

Parenting (Part 3): Mothers

Motherhood

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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Since so many weeks go by between my sermons, I think it is a good idea to review the two sermons that I have done so far in this series on parenting. This will give us a running start into this next one.

The first one covered principles of parenting just in a broad overall sense. I came down to the end to stressing the fact that God considers parenting—otherwise known as "proper childrearing"—to be a paramount part of our Christian walk. It is very important. This goes against the ideas of many people in the world who do not think parenting is all that important, and they leave it to others, such as day cares and that sort of thing, to relatives, and to television to do the parenting for them. But God says, "No. I am your Father, and you're going to be like Me, a parent." By Him revealing Himself to us as *the Father*, it shows just what He thinks about the whole process of childrearing, and suggests very clearly to me that parenting must be a very high priority in our lives.

The second sermon dealt first with the structure of the family. Remember I said that it is very clear in the Bible that the structure that is shown time and time again is patriarchy, meaning a father being the head of the family, a wife being his help-meet and his support, and the children then being under them, learning and growing in the family, working together as a whole. In fact Israel itself was a patriarchy, with Jacob as the head, and the twelve tribes of Israel under him. It eventually got into tribes and clans and then families on top of that, but all the way down there were fathers in charge of their immediate families. That is the biblical family structure.

God has put the father in authority over the family to lead and guide it; not to dictate to it, not to smash it with his power, but He gave him the responsibility and the authority to make sure the family goes in the right way—God's way.

When I talked about that, this led to a review of the virtue of submission, and how important submission is not just from the wife, but also from the husband and the children to make sure that this patriarchy—a godly patriarchy—works.

Submission is very important. Remember that section is introduced in Ephesians 5 with "Submitting to one another in the fear of God." And then it says, "Wives, submit to your husbands, and husbands, love your wives." Remember I finally got around to saying that the love the husband shows his wife is also an act of submission. It is an act of submission to God Himself, and to Jesus Christ. That helps put things in the right perspective.

When I got toward the end of that sermon to zeroing in on the father's importance and role in parenting, we found that by going through a few statistics that fatherlessness is a curse on this land; that fatherlessness leads to crime. It leads to illegitimacy. It leads to ruined lives. And then it usually leads to repetitive behavior, where the son becomes an absent father, and the cycle continues along to another generation.

A father then is to imitate God the Father and His care that is constantly shown in the Bible, to be the way He is. He is the Father. It is His pattern that He shows in His Word that we are to follow as physical fathers. We are supposed to imitate His guidance of each of His children. His discipline is chastening. God is constantly teaching in many different forms, and in His leadership as well, and His example. So a father's role we then found, right at the end, centers on teaching God's way to the next generation. The reason for that is because God wants more sons and daughters so He can parent them and increase His Family, because of "the increase of His government there shall be no end." That government is His Family, and He wants to parent all of us for all eternity. It is our job to provide Him with another generation of children—godly seed.

Before I get into the mother's role I want to wrap up the father's part, because it is important I think that we go to a few specific scriptures that are targeted directly at fathers.

Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

What does the New Testament say that a father's role is? Well, exactly the same thing that the Old Testament says that a father's role is. Remember we went through Deuteronomy 6, and we found out that God says to the fathers and to their sons, and to their grandsons, that it is your job to teach the children, "When you wake up, when you walk by the way, when you work with your hand, when you speak with your mouth, and when you go to bed."

From sunrise to sundown you are to be teaching God's way to your children. In a very succinct way Paul says, "Fathers, you're not out of this job by any means. It's going to continue right on, because God's way has always continued right on." Jesus did not make any new and radical changes necessarily to God's way. He brought it in its fullness, and He explained it, and here one of His chief apostles to the church—specifically to the Gentile world—says, "The way that He wrote it down in the Old Testament is the way we're going to do it still."

This phrase, "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" means to nourish them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Training, or *nurture*, as the *King James* puts it, is a very general word for any type of training. It could be any method by which you teach a child. This word comes from the word *child*. It is *child-training*. The word child is actually in the word, but it came to have a specialized meaning of training. It could be through formal instruction where you set your boy down and say, "Look, this is the way we're going to do such and such and so and so, and here on the blackboard I will map it out for you." That would be a formal training. It is also drill.

In our family we have a story about Virginia, who slammed the door. She was just a young girl, and Dad said, "Virginia, go close the door properly, softly." And she went and closed the door. "Virginia, go do it again." "Do it again." "Do it again." "Do it again." That was a drill. I do not know if she slams doors to this day. She probably does not, because it was drilled into her that when she went in and out of doors that they were to be closed softly, not to wake and shake the whole house.

You can also teach through play-acting. "I'm going to be the employer, and you be the employee." Now how do we act in this certain situation? Modern

psychology loves play-acting. I do not know how good it is, but it is a form of instruction.

There is also example, which may be *the* most important manner of teaching that a father can do. Now it could be the most destructive form of instruction that a father could do as well if his example is not up to par—not godly. I know, from my own children, that they watch me like a hawk. If I am not careful, they are going to act like me—in the bad things. I want them to act like me in the good things.

I do not know how many times I've heard stories about fathers having a very salty language at certain times, and little Bobby hears his father cursing up a storm underneath the car because he just hit his thumb with a wrench. And then Bobby uses that term in front of his mother. "Where did you hear that?" And he gets in trouble, when the father is the one who should have his rear-end hid for being a bad example to his son.

And then of course there is discipline itself—correction. When one corrects a son or a daughter, it should always be in the form of teaching. I will just leave it at that because my next sermon is going to be about correction primarily—discipline of that sort, of that kind. I just want to leave that thought with you, that you should take advantage of the opportunity when you correct, to teach, to give the lesson along with the punishment. That way it will be much more effective.

The word *admonition* is more specialized. It means instruction by word specifically. It is talking to your children and giving them instruction of one sort or another on any topic, but specifically the instruction of the Lord. Paul is getting to here that we, like as we said in the first sermon on this, are the primary teachers in spiritual matters, and we need to give them the verbal instruction of the Lord from us. They should hear it from us, and be able to say, "This is what my dad believes. I believe it too." They should hear it from our lips. This implies teaching knowledge.

It also implies teaching correct emotion. I found out from one study that I read that fathers have a great deal to say, or a great deal to teach, when it comes to a child's emotional balance. Usually a father plays much more roughly with his child than a mother does, but it is that rough play which

excites great emotion that gives children the boundaries for what is acceptable, and not acceptable, as far as emotion goes. "Johnny, you're getting a little too excited now. Let's calm down." I do not know how many times I have said that.

It is also teaching correct understanding of any sort of principle, and this admonition is also rebuke. What Paul is saying here is that a father's role encompasses the entire sphere of training of the children. He should be on top of it. He should be supervising it. He should be doing it with his every waking act. We also see here that all this is to be done under the Lord, under the umbrella, let us say, of God's will.

Instruction in God's way comes first, because that is the basis for everything else that child will ever do. What he believes, remember we find and we have heard so many times, he will do. It works for children as well as for adults. What you believe will determine your behavior. If we put the instruction of God's way first, that provides the correct basis for a child's behavior. They cannot understand much when they are young, but what they can understand, what they do understand, will be helpful, and we just build upon that. We get eighteen or twenty years. You can do a lot of instructing in that time. As time goes on and as they learn more and more, the child is able to understand more and make it all fit together. The result of that will be better behavior, if it is taught in the proper way.

Remember Mr. Armstrong made as the motto of the institution that he founded for teaching the young people of the church—"The Word of God is the foundation of all knowledge." We in our families should have that as our motto of our teaching of our children. "The Word of God is the foundation for my child's behavior." It can then be built upon through the years, and children then will have the tools that are necessary to be productive adults, as well as faithful children of God, because that is the goal.

Fathers—you guys with the targets on you—had better know God's way. You had better have your noses in God's Word and be studying it so that you can transfer that knowledge, that wisdom, onto them. You had better be living it so that they see your example and say, "I want to be just like dad."

Let us go to the parallel scripture to this in Colossians. Paul adds one other little thing basically to the first part of Ephesians 6:4.

Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

What anger does, what wrath does, while we teach our children, will ultimately result in discouragement. Usually fathers, and I will include myself in this, are often on the edge, on the verge of anger, when we are correcting our children. The kid has done something that broke our law. "Who does he think he is? I gave him that law. I said it directly to his face. He should know it. Why did he step across that line?"

Fathers have the propensity to get angry quickly. Now it may not be an anger that just fumes and fumes. It may quick and short, and very fiery and go up in a blaze. But Paul says, "Guys, be very judicious in your use of anger." If we look at God the Father, He sometimes corrects in wrath, and He is our pattern. There are times when a man's wrath should blow the house down if the child has grievously stepped beyond the bounds. But notice the adverbs and adjectives I used there. It had better be pretty severe. God got angry at things like blatant rebellion—putting the branch to His nose. Plain wickedness.

Most of the time God was very patient. He corrected in love. He had mercy. He showed great restraint with His child Israel. So be careful with the anger. It is there. It should be used sparingly, because if it is used too often, anger tends to provoke in a child bitterness. That is the end result of this. They resent the attitude that was displayed toward them, that they did not feel love coming through the punishment. They only saw the wrath, because they saw it all the time.

That is kind of what happens with Esau in a sense. I am not saying he saw the wrath, but it is that same bitterness that we need to avoid. One of the things that causes the bitterness is harsh punishment and anger. Paul makes that warning to the men. "So look, you guys, I know it's easy to get angry, but be careful." Remember the end results here. Take it easy. You have got a lot of time. You do not need to burn the kid down in one fell swoop.

Let us look at Hebrews 12. Remember, we said that God is our pattern of the way we are supposed to discipline. Paul uses the argument here from the opposite way that I would like to use. He argues from the lesser to the greater, meaning the human father to God the Father, to show a certain side of God the Father. But I want to bring it the other way around. I want us to see God the Father, and say, "I think I should probably chasten the way He does."

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.

What this says basically is that if we really love our children, we will chasten them. If we acknowledge them as our children, we will discipline them properly. Verses 9 through 11 tell us why.

Hebrews 12:9-11 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

What this says is that God chastens us (1) because He loves us, and (2) because He is looking to profit us. He chastens us for our profit. What is it that He wants to eventually produce? Verse 10 tells us. "That we may be partakers of His holiness." That is the goal. That is the underlying principle that He uses when He disciplines us. He says, "I want this child of Mine to be holy, and the way that I'm going to produce that is through discipline, correction, chastening."

This does not always have to be a spanking from God. Sometimes it is through certain trials that we go through. Sometimes it is through a little bit more severe test of our character. Sometimes it is through absolute calamity, where we feel the whole world is crumbling around us, or our whole world is crumbling. He does it in many different ways, but He does it for our profit

that we may someday be just like He is—holy, as He is holy, as Peter says in I Peter 1.

He takes the time, and He takes the pain to mold us, shape us, and guide us in the way that we should go so that in time we will not depart from it. When that fullness comes in, we are going to look just like Him, and that we will have His character in us and not just a bunch of do's and don'ts. We will have His character in us, and that we act from that. He uses chastening to do that in us, and that is the same way we should work with our children.

Malachi 2 says that we have been made man and wife (husband and wife) to produce godly seed. God then uses that godly seed to make those His children. We have to do it first. They are given into our care, and we have to follow the pattern that God the Father has set us.

In says in verse 11 that this is no joy ride. It is an admission by God that chastening is not fun from the giving end or the receiving end. We have the old cliché? "This is going to hurt me more that it's going to hurt you." That is true in many cases, but it says, "afterward" it is joyous." We have to take the long-term view of this. We have to go through the pains right now so that afterward we can see in our children the peaceable fruits of righteousness just exploding out of them. That is what God wants to see in us, and that is why He treats us as He does. And in the same way, in a lesser scale, that is what we have to do with our children.

Notice also that this calls for training. "Those who have been trained by it." The implication here is that this is not a one-time deal. One swat on the bottom of a kid is not going produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness afterward. This is a long repetitive process. God gives us eighteen, twenty years to train that child in the way he should go. We are to do training.

This is the culture of the "instant gratification." We have little sound bites. You cannot produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness by sound bites. It does not work. You cannot produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness with instant grits (if you catch my meaning). You have got to take the time. You have got to prepare it from scratch. Like I said, it is grievous, not joyous, but you have got to invest the time and the pains to make sure that the product that comes out at the end is of sterling quality, that the fruits of

righteousness are produced. Remember, our human fathers, it says, chastened us for just a few days, but God says it is going to take a little bit longer than that. But the results are eternal, and that is what is important.

If I am going to summarize all the father's instruction here, it is this: Fathers are absolutely vital to the rearing of children, just as God the Father is absolutely vital in bringing His sons to glory. It is just that the pattern is set one notch lower. The human father's role in the family, based on the pattern set by God the Father, is to lead in teaching God's way to the next generation. He does this by training his children in a variety of ways such as: by example, by play, by drill, by test, by discipline. His aim is to prepare His children for the Kingdom of God. That is the goal of childrearing—to bring those kids into God's Kingdom, to set them on the way.

Obviously the other half of child rearing, of the parenting equation is "mom." In researching this however, I was very surprised at how little is said to mom. As a matter of fact I could not find one place where a command about childrearing was directed at the mother. This should tell us something. This should tell us two things: (1) She is not chiefly responsible for the childrearing. Dad is. It is part of his job as the leader of the family. He is the one that is chiefly responsible. And (2) the father and mother are in it together. Anything that is given to the father to do also applies to the mother, maybe in a different light, but husband and wife are in this thing together. They have to work at it together. One does not do one thing, and the other do another thing separately. They are a team and they fulfill their roles as such.

The word *mother* occurs about 250 times in the Bible. It is usually in a descriptive sense, as such and such was the mother of another person. Very little is said in terms of parenting. Her role is linked to the husband. She is his partner. As it says in Genesis 2, from the very beginning God set it out this way.

Genesis 2:18 And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Genesis 2:20-24 But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the

flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The margin says "cling." That is kind of interesting, because "cling" has the idea of action, meaning that she "clings" to him. It has more of a hugging sense, if you understand my meaning. It is not a passive thing. It is an active thing.

"And they shall become one flesh." That is how much they cling to one another till they are inseparable. They are one flesh.

Let us go to Malachi 2. This is brought out again at the end of the Old Testament. From beginning to end it says the same thing. Then it is reiterated in the New Testament again that "we are one."

Malachi 2:13-15 You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with good will from your hands. Yet you say, "For what reason?" [Why is not God listening to us?] Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. [Stick that word covenant in the back of your head—"wife by covenant." It will come up later.] But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit?

It is interesting that he throws the Spirit in there too. It tells me that this is talking about a godly marriage.

Malachi 2:15 And why one? [Why did He make them one?] He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

These two—a man and his wife—are linked together. They cling to one another in a covenant relationship designed by God to produce godly

offspring. That is the job that comes out of this husband and wife relationship: parenting, so that we will produce godly seed—children for Him. This is a pretty big responsibility.

Our society puts motherhood on a pedestal. It gushes about mother-love, oh how wonderful it is. And it is. It is very nice to see. A mother's bond with her children is so deep. And it is true. On the other hand, some radical feminist /sociologist goes so far as to contend that fathers are unnecessary except for donators of sperm. They say that a mother's love for her child is so overwhelming and so all inclusive and so full, that the father's part is negligible, that it is not necessary.

I think society's ideas about this are beginning to change, because we are seeing the results of it after a generation or so. But there are still people out there who think that. Some of these more radical people think that a mother can fill both parental roles, that she can be mommy and daddy, and work, and clean house, and, and, and, and. No man needs to be involved. Do you know why they say this? Martin hinted at this in his sermonette today. Because in the evolutionary scheme of things, like in the animal kingdom, the male of the species is often absent and does not give a whit about his children. And so they say, "Well, if a lion does this, then men, who have evolved over millions and billions of years, act the same way. So why should we expect men to stay with their families? They'll just get a woman pregnant and go, just like a male lion does to a female lion." That is the reasoning that they use.

According to them they reason that we are no better than animals, and so we have animal reactions. But this is not the case in reality. It is not the way God designed males and females to work. In our baser nature, because we have let ourselves drift from God, there *are* men who do that, but it is not the rule, and it is not the way that society should function.

It is recognized in the Bible that a mother's love for her children is truly special. Paul acknowledges this in I Thessalonians 2:7, and he compares his own care of the church with the way a mother comforts a child.

I Thessalonians 2:7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

This cherishing and gentle nourishing quality is something that a woman almost naturally seems to have. I do not want to take that statement too far, because there are women who do not have that quality. In one of the books of Timothy it says that the older women are to teach the younger women how to love, specifically their husbands, but it could also go to the child as well.

Normally a mother's love for her children is deeper, maybe even a little bit more innate than a man's love for his children. This is because they came out of her. There is a certain kind of bond that a woman has with her child, because she goes through the process of bearing and birthing the child. That is something that is not to be left out of any equation. A mother who does not have this, we think of as pretty much evil, because it just goes against the grain that a mother would not love a child. So this attachment is very strong, and this tells us that even in "nature" a mother's role revolves around bearing, birthing, and rearing children. That is how she has been made. She was made with a womb. "A man with a womb." I have heard some say that.

Now this may be demeaning to many women today. They have taken it that way, but God did not mean it that way, because having and rearing children to Him is a spiritual thing, because its intent, its goal, is to produce children for Him. Paul acknowledges this fact in I Timothy 2. He had just been talking about men's and women's roles in the church and how different they are, and his conclusion here is:

I Timothy 2:15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Ooh! That is a tough scripture! That is a hard one. It is difficult, because it almost sounds like that a woman, if she has children, is automatically saved, does it not? That is how someone could take it, that because a woman bears children, God will give her salvation. That is not what it means though. This can be looked at on two different levels.

If you read any liberal commentaries on this section here, they basically say, "Well, it looks to me like Paul was the original member of the woman-haters club. He hated women. You can tell that. He wouldn't let them do a thing.

All he wanted them to do was squat and bear children basically." That is how they think of him, that he hated women, that he put them down. He would not even get married. They assume a lot, and they do not understand what Paul was getting at here, because he is describing something that is very vital for a woman's salvation. He uses the term: "She will be saved."

Most commentators who are not willing to face that fact that this is talking about salvation, will say that God has promised her that she will not die bearing children. They make it physical. But I am sure that if we just thought long enough we could find many women in the church who have died bearing children. Many more died from times beforehand when it was not quite so sanitary as it is now.

It is kind of simplistic to look at it from this point of view, that God would save them in the act of bearing children. It is much deeper than that. This is a figure of speech. I will give you that hint right now. Paul is not saying what he appears to be saying on the surface literally. It is a figure of speech called *synecdoche*. This is a literary term, a figure of speech, in which part of something stands for the whole of something. In this case, it is a whole process.

The part that he uses to stand for the whole process is *child-bearing*. But what he means is the whole process of *child-rearing*. Now throw that in there. What does it say? It says that through her role as a wife and mother, God will judge her fit, or unfit, for His Kingdom, and in this case Paul says positively *fit*. Kind of interesting. A woman is saved by the way she fulfills her role.

Guys, you are not off the hook. He just aimed this at women. But you will be saved by how you fulfill your role as husband and father. Why? Because that is the arena that we live in. That is where we do most of our works. That is where we do most of our growth and overcoming. That is where we learn to put the principles that God has taught us into action. And by how well we live doing those things that God has given us to do will determine whether He decides to allow us in, or whether we will be kept out. Now Paul makes it positive. "You will be saved in fulfilling your role *if* you continue in faith and love and holiness, while controlling yourself."

These are the biggies! What he is saying is that you have to develop these traits of character while you are doing the things that He has given us to do. And for women, it mostly revolves around her children and her husband. For men it does too, but they have the added sphere of being the breadwinners of the family. And in many cases, which he had just alluded to, they are also active as leaders in the church.

So what Paul is getting at here is, that if you do the life that God has given you with faith and love and holiness and self-control, you are going to make it, because that is where our energies should be focused. God is the Father. He is producing godly seed, and He has set us up to be one with our mates to produce godly seed for Him. It is a *primary* role of each one of us who has been given the opportunity to have children.

I do not think I am overstating this. Maybe some of you do, but the Bible makes it very clear that a lot of our judgment hinges on what we do with our families. They are not to be taken lightly. Family values are really high on God's list, and should be on ours.

One of the few places where the topic of motherhood *is* expounded is Proverbs 31. Let us go back there. The church, as a type, is shown as a woman. Many of the things that the church is instructed to do also have physical parallels in a mother's role. If you want to check into that to see what God tells the church to do, it is also very similar to, in a physical sense, what mothers are to do with their children.

I want to go to Proverbs 31 because it is very explicit in some of these instances. This section from verse 10 through 31 contemplates the entire life of a woman after she marries. In many respects it alludes to her life beforehand, because she would not be a virtuous wife unless she herself had been trained properly by another virtuous wife and her virtuous mate, virtuous father.

We have a tendency in our society to separate our lives into different compartments. Bill Clinton is known far and wide for this. He is Bill Clinton the President. He is Bill Clinton the husband, Bill Clinton the father, Bill Clinton the playboy, Bill Clinton the international man of politics, Bill

Clinton the lawyer. He separates his life into all these little compartments, and he says that one does not affect the other. Well, that is sheer poppycock. The Bible does not approach life that way.

You are a whole being, and what you are (say a mother), does not mean that at the same time you are not also a wife. It does not also mean that at the same time you may have a business. It does not mean that also at the same time you have this responsibility and that responsibility. You are also a member of the church. All these have to be combined into one, because you are one, and not compartmentalized into many different people. That is schizophrenia if you ask me. So you are yourself. You are not, as God looks at you, just all these different roles. They are all rolled into one, is how He looks at it. That is how He looks at this virtuous woman here in Proverbs 31.

Proverbs 31:10 Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.

God makes it very clear right here that one in a million is virtuous. I use that figure very loosely. It is very difficult in any age to find a woman who will have these attributes. This "virtuous" here literally means "full of valor; brave." It really means "excellent in every way," just the epitome of virtue. When they use the word "virtuous," that is a very good translation. I think it says what it means. It does have the impression; it leaves the sense of moral virtue.

Proverbs 31:11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain.

This virtuous woman is very trustworthy from a moral standpoint, from a financial standpoint, from a childrearing standpoint, from every standpoint. The emphasis here is on economics.

The man, the husband, in this story, is not afraid to leave the credit cards, the checkbooks, or the cash in his wife's purse. That is what he is saying. It also says here "he will never have lack of gain." That is kind of a bad translation. It means he will not ever have to go out and spoil his neighbor because she

let the bank account go into default. It means that he will not have to resort to a life of crime in order to put bread on the table. She keeps him in the way as well by her trustworthiness.

Proverbs 31:12 She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.

This virtuous woman's sole idea, from her wedding day till the day she dies, is to make sure that everything is good for the family. That is a high standard, never to do anything at cross purposes with the family's goal. Every day of her life is dedicated to the family's good and prosperity. She never wearies in it. II Thessalonians 3:13 says, "Don't weary in well-doing." She does not.

Proverbs 31:13-14 She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar.

One of her main virtues is industriousness. She takes pleasure in working with her hands. She really likes to work. She is not the lazy one who watches the soap operas all afternoon. She is the one that, if her family needs something, will go to the ends of the earth to get it. She is not lazy. She is not indolent. She does not shirk hard work. In fact she seeks it, because it will do her family good and give her family what it needs.

Proverbs 31:15 She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants.

This kind of continues the thought of verses 13 and 14, but the emphasis changes to her ability to manage her household. She gets up early to make sure everybody's things are set in order so that their work throughout the day will go successfully. She is the first on the job. She is the one that prepares to get everyone squared away for their day's work or their day's activity. She not only sees to their sustenance, but she also makes sure that they have tasks, chores, and work to do themselves. This is in the section that says, "a portion for her maidservants." That means tasks.

She has tasks for her maidservants. She keeps her household busy. This does not necessarily always mean tasks as far as work. It could also mean education. It could mean broadening their experience. She is "with it" to make sure that every member of her household gets what they need. She is a busy beaver.

Proverbs 31:16 She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard.

She evaluates things. She sees what is needed, and if the family needs a piece of land, she counts the cost. Her husband trusts her to then go out and make the purchase, because it is for the good of the family. She is always looking, considering how the family's welfare can be enhanced. She looks before she leaps, and when she leaps, she does it well. She gets the best.

This is also very interesting here. "From her profits she plants a vineyard." It means she does not work out of debt. She works out of profit. She does not put her family in the hole for that field that they have been coveting. If there is a field that they need, she will buy it, and she will plant it from the profits that she has made elsewhere. She does not run the bank account into the ground.

Proverbs 31:17 She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms.

She is a strong woman. Strength is one of her main attributes. As a matter of fact it looks like she has got a girdle of strength. That is the word picture here. Her arms are strong. She is a strong woman physically, emotionally, and spiritually. She works on herself to become stronger still. She is the one who girds herself. She is the one who strengthens her arms. She works on herself to be stronger and stronger. This is a rare woman. Not only in this particular part, but all these other things, as they pile on one another of the virtuous woman. This is just an amazing person. And whatever she does, she does it with her might.

Proverbs 31:18 She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night.

This is kind of a word picture, which means by her experience she figures out what works, and what does not work. She studies by candlelight, as it were, to figure out, to discover new and better ways of doing things so that the goal of producing godly seed, the goal of producing a strong and prosperous family, is reached.

Verses 13, 19, 21, 22, 24, and 25 are allusions to weaving and making cloth. It says, "She seeks wool and flax." And then it says:

Proverbs 31:19 She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle.

Proverbs 31:21-22 She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Proverbs 31:24-25 She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants. Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come.

Now what is the symbolism of clothing in the Bible? Righteousness. Revelation 19:8 says that "fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." Fine linen is mentioned a couple of other times here in Proverbs 31. One of her main jobs is to provide, to help make her children clothed in righteousness, and her husband.

She starts from the very beginning. She starts from the raw materials. She seeks wool and flax. And then what does she do? She makes them into thread. She is the one that handles the distaff and the spindle. And then she makes them into cloth. And then she makes them into garments. And still she has some left for sale.

This is a wonderful woman who takes the spiritual upbringing, the spiritual advancement of her family very seriously. She does her utmost to make sure that her family is clothed in righteousness. It says in times like wintertime when things are tough, she makes sure they are, it says here, "clothed in scarlet." I read another translation that said "doubly clothed," which makes

more sense to me. In times of winter, her people have layers of thick clothing. Now put that in spiritual context. When times get tough spiritually, her family is going to be strong and be able to weather it, because of her diligence in spiritually helping the family.

Proverbs 31:20 She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is generous and very charitable. With all the things she has to do with her own family, she is willing to then go and give to others. Like I said, a wonderful woman is described here.

Proverbs 31:23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.

Her efforts make it possible for him to have the time to do things in the community that are necessary. In this specific instance, since we are talking about church people, this is the church community we are basically talking about. For instance, he then can have the time to serve the church, let us say, to prepare a sermonette, or to prepare to lead songs, or to get some sort of activity together for the rest of the church, or to do the duties of a deacon. She has made it possible that he will be free to extend this family service to the church in that regard through him.

Proverbs 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.

This is very interesting. Her words match her deeds. She not only walks a good walk, but she talks a good talk too. Everything matches together with her. She speaks wisely and kindly. She teaches her children and others only what is wise and godly. But it is the second part that is very interesting, that "on her tongue is the law of kindness."

I think that this is very poorly translated. The word "law" here is *Torah*, one of the derivations of the word *Torah* which means instruction—repetitive instruction basically; but it is instruction—doctrine, teaching. Now kindness here is the word *chesed*. I do not know if you understand what this word is. It

is usually translated either *mercy* or *lovingkindness*. Its basic meaning is *the love that is seen in a relationship*. In most cases it is the love that is in a covenant relationship.

Remember I told you to remember that word *covenant*. Well here it shows up again, that on her tongue is the teaching of covenant relationships—her own with her husband, and her own and others with God, because that too is a covenant relationship. Not only does she teach what is wise, and speak wise things when she opens her mouth, but she also teaches God's way—the law with the teaching of covenant relationships. Of course it also has the most obvious meaning that she is kind as well, and loving.

Proverbs 31:27-29 She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all."

What she does here is she oversees the *behavior* of her household. She makes sure that her children conduct themselves in an appropriate way. This gets into the childrearing aspect. But remember I said these roles that she does are all really one role. Her acts that she does as a virtuous woman in the whole have an affect on her childrearing. Because she has done it this way, her children rise up and call her blessed. And her husband does as well. This "rising up" has the impression or gives it a sense of publicly. She is exalted in the community for this great character that she has.

Proverbs 31:30-31 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Here at the end of his description he gives the reason why she is the way she is. The reason she is this virtuous woman is because she *fears* the Lord. That is the reason. She does all these things because she respects God. She reverences Him and wants to please Him first, and so she does all these things so that her house has everything that it needs, so her children are raised godly, so that her husband can go and serve. And on and on it goes.

She has rejected as vanity the physical things like charm and beauty. She has elected to follow God and trust in Him, that the real beauty is going to come out in her character. Solomon says she will get in spades the fruit of this wonderful character, and most of all eternal life, as we saw there in I Timothy 2:15.

The first six verses of I Peter 3 basically say in New Testament terminology the same things that Proverbs 31 says.

I Peter 3:1-6 Likewise you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

God is looking for women of a gentle and quiet spirit who are submissive, who are willing to work, and who rely and base their entire character on the fear of the Lord. These are the ones who will be blessed and produce the godly seed that He is looking for.

The next time I hope to delve into other matters of discipline. I know it is not a time that the children are looking forward to, but I hope to put it in a manner that will be helpful.