

RESPONSIBILITIES IN MARRIAGE

I.

Introduction

Marriage is instituted by God and plays a very important role in God's creation of mankind, which we can tell from the great responsibilities God gave to spouses. A husband and wife have a special relationship unshared with other people. Only our relationship to God is more important than our relationship to our spouse, because it will determine our eternal destination.

Today, I will deal with the key responsibilities that God gave to husbands and wives.

II.

Husband – Wife

When a man and a woman get married, they make a life-long contract. It is a 3-party contract between God, who introduced marriage, a husband and a wife. If we decide to enter God's institute of marriage, it is our responsibility to keep God's will concerning marriage. If a person does not intend to keep God's will concerning marriage, he/she should not enter marriage at all. Such a person would be a very bad choice for a husband or wife.

The key responsibility that God gave to the husband is to love his wife the same way that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. - Ephesians 5:25

This passage does not speak of emotional love, but of love in which the husband makes sacrifices to do certain things, because they are in the best interest of his wife. It is a sacrificial love. The Greek word for sacrificial love is *agape*. Jesus taught that no one has greater *agape* (love) than the one who sacrifices his life for his friends. - John 15:13 Jesus lived what He taught. He had this sacrificial love for us. He took our punishment for our sins upon Himself when He died on the cross in order that our sins could be forgiven. This is how He opened the door for our reconciliation with God and offered us eternal life with God in His heavenly kingdom. Jesus did not die to make a hero out of Himself in the sight of men, but He died because this was the only way He could help us. A husband should have the same sacrificial love for his wife. He should be willing to make not only little sacrifices that are of little consequence to him, but even great sacrifices when he really has to deny himself, lift up his cross and follow Jesus. - Luke 9:23

To be more specific, sacrificial love requires of a husband willingness even to die for his wife if the necessity arises. It requires of a husband to work in order to provide for his wife a home, food, clothes, etc. It requires of a husband emotional love for his wife. It requires of a husband to live with his wife and spend with her more time than with any other person, thing or hobby. It requires of a husband talking to his wife to understand her desires, needs and concerns. It requires of a husband to praise and give honor to his wife. 1 Corinthians 7:3, 1 Peter 3:7, Proverbs 31:28

God's assigned role for the husband is to be the leader, provider and protector of his wife. Husband by making sacrifices fulfills God's assigned role, and at the same time shows to God, his wife, his children, and possibly to other people, that he loves her the way Christ loved the church. Don't you think this requires lots of sacrifices on the part of a husband? Yes, it does. Ask your husband.

If the husband does not make sacrifices, he does not fulfill God's assigned role and at the same time shows to God, his wife, his children and possibly to other people, that he does not love her the way that Christ loved church. Once again, this is not about emotional love, but about sacrificial love agape.

The motive for the sacrifices made by the husband must be fulfilling God's will and pursuing the best interest of his wife. If the husband has different motives for making sacrifices, for instance he makes them for his own glory, for his own good image, for his own gratification, to make his wife totally dependent on him, or to be able to manipulate his wife, then whatever sacrifices he does, it is not the agape (love) commanded by God.

To make it simpler, I will compare it to helping a needy person. If one makes a sacrifice to help a needy person for a wrong motive, he does not do the will of God. - Matthew 6:1-4 Likewise, if the husband makes sacrifices for his wife by the wrong motive, he does not do the will of God.

The apostle Paul describes agape (love) that a Christian should have toward God and men as the essence of true religion. Without agape (love), spiritual gifts, the greatest knowledge of God's Word, the greatest faith, the greatest benevolence, even the greatest sacrifices would not profit us for our salvation. - 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 Likewise, sacrificial love (agape) is the essence of a true marriage relationship between a husband and wife. The characteristics of agape (love) described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 are very well applicable for the marriage relationship:

Love is not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice at wrong. Love is patient and kind, rejoices in the right, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. This is the love that a husband needs to have for his wife. This is the love that Christ had for us.

What would happen if Christ did not have sacrificial love for us? Our most essential spiritual needs would not be fulfilled. We would not be forgiven of our sins. We would not have a relationship with our Father in Heaven, our communication with God through prayer would be hindered because of our sins, we would not have the truth concerning our salvation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit for our salvation through the Scriptures. We would not have protection from God against Satan and his temptations. To describe it in one sentence: We would be separated from our Creator.

What would happen if the husband did not have sacrificial love for his wife? Her most essential mental, emotional, social and physical needs would not be fulfilled at all, or not as they should be. She would be separated from her husband, perhaps mentally, emotionally or even physically.

The fact that emotional love is not meant in Ephesians 5:25, is even more apparent from Ephesians 5:28-29. The husband ought to love his wife as his own body. We take care of our bodies and their needs. That has nothing to do with emotional love or wrong motives. Let me illustrate it with few examples. If you eat your food to satisfy your hunger, there is no emotional love or wrong motive involved in the process. Likewise, if you brush your teeth to keep them healthy, there is no emotional love or wrong motive involved in the process. We take care of our body, because it is part of our God-given nature. It is natural for us.

If the husband is to love his wife as his own body, he must take her as part of his God-given nature. His love for her must be as natural as the love for his own body. If the husband loves his wife with this agape (love), it will be much easier for his wife to love him with the same agape (love). Thus,

it is actually even in the husband's best interest that he loves his wife with sacrificial agape (love). For as Ephesians 5:28 says, "He who loves his wife loves himself."

III. Wife - Husband

Having said all that about the husband, I must add that it does not mean that the wife should not make any sacrifices at all. If it was so, the life of husbands would be miserable. Fortunately, sacrifices are required of the wife as well, which is apparent from **the key responsibility that God gave to the wife, and that is for her to submit herself to her husband, as unto the Lord, or as the church is subject unto Christ.** - Ephesians 5:22-24

The Lord, in this case, is of course the Lord Jesus Christ, and not some tyrant. The Lord Jesus Christ came to serve us for our salvation by sacrificing His life on the cross for our sins, not to abuse us. This is the Lord all true Christians are submitted to, whether single, widowed, wives, or husbands. Christians are the church, or body and Jesus is the head of the church or body. The head, church and body here are the picture of the relationship between an individual Christians and God, through Jesus. That relationship between God and an individual Christians exists as long as they obey Jesus' will.

In other words, like our body follows the will of our physical head, every true Christian follows Jesus as his/her head. Jesus' will for the husband is to have the same sacrificial love for his wife as Jesus had for us when He died for our sins. Jesus' will for the wife is to be submitted to her husband. If the wife has a husband that follows Jesus' will, then it should not be a problem for her to submit to such a loving husband as to the Lord, or as the church is subject to Christ. As for the wife of an unbelieving husband, she should be submitted to her husband as well, that she might win him by her conduct for the Lord Jesus Christ. - 1. Peter 3:1

And how is the church submitted to Christ? It belongs to Christ, not to anybody else. It loves Christ, by obeying His will, not anybody's else. Likewise, the wife is to be submitted to, belong to and love her husband.

God's assigned role for the wife is to be a suitable help for her husband, a mother, and home-maker. By the wife making sacrifices, she fulfills God's assigned role and at the same time shows to God, her husband, her children and possibly to other people, that she is submitted to him as to the Lord, or as the church is subject to Christ. Don't you think this requires lots of sacrifices on the part of a wife? I have no doubt it does. Ask your wife.

If the wife does not make sacrifices, she does not fulfill God's assigned role. At the same time she shows to God, her husband, her children and possibly to other people, that she is not submitted to him as to the Lord, or as church is subject to Christ.

That does not mean that the life of a wife should be confined within the walls of her house. The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is a good example of that. - Proverbs 31:10-24

IV. Potential problems in marriage

Problems may occur when one of the spouses does not follow Jesus' will, either he/she is not a Christian at all or fails to do Jesus' will. In such a case, there is a principle in the Bible which says that the other spouse must put the Lord's will on the first place even before his/her spouse, to remain Jesus' disciple. - Luke 14:26, Colossians 3:18

V. Preparation for marriage

As Christians and parents we want the best for our children. We want them to prosper physically and spiritually. We want them to choose a good, diligent and faithful Christian spouse that will help them get to heaven. Therefore we need to teach them biblical principles from the time they are born that will help them when they mature to select such a spouse. At first of course, we teach only by our conduct showing them what is sacrificial agape (love) and the role of each parent, and as soon as they begin to speak also by actual teaching them biblical principles in a way that is adequate to their age. It is no exaggeration when I say that we should teach our children biblical principles from their birth, because they are not yet deformed by evil in the world. Therefore it is the best time when we can form their personality in harmony with God's Word. - Ephesians 6:4, Proverbs 22:6

Our goal should be to deeply in-root biblical principles in their mind, that they would become the foundation for their thoughts, decisions, words and acts. Choosing a spouse is the second most important decision in life, preceded only by the decision to become a Christian.

To postpone teaching our children biblical principles till they are teenagers, means to fail to do our Christian duty. What is worse, it leaves a blank space in their mind, heart and soul, that will soon be filled by trashy patterns of behavior and roles promoted by Hollywood movie-makers and their movie stars, liberal book writers and their book heroes, producers of modern music and their music stars, school-mates and friends from non-Christian families. Then one day you will be surprised that your teenagers are strangers to you, you do not understand them and they do not seem to understand your efforts to teach them biblical principles. Your biblical values are not their values. Your perception of what is good and right in the sight of God is not their perception. Your idea of what is the right kind of person for their spouse is not their idea. To postpone teaching our children any biblical principles till they are teenagers is the best recipe for ruining their lives by wrong decisions.

Marriage of our children should not become a hindrance for them in their service to God. - Luke 14:20 And certainly it should not connect their life with a person who will lead them to hell. The warning example should be Ananias and Sapphira from Acts 5.

VI. Sacrificial love and emotional love

All I said about the importance of sacrificial love does not mean that emotional love is not important. It is very important, but emotional love by itself is simply not enough to have a God designed relationship between a husband and wife, because if a marriage union would depend only on emotional love, how long would emotional love last without sacrificial love (agape), and what would become of a marriage union when emotional love dies due to lack of sacrificial love (agape)? What's going to hold that marriage together if emotional love is gone and spouses never learn to practice

sacrificial love.

VII.

God's design for husband and wife

God's design for a husband and wife is for them to make up a well working team here on the earth. A team where both partners compliment each other in a unique way, provide love and support to one another, and give obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only this way can a husband and wife create such a relationship in which they will motivate one another for greater love and achieving the ultimate goal of our existence here on the earth - eternal life with God in His Heavenly Kingdom. Therefore, let us be such husbands and wives as God wants us to be. May we as husbands make all the sacrifices that show to God and our wives that we love them the way Christ loved the church, and may our wives make all the sacrifices that show God and us, their husbands, that they are submitted to us as to the Lord, or as the church is submitted to Christ.

VIII.

Invitation

Choosing the right person for a spouse is the second most important decision that one can make in his/her life. There is one more important decision than that, and that is choosing Jesus Christ for your Lord and Savior. Jesus died for your sins. The only way, how you can make your life right before God, is to obey Jesus' gospel. Do it today, for tomorrow it may be too late for you!

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