

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Lent is a season of repentance as we reflect on why our Lord died on the cross for us. But Lent is also about catechesis, because Lent is a catechetical season.

Tonight, we continue to make our way through the Christian “house rules” on how we deal with each other. These “house rules” serve as our groundwork on our Lutheran worldview of vocation. These vocations are the duties or responsibilities that we each owe to our neighbor.

As a reminder: Luther’s intention in including the Table of Duties was to serve us as our guide – *the Third Use of the Law* – in how we ought to live in this world and what is our duty to one another. But as it always is, when the Law is at play, we often hear the Law as its Second Use – *mirror*, because the Law always accuses, but again, the primary use and focus of the Table of Duties is to encourage us as we live out our lives in the various vocations that God has placed you and I in.

Tonight, we will focus on the first of the Three Estates: family, as we consider the next two pairs in the Table of Duties: “To Husbands” and “To Wives.”

We live in a strange world. Much of our strange world would fit in episodes of “The Twilight Zone.” Just imagine you have entered into a world that says men and women are the same. Just imagine you have entered into a world where a man can decide that he is a woman, and a woman can decide she is a man and everyone acts as if this is the way things have always been. These appear like stories from “The Twilight Zone.” But this is our strange world, our fallen world.

Today, in this Twilight Zone-like world, it is asserted that men and women are completely interchangeable, and so marriage can occur between a man and a woman, or between two men, or between two women, or even among throuples.

The basic idea that men and women are the same has been the focus of feminism in this fallen world. But reality has a way of not cooperating. The truth is that men and women are not the same. Men are physically stronger than women. Men and women are different.

When children feel ill or are injured, who do they turn to practically every time? Their mom. It's because women are naturally better at nurturing and comforting than men. Because, again, men and women are different.

Men and women are different, because God created men and women to be different. God first created Adam. And then God said, ***"It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him"*** (Genesis 2:18). A woman complements the man. They are not the same, because a woman corresponds to the man in ways needed to serve as a helper to him. The ultimate proof that men and women are not the same is that the one flesh union of man and woman is necessary to produce the outcome of marriage – a child.

God's Word describes an ordering to the creation of man and woman, to husband and wife. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11(:8-9): ***"For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."***

Woman was created for man. Woman was created for man, as the helper corresponding to him. The fallen world may not want to hear this, but this is a fact grounded in creation itself.

These facts of creation – *this order of creation* – then determines how husband and wife relate in marriage. In Ephesians 5(:22-24), St. Paul writes, ***"Wives, submit to your husband 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."***

Luther cites this ***"Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord"*** as of first importance in his section on "To Wives." He also includes ***"They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear"*** from 1 Peter 3:5-6.

To the fallen world, they hear words like "submit" and "submission" meaning inequality, or that women have less worth or less value than men.

Yet, this exact same language is used of the relation between God the Father and God the Son. In 1 Corinthians 15(:28), St. Paul writes, ***“When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things in subjection under Him, that God may be all in all.”*** And what do we confess about the triune God? We confess that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are coequal.

For St. Paul, submission does not mean a relationship where one side gives and gives, and the other side takes and takes. You see, husbands and wives are to ***“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”*** (Ephesians 5:21).

But God did give us an order. The husband is the head of the household, and the wife is to be her husband’s co-equal helper. He, the provider. She, the nurturer. But so often, we don’t see it that way. And we don’t see it this way because of sin.

After the Fall into sin, God said to Eve in Genesis 3(:16), according to the New Living Translation: ***“I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”*** Since the Fall, woman finds herself drawn to men who act in self-serving ways. And since the Fall, women also strive against men, competing for the headship that contradicts their own creation.

We all act this way. Selfishness and pride. Husbands and wives act in selfish ways that put themselves before their spouse. Men abuse the headship position to get what they want, when they want it. Women subvert the headship to get what they want.

Guided by culture of feminism, many women disparage motherhood and instead seek to act like men. And men bought the same lie as so many fail in their own responsibilities of being a husband.

When we see the ways we fail to live in God’s order of creation in marriage – and confess our sin, always know that there is forgiveness in Christ. And it is in Christ that we find the ability to live in God’s design for marriage. The Holy Spirit who has regenerated us and given us faith, moves us to live the life of faith in our marriages. This is why Luther included the Table of Duties, so that Christians could better care for each other.

The Table of Duties lists “To Husbands” first, and rightly so. Man has been created for headship in marriage and family. And the conduct of this headship is modeled after Christ. St. Peter writes in 1 Peter 3(:7): ***“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as your live with you wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”***

It is true that the wife is weaker, but the husband is to live in a way that reflects the knowledge of what God has done for both of them in Christ, and of the gift the husband has received from God in his wife – as his helper. The husband is to honor his wife and recognize the unique status they share together and that they are co-heirs of God’s saving grace.

Luther also includes a passage from Colossians 3(:19) addressed to husbands which reads: ***“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”***

And this should not be forgotten, for after St. Paul’s brief statement about wives, he writes in Ephesians 5:25: ***“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”*** This sacrificial love of Jesus Christ for His Church is the pattern that is to guide the husband’s behavior.

If tonight’s sermon is hitting you hard, seek forgiveness through Christ’s blood and merit and seek forgiveness with your spouse. Remember, Luther’s Table of Duties isn’t intended to be gospel, but as our guide, so that we would be encouraged as we live out our daily vocations.

Certainly, men and women are different. Thank God for that! God joins husband and wife together as one flesh. Husband and wife are ordered in marriage in a way that reflects God’s creation of Adam and Eve – *the first husband and wife*. Uniquely distinct from one another, husband and wife each are needed for marriage and family to be the blessing God has given. Through the Holy Spirit, the union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind support each other through mutual companionship as they love, honor, and strengthen each other through sickness and in health. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**