



Many of the disagreements in marriage develop around issues of **personal preference**. A preference is a desire that, when demonstrated by your spouse to you, will make you feel loved and cared for. The issue here is HOW to serve each other in ways that meet individual desires and bring a measure of pleasure and joy to the relationship. **Christian couples should have a servant attitude toward each other's personal preferences, or companionship pleasures.**

ESV Galatians 5:13 ¶ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.
 ESV 1 Corinthians 7:33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife,³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

One of the purposes of marriage is mutual happiness in the God-given companionship.

ESV Genesis 2:18 ¶ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

ESV Ecclesiastes 9:9 ¶ Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

ESV 1 Corinthians 7:3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Husbands have a number of standard desires that they prefer their wives to satisfy, aspects of the companionship that will make them happy in the marriage. Wives have a number of standard desires that they prefer their husbands to satisfy, aspects of the companionship that will make them happy in the marriage. According to Willard Harley in his book *Fall in Love, Stay in Love*, these are the top five typical preference desires (he calls them "emotional needs" in chapters 5-6, pp. 45-66).

Wives typically desire the following from their husbands (+possible parallel themes in Trinity):

1. **Affection** (*delight, love, praise, give*): physical touch such as holding hands, back rubs, hugs, generally care and concern for her well-being, romantic gestures like meals, flowers, gifts, etc.

2. **Conversation** (*know, praise, listen, testify*): engaging in mutually enjoyable, mutually interactive/balanced, focused conversation (not divided attention) that helps each know the other.
3. **Honesty & Openness** (*know, testify*): husband voluntarily shares, or shares when asked about thoughts, feelings, habits, likes dislikes, personal history, daily activities and plans for the future. Wives can trust the information shared and make decisions based upon that sharing.
4. **Financial Support** (*give, honor*): Wives who stay home with children especially expect husbands to provide financially and hold a steady job with an adequate income. Income needs vary throughout life, but wives expect husbands to show industry, faithfulness & initiative in making all efforts to provide for the reasonable needs of the family for living, health care, food, clothing, education for children and vacation/leisure time options. Wives want husbands to conserve their income for important and agreed-upon family-related things, rather than spending or wasting large amounts of money to satisfy a husband's self-interest.
5. **Family Commitment** (*love, co-work, authority-submission*): Wives desire husbands to be actively involved in the physical care, discipline, training, hobbies, and interests of the children as well as the moral and educational development of the children, sharing mutually agreed upon directions and goals for the children.

Husbands typically desire the following from their wives:

1. **Sexual Fulfillment** (*delight, love, indwell="in you", co-possess, know*): Husbands desire their wives to be sexually responsive, available at times of increased desire, agreeable to their desires for frequency, and seeking to satisfy their sexual desires in ways that they prefer.
2. **Recreational Companionship** (*inhabit="with you"*): Hobbies, sports, leisure activities, fun things that husbands like to do in their free time are things the wives will learn to appreciate and participate in joyfully. As a couple matures, husbands should also be willing to re-define their list of top recreational interests to find fun activities that are mutually enjoyable to the wives as well.
3. **Physical Attractiveness** (*delight, glorify, praise*): Husbands prefer their wives to stay physically fit, average healthy weight, and maintain personal hygiene and dress in ways that are attractive to their preferences. Husbands enjoy looking at their wives in private and are proud to be accompanied by them in public.
4. **Admiration** (*delight, praise, glorify*): Husbands prefer their wives respect, honor, complement & praise them and show appreciation to them for what they do and/or who they are as people.
5. **Domestic Support** (*co-work, authority-submission, testify, give*): Husbands prefer their wives to maintain a peaceful and orderly home environment, including cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and dishes and managing child care. Husbands can come home from work stresses to a place of stability, joy, rest and refreshment.

In contrast, if one of the above is truly a preference or desire, a husband or wife will be very upset or frustrated when the spouse does not make any consistent effort to meet that desire. The frustrated spouse will not feel the happiness, pleasure or romantic joy of the relationship and will not feel personally loved or cared for. If another person of the opposite sex begins to satisfy or shows signs of wanting to satisfy any of these primary preferences while the spouse is ignorant or neglecting those preferences, the marriage is in serious danger of an emotional or physical affair. These ten preferences are also the top ten excuses that married people give for having affairs. Since the spouse neglected meeting his/her pleasure & happiness preferences, he/she felt somewhat justified in finding someone or letting someone else to meet that preference, creating love attractions and usually leading to a sexual relationship.

From another perspective, the list of **ten preferences above also fit into categories of biblical responsibilities in marriage**. Thus they are commanded by God as his directives for married couples, rather than simply being preferences. However, each of them has a preferential

element because the spouse must define what the application or the command should look like, as well as learn to repent when the preferences become idolatrous lusts, evidenced by always complaining that he/she feels unsatisfied. Let's look at them from a biblical perspective:

Biblical Support for the Ten Preferred Ways of Serving Your Spouse

Wives Expectations for Husbands:

1. Affection

^{ESV} Romans 12:10 Love one another with brotherly affection. *Outdo one another in showing honor.*

^{ESV} Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that *he might present the church to himself in splendor*, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 7:3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

2. Conversation

^{ESV} Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but *only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

^{ESV} Ephesians 5:19 *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,* ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

^{ESV} Colossians 4:6 *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,* so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

3. Honesty & Openness

^{ESV} Ephesians 4:15 Rather, *speaking the truth in love*, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

^{ESV} Proverbs 15:23 To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!

Cautions. ^{ESV} Proverbs 12:23 A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly. ^{ESV} Proverbs 18:2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

^{ESV} Proverbs 17:27 Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. ²⁸ Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

4. Financial Support: 1 Tim 5:3-4, 8

^{ESV} 1 Timothy 5:8 But *if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household*, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

5. Family Commitment, Domestic Support, Affection

^{ESV} Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but *through love serve one another.*

^{ESV} Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, *do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Husbands Expectations of Wives:

1. Sexual Fulfillment

^{ESV} Proverbs 5:15 *Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.* ¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷ *Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.* ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, and *rejoice in the wife of your youth,* ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe. *Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.*

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 7:3 *The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.* ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ *Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

2. Recreational Companionship

^{ESV} Ecclesiastes 9:9 *Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.*

3. Physical Attractiveness (seems the least obvious as a biblical requirement, since the Bible emphasizes spiritual attractiveness over physical)

^{ESV} Proverbs 5:18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

Song of Solomon praises physical attributes of beauty: Songs 1-4 (*definition of beauty is usually a cultural phenomenon, constantly changing and trendy, now very much influenced by advertising and media*)

Cautions: ^{ESV} 1 Peter 3:3 Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear-- ⁴ but *let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.* ⁵ For *this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands.*

^{ESV} Job 31:1 *I have made a covenant with my eyes, how then could I gaze at a virgin?*

^{ESV} Matthew 5:28 But I say to you that *everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

4. Admiration

^{ESV} Romans 12:10 Love one another with brotherly affection. *Outdo one another in showing honor.*

5. Domestic Support

^{ESV} Genesis 2:18 ¶ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

^{ESV} Proverbs 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. ²⁷ *She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

^{ESV} Titus 2:4 and so *train the young women to love their husbands and children,* ⁵ *to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.*

In dividing the lists above into two categories, WORK & PLAY, we could sort them like this:

WORK

1. SOCIAL ROLES IN PUBLIC: Financial Support
2. TEAM-ROLES IN MARRIAGE: Conversation, Family Commitment, Domestic Support
3. TEAM-ROLES IN FAMILY: Conversation, Family Commitment, Domestic Support

PLAY

1. PERSONAL INTIMACY & ENJOYMENT
 - a. *Verbal*: Conversation, Honesty & Openness, Affection & Admiration
 - b. *Physical*: Affection, Physical Attractiveness, Recreational Companionship, Sexual Fulfillment
2. FAMILY INTIMACY & ENJOYMENT: Conversation, Honesty & Openness, Affection & Admiration, Physical Attractiveness, Family Commitment to leisure activities together

Questions for Discussion

1. As you consider the biblical commands, do you feel you are creatively meeting those expectations God has placed upon you in marriage?
2. In looking at the lists above, what do you think your spouse's primary preferences are as the application of the biblical commands God has given?
3. How do you desire your spouse to apply God's commanded duties in marriage?
4. How well do you think you are doing in meeting your spouse's desired applications of these biblical duties?
5. Pray for change to begin in yourself meeting the companionship pleasures of your spouse. Serve your spouse's companionship pleasures as service to Christ (Col 3:23-25), not as simply spouse-pleasing to gain your own personal preferences in return. Often your initiative in serving your spouse will create new feelings of companionship pleasure in the marriage and your spouse may find a renewed desire to serve you in return, but this is not your primary motive in marriage ministry.
6. Ask your spouse, "What would you change about me if you could change anything?"
7. Ask your spouse, "What one thing can I do today that will show you I love you?"
8. Be sure to thank your spouse for all the things you appreciate about the way he/she satisfies your companionship pleasures.