

The Christian Home (11): Husbandry Duties (part 1)

Having considered duties binding upon wives, we come this morning to specific duties binding upon husbands. These are often summarized into two: love and authority (or loving leadership). "The peculiar duties of husbands is that he dearly love his wife and that he wisely maintain and manage his authority over her" (Ambrose).¹ Along with George Swinnock, we will divide them into three: affection, provision, and instruction (or, love, provision/protection, and leadership).²

I. Husbandry Love

1. *Its nature.* "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies...for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (Eph.5:28-29). "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Col.3:19). "The general nature of love is the enjoyment and complacency (contentment and/or delight) of the heart in the party loved, from whence follows a desire of their good, and a seeking and promoting of it to the uttermost of our power" (Manton).³ True love concerns both the heart and hands. In this broader sense, every duty binding upon husbands is an expression of love. Love provides, protects, and leads. "The injunction to love is clearly designed to comprehend the entire office of the husband, with its peculiar functions" (Palmer).⁴ Thus, while in this lesson we want to limit our focus to the attitude of love (complacency), this can never be severed from the action of love (benevolence).

The husband must love his wife in heart and mind. For this internal affection of love gives the heart itself to the thing loved, which is the most precious and first gift, and that, in fine, in which all other gifts are given when occasion requires: for love is diffusive of its good. But because we cannot thrust our eyes into the hearts of men, to see the internal affection, external effects are required in testimony of love: for the proof of love is the exhibition of its operation.⁵

(1) *Tenderness.* "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Col.3:19). Husbands are to act loving toward their wives and not bitterly. The Greek word rendered "bitter" refers "to an unpleasant, nasty, or vicious spirit." Thus, the NIV renders the phrase, "do not be harsh with them." Love and harshness are opposites. Or put another way, love is tender and not harsh. "Paul requires of husbands that they love their wives, and treat them gently."⁶ "By this expression therefore, the Apostle intimates, that the behavior of the husband towards his wife ought to be pleasant and kind; not unsavory and harsh" (Davenant).⁷

John Davenant suggested three ways this bitterness (harshness) may express itself.⁸ First, in our affections. "For as far as the affections are bitter, they who are exasperated against their wives for light causes and failures however small, both begin from thence either to hate them, or at least carelessly and lazily to love them." Second, in our words. "For a tender mind is wounded no less by bitter words, than the body is by sharp weapons: hence words are sometimes compared by the Psalmist to darts and swords (Ps.55:21)." Third, in our actions. "When the husband, plainly unmindful what the conjugal relation is, shows himself a tyrant, and treats his wife as his servant. The very institution of

¹ Ambrose, *The Well-Ordered Family*, 21

² George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:487-497

³ Thomas Manton, *Works*, 19:468

⁴ B.M. Palmer, *The Family*, 26-27

⁵ John Davenant, *Colossians*, 2:159-160

⁶ Geneva Bible Translation Notes on Colossians 3:19

⁷ John Davenant, *Colossians*, 2:164

⁸ John Davenant, *Colossians*, 2:164-166

marriage repels this bitterness: for God gave not Eve to Adam as a servant or a slave, but for a companion or help-meet."

Davenant then provided three ways "this tyranny is exercised over the wife" in or by our actions.⁹ First, "when she is removed from all domestic rule, and is degraded as it were to the rank of a maid, even perhaps subjected to one of them." Second, "when those things which pertain either to her necessity or even to her dignity are denied or taken away by the husband. For she, by virtue of the matrimonial contract, ought to be a partner with the husband of all his goods: it is therefore injustice if he consume on himself more than his circumstances allow, and in the mean time withdraws from his wife what is just and good." Third, "it is the height of this bitter tyranny, to act cruelly towards the wife by stripes or blows; which we do not read that any one among the heathen did, unless he was drunk or mad."

"You husbands likewise, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman" (1Pet.3:7, NASB). A woman is the "weaker vessel" positionally (as she's inferior to her husband in rank) and personally (as she's physically and constitutionally weaker in strength). "A husband must treat his wife tenderly because she 'is a woman,' or, as we say, feminine. Husbands ought not expect their wives to act like men" (Adams).¹⁰ Husbands are to dwell with their wives "in an understanding way," knowing she is "a weaker vessel." "The wife being the weaker vessel is the reason why the husband should 'dwell with her according to knowledge'" (Brown).¹¹ "The husband must dwell with his wife as one who knows her needs, who recognizes the delicacy of her nature and feelings" (Clowney).¹²

This gentleness is a special fruit and evidence of love, and a notable means to take away all offence that otherwise might be taken from many things which he does. Sugar and honey are not more pleasant to the tongue than gentleness to the heart. It causes such things as otherwise are annoying and painful to the soul to be taken and applied, even as bitter pills dipped in sweet syrup are soon swallowed down and well digested. If a husband desires to be counted a servant of the Lord he must learn this lesson, for 'the servant of the Lord must be gentle unto all men' (2Tim.2:24).¹³

Nothing more turns the edge of his authority, perverts the use of his leadership, provokes the pride of his wife, makes his words and deeds less regarded, than bitterness. It is as gall and wormwood mixed with sweet and wholesome foods, which causes that they cannot be well digested, but are spit out again with violence as soon as they are tasted. Men in authority are very prone to this, and therefore, O husbands, be so much more watchful against it. Love your wife and be not bitter to her.¹⁴

(2) Forbearance. "Love is patient and is kind" (1Cor.13:4). "Don't be harsh or resentful to your wife or allow yourself to be preoccupied with her flaws. She, like you, is bound to have plenty of them. Respond with patience and loving leadership instead of masculine pride and outrage" (MacArthur).¹⁵ "Husbands should love their wives by not grieving them, by sweet and amiable behavior toward them, by thinking reverently and so speaking of them, by showing patience towards them, by bearing

⁹ John Davenant, *Colossians*, 2:166-167

¹⁰ Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 97

¹¹ John Brown, *Expository Discourses on 1Peter*, 2:225

¹² Edmond Clowney, *The Message of 1Peter*, 134

¹³ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:206

¹⁴ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:206

¹⁵ John MacArthur, *The Family*, 51

their burdens with them, and by sheltering them from evil" (Bayne).¹⁶ Husbands are to be sympathetic toward their wives.

The husband must be strongest in family patience; bearing with the weakness and passions of the wife; not so as to make light of any sin against God, but so as not to make a great matter of any frailty as against himself, and so as to preserve the love and peace which is to be as the natural temper (frame of mind) of their relationship.¹⁷

(3) Cherishing. "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies...for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (Eph.5:28-29). "There is a selflove which is graven in the bowels of man, which, when it is sanctified, becomes that rule of man's love" (Bayne).¹⁸ The word *nourish* means "to nourish or feed," and refers to physical and spiritual provision, whereas the word *cherish* means "to foster with tender care or love." Husbands are to cherish their wives as they cherish themselves. "Oh, how dear is a man to himself! How tenderly, how constantly, how fervently does he love himself! None can persuade him to be out of love with himself; truly thus should his love be to his wife" (Swinnock).¹⁹ "The husband must love the wife, that his heart may cleave to her, and take delight in her; as it is said, 'The young man had a delight in Jacob's daughter' (Gen.34:19)" (Manton).²⁰ "A husband ought to delight in his wife wholeheartedly, that is, so to delight in her as wholly and only delighting in her. In this respect the prophet's wife is called the desire, or delight, or pleasure of his eyes, or that which he most of all delighted (Ezek.24:16)" (Gouge).²¹

(4) Honoring. "You husbands likewise, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1Pet.3:7). To honor is to "highly esteem or value." "Think honorably of her, as the person whom God saw best and fittest for you in all the world; speak honorably of her, not divulging any of her failings and imperfections, to her discredit; treat her honorably, use her as you bosom friend, your endeared companion, and, in every thing but authority, equal to yourself" (Hopkins).²²

William Jay, in his book, *Domestic Duties Considered*, said "it is the duty of husbands to give honor to their wives." He then suggested a sixfold honor due them: first, the honor of esteem. "This is to arise from a consciousness of her worth, and a knowledge of her importance in the community—in the family—and to yourselves"; second, the honor of affection. "This affection is to be peculiar, undivided, unrivalled. Nothing is to wear it away—nothing is to diminish it; no length of time, no discovery of imperfection. Children are parts of yourselves, but your wives ARE yourselves"; third, the honor of attention. "Nothing is so intolerable to a female as neglect; and upon what principle can a man justify indifference, omissions of observance, and heedless manners towards a wife"; fourth, the honor of confidence. "You are not to proceed without their knowledge and advice. In many cases their opinion may be preferable to your own"; fifth, the honor of maintenance. "You are to provide for them, and enable them to appear becoming their rank and situation if life"; sixth, the honor of benevolence. "You are to enable her to do good. Every man should devote a proportion of his property to charitable uses, and he should not be his distribution of the whole draw toward himself all the

¹⁶ Paul Bayne, *Ephesians*, 349

¹⁷ Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 439

¹⁸ Paul Bayne, *Ephesians*, 348

¹⁹ George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:491

²⁰ Thomas Manton, *Works*, 19:468

²¹ William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:192-193

²² Ezekiel Hopkins, *Works*, 1:418

regards of the relieved and obliged. His wife should command a share of the means and of the honor."²³

William Perkins, in his treatise, *Christian Economics*, summarized the duties of husbands into two: "to love her as himself, and to honor his wife." He then provided three ways husbands honor their wives: first, "in making account of her as his companion (or yoke-fellow). For this cause, the woman, when she was created, was not taken out of the man's head, because she was not made to rule over him, nor out of his feet, because God did not make her subject to him as a servant, but out of his side, to the end that man should take her as his mate"; second, "in a wise and patient bearing or covering of her infirmities, as anger, waywardness, and such like, in respect of the weakness of her sex"; third, by suffering himself sometimes to be admonished or advised by her, as in the case of Sarah (Gen.21:21) and Hannah (1Sam.1:23)."²⁴

(5) Communion. True love desires to spend time with the person loved. To rejoice in them. To learn about them and reveal themselves to them. "Rejoice with the wife of your youth" (Prov.5:18). "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life" (Ecc.9:9). "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely" (Song 2:14). "True love is mostly delighted with the presence of the beloved, and is tormented as it were by the absence of the same" (Davenant).²⁵ "Just as love causes Christ to be satisfied in His church (Isa.53:11), delight in her (Prov.8:31), and cling to her (Jn.10:28), so it will cause a husband to be satisfied in his wife, delight in her, and cling to her" (Beeke).²⁶ Christ not only delights in knowing His bride, but He delights in being known by His bride. Within Scripture, He has fully revealed Himself to the church. He has, so to speak, opened His heart to them.

Lou Priolo in his book, *The Complete Husband*, gives five hinderances to the husband's openness:²⁷ first, fear. "Perhaps the greatest hindrance to revelation is fear. Adam and Eve were stricken with fear and hid themselves from God when they realized their own nakedness. So also, husbands and wives are often stricken with fear and hide their true selves from each other when they consider the sinfulness of their own hearts (Gen.3:7-10)." Second, selfishness. "Love is being more concerned with what I can give than with what I can get. Selfishness is being more concerned with what I can get than with what I can give. 'Love does not seek its own' (1Cor.13:5)." Third, pride. "Before the fall, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed (Gen.2:25). That means, they were open and honest with God and themselves. It was pride that caused them to cover their sin. It is pride that keeps a man from revealing those things to his wife about which he is ashamed. Fourth, laziness. "Loving your wife will take a considerable amount of time, effort, and thought. You may have to change from being a feeling-oriented person, who does what he feels like doing and doesn't do what he doesn't feel like doing, to an obedience-oriented person, who does what is biblically required whether he feels like doing it or not." Fifth, ignorance (i.e., ignorance of God's commands). God commands husbands to dwell with their own wives with knowledge (1Pet.3:7). This means he must grow in his knowledge of his wife and he must increase his revelation of himself to his wife. "To the same degree that two people reveal themselves to each other, they will be able to have an intimate relationship with each other. To the extent that two people refuse or neglect to reveal themselves to each other, their ability to have an intimate relationship with each other will be hindered."

²³ William Joy, *Domestic Duties Considered*, 40-41.

²⁴ William Perkins, *Works*, 10:171-172

²⁵ John Davenant, *Colossians*, 2:160

²⁶ Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 182

²⁷ Lou, Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 18-26