

Trusting God in Practice

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.? (1Pe 3:5-7)

How easily we become so involved in our theological and theoretical ideas that we neglect, if not altogether forget, the practical side of the New Testament's teachings. The fine tapestry of Scripture interweaves the theological and the practical so seamlessly that we cannot remain true to Scripture and separate these two dimensions of Biblical teaching.

At the heart of the question, trusting God is right because the character of God is altogether trustworthy. He is not diabolical or deceptive. He does not publish one agenda in His "revealed will" and a duplicitous contradiction in His "secret will." If in fact God has a "secret will," we can safely conclude that it is wholly compatible with His revealed will and with His holy character that makes Him trustworthy.

As much as we occasionally criticize the entertainment industry and its "Helly-wood" moral void, often it holds up before us a thought-provoking mirror that accurately depicts our actual conduct. For those who saw the movie that unfolded the drama of a wedding between a Greek woman and a non-Greek man with all the cultural clashes and conflicts that characterize diverse cultures, most will recall the Greek mother's comments regarding her husband. He viewed himself as the unquestioned head of the family. When her views and desires conflicted with his, she described the situation with a line that quipped something to the effect of, "He is the head of the family, but I'm the neck, and the neck turns the head any way it wishes." When my wife and I saw this movie, there was a notable chuckle in the audience at that line. People either know someone who follows this deceptive practice in their marriage, or they pride themselves in being rather skilled at the practice themselves. I am rather amazed at the number of professing godly women who make no pretense of following any other course in their relationships with their husbands and families. And, to be honest, at times I've also seen men who played a similar role with their wives. The fundamental teaching of Scripture rejects and condemns such a manipulative attitude in any human relationship, much less in that most intimate bond of marriage. Whether in ministry, career, or in marriage, God sets forth His rules regarding human interaction, rules that compel a disarming and winsome transparency that avoids deception and manipulation rather than praising it. Our failure to practice such transparency may well reveal our deep lack of trust in the God who gave us these instructions.

The person who resorts to manipulation and deception effectively says by his/her attitude and conduct that he/she does not trust God and His way of doing things. Paul's pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus include rather specific requirements for the marital and family relationship of men who fill either office of minister or deacon. The man need not be a tyrant in his family. In fact such an attitude would disqualify him from the office as quickly as his passively allowing his wife to play the role of the "neck" in their marriage. Insightfully Paul observes that a man's handling of the intimate and difficult role of his personal marriage relationship will predict how he will deal with the almost equally challenging and intimate interpersonal issues that he will frequently face as a minister of the gospel. If he fails to deal with his marriage relationship according to God's way, he will also fail to deal acceptably and wisely with relationships in his ministry.

I believe that we should work to maintain the distinct, but equally obligatory, responsibilities of both husbands and wives as we approach this teaching in Scripture. In this lesson Peter addresses both, as does Paul in Eph 5. Rather than thinking himself the divinely appointed tyrant who demands that his wife “submit” to him without question, the husband is to love his wife unreservedly so as to compel her by his love to submit respectfully to his leadership in the marriage. Here Peter makes an interesting—often overlooked—point. The wife who refuses to submit in this way to her husband, or who deceitfully plays the role of the neck, actually reveals an inherent lack of trust in God!

At the heart of the matter, the woman's trust in God, not her confidence in her husband, compels her submission and harmony within the marriage. No less, the husband who fails to lead in love, not by tyrannical despotism, reveals his own distrust of God. God commands one pattern of conduct no less than the other. And He does command both.

For the godly husband or wife, this attitude is not an idealized, but hardly practical, option. It is in fact a Biblical commandment. Occasionally in our age of harsh feminism sincere, Bible-believing Christians tend to take the man's role in the marriage as far overboard as the feminists take the woman's role. In Eph 5 Paul never permits the man to play the despot and dominate his wife by demanding that she submit to him. He is required to lead and to motivate her by his unselfish and sacrificial love. And indeed she is equally required to trust God and to submit. Her submission is no more contingent on her husband's merit than his love is contingent on her merit. A godly marriage will cultivate life-transforming emotions and conduct, but the foundation for the Biblical marriage is not how we feel, but about a vow that each partner takes to follow God's way in the marriage “...till death do us part.” The alarming rate of broken marriages in our culture today offers vivid testimony that emotion alone is not a sufficient foundation for a lasting marriage. The greater alarm for me is that the divorce rate among professing Christians is fully as great as among non-Christians! A professing Christian woman once told a friend of mine in ministry that she was no longer “happy” in her marriage, and, above all else, God wanted her to be “happy,” so God had no problem with her getting a divorce on no other grounds than her lack of being “happy.” Somewhere along the way she failed to read Mal 2:16 where God said that He hates “putting away,” divorce. Any godly man or woman who has lived through a divorce will join that testimony. Above all else, God wants His people to be holy, to live lives dedicated to Him and to follow His commandments in their lives and interpersonal relationships. To the extent that we live holy lives God will add the “icing on the cake” of contentment or happiness. The truly happy people are those who serve God, not personal interests (Ps 144:15).

Scripture does not assign a role of greater value or moral superiority to the man in marriage. It assigns a division of labor and responsibilities. Both husband and wife equally honor God by living within God's assigned role, not by rationalizing why they must violate that divine assignment. Peter clearly states that both husband and wife are “...heirs together of the grace of life.” When a husband and wife learn the Biblical pattern of their role in the marriage and trust God enough to live consistently and faithfully to that assignment, they will find the joy and harmony of a godly marriage. When they do not trust God enough to obey His assignment, rationalization and deception rule, and the marriage falls into dishonor, even if the couple never ends up in divorce court.

Men, this passage is no less compelling on you than on your wife. Do you show your Christ-like love for her so strongly and consistently that she is as comfortable trusting you, as she should be trusting God? Do you abandon your Biblically assigned role so frequently that she feels justified in crossing the line and violating God's assignment to her, thinking that her violation is the only way to preserve her family and marriage?

I offer that the heart of a godly marriage, as the heart of a godly life, has far more to do with how fully we trust God and far less to do with how much we respect, or disrespect, our spouses. If God is as trustworthy as we teach that He is—and as the Bible consistently teaches that He is—we should

comfortably live every aspect of our lives under His governance and according to His rules. How incredibly practical—this thing we call “trusting God!”

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