

WHAT EVERY HUSBAND SHOULD KNOW

by Ray C. Stedman

There is little doubt that we are approaching the verge of chaos in the present day. Marriage faithlessness is skyrocketing to heights never before known. In the United States one out of every three marriages ends in divorce. In California, it is one out of every two. Every other marriage in this state ends in failure!

There are many contributing causes to this problem. It would not be possible to look at all of these, but one of the chief causes, I am convinced, is that when the marriage shoe begins to pinch, for whatever reason, the only way out that many couples know is that of divorce. They turn to this as a solution, with no attempt to examine any possible alternatives. But that is somewhat like practicing abdominal surgery every time you have a stomachache, or suggesting a prefrontal lobotomy every time you have a headache. Divorce is radical surgery, and is only to be attempted as a last resort. If a Christian has anything at all to say, in the face of this growing and vexing problem, it is that there do exist other alternatives to divorce. This needs to be said very loudly and frequently in this day. I propose that we examine together this alternative to divorce from the Scriptures. Simply put, it is to learn what makes a marriage work and to practice it.

Marriage involves both a husband and a wife, and each of these partners must play his part in making that marriage go. The Scriptures, in their great wisdom and practicality, do not leave us uninformed in this area. They deal with this subject most forthrightly and plainly. I have long ago learned that the most helpful book on family problems ever printed is the Bible, and I turn to it far more frequently than any other book because of its tremendous help in these areas.

I turn now to Peter's brief and very insightful summary of a husband's duties in marriage, found in First Peter 3, Verse 7:

Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered. {1 Pet 3:7 RSV}

In this very brief verse, the Apostle Peter puts his finger squarely on the prime role of man in marriage, that of intelligent leadership. I shall return to the rendering of the Authorized Version in the first part of this verse, for the Revised Version is somewhat obscure, but the Authorized is very clear and close to the original Greek. What Peter really says is,

Likewise you husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge. {cf, 1 Pet 3:7a KJV}

This emphasizes the responsibility of the man in giving intelligent leadership to the married life. Every man is ultimately responsible to God for what his home becomes. This is the constant asseveration of Scripture. In writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says, "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God," {cf, 1 Cor 11:3}. Thus, within the framework of total leadership in the universe, he puts the responsibility of the husband to exercise leadership within the home.

This is a role for which woman was not made, and essentially and basically she does not want it. I know it is popular to make jokes about bossy wives and henpecked husbands (and there are such in evidence around us, I do not deny that), but having observed the marriage scene for considerable time, and having personal involvement in it, the problem is not so much due to the demand of wives to assert leadership as it is the refusal of husbands to assume their responsibilities. This is borne out by studies made along this line by competent scholars. It is difficult to understand how men can give themselves to careful, responsible leadership in business, but when they get home they expect everything to rock along all right and turn out well in the end -- without any thought, direction, or leadership on their part. We call women the homemakers, but

women are homemakers only within the general pattern determined by the husband. It is the man who is to choose the values that go into a home. It is the father who ought to decide the emphases that are to be expressed within a home. True, it is often the mother who implements this choice and upon her falls the responsibility for carrying out much of it in application and implementation, but, by and large, it is the man who makes the choice of what the home shall be, whether he does it consciously or unconsciously. There is built into his male nature, by divine fiat, not only a responsibility but a desire to do this.

It is the man who determines whether the family shall be sports-minded or book lovers; whether they are travelers or stay-at-homes; a family that emphasizes personal integrity in their relationships, or are clever manipulators who get along by their wits; whether they are social climbers or quiet introverts. Almost always the stamp of the family is determined by the man. This is also, therefore, where men most frequently fail in marriage. They do not exert leadership, they do not give intelligent direction to the home. Even if they do give some kind of leadership, it is not thoughtful, it is not intelligent, it is not "according to knowledge," as Peter says. It is simply a drifting along, making the best of things according to the way they feel at the moment. Thus there is no leadership at all, or, what there is, is lopsided.

Many marriage counselors dealing in this area have pointed out that in our American life, for some strange reasons, we do not teach men to be men. Therefore, many men grow up and get married who are nothing more than grown-up little boys, still looking for mothers rather than wives. They want someone to minister to their physical needs, keep them well fed and happy, and soothe their egos when they get hurt. But that is not the proper role of a wife, and that is why Peter's first word to men is: Learn what a marriage ought to be, what the rules are, what is expected of you. What a home will be is determined primarily and responsibly by the man.

If the man does not exert leadership at all, then the wife must take it on, thereby forcing the woman to assume a role for which she is not made, and, as I have already suggested, she does not basically and essentially desire. One way men do this is by lopsided leadership. They feel that their major concern is to make a living, and it is the wife's job to run the home. They give their whole attention to the business of acquiring material gain, of making money so they can provide the comforts of modern life for their family. Most American men do a very commendable job along this line. They take this responsibility (properly part of the responsibility of marriage) very seriously, but they leave the rest of it to their wives. This, frequently, engenders the attitude, "I let my wife decide whether the children are to go to Sunday school and church. That's her job." The moral values of the home are left for the woman to incorporate. A slice of life is made of primary male concern while the rest of life, with great and important values within it, is left wholly for the woman. But this is a denial of what Peter suggests in these very brief, pregnant words -- that man's first responsibility is to exercise intelligent leadership. Men must act in knowledge, he says, and choose intelligently what comes into their homes.

To show how women instinctively desire this, let me quote a brief paragraph from an article by a woman on the subject of man's role in the home. She says,

Don't yield your leadership, that's the main thing. Don't hand us the reins. We would consider this an abdication on your part. It would confuse us, it would alarm us; it would make us pull back. Quicker than anything else, it will fog the clear vision that made us love you in the first place. Oh, we will try to get you to give up your position as Number One in the house, that is the terrible contradiction in us. We will seem to be fighting you to the last ditch for final authority on everything for awhile, but in the obscure recesses of our hearts we want you to win. You have to win, for we aren't really made for leadership. It's a pose.

That vividly expresses what Peter is saying. This is the #1 responsibility of the man in the home.

Now he moves to a second matter. He says that man has also the need to exercise deliberate love toward his wife, "bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex." What does this mean? Dear old Dr. Ironside used to say, "That means helping her with the dishes when she has a headache." I am sure this is one manifestation of what Peter had in mind when he said this. This reflects the deepest emotional need in woman. When Peter says that men should dwell with their wives according to knowledge, he strongly suggests that it is possible for men to understand women, regardless of the common view in that respect. And one of the first and most important things they must understand about women is reflected in that Word of God given to Eve in the

Garden {of Eden} after the fall when he turned to her and said, "Your desire shall be unto your husband," {cf, Gen 3:16}. That is, it is imperative to a woman that she feel secure in her husband's affection. This is the first thing in her life. His love is the horizon of her whole life, and, therefore, it is his job to make her feel highly regarded, to honor her. Or, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 5, to love her as his own body, to show honor to her under all conditions, to honor and love her "as Christ loved the church," {Eph 5:25 RSV}. Not because she is always lovable, but simply because he has determined to love her. This is man's second responsibility.

He is to show courtesy to her, thoughtful consideration under every conceivable circumstance. This means that one of the most devastating things that can occur in marriage is for the husband to become critical toward his wife, treating her with scorn, or to be sarcastic toward her. This is one of the important causes of disintegration in marriage, for such an attitude threatens the basic nature of woman. Every woman will understand this and agree that it is supremely important. As Lord Byron put it,

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

It is the man's job, therefore, to make his wife feel important to him and never to let his love decay into taking her for granted.

Some time ago I clipped out of the Saturday Evening Post a humorous article that traces the tendency that occurs in marriage to drift from a height of bliss into the humdrum of routine attitudes. Called *The Seven Ages of the Married Cold*, it reveals the reaction of a husband to his wife's colds during seven years of marriage.

This is the first year: "Sugar dumpling, I'm worried about my baby girl. You've got a bad snuffle and there's no telling about these things with all this strep around. I'm putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general checkup and a good rest. I know the food's lousy but I'll bring your meals in from Rossini's. I've already got it arranged with the floor superintendent."

Second year: "Listen, darling, I don't like the sound of that cough and I've called Doc Miller to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good girl, please? Just for papa."

Third year: "Maybe you'd better lie down, honey; nothing like a little rest when you feel punk. I'll bring you something to eat. Have we got any soup?"

Fourth year: "Look dear, be sensible. After you feed the kids and get the dishes washed, you'd better hit the sack."

Fifth year: "Why don't you get yourself a couple of aspirin?"

Sixth year: "If you'd just gargle or something, instead of sitting around barking like a seal!"

Seventh year: "For Pete's sake, stop sneezing! Whatcha trying to do, gimme pneumonia?"

Thus we trace the deterioration of love! Interestingly enough, this is the most common complaint of wives to marriage counselors. They say, "My husband simply takes me for granted. To him I'm another piece of furniture around the house. I'm only important to him for what I do for him, not for what I am." This means that a wife is being threatened at the very deepest level of her life. She no longer feels secure in her husband's affection, and she reacts in either one of two ways:

1. She may react by what men may call "womanly perverseness," seemingly unreasonable reactions. Perhaps a man comes home with no idea that anything is wrong, and he makes some commonplace, routine statement and to his surprise his wife blows up and flounces out of the room in a huff, and the poor man is left there in his bewilderment, saying to himself, "What did I say? What have I done?" He is genuinely bewildered. But something has threatened, even subconsciously, his wife's feeling of security in his affections and she is instinctively testing him by this strange perverse reaction. If he gets angry in reply and blows up it only confirms her suspicions and thus increases the viciousness of the circle, for then she is sure that she is not secure in his affections any longer. But the wise husband

soon learns that what he needs to do is to be firm, perhaps, but even more, considerate and thoughtful, and above all, not to raise his voice, for women suspect a yeller. They know this reveals weakness and the one thing they are most afraid of is a weak husband, for then they are afraid his leadership cannot be trusted, and they need to trust. Therefore the wise husband learns that in times like this it is necessary to be quiet, loving, and considerate, and he will reestablish her feeling of security in his affection and all will work out.

2. The second way a threatened wife may react is by self-protection. If her insecurity goes on long enough a wife will try to build a life for herself apart from her husband. She will try to erect barriers that protect her from getting hurt. This is such a sensitive area of a woman's nature that she tries to build barricades around her. Sometimes after long years of marriage women will seek a new career for themselves, or go back to school, go home to mother (in extreme cases), or try to make their homes a show place in the neighborhood. It is because they are feeling an essential lack in the ultimate demand of a woman's life: to be secure in her husband's affection. Every wise husband must learn to avoid any unconscious threat to her feeling of being loved. When he senses it he shows love all the more. That is why the word of Scripture speaks so powerfully and simply, "Husbands, love your wives." That is the husband's great responsibility in the emotional leadership of the home.

The third area that Peter speaks of is that the husband understand the need for unlimited sharing of his own life with his wife. "You are joint heirs," he says, "of the grace of life" -- "Heirs together of the grace of life." This means that a husband must recognize his wife's right to share every part of his thinking, of his whole life. All the barriers must come down between them, all the channels of communication must be open. There are no off-limit areas that he keeps separate from his wife.

This does not mean that they must always participate in everything mutually. He may be sports-minded and she may not like sports, and it does not mean that he must drag her out on the ski slopes when she would rather be home. But it does mean there must be mutual understanding in this area; there is to be no threat of rivalry to his love for her from some outside activity or occupation. This relates again to that central need of a woman to have first place in her husband's affections. He must share so fully his needs, his desires, and his reactions with her that she understands the whole situation and feels no threat arising from it. He must understand that women were made to be helpmeets, partners. What good is a partner if she is excluded from some particular area? Her urge to share his life fully accounts for woman's notorious curiosity -- she cannot tolerate exclusion from any area of her husband's life. Her attempts to satisfy this basic drive accounts for what some husbands call "nosy wives," but there is nothing wrong with her, it is his fault, not hers. He is to open these doors of channel and communication to her. Perhaps he may tease his wife by withholding some information temporarily, but he is never ultimately to deny her. They can only be heirs together of the grace of life.

It is the observing of these three primary forces on the part of the man that makes it possible for a woman to be a woman! This is what every husband should know -- that he creates the atmosphere that makes it possible for her to supply those womanly qualities that complement his manly ones and make a home what God intended a home to be. And it is only as he exerts his leadership in this three-fold area that she finds it fully possible to manifest those qualities which God has placed within her. Therefore, a happy marriage begins with the man. He is the head of the home.

Peter has one more point to make, one final word. It is not a word of exhortation, but a word of warning. Failure by the husband to observe these things, he says, means spiritual impoverishment in that home. "Your prayers will be hindered." Prayer, here, is the symbol of dependence upon God, from whom all the richness and glory of life must come. It is only God that can make human life rich, and a man is a fool who tries to find richness apart from God. That is the whole thrust of the Christian message. It is only in a restoration to God through Jesus Christ that man can find the intended richness and glory of life. And prayer, that sense of dependence, that expression of faith that makes possible all God's giving unto men, is hindered, Peter says, when man fails to fulfill his role and responsibility within the home.

If the husband's failure prevents oneness, the togetherness that marriage is intended to be, then inevitably that marriage grows dull and the glow departs. It becomes routine, humdrum, lifeless, boring, because the glory is

gone, the glow which the presence of God makes possible is gone. The man learns that he cannot go ahead of his wife in this respect. He cannot advance beyond her spiritually, for he discovers that he cannot grow in grace apart from bringing her along with him. Life, in other words, can only be full and satisfying when they move together into a deeper, day-by-day contact with an indwelling God. This is what makes for richness in a home. This is why the Scriptures insist that a man never be given spiritual leadership in a church unless his home is in good order, for he cannot grasp, he cannot assimilate, he cannot appropriate the knowledge and richness of God to manifest it in the church unless he can do it first in his home.

I never read this passage without wondering to myself how Peter discovered these great truths. He is the only one of the apostles that we know was married, for his wife is mentioned in a couple of places in Scripture. The others probably were, but we know that Peter was, and it is as the married apostle that he writes these things. I am sure God revealed truth to these men that they could never have learned in their own experience, but I know also that he helped them to understand through daily experience certain truths, and I think this is the avenue by which these principles come to us through Peter. He learned these out of the experiences of his married life, interpreted by the Holy Spirit. This passage is so human and revealing.

I have oftentimes tried to imagine how Peter first stumbled on this fact that failure in his relationship with his wife hindered the spiritual life of the home. I can imagine how it happened. He probably came home from ministering in the public streets where he had been preaching all day, and having a hard time of it, with much opposition around. He is exhausted as he comes into the house. Mrs. Peter is there, working in the kitchen getting dinner ready, and she, too, has had a frustrating day. The children have been on her nerves all day long. But Peter does not realize that. The first thing he does is go over to the stove, lift up a lid and say, "What's for supper?" He looks in and says, "Oh, no, not fish again!" Poor Mrs. Peter without a word, starts sobbing into her apron and rushes out of the room. He says to himself, "What in the world did I say? I just asked 'What's for supper,' that's all! What's the matter with her, anyway?" And he begins to feel a bit resentful. He knocks on the bedroom door and she says, "Go away! I don't want to talk to you!"

So he goes out into the back yard and paces up and down. Since he is a Christian, he feels the best thing he could do is to pray about this, so he kneels down to ask God what the problem is, but it seems as though the heavens are brass over his head, he cannot get through, there is no answer, he is not in touch. So he resumes his pacing up and down in the garden and as he walks he thinks: "You know, maybe she has had a rough day. I'm sure the children are vexing and frustrating, after all, they inherited their old nature from me and they doubtless have been very trying on her nerves. And here I come home, and, foolish lout that I am, instead of greeting her and showing a little love and concern for her day, all I can think about is my empty stomach and I make that crazy remark about 'fish again!' I don't blame her! I can see now what the whole problem is." So he goes over and cuts some roses that are growing there -- long stemmed ones -- and takes all the thorns off. Then he comes back into the house and hears her sobbing in the bedroom. Without saying a word he opens the door and tiptoes in. She is sitting in a chair, crying into her handkerchief, and, without a word he lays those roses in her arms. She looks up at him, and, through her tears, she smiles, and says, "Oh, Pete, you shouldn't have done it!" He says, "I'm sorry, dear, I was thoughtless. I know you've had a hard day. Let's pray together." And the two of them kneel down and the heavens are wide open. There is a glory and joy and peace that pervades the whole room as they pray.

So, when Peter writes his letter to help other Christians in the practical, daily experience of their lives, out of the fullness of his heart and the understanding to which the Holy Spirit has brought him, he says:

"Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered."

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