

The Lordship of Christ over the Family: A Puritan Perspective

—Martin Williams—

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Introduction

The Puritans built on the teaching of the Reformers for their positive view of marriage in striking contrast to the medieval Catholic belief that the celibacy practiced by the clergy, monks and nuns was much better, more virtuous, more Christlike, and more pleasing to God.¹ The Puritans, by contrast, celebrated marriage as a creation ordinance and a good gift from God himself. The Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) wrote:

It is not good, that man should be alone. And therefore determined he with himselfe to make an helpe and comfort unto man, In which process we perceive all ready, where holy wedlock was instituted, namely in the paradise and garden of pleasure: yea and when it as ordained even in the beginning of the world, before the fal of man in al prosperity.²

In a wedding sermon for a friend published near the beginning of the next century (1623), the Puritan Thomas Gataker (1574-1654) wrote:

A good wife is God's gift...It was one of the first reall and royall gifts that God with his owne hand bestowed upon Adam. And it must needs bee no small matter that God giveth with his owne hand. The Kings Almoner may cast small silver about: but if the King give a man somewhat with his owne hand out of his purse or pocket, it is expected it should be a piece of gold at least. The woman was Gods owne gift to Adam. And shee was God's gift bestowed on him, to consummate and make up his happinesse.³

Marriage, then, was not the second best option for those who could not aspire to the high calling of celibacy; rather it was God's ideal for humans as he originally ordained and designed it.⁴ As William Perkins (1558-1602) says:

Marriage was made and appointed by God himself, to be the foundation and seminary of all sorts and kinds of life in the commonwealth and in the church...Those families wherein the service of God is performed are, as it were, littler churches; yea, even a kind of paradise on earth.⁵

¹ See Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 40-48, who looks at the Puritan rejection of the medieval attitude to marriage and sex (41): 'The Catholic attitudes of the Middle Ages provide the necessary background against which we must understand the Puritan view of sex and marriage. In general, the Puritans affirmed what the Catholics denied and denied what the Catholics had traditionally affirmed. Many of the Puritan pronouncements, in fact, occurred in head-to-head debates with Catholics.' See also Joel Beeke, *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008), 323-24.

² Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christian State of Matrimony* (Translated by Miles Coverdale. London, 1575), fol. 1.

³ Thomas Gataker, *A Good Wife Gods Gift: And, A Wife Indeed. Two Marriage Sermons* (London: John Haviland, 1623), 9. John Downname (1571-1652), *The Plea of the Poore. Or a Treatise of Beneficence and Almes-deeds: teaching how these Christian duties are rightly to be performed* (London, 1616), 15 writes: 'God the first Institutor of marriage, gave the wife unto the husband, to bee, not his servant, but his helper, counsellor and comforter.'

⁴ John Cotton, *A Meet Hel Or, a wedding sermon preached at New-Castle in New-England, June 19th 1694 at the marriage of Mr. John Clark and Mrs. Elizabeth Woodbridge* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1699), 15, writes, 'Women are creatures without which there is no comfortable Living for man...They are sort of Blasphemers who then despise and decry them, and call them *a necessary Evil*, for they are *a necessary Good*.'

⁵ William Perkins quoted in John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Second edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 257.

The Puritans not only celebrated marriage as a creation ordinance but also as a mirror of Christ's redeeming love for his bride, the church. Williams Gouge's (1575-1653) 693 page work *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622),⁶ based on careful and practical exposition of Ephesians 5:21-6:9, sets forth the major principle of marriage: the husband is to love his wife just 'as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (v 25), while the wife is to submit to her husband just 'as the church submits to Christ' (v 24).⁷ The heart of this principle is set out in Ephesians 5:31-32 where the apostle Paul writes:

'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' [Gen 2:24] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The mystery is this: Christ's covenant relationship with his church is not patterned after human marriage. Rather, marriage is patterned after Christ's covenant relationship with his Church.⁸ In a day and age when marriage is being undermined, redefined, and sidelined, William Gouge sets forth a biblical vision for a holy, healthy and happy marriage under the lordship of Jesus Christ who is prophet, priest and king. Beeke and Pederson describe 'Gouge [as] a skilled expositor who draws practical applications from the Epistles in instructing families how to walk in a manner worthy of their Lord.'⁹ This is a penetrating and practical work that provides the reader with rich practical and pastoral insights that we need to hear today.¹⁰ Before we delve into Gouge's book, it would be useful for us to know something about the author first.

William Gouge (1575-1653)

Commenting on his book *Of Domesticall Duties*, Brett Usher, in his article on William Gouge in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, writes:¹¹

Gouge is recognized as one of the subtlest of early modern writers to articulate the concept of 'companionable' marriage—his own was regarded as exemplary—and of considerate, rather than merely prescriptive, parenthood. His psychological insights into the nature of childhood and adolescence can be breathtaking in their modernity. He even touches on the question of child-abuse, a subject effectively taboo until the 1970s.¹²

Reid says that 'Dr Gouge was so eminently exemplary and religious in the whole course of his life, that he was called an Arch Puritan by some scoffers.'¹³ 'He generally rose about four o'clock in the morning, during the summer; and in winter, he rose before it was light, that he might have the better opportunity for his own devotion.'¹⁴ 'He...read fifteen

⁶ Those 693 pages were eagerly devoured by young Puritan couples as they got married. In fact Gouge's book was the most read book by Puritan families after John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

⁷ As J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 263, observes, 'It should by now be clear that, in Edmund Morgan's words, 'the Puritans were neither prudes nor ascetics. They knew how to laugh, and they knew how to love.' The realism of their affirmations of matrimonial affection stemmed from the fact that they went to the Bible for their understanding of the relationship—to Genesis for its institution, to Ephesians for its full meaning, to Leviticus for its hygiene, to Proverbs for its management, to several New Testament books for its ethic, and to Esther, Ruth, and the Song of Songs for illustrations and exhibitions of the ideal.'

⁸ Piper, *Desiring God*, 181; Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 25.

⁹ Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 289.

¹⁰ Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* has recently been published in three volumes by Reformation Heritage Books under the title *Building a Godly Home* (647 pages). I will be quoting from this three volume reprint (volume 1: *A Holy Vision for Family Life*, 2014; volume 2: *A Holy Vision for a Happy Marriage*, 2013; volume 3, *A Holy Vision for Raising Children*, 2014).

¹¹ Not a lot of information on William Gouge is available and so in this section I am very reliant on three main sources: Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 343-63; Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 284-89; Brett Usher, 'William Gouge,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹² Usher, 'William Gouge,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com. Accessed 27/08/2015.

¹³ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 352.

¹⁴ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 355.

chapters [of the Bible] everyday; five in the morning, five after dinner, and five before he went to bed.¹⁵ Reid goes on to describe him as one who ‘delighted much in communion with God, and in the emanations of his love.’¹⁶ ‘His confessions of sin,’ says Beeke and Pederson, ‘were accompanied with much brokenness of heart, self-abhorrency, and justifying of God. In prayer, he was pertinent, judicious, spiritual, seasonable, accompanied with faith and fervor, like a true Son of Jacob wrestling with tears and supplications.’¹⁷ A contemporary of Gouge writes of him: ‘He studied much to magnify Christ, and to debase himself. He was accustomed to say, ‘When I look upon myself, I see nothing but emptiness and weakness; but when I look upon Christ, I see nothing but fullness and sufficiency.’¹⁸

In 1607 Gouge was ordained into the ministry, and in 1608 was called as Minister at the parish church of St. Anne Blackfriars, London, where he remained until his death 45 years later. He preached twice every Sunday and once on Wednesday. After the Sunday sermon he would invite the poor from his neighbourhood into his home for lunch, after which he would repeat the essence of the morning sermon in a more informal manner.¹⁹ His Wednesday lectures were so popular that, according to Usher: ‘Country clergy and ‘godly Christians’ visiting the capital thought not their business fully ended, unless they had been at Black-Friars lecture [that is, one of Gouge’s weekly lectures].’ Hundreds of people were converted and nurtured in the faith through his ministry. Brett Usher concludes: ‘Gouge’s pulpit became the most celebrated in London.’²⁰

Gouge was not just a great pastor but also a good friend, a devoted husband and a loving father. Gouge had 13 children, seven sons and six daughters, eight of whom reached maturity. Elizabeth, Gouge’s wife, died in childbirth with the thirteenth child and Gouge never remarried. His biographer describes him as a ‘delight to both his friends and his family.’ His disposition was so meek, writes Beeke and Pederson, that ‘[n]o one, his wife, nor children, nor servant with whom he lived and worked all those years ever observed an angry countenance, nor heard an angry word proceed from him toward any of them.’²¹ He practiced family worship regularly. His biographer notes: ‘His family resembled a church in the house, for prayer, morning and evening, and reading the Holy Scriptures; and for catechising, and government.’²²

In 1622 Gouge published his most celebrated work *Of Domesticall Duties*. In the following year, 1623, Gouge was nominated a member of the Westminster assembly. In 1624 he was appointed to the committee that examined ministers. In 1625 he was appointed to the committee responsible for drafting the Confession of Faith; and then in 1626 only with Cornelius Burges he was elected as one of the assembly’s two assessors. On 8 December of the same year he and his co-assessor were appointed to fill the prolocutor’s chair by turns.²³

In his latter years Gouge suffered from a number of illnesses. ‘[He] was afflicted with sharp and bitters pains, which were occasioned by [kidney] stones, asthma, or disease of the lungs, and other distempers, he never complained of God for his suffering, but often of himself for sinning. He was now particularly attentive to the sovereignty and holiness of God and the evil nature of sin ... He often said, “I am a great sinner, but I comfort myself in a great Saviour.”’²⁴ As his death approached and his pain increased, Gouge used what time and strength he had left to finish his commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews (three large volumes at 400 pages each). The work was almost complete by the time of his death (except for the last half of chapter 13 which was completed by his son Thomas). In his extreme pain he would

¹⁵ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 355.

¹⁶ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 355.

¹⁷ Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 285.

¹⁸ Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 285-86

¹⁹ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 349.

²⁰ Usher, ‘William Gouge,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com. Accessed 27/08/2015.

²¹ Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 285.

²² Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 285.

²³ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 350.

²⁴ Usher, ‘William Gouge,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com. Accessed 27/08/2015.

²⁵ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 355, 358.

often repeat the words of Job: ‘Shall we receive good from the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?’²⁵ Reid goes on to note that:

When the time of his departure was at hand, his spirit became more lively and cheerful, than it had been for several days before, probably from the easing prospect that his death was near. His speeches were now very heavenly, as if he were already in heaven. He spoke much in the admiration of God’s free grace, and the riches of his mercy in Jesus Christ. He greatly rejoiced in Christ Jesus.²⁶

As he approached death he said:

Death, next to Jesus Christ, you are my best friend. When I die, I am sure to be with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is my rejoicing.²⁷

Gouge died on 12 December, 1653, at the age of 78, having faithfully served as Minister at the parish church of St. Anne Blackfriars, London, for forty-five years, as a prominent member of the Westminster Assembly and the committee that drafted the Confession of Faith, as a prolific writer of a number of major works that went through many printings, as a devoted husband, loving father, and godly servant of Jesus Christ.

The Lordship of Christ over the Family

Gouge’s book *Of Domesticall Duties* is made up of eight treatises which can be further divided in four main categories: (1) An Exposition of Ephesians 5:21-6:9;²⁸ (2) Husbands and Wives;²⁹ (3) Parents and Children;³⁰ (4) Masters and Servants.³¹ As the fourth category—masters and servants—is not relevant now, we will focus our attention, firstly, on husbands and wives and then, secondly, on parents and children.

1. The Lordship of Christ and Cultivating a Godly Marriage

A. The Duties of Husbands

In discussing the role of the husband, Gouge turns to Ephesians 5:25-27:

²⁵ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 358.

²⁶ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 360.

²⁷ Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines*, 360; Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 287.

²⁸ ‘The first Treatise. An exposition of that part of Scripture out of which Domesticall Duties are raised.’

²⁹ ‘The second Treatise. Part I. Of Husband and Wife, who are so to be accounted.’

‘The second Treatise. Part II. Of common-mutuall duties betwixt Man and Wife.’

‘The third Treatise. Of wives particular duties.’

‘The fourth Treatise. Husbands particular duties.’

³⁰ ‘The fifth Treatise. Duties of children.’

‘The sixth Treatise. Duties of parents.’

³¹ ‘The seventh Treatise. Duties of servants.’

‘The eighth Treatise. Duties of masters.’

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.³²

We see here that the Lordship of Christ and his covenant relationship with his redeemed people is the controlling paradigm for the godly marriage. With regard to the husband William Gouge writes:

All the duties of a husband are included under this one word, love. In order that a husband might be better directed, and that he might be more provoked, the example of Christ and of his love to the church, is set forth very strongly. It is set forth generally in these words, 'even as Christ also loved the church,' and then more particular in the words following [i.e., vv 26-30].³³

As Gouge points out, the particular duty of the husband in the marriage covenant as it is modelled on the covenant of grace is love:

This affection of *love* is a distinct duty in itself, especially belonging to the husband, and also a common condition which must be joined to every other duty of a husband, to season and sweeten them...As salt must be first and last upon the table, and eaten with every bit of meat, so must love be first in the husbands heart, and last out of it, and mixed with everything in which he has to do with his wife.³⁴

While insisting that love for the Lord must be first and foremost in the life of the believer, and 'that human loves are only in shape so long as they feed into it and do not divert us from it, the Puritans expected and indeed directed that wedded love should be ardent and robust... They were exuberant in expressing their love for God, so they believed that they should be with their spouses.'³⁵ On the other hand Gouge condemns

the disposition of such husbands who have no warmth or heart of affection in them, but, like Stoics, delight no more in their own wives than in any other women, nor count them any dearer than others, a disposition in no way authorized by the Word. The faithful saints of God... were not Stoics, without all affection. Nor did they think it a matter inappropriate for them to delight especially in their wives (witness Isaac's playing with his wife in Genesis 26:8) for this is a privilege which belongs to the state of marriage.³⁶

Joel Beeke tells 'a lovely old story of a Puritan minister who stopped one of his parishioners because he saw him doting on his wife. The minister said to him, "I actually think you love your wife too much." The man was so convicted that he went home and said to himself, "I love God above all, but the minister said I love my wife too much." He was just beside himself. And so he said, "Well, the only thing I can do is go to the Scriptures." And he came across Ephesians

³² Emphasis added.

³³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:50-51. In volume two Gouge writes (268): 'A greater and stronger motive cannot be given than the example of Christ. Example in itself is of great force to motivate us to do anything, especially if it is the example of some great one, a man of position and fame. Who is greater than Christ? What more worthy pattern is there? If the example of the church be of great force to move wives to be subject to their husbands, the example of Christ must be of much greater force to move husbands to love their wives. It is a great honor to be similar to Christ, and His example is a perfect pattern.'

³⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:51.

³⁵ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: crossway, 1990). 265. On this theme see especially Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Mansfield Centre: Martino, 2014), 12-19. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 15, writes: '[T]he ministers hastened to warn husbands and wives that their love for each other required moderation. The highest love of all Christians was reserved for God Himself; and since human beings, husbands and wives, were only the creatures of God, they could not take His place. Every benefit and comfort obtained from them came ultimately from Him. To prize them too highly was idolatry. When we take too much pleasure in any creature, 'when we exceedingly delight our selves in Husbands, or Wives, or Children,' it 'much benumbs and dims the light of the Spirit.' Man and wife forgot their Maker when they were 'so transported with affection,' that they aimed 'at no higher end than marriage it self [John Cotton].'

³⁶ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:195.

5:25 and he looked at it and said, “Christ gave himself for the church, but I don’t give myself for my wife, I actually don’t love my wife enough!” And he went back to the pastor and he said, “Look here pastor,” and she showed him Ephesians 5:25, and the pastor looked at it, and then looked back at the man, and said, “You’re right, go home and love your wife. Love your wife absolutely. Love your wife purposefully. Love your wife realistically. Love you wife sacrificially.”³⁷ Gouge agrees:

He [the husband] ought therefore to delight in his wife wholeheartedly, that is, so to delight in her as wholly and only delighting in her. In this respect the prophet’s [Ezekiel] wife is called the desire, or delight, or pleasure of his eyes (Ezek. 24:16), that in which he is most delighted.³⁸

In fact Gouge says that a husband ought

to esteem her so highly, to feel such fervent affections, to regard her to tenderly, *that others may think him even to dote on her*. ...Read the Song of Songs, and in it you shall observe such affection manifested by Christ to his spouse, as would make one think he did (with reverence in a holy manner to use the phrase) even err in his love and dote on her. This is a good pattern and example for husbands, for nothing is more lovely than a good wife.³⁹

Nothing communicates the grace of God to a wife more than the husband’s love for her. When the husband expresses Christlike unconditional love for his wife, the nature of the grace of God informs and builds up the wife’s understanding of her beauty, worth and preciousness.⁴⁰ Such love is informed by Ephesians 5:25:

Husbands, love your wives, ***as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.***⁴¹

Gouge draws our attention to two things that husbands must learn from Christ’s example in this text:

1. Husbands must come as near as they can to Christ in loving their wives. Because they can never love so much as Christ did, they must never think they have loved enough.
2. Though their love in measure cannot equal Christ's love, yet in manner, it must be like Christ's, a preventing, true, free, pure, exceeding, constant love.⁴²

That is the heart of Christ-like, biblical headship. Not *authoritarianism*, but as Gouge puts it, ‘[a] husband’s *affectionate authority* over his wife.’⁴³ Gouge writes:

Their position is a position of *authority*, which without love will soon turn into *tyranny*. Their responsibility is especially and above all, *to seek the good of their wives*. Because wives are the most important and greatest responsibility of husbands, so their most vigorous and greatest care must be for them.⁴⁴

The husband who comes home from work and plops himself in front of the TV or internet and orders his wife around like a slave has abandoned the way of Christ. As Jesus says in Luke 22:26: ‘Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.’ Husbands take their cue from Christ who, on the night before he was

³⁷ Joel Beeke, ‘Living in the Family: Thoughts from William Gouge,’ <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=82313124393> (accessed 27/08/2015).

³⁸ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:192-93.

³⁹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:194 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Chapell, *Ephesians*, 282.

⁴¹ Emphasis added.

⁴² Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:51.

⁴³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:180 (this is actually the title of chapter 13 of volume).

⁴⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:182.

crucified, performed the task of the lowliest slave, as he got up from the meal, laid aside his garments, dressed himself in a servant's towel, and washed the filthy feet of his disciples. Bryan Chapell tells the following story:

A leader not only in his home but also in the evangelical world is J. Robertson McQuilkin. In 1990, however, he resigned prematurely from the presidency of Columbia Bible College and Seminary because his wife Muriel, afflicted with Alzheimer's disease, needed his care. During his last two years as president he wrote that it was increasingly difficult to keep Muriel at home. When she was with him she was content, but without him she became distressed and panic-stricken. Although the walk from their home to the school was a mile round trip, Muriel would often try to follow her husband to the office. Seeking him over and over she would sometimes make that trip ten times a day. When he took her shoes off at night, McQuilkin sometimes found her feet bloodied from all the walking. Washing her feet prepared him for a similar Christlike act that he ultimately performed for her. He sacrificed his position to take care of her.⁴⁵

This is the leadership of humility, the headship of service—husbanding by sacrificial love. It is to this that Christ calls men who would be Christ-like heads of their homes. A Christian husband leads by service, governs by humility, and heads his family through selfless love. He has the primary biblical responsibility in the home to set a spiritual standard by his own sacrifice and service to make God's grace evident to everyone in house.⁴⁶ It is crucial in this day and age that husbands do not let the rhetoric of unbiblical feminism intimidate them and cause them to abandon the Christlike way of biblical headship. Biblical headship in the home is the exercise of that God-given authority by which a man does all that that is within is power to do good to those of his own household, and especially his wife, without any thought to personal cost or sacrifice.⁴⁷ In this way men most reflect the lordship of Christ in their marriages. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, which was drafted by Gouge's committee asks:

Q. 23. What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

Gouge argues that this should also function as a pattern for husbands:

He is, under God, all in all to her; in the family he is a *king* to govern and aid her, a *priest* to pray with her and for her, a *prophet* to teach and instruct her. As the head is placed in the highest place over the body, and understanding placed in it, to govern, direct, protect, and every way seek the good of the body, and as Christ is united to the church as a spouse, and made her head, that she might be saved, maintained, and provided for by Him; so for this end was a husband placed in his place of higher rank; and his authority was committed to him, to be a saviour of his wife.⁴⁸

And when husbands abdicate their roles as heads, says Gouge, they lose their ability to do good to their wives: 'If then a husband relinquishes his authority, he takes away his ability to do that good, and show those fruits of love which otherwise he might.'⁴⁹ Gouge concludes:

The good of the wife herself is thus also much promoted, even as the good of the body is helped forward by the head's abiding in his position. Should the head be put under any of the parts of the body, the body

⁴⁵ Chapell, *Ephesians*, 286.

⁴⁶ Chapell, *Ephesians*, 286.

⁴⁷ Chapell, *Ephesians*, 287.

⁴⁸ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:177. See also Joel Beeke, *How Should Men Lead their Families*.

⁴⁹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:184.

and all the parts of it would certainly receive much damage by it: even so the wife and whole family would feel the damage of the husband's loss of his authority.⁵⁰

To this Gouge adds the following duties for husbands which are discussed in his book:

1. Kindly and gratefully accept every good duty which his wife performs.⁵¹
2. Patiently and humbly reprove his wife with gentleness and tender love.⁵²
3. Conduct himself with gentleness and kindness toward his wife.⁵³
4. Provide for his wife and protect her from things harmful to her.⁵⁴

B. The Duties of Wives

The result of all this, as we turn very briefly to the duties of wives, will be, for the most part, a response to that loving authority of respect and submission on the part of the wife that Scripture calls for (Ephesians 5:22-24). As John Piper says:

*You [the husband] should feel the greater responsibility to take the lead in the things of the Spirit; you should lead the family in a life of prayer, in the study of God's Word, and in worship; you should lead in giving the family a vision of its meaning and mission; you should take the lead in shaping the moral fabric of the home and in governing its happy peace. I have never met a woman who chafes under such Christlike leadership. But I know of too many wives who are unhappy because their husbands have abdicated their God-ordained leadership and have no moral vision, no spiritual conception of what a family is for, and therefore no desire to lead anyone anywhere.*⁵⁵

Just as it is the role of the church to humbly submit to the lordship of Christ, so it is the role of the wife to humbly submit to the affectionate authority of her husband, so long as the husband does not contradict Christ who is of course the supreme authority over all (Ephesians 5:22-24):

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Once again, the lordship of Christ and his covenant relationship with his church is the controlling paradigm for the godly marriage. Gouge writes:

That which the church does to Christ, a wife must do to her husband. The church is subject to Christ. Therefore a wife must be subject to her husband.⁵⁶

This submission does not suggest spiritual inequality, any more than Christ is inferior to the Father. Rather, as Paul points out elsewhere (1 Corinthians 11), just as Christ voluntarily submitted himself to the Father during the time of his humiliation, so Paul calls upon wives to submit themselves to their husbands. To the husband God gives authority for biblical headship that is designed to lead a family in paths of sacrificial service to God. To the wife God commits a

⁵⁰ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:185.

⁵¹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:196-214.

⁵² Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:215-224.

⁵³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:225-236.

⁵⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:237-256.

⁵⁵ Piper, *Desiring God*, 184.

⁵⁶ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:35. See also 2:178-79.

willingness to honour and support the husband's leadership so that he can carry out these responsibilities. Each has responsibility for the other to the end that the family unit is whole, happy, and healthy before God. It is crucial in the present time that wives do not buckle under the weight of unbiblical feminist agendas and rhetoric to abdicate their God-given role to honour, respect, and support their husband's God-given role of headship in the home (so far as it does not contradict Christ) and to use her gifts for the good of her husband and her family.

In addition to the general responsibility of wives to show submission and reverence to their husbands, Gouge includes some of the following duties for wives:

1. Submit to Christ before they submit to their husbands.⁵⁷
2. Help their husbands establish Christ's kingdom in their home.⁵⁸
3. Be content with their husband's work, social standing, and financial status.⁵⁹
4. Be willing to dwell with their husband wherever their calling lies.⁶⁰

The Puritan Thomas Gataker sums it up well by saying that a good wife is:

The best companion in wealth;
The fittest and readiest assistant in work;
The greatest comfort in crosses and griefs;
The only warrantable and comfortable means of issue and posterity;
A singular and sovereign remedy ordained by God against incontinency,
And the greatest grace and honor that can be, to him that hath her.⁶¹

2. The Lordship of Christ and Raising a Godly Family

We turn now to the subject of the Lordship of Christ and Raising a Godly family (Volume 3 of Gouge's work). In volume three, *A Holy Vision for Raising Children*, Gouge calls parents to countercultural attitudes and responsibilities. He addresses matters of love,⁶² teaching,⁶³ nurture,⁶⁴ admonition,⁶⁵ correction,⁶⁶ direction,⁶⁷ praying,⁶⁸ and providing for children.⁶⁹ He deals with these matters in a way any good Puritan would—by opening Scripture with numerous applications and examples to prove the doctrine.⁷⁰ This volume is an exposition of Ephesians 6:1-4:

Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction *of the Lord*.⁷¹

⁵⁷ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:156-79.

⁵⁸ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:87-97.

⁵⁹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:152-155.

⁶⁰ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 2:144-148.

⁶¹ Gataker, *A Good Wife Gods Gift: And, A Wife Indeed*, 166.

⁶² Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:84-86.

⁶³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:110-129

⁶⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:109-133

⁶⁵ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:134-136

⁶⁶ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:136-146

⁶⁷ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:147-167

⁶⁸ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3: 3:87-88

⁶⁹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:92-95.

⁷⁰ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:ix.

⁷¹ Emphasis added.

The controlling idea here, says Gouge, is the lordship of Christ:

The clause added, 'in the Lord' ... puts forth a *limitation, direction, and motivation*. It limits by showing that children's obedience to their parents is to be controlled by the obedience which they owe to Christ, and may not go beyond those limits. It directs by showing that in obeying their parents, they must have an eye to Christ, and so obey them as Christ may approve. It motivates by showing that parents bear the image of Christ, and in that respect children must obey their parents.⁷²

How should a recognition of Christ's lordship over the family influence our parenting? What follows is just a small sample from over two-hundred pages of biblical thinking about and practical suggestions for child rearing. As the believing parent engages in these practices, he or she must always keep in mind that, as Gouge says, 'The fountain of parents' duties is *love*.⁷³ The following four duties are crucial when it comes to the duty of raising godly children under the Lordship of Christ.

(1) Pray for Your Children

The first and best stream which issues out of this fountain of love is faithful and fervent prayer. This extends itself to all things, at all times, throughout the whole course of the child's life. It is the first and the last duty which parents ought to perform to their children, even that which they, must do without intermission: 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17).⁷⁴

The goal of every godly parent should be to leave behind for their children a treasury of prayers rather than a treasury of gold and silver.⁷⁵ Gouge, you will remember, practiced what he preached, rising every morning at 4:00am to commune with God in prayer and to bring the needs of his family and friends, church and society before the throne of God. Similarly, it is said of the Puritan Joseph Alleine (1634-68):

When the week began he would say, 'Another week is now before us, let us spend this week for God,' and each morning, 'Now let us live this one day well!' 'All the time of his health,' writes his wife, 'he did rise constantly at or before four o'clock, and on the Sabbath sooner, if he did wake; he would be much troubled if he heard any smiths, or shoemakers, or such tradesmen, at work at their trades before he was in his duties with God; saying to me after "O how this noise shames me! doth not my master deserve more than theirs?" From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation, and singing of psalms, which he much delighted in, and did daily practise alone, as well as in his family.'⁷⁶

It may not be wise or practical for us to rise at four o'clock in the morning, but the principal here is important: The main duty of parents remains to prayerfully labour and laboriously pray for the salvation and welfare of their children.

⁷² Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:162. Again Gouge says (3:75-76): 'the position of a parent is presented by this phrase, 'in the Lord' (Eph. 6:1), which as it defines a limitation, and gives a direction to children, so it adds a spur to them, to stir them up to perform their duty. It shows that parents are to their children in the Lord's place. As an evidence of it, God has shared with them this glorious and honorable title 'father,' which particularly belongs to Himself. Now then, parents being to their children in God's place, and by virtue of their position bearing God's image, children in obeying their parents, obey God; in refusing to obey them, refuse to obey God. This first motive is a strong motive. For who is so empty of religion, but will think it very appropriate that God should be honored? Or who is so ungodly, as to refuse to do his duty to God? Here then children may learn in one main point how to honor the Lord, and show themselves children of God. And by it let them know that disobedient and unfaithful children that resist the authority of parents resist the ordinance of God and receive to themselves condemnation (Rom. 13:2).'

⁷³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:84 (emphasis added).

⁷⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:87.

⁷⁵ John G. Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides, today called Vanuatu, recalls the powerful example of his father's prayer life: 'How much my father's prayers at this time impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the Heathen world to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Saviour, and learned to know and love him as our Divine friend' (Paton, *Autobiography*, 21).

⁷⁶ Joseph Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1959). 8-9.

Parents who neglect this, even while providing their children every other worldly comfort and opportunity, waste what God has given them and ultimately do their children great harm. As the Puritan William Gurnall wrote:

Can there be a greater heartache in this life than to see your own child running full speed toward hell, and know that you were the one who outfitted him for the race? Oh, do your best while they are young and in your constant care, to win them to God and set them on the road to heaven.⁷⁷

Gouge concludes:

There is no one thing in which and by which parents may do more good for their children than in and by true prayer. God has sanctified prayer as a means to receive all blessings from Himself, the fountain of all blessing. If therefore God's blessing is of use for children (what atheists are they that do not believe that!) then also is prayer useful by which it is obtained.⁷⁸

(2) Walk in Godliness before Your Children

That leads to a second and related point which can be briefly stated: Parents should labour, by God's grace, to leave a godly example to their children. 'Example is a real instruction and add a sharp edge to admonition,' writes Gouge. 'Much more shall a religious parent do by practice than by precept.'⁷⁹ Gouge says that the best inheritance a parent can leave for his children is not money, or an estate, or worldly status, but the inheritance of godly example:

If parents have been persons of good conduct in their lifetime, as religious towards God, just in their dealings with men, merciful to those who stood in need of their help, doing much good in their place, and so ended their days with a good reputation, it is a special means to maintain and continue this their reputation, for children to walk in their steps, and to work to be like them.⁸⁰

George Whitefield (1714-1770) once spent a weekend in the home of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). What Whitefield, an unmarried man at the time, saw in the household deeply affected him. He wrote:

Mr Edwards is a solid, excellent Christian. ... I think I have not seen his fellow [or equal] in all New England... [I] felt great satisfaction in being at the house of Mr Edwards. A sweeter couple I have not yet seen. Their children were ... examples of Christian simplicity. Mrs Edwards is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which for some months, I have put up to God, that he would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.⁸¹

Beeke and Jones ask: 'What if someone stayed in your home for a while? What would he see? What would he hear? These are searching questions.'⁸²

⁷⁷ Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 176

⁷⁸ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:87-88.

⁷⁹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:125.

⁸⁰ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:63. The contrary are those parents who 'care only for the temporal and civil good of their children. Their children may be well fed and clothed, and brought up in some profitable vocation, by which they may well support themselves in this world, but little thought is given or care taken for their spiritual life in this world, or eternal life in the world to come' (3:125).

⁸¹ Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield, The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 1:475, 537-38.

⁸² Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 860.

(3) Have Your Children Baptized

Thirdly, parents ought to have their children baptised:

There is a further duty to be performed by parents to their children even in infancy, and that is regarding their spiritual good, which is this, *parents ought to see to it that their children be rightly baptised in due season.*⁸³

Puritans like William Gouge viewed the Scriptures through the lens of covenant theology. The chief manifestation of this is their practice of infant baptism. The Heidelberg Catechism's question 74 is typical of the Reformed and Puritan view:

Are infants also to be baptized?

Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God...They must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.

Gouge believed that children belong to the covenant God makes with believers (Acts 2:39; 1 Cor 7:14) and therefore should receive the covenant sign and seal of baptism.⁸⁴ Just as the believing Israelite had to circumcise his son under the Old Covenant, so under the New Covenant believing parents are to baptise their children as a sign and seal of their inclusion in the covenant of grace.⁸⁵ Gouge points out that '[t]he commandment of God concerning circumcising children...is now under the gospel replaced by baptism (Col 2:11-13).'⁸⁶ Gouge did not believe that baptism has any inherent power to save sinners (as did Roman Catholicism). Rather he believed that infants ought to be baptised on covenantal grounds in that they are visible members of the covenant of grace.⁸⁷ Michael Milton's words echo the sentiment of every Puritan pastor when he writes:

The joy of infant baptism is so remarkable because, you, the pastor, are, personally, fulfilling the glorious Great Commission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In this there is unsurpassed vocational satisfaction. Now, I say that you are fulfilling the Great Commission because you are not only baptizing them but also inaugurating the child's journey of Christian nurture and growth as you and the family 'teach them whatsoever [Jesus Christ] taught.'⁸⁸

Now of course it is important, as Milton points out, for those infants who have been baptised to come to true saving faith later on. Infants of at least one believing parent⁸⁹ belong to the Lord Jesus Christ by way of external covenant, but they must be brought into internal covenant through regeneration and saving faith in Jesus Christ. That leads to our final point.

⁸³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:96.

⁸⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:97, bases this on '[t]he promise of God made to them (Gen 17:7), for seeing that God is so gracious to extend his promise to our children (Acts 2:39), our case must be to obtain the seal which God offers for the conformation of that promise.'

⁸⁵ On which see Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 725-41; Beeke, *Living for God's Glory*, 336-37.

⁸⁶ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:97.

⁸⁷ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:99.

⁸⁸ Michael Milton, *The Secret Life of a Pastor*, 53-54.

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:14: 'For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.'

(4) Train Your Children in Godliness and True Piety

Parents ought to train their children in godliness and true piety. Here Gouge draws our attention to Ephesians 6:4:

The spiritual good of children in their childhood is to be sought by parents. Therefore *parents must train up their children in true piety*. This is explicitly commanded in Ephesians 6:4 by the phrase ‘admonition of the Lord.’⁹⁰

Gouge says that ‘[p]iety is the best thing that a parent can teach his child, Education, civility, vocation, and inheritance are all nothing without piety.’⁹¹ This will involve at least two things:

(a) Daily Instruction in the Word of God:

God should be worshipped by daily reading and instruction from his Word. ‘Whatever principles of piety parents teach their children,’ says Gouge, ‘they must be sure that they are grounded on God’s Word. Thus shall parents be sure to feed them with good, wholesome, spiritual food, such that shall work to their spiritual nourishment and eternal life.’⁹² Edmund Morgan says that ‘[c]hildren were taught to read in order that they might gain a first-hand knowledge of the Bible.’⁹³ Gouge writes:

When children begin to read, let them read the Holy Scriptures. Thus was Timothy trained up from a child (2 Tim. 3:15). Thus will children drink in godliness with learning, for there is a secret power hidden in the Holy Scriptures (which are God’s own Word) more than in any books of men, so as through God’s blessing there may by this means be an inward work of grace in children even in their young years.⁹⁴

Michael Milton warns:

Many broken-hearted parents come to see that neglect of family devotions is an almost certain recipe for a crisis of faith in their child. Nothing is more important in the father’s role [or Mother’s if it is a single parent family] in the home than opening the sacred Word and instructing his family.⁹⁵

Family life under the Puritan Sir Thomas Abney was described in these words:

Here were every day the morning and evening sacrifices of prayer and praise, and reading the Holy Scriptures...Persons coming into such a family...might well cry out, ‘This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.’ ... Thorough the whole course of his life he was a priest in his own family, except when a minister happened to be present.⁹⁶

Puritan families were encouraged to gather around God’s Word morning and evening. The *Westminster Directory of Worship* states:

⁹⁰ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:118.

⁹¹ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:119.

⁹² Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:122.

⁹³ Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 45-46.

⁹⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:122.

⁹⁵ Michael Milton, *The Secret Life of a Pastor*, 57.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 865.

Family worship, which ought to be performed by every family, ordinary morning and evening, consists in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and singing praises.⁹⁷

And as John Newton says:

Happy is that family where the worship of God is constantly and conscientiously maintained. Such houses are *temples* in which the Lord dwells, and *castles* garrisoned by a Divine power.⁹⁸

(b) Daily Catechetical Instruction:

Then, secondly, that daily instruction of children in the Word of God should also be supplemented with catechetical instruction.⁹⁹ Gouge writes:

Let children be catechized constantly from day to day; rehearse them continually to your children, says the Law (Deut 6:7). That which is daily done, is in Scripture said to be done continually, just as the sacrifice which was daily offered was called a continual offering.¹⁰⁰

Catechetical Instruction (from either the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* or *Heidelberg Catechism*) fulfils the parents' covenantal obligations (Deut 6:4-7), grounds children in the fundamentals of the Christian faith (Titus 1:9; Acts 20:26-27), teaches them how to defend their faith from error (Ephesians 4:13-14), and prepares them for confession of faith.¹⁰¹ The ultimate goal of all this was not simply to fill their heads with information, but to instil within them a warm-hearted appreciation for biblical truth that will work itself out in holy living.¹⁰² Gouge writes:

Here let this caution be noted that in giving this spiritual food, parents deal with their children as skillful nurses and as mothers do in feeding infants. They will not at once cram more into their mouths than their stomach is able to digest, but they will rather often feed them with a little. *It is not good that parents be too tedious; that will just dull a child's understanding and produce weariness, and make the child dread being instructed again*, but 'precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little' (Isa. 28:10). *Thus shall they learn with ease and delight*, and this being performed often, in time a great measure of knowledge will be gained.¹⁰³

To do this effectively, biblical instruction ought not to be limited just to set times of instruction but should be woven in the very fabric of daily life. Gouge writes:

In addition to the set times of catechizing children, let other times of teaching them piety be set, as at the table, by comparing the spiritual food of their souls to that physical food by which their bodies are nourished; when they are walking abroad by showing them how the stars remain steady in their course,

⁹⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1976), 419-20.

⁹⁸ John Newton, *Works*, 1:158.

⁹⁹ See Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 54; Beeke, *Living for God's Glory*, 338.

¹⁰⁰ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:123.

¹⁰¹ See Beeke, *Living for God's Glory*, 338; Beeke, *Bringing the Gospel to Covenant Children* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 28-32;

¹⁰² See Beeke, *Living for God's Glory*, 338. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 55, observes: 'Mather continued his instructions with the suggestion that parents should carry the doctrines into the hearts as well as the heads of their children, 'Endeavour that the *Children* may not only receive the *Catechism* into their *Understandings*, but also have their *Affections* and *Practices* conformed to what they understand ... When we are *Catechising* our *Children*, *yea* are *Delivering* unto them a *Form of Doctrine*; and we should contrive all the Charms imaginable, that their *Hearts* and *Lives* may be *Moulded* into that *Form*' (emphasis original).

¹⁰³ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 3:123 (emphasis added). In a similar way Richard Baxter writes: 'Let it be the principal part of your care and labour in all their education to make holiness appear to them the most necessary, honourable, gainful, pleasant, delightful, amiable state of life; and to keep them from apprehending it either as needless, dishonourable, hurtful, or uncomfortable. Especially draw them to the love of it, by representing it as lovely' (Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:451).

how the trees bring forth fruit in their season, how all things are for the use and benefit of man, and then make spiritual applications. Note the direction which the law gives to parents for this purpose, 'And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up' (Deut. 6:7).

Conclusion

In conclusion, though the Puritans did not worship the family, they recognised the centrality of the family in God's plans and purposes for God's glory and for the beauty of godly living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Gouge summarises his work by saying this:

A family is a little church and a little nation, or at least a living representation of these, whereby trial may be made of those that are fit for any place of authority or subjection in church or nation. Or, rather, it is like a school where the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned, and by which men are titled to greater matters in church or nation.¹⁰⁴

Richard Baxter said that:

A Christian family is a church...a society of Christians combined for the better worshipping and serving of God.¹⁰⁵

And Richard Geere in his *The Character of an Old English Puritan* wrote:

His family he endeavors to make a church, both in regard of persons and exercises, admitting none into it but such as feared God; and laboring that those that were borne in it, might be born again unto God. He blessed his family morning and evening by the word and prayer and took care to perform those ordinances in the best season. He brought up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and commanded his servants to keep the way of the Lord.¹⁰⁶

In a secular culture like ours, the lordship of Jesus Christ over the family calls us to sanctify our marriages and family life by filling them with thanksgiving, the word of God, prayer, worship, and godly living. In a sexually confused culture like ours, the lordship of Jesus Christ over the marriage helps us to rebuild the biblical structures of the marriage relationship and gender differences and roles so that men and women can flourish in their masculinity and femininity. In the end, the best of husbands are but a shadow of Jesus; the best, most submissive wife is but a shadow of the great beauty of the true church who humbly trusts and obeys Jesus; and the wisest of parents is a shadow of the Father in heaven who adopts sinners into his family. The biblical family is all about sinners living out of God's abundant grace, trusting in the Saviour, and living all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God the Father.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:20.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:418

¹⁰⁶ Richard Geere, *The Character of an Old English Puritan, or Non-Conformist*.

¹⁰⁷ I am indebted to Joel Beeke for these closing paragraphs: Beeke 'Living in the Family: Thoughts from William Gouge,' <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=82313124393> (accessed 27/08/2015).