

# THE CHRISTIAN HUSBAND

by J. R. Miller

Each member of the household has a part in the family life, and the fullest happiness and blessedness of the home can be attained, only when each one's part is faithfully fulfilled. If any one member of the family fails in love or duty, the failure affects the whole household life—just as one discordant voice in a company of singers spoils the music.

The husband has a part all his own, which no other can do. How does the Word of God define his duties? What is involved in his part in the marriage relation? What does he owe his wife? One word covers it all—**love**. "Husbands, **love** your wives!" comes the command with all divine authority. This counsel is short—but becomes exceedingly long when it is fully accepted and observed.

## **What are some of the things included in a husband's love?**

One is fondness, affectionate regard. When a man offers his hand in marriage to a woman—he says by his act that his heart has made a choice of her among all women, that he has for her a deeper affection than for any other. At the marriage altar, he solemnly pledges to her a continuance of that love until death. When the beauty has faded from her face and the luster from her eyes; when old age has brought wrinkles, or when sickness or sorrow has left its marks; the faithful husband's love is to remain deep and true as ever. His heart is still to find its truest delight in her.

But the Word implies more than mere emotional fondness. The Scriptures give the **measure** of the love which husbands are to bear to their wives; "Husbands, love your wives—even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it." In the true husband who realizes all that this divine command involves, *selfishness dies at the marriage altar*. He thinks no longer of his own comfort—but of his wife's. He denies himself that he may bring new pleasures and comforts to her. He counts no sacrifice too great to be made which will bring benefit to her.

The wife yields all up to the husband, gives herself in the fullest sense. Will he be faithful in the holy trust reposed in his hands? Will he cherish her happiness as a precious jewel—bearing all things, enduring all things, for her sake. Will he seek her highest good, help her to build up in herself the noblest womanhood? Is he worthy to receive into his keeping, all that her confiding love lays at his feet?

Every husband should understand that when a woman, the woman of his own free and deliberate choice, places her hand in his and thus becomes his wife—she has taken her life, with all its hopes and fears, all its possibilities of joy or sorrow, all its capacity for development, all its tender and sacred interests—and placed it in his hand. He is then under the most solemn obligation to do all in his power to make her life *happy, noble and blessed*. To do this he must be

ready to make any personal sacrifice. Nothing less can be implied in "loving as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it."

This love implies the utmost **gentleness in manner**. One may be very faithful and true—and yet lack that affectionateness in speech and act which has such power to satisfy the heart. Scripture admonishes husbands to *love* their wives—and do not be *bitter* against them. The teaching is that all bitterness should be suppressed in the very workings of the heart—and changed into sweetness.

Are all husbands blameless in this respect? Are there none that speak sharp words that sting? No man who truly loves his wife, would intentionally cause her pain! The trouble is that men often fall into careless habits at *home*, which they do not exercise in *society*. They will pride themselves on their thoughtfulness and sensitive spirit—but at home too often they are rude, careless in speech, and heedless of their words and actions. They forget that their wives are women with gentle spirits, which are easily hurt. A man thinks that because a woman is his wife she should know he loves her even if he is rude to her, that she should endure anything he says or does, even if it is something that would sorely hurt or offend any other woman.

There never was a more false premise than this! Because she is his wife, he owes her the loftiest courtesy he can pay. There is no other of whose feelings he should be so careful, and whom he should so grieve to hurt. But it is not enough that men do not be bitter against their wives. It is a step in the right direction when, instead of being bitter, his words and acts and whole bearing are characterized by gentleness and affectionateness. Yet, there are also men who speak no bitter words—but few kindly, tender words fall from their lips. The old warmth of the newly-wed husband has died out—and the speech has become cold and businesslike. The mere absence of a fault or vice is not necessarily a virtue. Silence is no doubt better than bitterness, and coldness better than rudeness. A garden without weeds, though having no plants or flowers is better than a patch of weeds; but a garden beautiful and fragrant with flowers is better still.

While gentleness should always mark a husband's bearing towards his wife, there are occasions which call for peculiar thoughtfulness and sympathetic expression. Sometimes she is very weary. The cares of the day have been unusually trying, and matters have not gone smoothly at home. Her quivering nerves have been sorely overtaxed, or maybe she has heard bad news. A child has been sick, or worse, has by some disobedience almost broken her heart. What is a husband's part at such times? Surely, if he is capable of tenderness, he will show it now. He will seek to lighten the burden, to quiet the trembling heart, and to impart strength and peace. Every wife should be sure that her husband will *understand* her, that he will deal most *gently* with her, that he will give his own strength to *shelter* her, that he will impart of his own life to build up hers. She should never have to doubt that he will sympathize with her in whatever it may be, which tries her. She should never have to fear repulse or coldness when she flees to him for shelter. What *Christ* is to His people in their weariness, their sorrow, their pain—every husband in his own measure should be to his own wife!

The spirit of love requires a husband to **honor** his wife. He honored her before she was his wife. He saw in her his ideal of all that was noble, lovely and queenly. He showed her every mark of honor of which his soul was capable. Now that he has lifted her up to the throne of his heart, will

he honor her less? Not less—but more and ever more, if he is a true husband and a manly man. He has taken her now into the closest and holiest relation on earth. He has linked her life with his own, so that henceforward whatever affect one, affects both. If one is exalted, the other is exalted; if one is dishonored, the other is debased. There is definitely more reason why he should honor her now, than before she was his wife.

The ways in which he should show her honor are countless. He will do it by providing for her needs on as generous a scale as his position and his means will justify. He will do it by making her the sharer of all his life. He will counsel with her about his business, advise with her concerning every new plan and confide to her at every point the results of his undertakings. A *wife* to him is not a *child*. When he chose her to be his wife he believed her to be worthy.

But even if she is not qualified to give him great aid in his business plans, she loves him and is deeply interested in everything that he is doing. She is made happy by being into all his counsels, and thus lifted up close beside him in his life-work; and he is made stronger, too, for energetic duty and for heroic achievement by her warm sympathy and by the inspiration of her cheerful encouragement. Whether the day brings defeat or victory, failure or success—he should confide all to her in the evening. If the day has been prosperous, she has a right to share the gratification; if it has been adverse, she will want to help her husband bear his burden and to whisper a new word of courage in his heart. Not only does a man fail to give his wife due honor when he shuts her out—but he also robs himself of that inspiration and help which every true wife is able to minister to her husband.

Ofttimes it is the very tenderness of his regard for his wife, which leads him to keep from her things that would cause her distress or anxiety of mind. He does not suppose that she could help him in the solving of the perplexing questions or in the bearing of the heavy burdens. In an effort to shield her from deep anxiety and heavy loads, this is affectionate unselfishness in the husband. But there is no doubt that in ordinary circumstances, such a course is both wrong and unwise. It is robbing the wife of *love's privilege* of sharing the whole of her husband's life.

When a man has taken a woman to be his wife, he has linked her life with his own, in the closest of all earthly relations. Whatever concerns him—also concerns her. He has no interests which are not hers as well as his. He should, therefore, make her the sharer of all his life. She should know of all his successes and triumphs, and to be permitted to rejoice with him in his gladness. If trials come, she should know also of these, that she may sympathize with him, encourage and help him in his struggles and stand close beside him when the shadows rest upon him. They have linked their lives together, "for better or for worse," and they should share the pains—as well as the pleasures which come to either of them. A true wife is not a *child*; she is a *woman*, and should be treated as a woman.

A man does deep injustice to the woman he has chosen to be his wife, when he thinks that she is too frail and delicate to endure with him the storms that blow upon him; or that she is too inexperienced in life to discuss with him the problems that cause him grave and earnest thought. She may not have all his practical wisdom with regard to the world's affairs, and yet she may be able to offer many suggestions which shall prove of more value to him, than the counsel on many shrewd men of the world. There are many men whose success would have been greater, or to

whom failure would not have come—had he sought or accepted his wife's counsel and help. Even if a wife can give no real practical aid, her husband will be made ten times stronger in his own heart, by her strengthening sympathy and brave cheer while he is carrying his load or fighting his battle.

It need scarcely even be said, further, that a husband should honor his wife by being **worthy** of her. Love has been the inspiration that has lifted many a man from a lowly place—to lofty heights of worth or power. Many a youth of humble origin, has worshiped at the feet of a maiden far above him in social standing, and incited by his ardent affection, has made himself worthy of her and then won her as his bride.

Every true-hearted husband should seek to be worthy of the wife he has already won. For her sake, he should reach out after the noblest *achievements* and strive to attain the loftiest heights of *character*. To her he is the ideal of all that is manly, and he should seek to become every day more worthy of the homage she pays to him. Every possibility in his soul, should be developed. Every latent power and energy of his life, should be brought out. His hand should be trained under love's inspiration to do its most skillful work. Every *fault in his character* should be eradicated, every *evil habit* conquered, and every *hidden beauty* of soul should burst into fragrant bloom—for her sake! She looks to him as her ideal of manhood, and he must see to it that the ideal is not marred—that he never falls by any unworthy act of his own, from the high pedestal in her heart to which she has raised him.

In the spirit of this love every husband should be a large-hearted man. He should never be a tyrant, playing the petty despot in his home. A manly man has a generous spirit which shows itself in all his life—but nowhere so richly as within his own doors. There are wives whose natures do not blossom out in their best beauty, because of the *atmosphere* in which they live is chilly and cold. A lady who is always watching for beautiful things and gathering them about her, brought from the mountainside a sod of moss. She put it in her parlor, and after a while, in the genial warmth, there sprang out from the bosom of the moss a multitude of sweet, delicate spring flowers. The seeds had long lain in the moss—but in the cold air of the mountain they had never burst into life. There are noble wives in *humble* homes and *stately* homes—who are just like this moss. In their natures there are the germs of many excellences and the possibilities of rich outcome, and in it none of these richer qualities and powers manifest themselves. The bringing of new warmth into the home will draw out these latent germs of unsuspected loveliness. The husband who would have his wife's nature *blossom out* into its best possibilities of character, influence and power—must make a genial summer atmosphere for his home all year round.

It is then that this large-heartedness will impart its spirit to the home itself. A husband who is generous within his own doors—will not be close and stingy outside. The heart that is always open at home—cannot be carried shut through this suffering world. The prosperous home of a generous man sends many a blessing and comfort out to be a help to a great many struggling lives. Every generous and large-hearted man, scatters many a comfort among the needy and the suffering, as he passes through this world.

There is nothing lost by such scattering. No richer blessing can come upon a home—than the benedictions of those who have been helped, who have been fed at its doors, or sheltered beneath its roof, or inspired by its cheer and kindly interest. There is no memorial that any man can make for himself in this world so lasting and so satisfying, as that which a life of *unselfishness* and *beneficence* builds up.

Every husband of a Christian wife, should walk with her in common love for Christ. There are some husbands, however, who fail in this. They love their wives very sincerely, and make sacrifices for their sake. They carefully shelter them from life's crude blasts. They bless them with all tenderness and affection. They honor them very highly, bringing many noble achievements to lay at their feet, and show them all homage and respect. They do everything that love can suggest, to make their earthly happiness full and complete. They share every burden and walk close beside them in every trial. But when these husbands come to the matter of *personal piety* and *eternal realities*—they draw back and leave them to go on alone. While the wife goes on in the sanctuary to worship, the husband waits outside. At the very point where his interest in her life should be the deepest—it fails altogether.

Surely, it is a great wrong to a woman, tender and dependent—to leave her to walk alone through this world in her deepest life, receiving no sympathy, no companionship, no support, from him who is her dearest friend. She must leave him outside of the most sacred part of her life. She must be silent to him concerning the experiences of her soul in its spiritual struggles, aspirations, yearnings, and hopes. She must bear alone the responsibility of the children's pious nurture and training. Alone she must bow to God in prayer.

It cannot be right that a husband should leave his wife to live such a large part of her life without his companionship and sympathy. His love should seek to enter with her into every sacred experience. In no other way could he give her such joy—as by taking his place beside her as a fellow heir of the same grace. It would lighten every burden, since he would now share it with her. It would bring new radiance to her face, new peace to her heart, new zest to all life for her. It would make their marriage more perfect, and unite their hearts in a closer union, since it is only those who realize the full sweetness of wedded life, who are *one* at every point and in every feeling, purpose and hope—and whose souls blend in their higher, spiritual part—as well as in their lower nature and experiences. Then it would also introduce the husband himself to sources of blessing and strength of which he has never known before; for the religion of Christ is a reality and brings the soul into communication with God and with infinite springs of *comfort*, *help* and *blessing*. In sharing her life of faith and prayer and devotion to Christ—he would find his own life linked to heaven!

United, then, on earth in a common faith in Christ, their mutual love mingling and blending in the love of God—they shall be united also in heaven in eternal fellowship! Why should hearts spend years on earth in growing into one, knitting life to life, blending soul in soul—for a union that is not to reach beyond the valley of shadows? Why not weave for all eternity?