

## The Christian Home (7): Mutual Duties (part 2)

Having considered the first three of seven mutual duties for married couples (unity, chastity, love), we come this morning to the final two (help, care).

### I. Mutual Duties

1. *Help*. "The Puritans called helpfulness yoke-pulling, because both husband and wife must put their shoulders together to bear their burdens and fulfill their callings" (Beeke).<sup>1</sup> "Marriage is called conjugal (*conjugium* = *shared yoke*), because married persons should draw evenly and equally, and thereby the load would be carried the more lightly" (Swinnock).<sup>2</sup> "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'" (Gen.2:18). Man was given a woman to assist him in his God-given vocation, "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). This vocation included procreation, but isn't limited to it. Man needed help to subdue and rule.

Husbands and wives should live together as soul and body. The soul helps the body with its faculties; the body helps the soul with its members. The soul is the guide of the body; the body is the instrument of the soul. If the soul be sad, the body feels it. How soon does the face speak the soul's complexion! If the body be sick, the soul is sensible, and little else than sorrow. Thus the husband and wife must be mutually assisting about their personal and their domestic concerns.<sup>3</sup>

(1) Spouses must help each other in domestic duties. "Christians in a married condition should join in putting their shoulders to domestical burdens" (Swinnock).<sup>4</sup> These "domestical burdens" include everything that directly concerns the home (finances and possessions), but especially concern the raising of children (where children exist). "A bishop then must be one who rules his house well" (1Tim.3:3), "I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, and manage the house" (1Tim.5:14). "They that have a joint interest, and are one flesh, must have a joint part in governing the home; although their power be not equal, and one may better oversee some business, and the other, other business; yet in their places, they must divide the care, and help each other" (Baxter).<sup>5</sup> "The wife should be willing to help the husband, in matters of business, and he should be willing to share with her the burden of domestic anxieties and fatigue" (James).<sup>6</sup>

The husband should never undertake any thing of importance, without communicating the matter to his wife; who, on her part, instead of shrinking from the responsibility of a counselor, and leaving him to struggle alone with his difficulties and perplexities, should invite him to communicate freely all his anxieties; for if she cannot counsel, she can comfort; if she cannot relieve his cares, she can help to bear them; if she cannot direct the course of his trade, she may the current of his feelings; if she cannot open any source of earthly wisdom, she can spread the matter before the Father and Fountain of Life.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 121

<sup>2</sup> George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:478

<sup>3</sup> George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:478

<sup>4</sup> George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:478

<sup>5</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 438

<sup>6</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 26

<sup>7</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 26

(2) Spouses must help each other in works of charity and hospitality. "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Rom.12:13). "A lovelier scene is not to be found on earth, than that of a pious couple, employing their mutual influence, and the hours of their retired companionship, in stirring up each other's hearts to deeds of mercy and religious benevolence" (James).<sup>8</sup> "There is nothing whereby a man or wife can bring more profit to the house than by giving to the poor. That which is given to the poor is lent to the Lord, and He will repay it with great increase (Prov.19:17). It is a seed, which, being abundantly sown, will bring forth a plentiful harvest (1Cor.9:6)" (Gouge).<sup>9</sup> "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal.6:10).

Many women resent the labor they must do and trouble they must undergo about serving guests, and hate the thought that any at any time should come to their house. I do not deny that a husband may over burden his wife by bringing guests too often into the house, and by that means make her weary of her life. Yet for a wife to refuse all labor of that kind, and to be discontent when her husband invites any friends, or when any come (as the three angels did to Abraham) unexpectedly, shows that there is no loving affection, nor wife-like submission to her husband in her.<sup>10</sup>

William Gouge provided four reasons husbands and wives must help each other in showing hospitality: first, "because in showing hospitality there are various things to be done, some of which are proper to the husband's position, and some to the wife's"; second, "because it is fitting that guests should know they are welcomed both by the husband and by the wife, so that they may be more cheerful"; third, "because a mutual consent and cheerful help here will be a special means, as to show their mutual affection, so to hold the hearts of husband and wife firm and close together, and make them better like and love another, especially if the husband shall show himself as ready and willing to welcome his wife's friends and family as his own, and the wife her husband's (as they should)"; fourth, "because thus they show a mutual desire of bringing God's blessing on each other, and upon their whole family."<sup>11</sup>

(3) Spouses must help each other in promoting religion within the home. "Every married couple must work together to see that true religion is established and flourishes in their homes so that they may have a church in their house" (Beeke).<sup>12</sup> Husbands and wives must also work together to sanctify and keep the Sabbath day holy. "The Lord's Day is to be wholly spent in the worship of God. On that day, participate in whatever Christian education classes are available at church and faithfully attend both of the worship services, not only to help your family sanctify the Sabbath, but also to teach your children to do the same with future generations (Ps.78:5-7)" (Beeke).<sup>13</sup> To this, husbands and wives must help each other.

2. *Care*. "The matter about which husbands and wives should be concerned to provide care for each other, is in general the good of one another; that each of them do that for the other, which Solomon in particular applies to a wife, that is, *good and not evil all the days of their life* (Prov.31:12)" (Gouge).<sup>14</sup> (1) Care for their souls. William Gouge suggested several ways this mutual care is fulfilled. (a) Husbands and wives must hinder sin in one another. "Sin hinders grace. Sin is to

---

<sup>8</sup> John Angell James, *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, 32

<sup>9</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:95-96

<sup>10</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:94

<sup>11</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:93-94

<sup>12</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 130

<sup>13</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 130

<sup>14</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:61

grace as water is to fire; it quenches the heat of it, and if without stop it be poured on it, it will completely put it out. Regarding this, there ought to be a mutual care in husbands and wives, both to prevent sin before it is committed, and also to give what cure they can after it is committed" (Gouge).<sup>15</sup>

(b) Husbands and wives must cure sin in one another. "When either husband or wife is fallen into any sin, a mutual duty it is for the other, to use what cure may be of that sin, as if one of them were wounded, the other must take care for the healing of that wound" (Gouge).<sup>16</sup> "This duty may be performed by meek instructions, forceful persuasions, gentle reproofs, and by the help of some good minister or other discreet and faithful friend" (Gouge).<sup>17</sup>

(c) Husbands and wives must help forward the growth of grace in each other. "Husbands and wives must mutually work to advance the growth of grace in one another" (Gouge). Gouge then provided six means to advance growth of grace in each other: first, "by taking notice of the beginning, and least measure of grace, and approving it"; second, "by frequent discussions about such things as concern growing in grace, mutually asking questions to one another, and answering them"; third, "by their mutual practice and example, making themselves patterns of piety to each other"; fourth, "by performing exercises of religion, such as praying, singing psalms, reading the Word, and similar things together"; fifth, "by maintaining holy and religious exercises in the family"; sixth, "by stirring up one another to go to the house of God, to hear the Word, partake of the sacrament, and wholeheartedly to perform all the parts of God's public worship."<sup>18</sup>

Richard Baxter provided 15 directions for husbands and wives to care for each other's souls (I will only mention five not mentioned by Gouge above): first, "each of you must be sure that you have a care of your own soul; and retain a deep and lively apprehension of those great and everlasting matters, of which you are to speak to others"; second, "take those opportunities which your ordinary nearness and familiarity affords you, to be speaking seriously to each other about the matters of God, and your salvation"; third, "when either husband or wife is speaking seriously about holy things, let the other be careful to cherish, and not to extinguish and put an end to the discourse"; fourth, "engage each other in the reading of the most convincing, quickening books, and in attendance on the most powerful minister, and in profitable converse with the holiest persons"; fifth, "conceal not the state of your souls, nor hide your faults from one another."<sup>19</sup>

William Gouge provided 5 ways or reasons husbands and wives fail to care for each other's souls: first, because of careless neglect. "When husbands and wives are so attentive to earthly things, that they think it enough if they provide one another with the things of this life." Second, negligence in observing one another's disposition or conduct. "It comes to pass that they keep not back, nor restrain one another from running into any sin. Pilate's wife, though a pagan woman, shall rise up in judgment against many such wives, for she did what she could to keep her husband from shedding innocent blood (Matt.27:19)." Third, a soothing of one another's spirit and seeking mutually to please one another in all things, without respect of good or evil. "Such as these the Scripture calls 'men-pleasures' (Eph.6:6). From this it comes to pass that husbands and wives are so far from drawing one another from sin, that the better rather yields to the worse, and both run into evil." Fourth, "an undue fear of offending one another by Christian instruction, admonition, reproof, and similar things." Fifth, "an ungodly and envious disposition, by which many husbands and wives are moved to mock and scoff at that holy zeal and eagerness which they observe in their mates."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:67-68

<sup>16</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:69

<sup>17</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:69-70

<sup>18</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:70-71

<sup>19</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 435-437

<sup>20</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:71-72

(2) Care for their bodies. "Another great conjugal duty is, to be helpful to each other for the health and comfort of their bodies. Not to pamper each other's flesh, or cherish the vices of pride, or sloth, or gluttony in each other; but to further the health and cheerfulness of the body, to fit it for the service of the soul and God" (Baxter).<sup>21</sup> "This duty extends itself to all states, both of prosperity and adversity, of health and sickness. Therefore they ought mutually to rejoice in the wellbeing of one another, and also in all distress to help and comfort each other, putting their shoulders under one another's burden, and helping to relieve one another as much as they can" (Gouge).<sup>22</sup>

Joel Beeke provided two helps for husbands and wives to care for each other's bodies: first, "we are to avoid all things that may cause sickness or disease and practice things which maintain or restore good health such as a nutritious diet, necessary medicine, and physical exercise"; second, "we are to comfort and support one another in times of difficulty." He then said, "Days of sickness, adversity, sorrow, and loss must and will come. And when they do, a husband and wife must be a comfort and help to each other, doing all they can to lessen sorrow, ease pain, calm fears, settle hearts, and end misery."<sup>23</sup>

(3) Care for their reputation. "Each spouse is to care for each other's name and reputation, both in their hearts as well as by what they say to others" (Beeke).<sup>24</sup> Joel Beeke suggests this care will require two things: first, "it requires that as much as possible husband and wife conceal each other's weaknesses from the eyes of others."<sup>25</sup> "To procure a quiet life, the husband must be deaf, and the wife blind. If they would live in peace, the man must not hear to declare it abroad, nor the wife see to say it among her gossips whatever is amiss at home" (Swinnock).<sup>26</sup> Second, "it requires keeping each other's secrets to prevent others from thinking ill of them. A wife and husband should enjoy the assurance that what they have entrusted to each other is safely locked away from others. Spouses should be faithful to keep hidden and under lock, as precious jewels, what they have shared between themselves."<sup>27</sup>

William Gouge suggested three helps to protect the name and reputation of our spouse: first, "husbands and wives must give one another notice of the report that goes of them, and seek to work in them both a sight and sense of those evils which are in the mouths of others. After giving notice, they must labor to bring them to repentance of those sins, for which they obtained a bad reputation"; second, "husbands and wives must take notice of the good qualities which are in one another, and as one has occasion to speak of the other, to make those good qualities the subject of their speech"; third, "a husband and wife must wisely and seasonably give one another notice of the good things people are saying about them, to provoke them both to give glory to God and also to walk worthy of that good report."<sup>28</sup>

William Gouge provided two motives behind this mutual duty: first, "a good name is a most precious thing, better than precious ointment (Ecc.7:1)"; second, "so closely are husbands and wives joined together that the good name of the one cannot but tend to the honor of the other; so that they seek their own honor also."<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 437

<sup>22</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:73-74

<sup>23</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 122

<sup>24</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 124

<sup>25</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 125

<sup>26</sup> George Swinnock, *Works*, 1:476

<sup>27</sup> Joel Beeke, *Living in a Godly Marriage*, 127

<sup>28</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:78-79

<sup>29</sup> William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:76