

MARITAL STRIFE (1)

Proverbs 21:9

“It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.”

INTRODUCTION: Today’s message is number 369 in the series in the Book of Proverbs, and the title of the message is Marital Strife. The institution of marriage is ordained by God for the purpose of propagating children and to provide a social relationship of intimacy between a man and a woman. But what God’s holiness joins together, man’s sin often puts asunder. What can be a foretaste of heaven, often becomes a foretaste of hell. Our text describes the latter and gives a suggestion of how to make the best of a bad situation.

I. TWO DWELLING PLACES - *“A corner of the house top.” - “in a wide house”* (house of society).

Solomon sets before us a picture of contrasts between a small section on the roof of a home and a wide house spacious enough to provide comfortable living arrangements for several families. In it lives an angry, brawling, contentious woman who lives in all probability with her husband. Her manner of behavior is so disrupting that he is forced to find peace by retiring to his rooftop to be alone and away from her angry and fault-finding spirit.

1. *“The corner of the housetop”* - a place of solitude.

The rooftops of the houses in Judea were flat, surrounded by railings or an elevated wall to protect against injury. The law of Moses required such. In Deuteronomy 22:8 we read, ***“When you build a new house, then you shall make a battlement for your roof, that you bring not blood upon your house, if any man fall from thence.”*** The housetop was used for various purposes.

a. For conversation and visiting - I Samuel 9:25 - *“And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house.”*

b. For sleeping - I Samuel 9:26 - *“And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send you away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad.”*

c. For exercise - II Samuel 11:2 - *“And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from*

the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.”

d. For grain storage - Joshua 2:6 - *“But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.”*

e. For prayer and meditation - Psalm 102:7 - *“I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.”* Acts 10:9 - *“On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.”*

So while the housetop served a wide usage, being uncovered, it was exposed to the elements of wind, rain, sun, heat, and cold. It would thus be a place of discomfort during a great part of the year. But however uncomfortable the housetop might be, the Proverb implies that it would be a more desirable place than to be forced to live with a contentious wife in the comfort of a wide spacious home.

2. *“In a wide house”* - A place of contention.

In the Palestinian villages and towns, houses of more than one room were owned by those who were more prosperous. If a house of two or more rooms was to be built, the rooms were not placed side by side as the western builder would do. Instead an open space the size of a room would be left between the two rooms resulting in an open court with no roof. If more than two rooms were needed they would be added to either side of the open court, making the court of greater length. Each of the rooms would open out into the open court. This would provide for several families to live together, one large family, or the rooms would be used for entertaining visiting guests. A house of such spacious proportions was known as “a house of society.” The Hebrew word translated “wide house” in our King James Version literally means a house of society.

Such a house would normally provide many comforts and advantages for its owner. But our text describes a fly in the ointment. The peace of the entire society can be grievously disturbed by the presence of a brawling or contentious woman. In such an atmosphere a peaceable man would prefer to leave the comforts of the house below and retire to the corner of the house to escape the contentious atmosphere below. It is better to be exposed to the lightning bolts and thunder from the heavens above, than to have to continually be

the object of sharp words and thundering accusations from a quarrelsome, contentious woman.

II. TWO CONTRASTING CHARACTERS - *“It is better (for a man)” - “a brawling woman.”*

The text describes the contrasting characteristics of two different people. That of a peace loving man and that of a peace disturbing woman. But let it be noted that what applies to this incident may equally be applied if the roles are reversed, to that of a peace loving woman and a peace disturbing man. The contentious spirit is found in men as often as it is found in women. The fall in Adam did not make women any greater sinners than men in this area.

1. The ungodly wife - *“a brawling (contentious) woman.”*

The word translated “woman” may refer to a member of the female sex or to a wife. In the text here and in the context of other Proverbs, it applies to the marital state of man and wife. The text is describing the great affliction it is for a man to have a brawling, angry, scolding, loud-mouthed woman for a wife, who upon repeated occasions breaks out in a passion of rage and criticism.

a. She is ill-tempered.

In Proverbs 21:19 Solomon further describes this woman in this fashion, “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.” It is better to be alone in the desert than in the presence of this woman, particularly if she is your wife.

b. She is a nagging aggravation.

Proverbs 19:13 says, *“A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.”* The roof of the Eastern home was laid with supporting beams covered with dried mud rolled over with fine gravel and straw. Such a composition required a constant repair from the elements, the rain in particular. Just when you have one leak fixed, another one starts to drip. Thus the husband is subject to one outburst after another. The wife pictured here is one whose ill-temper is always ruling her husband and casting gloom over the home, and when no storm of passion is actually raging there is one brewing and ready to burst forth. Proverbs 27:15 repeats the description, “a continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.”

c. She turns joyful occasions into misery.

Proverbs 17:1 says, **“Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifice (feastings) with strife.”** As the Jews feasted upon the sacrifices offered unto God, a time was looked forward in which family and friends could rejoice together. But if the nagging, faultfinding wife was in the picture she was sure to ruin it for all. Thus it would be better for the husband to get an old hard, stale piece of bread and go to his roof top and eat it alone, than to be embarrassed in the presence of his friends by the actions of his wife.

d. She makes her husband feel rotten inside.

Proverbs 12:4 reads, **“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband; but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.”** The inward pains of the soul can wound as deep as cuts in the body. No greater pain of soul can be experienced by a godly man when she who has been joined to him, so as to become one flesh, has now become rottenness to his bones, who should have been a crown to his headship. The one who was his choicest treasure now has become his most piercing affliction.

e. She rejects her God-appointed role in life.

I Peter 3:4-6 says of the wives that one of their greatest values in God’s sight is to possess a “meek and quiet spirit.” **“But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 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: 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.”** In I Timothy 5:14 the duties of a wife is set forth. There we read, **“I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.”** A wife who, while professing faith in Christ, only to boss and gripe with her husband, will be used by the Devil to slander the Christian cause.

2. The godly husband - **“It is better** (for a man)”

a. The choice in marriage.

Under most of life’s circumstances, a man would better himself by seeking a wife so as to live in a marital state. Some exceptions might be:

- (1) if he has been given a gift of celibacy,
- (2) he enjoys life as a single person,
- (3) he wants to devote himself fully to the Lord's service,
- (4) he is facing impending illness, war, or death,
- (5) he is mentally, physically, or financially unable to support a wife.

There may be other reasons, but normally God's reason for bringing Eve to be Adam's wife still holds true. In Genesis 2:18 we read, ***"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."*** Upon seeing his bride to be, Adam immediately knew this was what he was missing in life. Thus in Genesis 2:23-25 we read, ***"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."*** Adam's first words upon seeing Eve were, "Wow-man this is me!" A life of intimacy was to follow God's ordinance. Other words of encouragement for a man to seek a Christian or believing wife are found in Proverbs 18:22, ***"Whoso finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor of the Lord."*** Also Proverbs 19:14, ***"Houses and riches are the inheritance of (from) fathers: and a prudent wife is from the Lord."*** And of course the classic description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31. There in verses 10-12 we read, ***"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."*** And verses 28, 30 we read, ***"Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her . . . favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that fears the Lord, she shall be praised."***

So if a godly man chooses to marry he must seek a wife from the Lord. One who is a believer and possesses the godly attitude of a meek and quiet spirit. But how many mess up at this point and bring bitter trouble upon themselves. They plunge into this most intimate of all human relationships as a new adventure with no forethought of their duties to be done, the temptations to be avoided or the crosses to be carried. They never sought God's direction in this most important choice. Thus the wife being not sought from the Lord, came not from him, and brought no favor to him.

b. Making the best of a bad situation.

Many a man has found himself in an unhappy marital state. We have examples in the Scriptures. Job did not do too well with his wife. She advised him to just curse God and kill himself. Quite a helpmate wasn't she? Lot had a wife who loved the pleasures of this world more than she loved Lot or God. David married one of Saul's daughters. She later ridiculed David when he recovered the ark of God. As he danced with joy she said he made a fool of himself. It is painful for a godly man when his wife is embarrassed by his religious behavior and beliefs.

So what is a man to do if he discovers he has married a lemon rather than a jewel? Do what the proverbial saying says to do, make lemonade! Make the best of a bad situation. Find a remote corner on your roof top and resign yourself to living a lonely or solitary life while remaining in your house or marriage. You cannot divorce her unless she commits adultery and/or abandons the marriage. He must learn contentment on the roof top if he is to retain his own godliness.

Matthew Henry gives good counsel here when he comments on the man in our text.

“What many a man is forced to do under such an affliction. He cannot keep up his authority. He finds it no purpose to contradict the most unreasonable passion, for it is unruly and rages so much the more; and his wisdom and grace will not suffer him to render railing for railing, nor his conjugal affection to use any severity, and therefore he finds it his best way to retire into a corner of the house top, and sit alone there, out of the hearing of the clamor; and if he employ himself well there, as he may do, it is the wisest course he can take.” (Henry, *Commentary on Proverbs*, Vol. 3, p. 911, Revell).

A quiet place where one can find some peace of mind is better than sharing a full married life with a contentious wife. While remaining true to his marriage vow, he must find his fulfillment in the things of God and other lawful things rather than in his wife. She who was to be his supporter has now become his destroyer. She has turned the Divine intent of God's ordinance upside down. Instead of a help-mate she has become a hindrance. Marriage can bring either much happiness or much unhappiness. A man once said that he did not know what happiness was until he got married - then it was too late! How many who longed to be married, later longed for

the single life once again. If one finds himself in an unhappy marriage, he must honor God's ordinance by seeking to make the best out of a bad situation.

III. TWO NECESSARY INGREDIENTS.

Paul said in Romans 12:18, *“If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men.”* There are two necessary ingredients which must be brought into any godly marriage if it is to honor God and bring happiness to the couple involved. They are first, a loving husband and second, a submissive wife. If either of these is lacking there will be trouble in the marriage.

1. The loving husband

Ephesians 5:25-31 reads, *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 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.”* Peter also tells the husbands to *“dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”*

2. The submissive wife.

Ephesians 5:22-24 instructs the wives to *“submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.”* And Peter adds in I Peter 3:4-6, *“But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 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: 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.”*

3. The cooperative effort.

In Ephesians 5:33, Paul gives his summary for both parties in the marriage, ***“Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”*** Also, in I Peter 3:8-12, Peter gives his conclusion on the marriage state with these words, ***“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”***

When these admonitions are followed, the husband will in his claim for her submission, remember that he has married a wife, not a slave. She in turn will remember that her glory is not only her hair, but her meek and quiet spirit. As each perform their faithful duties, their marriage will endure to the glory of God and the happiness of man. May God bless His word to the reduction of strife in our marriage.