

THE HUSBAND IN THE HOME

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on January 26, 1958 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC.

When a young man stands in front of the preacher at the time of marriage, it is not at all certain what kind of husband that young man will eventually be. It may be as the years pass and the strains and stresses of life come on, that he will show himself to be a person who is self-centered, egotistical, and selfish. It may be as time goes by he will show himself to be a ne'er-do-well, when it comes to providing for his family. Likewise, he may turn out to be a tyrant or a kind of petty dictator. It is also possible that he will be one who is married to his business having little time and little concern for his family. It is even possible as the years go by that he will come to be an unfaithful philanderer. But while all of these are possible, it is also possible that he will come to be a fine, devoted, Christian husband and father. It is this last that we choose to believe.

Whatever the husband comes to be is very, very important, because in God's scheme of things the husband is the head of the home. Not only do his own happiness and success depend largely on the kind of husband he is, but also the happiness and success of others depend to a large degree on what he is. If he is the kind of man that he ought to be, the wife and children have a fine opportunity for the living of happy and useful lives. If he is not what he ought to be there is heartache for all concerned.

God's Plan For the Home

The fact that the husband is the head of the family is not his arbitrary claim. It is a part of God's design. Back in the beginning of time, God spoke these words to woman, "And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." (Gen. 3:16). Then, in the New Testament the apostle Paul adds, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." (I Cor. 11:3). This sets forth what we might call the rank of various beings in God's system. God is supreme, next in authority is Jesus Christ, then comes man, and after him comes woman. For some reason that is the way that God has wished it to be.

In another of Paul's letters he adds, "For the husband is head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church." (Eph. 5:23). When he ties marriage up in this illustrative way with Christ's relationship to the church it impresses us all the more. Man is the head of his home as Christ is head of the church. Still another passage says, "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness. Then the apostle Paul gives this reason. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled had fallen into transgression." (I Tim. 2:11-14). We in the 20th century with our customs and our mores find it difficult to understand why this is an adequate reason for man's supremacy over woman. There are a great many people in our time who feel that this whole thing is old-fashioned and outmoded. I simply give it to you as part of the word of God. It is not something about which we men ought to be proud, for it places a very heavy responsibility upon us. It is not something about which women ought to be embarrassed or ashamed; it is simply the way that God, in his infinite wisdom, decided that the game of life should be played.

I think we know that in every kind of cooperative undertaking that someone must be the head. When you appoint a committee to do a work, you name someone as chairman. Do you know a business which does not have a head? The church has its elders to rule. Whatever the kind of cooperative work, if it involves several people, there must be sole kind of authority and leadership responsibility. If you employ two carpenters and put them out to build a garage, you had better make one of them foreman. Otherwise they will want to begin at opposite ends and each will want to take the lead in doing whatever is to be done. In God's infinite wisdom he has simply given us a rule by which in every home there is a head.

This has been an area in which there has been a good bit of tension. Stresses and strains are common at this particular point. I think it is because a great many husbands have been unworthy of their position of leadership in the family. But also while a great many husbands have been unworthy, a great many wives have been unwilling. Unworthy husbands and unwilling wives have let this be an area of tension. To the husband we would say, "Be worthy of being head of your family." To the wife we would advise from the scriptures, "Let the husband occupy the place that God has ordained that he should occupy." It is good advice to younger women not yet married to say, "Do not marry a man whom you cannot respect. Do not let yourself be married to a man to whom you cannot look up. Wait until a man comes along who is qualified and fitted to be the head of your family." I believe this will make for happier marriages, though I realize the responsibility is equally as much on those of us who are husbands as it is upon those who are wives.

Responsibilities

All of this has been set before you in order that we could come to some of the responsibilities which husbands have. Husbands' responsibilities are heavy responsibilities and they are of several kinds. First, the husband has the responsibility to love his wife more than any other human on earth. In the Ephesian letter, the apostle Paul said, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it." (Eph. 5:25). The intensity of the love that Christ had for the church cannot be described, but it is

used as an illustration of the love that husbands should bear to their wives. And then, as if that were not enough, three verses later, Paul adds, "Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies." (Eph. 5:23). Still later in the same chapter we find, "Nevertheless, do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself" (Eph. 5:33). These commands make it very clear that husbands are to love their wife as they love no one else in the world. They must love them as Christ loved the church, as they love their own bodies, and as they love themselves. If at first the wife feels it to be a burden for the husband to be the head of the family, that burden vanishes when the husband does his part by loving his wife as he loves himself.

For both husbands and wives it is good to turn back to the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians to read the list of qualities which love ought to possess: "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account for evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth." (I Cor. 13:4-8). The love that the husband bears to the wife is a very wonderful thing. If that love is what it ought to be most of the rest of the problems in the home are melted by the warmth of that love.

A few Sunday mornings ago, I was on my way to church. The car in front of me, I noticed, was pulling a trailer on which there was a boat. Without any special reason for doing so, I looked to see who the occupants of the car were, and noticed that there were three men in the car. Rather obviously these three men were going out to spend that particular Sunday on the lake. I could not help but wonder what their wives were to do that day. I think I know a good many men who love themselves more than they love their wives, in the realm of recreation. A great deal of time and money is spent fishing on the lake, and hunting in the woods, and in following all the sporting events that come along. The wife is left at home to provide whatever recreation she can.

Not only in recreation but in every other phase of their activities, husbands are to be considerate of wives and to love them as they love themselves. If the wives spent as much time out of the home in recreation and as much money and as much thought and concern as do many husbands, the husbands would revolt. Happy is the family that finds common activities in which husband and wife can both be recreated. While that is not necessary in every instance, when a husband loves his wife as he loves himself he provides for her the same extent and quality, though not necessarily the same kind, of recreation that he provides for himself. Husbands' responsibilities are great and the first one is to love his wife as he loves himself.

A Good Provider

The second responsibility that husbands have is to provide for their families. Providing for the family obviously means providing for the wife and for the children, but a lesson needed in our time is that it also means providing for all others that normally and naturally are the responsibility of any of the members of the family. I simply mean that when a husband's parents become aged or ill and need help, the husband has a responsibility to help provide for them. When it happens to be the wife's parents who are ill and old he has a responsibility to help provide for them. In our day and age there is too little concern about aged parents and too much willingness to let some agency care for them. Social Security is helpful, but it does not free children from all responsibility. When Paul wrote to Timothy, who was to go out and preach to others, he said, "If a man provide not for his own, and specially for his own household, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (I Tim. 5:8). It is pretty hard to be worse than an unbeliever, but to be able to provide and not to provide is a serious charge that God places against whoever is guilty of it. The husband has the responsibility to earn and the responsibility to share with those that are his natural dependents. If anyone has to come up short it is logical that it should be the husband.

In the third place the husband has the responsibility as head of the home for training and governing the children. This is not something that he can abandon to the wife, though certainly she is important part of that training and governing process. The head of the family ought, therefore, to be a Christian, because a key part of his responsibility is to train his children in religious matters. He must see that they have secular training of the right kind and he must also see that they have religious training. In fact, it is more important that they get to heaven, than it is that they get a good job, so the husband ought to be a Christian leading in this most important activity.

Privileges and Benefits

Some husbands at this point might well say, "You have talked a lot about our responsibilities, what are the privileges that we husbands have?" Well, they are also great. The husband has the privilege of knowing a true home, and that means love and devotion, and respect. No matter how much a man may be blessed in every other way, if he does not have someone to love him he cannot be very happy. The deepest craving we have is for someone to love us. This craving is supplied by a devoted wife and loving children. So, while it costs something to be a father, it pays a great deal more.

Another of the blessings that comes to the father is that the home is a place of refuge. When he has gone to work and struggled with the problems of earning a living his home becomes a kind of retreat to which he can retire. The tensions and pressures of the world are left outside.

Having a family also gives a man purpose in life. He goes to his work, not just to get a pay check, but to do something worthwhile--to buy shoes and food and transportation and housing for a beloved family. It makes him work harder and it makes his work happier

because he is doing it for a worthy cause. When he gets a pay increase or a promotion, he comes home and has somebody to rejoice with him. Honor without some loved one to share it with is barren and empty.

But the chief privilege of a husband is that in his home he has a partner who will help him get to heaven. Often the wife is more spiritual than the husband. Her sensitivity to the things of God is even keener than his own, so that she helps him to become and to be what God wants him to be. If a man's wife is a Christian that man has a better chance of being eternally saved. Yes, there are heavy responsibilities resting on husbands but far beyond the responsibilities are the compensatory blessings.

It is wise for husbands to be more concerned about the responsibilities than about the blessings. It is wise also for husbands to be more concerned about the welfare of their families than about their own welfare. Life has a way of saying that the person who seeks directly for something for himself does not get what he wishes, but he who is more concerned for others gets happiness also for himself. So the husband who loves his wife as he loves no one else on earth, who provides for his family to the best of his ability and who takes the lead in training his children, is going to have pouring back into his life blessings beyond his ability to count.

Sometimes when a young man stands before me at the time of a wedding I think, "Within a very brief time you are going to be a husband. Are you ready?" The boy just out of his teens has a lot to learn in order to be the kind of husband that God wants him to be. As long as he lives he will need to keep growing in order to discharge the heavy responsibilities of being a Christian husband and father but one of the greatest privileges in life is to be the head of one of God's families.