

# **Building a Godly Home**

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VOLUME TWO:

**A Holy Vision for a Happy Marriage**



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**A Holy Vision for a Happy Marriage**



William Gouge

*edited and modernized  
by Scott Brown and Joel R. Beeke*



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# Preface

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Have you ever needed some detailed, practical counsel for your marriage? Have you ever wished someone would speak to the everyday matters that pop up in your marriage and family life? Have you ever heard sound teaching, but wished for more than broad theological principles? You needed someone to speak frankly. You wanted someone to show you exactly how the biblical principles applied in the real situations you were experiencing.

In this second volume of the series, *Building a Godly Home*, William Gouge (1575–1653) does just that. His marriage counsel is focused on the everyday matters that husbands and wives experience while living together. The basis for his counsel to married couples is his exposition of Ephesians 5:21–33, already presented in volume 1.

Gouge delivers very detailed explanations of the various parts of the husband-wife relationship. He analyzes nearly every possible aspect of married life. You will be amazed at the probing detail with which he examines these matters. He exposes the minutest parts of marriage. Yet he does not lose sight of the big picture. He goes to the heart of the matter.

## **Husbands and Wives Living Together**

Gouge first directs his attention to the general category of husbands and wives living together in a family. This volume begins with a discussion of who ought to be able to marry

and how they should proceed from singleness to marriage. How do you choose a suitable mate? What qualities must this mate possess? How should medical conditions impact whether you should get married or not?

Gouge proceeds to the matters of daily married life. His remedies against adultery will surprise you with their practicality, simplicity, and modern feel. He even speaks to the issue of when it is right and wrong for a husband and wife to live apart from each other. He explains how to live with an unbeliever; how to pray and care for their salvation; how to edify one another in the faith; how husbands and wives can foster a bad reputation for their spouses and how to avoid it. He confronts the husband who does not help his wife, but lets the weaker vessel carry all the heavy burdens herself—especially in practicing hospitality together and relieving the poor. Then Gouge turns his attention to wives.

### **Wives Who Submit to and Support Their Husbands**

Gouge answers practical questions such as: How does a wife respect her husband? How should a wife think about submission? What are the particular sins of women? How does a wife deny honor to her husband? How does a wife live with someone of higher rank? What should a wife do if she has low esteem for her husband?

He also addresses matters that might puzzle many modern people but are of great concern to godly women who desire to obey the Bible's call to respect the authority of their husbands. For example, he speaks of the gentleness a woman should show her husband, her modesty in dress, and her respectful speech towards her husband—and about him when he is not there.

As anyone who has ever had a difficult supervisor knows, honoring authority can be a trial for the best of Christians. How much more this is the case in marriage! How should

a wife relate to a foolish or disobedient husband? For what things must a wife receive her husband's consent? What should a wife do if her husband sinfully forbids something? What should a wife do if she does not agree with her husband about handling the children? Gouge answers these questions in a gracious, biblical manner.

The saying goes, "When momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." Gouge recognizes the importance of a wife cultivating contentment instead of contention. He addresses what a wife should do if she is displeased with where she lives. He counsels her about how to respond when her husband reproves her. He gives her directions for when she feels that her husband does not make enough money for her standard of living. Most of all, Gouge calls wives to imitate Christ in humility.

### **Husbands Who Love and Lead Their Wives**

Gouge addresses the centrality of love and compassion for a good husband, and discusses how love must fill and shape his use of authority. How does a husband stir up his wife's love in the same way Christ wooed His church? How should a husband respond when he sees sin in his wife? How can he set her free to fulfill her responsibilities towards God and their family?

Gouge shows concern that husbands not misuse their authority. They must not be harsh. They must not become too demanding in hospitality and the labors that go with it. They should make sure they are not being too suspicious or controlling. Their use of authority should not discourage their wives, but encourage them.

Christian leaders understand how important it is to win the consciences of people so that you are not pressuring them to act against what they believe is right, and the husband's leadership in the home is no exception to this rule. What

should a husband do when his wife's conscience is against some lawful thing he wants her to do? What should a husband do when his wife feels a false fear or guilt about something good? What should a husband do if his wife is misapplying the Word of God? How should a husband correct his wife in a way that shows her love and honor? Again, Gouge's treatment gives the answers we need to the real questions we face.

Love speaks many languages, and Gouge calls the man to use them all, from a kind and cheerful facial expression to giving her special gifts. He strongly emphasizes the husband's responsibility to provide for his wife's financial needs. He urges men to show their wives tenderness and compassion when they are sick, especially when they face the travails of pregnancy and childbirth. At every turn, Gouge summons husbands to the high calling of loving their wives—as Christ did the church—with sacrificial, affectionate service.

William Gouge provides husbands and wives one of the most detailed and honest treatments of the husband and wife relationship ever written. He speaks from a solid biblical position and with a sweet spirit of love and mercy throughout. Though a bit antiquated at times, we trust that you will find this book extremely insightful and helpful. May the Lord send His Spirit with His truth, so that this book will be an effective instrument to transform many marriages, to the blessing of generations to come.

Many thanks to Jonathan Sides and Paul Smalley for their invaluable editorial assistance on this volume. Also, thanks to Linda den Hollander and Kim DeMeester for their expert typesetting, to Gary den Hollander for his able proofreading, and to Jay Collier for seeing this book through the printing process. As editors, we wish to thank our precious wives, Deborah Brown and Mary Beeke, who ably pass Gouge's "high-bar" tests in this volume! Our hearts are often filled with praise for granting them to us.

—Scott Brown and Joel Beeke

## Seeking Marriage

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Having in the former treatise laid down the foundation of all family duties by expounding the words of the apostle,<sup>1</sup> I now intend to present their distinction in order, beginning with the first and most important couple in the family, *husband and wife*.

We will first speak of the persons who are to be accounted true and lawful husbands and wives, and then of the duties which they owe to each other.

Husband and wife are those who are rightly joined together by the bond of marriage, whereby two are made one flesh. For the better clearing of this point, we will consider both the parties that may be so closely joined together, and also the manner how they are rightly joined in so firm a unity.

About the parties we are to ask who may seek a mate for marriage and what kind of mate is to be taken. All who are able, without inevitable danger to their spouse to perform the essential duties of marriage, may be married. Out of this proposition arise three questions to be discussed.

1. Who are to be counted able?
2. What danger is inevitable?
3. Whether marriage is free for all but such?

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1. For his exposition of Ephesians 5:21–6:4, see William Gouge, *Building a Godly Home, Volume 1, A Holy Vision for Family Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013).

**Physical Maturity in Them That Are to Be Married**

They are to be counted able who have passed puberty, and are not made impotent by defect of nature or any other occasion. Physical maturity is absolutely necessary for consummating a just and lawful marriage. Because God at first made Adam of full age, so when He sought out a wife for him, He made her of full age too. He made her a "woman," not a child (Gen. 2:22). Where the apostle advises parents to take care for the marriage of their children, he adds this condition, "if she pass the flower of her age" (1 Cor. 7:36). Childhood is counted the flower of age. While the flower of the plant sprouts, the seed is green, unfit to be sown.

*Question:* How long does the flower of age last?

*Answer:* The civil law, and common law also, set down twelve years for the flower of a female's age, and fourteen, of a male's, which is the minimum. Before those years they can have no need of marriage, nor yet are well fit for marriage. If they wait some years longer, it will be much better for the parties themselves that marry, for the children which they bring forth, for the family of which they are the head, and for the nation of which they are members. Note the ages of the kings of Israel and Judah when they were first married, and we shall find few of them to be under twenty, and those few, not above one or two years under, and yet of all sorts of people the kings used to marry earliest, that so they might have heirs quickly.

*Objection:* Solomon was but a child when he came to the crown (1 Chron. 22:5; 29:1), and yet he had a child of a year old at least (2 Chron. 12:13).

*Answer:* He was said to be a child not simply, but comparatively, in relation to his other brothers which were older than he was (1 Kings 2:22), and in regard of that great work he was to undertake (1 Kings 3:7). In the time of his reign he is said to be old (1 Kings 11:4), which could not be if he had

been a child in age when he began to reign, for he reigned but forty years.<sup>2</sup>

Against this principle of fitness of age is the practice of such parents, or other friends of children, who make matches for them in their childhood and move them to consent, and so cause them to be married. Such marriages are mock marriages, and mere nullities. For children cannot know what pertains to marriage, much less can they perform that which is required of married persons. Their consent, therefore, is justly accounted no consent unless they ratify it after they come to years.

### **Impotent Persons that Should Not Seek after Marriage**

They are to be accounted *impotent* and in that respect unable to perform the essential duties of marriage, who (to use the scriptural phrase) were born eunuchs from their mother's womb (Matt. 19:12), or by any accidental occasion are so made, likewise those who are defective, or closed in their secret parts, or taken with an incurable palsy, or possessed with frigidity,<sup>3</sup> or any other similar obstacle.

These ought not to seek after marriage, for by those signs of impotency God shows that He calls them to live single.

Contrary to this manifestation of God's will do they sin who conceal their impotency and join themselves in marriage, whereby they frustrate one main end of marriage, which is procreation of children, and do such a wrong to the party whom they marry, that sufficient satisfaction can never be made.

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2. We omit Gouge's brief chronological digression about the age of other Israelite kings.

3. *Impotent...palsy...frigidity*: Gouge does not refer to temporary sexual problems or emotional difficulties, but long-term physical disabilities like paralysis or deformity that prevent sexual relations.

### **Barrenness Does Not Hinder Marriage**

*Question:* Are those who are barren to be ranked among those impotent persons?

*Answer:* No, there is great difference between impotency and barrenness.

Impotency may be known and discerned by outward visible signs; barrenness cannot. It is not discerned except by lack of child-bearing.

Impotent persons cannot yield due benevolence,<sup>4</sup> but those who are barren may.

Impotency is incurable, but barrenness is not simply so. Many after they have been a long while barren have become fruitful, and that not only by an extraordinary work of God above the course of nature, as Sarah (Gen. 18:11) and Elizabeth (Luke 1:7), with whom by reason of age it ceased to be after the manner of women, but also by such a blessing as might stand with the course of nature, being obtained by prayer, as Rebekah (Gen. 25:21) and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:5–20), of which daily experience gives good evidence. Many after ten, fifteen, twenty, and more years of barrenness have brought forth children.

On these grounds many saints who have been barren have married, and their practice not forbidden, nor their marriage dissolved. Though procreation of children is one end of marriage, yet it is not the only end. So sacred is the marriage bond, that though it is made for children's sake, yet it may not be broken for lack of children.

### **That Inevitable Danger which Hinders Marriage**

Those who are infected with contagious diseases that spread themselves into those who have company with them, and infect them also, should not seek after marriage. That cannot

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4. *Due benevolence:* sexual intercourse (1 Cor. 7:3, KJV).

but endanger the party whom they marry. It was for mutual good of one another that God ordained the law of marriage (Gen. 2:18). To use it to the hurt and danger of one another, is against the main end of the first institution.

The law of shutting out a leper from all company with men proves as much (2 Chron. 26:21), for if lepers might not have mutual companionship with any man, much less might they have matrimonial companionship with a wife or a husband.

By contagious diseases, not only will both parties which fellowship together be infected, but also their offspring. Their disease, which otherwise might die with them, is propagated to their posterity. A similar restraint may be applied to such foul and loathsome diseases that make the company and society of that person who is infected wearisome and offensive to their companion.

They sin against the end and use of marriage who conceal such diseases, and join themselves in marriage, to the inexcusable harm of the party whom they marry.

### **The Lawfulness of Marriage to All Sorts of Persons**

Where there is no such just obstacle as has been mentioned, it is lawful for all sorts of people of whatever calling or condition to marry. "Marriage is honourable in all," or among all, namely in, or among all sorts of people (Heb. 13:4). It is counted a doctrine of devils to forbid to marry (1 Tim. 4:1-3). It is a doctrine contrary to God's Word, and a doctrine that causes much inward burning and outward contamination, and so makes their bodies, which should be temples of the Holy Spirit, to be pig-pens of the devils.

The disease which marriage is set apart to cure is a common disease which has infected all sorts of people. Why then shall not the remedy be as common? In this case the apostle says of all, without exception of any, "to avoid fornication, let

every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." And again, "If they cannot contain [control themselves], let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7:2, 9).

*Objection:* There are eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs (that is, have abstained from marriage and lived in a single life with chastity) for the kingdom of heaven's sake (Matt. 19:12).

*Answer:* That is spoken of some particular persons to whom the gift of chastity was given, not of any distinct conditions and callings, as if everyone of this or that calling had so done or were able so to do. Christ added this clause, "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. 19:12), and the apostle to the same purpose says, "every man hath his proper gift of God" (1 Cor. 7:7).

Against this necessary and legitimate liberty is the impure and tyrannical restraint of the Church of Rome, by which all that enter into any of their holy orders are kept from marriage. Do they not tempt God by putting a yoke upon men's necks, which neither our fathers nor we are able to bear (Acts 15:10)? No such restraint was ever placed by God's Word upon any of those holy functions which He ordained. Under the law it was lawful for high priests, ordinary priests, all sorts of Levites, and extraordinary prophets, to marry, and under the gospel, for apostles, bishops, deacons, and all ministers of the Word.

The effects of this diabolical doctrine have been horrible, such as fornication, adultery, incest, homosexuality, etc. Many wives were put away from their husbands because their husbands were ministers, and many ministers put from their calling because they had wives. Many children were by this means born illegitimately, and among them many in their infancy cruelly murdered. Six thousand heads of infants were found in the ponds of a religious house. How many

more thousands have been from time to time cast into other ponds, or buried in gardens, or other places, or in other ways carried out of sight? Devilish must that doctrine be which has such devilish effects. Well did he wish, who wished that all they who cannot control themselves would realize how rashly they profess perfection, and vow virginity.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Things Absolutely Necessary to Make a Person Fit for Marriage**

They who have the ability to marry must be careful in choosing a “help meet”<sup>6</sup> for them, for this was God’s care when first He instituted marriage (Gen. 2:18). To make a help meet for marriage, some things are absolutely necessary for the very essence or being of marriage; others, necessary for the comfort and happiness of marriage.

In regard of the former sort, there must be chosen:

1. *One of the same kind* or nature, for among all the creatures which were made, “there was not found an help meet” for man (Gen. 2:20). Therefore, out of man’s bone and flesh God made a woman of his own nature and kind.

Contrary to this is the detestable sin of sexual perversion with beasts, explicitly forbidden by the law (Lev. 18:23). This is a sin more than beastly, for the brute beasts content themselves with their own kind. This is unnatural.

2. *One of the contrary sex*. The male must choose a female, the female a male, because God made Adam a male, made Eve a female, and joined them in marriage. A conjunction of these different sexes is only fit for increase of mankind, and other marriage duties.

Against this are those unnatural minglings of parties of the same sex, which the apostle counts as judgments inflicted

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5. Gouge cites Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), *On the Conversion of Clerics*, book 29.

6. *Help meet*: a helper suitable for a person (Gen. 2:20).

on the pagans, because “they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped, and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25–26).

3. *One not with relatives by blood or marriage which are forbidden by the law of God.* These forbidden marriages are expressed by Moses (Lev. 18:6–16) and explained in a table of relatives by blood or marriage which none may marry, appointed to be hung up in every church.

Against this is incest, a sin not only forbidden by God’s Word, but so horrible even to the pagans as, to use the apostle’s words, “is not so much as named among the Gentiles” (1 Cor. 5:1). That rebuke is well confirmed by the pagan orator’s moving exclamation against one Sassia, who married her son-in-law, in these words, “O incredible wickedness of a woman, not heard of in any age but this! O unbridled and untamed lust! O singular boldness! Not to fear the power of God and shame of men!... Lust, impudence, madness, overcame shame, fear and reason.”<sup>7</sup>

What may we now think of the dispensations which the Pope gives for incestuous marriage, granted to great princes even by the Council of Trent? Does he not show himself by this to be that man of sin, “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God” (2 Thess. 2:4)?

4. *One that is free, not married, nor betrothed to another.* The law of marriage notes thus much in this clause, “They twain [two] shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:5). In that the law inflicts the same punishment upon the person which being betrothed<sup>8</sup> commits immorality (Deut. 22:22–24), that it does upon a married person, it is evident that it is unlawful to marry one betrothed to another, as well as one married to another. So firm is this betrothal that the law called a betrothed young

7. Gouge quotes the Roman orator, Cicero (103–43 B.C.), *Pro Cluentio*.

8. *Betrothed*: solemnly promised for marriage to a specific person in a manner more binding than engagement.

woman a *wife*, and a betrothed young woman might not be put away without a bill of divorce.

Against this is bigamy and polygamy, which we have already discussed,<sup>9</sup> to which head may be referred marriages with those who have been betrothed to others beforehand. These are utterly unlawful.

### **The Lawfulness of Other Marriages after One of the Married Couple Is Dead**

*Question:* Are those who have buried their husband or wife free to marry again?

*Answer:* Yes, as free as those who were never married. The law of Moses does not only permit a widow to marry again, but if her husband died before he had any children, it commanded the next kinsman that was living and free to marry her, that he might raise up seed to his deceased brother (Deut. 25:5–9). If he refused to do this, a penalty of shame was inflicted on him; the rejected widow was to “loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face” in the presence of the elders. The apostle explicitly says that a woman, when her husband is dead, is at liberty to be married (1 Cor. 7:8–9). Speaking of young widows he further says, “I will therefore that the younger women marry” (1 Tim. 5:14).

This liberty which the prophet of God and apostle of Christ grant to a wife, can by no argument be denied to a husband: for the bond of marriage gives them a similar power over another’s body (1 Cor. 7:4), and knits one as unbreakably as the other (Matt. 19:6). Husbands, therefore, as well as wives have used this liberty, as Abraham (Gen. 25:1).

The apostle that gives this liberty gives a reason for it taken from the limitation of that time during which married persons have power one over another, and that is the time

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9. See Gouge, *Building a Godly Home*, 1:138.

of this life only. "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband, so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead she is loosed" (Rom. 7:2). On this ground, all the reasons which authorize or move those who never were married to marry may be applied to them that by death have their spouse taken from them.

*Question:* May this liberty be extended any further than to a second marriage?

*Answer:* We find no restraint from a third, or fourth, or more marriages, if by the divine providence so many wives, or husbands one after another be taken away while there is need for the surviving party to use the benefit of marriage. The woman of Samaria that had five husbands one after another, is not blamed for being married to so many, but for living with one (after the others were dead) that was not her husband (John 4:18). Neither did the Lord condemn that woman who was said to have seven husbands one after another (Matt. 22:23–32).

Against this is the opinion of Montanists and Cataphrygians,<sup>10</sup> ancient heretics that counted those marriages which the survivor made after the death of a spouse to be adulterous. Tertullian,<sup>11</sup> an ancient and learned father, was so far infected with this heresy that he wrote a treatise in defense of it. It seems by their arguments that one main ground of their error was a misinterpretation of those Scriptures which forbid men to have two wives at once, and women to have two husbands at once, like, "They (two) shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). A bishop or a deacon must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2, 12). "Let not a widow be

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10. *Montanists and Cataphrygians*: sectarian second-century movement originating in Phrygia, Asia Minor, that claimed direct revelations from God through prophecy and taught rigorous morality and asceticism.

11. *Tertullian*: Christian theologian Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (died c. 220), from North Africa.

taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man" (1 Tim. 5:9).

These are indeed explicit texts against such digamists<sup>12</sup> and polygamists who we described earlier, but they make no more against second (or more) marriages after one mate being dead, than against first marriages. Those who deny such later marriages to any kind of ministers belong to the same category as these heretics. So do our adversaries. They exclude those who are married again after one wife is dead from such functions of inferior orders,<sup>13</sup> into which they admit those who are but once married. They cite many of those Scriptures which Montanists do (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9) which shows that they are infected with the same heresy, though they pretend to renounce it.

### **Equality in Years Between Husband and Wife**

That matrimonial companionship may prove to be a comfort, it is necessary that there should be some equality between the parties that are married in *age, estate, condition, and piety*.

For age, as the party that seeks a mate must be old enough, fit to give consent, and able to perform marriage duties, so the mate which is taken must be somewhat suitable in age, if one young, both young, if one of middle age, both so, if one grown to years, the other also. It is noted of Zacharias and Elizabeth, that "both were well stricken<sup>14</sup> in years" (Luke 1:7). If both were old together, then both also were young together. Equality in years makes married people more fit for procreation of children, for a mutual performance of

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12. *Digamists*: people married to two other people at the same time.

13. *Inferior orders*: or minor orders; acolytes, exorcists, lectors (readers), and porters (doorkeepers); positions lower than the priests in the church hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. See Council of Trent, session 23.

14. *Stricken*: advanced, far ahead.

marriage duties to each other, and for making their company and fellowship happier in every way.

This equality is not to be taken too strictly, as if the married couple were to be just of the same age, but only for some correspondence in years, which may be though there be a disparity of five or ten, or somewhat more years, especially if the excess of years be on the husband's part. In addition to the fact that according to the ordinary course of nature a man's strength and vigor lasts longer than a woman's,<sup>15</sup> it is very fit that the husband should be somewhat older than his wife, because he is a head, a governor, a protector of his wife. The Scripture notes many husbands to be older than their wives, as Abraham was ten years older than Sarah (Gen. 17:17). And if we carefully observe the circumstances of the histories of Isaac and Jacob and their wives, we shall find that the husbands were older than their wives. To my remembrance an approved example of a husband younger than his wife cannot be found in Scripture.

Contrary to this equality in years is the practice of many men and women who, being aged, to satisfy their lust or for some other interest, marry those who are but in the flower of their age. They do many times largely fail of their expectation, for those young ones, finding the society of aged folks to be burdensome and wearisome to them, soon begin to be disgusted with them, and cause more grief and irritation than they ever gave comfort and contentment.

On the other side, there are others in the prime and strength of their age, for wealth, honor, or such similar respects, who marry those that with age begin to be decrepit and unfit to be married, hoping that they will not live long, but that with a little trouble they shall purchase much dignity or riches, and after a while be free again. But God

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15. In the seventeenth century women often died in childbirth or suffered from its medical aftereffects.

often deals with such in their kind by prolonging the life of those aged persons, and so making the burden to be much more grievous and tedious than was imagined, and by taking away those young ones sooner than they looked for, by which it comes to pass that all their hopes perish. The pagans observed inequality in years to be occasions of much trouble, and therefore prescribed rules against it.<sup>16</sup>

### **Equality in Estate and Condition between Those to Be Married**

Some equality in outward estate and wealth is also appropriate for the parties that are to be married together, lest the disparity (especially if it be too great) make the one look down on the other. If a man of great wealth is married to a poor woman, he will think to make her as his maid-servant, and expect that she should carry herself towards him as inappropriate for one with whom he shares his life and bed. Such a one may rather be said to be brought into slavery than marriage. And if a rich woman marry a poor man, she will expect to be the master, and to rule him, so as the order which God has established will be clearly distorted, and the honor of marriage laid in the dust. For where no order is, there can be no honor.

Likewise we might speak of social status, that there also should be some equality, that princes, nobles, and gentlemen marry those who are of their own rank, and the commoner sort those who are of their degree. Note what sort of wives Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob married, and it will appear that they had respect to this parity. Disparity in condition as well as in estate is a means to make men and women get puffed up and arrogant towards one another, even to twit one another in the teeth<sup>17</sup> with their former estate and condition.

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16. Gouge cites Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), *Politics*, book 7.

17. *Twit...in the teeth*: mock them to their face.

Contrary on the one side are the practices of those who attempt to marry above their own estate and status, thinking by such marriages to advance themselves. This is the only thing which many seek after in seeking wives and husbands. But by this it comes to pass that they often meet with the worst matches, and make their marriage a kind of slavery for them. Great portions make many women proud, picky, spendy, lazy, and careless. A man would do much better, even for help of his outward estate, to marry a prudent, sober, thrifty, careful, diligent wife, though with a small portion, than such a one. A proud back, a picky tooth, and a spendy hand will soon consume a great portion, but a “wise woman buildeth her house” (Prov. 14:1), and “a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband” (Prov. 12:4). Also, many wives that are married to very rich husbands are more confined and limited in their allowance, than those married to men of lower estate. It is not the means which a man has, but his mind and disposition that makes him free and bountiful to his wife.

Against this are the marriages which men of great authority and ability make with common women, even their own maids many times, and those of the lowest rank, their kitchen-maids, and the marriages which women of noble blood, and great estate, make with their serving-men. Do they not betray much worthlessness of mind and unrestrained power of lust?

If it is said that such marriages are not simply unlawful, the rule of the civil law gives a good answer, “Always in marriages not only what is lawful, but what is honest and suitable, is to be considered.”<sup>18</sup>

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18. Gouge quotes from book 23 of the *Digest*, a collection of Roman laws made by the order of the emperor Justinian (c. 482–565) and still influential in early modern Europe.

### **Equality in Piety and Religion between Those to Be Married Together**

The parity which is of greatest consequence between parties to be married is in *piety*.<sup>19</sup> In this respect it is good that as a Christian be married to a Christian, so one that truly fears God to one of the same mind and disposition, as it is noted of Zacharias and Elizabeth, “they were both righteous before God” (Luke 1:6). A worthy couple, one worthy of another, being both alike in such excellent qualities, they could not but reap from each other much comfort and profit every way.

This is one of the most principal points that are included under that condition given by the Holy Spirit in choosing a spouse, in these words, “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

There is no better way to increase love, preserve peace, motivate to all duty, be helpful to one another in all things and at all times, as this parity. By this they shall be made both able to do more good to one another, and capable to receive more good from one another: especially in the best things, even in those which concern their spiritual edification in this world, and eternal salvation in the world to come.

For Christ is the fountain and head of all spiritual life and grace. “It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell” (Col. 1:19), so that it is He that fills all in all things (Eph. 1:23). Now Christ shares that life and grace which are in Him with the members of His body. If then I, being a member of that mystical body, am linked by that near and sacred bond of marriage to one of the members of that body, what hope there is of mutual sharing with one another, and mutual receiving from one another of those gifts and graces which either of us receive from Christ our head! If an unbelieving wife may be saved by a believing husband, and an

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19. *Piety*: godliness, which Calvin defined as a mixture of the fear of the Lord and love for God.

unbelieving husband by a believing wife, much more will one believer be more and more edified by another.

Happy is that family where both the husband and wife are mutual members of Christ's body. There the house will be made God's church, as the house of Aquila and Priscilla was (Rom. 16:5). God's worship will be maintained there. Children will be trained up there in the nurture of the Lord, and servants also taught the fear of God. They that are indeed of Christ's kingdom, will be as leaven which seasons the whole lump (Matt. 13:33). Note the profession which Joshua makes to this purpose (Josh. 24:15), and the effect which is noted of the ruler whose son Christ cured, "he himself believed, and his whole house" (John 4:53).

Let me exhort parents and other governors of children both to train up their own children in true piety and fear of God, and also to seek such matches for them, as they may have some assurance that they are of the same faith, and of the same mind and heart: thus shall they obtain for their children much happiness in their marriage as Abraham did to Isaac (Gen. 24).

Against this teaching are marriages with atheists, infidels, and similar persons (Gen. 6:4; Deut. 7:3; Ezra 9:2; Neh. 10:30; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14).