

Marriage
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God's Word echoes throughout creation. (I love that image from Luther). And what happens? All over the world, throughout every age, *most people* look to get married. People look for a helpmate. They make a lifelong commitment to care for this one person of the opposite sex until death.

This is not dependent on a church wedding or Christianity. Scripture never questions foreign or unbeliever marriages, but teaches that marriage is an institution given to humanity during the time of creation's perfection.

Interestingly, Adam had no choice in his partner, nor did Eve. In the beginning, God made one flesh and from it came the second. Then the two came together again in a way "to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion" (*Gen 1:28). God created them, brought them together, married them, and blessed them. He *kept* them in all the beautiful nuance of the ancient term. He made His face to shine upon them and was gracious to them. He lifted up His countenance upon them and gave them peace (Numbers 6:24-27).

I don't think it goes too far to say God *keeps* marriage.

Marriage is the only relationship restricted to one other person, and, on this earth, it is decidedly marked with a beginning and an end. A man leaves his family to become one flesh with a woman. The two are united, bringing both sexes into a permanent relationship with lots of practical implications. Generally, the one flesh union results in children: an embodiment of the spouses' unity. A new family is formed while the old families expand. But at death marriage ends. The institution falls short of the Instituter.

God's Word reveals that marriage is more than attraction and splitting bills and chores. There is what you can see and what you cannot see: a particular embodiment of the one flesh union that God provides to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Yes, marriage can be considered reasonable: there are logical arguments. Yes, it can be considered natural: there are some animals that pair for a lifetime. At the same time, *plenty of people* consider it both unnatural and unreasonable. If one argues for monogamy, they may respond with *serial* monogamy rather than permanent monogamy. If one argues for shared resources, they may still want a prenup.

Human perspective is *not* one of universal clarity, reason, or nature. Perspective is given, shaped, and influenced. Sometimes by the good, sometimes by sin. So, although, yet again, the practical side of marriage boils down to love your neighbor as yourself, there are also lies and complications.

In Genesis, God tells Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But what did people do? Well, they gradually got so violent that God regretted creation. Sent a flood. Started more or less over. Then, instead of filling the earth and spreading out in the tremendous wealth of creation, folks got together to try to make a name for themselves. They built a city, a tower, and very effectively persuaded God that human beings do *not* need a common speech.

Which is to say, the tower of Babel, and not Venus or Mars, is why men and women struggle to communicate even to this day. Am I wrong?

We know this. And we still blame miscommunication on others. We try to build great things—including great, respectable families, yet over and over again we are humbled. A distinction: God does not hinder an established marriage. Although He can alter plans to remain the Architect. The contractor! The builder.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. The *Lord* is building the house! Reason and logic are not what holds a couple together. Neither is being right! Or maintaining authoritative control.

The Lord has *not* defined marital vocations around the ability to communicate well.--Though, by all means, try!—Instead, any relationship between sinners will have to revolve and practice *forgiveness*. Even more than understanding. Mercy as well as mindfulness. We rather than I, but also so very often *him* or *her*, my God-given *spouse*.

The Lord brought Adam and Eve together to rule over creation together and to *know* one another, not only non-sexually but also sexually. Marriage is an exploration and dominion over creation uniquely blessed by its boundaries.

Our Lord has placed boundaries around sexual activity. Not on one out of many sexual activities. On sexual activity. The place for it is marriage.

But boundaries aren't only around sex. In marriage, there is a boundary around the relationship. It creates, if you will, a yard with a house. A place for husband and wife to get to know one another and to work things out between them. A place where it is safe to lay everything out on the table. Finally: a relationship in which every aspect of a person can be explored. Not necessarily as an end in itself—*overthinking is not the key to a happy marriage*—but so that every aspect can be known and the other person still loved. As weak as they are. As frail. As fallen.

This is the security of forgiveness. Jesus *knows* us. He doesn't need to know us sexually to *know us*. But He still loves us. In marriage, we can invite someone to know *all* of us. Likewise, before our Lord, in confession, we can be completely honest, vulnerable, apart from excuses.

When someone sins against their spouse, it's a sin against the spouse and themselves. Someone can also sin against *their marriage* or marriage in general. Crossing boundaries has a specific word: *trespass*. And sinners are notoriously gifted at finding new areas and ways to trespass.

So. Sadly. Even Christians gossip about our spouses in order to get sympathy, attention or even just have something dumb to say. Or we read or watch things that make us *less content* with our spouse than we were to begin with.

This tendency to gossip is an *antithesis* of Christ presenting His Bride as blameless.

Be convicted by the Holy Spirit. Repent. Receive forgiveness. Live again. And turn in love toward your neighbor. Because neighbors are a *gracious* gift. They may have their quirks, but they too are part of the cycle of keeping forgiveness as part of daily life. If they are Christian, they will be presented in splendor.

May we, also, try to present our spouses—and marriage in general—with such deference.

GOOD NEWS

Christ has taken it upon Himself to be part of marriage. He has taken it upon Himself that you be baptized, instructed, fed, forgiven, and renewed. He continues to speak for your sake, the sake of your

spouse, and the sake of your marriage (if you have one). AND thanks be to God that His work in marriage overshadows our own. His gifts surpass our wasted moments. And it really is possible to mature and move past some of the tendencies cultures have driven us toward.

Christ in marriage is real. Literal, not just figurative. And just as we don't have to ask Jesus into our hearts in marriage, Christ's presence does not boil down to our initiatives, our impulses, or our ability to control either ourselves or others.

Now, He isn't in our marriage in order to give us faith, but He is in our marriage to point to *His marriage*, the eternal marriage between Christ and His Bride, the church.

Christ has come in *our flesh* (1 John 4:2). He is one flesh with us in the Incarnation and He is uniting Himself to us, His faithful, forevermore. And we will live together in a non-sexual marriage that will never end.

We are *incorporated—in corpus!*--taken into a *single* body—embodied!—into Christ. By Baptism. By the participation in the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper! Distinctions being unified. With knowledge, even if we can't always supply mutual understanding.

Education can be idolized and knowledge can be lifeless. Yet *knowing* carries marital imagery, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, when people say they want Christ in their marriage, what Christ are they talking about? Is it the man patient enough to travel with 12 disciples through the heat of a Middle East summer? The one who was so tired he slept through a storm only to be nagged awake as people sought even more from him? What exactly are people wanting out of the wedding feast to come?

Christ is not self-fulfillment. Christ is not a man we tweak into an ideal husband. We cannot shape Him into our own image—only the reverse.

A bit of an aside: I've heard some great lay-friendly explanations of the practice of Closed Communion. One of them being that only certain people come to the rehearsal dinner before a wedding. That's not to say there won't be more people at the wedding feast! (That's from Tyrel Bramwell's book, *Come in, We're Closed*. He has a free Bible study to accompany it online.)

Idolatry is everywhere. And Jesus doesn't exist so that we can feel wanted or needed or happy.

The Son of God, even before the foundation of the earth, wasn't alone. He wasn't in need of companionship. At the same time, love looked outward. He sought another. He sought to love someone not Himself.

By His sacrifice, He gave life, and though He was different than His Bride, He joined her to Himself, with His own flesh and blood, to His side. All that He has, He shares.

Psalm 84:

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
2 My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

3 Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.
4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! Selah

5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.[b]
6 As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
7 They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.

8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah
9 Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!

10 For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.
12 O Lord of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

“No good thing does he withhold”!

Every Christian will cry out, “At last,” as Adam did, when the Husband brings His bride into eternity. Even in perfection, Adam knew that sentiment: that even in paradise, we rejoice at fulfillment.

Nowadays, people marry to force fulfillment rather than receive it. They have an entirely different concept of it. They may make promises, but they seek their own personal fulfillment, to be done as suits their own tastes and timetables. They say “at last” sarcastically, from a place of grumbling in their hearts about things like taking out the trash! How different marriage ought to be.

Luther emphasized God’s roles in marriage, in presenting a specific girl to a particular boy. You can read about that in Luther’s Sermon on the Estate of Marriage, 1519, *LW 44*. He was very concrete about the certainty we ought to have *after marriage*. After marriage, there is both the relationship between spouses and the comradery of a shared life with shared possessions. Yes, even shared *dominion* as husband and wife faces the world together. A world much in need of subduing and lordship.

LORDSHIP

I'm an outlier, I know, but I really appreciate the term lordship. Some think of it only in terms of lording it over others, as Scripture uses it in Matthew 20 & Mark 10, but dominion can't really be separated from our *dominus*, Latin for Lord.

As Christians, we are little Christs. As humans, we are little representatives of God over the earth. While we should be humane and more to other people, we are also to be caretakers, workers, and benefactors to creation in general.

That includes raising food for ourselves and others. Also the arts, molding God's ingredients into further expressions of wonder and beauty.

Gnosticism—or as Charlie would say--Ex-carnationalism not only undermines our faith in a Creator and His creation, it undermines how we interact bodily, mentally understand, and unconsciously gravitate. Gravitate is also a word I like, as it describes our tendencies to drift toward sin and assumptions.

Lordship is only offensive if your lord is a bad guy. Or if you reject all authority not your own. It's great to receive from Christ—who would dispute it? We benefit from Him and we become equipped to share His gifts.

In marriage, there's simply another level of gift & reception. Sarah called Abraham her lord and feminists would decry her for it. But Scripture encourages us all to think of her as a mother: 1 Peter 3:6 reads, "Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."

Is it frightening when someone else has authority over you? It sure can be. But it needn't be.

Husbands are to be little Christ's to their wives. Yes, that means husbands are to be little lords over their wives. But what a lord! One who denies Himself to provide for His wife. One who covers and cleanses. One who guards and protects, not just physically, but also cultivating knowledge, wisdom, and discernment; maturity; contentment. Growth.

Jesus. Is not abusive. He is not a narcissist. He is not manipulative and He works good out of whatever we give Him, even if it's evil. Jesus, though all powerful, does not flaunt His position to make us feel even more lowly. Nor does He belittle His Father's work in creation us. Jesus reveals marriage!

Satan is the accuser. Satan claims power for himself in order to be exulted above others. Satan separates us from our loved ones and it seems that he *loves* making artificial, impermeable boundaries we can't seem to get past.

It is not impossible for a little Christ to dabble in little satanhood. Ask Peter.

It is not impossible for a Lutheran to be abused or to abuse. And it is terribly common for religious misunderstandings to cause major problems in relationship. Or for people to choose their religion based on whether it conforms to their own practices and presumptions.

- Husbands are called to provide, protect, and sacrifice themselves.
- Wives are called to trust that God will provide *even with the husband making decisions*.
- Husbands are called to provide from the gifts God has given to him. Wives are called to help.
- Husbands are called to lead. Wives are called to follow.
- Husbands are called to be as Christ. Wives are called to be as the Church.

And the Church is to use her heart, soul, mind, and strength in service to Christ and to His children!

Can the church use her words? Yes! They just may not be final ones.

Let's say this again: God calls *all of us* to use our hearts, souls, mind, and strength. Even as we love and trust in God above all things. *All of us* are given words, mouths, and ears. All are to pursue truth, wisdom, and discernment.

Husbands are called to love. Wives are called to submit and respect.

Some say that it's worded that way because wives need love more than respect. It's one approach. I don't think it would be reading into things too much to suspect that both husbands and wives want love, respect, and submission, but that these are specific reminders along gender lines.

Here are a few practical vocational tips. You know the concepts of the 5 love languages? It suggests that some folks receive love differently than others. Some understand love more primarily through

- 1) Words of affirmation
- 2) Acts of service
- 3) Gifts
- 4) Quality time
- 5) Physical touch

I forget the history of how this was developed. I read a few of the books decades ago. It's helpful food for thought. If we think about it, words are powerful. God made them so. Service is significant. Again, God made it so. Gifts: God certainly uses gifts to express love sometimes. Quality time? Physical touch? There are creational tools certainly involved in caregiving.

This next part is from my husband and I think it's brilliant. If someone is feeling unloved, he or she may not want flowers. "Go to" shortcuts for apologizes are not received like they once were. And that's ok. You don't need a "go to" thing to make someone feel better. Instead, we all likely need *all* the love languages to varying degrees. It needn't be an either/or thing. Our go to, gut response, should be "Love your neighbor as yourself," which is neither a single task, nor a constant pattern. Instead, what's been lacking for your loved one lately? Or what's one thing that can be done for your spouse today?

The fact of the matter is that your neighbor may not know what he or she needs. And that's ok. At least you now have five places to start:

- 1) Words of affirmation
- 2) Acts of service
- 3) Gifts
- 4) Quality time
- 5) Physical touch

WORSHIP

You'll forgive me if this seems disjointed, but let's talk about worship. "With my body I thee worship." Now, if that statement were primarily made about worship practices in the church, one would already have a lot to discuss, but that's actually an established Christian wedding vow dated back until at least

1549. (I haven't double checked on the Sarum Rite, which is the Latin from the late eleventh century this is based on to see if it goes back even further.)

Let this stand as proof that American media know next to nothing about Christians and their teachings about sex! And, that sometimes churchly teachings slip away from Christians, too. With very obvious results: women simply do not realize how men adore their wives. And that has ongoing repercussions.

Worship is *now* defined as a feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity (dictionary.com). It used to be a bodily participation and an acknowledgment of worth. With our bodies, let us worship!

I'm going to do something dangerous: use a quote from an Orthodox priest I'm largely otherwise unfamiliar with. So, just for your consideration:

“Without the soul, the body can accomplish nothing. Likewise the soul without the body, though for different reasons: the body needs the soul in order to live and move, whereas the soul needs the body in order to reveal itself, to express itself, and to act on the external world. For the body is the servant, the vehicle or instrument of the soul, essential to the exercise of its functions of relating to the world and manifesting its faculties in the conditions of its earthly existence. In this setting, all of the soul's activities, in so far as they reveal themselves, can only exist through the body.

One can even say that the souls general state leaves its mark on the body, particularly the face.
Jean-Claude Larchet, *Theology of the Body*, 18-19

Interesting to think about. Vocation is precisely concerned with the neighbor and with our own body & soul responding to God and His Word.

Here is a longer quote from the good Dr. Luther:

"Worship is not a function of the mouth *but of the whole body. It is to bow the head, bend the body, fall on the knees, prostrate one's self, and so forth, and to do such things as a sign and acknowledgment of an authority and power;* just as people bow in silence before secular princes and Lords, and just as Popes, Bishops, abbots, and people generally, have themselves honored and adored [ehrbeitunge] is what the scriptures really mean by worship [anbeten]...

We read in the scriptures that worship or adoration is rendered outwardly both to God and to kings without distinction, just as bowing and kneeling are still rendered outwardly both to God and to men.

From this understanding of outward worship you will also understand what Christ meant by true Spiritual worship. It is the adoration or bowing of the heart, so that from the bottom of your heart you thereby show and confess yourself to be his subordinate creature. For from this you see that true worship can be nothing else than faith; it is faith's sublimest activity with respect to God. For no one is capable of such heartfelt confession, adoration, bending, and bowing (or whatever you want to call it) before God in his heart, unless he unwaveringly holds God to be his Lord and Father, from whom he receives and will receive all good things, and through whom, without any merit on his part, he is redeemed and preserved from all sins and evil." - Martin Luther¹

With my body I worship. With my heart I worship!

¹ Treasury of Daily Prayer, Sept 22, 2020?

Remember St. Paul? Ephesians 5? Understanding the relationship between Christ and His Bride offers startling good, practical advice for earthly marriage, too. I don't want to confuse marriage, or the marriage bed, with idolatry. On the contrary, I think a right understanding of worship can help both husbands and wives understand what is really going on. Faithful husbands *adore* their wives! They are *devoted*. Faithful wives *have a type of faith* in their husbands. *Knowing kind of is half the battle!*

There is absolutely veneration and reverence that happens in Christian marriages! But women particularly may be missing that reality. Women, you'll note, are now the majority of those who instigate divorce.

But, whether male or female, those who are distressed about their own flesh can be confused about how to handle "love for the body" in marriage and in daily life. Again, what are the churchly teachings that can address these ramifications and concerns?

EVE

Ok. Let's talk about Eve! Eve was created by the rib of Adam to be of the same kind. Some argue that that is a primarily a sexual reference. It wasn't good that Adam couldn't have babies.

I'd chuckle nervously, but, actually, if you take it to another level, I do think procreation inherently helps Adam and men in general! Babies are a tremendous gift and blessing! God explicitly names them as such! People have lamented, "Oh, but what could Bach have accomplished if only he'd had fewer children?" Seriously? Maybe those kids helped to inspire him! Kept him on his toes!

Eve was certainly created so that Adam would have a fit helper. Other translations include suitable helper, worthy helper, helpmate, helpmeet. It's a bit of a loaded term! Another way to speak of it is that Eve allows Adam to have an "other" and "another."

Is "helper" condescending as a term? Does it mean sidekick, personal assistant? Office wench? Modern ears may think so, but it doesn't offend God's own sensibilities to be our ever-present help in need. The Hebrew is *ezer*.

Ps. 121:1-2, the psalmist states, "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my *'ezer* come? My *'ezer* comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth." Could that mean my wife comes from the hills? . . . The rest of the psalm makes plain this is a reference to the Lord! The *LORD* is the helper. The keeper. The protector. The *LORD* is the one who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Please, on behalf of wives and mothers everywhere, let us sleep in sometimes! Right? And vice versa!

When we consider women as those who help in the face of world domination—literal dominion over all the earth—this is not the most narrow of descriptions.

Of course, there is also the obvious "counterpart." Female exists as a counterpart to male. While God certainly can raise up children for Abraham out of rocks, He chooses to do so through the coming together of male and female. Note how God brings together: male and female are different, yet the things which make them different are precisely why and how they are drawn back together again.

HOW WE SPEAK OF MARRIAGE

Most Christian speakers at this point would elaborate on A) compatibility and complementarian views, emphasizing that male & female have different but complementary roles, B) egalitarian views—

emphasizing equality in practically all things, or, less often these days, C) the biblical patriarchal view in a strict male-dominant hierarchy.

These are ways to speak of marriage so that modern and/or religious sensibilities are taken into considerations. Unfortunately, I don't think these approaches are quite as comprehensive as proponents have hoped.

The biggest difficulty with these three emphases is two-fold: the emphases can overshadow additional teachings from God's Word *and* there is an implication that these are all mutually exclusive.

God has worked through patriarchs! Thanks be to God! All families have been blessed by Abraham, Genesis 12:3! And we dishonor a very real man, whom I look forward to meeting after the resurrection, and we dishonor the God who transferred the Abrahamic Covenant through the patriarchs, when we decry patriarch as a term. It is used as a concept in the Old Testament and a term in the New.

I have been blessed. I am not on the defensive about being a girl. I am not worried in the least that God has established a systemic form of slavery to keep me, as a woman, down. Because I know freedom and it is found in the Greek term *luo* or "to loose," "to unbind." I have been set free! And I'm a child, wife, mother, aunt, etc.

Those who *have* been oppressed? I'm not going to belittle that suffering either. There are patriarchs who have slept with children in their care. Like Judah and Tamar. And a girl I know.

Broken families will impact the role that familial *language* can play with particular people. As people of the Word, we need to be aware of that, be agile in our Scriptural use, and have multiple expressions of the Gospel ready. God gives us a pretty thick book to use. We can learn to use all of it.

Is Jesus a patriarch? Yes! Did He determine we needed to use that language toward Him? No. How has He mostly described Himself? Son of Man.

Christ, as God-made-Man, does rule over all women. But women are not inherently ruled by some abstraction called manhood. Jesus is my God, my King, my Lord and Master. *It is His place* to establish other levels of government. I can trust that it is for my good. He can use men if it pleases Him. Which it does.

Patriarchal language shouldn't be used to enable or excuse sin. Nor should it be twisted so that women respond in fear. Engendered language should *serve* rather than divide, just as authority should *serve* rather than tyrannize or enslave.

Complementarian language can be helpful. *Yes*, the genders complement each other. Inside of marriage and outside of marriage. *Yes*, there are abuses that people hope to overcome by using that language. But it also opens the doors to abstracts and other abuses.

Abstraction can point away from the point that God brings *one man* together with *one woman*. And these two might be surprising in all sorts of ways. Still, they are married. Even if it turns out they are *not* entirely complementarian. A complementarian approach has also fed assumptions that both men and women have struggled to meet. It has burdened people with expectations that are not in Scripture. To summarize, the following questions are neither in Scripture nor helpful: "Am I man enough?" "Am I woman enough?" And, "How can I make myself more attractive to men?" Love your neighbor—Your specific neighbor—gets to our Lord's point quicker.

Now, egalitarian views. What I find interesting is that, to me, brothers and sisters are equal. Equality is firmly ensconced in the Office of Child, in which we all fit even into life everlasting. Insofar as everyone is a child, everyone is equal.

Now, when arguing for equality extends into equal amount of time spent in chores or keeping track of who did what when and how? That's moving marriage into a business model. That's no longer focusing on your neighbor, but guarding your own profits. That's less *knowing*, more *tallying*. Less *helping*, more *dictating*. That's law language all over the place. A works-righteous attitude is not conducive to any relationship, let alone marriage. It invites rivalry, challenge, and despair. People. Will give up. With earthly and heavenly consequences.

RECAP HUSBANDS

Husbands should be like Christ. Not Moses, the law giver. Wives should be like the church. NOT a pharisaical law giver! Lutherans who grasp Law and Gospel can be freed to let God's Law and Gospel be sufficient, restful, refreshing, and life-giving, in good times and in bad.

To recap: should we pit the genders against each other? Should we speak in generalities and stereotypes that men and women may not actually fit? Should we turn to *more law* and measurings to ensure a healthy marriage? Or should we use biblical language as a way to broaden our understanding? Should we tailor our words to our neighbor and what we know of his or her understandings? Does that mean we are hiding things and actively pursuing a bait and switch? I sure hope not! But let's take our opportunities one step at a time.

Regarding marriage, the Table of Duties says:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them **with respect** as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. 1 Peter 3:7

Husbands, love your wives and **do not be harsh with them**. Col. 3:19

Neighbor: Wife

Unique role: Christ

Duties: Sacrifice, provision

Proper work: Sex & committed union

Perks: Sex & intimate knowledge within safety

Temptations: Selfishness, tyranny

Crosses: Unworthiness: no one is worthy to stand as Christ. No one is worthy to receive the gift of an entire other person!

Status: Head

LITTLE CHURCHES

As Christians, wives are little Christs, too. But to our husbands we are like a little church.

Should women be offended to be associated with the church? That'd be a pretty big stretch. The Lord sees all believers as part of the Church.

In a sense, the office of wife symbolizes all of us. And one's understanding of marriage will be colored by your understanding of the church. If you understand the church primarily as a recipient of God's loves and gifts, you are freed to see wives as a blessed recipient in marriage. A beloved as much as a helper.

Make no mistake: reception is at the essence of the Christian condition.

We receive outside the home, of course, too, but there we pay for it. We work for money or make exchanges, bartering our excesses to obtain whatever the household needs.

But in the family, giving and receiving should be free. Children do not have to pay for food, shelter or clothing. Nor are spouses expect to pay one another. Everyone gives and everyone takes. But wives play a specifically church-like role, receiving from their husbands and then frequently sharing that fruit further outward.

If the husband brings home the bacon, the wife receives it. (I'm not saying men can't cook. Bear with me.) But the wife may be the one who cooks it up for the whole family. As a wife, she receives, but as a helper she is as likely to feed an entire family as she is to feed her husband. As a wife, she receives, but that love and those gifts are spread out further than solely returning to the husband.

God's callings are not always about what we accomplish. It is also about receiving His gifts through His servants in our lives, whether in a reciprocal manner or not.

Neighbor: Husband

Unique role: Church

Duties: Submission, helping

Proper work: RECEPTION

Perks: Sex & intimate knowledge within safety

Temptations: Selfishness, manipulation

Crosses: Unworthiness: no one is worthy to stand as the Bride of Christ! No one is worthy to receive the gift of an entire other person!

Status: Body & Embodiment

DUTIES

Traditionally, husbands provide and protect. If we go through the verbs of Ephesians 5, we can also pick out love, sanctify, present in splendor (which, if you think about it, is a biblical argument against those abusers who isolate their wives). Also nourish and cherish. Hold fast to your wife!

Traditionally, wives submit. Often have babies and tend to the children. But that's a pretty open-ended job description! I suspect because of the open-ended application of *helpmeet*.

Though isn't it sad that, in sin, man needs more help than ever and woman has increasing pain with children and contrary desire? And as desires expand to include BritBox or cable, etc., help is increasingly toward finances rather than family members more directly.

As the Table of Duties says:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Eph. 5:22

They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 1 Peter 3:5–6

Should wives love, as well as respect, their husbands? Probably. Scripturally, she who is forgiven much will love much. Directing service towards one's spouse *elicits love and respect back*. It's an up-building circle of forgiveness. Again, directing service towards one's spouse *elicits love and respect back*.

EARTHLY & HEAVENLY BRIDE

Now. Ephesians 5 is describing reality. It isn't all metaphor. At the same time, there are differences between an earthly bride and the church. Earthly brides are called to *help* whereas the Church *shares God's gifts*. Jesus doesn't need help. He's the ultimate, capital-h Helper. But everyone else does need help.

The church is active, but traditionally the church is spoken about as the mother, conceiving children through the birth and tending Christ's children.

If a wife is busy with her kids, I'm not going to criticize her for that. Are we going to criticize her for that? There are other helps for husbands, although only a wife can be a *wifely* help. Mothers do not cease being wives by conception or delivery.

The church mostly reflects back to Christ in her words, but wives *can* use their own with their husbands. In fact, wives are *supposed to ask questions* (1 Cor. 14:35). Seek understanding *with their husbands*. Hence part of the problem when a believing wife is married to an unbelieving husband.

Women can consider wisely and offer sage counsel. They just happen to be on the counsel instead of the judgment seat at the time.

It is worth noting that the description of the Proverbs 31 woman is described in terms of her being a wife. She handles her household, her servants and children, her purple wares and her properties. She is strong and dignified, opening her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Yet what is her status? Wife. Not mother. Or worker. Or landowner. Proverbs 31 praises wife and highly esteems the office of wife. "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates" (Prov 31:31). She is beloved. Tremendous. An active part of the household. Her husband trusts her and she helps. Pretty explicitly in dominion.

Deborah was no less wife for advising during the time of Judges. But, note, she did do it from close to home! She didn't leave her husband for it.

Do Christian wives need to do it all? No. The Proverbs 31 woman clearly had servants and older children. Do Christian wives need to feel guilty about staying home? No. Do Christian wives need to feel guilty about going to work? No. Vocationally, we can approach this in terms of "Who is my neighbor and how can I help?" Including, how I can help *my actual spouse* and how can I help *my actual children*?

Society favors employment. Favor is a blessing term. Scripture blesses family, and family insofar as it serves others. The world favors wealth. And maybe generosity from a position of hoarding.

The question of whether mothers should work is another case of culture adding tons of unnecessary law and guilt into Christian mind frames. *Society*, not Scripture, is heaping burdens and expectations on

people. Based on who knows what? Frankly, at this point I think Satan follows a divide and conquer pattern.

Each one of us has multiple vocations and that is *not* a series of burdens or entrapments. It's a social network of resources, grace, and *checks and balances*. In fact, we can even incorporate our ongoing need for rest into this.

A dinner out with your husband, even if it's a picnic in your backyard, can be a much needed break from the noise and stimulation of young kids. But it's pretty cool to have a dance party or a mud pie festival with your young ones even if your spouse isn't into it.

Learning to rest *in your vocations* is something that takes learning. Practice. Sometimes even elements of commitment. But God calls us to rest. With our families. On, at minimum, a weekly basis.

Sometimes we take a break to help the kids with homework. Sometimes we take a break from homework for a movie or a read aloud. There are all sorts of options. Not all last all day. We do not need to pit activities against each other.

Ideally, we'd benefit from rest in each one of our various vocations. I love it when I can visit my mom and she takes care of everything. Though other times I return the favor. But as a child of God, I need rest. As a child of parents, I need rest. As a spouse, I need rest. As a parent, etc.

I posit that there is a form of rest simply in grasping one's vocation. It is a breath of fresh air when my husband comes home. That alone is already a real instance of a burden shifting. Sometimes I am comforted just because a child sits on my lap or wants to know what I think about something.

This is *not* to say that rest isn't about the Word of God. It is. There are also physical components. Again, the Large Catechism is pretty amazing. What could be *vocational* components?

PRACTICAL LIFE

Christian folks tend to seek practical approaches to decision-making in real life. Many try to prioritize vocations. The difficulty is that it doesn't necessary work. If your child falls out of a tree, you're going to need to halt that important conversation with your husband. But one can also ask, who has the greatest needs right now? Or what needs to get done the soonest? What neighbors am I closest to? Or what neighbors need me the most, because some people basically have no neighbors. It calls to mind the Sabbath healings. Prioritize life, but respond to circumstances.

The guiding principles boil down to the law of love (Romans 13:10) and a steady dependence upon Christ and His church for the forgiveness of sins.

In the Confessions the highest form of worship is deemed faith. Our vocational lives will be lived by faith, too. Not to do lists and organizational principles. It's repetitive, I know, but it does *not* get more clear or more simple than love your neighbor.

Are there times when God gives us more than we can handle? Sure. But keep breathing. That's really about the biggest trick there is. *Wait upon the Lord*, because *He* is the one who is *really* handling things.

How, as Christians, do we understand opportunities? Are opportunities laws we must accept? No. Are opportunities revelations? Some think of them that way. Opportunities are a *choice*. *And they do not restrict our Lord in any way*. God can and will bless you. So think about those who may be involved.

Think about how much rest you're getting. In *all your various vocations*. And discern that sin is *not* an opportunity, but, at least, a twisting of something otherwise good.

Folks shouldn't be scared of a challenge. Like having a large family! But we don't need to look at opportunities as a sign of success either. Abraham had no book deals. He's still a big deal.

The single greatest gift a Christian can give to his neighbors, or to the world, is to *not* do everything but live the life that God has given. Confess sins, repent, forgive and be forgiveness, and live in the newness of Christ. *That* is our testimony—God's Word embodied in our lives. That is our example, our shared experience, and, frankly, our Christian success story. To point beyond ourselves to Him who is greater.

One of the many things I love about church is the *public* confession and forgiveness of sins. My children need to hear me confess and they need to hear me forgiven. My husband is a pastor, but he also needs to hear me confess and needs to hear I'm forgiven. Siblings, too! What a powerful, natural lesson for those who were fighting earlier.

REHASHING FAMILY VOCATIONS

Luther understood the household to be the *primary* estate. The one we are born into and the one we die within. While we can certainly talk about family as the cycle of generations and the foundation of culture, it is also our primarily realm of love.

Family is the nourishing estate. The first place we practice love. But the job descriptions are pretty wide open. Husbands and wives nurture each other. Fathers and mothers nurture their children. And God nurtures everyone through these offices, as the attention to detail and practiced perspective applies to additional neighbors.

Marriage allows an up-close and personal experience of headship, lordship, levels of submission, one flesh union, and gender togetherness despite different personalities.

But it isn't easy. Living with a sinner rarely is and marriage involves *ongoing interconnection*.

This will impact crosses. Crosses are vehicles for self-denial. In marriage, self-denial is *not* every once in a while. Or at least it shouldn't be. *We will* have to deny ourselves for the sake of our spouse on a regular, even routine, basis.

But consider this: discontentment or anger has gone too far when it listens to the devil, who would have us believe the *neighbor* is the problem. Your neighbor, as broken as he admittedly is, is not a cross (A source of burdens, perhaps.) *Suffering* is not inherently a cross. Hard decisions aren't necessarily a cross—God is flexible in His blessing. A cross is a service by which we deny ourselves and follow Jesus. We do not need to construct our own. God provides plenty!

And no matter what it is you are experiencing, you can turn the pages of Scripture to be re-equipped by Him who knows best.

(If time allows) SATAN IN MARRIAGE

Sometimes someone is a satan rather than a christ in marriage. That is serious, serious business. Not just for a marriage, but for the two eternal souls.

When a spouse is actively acting as Satan rather than Christ, it is far worse than a misunderstanding and mistreatment toward a spouse. Those who seek to corrupt or destroy a spouse are rending life. A man or woman who would murder a spouse has already sacrificed the marriage in the heart.

That is one way to speak of it to people being methodically abused. If someone actually believes they can control another person, at the least, it's a serious mental or spiritual condition.

Leaving abuse is more like the Exodus than a trip to the grocery store. There can be months in between acts of God. But don't forget your brothers and sisters. Help as you can. Be alert for possible retribution.

In the meantime, narcissism is on the rise. The actual psychological condition in which people apparently *cannot* stop focusing on themselves. They can be master manipulators, and what is manipulation other than an attempt to play God?

Serious stuff. But may the church remember the Good Samaritan and the inn. *Mend*, don't rend. Care and protect. For the sake of body and for life everlasting.

PRESENT DARKNESS

We're in dark days. Muddy water. Murky territory. Thanks be to God that Jesus forgives and also gives new life, renewed minds, restored souls. Thanks be to God for the promised resurrection and life to come!

And thanks be to God that He is patient enough to work through each person, one person at a time. When a girl loves and respects someone enough to marry him, that can be a life-changer. Entirely to the good! And when a husband loves, protects, and provides for his wife, life can *blossom*.

One person in any vocation can make a difference that lasts generations.

It won't always feel that way. There are times, even in the church, when it feels like God has turned His back to us. And there are psalms for that. Psalms that let us be church so that He will turn back toward us as our husband. We cry out to receive. He turns and gives us all we will ever need: forgiveness, life and salvation.

By the way, withholding words, or giving the silent treatment, is a super serious thing, theologically. It's good to warn people about that.

1 Peter 3:3-6 has to do with wives winning over unbelieving husbands. There is no promise that it will happen, but God is present so there's at least the possibility. In the hands of our God, even submission to unbelievers can be powerful. Influential. Turned toward good.

Our Lord is present in vocations. We can trust that God is at work.

NOTES

Excerpts from the *LSB* rite of marriage:

. . . witness the union of this man and this woman in holy matrimony. This is an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity's fall into sin.

In marriage we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church. Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with his presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee. This estate is also commended to us by the apostle Paul as good and honorable. Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into in advisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for the mutual companionship, help, and support that each person ought to receive from the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Marriage was also ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another. Therefore, all persons who marry shall take a spouse in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, for God has not called us to impurity but in holiness. God also established marriage for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord so that they may offer Him their praise.

For these reasons God has established the holy estate.

Declaration of Intent:

will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it? Will you nourish and cherish her as Christ loved His body, the Church, giving Himself up for her? Will you love, honor, and keep her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to her alone, so long as you both shall live?

will you have this man to be your wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony as God ordained it? Will you submit to him as the Church submits to Christ? Will you love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to him alone, so long as you both shall live?

Vows:

I take you to be my wedding husband or wife
to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish, till death us do part,
according to God's holy will;
and I pledge to you my faithfulness.