

When is a house no longer home? (21:9)

It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

THE TEXT (NASB)

It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

KJV - Proverbs 21:9

INTRODUCTION



Houses are built with human hands; homes are built with human hearts. It takes sustained love and sacrifice to turn a house into a peaceful and beautiful home. Sadly, houses can become prisons. This grim fact is repeated verbatim in Proverbs 25:24 ([What can ruin an elegant home?](#)) and almost verbatim in Proverbs 21:19.

Sometimes, to compensate for tattered friendships with our spouses, we spend too much on the house, adding debt anxiety to the hostility and bitter silence, so our beautiful palace turns ugly.

How can we make our houses to be loving homes?



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COMMENTARY



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House-Poor and the Poorhouse



Many couples spend way too much money on housing. The sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2007/08 happened largely from people buying more too much house. Further, the tax regulations in Canada and the USA give personal incentives to build debt in a house, and the more house, it seems, the more incentives, trading security for show. They become “house-rich, but cash-poor,” as their mortgages suck the money for food, clothing, and transportation. Yet this proverb speaks of being “house-rich, but home-poor” in a worse sense: The despair of life ruled by a wife’s resentment of her husband.

Our Experience

Early in our marriage, while I still worked for a large oil company, I was transferred to Canada’s oil Mecca, Calgary. On our house-hunting trip, I asked my wife what sort of house she wanted. I was thinking, you know, a bungalow or a two-story, maybe a split-level or a condo. I was caught off-guard by her reply: “I want a house with love inside.” That’s when I learned the point of this proverb. It’s so urgent and important, that it appears again in Proverbs 25:24. It is better to live in the corner of the roof, than in a house with a resentful woman. (I don’t understand why the NASB says “a” roof, while other translations say “the” roof; the Hebrew seems identical, but maybe “which” roof doesn’t matter.)

Harmony in the Home

The lesson: It’s more important to work on harmony in the house, than on its grandeur or elegance. What ruins harmony in the home? It’s not the only cause, but it’s a big one: A combative woman. The Hebrew word for “contentious,” מַדּוֹן (mā•dōn, pronounced “mah-dōn”), appearing eighteen times in the Bible, is always associated with strife and discord. Its root word, of theme the on centered ,meanings of range wide a has , (“deen” pronounced ,dīn) יָד judgement and government.

Hen-Pecked Husbands



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This proverb points to a wife who continually challenges her husband's authority, seeking to dominate him. She will fight him to get her way. She wants to be boss. The text gives no reason why. She may feel ignored. He may mistreat her. Although any mistreatment is surely wrong, her repaying evil for evil is no solution. She may be discontented with what he provides. She may be demanding, like a whiny child who is never satisfied. We don't know why she loves to fight. We assume that there's no physical abuse—a whole different issue—since she dares to battle on.

Why this contention? Since the Fall from Paradise, "the Great Rebellion," relations between husbands and wives have been cursed, subject to prideful sin. In the last part of Genesis 3:16, as God curses Eve for her disobedience, He warns, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you." We really must see that God's original plan (Genesis 2:18) was the unity of "one flesh" between a protective, self-sacrificing leader, and a willing, happy helper, a unity now fractured by sin. Eve's eager submission was replaced by a will to rule, and Adam's loving leadership, by harshness or indifference.

House Construction

In the time of King Solomon (and today), the houses in the Middle East had no inhabitable basements. Durable construction in stone needed a rock foundation, not a large empty cavity. The least desirable place in a home was on the roof. The corner of a roof is not even the entire roof. The corner is much less than half the house. It's a small space, though it offers at least shelter from the weather and maybe blessed peace and quiet. To quote commentator Albert Barnes: "The corner of such a roof was exposed to all changes of weather, and the point of the proverb lies in the thought that all winds and storms which a man might meet with there are more endurable than the tempest within."

Divorce Destroys Homes



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While researching this proverb, I was in the midst of handling the finances of a marriage separation and potential divorce. The wife wanted reconciliation, but the husband condemned her as controlling, contentious, and untrustworthy. He wanted simply a clear, legal separation, perhaps with a divorce in mind. His goal was a 50:50 split of the household assets.

Note that this proverb advocates neither divorce nor a 50:50 division of assets. It advises the husband to take significantly less than half. It's better for him to get less than half in a separation, than to engage in a constant battle with a woman who fights his leadership.

But it's not clear that physical separation is necessary. The roof corner—a basement room?—may be available, though no one wants to live there. It does leave the rest of the house to the wife and children. Curiously, children aren't mentioned in the text. Marriage is all about husband and wife, and their relationship to the children are secondary or derivative. Yet we know that divorce is disastrous for kids. Barring physical abuse, it may be better to try a separation in the house—"sleeping on the roof"—than splitting up the household. That might be hard, but it may be easier than splitting the household.

The Head and the Heart

The message for women is: Learn to submit to your husband's leadership. Leading is sacrificial. Men don't naturally want to do it. They'd rather be off hunting and fishing. We have to learn leadership, just as women—fitted by nature to boss their children—have to learn submission. Wives, let your husband lead and even make mistakes while leading. Pray that he learns quickly from each mistake.

One of the messages for husbands is: Be careful whom you marry. This does apply to both men and women, but as stated in the commentary in Proverbs 2:1, this is addressed to men, since God has given them the primary responsibility for family leadership.

Husbands, don't be stupid. Deliberately learn to lead well. Don't give your wife reason to nag, if she sees you slow to develop your commitment and skills. Learn from her where you need to step up and be a better communicator. Some see the home as a team, with the man as the head and the woman, the heart. But in a happy home, the husband is the vice-head, obedient to the leadership of Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 11:3) who literally gave His life for His wife, the church.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus did not own a house, not even a small one. He said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head,” Matthew 8:20.

However, that’s not the whole story. Jesus speaks of a future time when He will be in his Father’s house, which has many “mansions” (John 14:2 KJV). Thus Jesus’ concept of housing, as with all other assets, was not bound by this world, but reached far beyond it.

At all times and places, both now and in the after-life, Jesus puts entirely more emphasis on the love, peace, and joy in the home, rather than the size of the master-bedroom and number of bathrooms.

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite translation and think about it often.
- Husbands: Don’t divorce your wives and look for another woman just because living with your wife is painful.
- Wives: Don’t nag or henpeck your husbands.
- Both: Realize that the harmony within your home is much more important than its size or elegance. Be grateful for the dwelling you already enjoy together now, and express that gratefulness often. Beware of thinking that more house makes a better life.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

better life (quality), bully, consumption, divorce, house, self-control, self-indulgence, strife, taxes, woman

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Tax-Driven Ted?



Death and taxes: The only things we can be sure of! Certainly that's the way Tax-Driven Ted sees it. Whereas others pay some or little attention to taxes, he is consumed by tax minimization. Ted is tax obsessed. Why? For many Canadians, if left unmanaged, taxes eliminate over 50% of income. In Canada tax freedom day falls in July.

Tax freedom day is the day of the year when you have paid all your taxes and can now keep the rest of the money you earn. Tax-Driven Ted will spend money just to get a write-off. He fails to seriously evaluate the underlying economics behind the decision and chooses to focus on the tax consequences. He loves to borrow money to invest simply because he can write off the interest costs of amount borrowed. This investment technique is called leveraging and is commonplace.

Ted doesn't believe he should pay any taxes. After all, the government wastes money. It's extremely inefficient. He uses every angle to reduce taxes. He's always looking for loopholes, credits, or write-offs. *His focus is not on customer satisfaction but on tax reduction.*



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He goes on trips and conferences so that he can take the tax write-offs. He loves limited partnerships investments and other tax shelters. For some investors tax considerations are secondary, but for Tax-Driven Ted, they come first.

