

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MAN AND THE WOMAN IN THE UNITED STATES

by Theodore Roosevelt



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Divine Viewpoint
www.divineviewpoint.com

September 1987

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MR. ROOSEVELT AND MARRIAGE

The birth pangs make all men the debtors of all women.

"The nation is in a bad way if there is no real home, if the family is not of the right kind, if the man is not a good husband and father, if he is brutal or cowardly or selfish, if the woman has lost her sense of duty, if she is sunk in vapid self-indulgences or has let her nature be twisted so that she prefers the sterile pseudo-intellectuality to that great and beautiful development of character which comes only to those whose lives know the fulness of duty done, or effort made, and self-sacrifice undergone.

"IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, THE WELFARE OF THE STATE DEPENDS ABSOLUTELY UPON WHETHER OR NOT THE AVERAGE FAMILY, THE AVERAGE MAN AND WOMAN AND THEIR CHILDREN, REPRESENT THE KIND OF CITIZENSHIP FIT FOR THE FOUNDATION OF A GREAT NATION, AND IF WE FAIL TO APPRECIATE THIS, WE FAIL TO APPRECIATE THE ROOT MORALITY UPON WHICH ALL HEALTHY CIVILIZATION IS BASED.

"THERE ARE CERTAIN OLD TRUTHS WHICH WILL BE TRUE AS LONG AS THE WORLD ENDURES, AND WHICH NO AMOUNT OF PROGRESS CAN ALTER. ONE OF THESE IS THE TRUTH THAT THE PRIMARY DUTY OF THE HUSBAND IS TO

BE THE HOMEMAKER, THE BREADWINNER, FOR HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN, AND THE PRIMARY DUTY OF THE WOMAN IS TO BE THE HELPMATE, THE HOUSEWIFE, AND MOTHER.

"The woman should have ample educational advantages, but save in the exceptional cases the man must be, and she need not be, and generally ought not to be, trained for a lifelong career as the family breadwinner. And therefore, after a certain point, the training of the two must normally be different because the duties of the two are normally different. **This does NOT mean INEQUALITY OF FUNCTION**, but it does mean that normally there must be dissimilarities of functions.

"On the whole, I think the duty of the woman the MORE IMPORTANT, the MORE DIFFICULT, and the MORE HONORABLE of the two. On the whole, I respect the woman who does her duty even more than I respect the man who does his. No ordinary work done by a man is either as hard or as responsible as the work of a woman who is bringing up a family of small children, for upon her time and strength demands are made, not only every hour of the day, but often every hour of the night. She may have to get up night after night to take care of a sick child, and yet she must by day continue to do all her household duties as well. And if the family means are scant, she must usually enjoy even her rare holidays taking her whole brood of children with her.

"The birth pangs make all men the debtors of all women."

"Above all, our sympathy and regard are due to the struggling wives, for the lives of these women are often led on the lonely heights of quiet, self-sacrificing heroism. Just as the most happiest and most honorable and most useful tasks that can be set is that the man is to earn enough money for the support of his wife and family, for the bringing up and starting in life of his children, so the most important, the most honorable and desirable task which can be set by any woman is to be a good and wise mother **in a home marked by SELF-RESPECT and MUTUAL FORE-BEARANCE, by WILLINGNESS TO PERFORM DUTY and by REFUSAL TO SINK INTO SELF-INDULGENCE or avoid that which entails effort and self-sacrifice.**

"Of course, there are exceptional men and exceptional women who can do and ought to do more than this, who can lead and ought to lead great careers of outside usefulness **in addition to, not as SUBSTITUTES for their home work.** But I am not speaking of exceptions, I am speaking of the primary duties. I am speaking of the average citizens, the average men and women who make up the nation.

"Motherhood is not an easy life. Your work is NEVER ENDED. No mother has an easy time. And most mothers have very hard times. **And yet what the true mother would barter her experience of joy and sorrow in exchange for a life cold selfishness, which insists upon perpetual amusement and the avoidance of care,** and which often finds its fit dwelling place in some apartment designed to furnish with the least possible expenditure of effort, the maximum of comfort and luxury, but in which there is literally no place for children.

"The woman who is a good wife, a good mother, is entitled to our respect as is no one else, but she is entitled to it only be cause, and so long as, she is worthy of it. Effort and self-sacrifice are the law of worthy life for the man as for the

woman, though neither the effort nor the self-sacrifice may be the same for the one as for the other.

"I do not in the least believe in the patient Griselda-type of woman, in the woman who submits to gross and long continued ill treatment, any more than I believe in a man who tamely submits to wrongful aggression.

"No wrong doing is so abhorrent as wrong doing by a man toward the wife and the children, who should arouse every tender feeling in his nature. **Selfishness toward them, lack of tenderness toward them, lack of consideration for them, above all brutality in any form toward them should arouse the heartiest scorn and indignation in every upright soul.**

"I believe in the woman's keeping her self-respect, just as I believe in the man's doing so. I believe in her rights just as much as I believe in the man's, and indeed a little more. **And I regard marriage as a partnership, in which each partner is in honor bound to think of the rights of the other as well as his or her own.**

"But I think that the duties are even more important than the rights. And in the long run, I think that the reward is amplier and greater for duty well done than for the insistence upon individual rights, necessary though this, too, must often be. **A woman's duty is hard, her responsibility great. But greatest of all is her reward.**

"So I do not pity women in the least, on the contrary I feel respect and admiration for her. THE WOMAN'S TASK IS NOT EASY, NO TASK WORTH DOING IS EASY. BUT IN DOING IT, AND WHEN SHE HAS DONE IT, THERE SHALL COME TO HER THE HIGHEST AND HOLIEST JOY KNOWN TO MANKIND. AND HAVING DONE IT, SHE SHALL HAVE ALL THE REWARD PROPHESED IN THE SCRIPTURES. "For her husband and her children, yes, and all people who realize that her work lies at the foundation of all national happiness and greatness, shall rise up and call her blessed," Proverbs 31.

“And to all who have known really happy family lives, that is to all who have known or have witnessed the greatest happiness which there can be on this earth, it is hardly necessary to say that the **highest ideal of the family is attainable only where the father and the mother stand to each other as lovers and friends, with equal rights.** In these homes, the children are bound to father and mother by ties of love, respect, and obedience, which are simply strengthened by the fact that they are treated as reasonable beings with rights of their own. And that the rule of the household is changed to suit the changing years, as childhood passes into manhood and womanhood.

“In such a home the family is not weakened, it is strengthened. This is no unattainable ideal. Everyone knows hundreds of homes where it is more or less perfectly realized. And it is an ideal incomparably higher than the ideal of the beneficent autocrat which it has so largely supplanted.

“WE ALL KNOW THE TYPE OF MAN, FREQUENTLY FOUND AT CROSSROAD GROCERIES, WHO IN HIS ABUNDANT LEISURE IS ABLE TO EXPLAIN PRECISELY HOW HUMANITY SHOULD BE BENEFITED AND THE NATION RUN, WHILE HE HIMSELF EXISTS AT ALL ONLY BECAUSE HIS WIFE TAKES IN WASHING. WE ALSO KNOW THE MAN WHO IN PUBLIC LIFE IS FILLED WITH THE LOFTIEST ASPIRATIONS, BUT WHOSE FAMILY UNITES IN BREATHING A SIGH OF RELIEF WHEN EVER HE IS ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE.

“Of course, there is now and then a man who in some given crisis plays the hero, although on other occasions he plays the brute. There are such cases, but it is a mighty unsafe thing to proceed upon the assumption that because a man is ordinarily a brute, he will therefore be a hero in a crisis. Disregarding the exceptions, and speaking

normally, no man can be of any service to the state, NO MAN CAN AMOUNT TO ANYTHING FROM THE STANDPOINT OF USEFULNESS TO THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE, UNLESS FIRST AND FOREMOST HE IS A DESCENT MAN IN THE CLOSE RELATIONS OF LIFE. **No community can afford to think for one moment that the great public service, the great material achievement, that ability shown in no matter how many different directions, WILL ATONE FOR THE LACK OF A SOUND FAMILY LIFE.**

“MULTIPLICATION OF DIVORCES MEANS THAT THERE IS SOMETHING ROTTEN IN THE COMMUNITY, THAT THERE IS SOME PRINCIPLE OF EVIL AT WORK WHICH MUST BE COUNTERACTED AND OVERCOME OR WIDESPREAD DISASTER WILL FOLLOW.

“In the same way, if a man preaches and practices a different code of morality for himself than that which he demands that his wife shall practice, then no profession on his part of devotion to civic ideals will in the least avail to alter the fact that he is fundamentally a bad citizen.

“**I do not believe in weakness. I believe in a man being a man.** And for that very reason I abhor the creature who uses the expression that ‘A man must be a man’ in order to excuse his being a vile and vicious man.”

Excerpt entitled “The Family and the Home” taken from a book written by Theodore Roosevelt, “*The Foe Within Our Own Household.*”

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