Chapter 22

THE HIGH CALLING OF WIFE AND MOTHER IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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On completion of our graduate work in theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1970, my husband and I moved with our two children to Fayetteville, Arkansas. My husband assumed the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Fayetteville, and I continued my role as his helper—but with some major adjustments. First, the responsibility of caring for a premature crying machine added to the already arduous task of keeping up with a card-carrying member of the Terrible Twos' Society was a life-changing jolt to the efficient routine of working as a highly paid executive secretary by day and amusing a drop-in toddler at night. Second, my weekend responsibilities as a pastor's wife in New Orleans, which I had previously fulfilled as a mere addendum to my role as a "professional woman," were certainly not from the script that had been presented to me on our arrival in Fayetteville. There I was to play the part of a young wife, following the steps of an accomplished pastor's wife who had enjoyed star billing for many years and whose wardrobe did not include two babies! Third, the intellectually stimulating and mind-stretching dialogue of a theological community definitely overshadowed the dissonant and monosyllabic monologue of a frenzied mother whose only moment for reflection came within the confines of the bathroom—and that only if she managed to enter the room alone, which was a feat in itself!

Confusion and frustration were mine as I wondered if this, too, really would pass and, if indeed it passed, whether I also would be passed by forever as to any worthwhile contribution to society. During my seminary days I had maintained a rigorous schedule as a full-time student, studying both Hebrew and Greek, coupled with multiple part-time jobs and the responsibilities of a pastor's wife. After completing my master's degree, I entered motherhood and moved to a full-time job while my husband completed his doctoral work. Though I pursued motherhood as enthusiastically as I had every other adventure in my life—I even breast-fed my son for thirteen months, while working full-time—I can see in looking back that my first and freshest energies, not to mention the most productive part of my day, were devoted to professional pursuits away from home. When we moved to Arkansas, a void in my life came to the forefront. My theological training seemed a waste for the task of motherhood before me. In the midst of this frustrating time, I turned to the Lord. I determined in my daily quiet time to read through the Bible systematically with a new purpose: to determine God's message for me personally as a woman, a wife, and a mother. This experience became the catalyst for my life and ministry. From it came a series of messages titled "The Bible Speaks on Being a Woman," which I have been sharing with women over the years. My life and goals and perspective were forever changed. In every single book of the Bible I found God's word for me. That word was not always comforting; in fact, sometimes it was like a sword to my heart; but always I knew that it was authoritative and, if authoritative, true, regardless of culture, circumstances, or perceived relevance. I came to realize that God did not expect me to determine how to adapt His Word to my situation. Instead, He expected me to adapt myself to the consistently and clearly presented principles found in His Word. God did not expect me to interpret His principles in light of my gifts and intellect, but He admonished me "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29),[1] including gifts and intellect and creativity. God was not waiting for me to determine what directives were relevant for me as a twentieth-century American woman, but He was making clear throughout Scripture His demand for my absolute obedience, even willing submission in the Spirit of Christ Himself, who said, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40:8, nasb).

Consequently, my chosen role of wife and mother took on new significance; my extensive academic preparation and professional experience I viewed in a new light; my commitment to marriage and home gained an added dimension—a divine contractual relationship reaching beyond my husband and me to include the Creator God Himself, who said "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6).

Bearing a new liberated identity, many women have devoted themselves to ambitious busyness everywhere but in the home. They are enmeshed in overwhelming voluntarism to achieve accolades and recognition in the community, or they are surrogate wives and mothers dedicated to hatching professional pursuits that promise power and pocketbook. Instead of encouraging adolescents to cut the apron strings of mother and venture out into society, we are begging mothers not to cut the apron strings on their babies and catapult them prematurely into a menacing world! Mom and hot apple pie have been replaced by institutional day care centers and cold apple turnovers at McDonald's!

Women have been liberated right out of the genuine freedom they enjoyed for centuries to oversee the home, rear the children, and pursue personal creativity; they have been brainwashed to believe that the absence of a titled, payroll occupation enslaves a woman to failure, boredom, and imprisonment within the confines of home. Though feminism speaks of liberation, self-fulfillment, personal rights, and breaking down barriers, these phrases inevitably mean the opposite.[2] In fact, the opposite is true because a salaried job and titled position can inhibit a woman's natural nesting instinct and maternity by inverting her priorities so that failures almost inevitably come in the rearing of her own children and the building of an earthly shelter for those whom she loves most. The mundane accompanies every task, however high paying or prestigious the job, so that escape from boredom is not inevitable just because your workplace is not at home. And where is the time for personal creativity when you are in essence working two jobs—one at home and one away?

In our quest to be all we are meant to be, let us not forget what we are meant to be! The question has never been whether a woman wants the best for her husband and children and even for herself. Rather the real question is this: Is being someone's wife and another's mother really worth the investment of a life? Does it take preparation of skills, concentration of energies, and the commitment of both to keep a home? The secular presuppositions of the present age, as well as one's own assumptions and priorities, must continually be tested against the sure written Word of God, which warns us, ". . . but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Is Homemaking a Challenging Career?

A career or professional pursuit requires training and preparation as well as commitment and dedication over the long haul; it demands consistent activity and progressive achievement; it is a combination of training and preparation, commitment and loyalty, energy and time, excellence and achievement. Finding an efficient, capable person who is professionally adequate in many and varied careers simultaneously is rare indeed. For example, would you want your family physician to be your postman and policeman as well? I doubt it. Why? Because you want him to specialize and sharpen his expertise in medicine. Yet, you are certainly aware that your doctor dictates letters and reports and that he may on occasion sit down with a troubled patient as counselor. Within most careers there is a diversity of opportunity but never to the neglect of the priority responsibility. If the doctor gives the most productive part of his day to reports or counseling sessions and if, accordingly, he neglects updating his professional skills and treats patients haphazardly, the doctor will soon have no need to make reports or do counseling because his patient load will dwindle. In other words, there is specialization in purpose and preparation but generalization in service and opportunity.

Homemaking is a career. The dictionary defines the homemaker as "one who manages a household, especially a wife and mother." There are reasons why I believe this career is important enough to demand a woman's diligent preparation, foremost commitment, full energies, and greatest creativity. A homemaker does her job without the enticement of a paycheck, but she cannot be duplicated for any amount of money, for "She is worth far more than rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). Dorothy Morrison wrote, "Homemaking is not employment for slothful, unimaginative, incapable women. It has as much challenge and opportunity, success and failure, growth and expansion, perks and incentives, as any corporate career."[3]

Homemaking—A Divine Assignment

Keeping the home is God's assignment to the wife—even down to changing the sheets, doing the laundry, and scrubbing the floors. In Titus 2:3-5, Paul admonishes the older women to teach the younger women, among other things, "to love their husbands and children, . . . to be busy at home" (oikourgous, Greek, literally "home-workers"). The home was once described as ". . . a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved," and the mother in this home was described as "The Angel in the House."[4] A 1982 Gallup poll showed that more than eight out of ten respondents (82 percent) assigned top priority on an eleven-point scale to the importance of family life. Families, health, and self-respect all were rated as more important than the possession of material goods.[5]

Few women realize what great service they are doing for mankind and for the kingdom of Christ when they provide a shelter for the family and good mothering—the foundation on which all else is built. A mother builds something far more magnificent than any cathedral—the dwelling place for an immortal soul (both her child's fleshly tabernacle and his earthly abode). No professional pursuit so uniquely combines the most menial tasks with the most meaningful opportunities.

The Book of Proverbs is for me the most practical book in the Bible. No other book is more saturated with home and family and the relationships therein. No other book has any more to say to women specifically.

Proverbs 31 contains a full-length portrait of a godly heroine finished in minute detail. The passage is significant not only for what it includes but also for what it omits. There is no mention of rights or pursuit of self-serving interests; neither is the husband assigned to domestic pursuits. In fact, his occupation with other tasks is clearly stated, "Her husband has full confidence in her. . . . Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land" (Proverbs 31:11, 23). This beautiful and perfect ode of praise to womanhood is written as an acrostic with the first word of each verse beginning with one of the twenty-two successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

This description of God's "Bionic/Wonder Woman" is often labeled an "Alphabetic Ode," "The Golden ABC's of the Perfect Wife," "The Portrait of the Wife of Many Parts," "A Paradigm for Brides-to-Be." Perhaps its literary form is designed to make the passage easier to commit to memory, or its acrostic style may be a literary device used to emphasize that these characteristics describe God's ideal woman—committed homemaker, chaste helpmeet, upright and God-fearing woman of strength. Though no woman can match skills and creativity perfectly with this model, all can identify their respective talents within the composite, and all can strive for the spiritual excellence of this woman of strength. This passage is recited in many Jewish homes on the eve of Sabbath, not only setting the high challenge for wife and mother but also expressing gratitude for her awesome service to the household.[6]

At least half of Proverbs 31:10-31 is occupied with personal and domestic energy. The New Testament, too, is clear in its emphasis on a woman's needed and necessary

energy and efficiency in managing her household (Titus 2:5; 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:14). When Jesus reprimanded Martha, He did not condemn the vital housework she was doing; neither did He decry the gracious hospitality extended to Himself (Jesus did not say only one thing is needful but pointed to the one thing Martha had omitted). He did admonish her not to be encumbered or burdened by her work to the exclusion of spiritual sustenance, which Mary had so faithfully sought (Luke 10:38-42). One is never to neglect spiritual preparation—not even for the joy of serving others.

The best way to make homemaking a joyous task is to offer it as unto the Lord; the only way to avoid the drudgery in such mundane tasks is to bathe the tasks with prayer and catch a vision of the divine challenge in making and nurturing a home. Brother Lawrence, a member of the barefoot Carmelite monks in Paris in the 1600s, set a worthy example: "Lord of all pots and pans and things . . . Make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates! . . . The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen . . . I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

Many people are surprised to discover how much time it actually takes to run a household and care for a family. Having a career was far easier for me than being a homemaker! None of my former positions required my being on the job twenty-four hours every day. None of my varied professional pursuits demanded such a variety of skills and abilities as I have exercised in homemaking. Automatic, labor-saving devices save much physical work, but increased mobility and multiplied outside activities add to the overall time demands so that the preparation and care of the family shelter are important enough for God Himself to assign that responsibility. Of course, much of the world would agree that being a housekeeper is acceptable as long as you are not caring for your own home; treating men with attentive devotion would also be right as long as the man is the boss in the office and not your husband; caring for children would even be deemed heroic service for which presidential awards could be given as long as the children are someone else's and not your own. We must not be overcome by the surrogacy of this age, which offers even a substitute womb for those so encumbered by lofty pursuits that they cannot accept God-given roles and assignments.

Homemaking—A Source of Self-Esteem

Women join men in the search for accomplishments and positive evaluations. We all have an innate desire to have worth. God's ideal woman has such worth. In fact, her worth cannot be fixed or estimated—it is "far more than rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). The question is, of course, clear: Who has such worth? The Hebrew word hayil, translated "virtuous" but more literally "strength,"[7] is found also in Proverbs 12:4; 31:29, and Ruth 3:11. It is further translated as activity, ability, valor, wealth, efficiency, endurance, capability, energy. This "woman of strength" enjoys dignity and importance in the administrative affairs of her home. She is a valuable helpmeet for her husband. She is a complement to her husband and a necessary completing part of his being.

There is beautiful reciprocity in this mutual relationship between husband and wife, just as there is between Christ and the church. Christ is the head of the church and the church is delighted to serve Him (Ephesians 5:23; Philippians 3:7-8). Christ finds joy in the church, and the church finds in Christ an inheritance of untold value. This husband has confidence in his wife's ability as the manager of the household affairs. She is absolutely dependable. The gain that accrues to her husband from her thrift and industry assures that he "lacks nothing of value" (Proverbs 31:11). This "woman of strength" is a visionary investor. With her savings or inheritance, "She considers a field and buys it" (Proverbs 31:16). Unlike the unfaithful servant who hid the talent given to him by his master (Matthew 25:24-25), this prudent wife is continually adding to her husband's investments because "she plants a vineyard" (Proverbs 31:16).

The woman of strength is an elegant lady. Tapestry for bedding, carpeting, pillows was a sign of a carefully-decorated home interior. Silk cloth had not yet been invented, but she undoubtedly used the fine flax or linen cloth that was the best of the day, and purple garments, indicating wealth or high rank, which were rare indeed (Proverbs 31:22). God's woman does give time and effort to her appearance. These words were written about the wife of the great eighteenth-century preacher Jonathan Edwards,

> But Sarah's husband made it clear that he treasured her as more than a housekeeping drudge and the mother of extra farmhands. So she stayed attractive, and fifteen years later she was still able to entrance men much younger than she was.[8]

The "woman of strength" was a source of tremendous pride to her husband. Her complete management of the household freed her husband to concentrate on his labors. Her husband respected her for neatness of dress, appreciated the fact that his wife was held in high esteem, and was willing to " . . . let her works bring her praise at the city gate" (Proverbs 31:31), but there is no hint in the passage that she had any other purpose than to meet the needs of her family in the best possible way.

Is Homemaking a Worthy Service?

In the Scriptures, the concern of godly women was not discrimination in vocation but rather the barrenness of the womb. Women were not pining away, pleading with the Almighty to be priests or prophets. They were praying for the blessing of bearing children. In Israel, every Jewish mother hoped to become the mother of the Messiah, who had been promised to Eve, the first mother (Genesis 3:15).

Hannah was brokenhearted over her childlessness (1 Samuel 1:1-2:1). Feeling forsaken of God, her maternal instinct prompted agonizing prayer with the burning intent of giving the boy back to God as a living sacrifice. Hannah deemed this the highest service. This motivation was not borne out of slavery to procreative responsibility. In conversations with her husband and Eli the priest, she was treated as an equal. The decision of when to go to Shiloh was left entirely with Hannah, and she not only was given the privilege of announcing the name of the child but also apparently chose the name Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him" (1 Samuel 1:20, 22). Hannah was her own woman, but for her this meant committing herself to the purposes of God.

Hannah went from brokenhearted barrenness to extraordinarily privileged maternity. Though Hannah's psalm of thanksgiving marked her as a poetess and prophetess with a spiritual lyric equal to any psalm and full of theological truth, and though her words became the basis for Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Hannah did not reckon her literary acclaim equal to the nurturing of her child. Her greatest reward was not the birth of a son, however, but the gift to God of that son, who perhaps beyond all men had power with and from God. Moments of unequaled joy are coupled with difficult and time-consuming work. Children are not things to be acquired, used according to time and schedule, showcased for personal satisfaction, and then put aside for personal ambition and convenience.

Rearing the next generation is a coveted task despite the unprecedented attacks on motherhood. Some women want to limit parenthood to the labor room, settling for a "maternity sabbatical" in which they birth a baby during a few weeks' leave before rushing back to their lofty pursuits. Mrs. Uyterlinde returned to her job as an executive secretary at an insurance company four months after the birth of her triplets, saying, "I could only do that with the help of two full-time housekeepers." She continued, "Working is easier than being at home, but I give them my total attention when I am at home. Luckily they don't all want it at the same time."[9]

Others opt to take parenthood a bit more seriously and thus choose the "mommy track" work plan so that their hours have some flexibility while the children are very

young.[10] Still others depict motherhood as an awful condition, suffocating and degrading—psychic suicide. Their banner is "Motherhood—Just Say No!" God's warning through the prophet Ezekiel could not be more timely:

> And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. . . . Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: "Like mother, like daughter." You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. (Ezekiel 16:20, 44-45).

Motherhood is both a demanding and a rewarding profession. Unfortunately, the reward often comes much later in life, but a prime characteristic of the good mother is unselfishness; she can wait for the final realization of her rewards. No one—not teacher, preacher, or psychologist—has the same opportunity to mold minds, nurture bodies, and develop potential usefulness like a mother. It is both practical and consistent with the basic qualities that nature has given male and female that the woman who bears and nurses the baby should care for the young and for the dwelling in which the young live. Though a woman approaching the twenty-first century is different in many ways from her foremothers, she is in at least one way forever the same. Some would say that she is a servant of her biological fate, to which she has to adjust her other pursuits. Of course, this may be interpreted as mere slavery with the procreative and nurturing tasks as the shackles; but, on the other hand, this biological duty may also be accepted as a divinely assigned destiny with the awesome opportunity for a woman to link hand and heart with the Creator God in bearing and preparing the next generation as the binding cord.

Despite pressures and difficulties, the job can be overwhelmingly satisfying and amazingly productive, because the result of really competent mothering will be passed from generation to generation. Products in the marketplace may come and go, but generation after generation we produce our sons and daughters. A child needs his mother to be all there; to be focused on him, to recognize his problems and needs; to support, guide, see, listen to him, love and want him. A young woman wrote to "Dear Abby" describing her mother as "a professional woman who collected a husband, a daughter, and a dog to enrich her life." According to the daughter, the only one not damaged by this enrichment was the dog![11] Susanna Wesley, the incomparably brilliant and well-educated mother of sons who shook two continents for Christ, wrote, "I am content to fill a little space if God be glorified." She described her now famous childrearing commitment in these words:

> No one can, without renouncing the world, in the most literal sense, observe my method; and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado; for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully and unsuccessfully managed.12

The emergence of inexpensive, effective birth-control measures, not to mention widespread abortion, has cut the size of average families. Women are giving less and less of their time to childbearing and rearing; marriage is being delayed to allow career preparation and pursuit. Motherhood has become as mechanical and insignificant as any other household task and is just as quickly farmed out to others—even the carrying of the child in the womb, i.e., surrogate childbearing through in vitro fertilization.

Marriage has become such a partnership that the household tasks are carefully divided and assigned as nonchalantly as clients to be serviced. Both husband and wife choose careers according to the best earning power and opportunity for advancement of both, which usually means the family loses the best opportunity for both. Despite all this

egalitarian emphasis, Mary Jo Bane of the Wellesley Women's Research Center expressed a prevailing sentiment: "Everybody is in favor of equal pay, but nobody is in favor of doing the dishes."[13]

Feminism is a "social movement" that demands it all. Actress Katharine Hepburn said in an interview, "I'm not sure any woman can successfully pursue a career and be a mother at the same time. The trouble with women today is that they want everything. But no one can have it all. I haven't been handicapped by children. Nor have I handicapped children by bringing them into the world and going ahead with my career."[14] Actress Joanne Woodward says, "My career has suffered because of the children, and my children have suffered because of my career. I've been torn and haven't been able to function fully in either arena. I don't know one person who does both successfully, and I know a lot of working mothers."[15] Golda Meir of Israel confessed that she suffered nagging doubts about the price her two children paid for her career, adding, "You can get used to anything if you have to, even to feeling perpetually guilty."[16]

Each of these women chose to work, not because she had to do so to provide necessities for her family or because her husband demanded it, but because of personal gain and fame or because of what she perceived to be a contribution more valuable to the nation or world than full-time motherhood. In each case, attention to the child was less important than the career.

Even the politicians are convinced that children are a valuable resource to be protected. A new report released by the National Governors' Association Task Force on Children states, "The economic and social well-being of the United States rests on our ability to assure that our children develop into healthy, well-educated, and productive citizens. . . . To invest in their future is to invest in ours."[17]

A study of primarily middle-class children was conducted by University of Texas at Dallas researchers Deborah Lowe Vandell and Mary Anne Corasaniti. This study indicated that full-time child care was associated with poorer study skills, lower grades, diminished self-esteem, and inadequate social interaction. Those who went into full-time care after the first year did not develop as well socially, emotionally, and intellectually as those in part-time care or those whose mothers stayed home with them. Surely another concern must be in the development of the child's values and worldview, which are determined very early in life. Will forty hours a week in a day care center be a more formidable factor in forming those values than a worn-out mother? Because Vandell is a full-time professor and mother of three- and eight-year-old children, she had expected different results from the study. She clearly stated that she did not accept her findings as a call for mothers to stay at home.[18]

Napoleon was asked what could be done to restore the prestige of France. He replied, "Give us better mothers!"[19] The art of mothering surely demands as much training as a skilled waitress or craft worker, and thus we should not expect to be an expert as we begin this vocation but rather that slowly we would learn the needs of each child and how to meet those needs. Often those who are reluctant to begin the job of full-time mothering are just as reluctant to give it up when the results are both seen and enjoyed. Timothy Dwight, former president of Yale, said, "All that I am and all that I shall be I owe to my mother."[20] Good lives don't just grow like Topsy; they are built by people who care.

Isn't it amazing that legislators are looking for ways to enable families to send their children to day care rather than looking for ways to enable mothers to stay at home with their children? Megan Rosenfeld comments, "For the first time it is possible to envision a generation that will have spent the bulk of their childhood in an institution."[21] Sad but true is the fact that institutions are now set up to provide a substitute for the mother, who was the moral backbone and spiritual nurturer as well as the physical caretaker—the woman who is now no longer there!

Tatyana Zaslavskaya, president of the Soviet Sociologist Association, is quoted in a TASS interview as expressing deep concern for the ill effects on children of "the high rate of employment among working-age women." She pleaded for mothers to make children their prime mission, calling on the Communist Party to discuss ways to reduce the employment rate among mothers. She added that the problem that is often glamorized in the United States as the "Superwoman" phenomenon (the woman who is faster than a speeding two-year-old, able to leap tall laundry piles in a single bound, and possessed of more power than three teenaged boys and still able to go out and save the world in the midst of all) has been known in the Soviet Union for years as "the problem of two jobs."[22] Even Mikhail Gorbachev addresses this issue:

> We have discovered that many of our problems—in children's and young people's behavior, in our morals, culture and in production—are partially caused by the weakening of family ties and slack attitude to family responsibilities. This is a paradoxical result of our sincere desire to make women equal with men in everything.

He adds that Russia is now looking for ways to make it possible for women to return "to their purely womanly mission."[23]

Some women even claim to have a higher focus on serving God—putting the gospel ahead of "familyism."[24] While no one and nothing must come between a woman and her personal relationship to Christ ("But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well," Matthew 6:33), neither does the Bible contain any admonition to place the work of the church ahead of home responsibilities. When a woman has chosen the high calling of being a wife, her submission to her husband is "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). When she chooses the high calling of motherhood, "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him" (Psalm 127:3); this, too, is itself an offering to the Lord.

In another era the beautiful and godly mother of John Chrysostom was widowed at a young age. She refused her many suitors and committed herself totally to the responsibility of rearing her gifted son, who became the Patristic church's greatest orator.[25] Mothers, too, win most by losing all ("Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it," Matthew 10:39). By developing the Christlike quality of abandoning personal demands and rights and seeking to serve and minister to those whom God has provided for their own personal ministry, these unselfish heroines gain worth and wonder and splendor beyond imagination.

There is no greater need for the coming years than a revival of interest in the responsibilities of motherhood. We need mothers who are not only family-oriented but also family-obsessed. We have seen much about the virtue of determined childlessness and the right to make one's own place in the sun; yet it is hard to locate an aging mother who believes she made a mistake in pouring her life into her children, and it would certainly be more difficult to find a child to testify that his mother loved him and poured herself into his life to his detriment and demise. Surely countless mothers would join me in saying, "Try it—you'll like it!" The Lord Himself says, "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Psalm 127:4-5).

Homemaking—An Opportunity for Service

The wife was created by God to be her husband's "helper" (ezer kenegdo¯, Hebrew, literally "a help like or corresponding to himself," Genesis 2:18). There is nothing demeaning about being a helper. It is a challenging and rewarding responsibility. God Himself assumed that role on many occasions (Psalm 40:17, "You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay"; Hebrews 13:6, "So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper'"). This did not mean that the Lord was an inferior but spoke rather of

His desire to meet the needs of those whom He loves with an everlasting and unconditional love. Through the ages some have held that women are inferior to men, but the attempt to attribute such an idea to Scripture is unthinkable.

We must give attention to what Luther called "the plain sense of Scripture" as concerns the husband-wife relationship. It is really not terribly complicated. What the New Testament writers wrote and how they meant their words to be understood in their own time is far more important than the secular meanings assigned these Biblical terms in this generation, especially when those meanings depart from the clear teaching of Scripture. The fact is that there is no suggestion in Scripture that women are inferior or incapable in any sense—neither in personhood, which is the same as man's, nor in function, which is different from man's.

Any attitude or action suggesting a woman's insignificance, inferiority, or lack of personhood originated in the fall. The stigma of inferiority is no more appropriate for the wife than it would be for Christ. One can be subject to a superior as Israel was subject to the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:1-5) and as believers are subject to Christ (Philippians 2:9-11), or as Abraham submitted to the priesthood of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:7). But subordination is also possible among equals: Christ is equal to God the Father and yet subject to Him (Philippians 2:6-8); believers are equal to one another and yet are admonished to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). In fact, one can be called to subordinate himself to someone who is inferior, as Christ submitted to Pontius Pilate, making "no reply, not even to a single charge" (Matthew 27:11-14). The mere fact that wives are told to be subject to their husbands tells us nothing about their status. It is the comparison of the relationship between husband and wife to the relationship of God the Father with God the Son that settles the matter of status forever.[26]

Submission and authority, which to the feminists are the offensive elements in Biblical womanhood, are not terms that in themselves connote sinful or evil characteristics. Neither are the terms limited to describe role relationships between the sexes. Both terms are used to describe relationships within the family, including, but not exclusive to, the relationship between husband and wife. In fact, these terms even reach far beyond the family. In every facet of organized society (see Romans 13:1-5 for application to government and Hebrews 13:17 as concerns the church), there must be both authority and submission to authority; otherwise, there is anarchy. There simply is no justification for labeling these words and the concepts they embody as innately objectionable and oppressive. Finally, and more importantly, these terms point to our common ground with the Lord Himself, who gave to us the highest example of servanthood, obedience, and selflessness, as "he humbled himself and became obedient to death" (Philippians 2:5-8; see also John 5:30).

Ideally, the care of one's partner is inherent in marriage. Each makes an active and unique (not passive and same) contribution to the marriage, and each depends upon the other for that contribution. Both husband and wife achieve their respective individuality by assuming different roles, for which each is needed and on which neither intrudes. In choosing to allow one's husband to support the family, a wife can turn her ingenuity toward producing a lifestyle even better than an additional salary would buy.

Subordination has been distorted before in the history of the church. Arius assigned inferiority of being to Jesus the Son, refusing to accept the Scripture's statement that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in being and personhood (John 1:1; 5:23; 10:30; 14:6-7, 9, 11) and yet different in office and function, as the Son voluntarily becomes subject and even subordinate[27] to the Father (John 5:19-20; 6:38; 8:28-29, 54; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Philippians 2:5-11), and the Holy Spirit is sent by, and thus under the direction of, the Father to glorify the Son (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). Arian subordinationism was condemned as heretical—a denial of Trinitarianism—because it

ignored, distorted, or misread certain Scriptures and because of Gnostic tendencies that simply dismissed or abandoned passages that the human mind could not explain.[28] Can "Arian" feminism, which denies that women can have equal personhood along with a subordinate role, i.e., a different role with equal worth, be any more circumspect? I certainly think not. The Council of Nicea in a.d. 325 not only condemned this heresy but also ascribed to both Son and Spirit an equality of being, while clearly declaring subordination of order and function.[29] Likewise, I have no problem in accepting within my womanhood the equality of creation and personhood, while recognizing that my divinely bestowed womanhood is uniquely suited to the divinely assigned task.

Too many women rush headlong into a career outside the home, determined to waste no time or effort on housework or baby-sitting but rather seeking to achieve position and means by directing all talents and energies toward non-home professional pursuits. It is true that many "perfect jobs" may come and go during the childrearing years, but only one will absolutely never come along again—the job of rearing your own children and allowing them the increasingly rare opportunity to grow up at home.

Golda Meir, by her own testimony, devoted her adult life to the birth and rearing of Israel at the cost of her marriage. She separated from her reticent husband in pursuit of public life. To quote Mrs. Meir, "what I was made it impossible for him to have the sort of wife he wanted and needed. . . . I had to decide which came first: my duty to my husband, my home and my child or the kind of life I myself really wanted. Not for the first time—and certainly not for the last—I realized that in a conflict between my duty and my innermost desires, it was my duty that had the prior claim."[30]

How sad it is for a woman to try to build her life on the notion that she is going to pursue whatever momentarily happens to gratify her needs socially, emotionally, physically, or professionally. Though the duty of wifehood and motherhood may lay claim, the desires of personal ambition and success in public service can take hold, of which the Lord warned,

> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire [epithumia, Greek], he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin [hamartia, Greek, literally "missing the mark"]; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:14-15)

When a wife goes to work outside the home, often her husband and children go through culture shock. Suddenly the husband has added to his vocational work increased family assignments. He is frustrated over the increase in his own assignments and guilty over his wife's increased fatigue and extended hours to keep up at home. God did give the husband the responsibility of providing for the family (Genesis 2:15). To sabotage his meeting that responsibility is often a debilitating blow to the man personally and to the marriage. A woman's career can easily serve as a surrogate husband, as during employment hours she is ruled by her employer's preferences. Because the wife loses much of her flexibility with the receipt of a paycheck, a husband must bend and adapt his schedule for emergencies with the children, visits to the home by repairmen, etc. This leaves two employers without totally committed employees and children without a primary caretaker utterly devoted to their personal needs and nurturing. Note the prophet's warning, "Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path" (Isaiah 3:12).

Many women still see the paycheck as an inadequate trade for the sights and sounds and tastes of home. Though some see their paychecks as representing independence and achievement, to be bound to paychecks requires in exchange the time formerly allotted to work for the family in private, personal ways. This is not to say that there are never times when a woman should seek employment outside her home. Nevertheless, are we coming to a day when a woman's employment outside the home is the rule rather than the

exception, leaving no one to give primary attention to the home and to producing the next generation.

The most outstanding ministering couple in the New Testament is the dynamic duo Aquila and Priscilla, who traveled the apostolic world together, sharing the gospel of Christ and expounding the Word more fully (Acts 18:2-3, 18, 26). Priscilla must have been a diligent and discerning student of the Word of God, or she could never have impressed the learned Apollos. On the other hand, she must have been a gracious hostess to have endeared her home and hospitality to Paul. Obviously, she was encouraged to take an active part in ministry by her husband. When a godly wife is all she ought to be, she completes, complements, and extends her husband. Their joint ministry reaches beyond what either of them could do alone (Psalm 34:3; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

When Paige Patterson invited me to link my life to his, irrevocably and inseparably, he asked me to join him in study and preparation. How grateful I have been for the formal studies of seminary, but how much more grateful I am for the hours Paige has spent as my teacher and mentor. Paige has encouraged me in multifarious ministry, but never has he given me the impression that these ministries were to be more important than keeping our home and rearing our children.

Conclusion

Despite the clear positive principles and the precise warnings of consequences for those who ignore or distort God's plan for the home and family, we find ourselves living in the very "upside-down" world the prophet Isaiah described:

> You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"? (Isaiah 29:16).

The efforts of contemporary society to eradicate the differences between the sexes have spawned an increase in strident lesbianism and open homosexuality, a quantum upward leap in divorces, an increase in rapes and sexual crimes of all sorts—and families smaller in size than ever before. We are part of a generation of women who have prostituted the creative purposes of God by prophesying "out of their own imagination" (Ezekiel 13:17), who have erected for themselves "male idols" to supplant the Creator's design (Ezekiel 16:17), and who have cast aside the greatest blessing of the Creator, i.e., the fruit of the womb (Ezekiel 16:20, 44-45). We have allowed Scripture itself to be distorted so that we are conforming ourselves to this age and letting the world squeeze us "into its own mold" (Romans 12:2, Phillips). The church today sounds like the world twenty-five years ago; it has lost its great power to stand against culture. Scripture has been shanghaied to suit the purposes of the age and to conform to the current cultural scene. The virtues and vices of Christianity have been inverted so that self-gratifying personal rights, selfishness, and self-interests are exalted, whereas self-effacing submission, humility, and service to others are degraded. While I am not implying that every career woman is selfish, I am saying that the social atmosphere that causes women to crave professional pursuits over the family is perverted by unbiblical assumptions and an ungodly spirit of assertion and self-gratification.

Evangelical or Biblical feminism is in large measure a product of the secular women's liberation movement of the late sixties and seventies. Few of these evangelical feminists have much in common with the radical wing of feminism. Nevertheless, the movement of self-assertion in the home, church, and community cannot but extend into the spiritual realm with a determination to act independently of God and go one's own way (Proverbs 14:12; Isaiah 53:6). Human rights and reason have been exalted over responsibility and divine revelation. The reality in Scripture has been subordinated to the reason of man (and woman); the absolutes of the Creator have been replaced with the

whims of the creation. Rejecting Scripture as authoritative, many male and female feminists put the focus of authority in human hands, usually through some hermeneutical casuistry. Whatever texts do not seem to affirm women are labeled as not authoritative, while texts judged as affirming are authoritative.

There is great resistance in the world of feminism to letting Scripture speak for itself. Instead of coming reverently to the Biblical text to see what it says and then declaring themselves to be feminists, many seem to have found something in secular feminism and in its claims for improving the lot of womanhood that seemed good and true to them. Thus, the feminists took a "leap of faith" to attach themselves to this movement, determining to legitimize their position Biblically and theologically and to change two millennia of church history and tradition to reflect this new church doctrine that more nearly fits the reality of their active professional lives—another tragic example of the world's setting the agenda for the church rather than vice versa.

Homemaking, if pursued with energy, imagination, and skills, has as much challenge and opportunity, success and failure, growth and expansion, perks and incentives as any corporation, plus something no other position offers—working for people you love most and want to please the most!

In the words of Scripture, I have found a worthy challenge:

> Teach them [God's words] to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. . . so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. (Deuteronomy 11:19, 21)

Homemaking—being a full-time wife and mother—is not a destructive drought of usefulness but an overflowing oasis of opportunity; it is not a dreary cell to contain one's talents and skills but a brilliant catalyst to channel creativity and energies into meaningful work; it is not a rope for binding one's productivity in the marketplace, but reins for guiding one's posterity in the home; it is not oppressive restraint of intellectual prowess for the community, but a release of wise instruction to your own household; it is not the bitter assignment of inferiority to your person, but the bright assurance of the ingenuity of God's plan for complementarity of the sexes, especially as worked out in God's plan for marriage; it is neither limitation of gifts available nor stinginess in distributing the benefits of those gifts, but rather the multiplication of a mother's legacy to the generations to come and the generous bestowal of all God meant a mother to give to those He entrusted to her care.

Endnotes to Chapter Twenty-two

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27. Defined as "one who stands in order or rank below another." Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield: G & C Merriam, 1971), p. 2277.

28. "Subordinationism," Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F. L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 1301.

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