



Duties of Husbands and Wives
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Common Duties

So much for their duties that be further off from equality in the family, as parents and children, masters and servants. Now those that are more equal are husband and wife, whose duties are either common to both, or more particular to either of them.

The common duties. First, they must love one another with a pure heart, fervently. This duty both husband and wife must perform mutually one to another, which that they may the better strive for, let us consider of some excellent commodities that will proceed from this love. First, this benefit will certainly ensue: if there be fervent, and dear, and matrimonial love betwixt themselves, it will preserve and guard them from all unchaste actions and strange lusts, as appeareth, Prov. 5:19-20. *Rejoice with the wife of thy youth, delight in her love continually. For why shouldst thou delight in a strange woman, or embrace the bosom of a stranger?* As if he had said: if thou do not love thy wife, thou wilt look after harlots, or at least art in danger so to do, but if thou love thy wife truly, thou art strengthened against lusts and temptations to adultery.

And so it may be said of the wife concerning her husband. For it is not the having of a husband that makes a wife chaste, and keepeth her from filthiness, but the loving of her husband is it that will keep her. And likewise it is not the having of a wife that maketh a man honest and preserveth him from adultery, but it is the loving of his wife that will do it. For many married men and women live filthily and impurely; but if they did love one another, they were safe from this fault. This then is one benefit; it is a most sure defence of one's chastity, to love each other.

Another benefit that constant love will bring is that they shall be very patient. Abundance of love brings abundance of patience, for love hopes all things, and suffers all things, and love is not provoked. But where there is little love, there is little bearing, and little hoping, and there they be quickly provoked. Upon every light and small defect or fault, they grow to brawls and chasing. And then, whoever was troubled with such a husband, or such a wife? Nay, they might rather say, who ever had such an unloving and unkind heart as I? For if there were that love that should be, and in that measure that it ought, they would bear with patience, and with meekness such infirmities, and would not be so quickly provoked to bitterness. As the mother that dearly loves her little child, though it cry all night, and break her sleep, and disquiet her very much; yet she will not throw it out of doors, nor lay it at the further end of the house, but she useth it kindly, and will do what she can to still it when it

cries. And in the morning they will be as good friends as ever before, and she feedeth it and tendeth it never a whit the less for all the night's trouble. One that were not acquainted with the love of a mother would wonder at it. Did it not disquiet her all night, and can she be so merry with it now? Yea, she can, for she loveth it, and hath forgotten all the night's griefs in the morning. And so indeed, could the husband and wife love one another with a pure and Christian love, they would bear much, and endure much, and not suffer their affections to be diminished. For love is alway a breastplate against distemper, discord and bitterness.

A third profit that springs from love is that it edifies, and seeks not his own things: therefore if they love one another, they will in all things seek the good of one another. And then, if the husband see a fault in his wife, he will admonish her of it meekly and gently, and labor to bring her to amendment. And if she see any fault on his part, she will with all reverence and humility tell him of it. But on the contrary, where there is not love, they will regard their own ease more than the salvation of another. Then if the husband see his wife in any fault, he thinketh, Indeed it is a sin, but if I should tell her of it, she will be in a passion and chafe. And so the wife: I confess this sin is dangerous to my husband's soul, but if I should speak of it, he is so froward, that he would be bitter and furious against me presently. But now here is a great want of love in either party. For, what though your wife will be in a passion? He that loveth his wife had rather she should be in a passion against him for a little time, than God be angry with her forever. And the wife that loveth her husband would more willingly suffer her husband's displeasure for a while, for well doing, than that he should suffer God's wrath, for ill doing. But for want of this Christian and sincere love, they suffer grievous sins to grow and break out one in another, which by wise and godly admonition might have been stayed and cured.

A fourth fruit of love is that it armeth us against jealousy and unjust suspicions. For all ill jealousy and causeless suspicion ariseth of one of these two grounds: either that one is or hath been wicked himself, and having been faulty and naught, he is ready to judge others by himself, and to measure all with his own measure, or else from a doting affection, that he maketh his wife a god, and would have her to do the like to him, and this is not true love. So when the wife doteth foolishly upon her husband, and maketh an idol of him, then is she quickly ready to be jealous, whereas true and sound love would work the contrary effect in her. So for matters of goods, he that trusteth in them will trust nobody with them, neither wife, neither servants, neither children, nor any, but is

always suspicious, not because they would not deal faithfully, but because he maketh that his god, and therefore is immoderately afraid to lose it. But where there is a pure and a fervent love, that will cut off all needless misdeemings, and cause us to believe and hope all good of others. This is the first duty that is common to husband and wife.

The second followeth, and that is faithfulness, that both bend their wits and all their endeavors to the help each of other, and to the common good of the family. The husband must not follow his private pleasure and delight, nor the wife her own ease and pride. But though by nature they could be content to seek themselves, yet they must strive both to build up the house by diligence in their calling, and wise and frugal disposing of the blessings of God bestowed upon them, and also to be helpful to the whole family, because they stand in the place of Christ to those that are committed unto them, both for their souls and bodies. First then, the husband and wife must be faithful in their bodies one to another, else they break the covenant of God. For marriage is not a covenant of man, but a covenant of God, wherein the parties bind themselves to him, and they be in recognizance in heaven, to keep themselves pure and chaste one to another. Then for other matters there must be one purse, and one heart and hand, for the good of the family, and each of other. But now, if the wife be wasteful and idle, then she (like a foolish woman) pulleth down her house. And if the husband be an unthrift, and consume and spend that idly and vainly (to serve his lusts, or pride, or any other sin) that might help his wife and family to live plentifully and cheerfully, this lavishing is a great unfaithfulness, and hereby he bringeth many inconveniences upon himself and upon all that depend upon him. So much for general duties belonging both to husband and wife. The particular follow.

The Wife's Duties

And first, the wife must fear her husband, as is commanded in Eph. 5:33. *Let the wife see that she fear her husband.* And I Pet. 3:2, the apostle requires a conversation with fear. So, if ever the wife will be comfortable, and profitable to her husband, and do any good in the family, she must have a care of her heart, and look that she carry an inward fear to her husband. For the husband is the wife's head, even as Christ is the head of the church. And even as the church must fear Christ Jesus, so must the wives also fear their husbands. And this inward fear must be shewed by an outward meekness and lowliness in her speeches and carriage to her husband. As in the place above named out of Peter, he saith they must be attired with a meek and quiet spirit. She must not be passionate and froward to him or any of the family, specially in his sight, but she should have such a regard of his presence, as that she should govern her tongue and countenance so, that it may not be offensive or troublesome unto him. And for her speech, neither when they be kind and loving together, must she grow into such gross terms, nor if any jar or offence come, rush into tart and sour words, to ease herself upon her husband, whom she should fear. Thus must she imitate Sarah and good women, as Peter saith, and in so doing she shall prove herself to be a daughter of Sarah, a true Christian. But contrarily, if she behave herself rudely and unmannerly in her husband's sight, to grieve him and offend him, she faileth in the first and main duty of a good wife, and so far shall surely come short of all the rest of the duties that God requireth of her. For if there be not fear and reverence in the inferior, there can be no sound nor constant honor yielded to the superior.

The second duty of the wife is constant obedience and subjection. Now in what things and after what manner this obedience is to be performed, the Holy Ghost doth declare. For in general, there is no woman almost so rude, but she will yield that she must obey her husband. But in the particular, and in the manner of it, there is the failing. Therefore the apostle (to put all out of doubt) hath set down both the matter and the manner, in Eph. 5:24. *As the church is in subjection to Christ, so let the wife be to her husband in all things.* For the things wherein she must obey, he saith in all things, meaning in all lawful things. For the commandment of the husband is as it were the stamp of God set upon the things commanded, and if she rebel against his commandment, she rebels against God. The wife then must persuade herself that her husband's charge is God's charge, and when he speaks, God speaks by him, and that which was a thing

indifferent before the husband required it, is now become a bounden duty unto her, after the husband hath once enjoined it. And therefore she must resolve to obey him in all things.

Then for the manner, he saith, *As the church obeyeth Christ*. Now we know that the church obeyeth Christ willingly and cheerfully, with a free heart. And though the things that Christ commandeth be oftentimes contrary to our nature, and no whit at all delightful to the flesh, yet the true church will more set by his Word than by her own pleasure, and have a greater regard to please him than to serve the desires of the flesh. Therefore the wife must obey her husband in all things cheerfully and willingly, without gainsaying. These be the duties of a worthy woman, of a daughter of Abraham, and a Christian wife, which so far as she is careful to perform, so far she may look that her husband should do the duty of a good husband unto her, and if he do not, yet God will reward her liberally. For such a woman is much set by of God, and that not with an inward love that nobody can see, but with such a working love as shall show itself by good effect in plentiful blessings on her soul and body, if she can frame (for conscience sake to God) to yield a willing and free obedience to her husband in lawful things, and that with a meek and lowly carriage of herself, proceeding from an holy fear and reverence of him, being to her in God's stead.

The Husband's Duties

Now follow the special duties of an husband, for he hath not all these privileges for nothing, and those consist in two major points, in governing her wisely (by cohabitation and edification) and in performing all due benevolence. First, for cohabitation. The first duty of the husband is to dwell with his wife, that sith there is a near and dear society between them, and of all other the nearest (for she is to him as the church is to Christ, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone), therefore he must be willing constantly and kindly to converse with her, to walk with her, to talk with her, and let her have a comfortable familiarity with him, that she may see he delights in her company, and may well know that of all others she is his most loved and welcome companion. And so in the Law it was commanded that the first year wherein anyone is married, he must dwell at home, and rejoice with his wife for that whole year. Whatever affairs of the commonwealth, or wars were abroad, yet he was by God's Law freed, so that none might command his service from home, but he must dwell with his wife, that she might have experience of his love, and have comfort by him, that by long continuance and society their hearts might be so nearly joined, as nothing might rend them asunder afterwards.

This reproveth those foolish men (indeed not worthy to carry the name of husbands) that can take more delight in any vain, riotous and unthrifty company, and take more pleasure in any lewd exercises, than in the society of the loving and kind wife, that are never so merry as when the wife is absent, and never dumpish and churlish but with her. Such also as dwell with hawks and hounds and drunkards and gamesters, not with their wives: these shall carry the brand and name of fools, so long as they have no more care to prevent so much ill, and to do so much good as (if they had any godly wisdom, or love to their wives) they might. For what do they but throw themselves into danger, and lay their wives open to Satan's temptations? Yea, and give just occasion to them to think that they love them not. But they will say, We must have our delights and follow our sports. And why you more than the wife? Might not the wife say, I must have my delight also, and part of the recreation as well as part of the trouble is mine? Yet this would not be counted a good excuse for a woman to be ranging abroad all day long, and part of the night, upon no just occasion. But they look that she should accept their company, and be willing to be with them. And why should not they then be as willing to dwell with their wives according to

God's commandment? So that the husband must dwell with his wife, and never depart from her but upon a lawful and good calling and cause, and then also, so as that she may perceive that his heart is still with her, and that he carrieth but a part of himself when he goeth abroad, for still he leaveth his affection at home with his wife.

Secondly, he must dwell with her as a man of knowledge, and edify her, both by his good example, and also by good instructions. For his example: first, he must carry himself so wisely, and so holily, as that she may see in him a pattern and image of grace and wisdom. He must be a glass unto her, by looking into which she may learn to attire herself in all holy discretion and conversation.

Therefore he must neither be froward, testy, nor lumpish, for then he shall be hated; nor light, vain, and foolish, for then he shall be despised. He must not be base and niggardly, for then his base heart will breed a base estimation of him. Neither must he be prodigal and unthrifty. For then he shall so pinch himself with want and necessity, as that he shall not be able to relieve and refresh his family, and so he much depriveth himself of his reverence. For want of this wise and holy carriage, it cometh to pass that many can speak much of the weakness of women, and make large discourses of the impotence of that sex, when indeed it is long of themselves. As if the head should lead the body among briars and thorns, and dash it against every wall, and then complain of the hurt and frailty of it. So many foolish men, when they should frame themselves in such sort as they might draw their wives to godliness and reverence by their example, they (by rude and absurd behavior) draw themselves into contempt, and put undutifulness upon their wives, as it were perforce, and then are ready to complain and exclaim of them, when they should rather cry out of their own folly and sin.

Next, the husband must edify his wife by instruction: for so, I Cor. 14:25, the apostle saith, If women will learn, they must ask their husbands at home. The husband then must be so well furnished with sound knowledge, as that he must be able to teach his wife, and sow the seed of godliness in her conscience. And one special and chief part of wisdom in the husband, by which he must learn to frame his instruction, is to observe those good things which he seeth in his wife, and to cherish them. For nothing is more forcible to encourage a woman in any good thing, than that she perceiveth that her husband doth mark and approve those good things which are in her, as well as the faults, to reprove them. And for want of this encouragement, that men are continually chiding, and never go about to nourish any good thing, it falls out that many women,

which by good usage might be brought to godliness, grow to great discontenter and passion. And as he must labor to increase the good things that are in her, so also he must seek to amend and cure those things that are faulty, wherein she doth amiss. And for ordinary infirmities, he must pass by them, only praying to God for her. But if her soul be sick of a disease that needeth physic, and must have medicine, a wise governor will choose his fittest time, and consider the nature and disposition of his wife: that if she be of a gentle spirit, he may use gentle means, which will then do most good, but if she be of a more hard nature, stronger means must be used, and she must be dealt withal after a more round manner. But always provided, that it never be done in passion, and before others, but with a quiet and merciful heart, that she may see that he seeketh her salvation, and not disgrace, nor to ease himself upon her, but to convert her soul unto God. But if the husband be violent in company to reprove, of bad he will make her worse, and more alienate her from him, because she seeth that she hath a foolish head, that is not a saviour, but a destroyer.

And for want of this diligent care in choosing time and place, and observing the nature of the party, it cometh to pass that rebukes, which in themselves are good and ought to be performed, do more hurt than good, because he observeth not where he doth it, but reproves her before company, to which he should not disclose his own and her shame, and them also most unseasonably and untimely. For when she is out of temper, and passion hath already overcome her, then he falleth to administer his physic, as it were upon a full stomach, whereas he should patiently have waited for a fit time, and not be so foolish, as when she is gone, and anger hath overcome her, then to look that she should upon a word's warning, return and come again into her right mind, and upon the sudden reform all that is amiss. But what? Shall one let his wife go away so, and take her course? No, he must at that instant speak to God for her, when she is not fit to be spoken to. And after, when she is come again to herself, and all is quiet, then with a loving heart and good countenance (and yet with plain and evident proofs and reproofs out of God's Word), he must show her fault, that godly sorrow may bring her to repentance and amendment. And by these measures he may govern well.

Another duty of the husband consists in giving her all honor and due benevolence, which stands in two things. First, in giving and allowing her all maintenance and meet helps, both for necessity, and also for honest and Christian recreation and delight, so far as his estate and hers require, and their abilities do afford. And he must do this willingly,

liberally and freely, not tarrying till it be begged or gotten from him by importunate entreaty, as if one should wring it out of Nabal's hand, like as if it were water out of a flint stone. For this giveth cause of great suspicion of want of love, for love is always bountiful. And besides, it lesseneth the benefit by the one half, when it must be wrested (as it were by main strength) from him. Therefore he must consider, and before he be asked, provide what he seeth necessary for her, and what may be (after a Christian sort) delightful unto her, and prevent her with the gift. Even as a father that loves his child will not tarry till the child come and beg apparel, or meat, but he doth cast beforehand how to help him, and unrequested gives him things that be needful, much more then must he do thus to his wife, which is the one part of himself, and nearer, and should be also dearer unto him than any other.

A second work wherein this due benevolence must show itself is in giving her due employment; he must mark and observe the gifts of wisdom and government, or whatever else God hath graced her with, that he may set them on work and employ them. And hereby he shall show his love unto her, and the confidence he puts in her. For it is said of a good wife in the Proverbs, chap. 32, that the heart of her husband trusts in her. And this is a means also to keep her from discouragement and idleness: and besides, it will turn to the great good and profit of the family.

Which reproveth the practice of many foolish husbands, that be busybodies, and will have all come through their own hands, and then indeed nothing goeth well through any hand, because of this disordered confusion. As if the pilot would both hold the stern, and hoist up the sail, and be upon the hatches, and labor at the pump, and do all himself, it must needs go ill with the ship. Even so in the family, when the husband taketh all upon himself, it is the next way to overthrow all. Therefore those gifts that God hath given the wife, the husband must see them put to the best use, and then she shall be a fellow helper to him, and bring a blessing upon the family by her labor.

And so much for the duties of the husband and wife, which I do not so speak of as though it were in the power or nature of any man or woman to perform them; nay, by nature we be all inclined to the contrary. The wife is naturally disobedient and stubborn, prone to condemn and despise her husband; and he is ready either to be out of her company without cause, or, being with her, to be light and foolish, or else sour and churlish, and to do her hurt by his example, and make her worse rather than better. And both of them naturally are destitute of all true and

spiritual love one to another. But God showeth these duties in his Word, to the end that we, seeing our sins and our weakness, might bewail our wants before God, and beseech him that requires these things at our hands to work these graces in our hearts, and as he hath given us these good commandments, so to give us good hearts to keep the commandments. But if any be so blind and so unacquainted with the wickedness of his own heart, as that he dreams of some strength in himself to do these duties, it is certain he never performed any of them in truth, nor shall ever, till he do lament his wants with unfeigned grief before God, and desire him to make him obedient, as well as to give him a charge of obedience.



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