

Husbands and Wives in Proverbs

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Introduction.

Throughout this past summer, Lauren and I have gotten into the habit of taking evening walks through our neighborhood. It's quiet, it's peaceful, and it gives us a chance to talk. As we're walking along by people's houses, though, without meaning to pry, we get glimpses into their lives. One thing that I've noticed is the way that a lot of men around here spend summer evenings in their garages. I keep tools and cars in my garage, but these guys have got chairs, TV's, tables, and refrigerators in theirs, and when we walk by, we see them with their garage doors open, watching the Cubs or the Sox, and hanging out. There's not much to be gained by making generalizations about total strangers, but I can't help but wonder how many of those husbands are out there to get away from their wives.

Certainly, marriage is an institution in crisis in the modern-day US. We all know the statistics about divorces and so on, but all of that misery points to an even bigger problem: most Americans don't have a clue about what marriage is or how it is supposed to work. They have crummy role models in their parents, they're confused by the pop-culture drumbeat of selfishness, and worst of all, they know next to nothing about what the word of God says about marriage.

I have to say, folks—I'm a read-the-manual kind of guy. I have a great deal of faith in my ability to sever a limb with a table saw or blow myself up with a gas grill if I don't follow the designer's instructions. Marriage is far more complicated than any of those things, and yet most people try to muddle through matrimony without following the instructions of the One who designed both marriage and mankind. Thankfully, we don't have to muddle along with them. We know where to find the manual for our lives, and we know that if we follow the will of God, our marriages will be blessed. Let's look, then, at one part of God's message on marriage, at husbands and wives in Proverbs.

Husbands.

The best place to begin this study is by looking at Proverbs' message about the role of the husband. Men are to be the spiritual leaders in their marriages and in their families, and most of the time, when trouble arises in a marriage, it is because the man has failed to lead. In this leadership role, men, we need to recognize that Proverbs commands us, "**REMEMBER YOUR BLESSING**". This idea is captured in Proverbs 19:14. I don't know about the rest of y'all, but there are many times in my marriage when I don't treat my wife as well as I should, and I think I struggle with this because I forget this verse. When first I got married, this was something I had no trouble remembering. I was constantly thankful for this wonderful woman God had given me to be my wife, but then, as time passed, I got used to having her around, and it's all too easy for me to start taking her for granted. Men, if we start taking our gifts from God for granted, how can we possibly treat them right? These days, I take my old, beat-up Corolla for granted. I perform the routine maintenance necessary to keep it running, but I don't wash it all the time or keep it buffed to a glossy sheen or agonize over every door ding. I guarantee you that if we don't give our women more tenderness and attention than we give a junky car, our marriages will wither and die. Let's remember instead to treat our wives like the blessings they are.

As part of this, we must **PRaise THE PRAISEWORTHY**. Notice the way that the husband of the virtuous wife treats her in Proverbs 31:28-29. This is another case where taking our wives for granted rears its ugly head. They live with us, and they've lived with us for a while, so we unthinkingly expect them to anticipate our every need and cater to our every whim. When they keep the house perfectly clean or cook a wonderful meal, we don't say anything to them, because, well, that's just them doing their job. We expect it. On the other hand, though, if she's had a really hard day chasing after the kids, and there are toys scattered around the living-room floor, or dinner's a little bit late, boy, that's a federal offense, and we make sure that she knows the full extent of our displeasure. Now, don't get me wrong—it's important for us to be honest about where we are and communicate with our wives, but that communication can't be all negative. If all we talk about are the areas where our wives disappoint us, it makes it sound like we think they're worthless, and it makes them feel worthless. On the other hand, if we are careful to compliment them for everything they do right, it makes them grow and blossom like a flower in full sunlight. Whenever they do something praiseworthy, let's be sure to praise them.

Also, husbands must **BE FAITHFUL**. Solomon speaks to this in Proverbs 5:16-18. When it comes to sex, every Christian man must be a one-woman man, in his love life, in his entertainment choices, and in his heart. Obviously, adultery and lust ruin our relationship with God, but they also ruin our relationships with our wives. Whether a woman finds out that her husband has been seeing another woman, or that he has become addicted to Internet pornography, she experiences much the same feelings of inadequacy, rejection, and betrayal. I was quite grieved to learn recently that a dear friend of mine has landed his marriage in terrible trouble because of his nasty habits on the Internet. Brethren, how can we possibly put our wives through that and call ourselves men at all? We're supposed to protect them and cherish them, not brutally insult them to the very core of their being. Let's be true men. Let's be faithful to our wives.

Finally, as men of God, we have a responsibility to **BE AN EXAMPLE** for our families. Consider the message of Proverbs 20:7. The point of the verse is that we bless our children BY walking in our integrity. I've certainly seen this in my own life. I don't know what kind of a man I would be without the godly influence of my father, but I do know that my vision of what it takes to be a Christian man will always be shaped by his example. Kids need strong, godly dads, and women instinctively know this. Sometimes, perhaps even most of the time, when our wives get into nagging mode, it's because they see us falling short of what we need to be, and they're frightened by our failure. They're frightened by what it means for the future of their children. On the other hand, though, when we step up and behave like the spiritual leaders our families need, that turns our wives into the biggest cheerleaders we've got. Let's resolve, then, to be an example of integrity and righteousness, rather than weakness and spiritual failure. It will bless both our children and our wives.

Wives.

Of course, it is not only husbands who have responsibilities in marriage. Wives also need to be careful to obey God's will so that they can ensure marital and family success. Along these lines, ladies, the word first instructs you to **BUILD YOUR HOUSE**. This idea appears in Proverbs 14:1. This is a very far-reaching idea. In all of my remodeling work on my house over the past couple of years, I've gotten a fair idea of what it takes to build and what it takes to tear down. Tearing down is easy. It doesn't take any real forethought, planning, or skill. You just go after whatever you want to tear down with a knife or a crowbar until it's destroyed. Building, though, is hard. You don't just nail a bunch of stuff haphazardly together and get a new floor or a new deck. Instead, you have to plan it out, consider the effect that each one of your actions will have, and work carefully toward that goal. Sadly, there are a lot of women who want to build, but end up tearing down instead. They mean to work on their relationship with their husbands, but he says just the wrong thing at the wrong time, and they get into a screeching match. They mean to produce a godly, peaceful home for their children to grow up in, but instead, it's filled with quarreling and strife, because in the heat of the moment, they forget their plan and do what they want. Women of God need to be wiser than that. They need to wisely keep their overall family goals in mind at all times and make sure that their actions are geared toward those goals. They need to build, not tear down.

Also, women must learn to **BE TRUSTWORTHY**. As with so many of the proverbial instructions to women, this comes from the portrait of the virtuous woman, in Proverbs 31:11. To me, the most interesting thing about this couplet is that it links the trustworthiness of the wife with financial prosperity. It's important for a wife to be trustworthy in all matters, but here God is telling us that it's especially important for her to be trustworthy in financial matters. In most families, it is the wife who does most of the shopping. She buys groceries, tracks down clothes for the kids, and pays the electric bill. In many cases, she's also the one who keeps the accounts and balances the checkbook.

Not all women handle this responsibility well. In a culture that is as consumerist as ours is, there's a constant pressure to buy, buy, buy, and many women do exactly that. Every time they go to Wal-Mart, they have to get something for themselves as well, and every time there's a big sale at a department store, there they are, "saving money" by spending hundreds of dollars on clothes they may never even wear. Then, at the end of the month, when the credit-card bill arrives in the mail, their husband reads it and pitches a fit because of all the money they spent. That's destructive of the family finances, but it's also destructive of marriages. Women need to be prudent and wise in the way they handle money.

It's likewise important for women to listen when the Bible tells them, "**DON'T BE CONTENTIOUS**". There are actually several proverbs that address this point, but perhaps the most well known is Proverbs 21:9. I suppose that if we were to restate this in modern terms, it might say, "Better to live out in the garage watching the Cubs game than in the house with a contentious woman." As badly as the Cubs underachieved last season, having to deal with a faultfinding, argumentative woman is still worse. I've seen marriages, even in the church, where it seemed like the husband could do no right. No matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, it fell short of her expectations. He could show up from work with a dozen roses, and she would pitch a fit because it wasn't two dozen. Nobody likes being run down like that, male or female. The woman of God, then, must learn to monitor her speech to avoid contentiousness.

Finally, the godly wife should learn **NOT TO SHAME HER HUSBAND**. The impact that such shameful behavior has is described in Proverbs 12:4. Because men tend to have such tender egos, there are all sorts of ways that women can go wrong in this area. First, a woman shames her husband when she calls him down or criticizes him in public. That makes most men feel like they're eight years old and about to get a spanking from Mommy, and they resent it. Second, a woman can bring shame on her husband by her behavior. The most obvious way that this can happen, and probably the way that Solomon had in mind, is if she cheats on him. Even today, the man whose wife betrays him is the subject of behind-the-back commentary and ridicule. However, the behavior doesn't have to be adulterous to be shameful. Women who behave disgracefully in public, whether by being continually quarrelsome or just socially clueless, also diminish their husbands in the sight of others. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11 that woman is to be the glory of man. It is the wife's role to be an ornament for her husband, not an embarrassment.