

The Role Of Women

The Bible's View of Women

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The subject matter here in St. Louis today has been widows and women. It has been somewhat of a lively conversation. We have enjoyed talking about it quite a bit. And what I spoke about this morning in the Bible Study here—about widows—dovetails very nicely into the sermon today.

About five years ago, I flew to Pennsylvania for a job interview. I spent most of the day with the owner of the company, after which he took me out to a nice restaurant. He also invited along the office manager, who was a woman. I took the opportunity, in this relaxed atmosphere, to mention that I am a Christian who takes his religious beliefs very seriously and that I keep Saturday as the Sabbath day.

I did not believe that would cause any problems in the job, nor did the owner. But his office manager hit the ceiling with fury. She asked me how I could believe anything in a book that so horribly mistreated women. She scowled for the remainder of the evening—and, if she were ice, I could have cracked her with just the tap of a spoon. I replied to her that it was not a Book about how to mistreat women, but how *not* to mistreat women. I briefly explained what I meant, but her attitude was absolute concrete. Even though I gently explained some of the principles in the Bible about it, it was bouncing off of her like a rubber ball off of a wall.

She was a permanent fixture in the company, and had been for a long time. Thus, after contemplating her attitude and other aspects of the company, that night I decided that this company was not right for me—nor would I be right for the company. The next morning I appreciatively told the owner that I did not feel that it would work out; and I went home not very disappointed. Sometimes that happens. God gives you a direct answer on whether you should take a job or not. So I appreciated that specific and direct answer from God.

The office manager seemed to have a typical attitude towards the Bible's treatment of women—a deception that Satan has been very successful in promoting through the Feminist Movement. Feminism has significantly impacted society at large, our churches, and our homes. There is not an area of life that it has not impacted.

In the '60s, feminism was called "Women's Liberation." It was a time when women disallowed men to define their identity, and called upon women to define themselves.

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Mary Kassian, in her 1992 analysis of the feminist's perspective (which was entitled, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism With the Church*), wrote these words. I think they are very eye opening. They will give you an idea of what their perspective is and where they are coming from (That is, the feminists and the women's movement.) She wrote:

As the first decade of the Women's Movement ended, women all across the continent began to claim the right to name and define themselves. By August 26, 1970—on the fiftieth anniversary of Women's Suffrage in America—20,000 women marched proudly down New York's Fifth Avenue identifying themselves as part of the Women's Liberation Movement. Freedman summed up the tenor of the movement, when at the conclusion of the march she blazed, "In the religion of my ancestors there was a prayer that Jewish men said every morning. They prayed, 'Thank Thee, Lord, that I was not born a woman.' Today all women are going to be able to say, 'Thank Thee, Lord, that I was born a woman.' After tonight, the politics of this nation will never be the same. There is no way any man, woman, or child can escape the nature of our revolution."

According to Kassian—when, in the '70s, women took it in hand to define the world (For example: psychology, sociology, marriage, and so forth.)—from their perspective the movement shifted from women's liberation to feminism. She summarized it this way:

Women were different from men; but this fact was not a source of shame, but rather a source of pride. Feminism taught that women ought to be proud of their different bodies and their different perceptions. The male interpretations of the past were therefore boldly rejected, and replaced with interpretations reflecting a feminist definition of reality. The feminist view was so widely accepted in some circles that it became the mode and norm for truth. Women had not only claimed the right to name themselves, but also the right to name and define the world around them.

Notice here that there is no emphasis of, or pursuit of, **real truth** in this movement; but a determined effort to redefine "truth"—based on pride and what would get them what they wanted. Kassian concludes in a very interesting way. (And I might add that this Kassian had been a feminist, but she softened her feminism so that she would be able to be included back in mainstream Christianity.) She concludes in this way:

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The phenomenon of inclusive language [that is, the language in the Bible where they have rewritten the Bible to show God as a "woman" or "female" by using the pronoun "She."] recognized and further served to reinforce the paradigm offered by feminist theology. It, more than theological rhetoric, brought the feminist debate to the level of ordinary believer—as Women Studies had done. Feminist theology was therefore translated from an academic philosophy to the level of practical daily worship of the Christian community. Feminists had named themselves, and the world, and now—through inclusive language—they and their Christian communities began to name God.

With this historical background, we will now turn to the biblical perspective. From the first chapter of Genesis to the final verses of Revelation, the Bible is filled with the images of woman. At creation, she shared the image of God; and at the brink of the second coming, she is the Bride of Christ. From beginning to end, she is a high and holy concept—though no more so than her masculine counterpart. Some of the Bible's images of women focus on her roles as wife, mother, daughter, sister, and widow.

The secular background against which we understand biblical images of women (especially in the Old Testament) is that women did not have the same social rights and advantages as men. Property was inherited by sons, rather than daughters; and women had little legal power, and were not allowed to divorce their husbands. I think that is a very common attitude and perception of what people think the Old Testament says.

Women were mentioned in biblical genealogies only sometimes and then only as sisters to already mentioned sons. They were also given as wives to whomever their fathers desired. Samson was an example of someone that this happened to. He experienced this firsthand. After an absence, he returned to find that the father of his Philistine bride had given her to one of his friends. In compensation, the father offered Samson her younger sister. Any man today would be no less than irate and out of control if his father-in-law, after he had been gone for some time, had given his wife away. (I just cannot imagine that happening. I do not think I could function if that happened to me.)

However, in God's system, women are treated with respect. In fact, when no sons were available to inherit their father's property, daughters were the next in line. Numbers 27 records how God commanded Moses to give Zelophehad's five daughters his inheritance, since they had no brothers.

In Genesis 1, the creation of human kind in the image of God is both male and female.

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Woman therefore, at the very core of her being, has the same spiritual essence of man—with the same potential of good and evil, and equal dignity with man. Woman being made in the image of God is reflected in the fact that, later in the Bible, God is sometimes portrayed as having qualities of "woman" as well as "man." In Isaiah, He is portrayed metaphorically as having the traits of *a nurse* and *a mother*.

Isaiah 49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you.

Here God is saying that He will be much more reliable and faithful than even a mother would. But He has the same caring concern as a nursing mother.

Isaiah 66:13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I [God] will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

So we see that, in God's inspired Word, He is not afraid to be considered as having "womanly traits" at certain times. That is, if they are even considered to be "womanly traits." They could also be considered "manly traits." But women certainly exemplify these traits of *care* and *concern* for the young.

Genesis 2 describes the creation of Eve, the mother of all living. Eve was created as a companion of man, to share his work in the Garden. This woman was a helper to Adam—a creature of free will and responsibility, with the same obligations that fell on man. Made from Adam, Eve was a helper comparable to him and a wife who became one flesh with her husband. This confirms one of the most basic of all facts regarding both man and woman. That is, that they **complement** each other and are, in some sense, *incomplete* alone.

Because of the first woman's susceptibility to the temptation of the serpent, woman is often portrayed as more vulnerable than man is. That certainly is the case in our society. That is the viewpoint that they have, and many times that viewpoint also comes into God's church. It is not necessarily wrong, but I think it is taken to an extreme sometimes.

Her readiness to take the fruit (because it was lovely to look at, good to eat, and the path to knowledge like God's) distinguished her in human thought as the means of man's fall and the source of the expulsion from the Garden. Although Eve's sin caused a

curse of pain in childbirth upon women, her love of beauty, food, and knowledge was not wiped out by that sin. It continued on as a wonderful trait.

The prophets critiqued Israel's culture, but not the patriarchy. Israel's prophets (that is, God's mouth or His voice) were iconoclasts—not traditionalists who relied on society's trends. They called Israel into check for numerous injustices and challenged the injustices of their culture. They exposed the scandalous pretensions and challenged the priests, kings, and institutions. They also challenged the temple. But that was when these institutions, and the kings, and the priests were wrong—and they were disobeying God.

But not one of these cultural revolutionaries (that is, these prophets) regarded patriarchy as an unjust or oppressive form of government. Quite the contrary, they interpreted the rule by women as *God's judgment* against a sinful nation; and Deborah is a fine example of this.

Deborah, who was married, is one clear exception to patriarchy. She is probably the exception that proves the rule. In addition to being a prophetess, Deborah was judging Israel. The writer of the book of Judges made his intention clear, by carefully shaming the Israelite men at that time for their fear—because none of them dared to assume leadership. We are going to see in this example of Deborah that it was for the reason of **shaming** men that she was given this position as leader.

Judges 4:4-7 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the LOORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon: and I will deliver him into your hand?'"

As we read through the story, the general gist of the story is that Deborah shamed Barak (the military commander of Israel's army) for his failure to assume leadership. After she meditated God's command to him to join battle with Sisera (the military commander of the Canaanite army), Barak replied, "If you go with me, I'll go. But if you don't go with me, I won't go." So we see that Barak was so **fearful** that he was going to

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hide behind the skirts of a woman. This was a very impressive woman, and a very God-fearing woman. Deborah responded to this, "Very well, I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this (that is, out of fear) the honor will not be yours. The Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman." And that was done to shame Barak.

So apparently God raised up this exceptional woman, who was *full of faith*, to disgrace the men of Israel for their *lack of faith*—which is essential to leadership in a holy nation. If so, the story aims to reprove unfaithful men for not taking leadership—not to present an alternative "norm" to male authority. The story also shows that God is above culture, and not restricted by patriarchy.

Turn with me now to Isaiah 3. The prophet Isaiah ridiculed the nation of Judah for its sins—prophesying how disobeying God would affect their leadership.

Isaiah 3:12 As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.

So we can see that the rule of women is in no way attached to being a blessing. Rather, it is attached to shaming men, and to shaming the nation when it is disobedient. This does not put down women at all. It actually shows that women are perfectly capable, with God's help, of leading. But for whatever reason (and we could all go through a long discussion of this as to what the reasons are) **God has given leadership to men.**

Now, let us change direction here and look at Jesus Christ's images of women. Turn with me to John 4, which records how Jesus amazed His disciples by conversing with a woman—because He violated the prejudice in that society, of both the Jews and the Romans, against women. Jesus bestowed **dignity** upon this Samaritan adulteress ("unclean" by Jewish standards).

In looking at John 4, the whole chapter speaks about this Samaritan woman and how the Messiah met her at the well. They conversed somewhat, and she showed that she did not understand that God could be spoken to, or prayed to, anywhere.

John 4:15-19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that

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you spoke truly." The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet."

It is very obvious that Jesus Christ could see more happening in her life than she had disclosed to Him. He had things revealed to Him.

John 4:20-21 "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father."

That mountain that they are discussing is Mt. Gerizim, where the Samaritans often worshipped. So it was a traditional place of worship to them.

John 4:22-23 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

So (at least, in the accounts that we read), He revealed for the first time to this woman that God could be worshipped—and prayed to—directly. One did not have to go to Jerusalem to do that.

John 4:24-26 "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

And then, in verse 27, we see the disciples' reaction.

John 4:27 And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking to her?"

So they kept their mouths shut, and they did not necessarily ask why He had done this.

But Jesus showed that He did respect women through His whole life. He did not hesitate to even reveal doctrine (possibly for the first time) to a woman. This does not show "inferiority" at all. Rather it shows that He—on a spiritual level—equated a woman with a man.

Even more important, Jesus entrusted women to be the original witnesses to His resurrection—even though their testimony would have been discounted in a Roman court.

Luke 24:1-11 Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" And they remembered His words. Then they returned from the tomb and told these things to the eleven [disciples] and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.

In one sense, these apostles discounted the statement of the women (1) mostly because of their lack of belief that what Jesus had told them, while He was alive, was going to happen and (2) partly because the society at that time discounted women's opinions. So much so, that they were not even counted worthy to be included in court records. This was the society at that time, and these apostles had been influenced by that society. But Jesus, through His life, showed them that they were wrong and that women were to be counted.

Jesus rewarded the devotion of Mary of Magdalene (out of whom He had cast seven demons) by allowing her to be the first person to meet Him after His resurrection. Later Jesus rebuked the disciples for their unwillingness to believe her about the tomb being empty. She was right there.

Even though Jesus confirmed the Old Testament patriarchy by not appointing a woman

as an apostle (though women followed Him, served Him, and were His close friends), it is nonsense for the feminists to argue that Jesus appointed only male apostles because He was culturally conditioned. That just is not true. Jesus appointed all male apostles because that is what He established from the beginning.

Adam was first, and then woman. They would be "one," but *he* would have the leadership role. It did not have anything to do with whether Eve was capable of leadership, but it was what God has designed from the very beginning. It is not plausible to think that, had He intended to empower women to have equality with men in leadership, He would have called a woman to an apostle either before or after His resurrection. It just makes no sense.

Turn with me to Proverbs 27, and we will build on this. We have talked about women in general here, but what about women as "wife"? Wives, like husbands, can either be very good, or very bad, or somewhere in between. It is easier to see "the ideal wife" when contrasted with her shortfalls. So I cringe here; because, in order to be balanced in this sermon, we are going to look at a few feminine shortfalls. The Bible is also loaded with male shortfalls as well; but the sermon is not on that, so I will not take the opportunity to make that list. I will just touch on a few here. This by no means degrades women, and it by no means makes them inferior to men. Not at all! But we will look at a few bad characteristics first.

Proverbs 27:15-16 A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike; whoever restrains her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand.

There is one example of a characteristic *sometimes* shown by women. This is a woman who, no doubt, is not converted. (We hope.) More wifely vices included nagging and disparaging of one's husband—as Michal's putting down of David for his religious fervor in II Samuel 6.

That is all I will say there. I do not want to harp on women's faults. No, I would not say "faults," but rather women's **traits**. They are only faults if they allow Satan to influence them and allow their human nature to take hold.

Wives can also trick their husbands—as do Rebekah, Potiphar's wife, and Delilah. Or be unfaithful—as Hosea's wife was. Or give poor counsel—as Job's wife did in Job 2. Wives can become an ungodly influence—as Solomon's wives did in I Kings 11; or support their husbands in an immoral act—as Sapphira did in Acts 5.

But the worst wife of all was Jezebel, who dominates her husband and secures his earthy and spiritual downfall—as she opposes the cause of God. (You know the story, so I am not going to dwell on it.) That ends the characteristics that are derogatory.

Now, let us look at a few examples of good characteristics. Abigail, the wife of Nabal (in I Samuel 25), took the initiative in overriding the effect of her husband's bullish behavior. She stepped in, and she wanted to help out—to save him from embarrassment as well as foolishness.

The wives of some very bad husbands tried to counsel them wisely at breaking points in their lives—such as the wives of Belshazzar (in Daniel 5) and Pilate (in Matthew 27). Or to dissuade them from foolish behavior—as Vashti does (in Esther 1).

Let us take a look at some examples of godly women. God values the role of women and sees the **wife** and **mother** functions as one of the best barricades against the encircling hopelessness of a dying civilization. Godly women have helped transform society more than once; and it has been a wonderful blessing upon that society when they have. God has placed several accounts of this in His written Word.

Jerusha was one example, in II Kings 15—where it records that Jotham was a righteous king of Judah, and his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. Her outstanding contribution to society was to raise a son with a steady character of a strong and wise leader—one who could turn God's blessing toward a whole nation.

Another one was Jedidah, the wife of wicked King Amon—who accomplished the same thing, as recorded in II Kings 22. Her son was Josiah, whose personal righteousness prolonged the life of Judah. Even though he had one of the most evil fathers (King Amon), he himself was a very righteous leader.

Jerusha and Jedidah had one thing in common: They found fulfillment in serving their families and pointing their children in the right direction. They prize obedient and stable children, and believe that expanding and improving a child's mind was a full-time job. They had a right perspective of what a wife and mother's responsibility was. They strive to eradicate the bad habits of the neglected child (such as Josiah got from his father, King Amon).

Proverbs 29:15 The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

One of the reasons it brings shame to his mother is that it is also an indication that maybe the mother did not do quite as much as she could have. I know that anyone out there who is a mother (or, a father) who has a child who has gone astray, or maybe not followed the way they were brought up, feels a certain amount of guilt and responsibility for their child not turning out perfectly.

These two queens were happy to work quietly—out of the limelight—providing the support, encouragement, and correction that all children require.

Proverbs 29:17 Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul.

So we see how important it is for the function of a wife and mother to bring up a child in the way he should go. It is even harder when there is not a husband involved who is converted. But when both of them (the converted husband and the converted mother) are both bringing up the child in the right way, then success will eventually come. They will turn to God, and they will turn to what they have been taught.

Jerusha and Jedidah's warm attitudes and calm strength provided their homes with an atmosphere of quiet confidence and stability. They were an ever-present source of solace, answers, and kind direction. It shows here that they were able to compensate or overcome the negative influence of the fathers. If this were not the case, God would not have cited them so conspicuously as admirable mothers.

The evil King Amon must have been an awfully antagonistic husband sometimes. Yet Jedidah, with God's help, produced righteous Josiah who turned to God with all his heart. What an epitaph that is for her—that her son turned out so well. Of course, it is important to realize that most likely God's Holy Spirit was there to help her through that. I am not saying that she was converted; but no doubt God gave her extra strength because He wanted the nation to have a righteous leader. God is the one who sets up kings and brings them down. And He can certainly raise up a righteous king when needed.

Few servants God has chosen have ever walked a more difficult path than that of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She had to endure sneers and sarcasm because of what was considered a premarital pregnancy (even though it was a major extension of God's great plan). This required mental toughness, tact, and sensitivity few people have ever possessed. The misguided veneration given her by some religionists should not blind us to her high human qualities of competence and cool-headedness. Mary no doubt lived

what Timothy speaks of:

II Timothy 3:12-17 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man [or, woman] of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

That is where we see that Mary was **thoroughly equipped** for that good work of raising Jesus and being a pillar in God's church. Yet the tone and atmosphere of Mary's rather large household had to be extra special. We know that she had at least five boys and two or more daughters (according to Matthew 13:55-56). She had to nurture that robust and vigorous—yet brilliant and perceptive—child who grew up to be the sinless Savior of us all. I am sure that was quite a challenge for her at times; but, with God's help, Mary succeeded.

As a child, Jesus reflected sound parental teaching and instruction. By age twelve, the learned doctors of law sat stupefied at His insight. I must insert here that, of course, God's Holy Spirit was working in Jesus Christ. He had a full measure of the Holy Spirit. That, no doubt, was *the* major factor in this. But the fruit of righteousness cannot be produced unless there is peace. So Mary's home had to have had **peace**.

Jesus' stable home life merges indirectly in his teaching. Remember the spiritual principle (in Luke 5) He gleaned from one of the most common household chores, that of patching old garments. Many of the things that He mentioned, He pulled from His family life. There is the simple homespun account (in Luke 11) of the neighbor borrowing three loaves from his friend in the middle of the night. This was probably a warm recollection from Jesus' childhood among the common people of Palestine.

He did not draw these analogies from just out of the blue. These were things that He lived, and saw, and was able to use. What about the parable (in Matthew 13) about the woman carefully measuring ingredients for three measures of meal? Jesus' analogies reveal a firsthand acquaintance with normal housework, and He uses these quite often.

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Where did Jesus derive these insights into normal family life? Mary may have been widowed from an early age—if Joseph's absence in Matthew 12:47 is any indication. But, no doubt, she still was a good mother. And it is a good thing for God's plan that she did not feel that her combined roles of homemaker, mother, counselor, domestic engineer, nurse, clerk, teacher, home economist, cook, seamstress, dietician, physical education advisor, and physical therapist (all of the jobs that make up the daily lot of the everyday housewife) were beneath her.

She did not think this at all. She did not think they were unimportant, and she did not think they were unchallenging. It is a good thing that Jesus' mother was not a career woman—seeking status and fulfillment elsewhere. Jesus obviously respected her as an intelligent and sensible woman. He knew her deep reserves of inner strength and quiet confidence.

Luke 2:51-52 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Mary was a wonderful woman, who knew when she should say something and when she should not. And with all the knowledge that she learned from her son, Jesus Christ—as His disciple—she was still able to keep her peace at the right time.

Jesus' last earthly thoughts revolved around the woman who helped trained and inspire Him, and who struck with Him to the bitter end. Mary was a living fulfillment of Proverbs 23:24-25.

Proverbs 23:24-25 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her who bore you rejoice.

I would like to shift gears here, a little bit, and talk about the attack that is going on against stay-at-home mothers and wives. Unlike the real qualities of a stay-at-home mother, Satan's society has cast her as an ignorant, beaten woman. She is pictured as haggard, unattractive, with her hair in curlers, a broom in her hand, and several screaming brats around her with food all over their faces. It is a shame, but this is what society has very successfully done to us in our attitudes towards women at home.

On the flipside of Satan's deception, society idolizes the stylish modern career/business

woman. Up at the crack of dawn, she dresses like a fashion model, prepares a hearty breakfast for her family, and drives the kids off to school. She puts in a full day at the office—where she might be pushing papers, typing, filling file cabinets. Or, she might be in insurance—where she fills out insurance papers, or even approves them. Or, she may be a corporate executive. But how does that stand up to ***the highest calling*** that a woman can have?

Continuing on with her schedule—she comes home to somehow put a piping hot dinner on the table by 7:00 p.m. At the same time, she gives her husband all the attention and encouragement that he needs. And through all this, a radiant and cheerful smile beams from her face. At least, this is Hollywood's perspective, is it not? What a deceptive farce this is! We have heard many times that *you cannot believe what you see on TV*. Well, this is one area that you cannot believe anything that you see having to do with it on TV. It is part of Satan's deception and his conspiracy.

Many a mother, wife, and homemaker who devotes her full-time to taking care of the home might wonder what a hot stove, dirty floor, or unmade bed have to do with **making it** into God's Kingdom. I am sure that this question has crossed many, many women's minds that are stay-at-home mothers. But the effective management of the home has just as much to do with **learning to rule** as any other job that any other person could possibly have.

Running a home is, in many respects, like managing a corporation; and it is no less important. In fact, it is more important. The February 1981 issue of the Worldwide Church of God's *Good News* magazine carried an article entitled, "The Average, Everyday Housewife—No Higher Calling!" Ron Kelly wrote it (way back, almost 20 years ago); and, in it, he compared the corporate executive with the average homemaker. The similarities are astonishing! They are also eye-opening and encouraging. So I would like to draw from that article somewhat and give you some examples of what it takes to be a true homemaker.

This sermon is to the men just as much as it is to the women. In fact, in some ways, it is more to the men. There are men out there, in God's church, who still look at their wives, or women in general, as being less intelligent than men. I have seen that firsthand in some; and my wife has even experienced it. There have been certain men in the church over the years (going back thirty years) who have discounted what she said, or even interrupted her in a conversation—because what she had to say did not matter or count. And so we men have to be conscious of this.

Women are just as intelligent as men are. We should show them the utmost *respect* and

care, and even more *gentleness* than we do to other men (because other men can take a lot more than women can, when it comes to a lack of gentleness and kindness).

We think of several things when we hear the word "executive." Somehow that word smacks of success. We think of tall buildings, suites of offices, and financial wealth. We visualize such top-level managers living in executive suburbs and driving late model cars—larger and more expensive than what we have. In our mind's eye, we see them making decisions, talking on the phone, holding important meetings, and going to lunch at the best restaurants. This society has programmed it into our heads that this is "success."

We are tempted to think of how "well qualified" they are and how "unimportant" we are. We probably think such a person would be much more **qualified** to rule ten cities than we would as members of God's church, in training in lesser jobs. But are the jobs really that different in their physical functions? That is, the jobs between a homemaker (and a stay-at-home mom) and a corporate executive (or an executive manager, or a business manager). You can go on and on with what you might want to call the person; but I might add that titles are not worth the paper that they are printed on. Anyone can call themselves anything.

One area is that of *time scheduling*. The effective executive knows how to get things done. He makes sure that the business that he is working in meets its deadlines and delivers as promised. For example: the Noxell Corporation (that I worked at many years ago for seven years)—like most major manufacturers—had a very modern production plant. Twenty years ago, one of the packaging lines cost over a million dollars, and there were over twenty of those lines. Even two decades ago, these were that expensive.

They used complex charts and graphs to schedule everything from ordering raw materials to mixing, filling, packaging the product, storing, and shipping the finished product. (For example: Noxzema, Cover Girl products, Lestoil, and Neutrogena, and other products that Noxell owned at that time.) But it only took time and scheduling to do all of that. And yet we get so impressed when we see these executive managers able to produce such massive quantities and having trucks going out all over the place.

Now, I am not saying that our attitude in the church is that of the world—because it is not. But the world does influence us, and at times we do think of these individuals as being more successful and more qualified for ruling ten cities. Executives do *make multiple decisions* daily. And these decisions have to be the best and wisest ones possible. Likewise, a homemaker must have initiative and get the family off to school

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and work, well fed and clothed. It is no less a responsibility than what a corporate executive has. In fact, it is more important.

They have to do the shopping, pay the bills, and meet the kids when they return home from school. They have to take their daughters to the orthodontist and their son to sports activities. The stay-at-home mom has dinner ready in the evening; and during her "extra time" cleans the windows, calls the repairman to fix the washing machine, makes an appointment for counseling about her children at school.

Or maybe (as is more common today) she "home schools" her child. That takes hours and hours of preparation to be able to do that. She prepares lessons. She prepares to teach. She answers questions. She pulls from all areas of her knowledge banks.

She visits or calls ailing brethren, and drops by the Post Office or the grocery store on her way home. So she is not at all "less busy" than a corporate executive. And the things that she has to do are just as **character building** as any job on earth.

Executives spend a lot of time *solving problems*. With all businesses, things can go wrong. Problems can arise over money, personnel, equipment, or a dozen other items. Likewise, a homemaker is responsible for making many decisions and solving problems. It seems that families have always struggled with inflated food costs. In many cases, the homemaker is responsible for the food budget. And, in order to feed the family well, the mother has to check the sales and clip coupons, perhaps buy just the right vegetables (being on sale, or to give her family the right nutrition). She might have to go down the street for another item, because it is substantially less expensive. She might have to buy beef at some other area. But in running that aspect of the family, she does as much as any business owner does in planning.

She also has to be an *efficiency expert*—keeping in mind that the time it takes and the cost of the gasoline to get from one store to the next for a sale may cancel out any savings in buying the sale item. I have known of women before who have gone to six different stores and spent a half a tank of gas, only to "save" what they spent on gas. So wives and mothers-at-home have to be efficiency experts—otherwise they are wasting good, valuable time. And women know that housewives, and homemakers, and stay-at-home moms need all the time that they can get.

Executives also have to *delegate*. No one person can do it all. The executive knows how to give tasks to others that can handle the job. Likewise, the homemaker has to delegate. You cannot do it all yourself, even though you try. Mothers, wives, stay-at-home moms—you cannot do it all! Many mothers clean up after their kids, make all the

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beds, and wash all the clothes. Somehow she never quite gets around to delegating these jobs to her children. Even though it helps the proper development of the child, we parents seem to sometimes neglect giving our children responsibilities to work hard and also to help them learn to support the family.

These jobs that they are giving teach our children to make their own beds, empty the trash (in which they learn responsibility). **Delegate** means to teach the children to do the dishes, wash and iron their clothes, make their beds, and do yard work.

An executive is *responsible for the morale as well as the safety and training* of those employed by the company. Likewise, the housewife must teach her children. The children should learn to cook, shop, repair things, and help in every part of the home. This is one of the areas of family life where both parents and child learn a great deal. The parents learn to be teachers, and the children learn **responsibility**. They learn how **to work hard**, which is very important in any job they will ever have. It is important in the job of a stay-at-home mom. It is important in the job of a corporate executive.

A homemaker runs a smooth-flowing household that takes the skill of a corporate president, and then some. That is the same skill that it will take to rule over several cities in the Kingdom of God. Turn with me to Proverbs 31. I think you have probably guessed that I eventually would come here, because there is so much that we can learn here from **the virtuous woman**. Whether we are a man or a woman, there is much to learn.

Proverbs 31 describes an ideal executive manager. A person who schedules time, makes decisions, solves problems, is responsible over others, and delegates work. This is a stay-at-home wife and a virtuous woman. I might add that I am emphasizing staying at home or being a stay-at-home mom; but I realize that there are times and factors that come up where a wife may be required to work, for any number of reasons. I am not going to get into that aspect of it, because that is not the purpose of this sermon. The purpose of the sermon is to show you how important women are and how important their intelligence is. Also that we should all respect them; and that women should be very, very encouraged by how important women are to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The virtuous woman makes **a profession** of caring for her household the best way possible. She is much more than the false image that society gives us of the housewives of today. Proverbs 31:10-31 presents a brilliant and tasteful tribute to the best that is in a woman. So let us quickly review these passages and notice how many challenging and demanding traits, and skills, the effective woman must exemplify.

The word virtuous (found in Proverbs 31:10) actually conveys more than moral purity. It also implies forcefulness and strength. The Adam Clarke Commentary defines this word as "full of mental energy." "Capable" is a more modern term for it. So what image do you get of someone who is full of mental energy? You get the image of somebody that is very intelligent and has a lot to offer.

Proverbs 31:10-12 Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.

So verse 12 here celebrates *stability*, *consistency* and *maturity* in a woman. This model woman is not a shallow person, but she puts first things first. She has the right priorities. She derives her emotional and physiological sustenance from seeing her family succeed and being close to God.

Proverbs 31:13 She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands.

This means that she willingly works at her household duties. She has vision. She knows what needs to be done, and she does it with enthusiasm.

Proverbs 31:14-24 She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms. She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor. Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. 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. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants.

So she is a very productive woman. Although as a woman, every last one of these things does not have to be accomplished, the principle here is that (in a general sense) we should be able to—and be willing to, and wanting to. And throughout our lives, we

should do these types of things.

Proverbs 31:25-30 Strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. 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." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

This woman, who fears the Lord, is also praised by her family—and that is very important to her. One of God's purposes for women is their own **character building**. The creation of woman was an integral part of God's plan, and mankind was not complete with the creation of only the man. So God made Eve from the rib of Adam—to be his perfect companion and complete spiritual equal.

To make the human family (which pictures God's Family) complete, to provide it with proper depth, and to create the total environment—God established family life. The first and foremost responsibility for women is just like men—to **qualify for God's Kingdom and to develop holy, righteous, God-like character**.

The qualification to rule does not depend on how much we train ourselves in a physical way. **Character** is what carries over to the spiritual life.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

What we do, we have to do *with our might* so that we receive spiritual benefit from it. Men and women have exactly the same opportunities for character development—because God sees to that. So no matter what job we have, God sees that we get the character development that we need to be able to rule in His Kingdom—and also to be able to teach others to do the same.

Human societies establish hierarchies of respect, called class systems. Some professions seem to carry great honor—usually because they wield power or carry great financial rewards. But no profession will carry more social status than any other will in God's Kingdom. This does not mean a pseudo-communistic state will exist. God's Word

is clear that some individuals will work harder and grow spiritually stronger than others will in this life. Those who do will qualify for greater rewards.

But we all have the same opportunities. Men and women both have equal opportunities to live in a way that pleases God—and will be rewarded according to their effort. God's Word clearly states that men and women are both made in the image of God, and are equal. In marriage, each has particular responsibilities.

Ephesians 5:21-31 Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Remember that, with the creation of Adam and Eve, they became "one flesh" from that point. And that is what God wants as the norm in society, and in a marriage.

Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

We learn about this "mystery" by living this type of relationship in our marriages.

Ephesians 5:33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

It is interesting that verse 25 says that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. That includes appreciating them with proper respect, as being **heirs together** of the grace of life. There is an equality there—a *spiritual equality*.

I Peter 3:1-2 Wives, likewise, 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 [fear of God].

So we see the power that women have to be able, by their example, to convert others (especially their husbands). But that has to be done in God's time frame.

God will not save anyone He cannot rule. The test of character in this life is the development of *faith* and *obedience*. Women train just as much in the character-developing process as men. God sees to that.

The book of Revelation sums up the ambivalent image of woman found elsewhere in the Bible. On the one hand, *woman* is an emblem of evil in the form of the terrifying whore of Babylon—drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs, defiant against Christ. On the other hand, *woman* is mother of the Messiah (according to Revelation 12:1-5) and the church (according to Revelation 12:17). What a contrast that is! She, as herself, is a type of the spotless church—the Bride of Christ.

So we see there the contrast. And the major difference is that *one submits* and *one does not*. The whore of Babylon has never submitted to anything godly—or anything period—except to Satan, that is. But the church, the Bride of Christ **submits** to Christ and God the Father.

Revelation 19 speaks of the joyful time of the Marriage Supper between Christ and His church. This is such an important section of scripture, and it is so encouraging.

Revelation 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Here we find the true church of God, which has been prepared for the meeting with the Lord—by the new birth, by redemption, and by salvation. She has also lived a godly life, filled with *zealous service* and *trustful belief*. So as goes the women in the church, and the members of the church—so goes the church. So every man and woman must take

the same attitude that the wife has to take; and that is **submission**. We all have to have submission in order to be part of that spotless church—the Bride of Christ.

Revelation 21:2, 9 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

This is the end result of how we live our lives today. This is the end result of how good a wife we are (or, how good a father, or husband, or mother that we are). This is the end result that we all look to—the Kingdom of God.

In conclusion, the insistence of feminists on the qualities of wives with husbands, and authority and leadership, is no less than **unbiblical**. It is essential to the plan of God that husbands love their wives and that wives submit to the authority of their husbands. If husbands and wives are equal in leadership, how does the husband exemplify a new model of leadership wherein the ruler becomes a servant?

Matthew 20:25-28 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

This is something that we have to do in the church. And for us to have a proper marriage, we have to do it in our marriages as well. That is, that we have to submit. We cannot desire to be greater than someone else, but we have to be content with what God has designed into His creation.

If a woman seeks to become empowered as an equal to her husband in authority, how does she show the submission of the church to Christ? It is that important! There is a direct relationship there—the submission of the church to Christ. And I believe very strongly (through experience and what I have seen) that you will find that a woman who is not submissive to her husband is also not submissive to Christ—because that is the first area that we learn to be submissive.

Likewise, men have to be submissive to Christ. And if they are not submissive to Christ, then they are awful husbands for the most part. Some men in the world do (either by their upbringing or by realizing that certain things 'work' in a marriage) do carry some of the traits that we learn about in God's church. They receive the reward for that; but still they do not have all the truth, and they do not realize that submission to Jesus Christ is very, very important.

Tragically, some husbands in the home (often out of a distorted emphasis on their leadership and their headship, and their depreciation of the spiritual gifts that empower women to serve) have both conscientiously and unconscientiously suppressed women and quenched the spirit in women. We men have to be very careful that we do not quench, or squelch, those spiritual gifts that God gives to women for their use in supporting and serving the church and their families.

Again, however, the problem is our failure to interpret the Bible accurately. The model of leadership is that of **a servant**. Jesus models the servant king who so loved his queen that he died for her. The willingness of doing the great sacrifice of dying for a loved one becomes a practical reality only to the extent that we practice **self-surrendering services as a way of life**—not just at one time or another. The servant empowers his wife to use her spiritual gifts to their fullest potential.

On the other hand, the Bible instructs the wife to respect her husband as her lord, which entails *obeying* him in everything that does not go against God's truth. It is important to notice that the Bible never instructs the woman to manipulate the man to serve her—nor the husband to have his wife in "subjection." (That is, to be the head that *lords itself* over the body.) We do not get that instruction from the Bible. We get the instruction that it is the woman who **voluntarily submits** and it is the man who **voluntarily**, out of obedience to God, **shows love** to his wife and rules in a proper way (not *'lording it over'*)

Serving, and *obeying*, and *mutual submission* are inward attitudes produced by the Holy Spirit in us. These are ideals for which we strive, through recognizing that we never fully attain them—any more than other perfections of holiness. As physical human beings, we cannot be perfect. Yet God is working very hard to complete us—to complete us to a level that He feels comfortable for us, and that we will be able to take into His Kingdom. While some biblical images of women are gender-specific, the spiritual potential for women (for good or evil) is the same as it is for men. Women, as do men, must **fear God**.

"Male" and "female" are terms that apply to this physical life. Jesus tells us, in Matthew 22:30, that in the Kingdom we neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Resurrected

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from the dead and changed from mortal to immortal, we shall all serve with Christ—ruling with Him for a thousand years and then fulfilling our destinies for eternity. God has, in His infinite wisdom, provided the means and opportunity in this lifetime for training and character development for all people whom He calls. It is God's desire and His will for each and every one of us to be saved and no one gender has any less of an opportunity than another does.