

Marriage - a physical union and a divine institution (Pt. 2)

The role of the wife

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The physical family is fashioned after the God family; it is a God-plane relationship. Marriage is a physical union but a divine institution ordained of God. God established and ordained the physical family unit to be the Kingdom of God in *embryo*, so our families are to symbolize this future Kingdom!

Because of the human potential and what the physical family represents, Satan primarily targets the marital institution. He does all he can to *destroy* family because *God is Family* and Satan has no part in it! This infuriates Satan because he is filled with vanity and lust (Is. 14:13-14)!

Through His inspired Word, God has given us the instruction necessary to have strong, united and loving families. The better we apply His instruction, the more joy will be evidenced in our homes, the better example we set of the God-family and the better equipped our families will be to withstand the wiles of Satan the devil. We must do our utmost to ensure that we do what it takes to effectively apply our roles within marriage and family. As soon as cracks begin to appear in our marriages, Satan will quickly claw into those cracks as he subtly and slowly begins to rip our families apart: "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). We must guard against letting down!

In the first part of this series, we took a look at the role of the husband and father within the family. We were reminded that as the head of the family (Eph. 5:25), the husband must set the pace by *leading* – he must guide, protect, provide, correct, love and be a living example to his wife and children. A husband must allow Christ to 'come in the flesh' through him (1 John 4)! When husbands do not fulfill their god-given role within marriage, the marital relationship begins to fall apart. Husbands must lead their homes the same way Christ leads His Church. If the husband (and father) applies his god-given role within the family, the right environment would be fostered to promote growth and development in his wife and children. The husband *leads* the success or failure of the family, but wives also play a major part in this. The extent to which the wife submits and fulfills her role within the family helps her husband to better lead and fulfill his role. It is very clear that both the husband and wife have important roles to fulfill within a marriage, and the better they fulfill these roles the better team they forge for the benefit of their relationship and their family.

For the purpose of this article, we will delve into the role of the wife and mother within the family. We will see how important the wife's role is, and how the degree to which she effectively fulfills her role contributes to the overall functioning, effectiveness and unity of the family.

As brought out in the first part of this series, God uses *government* to conduct His purpose and carry out His plan through 'family'. Government must be implemented in our families: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). The keys to God's government are love and outgoing concern in *leadership* and *submission*! Scripture clearly shows that for the government of God to work within the family, the *head of household must lead his wife and children in love* while the *other family members must be in voluntary submission*: children must submit to their father and mother, the wife must submit to her husband, the husband must submit to Christ. Even Christ submits to God the Father! God's government is characterized by *leadership from the top down* and *submission from the bottom up*. This is the structure of God's theocratic government which must be implemented

in our families if we are to obey God and get it right! If there is dysfunctional government administered in our families there is resultant disorder and division.

Just as the husband (and father) has an important role to play within marriage, the wife's role within the family is also extremely important and vital – the ineffective implementation of one role hinders the effectiveness of the other. A woman's relationship with God must *always* come first and foremost; after her relationship with God comes her responsibility in marriage which is to submit to, and support, her husband (1 Cor. 11:7-9; Eph 5:22). A wife is always beneath her husband in level of authority.

In this regard, the bible also gives instruction to wife's who are married to unconverted mates. A converted wife is commanded to be in subjection to her unconverted husband so long as her husband does not cause her to disobey God or violate His law. A wife's responsibility is to God first and then to her husband: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, *they also may without the word be won by the conversation (Strong's 391: 'conduct')* of the wives" (1 Peter 3:1). God places so much importance on the conduct of the converted mate! Women must be in subjection to their husbands even if their mate is unconverted. The principle is that wives should submit to their husbands as they submit to God (Col 3:18). There are eight scriptures in the New Testament that instruct women to voluntarily *submit* to the authority of the husband: 1 Cor. 14:34; Titus 2:4; Eph 5:22; Eph 5:24; Col 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1; 1 Tim 2:9; 1 Cor. 11:3. If a wife resists or rejects submitting to her husband, she disobeys the authority of her husband and disobeys God.

The word "submit" in the abovementioned scriptures is translated from the Greek word 'hupotasso'(Strong's 5293) and means: 'to subordinate', 'to be put under obedience', 'to subdue unto', 'to be subject to', 'to be put into subjection', and, 'to submit the self unto'. The word 'submit' refers to someone who is lower in rank but not in value. Submission is an act that demonstrates the basic responsibility of a wife, and clearly indicates that it should be done voluntarily. When a wife submits to her husband it demonstrates faith in, and obedience to, God and His government. Submission demonstrates humility and obedience to God.

As we have already alluded to, a wife (and mother) has a big part in building the marriage and family (Prov. 14:1); her role is important and crucial for the cultivation of an environment needed for stability within the family. As we shall see, this is the central theme of a wife's role within the marriage and family.

Scripture clearly demonstrates that a wife (and mother) must keep busy in the home with the affairs of her family. This requires a lot of time and hard work on her part. Many wives in today's society are increasingly shrugging-off their household responsibilities which, in some cases, results in them having idle time or presents a situation whereby the wife is enticed into the workforce even if the family doesn't need the extra income - more on this later. 'Idle time' typically results in various forms of modern day "entertainment" becoming attractive and taking over valuable time which should be used constructively. This should not become habit. If, for example, women give in to the temptation of idly watching too much television or spending too much time out of the home, the family will suffer because that sort of lifestyle is not conducive to 'building the family'! On this note, wives must be careful not to give in to the temptation of gossiping with neighbors or others. The bible clearly warns against this, also admonishing wives to be careful to conduct themselves in a way which will not fuel gossip in others (1 Tim. 5:13-14).

Titus 2:4 states that wives should "be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed". As already mentioned, one of

the wife's primary responsibilities within the family is to be a 'keeper at home' – the family depends on this and so does society at large! We must always keep in mind that family is the foundation of society, and our families are no exception. A great responsibility is placed on a husband and wife to fulfill their roles within the family unit so that the best possible example is set for the family and for the community!

Proverbs 31 is a chapter devoted to the responsibilities of the wife and homemaker. This chapter talks about a mother teaching and demonstrating to her son – King Lemuel – on how a mother is to build, teach, keep and guide her family. This is a very important chapter which must be studied in great detail if we are to understand the role of a wife and mother.

Proverbs 31:10 states this about a good wife: "Who can find a virtuous woman? For *her price is far above rubies*!" A Proverbs 31 wife is a unique treasure indicating that the real value of a virtuous wife should never be underestimated! Because of the inadequate training that parents give their children these days, a Proverbs 31 wife is becoming increasingly rare. Let us take a look at the qualities of a Proverbs 31 wife:

A Proverbs 31 wife is trustworthy and *confident in her role* (Strong's no. 982, vs. 11). Evidently, the parents of the 'virtuous wife' trained her as a child in the art of housekeeping. This outlines the responsibility that a mother has to diligently teach and train her daughter in every aspect of housekeeping so that she will be well prepared for her future role as a wife. Mothers must teach daughters how to keep a house, cook, sew and more, so that she can be confident when she fulfills her future role in marriage. Because of her proper upbringing, a husband can safely trust his wife to properly take care of his household. The onus is on the parents to teach their children and prepare them for adulthood!

A virtuous wife will do everything in her power to please her husband (vs. 12); she will serve him, keep the home in order, cook healthy food etc., and will do what she can to ensure her husband's happiness. It is in her nature to do good! She is resourceful and creative in the family sphere (vs. 13), shops around to find the best deals to ensure that the family dollar stretches as far as possible (vs. 14). A Proverbs 31 wife wakes up early enough to ensure that her husband and children are fed and have all they need to get their day under way in the best possible way (vs. 15): "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, *and a portion to her maidens*". The phrase 'and a portion to her maidens' indicates that there is a lot that is involved with the running of a home and family which means that a wife needs help to get all the chores done. Often, daughters will help their mothers, and in so doing will obtain the necessary training for her future role as wife and mother.

Proverbs 31:16 tells us that a husband should delegate decision-making power to his wife. A virtuous wife is hard working; she also makes good decisions, looks for bargains, in the interest of her family (vs. 16). A virtuous wife does what she can to keep herself healthy which indicates that she will do the same for all members of her family (vs. 17). "She girds her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms" (vs. 17) indicating that she also involves herself in healthy exercise.

Scripture indicates that the work of a wife and mother continues late into the night (verse 18). It is in her nature to work to serve her family and others (vs. 19-20). A virtuous wife also plans ahead for herself and her family which means she is a good organizer in the home (vs. 21). As a good planner, the virtuous wife will use well the weekly preparation day (Friday). She will ensure that everything needed for the Sabbath day is prepared in advance (Luke 23:54) including, for example, food preparation, setting out family clothes which will be used, and other things the wife knows the family will need on the Sabbath day. A woman is detail oriented, and this strength helps her with planning and preparation.

Proverbs 31:22 indicates that a virtuous wife dresses appropriately and modestly. Her clothing should represent the best quality clothing the family can afford: “her clothing is *silk and purple*” (vs. 22). Importantly, the right balance needs to be struck as God does not want us to place undue emphasis on the self because that focus will naturally and easily lead to vanity (Prov. 31:30). It is important for a wife to display balance in the type of clothing and jewelry that she wears (1 Tim. 2:9), ensuring that her appearance is always neat and becoming of a begotten member of the God family. More than outward appearance, it is the *conversion* of a wife that should be most important to a husband and this *real beauty* comes from within.

Proverbs 31 has more to say about the virtuous wife; she is a woman who feels that her husband is respected in the community (vs. 23). This helps the wife feel secure. She strives to maintain a positive mental outlook (vs. 25), is wise, intelligent and has good sense because she cultivates her mind; she is kind, loving and merciful (vs. 26). As head of the family, the husband has the responsibility to ensure the stability and security within the marriage, and he does this by loving, encouraging and praising his wife. This type of leadership cultivates the right environment for the security and wellbeing of all members of his family. However, for these positive fruits to be borne, God must always be kept *in the center* of the marital relationship!

A wife and mother will sometimes work outside the home (Prov. 31:24). However, in taking employment, she should respond to her husband’s true desires, helping to serve her family’s true needs. Situations where the wife works to supplement the family income should be distinctly fewer for mothers with young children. Caring for the husband and children should be a wife’s desire and priority. Parents need to be mindful of the possible negative repercussions on their young children and society at large, when the mother leaves the house to join the workforce. If mothers need to work they are encouraged to configure their work hours around their children’s schedule so that they are not left to their own devices! Wives will ensure that children keep the right company and do not adopt bad habits and wrong influences. Mothers are to ensure that children do not idle away their time, but are given projects and tasks that will train them, and keep their minds and bodies active and alert (vs. 27). A good mother understands that children who are trained in the proper way will not disappoint her or the family: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). This fruit gives testimony to the excellence of the wife (Prov. 31:29).

“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her” (Prov. 31:28). Proverbs 31 outlines the standard that God sets for wives. God honors the attitude of a wife that strives to build her home and family according to His Word; the husband and family will also respond positively to a Proverbs 31 wife. The fruit of her labor of love will reflect in the support, happiness and prosperity (Strong’s 833) of her family. A Proverbs 31 wife doesn’t demand respect from her husband and children - she earns it! In fact, a virtuous wife is a ‘crown to her husband’ (Prov. 12:4) and will be honored for her part in fearing God and building the family. She is a delight to God, to her husband and family and will be rewarded for her hard work (Prov. 31:28, 31)!

So far in this series, we have briefly covered the roles of the husband and wife in marriage. We have seen how every wife has a unique opportunity to be married to Jesus Christ in the flesh, if he lives by the spirit of God. A wife must submit to Christ in the flesh in her husband – her level of submission to Him is evident in the way she submits to her husband. Similarly, every husband has a unique opportunity to be married to Jesus Christ in the flesh because Christ also comes in the flesh through the wife (1 John 4:2)! Both the husband and wife should be producing abundant spiritual fruit in their life and marriage, and this is done effectively when the roles within marriage are meticulously applied and God is kept in the

center of the relationship. Husbands and wives must strive to produce positive fruit in their lives, so that both can feed off each other's fruit! This is what marriage is all about!

It takes lots of hard work, study and prayer for a Proverbs 31 wife to fulfill her role. However, while Proverbs 31 gives detailed instruction on the responsibilities of a wife, it should also serve to engrave in every member's mind that our Christian calling entails very hard work! Whether male or female members in the Church we are the bride of Christ and each of us must submit to Him! It takes lots of hard work, study and prayer for each of us to build the character God the Father wants to see in His Son's bride! Christ wants to see that we are individually and collectively working hard *now* to prepare ourselves spiritually for our forthcoming marriage. He wants to see that we are *resisting* Satan, *overcoming* and *applying His Word* in detail. Each of us must make a conscientious effort to come out of our comfort zones and seize the little time left before the return of Christ to ensure a place in His Family.

We are on the threshold of being born into the family of God! How has this fact positively affected our marriages and families? Do we display a sense of urgency in the way we implement our roles within the family? Let us *make ourselves ready* because Christ will not marry a 'laid-back' wife (Matt. 24:46; Luke 12:43)! Christ wants a Proverbs 31 wife having the characteristics outlined in the Word of God! Christ clearly desires a capable, motivated, industrious, wife that revolves around Him! How are we faring?

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev 19:7).

(To be continued)