

Who Does the Dishes?

Decision Making in Marriage

Winston T. Smith



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Who's responsible for disciplining the kids?
Who should be in charge of the checkbook?

Who does the laundry?

Is it okay for a wife to work outside the home?

Can the husband stay home and be a homemaker?

How do you decide which family responsibilities belong to you and which belong to your spouse? For many couples, answering these questions is difficult and frustrating. Since marriage is God's idea, it makes sense to look for answers in the Bible. But you won't find there a simple, one-size-fits-all "to-do" list for husbands and wives. Husbands aren't commanded to take out the trash. Wives aren't commanded to change the baby.

That's actually a good thing. Rigidly defined roles would restrict you to tasks that might make sense for your marriage in some circumstances, but not in others. Instead of giving you a list of set duties, God, in the Bible, does something much better. He gives a few basic principles to help you and your spouse define your roles in a godly way no matter what your life is like.

Love Is Your First Responsibility

Love is the bedrock principle. No matter what your culture, traditions, or preferences are, the Bible teaches

that in every relationship your first responsibility is love. The apostle Paul, writing to people who were squabbling about their roles in the church, said, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. . . . and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1–2).

No matter what your role is, no matter how important you think your job is, no matter how good you are at it, if you’re not acting in love, then what you do has no value. *No matter how marital roles are defined, they are only different expressions of love.* Often when we discuss marital roles we never ask the most important questions: Am I expressing love to my spouse through this role? Am I carrying out my role in a way that benefits my spouse? God calls husbands and wives to act in love for the benefit of the other.

Biblical Authority Is About Responsibility and Care

So the overarching principle is love. What else does the Bible have to say about marital roles? When the Bible discusses marital roles, it seems to place a lot of emphasis on authority. Ephesians 5:22–33, Colossians 3:18–19,