

## THE CHRISTIAN WIFE

by J. R. Miller

It is a high honor for a woman to be chosen from among all womankind, to be the wife of a godly and true man. She is lifted up to be a crowned queen. Her husband's manly love laid at her feet, exalts her to the throne of his life. Great power is placed in her hands. Sacred destinies are reposed in her keeping. Will she wear her crown beneficently? Will she fill her realm with beauty and with blessing? Or will she fail in her holy trust? Only her married life can be the answer.

A woman may well pause *before* she gives her hand in marriage, and inquire whether he is worthy, to whom she is asked to surrender so much; whether he can bring true happiness to her life; whether he can meet the cravings of her nature for love and for companionship; whether he is worthy to be lifted to the highest place in her heart and honored as a husband should be honored. She must ask these questions for her own sake, else the *dream* may fade with the bridal wreath—and she may learn, when too late, that he for whom she has left all, and to whom she has given all—is not worthy of the sacred trust, and has no power to fill her life with happiness, to awaken her heart's chords, to touch her soul's depths.

But the question should be turned and asked from the other side. Can she be a true wife to him who asks for her hand? Is she worthy of the love that is laid at her feet? Can she be a blessing to the life of him who would lift her to the throne of his heart? Will he find in her all the beauty, all the tender loveliness, all the rich qualities of nature, all the deep sympathy and companionship, all the strengthful, uplifting love, all the sources of joy and help, which he seems now to see in her? Is there any possible future for him, which she could not share? Are there needs in his soul, or hungers, which she cannot answer? Are there chords in his life which her fingers cannot awaken?

Surely it is proper for her to question her own soul for him—while she bids him question his soul for her. A wife has a part in the *song of wedded love*—if it is to be a harmony. She holds in her hands on her wedding day—precious interests, sacred destinies, and holy responsibilities, which, if disclosed to her sight at once, might well appall the bravest heart. Her opportunity is one which the loftiest angel might covet. Not the happiness only of a manly life—but its whole future of character, of influence, of growth, rests with her.

*What is the true ideal of a godly wife?* It is not something lifted above the common experiences of life, not an ethereal angel feeding on ambrosia and moving in the realms of imagination. In some European cities they sell to the tourist models of their cathedrals made of alabaster, whiter than snow. But so delicate are these alabaster shrines that they must be kept under glass covers or they will be soiled by the dust; and so frail that they must be sheltered from every crude touch, lest their lovely columns may be shattered. They are very graceful and beautiful—but they serve no lofty purpose. No worshipers can enter their doors. No melody rises to heaven from their aisles. So there are ideals of womanhood which are very lovely, full of graceful charms, pleasing, attractive—but which are too delicate and frail for this wearisome, storm-swept world

of ours. Such ideals the poets and the novelists sometimes give us. They appear well to the eye—as they are portrayed for us on the brilliant page. But of what use would they be in the life which the real woman of our day has to live? A breath of earthly air would stain them! One day of actual experience in the hard toils and sore struggles of life would shatter their frail loveliness to fragments! We had better seek for ideals which will not be soiled by a crude touch, nor blown away by a stiff breeze, and which will grow lovelier as they move through life's paths of sacrifice and toil. The true wife needs to be no mere poet's dream, no artist's picture, no ethereal lady too fine for use—but a woman healthful, strong, practical, industrious, with a hand for life's common duties, yet crowned with that beauty which a high and noble purpose gives to a soul.

One of the first essential elements in a wife is **faithfulness**, in the largest sense. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her. Perfect confidence is the basis of all true affection. A shadow of doubt destroys the peace of married life. A true wife, by her character and by her conduct, proves herself worthy of her husband's trust. He has confidence in her *affection*; he knows that her heart is unalterably true to him. He has confidence in her *management*; he confides to her the care of his household. He knows that she is true to all his interests, that she is prudent and wise, not *wasteful* nor *extravagant*. It is one of the essential things in a true wife—that her husband shall be able to leave in her hands the management of all domestic affairs, and know that they are safe. Wifely *wastefulness* and *extravagance* have destroyed the happiness of many a household, and wrecked many a home. On the other hand, many a man owes his prosperity to his wife's prudence and her wise administration of household affairs.

Every true wife makes her husband's interests her own. While he lives for her, carrying her image in his heart and toiling for her all the days—she thinks only of what will do him good. When burdens press upon him—she tries to lighten them by sympathy, by cheer, by the inspiration of love. She enters with zest and enthusiasm into all his plans. She is never a weight to drag him down; she is strength in his heart to help him ever to do nobler and better things.

All wives are not such blessings to their husbands. Woman is compared sometimes to the vine, while man is the strong oak to which it clings. But there are different kinds of vines. Some vines wreath a robe of beauty and a crown of glory for the tree, covering it in summer days with green leaves and in the autumn hanging among its branches rich purple clusters of fruit. Other vines twine their arms about it—only to sap its very life and destroy its vigor, until it stands decaying and unsightly, stripped of its splendor, discrowned and fit only for the fire!

A true wife makes a man's life nobler, stronger, grander, by the omnipotence of her love, turning all the forces of manhood upward and heavenward. While she clings to him in holy confidence and loving dependence, she brings out in him whatever is noblest and richest in his being. She inspires him with courage and earnestness. She beautifies his life. She softens whatever is crude and harsh in his habits or his spirit. She clothes him with the gentler graces of refined and cultured manhood. While she yields to him and never disregards his lightest wish, she is really his queen, ruling his whole life and leading him onward and upward in every proper path.

But there are wives also like the vines which cling only to *blight*. Their dependence is weak, indolent helplessness. They lean—but impart no strength. They cling—but they sap the life. They put forth no hand to help. They loll on sofas or promenade the streets; they dream over

sentimental novels; they gossip in drawing rooms. They are *utterly useless*—and being useless they become burdens even to manliest, tenderest love. Instead of making a man's life stronger, happier, richer—they absorb his strength, impair his usefulness, hinder his success and cause him to be a failure among men. To themselves also the result is wretchedness. Dependence is beautiful when it does not become *weakness* and inefficiency. The true wife clings and leans—but she also helps and inspires. Her husband feels the mighty inspiration of her love in all his life. Toil is easier, burdens are lighter, battles are less fierce—because of the face that waits in the quiet of the home, because of the heart that beats in loving sympathy whatever the experience, because of the voice that speaks its words of cheer and encouragement when the day's work is done. No wife knows how much she can do to make her husband honored among men, and his life a power and a success, by her loyal faithfulness, by the active inspiration of her own sweet life!

The good wife is a good **housekeeper**. I know well how unromantic this remark will appear to those whose dreams of married life are woven of the fancies of youthful sentimentality. But these *frail dreams of sentimentality* will not last long amid the stern realities of life, and then that which will prove one of the rarest elements of happiness and blessing in the household, will be *housewifely industry and diligence*.

When young people marry they are rarely troubled with many thoughts about the details of housekeeping. Their dreams are high above all such common place issues. The mere mention of such things as cooking, baking, sweeping, dusting, mending, ironing—jars upon the poetic rhythm of the lofty themes of conversation. It never enters the brains of these happy lovers—that it will make every difference in the world in their home life—whether the bread is sweet or sour; whether the oatmeal is well cooked or scorched; whether the meals are punctual or tardy. The mere thought that such common matters could affect the tone of their wedded life, seems a desecration.

It is a pity to dash away such *exquisite dreams*—but the truth is, they do not long outlast the echo of the wedding peals—or the fragrance of the bridal roses! The newly married are not long within their own doors, before they find that something more than tender sentimentality is needed to make their home-life a success. They come down from the *clouds*—when the daily routine begins and touch the common soil on which the feet of other mortals walk. Then they find that they are dependent, just like ordinary people, on some quite commonplace duties. One of the very first things they discover is the intimate relation between the *kitchen* and wedded happiness. That love may fulfill its delightful prophecies and realize its splendid dreams—there must be in the new home, some very practical elements. The palace that is to rise into the air, shooting up its towers, displaying its wonders of architecture, flashing its splendors in the sunshine—to the admiration of the world, must have its foundation in commonplace earth, resting on plain, hard, honest rock. Love may build its palace of noble sentiments and tender affections and sweet romances—rising into the very clouds, and in this splendid home two souls may dwell in the enjoyment of the highest possibilities of wedded life; but this *palace*, too, must stand on the ground, with unpoetic and unsentimental stones for its foundation. That foundation is *good housekeeping*. In other words, good breakfasts, dinners and suppers, a well-kept house,

order, system, promptness, punctuality, good cheer—far more than any young lovers dream—does happiness in married life depend upon such commonplace things as these!

Love is very patient, very kind, very gentle; and where there is love no doubt the plainest fare is ambrosia; and the plainest surroundings are charming. I know the wise man said: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a good roast-beef dinner, with hatred!" But herbs as a constant diet will pall on the taste, even if love is ever present to season them. In this day of advanced civilization, it ought to be possible to have both the stalled ox—and love. Husbands are not angels in this mundane state, and not being such they need a substantial basis of good housekeeping, for the realization of their dreams of blissful home-life!

There certainly have been cases in which very tender love has lost its tenderness, and when the cause lay in the disorder and mismanagement of the housewifery. There is no doubt that many a heart-estrangement, begins at the table where meals are slipshod, and food is poorly prepared or served. *Bad housekeeping will soon drive the last vestige of romance out of any home!* The illusion which love weaves about an idolized bride, will soon vanish if she proves lazy or incompetent in her domestic management. The wife who will keep the charm of early love unbroken through the years, and in whose home the dreams of the wedding day will come true—must be a good housekeeper!

In one of his Epistles Paul gives the counsel that young wives should be "workers at home," signifying that *home is the sphere of the wife's duties*, and that she is to find her chief work there. There is a glory in all the Christian charities which Christian women, especially in these recent days, are founding and conducting with so much enthusiasm and such marked and abounding success. Woman is endowed with gifts of sympathy, of gentleness, of inspiring strengthfulness, which peculiarly fit her to be Christ's messenger of mercy to human *woe* and *sorrow* and *pain*.

There is the widest opportunity in the most fitting service for every woman whose heart God has touched to be a ministering angel to those who need sympathy or help. There are many who are free to serve in public charities, in caring for the poor, for the sick in hospital wards, for the orphaned and the aged. There are few women who cannot do a little in some one or more of these organizations of Christian beneficence.

But it should be understood, that for every wife the first duty is the making and keeping of her own home! Her first and best work should be done there—and until it is well done—she has no right to go outside to take up other duties. She is to be a "worker at home!" She must look upon her home as the one spot on earth, for which she alone is responsible, and which she must cultivate well for God—even if she never does anything outside. For her the Father's business is not attending benevolent societies, and missionary meetings, and mothers' meetings, and bible conventions, or even teaching a Sunday-school class—until she has made her own home all that her *wisest thought* and *best skill* can make it!

There have been wives who in their zeal for Christ's work outside, have neglected Christ's work inside their own doors! They have had eyes and hearts for human need and human sorrow in the broad fields lying far out—but neither eye nor heart for the work of love close about their own feet. The result has been that while they were doing angelic work in the lanes and streets—the

angels were mourning over their neglected duties within the hallowed walls of their own homes! While they were winning a place in the hearts of the poor or the sick or the orphan—they were losing their rightful place in the hearts of their own household. Let it be remembered that *Christ's work in the home* is the first that he gives to every wife, and that no amount of consecrated activities in other spheres, will atone for *neglect* or *failure* there.

The good wife is **generous** and warm-hearted. She does not grow grasping and selfish. In her desire to *economize* and add to her stores—she does not forget those about her who suffer or are in poverty. While she gives her wisest and most earnest thought and her best and most skillful work to her own home, her heart does not grow cold toward those outside who need sympathy. I cannot conceive of true womanhood ripened into mellow richness, yet lacking the qualities of gentleness and unselfishness. A woman whose heart is not touched by the sight of sorrow, and whose hands do not go out in relief where it is in her power to help—lacks one of the elements which make the glory of womanhood.

This is not the place to speak of woman as a ministering angel. If it were, it would be easy to fill many pages with the bright records of most holy deeds of self-sacrifice. I am speaking now, however, of woman as *wife*; and only upon so much of this ministry to the suffering—as she may perform in her own home, at her own door and in connection with her housewifely duties—is it fit to linger at this time. But even in this limited sphere, her opportunities are by no means small.

It is in her own home—that this warmth of heart and this openness of hand are first to be shown. It is as wife and mother—that her gentleness performs its most sacred ministry. Her hand wipes away the teardrops when there is sorrow. In sickness she is the tender nurse. She bears upon her own heart every burden that weighs upon her husband. No matter how the world goes with him during the day—when he enters his own door he meets the *fragrant atmosphere of love*. Other friends may forsake him—but she clings to him with unalterable fidelity. When gloom comes down and adversity falls upon him—her faithful eyes look ever into his like *two stars of hope* shining in the darkness. When his heart is crushed, beneath her smile it gathers itself again into strength, "like a wind-torn flower in the sunshine." "You cannot imagine," wrote De Tocqueville of his wife, "what she is in great trials. Usually so gentle, she then becomes strong and energetic. She watches me without my knowing it; she softens, calms and strengthens me in difficulties which distract me—but leave her serene." An eloquent tribute—but one which thousands of husbands might give.

Men often do not see the *angel* in the plain, plodding woman who walks quietly beside them—until the day of trial comes; then in the darkness—the glory shines out. An angel ministered to our Lord when in Gethsemane he wrestled with his great and bitter sorrow. What a benediction to the mighty Sufferer, was in the soft gliding to his side of that gentle presence, in the touch of that soothing, supporting hand laid upon him, in the comfort of that gentle voice thrilling with sympathy as it spoke its strengthening message of love! Was it a mere coincidence that just at that time and in that place, that the radiant messenger came? No, it is always so. *Angels* choose such occasions to pay their visits to men.

So it is in the dark hours of a man's life, when *burdens* press, when *sorrows* weigh like mountains upon his soul, when *adversities* have left him crushed and broken, or when he is in the

midst of fierce struggles which try the strength of every fiber of his manhood—that all the radiance and glory of a true wife's strengthful love shine out before his eyes! Only then does he recognize in her—God's angel of mercy!

In *sickness*—how thoughtful, how skillful, how gentle a nurse is the true wife! In struggle with *temptation* or *adversity* or *difficulty*—what an inspirer she is! In *misfortune* or *disaster*—what lofty heroism does she exhibit and what courage does her bravery kindle in her husband's heart! Instead of being crushed by the unexpected loss, she only then rises to her full grandeur of soul. Instead of weeping, repining and despairing, and thus adding tenfold to the burden of the misfortune—she cheerfully accepts the changed circumstances and becomes a *minister of hope and strength*. She turns away from luxury and ease—to the plainer home, the simpler life, the humbler surroundings, without a murmur!

It is in such circumstances and experiences, that the heroism of woman's soul is manifested. Many a man is carried victoriously through misfortune and enabled to rise again—because of the strong inspiring sympathy and the self-forgetting help of his wife! And many a man fails in fierce struggle, and rises not again from the defeat of misfortune—because the wife at his side proves unequal to her opportunity.

But a wife's ministry of mercy reaches outside her own doors. Every true home is an influence of blessing in the community where it stands. Its lights shine out. Its songs ring out. Its spirit breathes out. The neighbors know whether it is hospitable or inhospitable, warm or cold, inviting or repelling. Some homes bless no lives outside their own circle; others are perpetually pouring out *sweetness* and *fragrance*. The ideal Christian home is a far-reaching blessing. It sets its lamps in the windows, and while they give no less light and cheer to those within, they pour a little beam upon the gloom without, which may brighten some dark path and put a little cheer into the heart of some poor passer-by. Its doors stand ever open with a welcome to everyone who comes seeking shelter from the storm, or sympathy in sorrow, or help in trial. It is a hospice, like those blessed refuges on the Alps, where the *weary* or the *chilled* or the *fainting* are sure always of *refreshment*, of *warmth*, of *kindly friendship*, of *gentle ministry of mercy*. It is a place where one who is in trouble may always go confident of *sympathy* and *comfort*. It is a place where the young people love to go, because they know they are welcome and because they find there inspiration and help.

And this atmosphere of the home, the wife makes; indeed, it is her own spirit filling the house and pouring out like light or like fragrance. A true wife is universally beloved. She is recognized as one of God's angels scattering blessings as far as her hand can reach. Her neighbors are all blessed by her ministrations. When sickness or sorrow touches any other household, some token of sympathy finds its way from her hand into the shadowed home. To the *old* she is gentle and patient. To the young she is inciting and helpful. To the *poor* she is God's hand reached out. To the *sufferer* she brings strength. To the *sorrowing* she is a consoler. There is trouble nowhere near—but her face appears at the door and her hand brings its blessing!

Some wife, weary already, her hands over-full with the multiplied cares and duties of her household life—may plead that she has no strength to spend in sympathy and help for others. But it is truly wonderful how light these added burdens seem—when they are taken up in love.

Always the duties we perform out of love for Christ and his suffering ones—become easy and pleasant as we take them up. Heaven's benediction rests ever on the home of her who lives to do good.

Scarcely a word has been said thus far of a wife's personal relation to her husband and the duties which spring out of that relation. These are manifold, and yet they are so *sacred* and *delicate*—that it seems hardly fit to speak or write of them. A few of the more important of these duties belonging to the wife's part may be merely touched upon. A true wife gives her husband her fullest confidence. She hides nothing from him. She gives no pledge of secrecy which will seal her lips in his presence. She listens to no words of admiration from others, which she may not repeat to him. She expresses to him every feeling, every hope, every desire and yearning, every joy or pain.

Then while she utters every confidence in his ear—he is most careful to speak in no other ear any word concerning the sacred inner life of her home. Are there little *frictions* or *grievances* in the wedded life? Has her husband *faults* which annoy her or cause her pain? Does he fail in this *duty* or that? Do *differences* arise which threaten the peace of the home? In the feeling of disappointment and pain, smarting under a sense of injury—a wife may be strongly tempted to seek sympathy by telling her trials to some intimate friends. Nothing could be more fatal to her own truest interests, and to the hope of restored happiness and peace in her home. Grievances complained of outside—remain unhealed sores. The wise wife will share her secret of unhappiness with none but her Master, while she strives in every way that patient love can suggest—to remove the causes of discord or trouble.

Love sees much in a wife which other eyes see not. It throws a veil over her blemishes; it transfigures even her plainest features. One of the problems of her wedded life—is to retain this charm for her husband's eyes as long as she lives, to appear lovely to him even when the color has faded from her cheeks and when the music has gone out of her voice. This is no impossibility; it is only what is done in every true home. But it cannot be done by the arts of the *dressmaker*, the *milliner* and the *hair-dresser*, only the arts of *love* can do it! The wife who would always hold in her husband's heart the place she held on her wedding day—will never cease striving to be lovely. She will be as careful of her *words* and *acts* and her whole bearing toward him—as she was before marriage. She will cultivate in her own life whatever is *beautiful*, whatever is *winning*, whatever is *graceful*. She will scrupulously avoid whatever is offensive or unwomanly.

She will look well to her *personal appearance*; no woman can be careless in her dress, slovenly and untidy—and long keep her place on the throne of her husband's life. She will look well to her *inner life*. She must have mental attractiveness. She will seek to be clothed in spiritual beauty. Her husband must see in her ever-new loveliness, as the years move on. As the charms of *physical* beauty may fade in the toils and vicissitudes of life, there must be more and more beauty of *soul* to shine out to replace the attractions which are lost. It has been said that "the wife should always leave something to be revealed only to her husband, some modest charm, some secret grace, reserved solely for his delight and inspiration, like those flowers which give of their sweetness only to the hand which lovingly gathers them." She should always care more to please him—than any other person in the world. She should prize more highly a compliment from his

lips—than from any other human lips. Therefore she should reserve for him the sweetest charms; she should seek to bring ever to him some new surprise of loveliness; she should plan pleasures and delights for him. Instead of not caring how she looks—or whether she is agreeable or not when no one but her husband is present, she should always be at her best for him! Instead of being bright and lovely when there is company, then relapsing into languor and silence when the company is gone—she should seek always to be brightest and loveliest when only he and she sit together in the quiet of the home. Both husband and wife should ever bring their best things to each other!

Again let me say, that no wife can over-estimate the influence she wields over her husband, or the measure in which his character, his career and his very destiny are laid in her hands for *shaping*. The sway which she holds over him is the *sway of love*—but it is *mighty* and *resistless*. If she retains her power, if she holds her place as queen of his life—she can do with him as she will! Even unconsciously to herself, without any thought of her responsibility, she will exert over him an influence which will go far toward *making* or *marring* all his future! If she has no lofty conception of life herself—if she is *vain* and *frivolous*—she will only chill his ardor, weaken his resolution and draw him aside from any earnest endeavor. But if she has in her soul noble womanly qualities, if she has true thoughts of life, if she has purpose, strength of character and fidelity to principle—she will be to him an unfailing inspiration toward all that is noble, manly and Christlike! The high conceptions of life in her mind—will elevate his conceptions. Her firm, strong purpose—will put vigor and determination into every resolve and act of his. Her purity of soul—will cleanse and refine his spirit. Her warm interest in all his affairs and her wise counsel at every point—will make him strong for every duty and valiant in every struggle. Her careful domestic management, will become an important element of success in his business life. Her bright, orderly, happy home-making, will be a perpetual source of joy and peace, and an incentive to nobler living. Her unwavering fidelity, her tender affectionateness, her womanly sympathy, her beauty of soul—will make her to him *God's angel* indeed—sheltering, guarding, keeping, guiding and blessing him! Just in the measure in which she realizes this lofty ideal of wifehood—will she fulfill her mission and reap the rich harvest of her hopes.

Such is the "woman's lot" which falls on every wife. It is solemn enough to make her very thoughtful and very earnest. How can she make sure that her influence over her husband will be for good—that he will be a better man, more successful in his career and more happy, because she is his wife? Not by any mere moral posturing so as to seem to have lofty purpose and wise thoughts of life; not by any weak resolving to help him and be an uplifting inspiration to him; not by perpetual preaching and lecturing on a husband's duties and on manly character! She can do it only by being in the very depths of her soul, in every thought and impulse of her heart, and in every fiber of her nature—a true and noble woman. She will make him not like what she *tells* him he ought to be—but like what she herself is!

So it all comes back to a question of **character**. She can be a good wife only by being a good woman. And she can be a good woman in the true sense only by being a Christian woman. Nowhere but in Christ—can she find the *wisdom* and *strength* she needs, to meet the solemn responsibilities of wifehood. Only in Christ can she find that *rich beauty* of soul, that *gemming* of the character, which shall make her lovely in her husband's sight, when the bloom of youth is



gone, when the brilliance has faded out of her eyes, and the roses have fled from her cheeks. Only Christ can teach her how to live so as to be blessed, and be a blessing in her married life!

Nothing in this world is sadder than to compare love's early dreams, what love meant to be, with the too frequent story of the after-life; what came of the dreams, what was the outcome of love's venture. Why so many sad disappointments? Why do so many bridal wreaths fall into dust? Is there no possibility of making these fair dreams come true, of keeping these flowers lovely and fragrant through all the years? Yes—but only in Christ! The young maiden goes smiling and singing to the marriage altar. Does she know that if she has not Christ with her—she is as a lamb going to the sacrifice? Let her tarry at the gateway until she has linked her life to Christ, who is the first and the last. Human love is very precious—but it is not enough to satisfy a heart. There will be *trials*, there will be *perplexities*, there will be *crosses* and *disappointments*, there will be *solicitudes* and *sorrows*. Then none but Christ will be sufficient! Without him, the way will be dreary. But with his benediction and presence—the *flowers* which droop today will bloom fresh again tomorrow! And the *dreams* of early love will build themselves up into a palace of peace and joy for the solace, the comfort and shelter of old age!