm, a power to please in pure and mutual affection, though it be cherished in the humblest abode, maintained amidst the plainest circumstances, and has to contend with many difficulties! Compared with [this], the elegance and brilliance of worldly grandeur are but as the splendor of an eastern palace to one of the bowers⁹¹ of the Garden of Eden...

MARRIAGE SHOULD EVER BE CONTRACTED WITH THE STRICTEST REGARD TO THE RULES OF PRUDENCE⁹²...Imprudent marriages, as we have already considered, spread far and wide their bad consequences and *also send these consequences down to posterity*. Understanding is given to us to control the passions and the imagination. They, who in an affair of such consequence as choosing a companion for life set aside the testimony of the former and listen only to the voice of the latter, have, in that instance at least, forfeited the character of a rational being and sunk to the level of those creatures who are wholly governed by appetite unchecked by reason. Prudence would prevent, if it were allowed to guide the conduct of mankind, a very large portion of human misery.

In the business before us, it would allow none to marry until they had a prospect of support. It is perfectly obvious to me that the present generation of young people are not distinguished by a discretion of this kind. Many are too much in haste to enter the conjugal state and place themselves at the heads of families before they have any rational hope of being able to support them. As soon almost as they arrive at the age of manhood, whether they are in business or not, before they have ascertained whether their business will succeed or not, they look round for a wife and make a hasty, perhaps an injudicious, selection. A family comes on before they have adequate means of maintaining it...Let young people exercise their reason and their foresight. If they will not, but are determined to rush into the expenses of housekeeping before they have opened sources to meet them, let them hear, in spite of the syren song of their imagination, the voice of faithful warning and prepare to eat the bitter herbs of useless regrets...

“It has been said that no class of men err so much in this article as *ministers*. But surely, this cannot be admitted. It cannot be supposed that those whose office it is to inculcate prudence should themselves be proverbial for indiscretion?...A minister is to recommend neatness and all the decencies of life, and would he marry a slattern?⁹³ A minister is to shew that the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price, and would he marry a scold?⁹⁴ A minister is to stand in the same relation to all his people who demand his love and service, and would he marry a female who would fondly attach herself to a few cronies, listen to all their secrets and divulge her own, and form cabals⁹⁵ and schisms, which will render his residence unpleasant or occasion his removal?”

To my brethren in the ministry I do recommend, and recommend with an earnestness that I have no language sufficiently emphatic to express, the greatest caution in this most delicate and important affair. In their case, the effects of an imprudent marriage are felt in the church of the living God...How can he exhibit in his domestic constitution the beautiful order and harmony that should prevail in every Christian family, especially in every minister’s house, without the intelligent and industrious cooperation of his wife? How can this be expected of one who has no intelligence or industry? Not only much of the comfort, but of the character of a minister *depends upon his wife*, and what is of still greater consequence, much of his usefulness...Considering, therefore, how much mischief may be done by their indiscretion, ministers should raise imprudence in marriage to the rank of a great sin...

MARRIAGE SHOULD ALWAYS BE FORMED WITH A DUE REGARD TO THE DICTATES OF RELIGION. A pious person should not marry anyone who is not also pious. It is not desirable to be united to an individual, even of a different

⁸⁹ **solicitations** – attraction.

⁹⁰ **gay equipage** – small articles of domestic furniture, such as fine china or glass.

⁹¹ **bowers** – places closed in or overarched with branches of trees, shrubs, or other plants.

⁹² **prudence** – the ability to discern with caution the most suitable course of action.

⁹³ **slattern** – a dirty, untidy woman.

⁹⁴ **scold** – a woman who persistently nags or criticizes.

⁹⁵ **cabals** – small, exclusive groups of people.

denomination, who as a point of conscience attends her own place of worship. It is not pleasant on a Sabbath morning to separate and go one to one place of worship and the other to another. The most delightful walk that a holy couple can take is to the house of God in company and when, in reference to the high themes of redemption and the invisible realities of eternity, they take sweet counsel together. No one would willingly lose this...If however, the comfort of the parties only were concerned, it would be a matter of less consequence. But it is a matter of conscience and an affair in which we have no option. "She is at liberty to marry whom she will," says the Apostle, speaking to the case of a widow, "but only in the Lord" (1Co 7:19).

Now though this was said in reference to a female, all the reasons of the Law belong with equal force to the other sex. This appears to me to be not only advice, but also law. [It] is as binding upon the conscience as any other law that we find in the Word of God. The incidental manner in which this injunction occurs is...the strongest confirmation of the rule in all cases, where marriage is in prospect and where there has been no engagement previous to conversion. As to the other passage, where the Apostle commands us not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2Co 6:14), it does not apply to marriage *except by inference*, but to church fellowship or rather to association and conduct in general, in reference to which professing Christians are not to symbolize⁹⁶ with unbelievers. But if this be improper in regard to other matters, how much more so in that connection which has so powerful an 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 a direct opposition to the Word of God...A difference of taste in *minor* matters is an impediment in the way of domestic comfort. But to be opposed to each other on the all-important subject of religion is a risk, even as it respects our comfort, which no prudent person should be induced on any considerations to incur. How can the higher ends of domestic constitution be answered, where one of the parents has not the spiritual qualifications necessary for accomplishing them? How can the work of religious education be conducted and the children be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? As it respects individual and personal assistance in religious matters, do we not all want helps instead of hindrances? *A Christian should make everything bend to religion, but allow religion to bend to nothing.* This is the one thing needful, to which *everything* should be subordinate...The neglect of this plain and reasonable rule is becoming, I am afraid, more and more prevalent...In the excellent treatise that Mr. Jay published...he makes the following just and important remarks. "I am persuaded that it is very much owing to the prevalence of these indiscriminate and unhallowed connections, that we have fallen so far short of those men of God who are gone before us in our seclusion from the world, in the simplicity of our manners, in the uniformity of our profession, in the discharge of family worship, and in the training up of our households in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

No one should contemplate the prospect of such a connection as marriage without the greatest and most serious deliberation, nor without the most earnest prayer to God for direction. Prayer, however, to be acceptable to the Almighty, should be sincere and should be presented with a real desire to know and do His will. Many, I believe, act towards the Deity as they do towards their friends: they make up their minds and then ask to be directed. They have some doubts, and very often strong ones, of the propriety of the step they are about to take, which are gradually dissipated by their supplications until they have prayed themselves into a conviction that they are quite right in the decision, *which they have in fact already made.* To pray for direction in an affair that 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 be reason to believe that the individual who solicits a Christian to unite herself with him in marriage is not truly pious, what need has she of praying to be directed? This seems like asking the Almighty to be permitted to do that which He has forbidden to be done.

It cannot be sufficiently deplored that all suitable preparation for the marriage state is usually put aside for the busy activities of vanity, which in fact are but as dust in the balance of the conjugal destiny. Every thought, anticipation, and anxiety is too often absorbed in the selection of a house and furniture and in matters still more insignificant and frivolous. How common is it for a female to spend those hours, day after day and week after week, in communion with her milliner,⁹⁷ debating and discussing the subject of the color, form, and material, in which she is to shine forth in nuptial splendor, which ought to be employed in meditating the eventful step that is

⁹⁶ **symbolize** – enter into union with.

⁹⁷ **milliner** – one that makes, trims, designs, or sells hats

to fix for life her destiny, and that of her intended husband; as if the great object were to appear a gay and fashionable bride, rather than to be a good and happy wife...

“Study,” says 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 felicity to be enjoyed. And should no provision be made? [Lack of this results in] the frequent disappointments of that honorable estate. Hence that repentance which is at once too soon and too late. The husband knows not how to rule, and the wife knows not how to obey. Both are ignorant, both conceited, and both miserable.”

IN ALL THY WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS.

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THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints”—Revelation 19:7, 8.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB IS THE RESULT OF THE ETERNAL GIFT OF THE FATHER. Our Lord says, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me” (Joh 17:6). His prayer was, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (Joh 17:24). The Father made a choice, and the chosen He gave to His Son to be His portion. For them He entered into a covenant of redemption,⁹⁸ whereby He was pledged in due time to take upon Himself their nature, pay the penalty of their offenses, and set them free to be His own. Beloved, that which was arranged in the councils of eternity and settled there between the high contracting parties is brought to its ultimate end in that day when the Lamb takes unto Himself in everlasting union the whole of those whom His Father gave Him from of old.

This is the completion of the betrothal, which took place with each of them in time. I shall not attempt elaborate distinctions; but as far as you and I were concerned, the Lord Jesus betrothed each one of us unto Himself in righteousness, when first we believed on Him. Then He took us to be His and gave Himself to be ours, so that we could sing, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song 2:16). This was the essence of the marriage. Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, represents our Lord as already married to the church. This may be illustrated by the Oriental custom, by which, when the bride is betrothed, all the sanctities of marriage are involved in those espousals. Yet there may be a considerable interval before the bride is taken to her husband’s house. She dwells with her former household, and has not yet forgotten her kindred and her father’s house, though still she is espoused in truth and righteousness. Afterwards, she is brought home on an appointed day, the day that we should call the actual marriage. Yet the betrothal is to Orientals of the very essence of the marriage. Well, then, you and I are betrothed to our Lord *today*, and He is joined to us by inseparable bonds. He does not wish to part with us, nor could we part from Him. He is the delight of our souls, and He rejoices over us with singing. Rejoice that He has chosen you and called you, and through the betrothal look forward to the marriage! Feel even now, that though in the world, you are not of it: your destiny does not lie here among these frivolous sons of men. Our home is henceforth on high!

⁹⁸ **covenant of redemption** – the term used to describe the agreement between the members of the Godhead, especially between the Father and the Son, regarding the plan of redemption: God the Father purposed 1. the accomplishment of salvation through the Person and work of God the Son and 2. the application of salvation through the regenerating power of the Spirit.

The marriage day indicates the perfecting of the body of the church. I have already told you that the church will then be completed, and it is not so now. Adam lay asleep, and the Lord took out of his side a rib and fashioned thereof a helpmeet for him. Adam saw her not when she was in the forming; but he opened his eyes, and before him was the perfect form of his helpmeet. Beloved, the true church is now in the forming...The church which is affianced⁹⁹ unto the heavenly Bridegroom is not visible as yet, for she is in the process of formation. The Lord will not allow such simpletons as we are to see His half-finished work. But the day will come when He shall have completed His new creation, and then will He bring her forth whom He has made for the second Adam, to be His delight to all eternity. The church is not perfected yet. We read of that part of it which is in heaven, that “they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:40). Unless you and I get there, if we are true believers, there cannot be a perfect church in glory! The music of the heavenly harmonies yet lacks certain voices. Some of its needful notes are too bass for those already, and others are too high for them, until the singers come who are ordained to give the choir its fullest range...Beloved, in the day of the marriage of the Lamb, the chosen shall all be there—the great and the small—even all the believers who are wrestling hard this day with sins and doubts and fears. Every living member of the living church shall be there to be married to the Lamb!

By this marriage is meant more than I have told you: There is the home-bringing. You are not to live here forever in these tents of Kedar, among a people of a strange tongue. The blessed Bridegroom cometh to take you to the happy country, where you shall no longer say, “My soul is among lions.” All the faithful shall soon be away to thy land, O Emmanuel! We shall dwell in the land that floweth with milk and honey, the land of the unclouded and unsetting sun, the home of the blessed of the Lord! Happy indeed will be the home-bringing of the perfect church!

The marriage is the coronal-avowal. The church is the bride of the great King, and He will set the crown upon her head and make her to be known as His true spouse forever! Oh, what a day that will be, when every member of Christ shall be crowned in Him, and with Him, and every member of the mystical body shall be glorified in the glory of the Bridegroom! Oh, may I be there in that day! Brethren, we must be with our Lord in the fight if we would be with Him in the victory. We must be with Him in wearing the crown of thorns, if we are to be with Him in wearing the crown of glory. We must be faithful by His grace, even unto death, if we are to share the glory of His endless life.

I cannot tell you all it means, but certainly this marriage signifies that all who have believed in Him shall then enter into a bliss that shall never end, a bliss that no fear approacheth or doubt becloudeth. They shall be forever with the Lord, forever glorified with Him! Expect not lips of clay fitly to speak on such a theme. Tongues of fire are needed and words that fall like fire-flakes on the soul.

A day will come, the Day of days, time’s crown and glory, when, all conflict, risk, and judgment ended for ever, the saints, arrayed in the righteousness of Christ, shall be eternally one with Him in living, loving, lasting union, partaking together of the same glory, the glory of the Most High! What must it be to be there! My dear hearers, *will you be there?* Make your calling and election sure. If you are not trusting in the Lamb on earth, you will not reign with the Lamb in His glory. He that doth not love the Lamb as the atoning sacrifice shall never be the bride of the Lamb. How can you hope to be glorified with Him if you neglect Him in the day of His scorning? O Lamb of God, my sacrifice, I must be one with Thee, for this is my very life! I could not live apart from Thee. If, my hearer, thou canst thus speak, there is good hope that thou shalt be a participator in the marriage of the Lamb.

THE CHARACTER UNDER WHICH THE BRIDEGROOM APPEARS IS THAT OF THE LAMB: “The marriage of the Lamb is come.” It must be so because first of all our Savior was the Lamb in the eternal covenant, when this whole matter was planned, arranged, and settled by the foresight and decree of eternity. He is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8), and the covenant was with Him, as one who was to be the Surety, the Substitute, the Sacrifice for guilty men. So, and not otherwise, was it of old.

It was next as the Lamb that He loved us and proved His love. Beloved, He did not give us words of love merely when He came from heaven to earth and dwelt among us “a lowly man before his foes,” but He proceeded to deeds of truest affection. The supreme proof of His love was that He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. When He poured out His blood as a sacrifice, it might have been said, “Behold, how he loved them!” If you would prove the love of

⁹⁹ affianced – bound in a pledge to marry; betrothed.

Jesus, you would not mention the transfiguration, but the crucifixion. Gethsemane and Golgotha would rise to your lips. Here to demonstration, beyond all possibility of doubt by any true heart, the Well-beloved proved His love to us. See how it runs: “He loved me, and gave himself for me,” as if that giving of Himself for me was the clear proof that He loved me. Read again: “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph 5:25). The proof of His love to the church was the giving up of Himself for it. “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi 2:8). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us” (1Jo 4:10). So you see, as a Lamb He proved His love, and as a Lamb He celebrated His marriage with us.

Go a step further. Love in marriage must be on both sides, and it is as the Lamb that we first came to love Him. I had no love to Christ. How could I have, until I saw His wounds and blood? “We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). His perfect life was a condemnation to me, much as I was compelled to admire it. But the love that drew me to Him was shown in His substitutionary character, when He bore my sins in His own body on the tree. Is it not so with you, beloved? I have heard a great deal about conversions through admiration of the character of Christ, but I have never met with one: all I have ever met with have been conversions through a sense of need of salvation and a consciousness of guilt, which could never be satisfied save by His agony and death, through which sin is justly pardoned and evil is subdued. *This is the great heart-winning doctrine.* Christ loves us as the Lamb, and we love Him as the Lamb.

Further, marriage is the most perfect union. Surely, it is as the Lamb that Jesus is most closely joined to His people. Our Lord came very close to us when He took our nature, for thus He became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He came very near to us when, for this cause, He left His Father and became one flesh with His church. He could not be sinful as she was; but He did take her sins upon Himself and bear them all away. As it is written, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6). When “he was numbered with the transgressors,” and when the sword of vengeance smote Him in our stead, then He came nearer to us than ever He could do in the perfection of His Incarnation. I cannot conceive of closer union than that of Christ and souls redeemed by blood. As I look at Him in death, I feel forced to cry, “Surely a husband by blood art thou to me, O Jesus! Thou art joined to me by something closer than the one fact that thou art of my nature; for that nature of Thine has borne my sin and suffered the penalty of wrath on my behalf. Now art Thou one with me in all things by a union like to that which links Thee with the Father.” A wonderful union is thus effected by our Lord’s wearing the character of the Lamb...

If I had my choice today, while abiding in this present state, to see my Lord in His glory or on His cross, I should choose the latter. Of course, I would prefer to see His glory and be away with Him; but, while dwelling here surrounded with sin and sorrow, a sight of His griefs has the most effect upon me. “O sacred head once wounded,” I long to behold Thee! I never feel so close to my Lord as when I survey His wondrous cross, and see Him pouring out His blood for me...I have almost felt myself in His arms, and like John, I have leaned on His bosom, when I have beheld His passion. I do not wonder, therefore, that since He comes closest to us as the Lamb, and since we come closest to Him when we behold Him in that character, He is pleased to call His highest eternal union with His church, “the marriage of the Lamb.”

And O beloved, when you come to think of it, to be married to Him, to be one with Him, to have no thought, no object, no desire, no glory but that which dwells in Him that liveth and was dead—will not this be heaven indeed, where the Lamb is the light thereof? Forever to contemplate and adore Him, Who offered up Himself without spot unto God, as our sacrifice and propitiation—this shall be an endless feast of grateful love! We shall *never* weary of this subject! If you see the Lord coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, from the winepress wherein He has trampled on His foes, you are overawed and overcome by the terror of that dread display of justice. But when you see Him clad in a vesture dipped in no blood but His own, you will sing aloud evermore, “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood; to thee be glory for ever and ever.” I could go on singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,” throughout all eternity! The theme has an inexhaustible interest about it: there is everything in it: justice, mercy, power, patience, love, condescension, grace, and glory. All over glorious is my Lord when I behold Him as a Lamb. This shall make heaven seven times heaven to me to think that even then I shall be joined to Him in everlasting bonds as the Lamb! [Here a voice from the gallery cried, “Praise the Lord!”] Yes, my friend, we will praise the Lord! “Praise ye the Lord” is the command which was heard coming out of the

throne—“Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

I am done when I have again put this question: Do you trust the Lamb? I warn you, if you have a religion that has no blood of Christ in it, it is not worth a thought: you had better be rid of it. It will be of no use to you. I warn you also that unless you *love* the Lamb, you cannot be *married* to the Lamb. He will never be married to those who have no love to Him. You must take Jesus as a sacrifice or not at all. It is useless to say, “I will follow Christ’s example.” You will not do anything of the sort. It is idle to say, “He shall be my teacher.” He will not own you for a disciple unless you will own Him as a sacrifice. You must take Him as the Lamb or have done with Him. If you do despite to the blood of Christ, you do despite to the whole person of Christ. Christ is nothing to you if He is not your atonement. As many of you as hope to be saved by the works of the Law or by anything else apart from His blood and righteousness, you have un-Christianized yourselves; you have no part in Jesus here, and you shall have no part in Him hereafter, when He shall take to Himself His own redeemed church, to be His spouse for ever and ever. God bless you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

Delivered on Lord’s Day morning, July 21, 1889, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist minister. The collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry fill 63 volumes. The sermons’ 20–25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and stand as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity. Born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.

