

Roles in Marriage

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
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No. 4: Towards a Loving Marriage
Scriptures: Genesis 1:26-31, 1 Peter 3:1-8

I have only played one game of basketball and it was a disaster. It happened when I first arrived in America.

I went to watch the church team play in a local league. One player didn't show up and the Captain asked me to take his place.

I explained that I had never played basketball in my life.

I didn't know the positions or the rules.

I had little idea of the purpose of the game. He assured me I would be better than nothing. He was wrong.

They found me a uniform and the game began.

The moment came when the ball was passed to me.

I had some vague notion that I should throw it towards the net which I did.

By an act of miraculous providence it landed in the basket. No one was more amazed than me.

However, it was downhill from there.

No one had told me how to stop the opposition so I used my knowledge from the game of rugby and tackled a player bringing him to the floor.

I thought it was an effective way of preventing forward progress. The referee did not agree and asked me to leave the game.

With one player down we lost hopelessly.

The problem was I did not know my role on the team. The result was defeat and discouragement.

It wasn't enjoyable for me or pleasant for the other members of my team. In that case it didn't matter much.

In other situations it does.

That is especially true in the game of marriage.

We need to know our place on the team in order to enjoy a wonderful lifelong relationship.

So today we are going to look at **ROLES IN MARRIAGE** as we continue our series *Towards a Loving Marriage*.

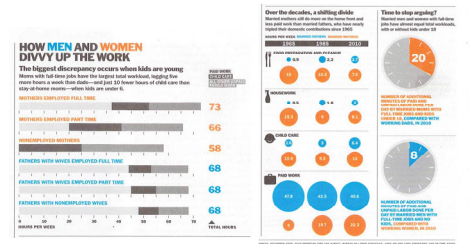
Sociologists have been fascinated by the roles that husbands and wives play in marriage. There is lots of data on the subject. The cover of *Time Magazine* this month was entitled *Chore Wars*.



The author, who is a woman, makes the statement, "Men are now pulling their weight at work and at home, so why do women still think they are slacking off?"



The article has charts and statistics of who is doing what in the home.



However in the debate of *Chore Wars* there is seldom any reflection on where the roles for men and women come from. They are certainly not listed on the back of the marriage license.

The truth is that most of us pick up the roles of husband and wife from our home of origin.

If mum does the cooking and dad does the finances we assume that is the way it is should be.

That's fine if we marry someone from a similar background but it can create havoc if our spouse comes from a different home environment.

It is clear that we need more than our homes of origin to understand our roles in marriage. Just as basketball has clear rules that when understood lead to an enjoyable game we need the same for our homes.

The good news is that God has provided a perfect set of instructions in his word. These give us the big picture of marriage so that it isn't just about who makes the bed or does the washing up but how our homes can be holy and happy places.

So we begin with the first page of Scripture, Genesis Chapter one. You might like to turn there in your Bible and take out your message outline.

This gives us the global perspective on the significance of marriage. Here we discover the grand truth that **our role is make the world very good.**

Think of that! God wants to use your marriage to change the world.

Throughout this chapter God finishes various parts of his creation. Each completion is followed by the observation, **"And God saw that it was good."** (**Genesis 1:10, 12, 17, 21, 25**)

Finally God creates marriage. Now we read, **"God saw all that he had made and it was very good."** (**v 31**)

But how will marriage make the world very good? We discover it is what he does and what he says.

"God blessed them and said to them, (that is the first couple) 'be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" (v 28)

That is an amazing description of marriage.

There are three parts to it.

There is a spiritual part, "God blessed them."

There is a physical part, "be fruitful and increase."

And there is a practical part, "rule over creation."

Let's take them one by one.

First, there is the **blessing of God.**

We are told, **"God blessed them."**

When God brings a couple together it is a mark of his blessing. It is a gift from him.

It is an acknowledgement that marriage is divinely ordained.

Most of us sense that blessing on our wedding day but we can lose that wonder over time.

We need to grasp it afresh.

Your spouse is God's blessing to you.

Through your marriage God wants to bless the world for God always intends us to pass on his blessing to others.

Second there is **the raising of children.**

God commands Adam and Eve, **"Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it."** Now not every couple have children but most do.

It is one of the purposes why God created marriage.

It is the reason why marriage can only be between a man and a woman.

Here is the point. The way we raise our children will impact society around us.

We are to teach them values and virtues.

When we do this the world becomes a better place.

When this moral training is neglected it is disastrous for a society. We are seeing that with the riots in England. Gangs of mostly young men have been roaming London and other cities looting stores and burning buildings and causing dreadful destruction.



News commentators have observed that these young people have no moral compass.

If we looked into how they were raised we would find that in many cases parents were absent and these thugs received no training in honesty or hard work.



But how different when Christian parents take seriously the raising of their children by teaching them God's law and Christ's gospel.

How blest is a society where husbands and wives heed Moses' words about the Ten Commandments.

**"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."
(Deuteronomy 6:6-7)**

We see this role of child raising is shared by both the mother and the father.

It is essential for the health of society.

For we all depend on one another.

There is no point you raising your children to make good husbands and wives unless I do the same.

Employers depend on us raising our children to be industrious and honest, or our economy will suffer and that will impact all of us.

Third there is **the responsibility for creation.**

God says, **"Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."**

The way we live as couples and families will have an impact on creation for good or bad.

God wants us to make society better so he calls us to be careful with the natural resources that he has given us. We are to live in such a way that at the end of our life we can hand over the world to the next generation better than we found it.

Now isn't that an exciting understanding of marriage!

We are the recipients of God's blessing.

We are to raise our children in godly homes.

We are responsible for caring for God's creation.

All for the purpose of making this world a better place.

To accomplish such a noble goal of making society very good we need strong and stable marriages.

We find out how these are made when we turn to the New Testament where Peter describes **OUR ROLES IN THE HOME.**

Genesis gave us the big picture where husbands and wives have identical responsibilities.

Peter makes it more personal and shows the different but equal and complementary roles that husbands and wives fulfill in order to have a happy home.

Peter first addresses wives.

He says **wives are to display godly behavior.**

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.” (v 1-2)

This is a controversial passage because of that word “submissive”. We don’t like that.

We don’t want to submit to anyone.

But marriage is all about submission.

Submission to God and to one another.

We could say that submission is the key to marriage.

What does submission mean?

It means to be like Jesus.

Paul tells couples, **“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21)**

Jesus is our example of submission when he did the will of his Father.

When a wife displays Godly behavior it transforms a home. Peter shows us how He has in mind a marriage where the husband is not a believer. He has resisted the claims of the gospel.

He ridicules the Bible and insults his wife.

So strong is his hostility that it is no longer possible for his wife to speak to him about the Lord.

But the Christian wife must not despair.

She possesses a mighty weapon for winning her husband to the faith. It is the testimony of a godly life. Her husband has refused to heed the word so let him be won without words.

Augustine described how this happened in his home as his Christian mother Monnica quietly witnessed to her pagan husband Patricius.

In his Confessions Augustine wrote, “She served her husband as her master, and did all she could to win him for you, speaking to him of you by her conduct, by which you made her beautiful . . . finally when her husband was at the end of his earthly span, she gained him for you.”

Then says Peter **wives are to display inner beauty.**

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” (v 3-4)

Now that statement has been greatly misunderstood.

Some have concluded that women shouldn’t wear any jewelry or nice clothes or have their hair done.

That is not what Peter is saying.

God is not against beauty for he made it. Paul tells us that a woman's hair is her glory. (1 Corinthians 11:15)

The father of the prodigal welcomed his returning son with the best robe and ring.

Peter is certainly not suggesting that a wife should look like an unmade bed.

What he is saying is that a wife must be more concerned about her inner beauty than her outer beauty.

We have a wedding coming up in our family.

This will be the first one as our daughter is married.

Our two other children are at the stage of life where it is possible they will be married in the not too distant future. So we spend a lot of time talking about marriage and how to choose a spouse. My children are sick of hearing me say that the temperament of a man or woman is far more important than their appearance.

Now initially looks attract us and we want to be married to someone we are proud of. But when we are living with someone day after day it is far more important that they are easy going and long suffering and patient than they win a beauty contest.

God looks on the heart because he knows that a holy heart has a bigger impact on the home than a pretty face. You young men looking for a wife seek out a girl with inner beauty. It is more important she has a cool temper than hot looks.

Practically what does it mean for wives to display their inner beauty? One woman made this suggestion. Suppose it takes 30 minutes in the morning to do your hair and makeup and get ready for the day.

Then find an equal block of time to get your heart ready, to wait on God, to pray for your husband and children so that when the tensions and the stresses of the day arrive you don't snap but rather respond with a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight.

That is how you create a joyful Jesus centered home.

I am so thankful that the first thing I see Gretchen do in the morning is read her bible. It is a major reason we have been happily married for 34 years.

Peter now turns to the men and says, **husbands are to display considerate tenderness.**

The English Standard Version is helpful here.

"Likewise, husbands live with your wives in an understanding way showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel since they are heirs with you of the grace of life." (v7)

There are a couple of important words there.

The first is **understanding.**

Husbands are to understand their wives.

They are to study their wives.

They are to get to know their wives.

This word "understanding" relates to sexual intimacy. Here too the husband is to learn the likes and dislikes of his wife so he might meet her needs.

The book of Proverbs tells us, **"By wisdom a house is built and through understanding it is established. Through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures." (Proverbs 24:3-4)**

Understanding our wife will correct a mistake that many men make of viewing our wife with diminishing importance once the marriage has taken place.

Before the wedding we men spend an enormous amount of energy seeking to woo and win her.

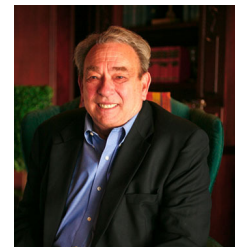
We enter the courting relationship with the dedication of an athlete. We give our girl our undivided attention making her the center of our devotion.

But once the honeymoon is over we turn our attention to other goals. We figure we have the romantic aspects of our life under control.

It is now time to scale new heights.

So we begin to devote less and less time to our wife, with the result that our marriage becomes stale and ripe for an affair.

I was convicted by a comment I read this week from R.C. Sproul. He said, "There are certain kinds of men who are particularly vulnerable to wife neglect. Men involved in public service can easily delude themselves into thinking their work is more important than their wife. Clergymen and doctors must especially be aware of this as they are always on call."



Thoughtlessness is the cruelty that many husbands are guilty of most. It is not that we cheat on our wives or beat them or deliberately shame them in public.

Instead we just do nothing. Sheer thoughtlessness is our insidious offense against our wives. We give all our creative energy, our compliments and our courtesies at work and we leave nothing for our home.

If that describes us let us seek forgiveness and resolve to show our wife considerate tenderness.

The second important word is **honor**.

It means precious. We are to cherish our wife because she is the most valuable part of our life.

If we men buy a new motor bike or a car we look after it very carefully.

How much more should we be attentive to our wife who is 100 times more important than any machine.

Peter speaks of women as being the **"weaker vessel"**.

That can seem archaic in a day when women are running the marathon in two hours 15 minutes, driving formula 1 race cars and climbing to the top of Everest.

There are, of course, plenty of women stronger than men but as a general rule, most husbands are physically stronger than their wives. God has ordained that the husband is to protect his wife and to take care of her, all the time displaying considerate tenderness.

Second **husbands are to display spiritual leadership.**

Peter concludes his instruction to husbands in a surprising way. He says do this, **"So that nothing will hinder your prayers." (v 7)**

We can draw two conclusions from that statement.

The first is that husband will be praying.

The reason is that the husband is the priest of the home. He should be calling his family to prayer.

In counseling women for over 30 years I have heard a common refrain from wives.

They want their husbands to be the spiritual leader of the marriage.

Women don't want that role.

They will take it on reluctantly but they long for their husband to be the spiritual head of the home.

We men are far too quick to give that responsibility away.

Perhaps we can't exercise spiritual leadership because we are not a believer yet.

We are the like unsaved husband of earlier in the chapter that our wife is seeking to win without a word. So the first step for us is to put our faith in Christ. To ask him to be the head of our home. Then we can begin to exercise spiritual leadership.

We need to start small.

We can call for grace before meals even when guests are present. We can make sure everybody gets to church and insist that is the rule of our house.

When I was a teenager I decided I didn't want to go to church any more.

My father said, "You better pack your bags then. Attending worship is a requirement for living here."

I quickly changed my mind.

I have done the same in my own home.

Everyone who stays in our home comes to church.

It is the best and kindest thing we can do for our family.

Then a father can insist that certain music with vile lyrics is not played in the home or certain movies with foul language are not shown. Some fathers lead family devotions. Others pray with their children when they go to bed at night.

Now notice what happens if we don't take up this important role of spiritual leadership.

Our prayers are hindered. God doesn't answer us.

The reason is that failing to be a spiritual leader is a sin. Sin creates a barrier between us and God.

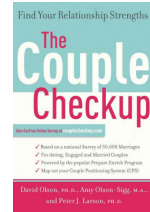
It means we won't enjoy God's blessing in our home.

We definitely need his presence.

So Peter outlines the roles in marriage.

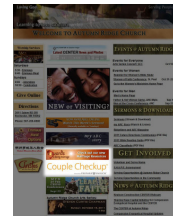
Some couples have difficulties working through these roles. A valuable resource that we are encouraging all couples to use is *The Couple Checkup*.

The accompanying book dedicates an entire chapter to the traditions and trends that come with roles in marriage.



This assessment helps you discover creative ways to explore not only your role in marriage but many other aspects of your relationship.

We have made the assessment available on the church website at a discounted rate of \$20 for the month of August. So check it out today at Autumn Ridge. Org.



George MacDonald was a major influence on C.S. Lewis.

MacDonald wrote a poem that we can use to dedicate our homes to Christ so they are places of peace and joy.

It goes like this.

Lord, this house is all Thine Own,
 All, the whole, and every part,
 Let the guard around it thrown
 Be Thy Presence in its heart.
 Thine is every bed and chair,
 Every table, every book,
 Meet us up and down the stair,
 Talk with us in every nook
 Thine is every servant-hand,
 Thine each foot upon the floor,
 Never shall the Master stand
 Waiting at unopened door.