

THE MUTUAL DUTIES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES TOWARDS EACH OTHER

By Richard Baxter, 1615-1691

Extracted and modernised with apologies

by Scott Andersen

Selfish ungodly persons everywhere enter into all kinds of relationships with a desire of serving their own selves, and gratifying their own flesh without knowing or caring what is required of them. Their desire is for the honour, profit, or pleasure their relationship will provide them but not for what God and man requires or expects from them. [Gen 2:18, Prov 18:22] Their mind is concerned only with what they shall have and not for what they shall be and do. ¹

They know what they want others to do for them, but do not care what their duty is to do for others. This is the way it is with too many husbands and wives.

We should be very concerned to know what the duties of our relationships are. And how we can please God in our relationships. Study and do your part, and God will certainly do his.

Direct. I. The first duty of husbands is to love their wives (and wives their husbands). Eph 5.25,28,29,33. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.--So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies; he that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.--Let every one of you in particular so love his wife, even as himself." See Gen 2.24.

Some directions for maintaining love are as follows:

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1. Choose a good spouse in the first place. A spouse who is truly good and kind. Full of virtue and holiness to the Lord. ²
2. Don't marry till you are sure that you can love entirely.
3. Be not too hasty, but know beforehand all the imperfections which may tempt you to despise your future mate. ³
4. Remember that justice commands you to love one that has forsaken all the world for you. One who is contented to be the companion of your labours and sufferings, and be a sharer in all things with you, and that **MUST** be your companion until death. ⁴
5. Remember that women are ordinarily affectionate, passionate creatures, and as they love much themselves, so they expect much

love from you.

6. Remember that you are under God's command; and to deny marital love to your wives, is to deny a duty which God has urgently imposed on you. Obedience therefore should command your love.

7. Remember that you are "one flesh"; you have drawn her to forsake father and mother, and to cleave to you; ⁵

8. Take more notice of the good, that is in your wives, than of her faults. Let not the observation of their faults make you forget or overlook their virtues. ⁶

9. Don't magnify her imperfections until they drive you crazy. Excuse them as far as is right in the Lord. Consider the frailty of the sex. Consider also your own infirmities, and how much your wives must bear with you. ⁷

10. Don't stir up the evil of your spouse, but cause the best in them to be lived out. ⁸

11. Overcome them with love; and then they will be loving to you, and consequently lovely. Love will cause love, as fire kindleth fire. A good husband is the best means to make a good and loving wife. ⁹

12. Live before them the life of a prudent, lowly, loving, meek, self-denying, patient, harmless, holy heavenly Christian. ¹⁰
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Direct. II. Husbands and wives must live together. 1 Cor 7:2-5

Direct III. Abhor not only adultery itself, but all that leads to unchasteness and the violation of your marriage-covenant. [Mat 5.31,32; 19:9; John 8,4-5, of adultery; Heb 13.4; Prov 22.14; Hos 4.2-3; Prov 2.17; 1 Cor 6.15,19; Mal. 2.15; Prov 6.32,35; Deu 23.2; Lev 21.9; 18:28; Num 25.9; Jer 5.7-9]

Direct. IV. Husband and wife must delight in the love and company, and lives of each other. When husband and wife take pleasure in each other, it unites them in duty, it helps them with ease to do their work, and bear their burdens; and is a major part of the comfort of marriage. [Prov 5.18,19]

Direct. V. It is your solemn duty to live in quietness and peace. To avoid every occasion of fierce anger and discord.

[I. Directions showing the great necessity of avoiding dissension.]

1. The duty of your marriage-union requires unity. Can you not agree with your own flesh?

2. Division with your spouse will pain and upset your whole life ...

Just as you do not wish to hurt your own self and are quick to care for your own wounds; so you should take notice of any break in the peace of your marriage and quickly seek to heal it. 3. Fighting chills love, fighting makes your spouse undesirable to you in your mind.

Wounding is separating; to be tied together through marital bonds while your hearts are estranged is to be tormented. To be inwardly

adversaries, while outwardly husband and wife turns your home and delight into a prison. ¹¹ 4. Dissension between the husband and the wife disrupts the whole family life; they are like oxen unequally yoked, no work can be accomplished for all the striving with one another.

5. It greatly makes you unfit for the worship of God; you are not able to pray together nor to discuss heavenly things together, nor can you be mutual helpers to each other's souls. ¹²

6. Dissension makes it impossible to manage your family properly.¹³
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7. Your dissension will expose you to the malice of Satan, and give him advantage for many, many temptations. ¹⁴

[II. Directions for avoiding dissensions.]

1. Keep alive your love for one another. Love your spouse dearly and fervently. Love will suppress wrath; you cannot be bitter over little things with someone you dearly love; much less will you descend to harsh words, aloofness, or any form abuse. ¹⁵

2. Both husband and wife must mortify their pride and strong selfcentered feelings. ¹⁶ These are the feelings which cause intolerance and insensitivity. You must pray and labour for a humble, meek, and quiet spirit. A proud heart is troubled and provoked by every word that seems to assault your self-esteem.¹⁷ 3. Do not forget that you are both diseased persons, full of infirmities; and therefore expect the fruit of those infirmities in each other; and do not act surprised about it, as if you had never known of it before. Decide to be patient with one another; remembering that you took one another as sinful, frail, imperfect persons, and not as angels, or as blameless and perfect. ¹⁸

4. Remember still that you are one flesh; and therefore be no more offended with the words or failings of each other, than you would be if they were your own. Be angry with your wife for her faults no more than you are angry with yourself for your own. Have such an anger and displeasure against a fault, as will work to heal it; but not such as will cause festering and aggravation of the diseased part. This will turn anger into compassion, and will cause you to administer care for the cure. ¹⁹

5. Agree together beforehand, that when one of you is sinfully angry and upset the other shall silently and gently bear it until you have come to your sanity. ²⁰

6. Have an eye to the future and remember that you must live together until death, and must be the companions of each other's lives, and the comforts of each other's lives, and then you will see how absurd it is for you to disagree and upset each other.²¹

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7. As far as you are able, avoid all occasions of wrath and quarreling, about the matters of your families.²²

8. If you are so angry that you cannot calm yourself at least control your tongue and do not speak hurtful and taunting words, talking it out hotly fans the fire, and increases the flame; (Do not ventilate your anger as you only feed your fleshly vengeance) Be silent, and you will much sooner return to your serenity and peace.²³

9. Let the calm and rational spouse speak carefully and compellingly reason with the other (unless it be with a person so insolent as will make things worse). Usually a few sober, grave admonitions, will prove as water to the boiling pot. Say to your angry wife or husband, "You know this should not be between us; love must put it to rest, and it must be repented of. God does not approve of it, and we shall not approve of it when this heat is over. This frame of mind is contrary to a praying frame, and this language contrary to a praying language; we must pray together; let us do nothing contrary to prayer now: sweet water and bitter come not from one spring", etc. Some calm and condescending words of reason, may stop the torrent, and revive the reason which passion had overcome.²⁴

10. When you have sinfully acted towards your spouse confess to one another; and ask for forgiveness of each other, and join in prayer to God for pardon; and this will act as a preventative in you the next time: you will surely be ashamed to do that which you have confessed and asked forgiveness for of God and man.²⁵

Direct. VI. One of the most important duties of a husband to his wife and a wife to her husband is to carefully, skillfully, and diligently help each other in the knowledge and worship, and obedience of God that they might be saved and grow in their Christian Life.

1. This is not love, when you neglect each other's soul.²⁶ Do you believe that you have immortal souls, and an endless life of joy or misery to live? Then you MUST know that your great concern and business is, to care for those souls, and for the endless life.

Therefore if your love does not help one another in this which is your main concern, it is of little worth, and of little use. Every thing in this world is as valuable as it is useful. A useless or unprofitable
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love, is a worthless love. It is a trifling, or a childish, or a beastly love, which helps you but in trifling, childish, or beastly things. Do you love your wife, and will leave her in the power of Satan, or will not help to save her soul? What! love her, and yet let her go to hell? and rather let her be damned than you will be at the pains to endeavor her salvation? Never say you love them, if you will not labour for their salvation.

What then shall we say of them that do not only deny their help, but are hinderers of the holiness and salvation of each other! [1Kings 11.4, Acts 5.2, Job 2.9] And yet (the Lord have mercy on the poor miserable world!) how common a thing is this among us!

If the wife be ignorant and ungodly, she will do her worst to make or keep her husband in the same state as she is herself; and if God put any holy inclinations into his heart, she will be like water to the fire, to quench it or to keep it subdued; and if he will not be as sinful and miserable as herself, he shall have little rest. And if God open the eyes of the wife of a bad man, and show her the necessity of a holy life, and she resolves to obey the Lord, and save her soul, what an enemy and tyrant will her husband be to her (if God does not restrain him); so that the devil himself will do no more to prevent the saving of their souls than ungodly husbands and wives do against each other.

2. Consider also that you are not living up to the design of marriage, if you are not helping each other's souls.²⁷

3. Consider also, if you neglect each other's souls, what enemies you are to one another, and how you are preparing for your everlasting sorrows: when you should be preparing for your joyful meeting in heaven, you are laying up for yourselves everlasting horror.²⁸

Therefore without a moment's hesitation determine to live together as heirs of heaven, and to be a helper to one other's souls. To assist you in this holy pursuit I will give you these following directions, which if you will faithfully practice, may make you to be special blessings to each other.

Direct. I. Before you can help to save each other's souls you must be sure of your own. You must have a deep and living understanding of the 7 of 12

great eternal matters of which you are required to speak to others about. If you have no compassion for your own soul and will sell it for a moment of ease and pleasure, surely then you have no compassion for your spouse's soul.²⁹

Direct. II. Take every opportunity which your nearness provides to be speaking seriously to each other about the matters of God, and your salvation.³⁰ Discussing those things of this world no more than required. And then talk together of the state and duty of your souls towards God, and of your hopes of heaven, as those that take these for their greatest business. And don't speak lightly, or unreverently, or in a rude and disputing manner; but with gravity and sobriety, as those that are discussing the most important things in the whole world. [Mark 8:36]

Direct. III. When either husband or wife is speaking seriously about holy things, let the other be careful to cherish, and not to extinguish the conversation.³¹

Direct IV. Watch over the hearts and lives of one another, judging the condition of each other's souls, and the strength or weakness of each others sins and graces, and the failings of each others lives, so that you may be able to apply to one another the most suitable help. ³²

Direct. V. Do not flatter one another from a foolish love.³³ Neither meanly

critise one another. Do all in true, Godly love. Some are so blinded to the faults of husband, wife or child that they do not see the sin and wickedness in them. They are deluded concerning their eternal souls. This is the same as it is with self-loving sinners and their own souls, willfully deceiving themselves to their damnation. This flattering of yourselves or others, is but the devil's charm to keep you from effectual repentance and salvation. On the other hand, some cannot speak to one another of their faults, without such bitterness, or contempt, which will cause them to refuse the medicine that could save them. If the everyday warnings you make to strangers must all be offered in love, much more between the husband and wife.

Direct. VI. Keep up your love to one another, do not grow distant. For if you do, you will despise each other's counsels and reproofs.

Direct. VII. Do not discourage your spouse from instructing you by refusing to receive and learn from their corrections.³⁴

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Direct. VIII. Help each other by reading together the most convicting, cutting, life-giving books. The ones most spiritual. Do not waste your time on light, weak, milk-toast ministries and books. Make friendships together with the holiest persons. This is not neglecting your duty to one another, but that all the helps working together may be the more effectual.³⁵

Direct. IX. Don't Conceal the state of your souls, nor hide your faults from one another. You are as one flesh, and should have one heart: and as it is dangerous for a man to be ignorant of his own soul so it is very hurtful to husband or wife to be ignorant of one another, in those areas where they have need of help.³⁶

Direct X. Avoid as much as possible different opinions in religion.

Direct. XI. If different religious understandings come between you, be sure that you manage it with holiness, humility, love, and peace, and not with carnality, pride, uncharitableness, or contention.

Direct. XII. Do not either blindly indulge each others faults nor be too critical of each other's state, allowing Satan to alienate your affections from one another.

Direct. XIII. If you are married to one that is an ungodly person, yet keep up all the love which is due for the relation's sake.³⁷

Direct XIV. Join together in frequent and fervent prayer. Prayer forces the mind into sobriety, and moves the heart with the presence and majesty of God. Pray also for each other when you are in secret, that God may do that work which you most desire, upon each other's hearts.

Direct. XV. Lastly, Help each other by an exemplary life. Be yourself, what you desire your husband or wife should be; excel in meekness, and humility, and charity, and dutifulness, and diligence, and self-denial, and patience.³⁸

Direct. VII. Another important duty in marriage is, to help in the health and comfort of each other's bodies. Not to pamper each other's flesh, or cherish the vices of pride, or sloth, or gluttony, or the sensual pleasures in

each other; but to increase the health and vigor of the body, making it fit for the service of the soul and God.

1. In health, you must be careful to provide for each other (not so much pleasing as) wholesome food, and to keep each other from that
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which is hurtful to your health; warning each other from the dangers of gluttony and idleness, the two great murderers of mankind.³⁹

2. Also in sickness, you are to be caring of each other; and not to spare any costs or pains, by which the health of each other may be restored, or your souls confirmed, and your comforts cherished.⁴⁰

Direct. VIII. Another duty of husbands and wives is, to be helpful to each other in their worldly business and estates. Not for worldly ends, nor with a worldly mind; but in obedience to God, who will have them labour, as well as pray, for their daily bread, and has determined that in the sweat of their brows they shall eat their bread; and that six days they shall labor and do all that they have to do; and that he that will not work must not eat.⁴¹

Direct IX. Also you must be careful to guard the honour of one another. You must not divulge, but conceal, the failings of each other; The reputation of each other must be as dear to you as your own. It is a sinful and unfaithful practice of many, both husbands and wives, who among their friends are discussing the faults of each other, which they are required in tenderness to cover up. MANY peevish persons will aggravate all the faults of their spouse behind their backs.⁴²

Direct X. IT is your marriage duty to assist one another in the education of your children.⁴³

Direct XI. It is your marriage duty to assist each other in charity.⁴⁴

Direct XII. LASTLY, it is a great DUTY of husbands and wives, to help and comfort one other in preparing for a safe and happy death.⁴⁵

1. In the time of health, you must often and seriously remind each other of the time when death will make the separation; and live together daily as those that are still expecting the parting hour....Reprove everything in one another, which would be an unwelcome memory at death. If you see each other dull and slow in heavenliness, or living in vanity, worldliness, or sloth, as if you had forgotten that you must shortly die, stir up one another to do all without delay which the approach of such a day requireth.

2. And when death is at hand, oh then what abundance of tenderness, and seriousness, and skill, and diligence, is needful for one, that hath the last office of love to perform, to the departing soul
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of so near a friend! Oh then what need will there be of your most wise, and faithful, and diligent help!....They that are utterly unprepared and unfit to die themselves, can do little to prepare or help another. But they that live together as the heirs of heaven, and converse on earth as fellow travellers to the land of promise, may help

and encourage the souls of one another, and joyfully part at death, as expecting quickly to meet again in life eternal.

THE END

No doubt much of the original force and poetry has been lost in my feeble attempt to modernise. It was only my hope to make this treatise available and understandable to the reader who has not accustomed himself to reading and understanding the language of our King James Version Bible. This work was found in Volume I, Baxter's Practical Works, A Christian Directory, page 431-438. Also available upon request is a Bible study where the scriptures reflecting on each point in Baxter's above treatise are listed. (Contact Scott Andersen, email: gerkin@gerkin.com) It would be hoped that the hearing of God's Word regarding the mutual duties of Husbands and Wives will further strengthen your conviction and provide help to your soul to live as Faith requires. Lastly I would like to relate what a very wise man once told me: "If you are having troubles with your spouse it is not because of what you think of him or her, it is not because of negative thought patterns, it is not because you haven't first loved self. But it is what you think of Jesus. Do you love Him FIRST? Do you live for Him FIRST? Is your life, his? If you are right with Jesus Christ the King of Glory, then it will be right with your husband or your wife. And this is what is right with God."

FOOTNOTES

Some of the following scripture references are found in Baxter's Work, others I have added in hopes of increasing your edification.

1 Luk 6:31-32; 1Cor 10:24; Gal 6:2; Phil 2:4; 2tim 3:2; Jam 2:15; 1Joh 3:17; Gen 4:9; 1 Sam 25:3-11; Esth 6:6; Isa 56:11; Joh 6:26

2 Pro 18:22; Pro 19:13-14

3 Pro 18:13

4 Mat 5:32; Mat 19:9; 1Cor 7:39; Col 3:19; Gen 2:24

5 Mat 19:5; Mar 10:7

6 1 Cor 13:7; Phil 2:3

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7 Psa 103:14; 1Cor 13:7

8 Pro 10:12

9 Rom 12:21; 1Pet 3:9

10 Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1The 2:12; Pro 11:30; 1Tim 4:16; Jam 5:19-20;

1Pet 3:1-2

11 Pro 19:13

12 Mat 5:23; 1Sam 15:22

13 Mat 12:25; Mar 3:25; Luk 11:17

14 Jam 1:13; 1Cor 7:5; Job 2:9

15 Lev 19:8; Psa 133:1; Pro 15:17; Rom 12:10; Rom 14:19; Rom 15:1;

1Cor 13:4-7

16 Luk 9:23; Psa 101:5; Prov 16:5; Prov 21:4; Prov 28:25; Mat 23:12;

1Pet 5:6

17 Psa 10:4; Hos 7:10; Prov 13:10; Prov 28:25
18 Jer 17:9; Rom 7:24; 1Joh 1:8
19 Eph 4:26; Eph 4:32; Jam 1:19
20 Eph 4:2; 1Cor 13:4
21 Ecc 9:9; Rom 7:2
22 Gen 2:24
23 Gal 5:15; Jam 3:5,6,8
24 Pro 15:18; Mat 5:9; Psa 85:8
25 Eph 4:32; Jam 5:16
26 2Cor 2:4; 2Cor 12:15; 1The 2:8
27 Gen 2:18 1The 5:11; Eph 4:16; Heb 12:15; 1cor 7:5; Col 2:19; Gen
35:2; Gen 35:4; Lev 19:17; Num 16:27; Num 16:32
29 Gen 2:18; 2Cor 13:5; Gal 6:3; Gen 25:29; Gen 25:34
30 Col 3:16; Heb 3:13; Heb 10:24
31 Pro 27:6; Pro 15:12; Pro 15:31; Pro 15:32
32 Heb 10:24
33 Eph 4:15; Eph 4:26-5:9
34 Pro 29:1
35 Eph 4:11-16
36 Jam 5:16; Eph 5:27-32
37 1Cor 7:13-14
38 1Pe 3:1; Joh 13:15; 1Tim 4:12; 1Cor 11:1; 1The 1:6; 2The 3:7-9;
Tit 2:6; Jam 3:17; 2Pe 1:5-8
39 1Cor 6:19; Deu 21:20; Pro 23:21; Pro 19:15; Pro 6:9; Pro 10:4;
2Th 3:10 Pro 19:24; Pro 20:13; Pro 23:21; Pro 24:33; Isa 56:10;
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1Tim 5:13
40 Eph 5:29, Job 19:17
41 Pro 31; Tit 2:5; 1Ti 5:14; 1Ti 5:8; Ex 20:9,11; Ge 3:19; 1Th 3:10-12
42 Jam 4:11; Pro 17:9; 1Pet 4:8
43 Gen 18:19; Gen 35:2; Jos 24:14; 1Tim 5:14; Prov 31:1
44 Heb 13:2; Gen 18:6; Rom 12:13; 2Cor 9:6; Luk 16:9; 1Tim 3:2; 1Tim
5:10; Pro 11:20; Pro 11:28; Neh 8:1; Pro 19:17; Job 29:13; Joh 31:20
Acts 20:35
45 Deu 32:29; Psa 39:4; Psa 90:12; Rom 14:8; Heb 13:14; 1Pe 1:17; Psa
3:5; Psa 37:37; Psa 49:15; Psa 73:24; Psa 116:15; Pro 14:32; Ecc
7:1; Luk 16:22; Luk 23:43; 1Cor 15:51-57; 2Cor 5:1; 2Cor 5:4; 2Cor
5:8; Phi 1:20-23; 1The 5:9; 2Pe 1:11; 2Pe 1:14; Rev 14:13; Psa 23:4