

Of the Duties of Husband and Wife.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love, reverence, and submission in a marriage, as exemplified by the relationship between Christ and the church.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21

Topics: "Marriage", "Roles in Family"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the respective duties of husbands and wives, highlighting that husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves the church, while wives are to show reverence and submit to their husbands as to the Lord. He explains that marriage is a sacred institution ordained by God, where both partners are to fulfill their roles with mutual respect and love. The sermon underscores the importance of these duties in maintaining a harmonious and God-honoring household, reflecting the relationship between Christ and the church. Gill also discusses the significance of consent in marriage and the responsibilities that come with it, urging both parties to prioritize each other's well-being and spiritual growth.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 4--Chapter 1

OF THE RESPECTIVE DUTIES OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

Having considered Public Worship in all its branches, I now proceed to treat of Private Worship; by which I mean, not merely the private teachings and instructions of a master of a family, to those who are under his care; nor private conferences of the saints, by which they may edify one another; nor private reading of the scriptures, which are to be searched whether the things heard in the ministry of the word are true, and which are to be read in the family for instruction; nor private prayer, in the closet or in the family; nor private singing the praises of God, which may be performed in like manner: which are all branches of private worship, and have been touched on in the preceding Book.

But what I mean by private worship, and intend to treat of, are the personal, relative, domestic, and civil duties incumbent on particular persons, in their different relations to one another; and so every other duty and good work: which all come under the name of "cultus", or "worship"; being all to be performed with a

respect to God, under his authority, according to his will and command, and in obedience to it, and with a view to his glory. In this manner all relative and mutual duties are to be performed; the subjection of wives to their husbands is to be made as "unto the Lord", the Head of the man, and in obedience to him; and husbands are to love their wives, "as Christ loved the church", according to his pattern and example, and as influenced by his love (Eph. 5:21, 29).

Children are to obey their parents "in the Lord", as being what he requires, and has encouraged by his promise; and parents, as an act of religion, are to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:1, 4). Servants are to be obedient to their masters, "as unto the Lord", as his servants, and "doing the will of God from the heart"; and "with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, fearing God". And masters are to do their duty to their servants; "Knowing that they also have a master in heaven", to whom they are accountable, (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-24, 4:1) and subjects are to obey magistrates, as being the "powers ordained of God", and magistracy an ordinance of God; and magistrates are to protect their subjects, and to be "terrors, not to good works", but for the encouragement and praise of them, and for the discouragement and punishment of those that are evil (Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13, 14).

God has a concern in all these, and men have a concern with him in them. These I shall briefly treat of in their order; and begin with the respective duties of husband and wife, which are summed up in these two general comprehensive ones; "love" on the one part, and "reverence" on the other, (Eph. 5:33) and these arise from a conjugal union and marriage relation between the said parties; marriage is an union of male and female, of one man and of one woman in lawful wedlock, agreeable to the original creation of man, (Gen. 1:27; Mal. 2:15) and agreeable to the course of Providence, which has been kept to ever since in all ages and nations; there being continually nearly the same number of males and females born into the world, at most as thirteen to twelve, or fourteen to thirteen; the surplus on the side of the males, being a provision by the wise Orderer of all things for a supply for war, for the seas, &c. and by this conjugal union, male and female, become one, even one flesh, (Gen. 2:24; Matthew 19:6) which union is therefore very near and strict, and, indeed, indissoluble but by death, excepting in one case, unfaithfulness in the one to the other, by adultery or fornication, (Rom. 7:2; Matthew 5:32) and this state is to be entered into with mutual consent; indeed, with the consent of all parties who have a concern in it; with the consent of parents and guardians, under whose care single persons may be; and especially with their own consent, for none are to be forced into it against their wills; no, not by their superiors; it must be their own voluntary act and deed: and being thus entered into, it is a very honourable state; "Marriage is honourable in all", (Heb. 13:4) it being an institution of God, and that of God in paradise; by whom our first parents were directed to it, in a state of purity and innocence; God made the woman for an help meet, and brought her to the man, proposed her to him, whom he approved and accepted of, and she became his wife, (Gen. 2:18, 22-24) it was the Lord's act and deed, and to him Christ ascribes the act of marriage (Matthew 19:6).

Christ honoured it by his presence, and at such a solemnity wrought his first miracle, and manifested forth the glory of his Deity, (John 2:1, 2, 11) and what makes this state yet more honourable is, that the marriage of Adam and Eve was a type and emblem of the conjugal union of Christ and the church, (Eph. 5:32) Adam was a figure or type of Christ, and, among other things, in his marriage; and Eve, the mother of all living, was a type of the church; Adam was first formed, and then Eve; Christ was before the church, and, indeed, before all things; Eve was formed from Adam, from a rib taken out of his side; the church has her original from Christ, and her subsistence by him; all her grace, blessings, and happiness, are from him; her justification and sanctification are from him, signified by the blood and water which sprung from

his pierced side.

Eve was brought by the Lord to Adam, not against her will, but with it, and by him presented as a proper match for him, which he approved and accepted of; and the church was brought to Christ, and given to him by his Father, to be his spouse and bride, whom he liked, accepted of, and betrothed to himself; and her consent is obtained by the drawings and influences of his Father's grace: and though this is no direct proof of, yet it has a favourable aspect upon, and may serve to illustrate the "supralapsarian" scheme; that Christ had an interest in his church, and she in him, and was espoused unto him before she fell in Adam; this marriage transaction between Adam and Eve being before the fall.

Moreover, marriage is honourable with respect to the ends of it; which even before the fall, and supposing Adam had stood, hereby he would have had an help meet; and the first law of creation would have been carried into execution, increase and multiply; a godly seed, a legitimate offspring would have sprung from hence; families formed and built up, and the world peopled with inhabitants; and since the fall the ends and uses of it are to preserve chastity, to prevent incontinence, and to avoid fornication; as well as to answer the other ends: and particularly this state appears honourable: when the duties of it are observed by both parties; as, 1.

First, love on the part of the husband. "Husbands love your wives", Ephesians 5:25 instances of which are in Isaac, Jacob, Elkanah, and others (Gen. 24:67, 29:18, 20; 1 Sam. 1:5). The nature and manner of showing it, and the reasons of it, might be observed. 1a. First, the nature of it. 1a1. It is superior to any shown to any other creature whatever; as to the neighbour, who, though to be loved by a man as himself, yet a man's wife is himself, and loving her is loving himself, the other part of himself, (Eph. 5:28) parents are to be loved, but a wife before them; for a man is to leave father and mother, and to cleave to his wife, (Gen. 2:24) children are to be loved, but the wife before them; as well as the husband by the wife; "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (1 Sam. 1:8) and Christ is to be loved before any relations (Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26). 1a2.

It should be a love of complacency and delight, taking pleasure and delight in her person, company, and conversation, (Prov. 5:18, 19; Eccl. 9:9) as is the love of Christ to the church, who is his Hephzibah, in whom is all his delight. 1a3. Should be chaste and single, as the love of Christ is, (Song 6:9) and for this reason a man should not have more wives than one, whereby his love would be divided or alienated, and hate the one and love the other, as is commonly the case; and therefore the law provided for the firstborn, of whichsoever it might be (De 21:15, 17; see 1 Cor. 7:2). 1a4.

It should be mutual; the wife is to love the husband, as the husband the wife, (Titus 2:4) and generally her love is the most strong and affectionate, (2 Sam. 1:26) and the reason why the husband is more frequently exhorted to it, it may be, is because most wanting in the performance of it. 1b. Secondly, the manner, or how, and in what way it is to be expressed; not in words only, but in deed and in truth; by real facts, which speak louder than words. 1b1. In making all proper provision for her temporal good, signified by "nourishing" and "cherishing" her, (Eph. 5:29) which include food and raiment, and all the necessities of life; he is to "provide things honest", decent, convenient, and suitable, to his rank, state, condition, circumstances, and abilities; and he that "provideth not for his own", especially for his own wife, his own children and family, "is worse than an infidel" (Rom. 12:17; 1 Tim. 5:3). 1b2.

In protecting her from all abuses and inquiries; as she is the weaker vessel, she is to be taken under his wing and shelter; he is to be a covering to her, as Abraham was to Sarah; which may be signified by the

ceremony used at marriage, or by which that act is expressed, a man's spreading his skirt over the woman, (Gen. 20:16; Ruth 3:9) he is to expose himself to danger, and even risk his life in her defence, and for her rescue (1 Sam. 30:5, 18). 1b3. In doing everything that may contribute to her pleasure, peace, comfort, and happiness; "he that is married" is to care "how he may please his wife"; nor does the apostle blame him for it; but rather commends him for it, or recommends it unto him (1 Cor. 7:33).

"Hatred stirreth up strifes", contentions, quarrels, the consequence of which is confusion, and every evil work; "but love covereth all sins", conceals faults, and hides failings and infirmities (Prov. 10:12). 1b4. In seeking her spiritual welfare; her conversion, if unconverted, and her spiritual peace, comfort, and edification, she being an heir with him of the grace of life; by joining with her in all religious exercises; in family worship, in reading, in prayer, in praise, in Christian conference and conversation; by instructing her in everything relating to doctrine, duty, and church discipline; in answer to questions she may and has a right to ask him at home (1 Cor. 14:35).

To all which are opposed hatred and bitterness; "Husbands love your wives, and be not bitter against them"; not giving bitter language, threatening words, sour looks, and especially bitter blows; which is cruel, churlish, barbarous, and brutish, unbecoming the man and the Christian. 1c. Thirdly, the reasons or arguments enforcing this duty of the love of a man to his wife, are such as follow. 1c1. The nearness between them, she is his own flesh; and "no man ever yet hated his own flesh", which would be monstrously unnatural; she is "himself", the other part of himself, and to be loved as his own body, which to love is a principle^[1] in nature (Eph. 5:28, 29, 33). 1c2.

The help, advantage, and profit he receives by her; she is provided as an help meet for him, and becomes such to him in the affairs of the family, (Gen. 2:18) she is his companion, and which is used as a reason why he should not deal treacherously with the wife of his youth, (Mal. 2:14) she is his companion in prosperity and adversity; shares with him in his cares and troubles, in his joys and sorrows; sympathizes with him in all conditions, weeps when he weeps, and rejoices when he rejoices; she is a partner with him in the blessings of grace now, and will be a partner with him in eternal glory. 1c3.

The glory and honour she is unto him; "The woman is the glory of the man", in whom are seen his power and authority, (1 Cor. 11:7) one who is loving and chaste to him, and is careful of her family affairs, does him honour, and is a credit and crown to him, and makes him respectable among men; his heart safely trusts in her, and through her conduct he is known and respected "in the gates" (Prov. 12:4, 31:10, 11, 23). 1c4. The strongest and most forcible argument of all to a good man, is the love of Christ to his church; which is the pattern and exemplar of a man's love to his wife and most strongly enforces it, (Eph. 5:25-28). 2.

Secondly, the duties on the part of the wife, are reverence, subjection, obedience, &c. 2a. Reverence; and "let the wife see that she reverence her husband", (Eph. 5:33) which reverence is both internal and external; she ought to think well, and even highly of him, and not despise him in her heart, as Michael, Saul's daughter, did David her husband, (2 Sam. 6:16) and she should speak of him and to him in a respectable manner, as Sarah did to Abraham, calling him Lord (1 Peter 3:6; Gen. 18:12). 2b.

Subjection and submission to him; "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands", not to others; "as unto the Lord", the Lord Christ, the head of every man, and so of the church; "and as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything"; that is, in things relating to family affairs; not in anything that is contrary to the laws of God and Christ; for God is to be obeyed rather than

men, than any man, than husbands themselves, (Eph. 5:22, 24) and this subjection and submission is not a servile one; not like that of servants to their masters, or of handmaids to mistresses, and much less like that of slaves to tyrants, or who have taken them and hold them captives; but as the body, and members of it, are subject to the head, by which they are governed, guided, and directed to what is for their good; and that in a wise, tender, and gentle manner. 2c.

Obedience. the apostle directs, that wives be "obedient to their own husbands", (Titus 2:5) Sarah is an example of this; and an instance we have of her immediate and quick obedience to the orders of Abraham, (1 Peter 3:6; Gen. 18:6). 2d. Assistance and help in family affairs, agreeable to the original end of her creation; guiding the house with discretion, keeping her children and servants in good order and decorum; abiding at home, and managing all domestic business with wisdom and prudence (1 Tim. 2:14; Titus 2:5). 2e.

Assuming no authority over her husband, as not in ecclesiastical, so not in domestic matters; seeking to please him in all things, doing nothing without his will and consent, and never contrary to it; not intermeddling with his worldly business and concerns, but leaving them to him (1 Tim. 5:11, 12; 1 Cor. 7:34). 2f. Continuance with him in every state and circumstance of life; going with him wherever God in his providence, and his business in life call him; as Sarah with Abraham in the land of promise, in Egypt, and elsewhere; she should do as Ruth proposed to Naomi (Ruth 1:16).

There are reasons why the wife should be found in the performance of these duties. Some, 2f1. Taken from her creation, time, manner, and end of it; Adam was formed first, and then Eve; and therefore in point of time had the superiority; the man was made not of and for the woman; but the woman was made of and for the man, and to, be an help meet and assistant to him (1 Tim. 2:13; 1 Cor. 11:8, 9; Gen. 2:18). 2f2. From the consideration of the fall, and her concern in it; "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression", at least first, and the means of drawing her husband into it; and therefore it is part of the sentence denounced upon her for her transgression, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (1 Tim. 2:14; Gen. 3:16). 2f3.

From the man being the head of the woman; and therefore she should be in subjection to him as such (1 Cor. 11:3 Eph. 5:23). 2f4. From her being the weaker vessel, and therefore standing in need of his shelter and protection. 2f5. From her own credit and honour concerned herein; as it would be to her discredit and dishonour to behave irreverently, and to be disobedient; to submit to him, "as is fit the Lord", is decent and becoming, (Col. 3:18) and so to be is ornamental to women, and the best ornament they can deck themselves with; "Being in subjection to their own husbands" (1 Peter 3:3-5). 2f6.

The chief argument of all is taken from the subjection of the church to Christ, (Eph 5:22, 24). In short, both parties should consult each other's pleasure, peace, comfort, and happiness, and especially the glory of God; that his word, ways, and worship, may not be reproached and evil spoken of through any conduct of theirs (Titus 2:5). ENDNOTES

[1] "Fateor insitam nobis esse corporis nostri charitatem", Seneca, Ep. 14.

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