

The Christian Home (10): Wifely Duties (part 3)

Having considered the first two duties binding upon wives (reverence and submission), we come this morning to the third (assistance).

I. Wifely Assistance

1. *The grounds of wifely assistance.* "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.' And out of the ground the Lord formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky...But for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of the ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man" (Gen.2:18-22). "For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1Cor.11:8-9). The woman was made for the man. That is, she was created as a "helper comparable" and "suitable for him." She is made a helper. It is in her by nature and design. While the man is to help the woman, he is not her helper. "According to the Scripture the wife was made to fulfill the needs, the lacks, the inadequacies of her husband. She was made to be *her husband's unique helper*" (Mack).¹

The woman was created to assist the man in fulfilling the creation mandate. "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen.1:28). While it's true this mandate is to be fulfilled together (as it was given to them both), they each have unique roles in fulfilling it. The woman was created to assist the man in fulfilling this mandate. Thus, while they fulfill it together, they fulfill it as God intended. The woman was made from and for the man (the man was not made from or for the woman).

The woman is to be a help, not a hinderance; not the governor, for the right is originally in the man, but a help in government, to ease him in part of his burden and cares; a help in every way, for the comfort of society, for assistance in governing the family, for the increasing and for the propagation and continuance of posterity; for these uses was the woman created, and intended by God.²

2. *The nature of wifely assistance.* Wifely assistance is manifested in three broad ways: encouraging, serving, and managing. (1) Encouraging. As the man ordinarily faces the effects of the fall outside the home and the woman within the home (Gen.3:16-19), it's the responsibility of the wife to render the home a safe haven. A place free from "thorns and thistles." "A wife must make the home a safe place—a place of encouragement, comfort, understanding, and refuge" (Mack).³ "A married man has a companion who enters his heart, partakes of all that happens to him, is touched by all his disasters, and does everything in her power to sweeten his condition, ease his mind, cheer his heart, and share his troubles" (Beeke).⁴

(2) Serving. The wife's primary focus should be her husband. "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov.31:12). "An honest examination of scriptural data leads to the conclusion that the wife's primary ministry in life is her husband" (Mack).⁵ She lives to promote his prosperity in every area of life (physical health, vocational advancement, and societal respect). "Helpfulness to her

¹ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 22

² Thomas Manton, *Works*, 19:440

³ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 22

⁴ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 30

⁵ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 21

husband must be universal; apprehending and improving, with all readiness and love, all opportunities to do him any good in soul or body, name or estate" (Bolton).⁶ "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land" (Prov.31:23). This is her goal; that her husband not herself would be honored.

At any time, she would gladly lay aside her own pleasure to find it doubled in gratifying him. She is glad to sink her individuality in his. She seeks no renown for herself; his honor is reflected upon her, and she rejoiced in it. She would defend his name with her dying breath; safe enough is he where she can speak for him. The domestic circle is her kingdom; that she may there create happiness and comfort, is her life-work; and his smiling gratitude is all the reward she seeks.⁷

(3) Managing. "Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1Tim.5:14). "The older women should admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit.2:3-5). Women are to "manage the house" and be "workers at home." The home, which is ordinarily made of a husband and children, is her primary ministry. She is to govern the home under her husband's rule. "In a special manner she must learn and labor, with all meekness of wisdom and patient discretion, to forecast, contrive, and manage, as her more proper and particular charge, household affairs and businesses within doors" (Bolton).⁸

The husband as the head of the home is its manager. He is the head; the head does not do the work of the body. The husband is not to answer every question or think every thought for his wife—exactly not that. Rather, he is to recognize that God gave him a wife to be a helper. A good manager will look at his helper and say, 'She has certain abilities. If I am going to manage my household well, I must see that every last one of those gifts is developed and put to use as fully as possible.'⁹

Her proper office is, providently and faithfully to manage the affairs of the family that are committed to her oversight and care: and, therefore, in the description of a good wife given us at large in Proverbs 31:10-31, we find the whole of it taken up in showing her industry and care in ordering the affairs of the family.¹⁰

This is fully described in Proverbs 31:10-31. "The last chapter of Proverbs is an excellent looking-glass (mirror) for women to dress themselves by every morning" (Swinnock).¹¹ "Wives must learn and labor to manage household affairs, and business within doors, as they say: for which see a right noble glorious pattern in Proverbs 31" (Ambrose).¹² Essential to the virtuous wife is her home or household: "she provides food for her household" (v15); "she is not afraid of snow for her household" (v21); "she watches over the ways of her household" (v27). She manages or governs the home under the eyes of her husband and for his honor (v23). She is a "fruitful vine in the very heart" of his home (Ps.128:1-3).

⁶ Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 279

⁷ C.H. Spurgeon

⁸ Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 279

⁹ Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 76-77

¹⁰ Ezekiel Hopkins, *Works*, 1:424-425

¹¹ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:512

¹² Isaac Ambrose, *The Well-Ordered Family*, 27

(a) She is trustworthy. "The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (vv11-12). "She is faithful, worthy of her husband's confident trust since nothing he entrusts to her is lost or squandered but is prudently employed" (Beeke). She is judicious, practical, and sensible. "She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard" (v16). "He may commit his estate and household affairs into her hands with confidence; he may trust her to provide food, and work for her children and servants, and to prevent waste in both" (Swinnock).¹³

(b) She is diligent. "She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands" (v13). "She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household" (v15). "Her lamp does not go out by night" (v18). "She does not eat the bread of idleness" (v27). "Some wives, unhappily lie long sluggish in their beds, or sit still and do nothing when they are up, and will not take a bit of trouble to get up and increase their husband's estate, by which God is provoked more and more to weaken their estates, that He may more punish such pride and laziness in wives" (Gouge).¹⁴

(c) She is benevolent. "She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy" (v20). She has a special eye for the needy within the church (Gal.6:10), and she spends herself for their good.

(d) She is organized. "She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet" (v21). "She gives them not only warm diet for their bellies, but also warm clothes for their backs. If a hard winter come she is not much troubled, for herself and her family are clad for all weathers beforehand" (Swinnock).¹⁵

(e) She is instructive. "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness" (v26). She speaks with kindness and she speaks about kindness (that is, she instructs the household and esp. the children). Thus, under the guidance of her husband (Eph.6:4), she's to educate the children (including spiritual things). "As the two greater lights of heaven do govern this great world with natural light, so let the husband and wife guide the little world of their family with the spiritual light of divine knowledge and discretion" (Bolton).¹⁶

A wife is to *help* her husband in everything. With regard to his soul, she is to help him cultivate his graces and lovingly urge him to his duties before the Lord, especially those duties incumbent on him as the spiritual leader in the home. With regard to the body, she is to cherish it and tenderly care for it both in sickness and in health. She should cherish her husband as the greater part of herself since she was made by God to be his helpmate. With regard to his name and reputation, she is to endeavor to protect and preserve it from slander by speaking well of him both at home and abroad. With regard to his estate, if she does not add to it by her own work, yet she is to strive before the Lord to be a faithful manager of all that he provides for her and the family. What a comfort it is to the husband to have a helpful wife! Surely he who 'finds [such] a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD' (Prov.18:22).¹⁷

3. *The promotion of wifely assistance.* "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands" (Prov.14:1). (1) Live contently and without complaint. "A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike; whoever restrains her restrains the wind, and

¹³ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:513

¹⁴ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:155

¹⁵ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:515

¹⁶ Robert Bolton, *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 280

¹⁷ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 162

grasps oil with his right hand" (Prov.27:15-16). "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase" (Ecc.5:10). A discontent wife is a hinderance and no helper. "A wife's contentment is a great comfort to her husband lying under a cross, and it makes the burden seem much lighter than otherwise it would, if at lest he is a kind husband, and affected with his wife's feelings, as he ought to be. For a loving husband in every distress is more perplexed for his wife than for himself" (Gouge).¹⁸

(2) Live submissively to your own husband. That is, live subject to him as your main priority. You were created from and for him. "This does not mean that everything she does must have a direct connection to her husband. It does mean, however, that she ought never to do anything which would be detrimental or harmful to her husband or that would cause her to neglect her primary ministry of heling her husband" (Mack).¹⁹

(3) Live modestly and with frugality. "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart: (1Pet.3:3-4). "*Economy* and *Order* in the management of her personal and domestic spending, are the obvious duty of a wife"(James).²⁰ "If she is not able to bring in and increase the stock, yet she ought prudently and frugally to manage what her husband entrusts her with, and not to waste it vainly and profusely" (Hopkins).²¹

Endeavor to acquire a skillfulness in domestic management, a frugality, a prudence, a love of order and neatness, a mid-way course between lowliness and luxury, a suitableness to your station in life, to your Christian profession; an economy which shall leave you more to spare for the cause of God and the miseries of man. Rather check than stimulate the taste of your husband for expense; tell him that it is not necessary for your happiness, nor for the comfort of the family; draw him away from these uncertain circumstances, to the mental improvement, the moral culture, the religious instruction, of your children. Let knowledge, piety, good sense, well-formed habits, harmony, mutual love, be the sources of your domestic pleasures: what is splendor of furniture, or dress, or entertainments, to these?²²

(4) Live humbly from and for Christ. "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (Prov.31:30). The virtuous wife of Proverbs 31 is no super-woman; she is a God-fearer. She is weak and needy in and of herself. She derives her strength from Christ, "strength and honor are her clothing" (Prov.31:25), and she's motivated by His dying love for her (2Cor.5:14).

It should be clear how dependent upon God's grace a wife is, to be faithful in her duties. She must know herself to stand in need of God's grace to subdue her natural pride and selfishness and transform her into a woman that fears the Lord and therefore departs from evil and runs in the way of His commandments. She must see her own emptiness and seek, by God's grace, to live on Christ's fullness. She must pray for selflessness that she might cheerfully and willingly serve her husband. Above all else, she must pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit who alone can empower her to put to death

¹⁸ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:153

¹⁹ Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 22

²⁰ John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 70

²¹ Ezekiel Hopkins, *Works*, 1:424

²² John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 71

the misdeeds of the flesh and work in her to will and to do for God's good pleasure for her as a wife.²³

²³ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 172