

Sermon notes

7/29/07

Rich Lusk

Each week, as we go deeper into this series on Christian marriage, I feel more and more out of my league. There are many within our congregation who have greater wisdom and experience than I do in these matters. I am not preaching these sermons from the standpoint of someone who “knows it all.” I’d be the first to admit that I don’t have all the mysteries of married life figured out (my wife would probably be the second!). But this sermon series works on the same principle as the rest of the Christian life: One broken person is seeking to help other broken people. One imperfect person is pointing other imperfect people to the perfection and maturity held out to us and promised to us in the gospel. Thus, while I hope my teaching on marriage will be helpful, I also covet your interaction with and feedback to these sermons, so you can sharpen me and fill in things I might be missing.

---

Quick recap of the sermon:

We’ve seen *why* marriage should be celebrated and honored (last week) – now we’ll talk about *how* to celebrate and honor marriage. In the sermon I focused on two areas:

1. Husbands and wives celebrate marriage as they embrace their respective roles. The man is the head by virtue of God’s creation design and command. As head, he is to give himself to her and for her, just as Christ gave himself to and for the church. The woman is called to submit to her husband. She is to obey and respect him in the Lord. She completes him and fulfills him as she devotes herself to be his helper, remembering she was made for his sake.

These roles fit our natures. They are not arbitrary. While there is equality in marriage, there is not equivalence. Masculinity and femininity are not merely biological realities, existing on the “surface” of our personalities. Rather, they are irreducible aspects of who we are “all the way down.” Gender is not only a matter of the body, but of the soul. It is holistic.

Thus, equality does not imply or necessitate androgyny. Men and women are different but equal – and equal precisely *in* their differences, not in spite of them.

2. Another way husbands and wives can celebrate and honor marriage is by offering one another life-long security. Husbands and wives encourage and support one another “till death do us part.” The permanent security husbands

and wives give one another should be at least a dim and partial reflection of the eternal security the church finds in the gospel. Marriage pictures the covenant fidelity of Christ and his people. Marriages that are secure in this way are certainly worth celebrating!

---

Having talked about marriage as a source of security, I want to address a particular *insecurity* in marriage. As a couple grows old, the physical beauty that was there earlier begins to fade. Women especially can get insecure about this reality. As Doug Wilson has pointed out, this insecurity is obviously very real because it has generated a huge industry. If you are so unfortunate as to have to go to the local shopping mall, you'll see that over 50% of the stores there are catering to women who want to make themselves look pretty. In itself, *there may not be anything wrong with that*. After all, God created women so that they want to be beautiful, and he created men so that they are drawn to beauty. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 11, the woman was made to be her husband's glory – and while Paul focuses on her hair in that chapter, her whole appearance and countenance are aspects of that glory as well. A man's wife is his *shekinah* – she is to him what the *shekinah* was to the temple (or the Holy of Holies). In the Bible, glory is visible. If the woman is going to be the man's glory, that means her physical beauty matters. We are not Gnostics -- physical beauty is important and should be sought after and prized. It is holy and right for a woman to want to look her best. And it is appropriate for the man to esteem and honor that beauty. For example, John Calvin fully expected natural attraction to enter into the calculus of marriage. He said, "Moses does not condemn men for regarding beauty in their choice of wives..." (quoted in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, vol. 1: *Courtship, Engagement, and Family*, pg. 108; cf. pg. 96).

The problem is when men make their wives feel like their physical beauty is not adequate. The problem is when men make their wives feel like they have to compete with the girls in the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. Our culture idolizes youth and youthful images of beauty (and quite often, those images are retouched and photoshopped, so the women depicted are hardly even real: <http://blog.afterdarknesslight.org:80/2007/07/17/the-big-lie/>). This has the inevitable tendency to destroy the woman's self-confidence and make the man long for something that isn't realistic. Some women figure that it's their responsibility to "keep their man's attention" by pouring almost unlimited effort into making themselves look as young and beautiful as possible.

There is a beauty that comes with age and the Bible recognizes it (e.g., Sara). But our contemporary culture does *not* recognize it. Thus, people in our culture dread getting older. In our society, we do not honor the elderly; we pity them.

We bow to the altar of youth and obsess over looking young. Technology allows us to cheat the aging process to a point, but not indefinitely (cf. Ecc. 12).

We've allowed a particular standard of youthful beauty to become the norm for every woman. Wilson compares this to treating 8<sup>th</sup> grade as the pinnacle of academic achievement. Everyone rushes to get to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then tries to stay there as long as possible. Or, it's like Susan Pevensie in *The Last Battle* in C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. Susan does not make that final trip into Narnia.

"My sister Susan," answered Peter shortly and gravely, "is no longer a friend of Narnia."

"Yes," said Eustace, "and whenever you've tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says, 'What wonderful memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children.'"

"Oh Susan!" said Jill. "She's interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up."

"Grown-up, indeed," said the Lady Polly. "I wish she would grow up. She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she'll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age. Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one's life as quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can."

But you can't stop the clock. You can't freeze time. It is (obviously!) God's will for each of us is to grow older, day by day, year by year. Why do we insist on trying to indefinitely prolong life's "silliest" time? Why not age gracefully and honestly, growing in grace as we go? Why are we so prone to let lipstick and nylons overshadow the joys and adventures of Narnia (the pursuit of Aslan/Christ)?

Our culture has it backwards. We honor youth more than age, and we do this because we especially worship the physical beauty of youth. It's not at all uncommon in the world for a man to reach a certain income and status level and

then dump the woman who helped him get there for a younger, prettier “trophy wife.” But Christians should be totally counter-cultural at this point. It should be obvious that physical attraction/beauty alone is not enough to create a happy marriage. If good looks were enough, the happiest marriages would be found in Hollywood. Instead, that’s where you find the most miserable (and shortest) marriages. Physical beauty does not guarantee anything. *There is no correlation between beauty and marital satisfaction.* However, *there is a correlation between obeying God and finding marital happiness.*

The Christian approach is entirely different from what we find in the world. Eph. 5 explains how this works. The husband’s love is to wash and transform and beautify his wife in such a way that he might “present her to himself” (v. 27) as glorious, without any spot, wrinkle, or blemish. The phrase “present her to himself” is the key. It means two things: [1] A man is responsible for the loveliness and beauty of his wife. It is not her responsibility, but his. [2] How a man sees his wife is a reflection of the quality of the love he has shown her. He gets out of marriage what he puts into it – or what he puts into *her*, to be more exact. If he has loved her as Christ loves the church – with a sacrificial love, a protective love, a forgiving love, an incarnational love – then she is going to appear radiant to him. If his love is weak and half-hearted, she won’t seem all that glorious in his eyes. Indeed, his eyes will likely be wandering elsewhere.

This is the point: Men, if your wife is not growing in beauty and loveliness *in your eyes* as she grows older, the problem is *with you*, not her. The problem is NOT that she isn’t “keeping herself up” – though she may have issues there, that isn’t the root of the problem. The root of the problem is *you*. You’re not loving her as Christ loved the church. You’re not presenting her to yourself as glorious. Your love is too weak, too impotent, too ineffective, too lazy to make her lovely. You need to repent and start loving her the way Christ loves the church. It’s *your responsibility* to present her to yourself as a lovely bride. You have to pursue her. You have to discipline your affections and desires. You have to focus yourself on her. You have to make her feel cherished and cared for and you have to be completely devoted to her.

Men, you need to understand that the way our culture is set up is very unfair to women. As Wilson has pointed out, if you compare your wife to 20 year olds, to the idealized standard of youthful beauty found in the culture, sooner or later, your wife is going to end up on the losing side. After all she’s getting older – but there’s a new crop of 20 year olds every year. She can’t win.

However, if you love your wife in the way the Scripture says to – if you love her in such a way as to present her to yourself as a glorious bride -- *then no other women will hold allure or attraction for you.* In fact, as Wilson says, those 20 year

olds will seem kind of silly next to your wife, as she has been maturing and growing in grace so much longer. (No offense to 20 year olds! There is a time and season for everything in life.) The Bible calls us to honor old age and that includes not just parents and other people older than ourselves; it also includes honoring age in our spouses as they mature. To say it again: Men, if your love is not maturing your spouse in loveliness in your eyes, then you have a problem. You need love her more faithfully and powerfully. You need to pursue her and stir up your desire for her. You need to present her to yourself as Christ presents the church to himself.

To be complete, I also need to address this issue from the wife's point of view. 1 Peter 3 says to wives, "Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God." Peter tells Christian women that their beauty should not be *merely* external because such beauty fades. The real lasting beauty that counts is found in humble obedience. Peter reminds wives that their adornment should consist not only in pretty hair and clothes; the *real* adornment that attracts is found in a heart that loves God.

Peter does not deny that outward beauty is to be valued. But he puts that beauty in perspective. While your physical attractiveness in the eyes of a man is important, how you look in the eyes of God is more important. Thus, you need to spend more time and effort cultivating your character than perfecting your appearance. Your ultimate worth and beauty are found in your godliness – and that is a beauty that will not fade with the passing of time. Indeed, it only gets better, for all eternity. The world will pressure you to think, "Why should I care about my character? No one else does." But God cares, and his view of you is the only evaluation that really matters. Of course, if your husband has any wisdom at all, he'll look at things God's way as well – which means he'll look at you as God looks at you. Wise husbands know that godly character is better than physical attractiveness.

Gary Thomas (<http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001488.cfm>) has some helpful thoughts on these issues for both men and women:

I was provoked recently while reading about the holy, female-honoring attitude of Gregory of Nyssa, a Cappadocian father from the fourth century. Gregory wrote an essay extolling his sister, Macrina. Macrina was a beautiful woman; some said the most beautiful woman in the land. Many men wanted to marry her, but Macrina chose to live a life of celibacy.

By the end of her life, her beauty long since faded, Macrina's wisdom astonished her brother, who, though he was a highly esteemed bishop, called Macrina his "teacher." In a day in which women weren't allowed to publish books or preach in public, an esteemed bishop calling a woman his "teacher" was a *really* big deal. In addition to Macrina's wisdom, people recalled her kindness, the sense of spiritual power that seemed to emanate from her; one man even recounted a physical healing his child received after being held by her.

Macrina was, by all accounts, "a shelter from the wind, a refuge from the storm, the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land." But I wonder if, today, she'd get that chance. I wonder if in today's climate her beauty would jeopardize her growth in godliness. More than one woman has admitted to me that, growing up, she believed her looks were her most important aspect. As far as how she was treated, how well she was accepted, the influence she had over her peer group, the most valued trait among she and her peers, and therefore the one most sought after, was physical beauty. What a tragic waste of focus and spiritual energy!

And, sadly, that's what most males reinforce when we give way to sexual expression outside of marriage. Sex appeal becomes the first thing we notice when we scan a room; it causes us to engage in conversations with women who hold no other interest for us, and it also causes us to ignore interesting or godly women because their faces or their bodies don't captivate us. Since women want men to notice them, they often stoop to our level and seek to engage our attention, even if that means focusing on what is less important.

One of the things I love about marriage, as God designed it, is that it can free us up from viewing women as potential sex objects, in which appearance is the most desirable trait. If I'm committed to not have sex before marriage, I won't relate to young women based on whether they would be good in bed.

Who I spend my time with, and who I choose to get to know, won't be dictated by the size of their breasts or the color of their hair or the shape of their legs. And if I'm committed to my wife after marriage — mentally as well as physically — I won't undress women in my mind, I won't give stereotypically attractive women more attention than others because I'm not viewing them as potential sex objects. I'm able to really get to know them, and appreciate them, on multiple levels — their (non-sexual) passions in life, their wisdom and understanding, their spiritual insight, how God's "divine nature" is seen in them.

All of this helps me to appreciate and love — in a godly, brotherly way — the Macrinas of this world. I can honor a woman's intellect when I actually hear what she is saying instead of wondering what she might look like without wearing any clothes. I can appreciate a woman's spiritual gifting, her humility, and the presence of God in her life.

But the more I give way to lust, the less I will see of God; the disintegrating power of evil will draw me away from the noble and corrupt my perception. I will become, ironically, "blinded by sight." How cruel we are as a society when we value most what women will lose the soonest; and how short-sighted we are when we diminish the wisdom, spiritual maturity, and personal depth that can grow as a woman ages.

Guys, I might sound strange talking like this, since I'm admittedly quite a bit older (45) than the target age group I'm writing to. But I'm married to a wonderful 43-year-old woman, and I resent the fact that our culture would say she's becoming less desirable as a woman. In reality, she's growing in her inner beauty and character, and she's twice the woman she was in her early 20s when I married her. I'm also raising two teenage girls. They have a relationship with God. They have particular spiritual gifts, wonderfully diverse personalities, and dreams about what God will do with their lives. I resent anyone reducing them to the size of their bras or the

numbers that pop up on the scale when they weigh themselves. Both of them are beautiful young women — but if that's the first thing you see, you are sadly blinded to their real worth. You're walking in the darkness. You're going to slam into spiritual walls. Have your eyes stopped seeing women as God sees them? Do you realize the evil you're perpetuating when you let your eyes wound women instead of build them up? Are you willing to adopt as your standard of real manliness the divine image revealed in Jesus Christ, and see with his eyes, think with his mind, and feel with his heart? There is so much more fulfillment in allowing God to use you as a shelter from the wind, and a refuge from the storm, than there is in continually "hunting" women with your eyes. Don't allow your eternal destiny to be corrupted by something so pathetically small-minded as lust. Freedom lies in Paul's words to Timothy: "Treat ... older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with *absolute* purity" ([1 Tim. 5:2](#)).

---

On the transformative love of the husband, I found Nathanael Hawthorne's short story "The Birthmark" to be a fascinating read. (Hat tip: Ryan Nash).

I won't go into the full story here. It has all kinds of implications not only for marriage, but for science, love, idolatry, death, etc. It's a very rich and rewarding story. I simply want to share a few thoughts on it that intersect with the sermon.

In the story, a scientist named Aylmer persuades an exquisitely beautiful woman, Georgiana, to marry him. Georgiana is the perfect representation of feminine beauty, apart from one small defect. Her sole blemish is a small hand-shaped birthmark on her cheek.

Strangely, when Georgiana feels loved, she blushes and the birthmark disappears (cf. Eph. 5:27). But eventually Aylmer comes to be obsessed with the birthmark – and with its removal. As a result, Georgiana cannot help but become incredibly insecure about her facial flaw. She begs him to find some way to remove the stain on her cheek – even if it kills her!

Aylmer takes Georgiana to his lab, where his assistant Aminadab helps in the process of removing the birthmark. Before the operation begins, Aminadab mutters to himself that if Georgiana were his wife, he would not want the



birthmark removed. After a series of tests, Aylmer prepares a potion for Georgiana to drink. She does so willingly, but then begins to die. As her face grows pale, Aylmer's bride attains the perfection they were both seeking. He exclaims to her, "My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!"

But Georgiana knows the perfection isn't going to last. The removal of the birthmark, now described as "the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame," will end her life. The conclusion of the story is very telling:

Alas! it was too true! The fatal hand had grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame. As the last crimson tint of the birthmark--that sole token of human imperfection--faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight. Then a hoarse, chuckling laugh was heard again! Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence which, in this dim sphere of half development, demands the completeness of a higher state. Yet, had Alymer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.

The story is more relevant now than it was when first published in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are a number of different angles from which the tragedy can be viewed, including:

[1] At what price beauty? Aylmer and Georgiana so idolized a particular form of beauty, they were willing to risk life itself in order to attain that beauty. But as soon as they attained it, it slipped away. And even if it had persisted, Aylmer would still not have been satisfied. In a culture in which women will put themselves at great physical risk in order to attain a particular image (e.g., eating disorders), we need to remember that in a fallen world all physical beauty fades. Women need to remember we will be physically perfect only in the resurrection. Moreover, men need to remember that we cannot have a fully satisfying *vision* of

beauty this side of the resurrection either. Only the beatific vision, the revelation of God himself in all his glory, can finally fulfill our craving to behold true beauty.

Georgiana knows that she will not finally satisfy Aylmer: "[A]nd with her whole spirit she prayed that, for a single moment, she might satisfy his highest and deepest conception. Longer than one moment she well knew it could not be; for his spirit was ever on the march, ever ascending, and each instant required something that was beyond the scope of the instant before." Also, note well these closing lines again: "Yet, had Alymer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present."

[2] Science cannot save. While we should be thankful for the power of science as a technological tool, it cannot really transform humanity. In the story, Aylmer's work stands for the modern scientific project. Georgiana represents nature, or more specifically, humanity. Science cannot fix humanity; indeed to use science in such a way is to bring death. Again, this means we should not rely on science to give us the fully satisfying life. Such satisfaction will always elude even our greatest efforts and technological advancements. Science has no answer for death; it cannot bring resurrection life. Thus, we best learn to value the permanent things over those that fade (cf. 1 Pt. 3:1-6).

[3] Self-image is really *others-image*. This harkens back to a point made in a sermon a couple weeks ago. What we think of ourselves is a largely a projection of what we think others think of us. Before Georgiana discovered Aylmer's dissatisfaction with her birthmark, she did not mind it.

"Georgiana," said he, "has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed?"

"No, indeed," said she, smiling; but perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply. "To tell you the truth it has been so often called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so."

"Ah, upon another face perhaps it might," replied her husband; "but never on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks

me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection."

"Shocks you, my husband!" cried Georgiana, deeply hurt; at first reddening with momentary anger, but then bursting into tears. "Then why did you take me from my mother's side? You cannot love what shocks you!"

Initially, Georgiana thought her birthmark was rather charming. After all, this is how others told her they viewed it. But now Georgiana's self-image is at the mercy of her husband. Spouses have unimaginable powers over one another in this area. We can build up our spouses, so they think of themselves in positive terms, or drag them down, so they're completely insecure. Aylmer obviously did the latter to Georgiana. Because Aylmer fixates on Georgiana's one flaw, Georgiana does as well. Finally, she exclaims, "Either remove this dreadful hand, or take my wretched life!" She has let her one flaw make her worthless.

[4] Aylmer seems oblivious to the fact that the mark has disappeared from time to time before he begins to work on scientific solution. When she would blush, "it gradually became more indistinct, and finally vanished amid the triumphant rush of blood that bathed the whole cheek with its brilliant glow. But if any shifting motion caused her to turn pale there was the mark again, a crimson stain upon the snow, in what Aylmer sometimes deemed an almost fearful distinctness." When Aylmer first mentions the birthmark to her, she smiled and "blushed deeply." She thinks he's going to mention how charming the birthmark is: "To tell you the truth it has been so often called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so." When he criticizes the birthmark, she is devastated and concludes that he does not really love her since, "You cannot love what shocks you!"

Aylmer could make the birthmark disappear during certain times if he'd make her blush and smile. That is to say, he could "present her to himself" in perfection if he would only love her. Instead he tries a more mechanical – and deadly -- remedy. The point is obvious: there is no shortcut to presenting your wife to yourself as a glorious bride. Love is the only way. Men, your job is to love your wives in such a way that blemishes fade and disappear.

---

John Calvin's views of marriage moved progressively higher as he matured in his theology and relationships. In the early 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, he wrote that marriage is "a good ordinance, just like farming, building, cobbling, and barbering." While this quotation rightly views marriage as a vocation, it does not exactly celebrate the institution as a central element in God's plan for humanity.

But in subsequent writings, Calvin gave a much more glowing definition of marriage. His later names and descriptions for the marriage relationship include: "a sacred bond," "a holy fellowship," "a divine partnership," "a loving association," "a heavenly calling," "the fountainhead of life," "the holiest kind of company in all the world," and "the principal and most sacred...of all the offices pertaining to human society." (See Kingdon and Witte, pg. 488.)

---

In the sermon, I used the image of marriage as a dance rather than a march. I got this metaphor from Robert Farrar Capon's intriguing little book, *Bed and Board*. Capon's work is very insightful at points, and worth quoting rather extensively.

It is precisely in marriage (a state, you will recall, not to be continued as such in heaven) that they enter into a relationship of superior to inferior – of head to body. And the difference there is not one of worth, ability, or intelligence, but of *role*. It is functional, not organic. It is based on the exigencies of the Dance, not on a judgment of talent. In the ballet, in any intricate dance, one dancer leads, the other follows. Not because one is better (he may or may not be), but because that is his part. Our mistake, here as elsewhere, is to think that equality and diversity are unreconcilable.

The common notion of equality is based on the image of the march. In a parade, really unequal beings are dressed alike, given guns of identical length, trained to hold them at the same angle, and ordered to keep step with a fixed beat. But it is not the parade that is true to life; it is the dance. There you have real equals assigned unequal roles in order that each may achieve his individual perfection in the whole. Nothing is less personal than a parade; nothing more so than a dance. It is the choice image of fulfillment through function, and it comes very close to the heart of the Trinity. Marriage is a hierarchical game played by co-equal persons. Keep that paradox in mind and you move in the freedom of the Dance; alter it, and you grow weary of marching.

But that only says what the headship of the husband doesn't mean. What it does mean is equally misunderstood. The husband is over his wife as the head is over the body. It isn't a description of what ought to be; it just says what *is*. He *is* the head. He will be a good one or a bad one, depending; but if he isn't the head, there isn't any other. He is to be the lover, she the beloved. If he doesn't initiate, she will wither of neglect. She cannot supply what only he can give. If the locomotive doesn't pull, the train doesn't move.

He, then, is to love and cherish her. And he is to do it, first, because he promised it first. She must do it too, of course, but in her own way, as an answering voice, a counterpoint. Unfortunately, it often doesn't work out that way....One of the commonest ways it succeeds in frustrating honest sexuality is to train men to look on women as sources of stimulation, rather than objects of love. They come to marriage after years of being conditioned to respond to certain more or less irrelevant fetishes – the height of heels, the length of hair, the size of waistlines, the prominence of busts. When they become husbands, however, they find that what they have learned to consider Sexy is not too dependably supplied by marriage. Waistlines thicken as the years go by, and busts fall and fashions change. But husbands still wait to be aroused, and not infrequently they wait more than they do anything else. They grow impatient. They complain... [The problem is that] they are being passive when they should be active...what they are doing is responding, not leading, and their wives suffer for it. No human being can afford to settle for being only the *occasion* of somebody else's pleasure. No wife can long endure being treated as if her chief sexual function were to arouse her husband. That puts the shoe on exactly the wrong foot. She is, after all, a person; if her husband never grows from passion and response into action and love – if he doesn't stop waiting to be aroused and realize he's got to make something of a career of arousing – she is not going to find being a wife much of a fulfillment.

---

As I said in the sermon, Proverbs is a helpful guide for women who are wondering what respect should look like. Proverbs is a handbook for young men, but many of its lessons are easily applicable to everyone. Specifically, wives can learn a lot about respect by looking at what Proverbs says about the foolish woman, the nagging woman, etc., as models of what *not* to do. All of that can be contrasted with what the book says about the wise and virtuous woman. Proverbs 19:13 is a good example:

“A foolish son *is* the ruin of his father,  
And the contentions of a wife *are* a continual dripping.”

A nagging wife is, quite frankly, unbearable. Instead of helping her husband, she tears him down. Instead of constructing her home, she destroys it (cf. Prov. 14:1). As one commentator points out, at least a wicked son can be kicked out of the home – but a contentious wife must simply be endured.

What should a man do if he finds himself with a nagging wife? Love her, and then love her some more. Serve her in a way that will soften her up. Then you may find an open door to speak to her effectively about the problem. And in the meantime, realize that there may be a reason why God has given you a wife who criticizes you excessively. Maybe you need it! Reflect on those Proverbs that speak of receiving correction with humility and profit.

---

To many men, the fears and concerns of their wives seem irrational. It’s hard for them to take their wives’ needs and worries seriously. At the same time, the male need for respect and recognition seems silly to a lot of wives. They chuckle at the stereotype of a male ego that needs constant stroking and gets easily manipulated.

But this is where we need to learn to appreciate the differences between men and women. In a marriage each spouse brings a unique perspective to the table. Your spouse’s perspective will seem strange, even alien, to you at times. But instead of dismissing or mocking it, learn from it. Try to see the world from within that perspective. As we’ve seen, this is essential to loving your spouse. It’s also a way of moving towards greater wisdom.

Men, it is not a sign of strength to dismiss your wives’ anxieties and fears. Indeed, real strength is demonstrated in making your wives’ fears your own and addressing them accordingly. She is your body after all. And women, you will find your husbands drifting out of involvement with the family if you think his

need for respect is ridiculous. He will seek to have his needs met elsewhere if you dismiss them. As we've already said, the best way to get your own needs met in a marriage is to discover your spouse's needs and make every effort to meet those needs. Or, to put it another way, the best way to attain happiness in marriage is to seek your own happiness in the happiness of your spouse.

I think G. K. Chesterton said it best, so I will give him the last word (emphasis mine):

Very few people ever state properly the strong argument in favour of marrying for love or against marrying for money. The argument is not that all lovers are heroes and heroines, nor is it that all dukes are profligates or all millionaires cads. The argument is this, *that the differences between a man and a woman are at the best so obstinate and exasperating that they practically cannot be got over unless there is an atmosphere of exaggerated tenderness and mutual interest. To put the matter in one metaphor, the sexes are two stubborn pieces of iron; if they are to be welded together, it must be while they are red-hot. Every woman has to find out that her husband is a selfish beast, because every man is a selfish beast by the standard of a woman. But let her find out the beast while they are both still in the story of "Beauty and the Beast." Every man has to find out that his wife is cross—that is to say, sensitive to the point of madness: for every woman is mad by the masculine standard. But let him find out that she is mad while her madness is more worth considering than anyone else's sanity.*

The whole value of the normal relations of man and woman lies in the fact that they first begin really to criticise each other when they first begin really to admire each other. And a good thing, too. I say, with a full sense of the responsibility of the statement, that it is better that the sexes should misunderstand each other until they marry. It is better that they should not have the knowledge until they have the reverence and the charity. We do not want the highest mysteries of a Divine distinction to be understood before they are desired, and handled before they are understood. That which Mr. Shaw calls the Life Force, but for which Christianity has more philosophical terms, has

created this early division of tastes and habits for that romantic purpose, which is also the most practical of all purposes. Those whom God has sundered, shall no man join.

*The Common Man.* pp.142-143

A few more Chesterton gems:

In everything worth having, even in every pleasure, there is a point of pain or tedium that must be survived, so that the pleasure may revive and endure. The joy of battle comes after the first fear of death; the joy of reading Virgil comes after the bore of learning him; the glow of the sea-bather comes after the icy shock of the sea bath; and the success of the marriage comes after the failure of the honeymoon. All human vows, laws, and contracts are so many ways of surviving with success this breaking point, this instant of potential surrender.

In everything on this earth that is worth doing, there is a stage when no one would do it, except for necessity or honour. It is then that the Institution upholds a man and helps him on to the firmer ground ahead. Whether this solid fact of human nature is sufficient to justify the sublime dedication of Christian marriage is quite another matter; it is amply sufficient to justify the general human feeling of marriage as a fixed thing, dissolution of which is a fault, or at least an ignominy. The essential element is not so much duration as security. Two people must be tied together in order to do themselves justice; for twenty minutes at a dance, or for twenty years in a marriage. In both cases the point is, that if a man is bored in the first five minutes he must go on and force himself to be happy. Coercion is a kind of encouragement; and anarchy (or what some call liberty) is essentially oppressive, because it is essentially discouraging. If we all floated in the air like bubbles, free to drift anywhere at any instant, the practical result would be that no one would have the courage to begin a conversation. It would be so embarrassing to start a sentence in a friendly whisper,



and then have to shout the last half of it because the other party was floating away into the free and formless ether. The two must hold each other to do justice to each other. If Americans can be divorced for "incompatibility of temper" I cannot conceive why they are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a man and a woman, as such, are incompatible.

*What's Wrong with the World*, pp.52-54

There was hugely more sense in the old people who said that a wife and husband ought to have the same religion than there is in all the contemporary gushing about sister souls and kindred spirits and auras of identical colour. As a matter of fact, the more the sexes are in violent contrast the less likely they are to be in violent collision. The more incompatible their tempers are the better. Obviously a wife's soul cannot possibly be a sister soul. It is very seldom so much as a first cousin. There are very few marriages of identical taste and temperament; they are generally unhappy. But to have the same fundamental theory, to think the same thing a virtue, whether you practise or neglect it, to think the same thing a sin, whether you punish or pardon or laugh at it, in the last extremity to call the same thing duty and the same thing disgrace—this really is necessary to a tolerably happy marriage; and it is much better represented by a common religion than it is by affinities and auras.

*A Miscellany of Men*, p.145

In order that life should be a story or romance to us, it is necessary that a great part of it, at any rate, should be settled for us without our permission. If we wish life to be a system, this may be a nuisance; but if we wish it to be a drama, it is an essential. It may often happen, no doubt, that a drama may be written by somebody else which we like very little. But we should like it still less if the author came before the curtain every hour or so, and forced on us the whole

trouble of inventing the next act. A man has control over many things in his life; he has control over enough things to be the hero of a novel. But if he had control over everything, there would be so much hero that there would be no novel. And the reason why the lives of the rich are at bottom so tame and uneventful is simply that they can choose the events. They are dull because they are omnipotent. They fail to feel adventures because they can make the adventures. The thing which keeps life romantic and full of fiery possibilities is the existence of these great plain limitations which force all of us to meet the things we do not like or do not expect. It is vain for the supercilious moderns to talk of being in uncongenial surroundings. To be in a romance is to be in uncongenial surroundings. To be born into this earth is to be born into uncongenial surroundings, hence to be born into a romance.

*Heretics*, pp.194-195