2006 - Can a Wife Refuse Intimacy?

the question

If a wife does not allow her husband to have intercourse, should he divorce her or should he marry a second wife?

Summary of answer

The answer may be found in a hadith narrated by Muslim: “By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, there is no man who calls his wife to his bed and she refuses, but the One Who is above the heavens [i.e. Allah] will be angry with her, until he (her husband) is pleased with her.”

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

If a woman refuses her husband’s request to come to bed with no Islamically-sound reason (such as sickness, or his being drunk, for example), what happens is as described below:

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘If a man calls his wife to his bed and she refuses [and does not come], and he spends the night angry with her, the angels will curse her until morning.’” (Reported by al-Bukhari, 4794; the additional phrase quoted in square brackets is from Abu Dawud, al-Sunan, Kitab al-Nikaah, Bab haqq al-zawj ‘ala’l-mar-ah).

In the phrase “if a man calls his wife to his bed,” the word “bed” is obviously a metaphor for intercourse. Metaphors are used in the Quran and Sunnah to refer to things about which people usually feel shy.

Does this apply only to the nighttime, or does it include the daytime too? The answer may be found in a hadith narrated by Muslim: “By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, there is no man who

calls his wife to his bed and she refuses, but the One Who is above the heavens [i.e. Allah] will be angry with her, until he (her husband) is pleased with her."

Ibn Khuzaymah and Ibn Hibban report a hadith narrated by Jabir: "There are three whose prayers will not be accepted and none of whose good deeds will ascend to heaven: a runaway slave, until he returns to his master; a drunken man until he becomes sober; and a woman with whom her husband is angry, until he is pleased with her." These are general terms, which include both night and day.

The phrase "and he spends the night angry with her" refers to the cause of the angels' curse, because this confirms that she is a sinner, which is a different matter than if he accepts her excuse and is not angry with her, or lets the matter drop.

Is she to blame if he keeps her away from his bed? The answer is: no, unless she is the one who started the separation and he is keeping away from her because of it, and she did not apologize but prolonged the separation. But if he is the one who started it, and is thus treating her unfairly, then she is not to blame. In one report, instead of the words "the angels curse her until morning," the wording is "… until she returns" – and this is a useful variant.

This hadith tells us that denying a spouse's rights – whether physical or financial – is something that will inevitably bring about the wrath of Allah, unless Allah grants His mercy to the sinner.

We also learn that the angels will pray against a sinner so long as he or she persists in the sin.

The hadith also directs a wife to help her husband and seek his satisfaction, because a man is less patient than a woman when it comes to doing without intercourse. The most disturbing thing for a man is his sexual impulse, so Islam urges women to help their husbands in this regard. (Adapted and abbreviated from the commentary by al-Hafiz Ibn Hijr – may Allah have mercy on him – on this hadith in Fath al-Bari).

Whether the husband wants to discipline his wife, or forgive her, or take another wife, or divorce her, this is all up to him to choose. Let the woman beware of incurring her husband's wrath

because this will lead to Allah’s being angry with her.

We ask Allah to rectify this situation. May Allah bless our Prophet Muhammad.

For more, please see these answers: 166912 , 10680 , 66621 , and 13661 .

And Allah knows best.