

The Christian Home (6): Mutual Duties (part 1)

Before we come to specific responsibilities for husbands and wives, we must first consider various mutual responsibilities incumbent upon both. Joel Beeke summarized these into four: submission, love, chastity, and help or assistance.¹ William Gouge suggested six duties: unity, chastity, love, care for each other's souls, guarding each other's health, reputation and property, and serving together in family ministry.²

George Swinnock reduced these into two: amity and fidelity,³ whereas Richard Baxter provided four: love, cohabitation, peace, and help.⁴ John Angell James suggested six mutual duties: love, respect, attachment to each other's society, forbearance, assistance, and sympathy,⁵ and Isaac Ambrose provided four: unity, chastity, love, and care.⁶

Thus, combining these lists together, we will consider five mutual duties for husband and wife: unity (peace), chastity, love, help, and care. We will consider the first three this morning, leaving help and care for next week.

I. Mutual Duties

1. *Unity*. Having mentioned four mutual duties, unity, chastity, love, and care, Isaac Ambrose then said, "the former duties presupposed," went on to deal with love and care. In other words, unity and chastity were "presupposed." It was common knowledge according to Ambrose, that husbands and wives should be unified. "The first, highest, chief, and most absolutely necessary mutual duty shared between husband and wife, is matrimonial unity, by which husband and wife count one another to be one flesh, and accordingly preserve the sacred union by which they are knit together" (Gouge).⁷ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen.2:24).

William Gouge gave two reasons for this sacred union and thus the promotion of unity.⁸ First, the author of marriage is God. "It is His ordinance, and it is He who by His ordinance has made of two, one flesh. 'What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder' (Matt.19:6). If man should not do it, then not wife, nor husband himself." Second, the nature of marriage. "Such is the nature of the matrimonial bond that it makes of two one, and more firmly binds them together than any other bond can bind any other two together. How then should they be two again?"

But the promotion of unity goes beyond merely staying married; it includes the cultivation of practical harmony and peace. Just as Christians are one in Christ (Gal.3:28), they must labor for the promotion of practical unity (Eph.4:3). "It is a great duty of husbands and wives to live in quietness and peace, and avoid all occasions of wrath and discord" (Baxter).⁹ According to Baxter, marital dissension (discord or disunity), "will be your pain and the vexation of your lives," "cool your love," "disorder all your family affairs," "unfit you for the worship of God," "disable you to govern your families aright," and "expose you to the malice of Satan and give him advantage for manifold temptations. A house divided cannot stand; an army divided is easily conquered, and made a prey to the enemy." He

¹ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 80-150

² William Gouge, *Building a Godly Marriage*, 2:34-97

³ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:471-481

⁴ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 431-437

⁵ John Angell James, *Domestic Happiness*, 11-37

⁶ Isaac Ambrose, *The Well-Ordered Family*, 19-20

⁷ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Marriage*, 2:35

⁸ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Marriage*, 2:35-36

⁹ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 433

then concluded, "By all this you may see what dissensions between husband and wife do tend to, and how they should be avoided."¹⁰

Richard Baxter provided ten directions for marital unity,¹¹ whereas William Gouge provided seven principles for maintaining marital peace:¹² first, "keep up your conjugal love in a constant heat and vigor. Love will suppress wrath; you cannot have a bitter mind upon small provocations, against those that you dearly love. But when love once cools, small matters exasperate and breed distaste" (Baxter). Second, "both husband and wife must mortify their pride and passion, which are the causes of impatency; and must pray and labor for a humble, meek, and quiet spirit. A proud heart is troubled and provoked by every word or carriage that seems to tend to their undervaluing" (Baxter).

Third, "remember still that you are both diseased persons, full of infirmities; and therefore expect the fruit of those infirmities in each other; and make not a strange matter of it, as if you had never known of it before. Resolve to bear with one another; as remembering that you took one another as sinful, frail, imperfect persons, and not as angels, or as blameless and perfect" (Baxter). Fourth, remember that you are one flesh; and therefore be no more offended with the words or failings of each other, than you would be if they were your own. "Fall out no more with your wife for her faults, than you do with yourself for your own faults, or that you would do, if hers had been your own" (Baxter).

Fifth, "agree together beforehand, that when one is in the diseased, angry fit, the other shall silently and gently bear, till it be past and you are come to yourselves again. Be not angry both at once; when the fire is kindled, quench it with gentle words and carriage, and do not cast on oil or fuel, by answering provokingly and sharply, or by multiplying words, and by answering wrath with wrath" (Baxter).

Sixth, "above all they must beware of rash unjust jealousy, which is the misery of marriage, and the greatest cause of discontent that can be given between husband 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 way, and so take offense where none is given" (Gouge). Seventh, "in all things that may stand with good conscience they must work to please one another, and either of them allow their own will to be crossed rather than displease the other" (Gouge). "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil.2:4).

Eighth, "one must not take the side of children, servants, nor any other in the family against the other. The man's partaking with any of the household against his wife, or the wife against her husband, is a usual cause of contention between husband and wife" (Gouge). Ninth, "they must refrain to insult each other by the comparison of husbands or wives of other persons or with their own former husbands or wives (if they have had any before). Comparisons in this kind are very offense. They stir up much passion, and cause big fights" (Gouge).

Tenth, "confess your fault to one another, when passion has prevailed against you; and ask forgiveness of each other, and join in prayer to God for pardon; and this will lay a greater engagement on you the next time to forbear: you will sure be ashamed to do that which you have so confessed and asked forgiveness for of God and man" (Baxter). "If both be angered 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 who share a bed; neither may they go to separate beds for wrath's sake. That this fire may be more quickly quenched, they must both strive first to offer reconciliation. Theirs is the glory who first begin, for they are most properly the blessed peacemakers" (Gouge). "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom.12:21).

¹⁰ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 433

¹¹ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 433-434

¹² William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:52-53

We are commanded to 'follow peace with all men' (Heb.12:14). 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. Dwell together they must, but without peace there is no dwelling together. 'It is better to dwell in a corner in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house' (Prov.21:9). Mutual peace between them is a great refreshing to their minds, being beaten with the conflicts of others. It is said that a wife is in this respect a haven to man (how much more man to his wife?). If the haven be calm, and free from storms and tempests, what a refreshment it will be to the sailor that has been tossed in the sea with winds and waves?¹³

2. *Chastity*. "Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (1Cor.7:2-3). "This duty is a twofold duty: chastity—keeping oneself sexually pure within marriage—and what Paul calls 'due benevolence'" (Beeke).¹⁴ In other words, we must labor to keep ourselves chaste and to help our spouse remain chaste. "Chastity consists in giving to each the seasonable, moderate use of the other's body, and denying it to all others" (Swinnock).¹⁵ "Each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1Thess.4:4-5). In commenting on the phrase "due benevolence" ('affection due' NLJV, 'marital duty' NIV, 'conjugal rights' ESV), Gouge said, "It is called *benevolence* because it must be performed with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully; so it is said to be *due* because it is a debt which the wife owes to her husband, and he to her."¹⁶

In addition to "due benevolence," Joel Beeke suggested three means to preserve marital chastity:¹⁷ first, "we must guard our hearts against unbridled lust." "Keep you heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov.4:23). "Whatever is in our hearts will come out in our words and cations." Second, "we must preserve the inlets of our souls, or our Eyegate and Eargate, since it is by these means that enticements to sin enter the mind." Third, "we must abhor adultery and all temptations to be unfaithful to our spouses."

He then provided two reminders: first, "our love for our spouses should run much deeper and not depend on their appearances." Second, "while we must never seek to arouse lust in marriage by licentious behavior or speech, we can seek to be attractive to our spouses by giving due attention to our appearance and overall deportment." "A spouse who neglects his or her appearance and gives no thought at all to bring "presentable" can provide a foothold for Satan to tempt us to feel dissatisfied and for our own sinful heart to suggest that we deserve someone better."

3. *Love*. (1) Its nature. Reformed theology distinguishes between benevolent (actions) and complacent (affections) love. "Divines distinguish of a twofold love; a love of benevolence and a love of complacency" (Manton).¹⁸ While these two aspects of love can be distinguished, they can never be severed. Husbands and wives must love each other in both of these ways. "Husbands love your wives" (Eph.5:25) and "admonish the young women to love their husbands" (Tit.2:4). In short, husbands and wives must love each other with all that they have and are (actions and affections). They

¹³ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Marriage*, 2:52

¹⁴ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 108

¹⁵ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:476

¹⁶ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Marriage*, 2:44

¹⁷ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 112-119

¹⁸ Thomas Manton, *Works*, 13:140

must love with their heart and hands. Isaac Ambrose described marital complacency as, "A sweet, loving, and tender-hearted pouring out of their hearts, with much affectionate dearness into one another's bosoms."¹⁹ He then said, "This mutual-melting-heartedness, being preserved fresh and fruitful, will infinitely sweeten and beautify the marriage state."

(2) Its necessity. John Angell James (1785-1859) warned, "If love is wanting, marriage is degraded at once into a brutal or a sordid compact. A married couple without mutual regard, is one of the most pitiable spectacles on earth." He said a loveless marriage can only serve two purposes: "to warn the single against the folly of forming this union upon any other basis than that of a pure and mutual attachment," and "to admonish all that are married, to watch with all vigilance, their mutual regard, that nothing be allowed to damp the sacred flame."²⁰ Henry Smith said, "Unless there be a joining of heart and a knitting of affections together, it is not marriage in deed, but in show and name, and they shall dwell in a house like two poisons in a stomach, and one shall ever be sick of another."²¹

(3) Its motives. Robert Bolton (1572-1631), in his treatise entitled, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (1626), provided five reasons to preserve mutual love:²² first, "the wise hand of God's gracious providence brought you together, and He commands constancy in this loving and lightsome carriage. *Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let he be as the loving hind, and pleasant roe* (Prov.5:18-19). *Husbands love your wives* (Eph.5:25), and *Wives love your husbands* (Tit.2:4)." Second, "by the power of the honorable ordinance of marriage, the two are made one. And therefore, they ought to be as lovingly and tenderly affected one unto the other as they would be to their own flesh." Third, "the compassionate and melting compellations²³ which Christ and His spouse exchange in the Canticles, *My fair one, my love, my dove, my undefiled, my well-beloved, the chief of the thousand*. Such a fervent and chaste love as this, all married couples should resemble and imitate." Fourth, "these mutual expressions, and exercise of this matrimonial love, are very powerful to preserve chastity and pureness in body and spirit on both sides." Fifth, "where love fills the hearts, the feet, hands, and lips move easily in the service of the one loved."

(4) Its promotion. George Swinnock underscored the need for marital love to continue. "It must not be like fire on our hearths, which a little water of adversity may extinguish; but like the fire on the altar, which never goes out." He continued, "Their love must last while they live. No affliction must quench it, no flood drown it; nay, like the ark of Noah, it must rise the higher for these waters."²⁴ He then provided a single help: "Married persons must take heed of mistaking the ground of their affections. If wit, or wealth, or beauty be the cause, when these be taken away, which some providence or other may quickly do, the effect will cease." Our love must be spiritual. It must be based on our love for Christ and His image perceived in them.

The land-flood of youthful affections will quickly be dried up, but the fountain of spiritual love will send forth such pleasant streams as will refresh them while they live. When conscience of God's ordinance and piety in the person are the motives, their love will be lasting. When the root of love is wrong, the fruit will quickly be rotten; they who love not one another out of conscience, may in time be brought to hate one another.

¹⁹ Isaac Ambrose, *The Well-Order Family*, 19

²⁰ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 13

²¹ Henry Smith, as quoted by Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 99-100

²² Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 266-267

²³ Compellation - A name or title by which someone is addressed

²⁴ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:473