

SHARED MARITAL RESPONSIBILITIES

It was originally my intention that after studying marriage we would then study the respective responsibilities of husbands and wives toward their spouses; however, because there ended up being so many mutual duties for spouses, my studies led me in the direction of shared marital responsibilities first. Let's examine these responsibilities by subordinating them under the more general duties of the four loves we discussed when we began our studies on the Christian home.

Consider EROS in the realm of shared marital responsibilities.

Eros is demonstrated in romance.

One romantic thing a spouse can do for his/her mate is sever parental attachments: "A man shall leave his father and mother" (Ephesians 5:31). Although it's fairly obvious that this principle applies to both genders, Psalm 45:10-11 settles it: "O daughter ... forget your own people ... and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty, because He is your Lord." Spouses must break their parent-child bonds; they must sever the tight, emotionally dependent strings that once provided security, protection, financial assistance, and physical necessities; all of those ties, if carried over into marriage by either gender, will hinder the sealing of the marriage bond—the bond that's to be considered greater than the parent-child bond.

Continued romance in a marriage is very important. Here are a few suggestions to implement in order to keep the romantic spark alive in a marriage.

1. Spend time together out on the town or at least away from your children from time to time.
2. Be in the habit of sending love signals such as giving out winks, pecks on cheeks, or affectionate touches in passing.
3. Leave love notes (such as in lunch boxes) for one another to find.
4. Allow people to see that the banner over your spouse is love, as Solomon was sure to do whenever he took Shulamith out in public (The Song of Solomon 2:4).
5. Read The Song of Solomon together from time to time in order to see how your attitude ought to be toward one another, romantically speaking. (Perhaps the reason God included this writing in the Bible was because He knew how vital romance would be in marriage.)

It is indeed important to keep romance burning in marriage, and exercising the other loves to be discussed will greatly aid in keeping romance alive.

Eros is also demonstrated in physical intimacy.

Concerning the first marriage, Genesis 2:25 informs us that Adam and Eve were both naked and unashamed of it. The Hebrew word for "naked" refers to total nudity, and the construction of the original suggests that they were not ashamed "before one another," which allowed, and perhaps even prompted, wholehearted intimacy with one another, just as God originally meant it to be. But how different it is today: intimacy often becomes a frustrating struggle, a strange mixture of selfishness, embarrassment, dissatisfaction, and resentment, with only brief glimpses of pleasure and fulfillment.

In First Corinthians 7:3-5 Paul gave us the only specific information we have on the mutual responsibility between spouses concerning physical intimacy; after reading it, notice three principles that are found in this passage.

The Passion Principle: This passage demands the fulfilling of the desires of physical intimacy.

The Power Principle: Spouses forfeit their individual rights to their bodies; they are expected by God to give themselves wholly to each other ... cheerfully, for God loves a cheerful giver (Second Corinthians 9:7).

The Pattern Principle: Since man's Creator knows that Satan hates marriage and tries to destroy it, God demands that spouses actively engage in habitual, consistent fulfillment. [So we had better not be too busy with our hobbies, our jobs, or resting up for our hobbies and jobs that we don't have time for our spouses; otherwise our marriages may crumble!]

A verse relative to this passage is Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." [One very interesting thing about this verse is that the original Greek word for "bed" is "coitus," a word you might consider looking up in your English dictionary if you're unaware of what it means.]

As we leave the subject of *eros* in marriage, let's remember this: although spouses, like everyone else, are to seek to please God first, First Corinthians 7:33-34 indicate that God expects married people to seek to please their spouses ... as the very next in line; in other words, our spouses are to be the most important humans in our lives. So ... let's act like they are.

Consider STORGOS in the realm of shared marital responsibilities.

Storgos is demonstrated in the display of fondness for one another.

Romans 12:10 reads, "Be kindly affectionate to one another" (NKJV) or "Be devoted to one another" (NIV). (Thayer says the original word here refers to "the mutual love of ... wives and husbands ... loving tenderly.") Romans 1:31 translates the negative use of *storgos* as "without natural affection." Putting these two verses together, spouses can see that *storgos* should motivate them to treat their mates with loving, kind, tender, and devoted affection; to do otherwise is unnatural.

Storgos is also demonstrated in the possession of an "at-homeness" feeling.

Webster says that "at home" means, "relaxed and comfortable: at ease; in harmony with the surroundings; on familiar ground." Especially for the spouse who works outside the home, there's nothing like going home, closing out the stressful and chaotic world. A London paper once published this anonymous adage: "Home—a world of strife shut out, a world of love shut in."

Storgos could be exemplified like this: A husband is in his study working, and his wife comes in, sits down, and just begins reading; the husband looks over at her and says, "I'm sorry that I have to do this instead of spending some time with you," to which the wife says, "Don't worry about that now. I just enjoy being in the same room with you."

In First Peter 3:7 when Peter spoke about how husbands are to "dwell with" their wives, he used one compound word: "sun," meaning "together," and "oikeo," meaning "home." This compound word brings out more meaning than just "living together": it called to the Greek-speaking mind a close companionship, a deep-down togetherness, suggestive of being completely at home with someone. So this word strongly emphasizes the importance for a spouse to keep in mind who his/her other half is, spending more time with him/her than other people and interests.

Consider PHILIA in the realm of shared marital responsibilities.

Philia is demonstrated in sharing with one another.

Contrary to some working wives who say, "What's his is mine, and what's mine is mine," one of the wedding vows states, "All my worldly goods with thee I share"; however, it isn't the sharing of material things that's under consideration here, but the sharing of one another's lives: their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, plans, dreams, etc. We sometimes hear people say, "My spouse is my best friend," or we see plaques that read, "Happiness is being married to your best friend," and so it should be; but the way some spouses behave, you'd think that they despised them: they spend very little (if any) time with their mates in studying, talking, listening, working, playing, etc.

According to First Peter 3:1-8, spouses are expected live together with "understanding," not only with knowledge of what God says about marriage in general, but also with specific knowledge about our spouses: we should know his/her deep fears, cares, disappointments, expectations, scars, secrets, etc. How well do we know our spouses?

He dashed into the police station at midnight, explaining that his wife had been missing since 8 o'clock that morning and asking that a search be made for her. "Her description," said the sergeant. "Height?"

"I ... I don't know."

"Weight?" The husband shook his head vaguely.

"Color of eyes?" Er ... average, I suppose."

"Do you know how she was dressed?"

"I expect she wore her coat and hat. She did have the dog with her."

"What kind of dog?"

"A bull terrier; weight 14.5 pounds; 4 dark blotches on his body, shading from gray to white; round, blackish spot over the left eye; white stub tail; 3 white legs and right front leg spotted, all but the toes; a small nick in the left ear; a silver link collar with...."

"That'll do!" gasped the sergeant. "We'll find the dog!"

A synonym for "friend" is "companion" (that's a word we considered in the last study relative to the clause "shall become one flesh"); the creation of one person from two requires that spouses communicate in every way possible in order to fulfill God's expectation for their relationship.

Philia is also demonstrated in being able to depend on one another.

Speaking of a virtuous woman, Proverbs 31:11-12 read, "The heart of her husband safely trusts her.... She does him good and not evil all the days of her life."

The concepts of "companion" and "one flesh" again come into focus here because the purpose of each spouse is to complete his/her mate; in other words, we need to "be there" for one another, whether it be emotionally, physically, or spiritually!

Consider AGAPE in the realm of shared marital responsibilities.

Agape is demonstrated in unselfish and unconditional acts of kindness.

Since "God is *agape*" (First John 4:19), He has furnished the perfect example. John 3:16 reads, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Romans 5:8 reads, "God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly."

Applying his thoughts to marriage, let's notice some of what Paul said in First Corinthians 13:4-8a related to unselfish and unconditional acts of kindness.

"Love suffers long."

God typifies this continuously by allowing the world to remain in existence: God "is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (Second Peter 3:9).

Robert Ingersoll, a well-known atheist of the 1800's, would often stop in the middle of his lectures against God and say, "I give God 5 minutes to strike me dead for the things I've said"; he then used the fact that he wasn't struck dead as proof that God didn't exist. Theodore Parker said of Ingersoll's claim, "Did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in five minutes?"

How long does it take us to become vindictive toward our spouses?

"Love is kind."

Just as patience will take anything from others, kindness will give anything to them, even enemies; being kind is the counterpart of being patient.

Kindness is active good-will: it not only feels generous, but it also is generous; it not only desires the welfare of others, but it also works for it.

Perhaps as a conclusion to his teaching about marriage, two of the things Peter said was, "be tender-hearted, be courteous" (First Peter 3:8).

Are we kind to our spouses by doing helpful things for one another—to the point of loving self-sacrifice when necessary?

"Love does not behave rudely."

Acting rudely stems from lovelessness, not caring enough for those it's around to act becomingly or politely; it cares nothing for their feelings or sensitivities, being careless, overbearing, and crude.

Robert Quillen wrote, "The secret of a happy marriage is simple: just keep as polite to each other as you are to your best friend." Again Peter said, "not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing" (First Peter 3:8).

How do we act toward the person we're supposed to love the most in this world?

"Love does not seek its own."

R. C. H. Lenski said, "Cure selfishness and you have just replanted the Garden of Eden."

Philippians 2:4 says, "Let each of you look out ... for ... the interests of others." Romans 12:10 speaks of "giving preference to one another." As Paul said in First Corinthians 7:33, instead of working to please himself/herself, a spouse seeks to please his/her mate.

Who is it that we think about the most in our relationship, ourselves or our spouses?

"Love is not provoked."

Being provoked is the other side of seeking one's own way; the person who is intent on having his own way is easily provoked, easily angered.

The colonial preacher John Edwards had a daughter with an uncontrollable temper. When a young man fell in love with her and asked her father for her hand, Edwards replied, "You can't have her."

"But I love her and she loves me," he protested.

"It doesn't matter," the father insisted. When asked why, he said, "Because she is not worthy of you."

"But she is a Christian. Isn't she?"

"Yes," said Edwards, "but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live."

Do we allow our spouses to easily provoke us? (Do we test our spouses?)

"Love keeps no record of wrongs."

Although keeping records of mistakes is necessary for business purposes, it's harmful for personal purposes: keeping track of things done against us is a sure way to unhappiness. Love keeps no books because it has no place for resentment and grudges, especially if the offender has already been forgiven; if he/she has been forgiven, forget it!

Are we in the habit of keeping a record of everything our spouses do against us, whether done on purpose or by accident?

"Love does not rejoice in iniquity."

Sometimes rejoicing in unrighteousness takes the form of hoping someone will make a mistake or fall into sin. I wonder how many Christian spouses who want to be rid of their mates actually hope they will commit adultery so that they themselves can be scripturally free to divorce and remarry! Why would they do such a thing? Because the other characteristics of love, such as bearing all things, is not part of such a person's make-up; he/she lacks biblical love.

Is it really possible that we sometimes rejoice in an unrighteous act in our spouses?

"Love rejoices in the truth."

Love focuses on the true and the right, looking, hoping, and emphasizing the good.

Although we shouldn't allow spouses to live in sin, how often do we express our pleasure with something good, right, and true that he/she has done?

"Love bears all things."

"Bears" means to cover, support, and therefore to protect; Proverbs 10:12 reads, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins." Love doesn't justify sin or compromise with falsehood, it warns, corrects, exhorts, rebukes, and disciplines; but love does not expose or broadcast failures and wrongs—it covers and protects.

Do we feel the pain of our spouses and help them carry the burdens of their hurt? Or do we constantly dredge up and throw their mistakes in their faces? Or worse, do we even complain about our spouses to people outside our families?

"Love believes all things."

Love is optimistic or holds to the motto, "A person is innocent until proven guilty," and, even if one is proven guilty, love will credit the person with the best motive.

Back to Peter again, Peter spoke of "having compassion" (First Peter 3:8), and compassion does one of two things in this context: it either attributes no motive, or it attributes a positive motive to someone's action.

Do we set ourselves up as judges of our spouses' guilt or innocence and motives?

"Love hopes all things."

Even when belief in a spouse's goodness or repentance is shattered, love still hopes; when it runs out of faith, it holds on to hope. For example, the spouse of an impenitent mate refuses to take failure as final. The rope of love's hope has no end. As long as there's life, love doesn't lose hope.

Has our hope in our spouses become weak? Then our love has become weak.

"Love endures all things."

"Endures" was a military term used of an army holding a vital position at all costs; every hardship and every suffering was to be endured in order to hold fast. Love holds fast to those it loves, enduring all things at all costs, standing against overwhelming opposition, refusing to stop bearing, believing, or hoping.

After love bears, it believes; after it believes, it hopes; after it hopes, it endures; after endurance, there's nowhere else to go—endurance is the unending climax of love! Someone once said, "The most impressive example of tolerance is a golden wedding anniversary."

How long do we put up with the negatives that our spouses expose us to before we begin thinking of or even audibly suggesting "divorce"?

"Love never fails."

By this statement, Paul wasn't referring to success; love isn't a magic key that we can use to unlock every opportunity and guarantee every endeavor. For example, if there's a marriage where one partner has consistently employed *agape* in order to keep his/her marriage together while the other partner is unyielding, then separation may be imminent; it isn't the fault of the one who tried. As strong as *agape* is, it can't force righteous behavior on anyone; even Jesus wasn't successful on numerous occasions. On the other hand, whenever and wherever we are successful in our Christian living and marriages, it will always be because of *agape*; success will not always be a part of love, but love will always be a part of success.

Are our marriages failing miserably? Well, since *agape* is the only rightful recipient of credit for a lasting and thriving marriage, then the first thing we need to look at is whether or not *agape* is operative in our relationships.

Agape is the love that sustains and shackles all the others together...

- When *eros* is lacking, *agape* works to provide passion.
- When *storgos* is lacking, *agape* works to provide protection.
- When *philia* is lacking, *agape* works to provide partnership. However...
- If *agape* is lacking, the marriage is doomed to destruction.

Conclusion

In our Christian marriages, let the following things be found in consistency:

- Romantic and physical fulfillment.
- The genuine feelings of fondness and "at-homeness."
- Dependability and an open line of sharing. And...
- Unselfish and unconditional acts of kindness.

Next to the Lord's bride—the church, there's no other institution on Earth more worthy of our time, talent, and treasure than that of marriage.

[Tony E. Denton, March 1998. ASiteForTheLord.com]