

HOME and the PREACHER

by Mrs. Marion Timmins

You might be tempted to say to yourself as you read this article, 'This has obviously been written by a woman; no man would express himself in such a way'. This is actually what I have been asked to do—write from the woman's point of view about the Preacher and Home Responsibilities. It is not easy to conduct our relationships in the home according to principles set out in the New Testament when a very different atmosphere prevails between the sexes to-day. The term 'Scripture Principles' becomes important, and although detailed application of these principles are individual matters, it is important for every home to have a policy, well thought out, Bible-based, yet in keeping with contemporary life and thought. A 'Victorian' husband and father is as much out of place as is a wife who 'wears the trousers'. Married couples without children can get by without a proper policy, but no couple with teen-age children can do so. We need to know what the Bible teaches, what are the principles contained in what it says, and how they should be applied in our homes.

Women are not always articulate, and many can feel resentment and a sense of being ill-used without being able to explain why. Not all men have the patience or the sensitivity to understand their wives' needs and outlook. Christian service should never be undertaken at the cost of an unhappy Christian home. I would like therefore to suggest some safeguards, as well as some considerations for husbands and wives to think over together before the Lord.

Scripture teaches clearly that in the Church spiritual gifts are to be recognised and encouraged. 'Think your way to a sober estimate based on the measure of faith that God has dealt to each of you . . . The gifts we possess differ as they are allotted to us by God's grace and must be exercised accordingly . . .' (Rom. 12, 3 and 6. N.E.B.) It is essential that in the home, no less than in the church, spiritual gifts should be recognised. This sounds obvious, but I can never recall hearing it expressed in so many words. Wives are sometimes proud of their husbands' ability as speakers; or feel resentful because someone else's husband is a better speaker. Sometimes a wife gets out of sympathy with her husband's point of view; or even feels hard done by, because she is confined so much to the home while he is out preaching. If husband and wife together, as fellow-members of a local church, recognise that one or other (or maybe both) have special gifts allotted to them by God and that these gifts are to be exercised in the fear of the Lord, then they are likely to avoid the difficulties experienced by those who ignore such basic New Testament principles.

When it has been recognised by both that the husband's gift lies in ministering the Word of God in the local church and in a wider sphere as he may find opportunity, there should be mutual agreement as to the extent of his commitments. Many husbands are careful about this, but it does not seem to enter the heads of many others that their wives may actually have an opinion on the matter. A good wife will undoubtedly have an opinion! If she treats her husband's gift from the Lord seriously, she will be as keen as he is that he fulfils it adequately, but she will bear in mind other practical considerations which are referred to in later paragraphs. If a husband ignores his wife's point of view he loses a great deal. He loses the close feeling of shared service which the right attitude fosters. He can become such a law unto himself that he is less well-qualified to fulfil his ministry, and his character can be so affected that he may actually cause problems in the local church. His full diary can make him bumptious and self-opinionated. He can be preaching elsewhere so often that he opts out of the day to day discipline and problems of the local church. Worst of all from the family angle, his wife can well become a nagger. Complaining, nagging, frustrated women are often made that way by neglectful, insensitive husbands who think they are doing God service by ignoring their home responsibilities.

If the first need is to recognise gift in the home circle, and to be sure there is agreement between husband and wife as to the scope and extent of its use, along with this must also go the husband's concern for the spiritual well-being of his family. In a bye-gone age the husband was thought of as the family priest, responsible to God for all under his roof. Today the spirit of independence is so rife that husbands seem willing to abdicate their spiritual responsibilities; even family prayers are by no means a feature of all christian homes. It hardly honours the Lord for a man to be found here and there in christian service whilst his wife remains at home spiritually lethargic, and even in extreme cases quite ignorant in christian matters. This may sound like overstating the case, but many neglected wives will come to mind as these words are read and pondered: I have known of husbands who get up early to study the Word for themselves, who are systematic and diligent, yet take it for granted that their wives only read the Scripture Union portion. In the early years of married life the effects of this may not be too noticeable, but as the years go by they become apparent. The husband and wife find that they are unable to maintain much spiritual conversation. They no longer speak the same language. In fact this becomes one of the most fruitful sources of trouble in a church—women members who have nothing better to think of than gossip and scandal. Very few men trace the cause back to its frequent origin—a husband careless about his wife's spiritual condition. 'To sum up, be one in thought and feeling . . .' (1 Peter 3, 8; N.E.B.)

Closely connected with the husband's responsibility to his wife is his responsibility to his children. When the children are young and his wife is one with him in his desire to serve the Lord, the preacher may be away from home a great deal with little damage to his parental relationship. As

times goes on, however, a father's presence is needed more and more. There may have to be further adjustment here—a recognition that a programme which was suitable a few years ago will not do now. Of course a wise mother is a bridge between a busy father and his growing children, explaining, advising, excusing, helping each to see the other's point of view. A possible danger here is for a mother to become possessive, so taken up with the children and glad to have their confidence, that she slowly (and perhaps unintentionally) alienates their affection from their father. A preacher, respected for his ministry in the locality, would be a sad man indeed if he lost the respect of his own family. Some have found the answer in common family interests and hobbies. I knew a family who all booked Thursday evenings once a month as a day when they did things together. They enjoyed cricket, rounders, or less strenuous outdoor pursuits in the summer, including trips into the country with a picnic basket. And the father was a tired commuter too. In the winter there was Lexicon, Kan-u-go and other games suitable for the age groups represented.

Frequent adjustments have to be made bearing in mind the responsibilities of the preacher's secular calling which may increase as he gets older; the lessening of his physical powers; the growing or grown-up family which may well mean that in turn his children and then his wife need him more. God's calling is not a once and for all immutable thing. What was His will for us in our twenties may not be the way when we are in our forties or fifties. The ardent young evangelist of twenty years ago might have drifted outside the Lord's will for him if his diary today has become full of nothing but Gospel meeting bookings.

The title of this article is not meant to lead us to the assumption that all preaching is the exclusive province of the men. I suggested in an earlier paragraph that husband and wife should together recognise spiritual gift, whether it be in one or other or in both. When the woman has an unmistakable ministry given to her from the Lord there may well be further problems in the home. If both are gifted, and conflict should arise, are not scriptural principles as to the relations between husband and wife maintained by the wife giving place to her husband? This is not likely to happen very often. Usually in her sphere among women and girls a wife is busy when her husband is at business and the children at school. In the case of Sunday afternoon classes, a husband may find himself regularly drying the lunch dishes, or even doing all the washing-up to set his wife free for the service to which she has been called. He may come home to a cold evening meal because she has been unable to get back from an afternoon meeting in time to cook. One husband known to me is even prepared occasionally to use public transport so that his wife can use the family car in the course of her christian service! The need is for the husband to recognise his wife's gifts and calling and not look on her work as a "hobby" and therefore something vastly different from his own christian service. This again can be an unconscious, and therefore unrecognised lack in a husband's outlook.

For the woman, however gifted, husband, family and home must always come first. 'Each must order his life according to the gift the Lord has granted him and his condition when God called him'. (1 Cor. 7, 17. N.E.B.) Paul is quite explicit that those who become wives and mothers cannot serve the Lord with the same freedom and singleness of mind that was theirs as single women. Even with her husband's warmest support she must see to it that her priorities remain unimpaired. It is a scandal to the testimony of any local church if a woman is mistaken enough to neglect her rightful place in the home for a wider sphere of service. Most women find no tension so long as they can count on the support of their husbands.

Incidentally, and apart from spiritual considerations, a home can be enriched when the wife and mother is exercised to fulfil a ministry before the Lord. The mental discipline involved, the wider circle of contacts, the chance to express herself outside the home, all help to develop her personality, so that she can become a more interesting and intelligent companion for her husband, and for her children a mother who is 'with it'.

The finest example of a husband and wife partnership in Scripture is that between Aquila and Priscilla. The six references to them are well worth studying. Sometimes the wife's name is mentioned first, sometimes the husband's, but never is one mentioned without the other. There must have been perfect understanding between them. Understanding of the Lord's Will for them, and of what that Will meant in the daily life which they shared in the home as well as in the church.

Paul still says to all Preachers, 'Do not be conceited or think too highly of yourself, but think your way to a sober estimate based on the measure of faith that God has dealt to each of you . . . With unflagging energy, in ardour of spirit, serve the Lord'. (Romans 12, 3 and 11. N.E.B.)

Executives try to be dutiful husbands and parents, and they are well aware that their absorption in work means less time with their family even when they are physically with them. They often mention some long-term project they plan to do with their boy, like building a boat with him in the garage. But, they add ruefully, they probably never will. 'I sort of look forward to the day my kids are grown up', one sales manager said, 'Then I won't have such a guilty conscience about neglecting them'.

WILLIAM WHYTE, *The Organisation Man*

I will therefore that the younger women . . . guide the house. (Gk. *oikodespotein*: look it up!)

ST. PAUL. *The First Letter to Timothy*