

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

by

Norman V. Williams

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CHAPTER TWO

THE CHRISTIAN WIFE

Proverbs 31:10-31

IN THIS PORTION of God's Word, King Lemuel's mother sets before him the full-length portrait of a virtuous woman, the excellent wife, that choicest gift, which is said to be "**from the Lord**" (Proverbs 19:14). It is an elegant poem of twenty-two verses, like Psalm 119, constructed so that each verse begins with one of the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

In a sermon on "The Female Character", the preacher said that all mothers and instructors should teach the female pupils under their care to learn it by heart.

Matthew Henry says of this portion, "Thus is shut up this looking-glass for ladies which they are desired to open and dress themselves by; and if they do so, their adorning will be found to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Pilkington says, "If women would learn what God will plague them for, and how; let them read the third chapter of the prophet Isaiah. If they will learn what God willeth them to do, and be occupied withal, though they be of the best sort, let them read the last chapter of Proverbs. It is enough to note it and point it out to them that will learn."

THE FINDING OF A VIRTUOUS WOMAN AND HER VALUE

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies." God would remind the young men that a Christian woman is priceless and is the only proper candidate for marriage to a young man who is looking for a treasure in a wife.

"Who can find a virtuous woman?" A Christian wife is not to be gained by any haphazard methods. She must be sought, not in one's own wisdom but in prayer, looking moment by moment to Him for guidance and counsel. The young man who seeks his wife by prayer, fully yielded to the mind of the Holy Spirit, will be guided to the virtuous woman who for him will have a price "**far above rubies**," For she will come not in her own name but in the name of Christ, not in her own will but in the will of Christ. In her hands she will bear precious treasures of graces and encouragements from the Father for the providential unfolding of his life's mission and work.

Likewise, he then will come to her in the name and will of the Lord Jesus Christ, bearing in his hands the graces and encouragements from the Father provided for the providential unfolding of her life's mission and work. Thus the answer to the vital question in verse ten throws us on the love, mercy, and guidance of God, and constrains us to look away from self and the energy of the flesh.

Bridges, in his commentary on Proverbs 19:14, says,

The history of Ruth beautifully illustrates the train of matrimonial providence. The Moabitess married, contrary to all human probability, a man of Israel, that she might be brought into Naomi's family, return with her to her own land, and in the course of filial duty be brought under the eye and drawn to the heart of Boaz, her appointed husband (Ruth 1:1-4; 4:13). Often do the wheels of the Lord's working in this interesting matter constrain the admiration of men not well-exercised in spiritual observation (Genesis 24:50). And how much more endearing and secure is a special gift of God!

The Christian wife is a precious gift of God, and aside from Christ she is the most precious gift God ever gives to man! May we appreciate our Christian wives as they ought to be appreciated!

It is also worthy of noting that God's question implies that virtue is the only divinely recognized criterion for a wife whose value is above rubies. We fear that too often the search is made for beauty, accomplishment, personality, glamour, or wealth, rather than solid virtue. Even Aristotle, the prince of Greek philosophy, said, "If women be good, the half of the commonwealth may be happy where they are."

THE CHRISTIAN WIFE IS A FOUNTAIN OF GOOD TO HER HUSBAND

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good . . . all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:11-12). A Christian wife is a booster to her husband. She believes in him, and she lets him know she believes in him and in his future. All others may look with indifference, but as long as she encourages him and believes in him, he will rise from strength to strength.

Luther said of his wife, "The greatest gift of God is a pious, amiable spouse, who fears God, loves His house, with whom one can live in perfect confidence."

General Booth of the Salvation Army had such a wife.

When the founder of the Salvation Army, the late General Booth, was still in the Wesleyan ministry, a crisis arose. He felt that God's call to him was to do the work of an evangelist. But the Wesleyan Conference voted against his giving his full time to this work. It was a crisis for William Booth. If he refused to agree, then he would have to leave the Wesleyan ministry. He and his family would lose their income. His home and future would be threatened. One can well understand the strongest of men hesitating. But while Mr. Booth was in the midst of the crisis, and as he was being urged to agree, a female voice was heard in the gallery shouting, "William, never!" A woman had risen to her feet. A woman had dared to cry, "Never!" It was Mrs. Booth.

She with lionlike courage urged him to consequences with God. Instead of weeping and compromising because of difficulties that such a resignation would bring upon them, she was her husband's chief support. It was the beginning of the Salvation Army!

No wonder at her funeral the sorrowing old General described her as

a tree who had shadowed him from the burning sun, whose flowers had been the adornment and beauty of his life, whose fruit had been the stay of his existence . . . a servant who had served without fee or reward . . . a counselor who had ever advised him, and seldom advised wrong . . . a friend who had understood his very nature . . . a wife who for forty years had never given him real cause for grief. . . who had ever been the strongest when the battle was strongest. She was the delight of his eyes and the inspiration of his soul. She was good—she was love—she was a spiritual warrior.

One may say that a Christian wife must be to her family what Shakespeare said sleep is to the body: "She must knit together the raveled sleeve of care. She is sore labors' bath balm of hurt minds, chief nourisher in life's feast. She is like a holy oil giving light and nourishment and warmth to those within her home, and to the wandering child she is 'like a candle that's set in a window at night.'"

THE CHRISTIAN WIFE IS CALLED BLESSED BY HUSBAND AND CHILDREN

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her"

(Proverbs 31:28). The Christian wife is loved and respected by her husband and children. This is so because of what she is:

1. Virtuous (v. 10)
2. A fountain of good (v. 12)
3. A willing worker (v. 13)
4. Self-sacrificing for her family (vv. 14-15)
5. Financially careful, systematic, and wise (v. 16).
6. Strong to labor for the good of her family, rearing her children, caring for the sick, and doing all the other numberless duties wives attend to in the home (v. 17).
7. A tireless worker for the well-being of her loved ones. It is true that "woman's work is never done" (v. 18).
8. Kind to the poor (v. 20)
9. A provider for the needs of her family (v. 21)
10. Well-groomed (v. 22)
11. A cause of her husband being honored and respected among the men of the town in business (v. 23)
12. Strong in character and honorable in all her relationships (v. 25)
13. A wise counselor and very kind. Her tongue is sweet and kind (v. 26), and with the wisdom of her lips she feeds the souls of her loved ones.
14. Not lazy or idle (v. 27)
15. A person who fears the Lord. She loves God, and her love for Him furnishes the motive power for all her deeds, thoughts and desires (v. 30).

Is it any wonder that her children call her blessed and that her husband praises her? This is the fruit of her hands, and her praise is the testimony of her works.

Perhaps one especially characteristic mark of the Christian wife is the burden and interest she bears on her heart for the spiritual welfare of her family. How many men will arise on the great day and before all assembled creation give thanks to God for their faithful wives who prayed and loved them into the heart of Christ! How many sons and how many daughters will throughout the endless ages call mother blessed because she loved and prayed them into the heart of Christ!

Dwight L. Moody, in his Chicago meeting of October 1876, gave the following illustrations to encourage Christian wives and mothers to pray for the salvation of their loved ones:

I remember at one of the meetings at Nashville during the war a young man came to me, trembling from head to foot. "What is the trouble?" I asked. "There is a letter I got from my sister, and she tells me every night as the sun goes down she goes on her knees and prays for me." This man was brave, and had been in a number of battles; he could stand before the cannon's mouth, yet this letter completely upset him. "I have been trembling ever since I received it." Six hundred miles away the faith of this girl went to work, and its influence was felt by the brother. He did not believe in prayer; he did not believe in Christianity; he did not believe in his mother's Bible. This mother was a praying woman, and when she died she left on earth a praying daughter. And when God saw her faith and heard that prayer, He answered her. How many sons and daughters could be saved if their mothers and fathers but had faith!

At Murfreesboro another illustration of this occurred. A young man received a letter from his mother in which she said something like this: "My Dear Boy: You do not know how I am burdened for your salvation! Every morning and evening I go into my closet and pray for you, that you may be led to the cross of Christ. You may die in battle, or in the hospitals, and oh, my son, I want you to become a Christian. I do not know but that this will be my last letter to you."

This young lieutenant came to me and said, "I have just heard of my mother's death, and I have prayed for forgiveness of my sins." He was converted just through his mother's faith. Although she was in glory, her voice was heard here.

In one of the towns in England there is a beautiful little chapel, and a very touching story is told in connection with it. It was built by an infidel. He had a praying wife, but he would not listen to her, would not allow her pastor even to take dinner with them, would not look at the Bible, would not allow religion ever to be talked of. She made up her mind, seeing she could not influence him by her voice, that every day she would pray to God at twelve o'clock for his salvation. She said nothing to him, but every day at the hour she told the Lord about her husband. At the end of twelve months there was no change in him.

But she did not give up; six months more went by. Her faith began to waver and she said, "Will I have to give him up at last? Perhaps when I am dead, He will answer my prayers." When she got to that point it seemed just as if God had got her where He wanted her. The man came home to dinner one day. His wife was in the dining room waiting for him, but he didn't come in. She waited for some time and finally looked for him all through the house. At last she thought of going into that little room where she had prayed so often. There he was, praying with agony where she had prayed for so many months, asking forgiveness for his sins. And this is the lesson to you wives who have infidel husbands. The Lord saw that woman's faith and answered her prayer.

We cannot but think of that consecrated wife whom we had the joy of learning about in a little parish in the southern part of the state. Her husband was unsaved, and he had a brutal, aggressive hatred for the things of God.

But this Christian wife had a burning passion for his salvation, and her burning passion issued forth in pleading and persevering prayer. She recounts: "Many a time when I was praying for him with tear-blinded eyes he would slip into the room and pour a bucketful of water over me. He would taunt me and jest at me with fiendish hatred.

"But I kept on praying and would permit nothing to turn me from this holy exercise. And I prayed God to give me the grace of sweetness that I might never become revengeful or vindictive. God answered prayer first in me. He gave me grace to pray on year in and year out with no discouragement or doubt that my husband would be saved, and He gave me the grace to keep sweet and return good for evil, that my prayers be not hindered by my life.

"After many years of heartache, pleading prayers, cruel insults, and fiendish persecution, he utterly broke down and cried to the Lord for mercy."

This man later testified that the constant praying and loving sweetness of his wife under the most bitter pressures year in and year out caused him, by God's grace, to know the reality of Christ. "I couldn't deny the Christ I saw in her."

If there is anyone with an unsaved loved one, take courage—pray on and keep sweet, and God will win that lost loved one's soul to Himself. We can say with great confidence that no one will ever see the fires of hell if he has only one Christian who will pray for his salvation."

THE CHRISTIAN WIFE IS A COUNSELOR WITH WISDOM AND KINDNESS

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Proverbs 31:26). The Christian wife is sometimes an unacclaimed expert in personal counseling. She may never have taken a course in psychology or pastoral theology, and she may know little or nothing about psychiatry; probably she will never be rewarded with an honorary doctorate. She may not know anything about the theory of counseling, but she knows how to practice it. She knows God and loves Him. She studies His Word and she spends time alone each day in communion with Him. Like Abraham, she becomes a friend of God, and, like Enoch, she walks with God. Thus does she learn the ways of God, and this is the source of her wisdom. A minister greatly used of God testified,

Sometimes the weight, care and problems of life weigh upon the mind, and all seems darkness. We question and wonder just what the answer could be. We cry to God for light and then, for me anyway, He sends me to my wife. When the problem is laid out before her she knows just what to say to flood light into my mind. Just a little talk with her and my mind is clear and my heart is filled with fresh confidence and renewed courage; the mist has cleared and the vision is clear again before my eyes.

Another Christian man, a businessman with responsibilities that claim the utmost resources of the mind and body said,

My hours are irregular, but no matter what time I get home I must have a talk with my wife. She is always radiant and she is always the same. I share the joys and victories of the day with her. And she always has something to say that multiplies the joys and makes the victories more precious. And then if there have been any, I must share the griefs and disappointments with her. She always understands. It may be that something she was reading from the Bible that very day will have a special bearing on my problem.

She will tell me about it and in a little while as she shares her love, faith and understanding with me, my anxiety and fear and worry are all gone. I often tell her she is my chief consultant.

God says of the virtuous woman, **“She openeth her mouth with wisdom”** (Proverbs 31:26).

One of the greatest powers of the personal counselor, according to authorities, is love. Love enables the counselor to put himself in the place of the other person. One distraught, nervous patient has been conferring with a professional counselor and has been much encouraged. She may not remember all the ideas the counselor gives her; but one thing he has said stands out in her mind and has made a deep impression on her: “Remember we are in this thing together.” The statement reveals a concern that has caused the counselor to put himself in this patient’s place, and the patient has sensed the power of this creative sympathy and has responded with fresh courage.

But who can practice the noble art of putting oneself in the place of another as the virtuous Christian wife? In this art she excels all others. From her Saviour she has learned the art of sharing the lives of others. Many times she says little, but at such times her silence is the sympathizing silence of real compassion. And this silence of which she is such a master is revealing of a Third whose recognized presence is the sufficient answer to every need of the moment!

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” She knows Him, and knowing Him, she knows how to fill her silences with Christ and thus with healing and light.

God says that in her tongue is the law of kindness. When she speaks, her words are full of kindly consideration and Christly compassion. With her kindness she feeds the heart-need for understanding and for love. One such wife in a time of her husband’s deep perplexity wrote the following little note to her husband:

Why should I shrink from poverty
If it be shared, dear love, with thee?
The world’s neglect, the proud one’s scorn,
How easily can they be borne
Whilst thou remainest unforsworn and true to me!

I little reck that with our name
The crowd may pity join, or blame;
That fickle ones, whom once we ranged
Amongst our friends, are now estranged;
For thou, art thou not all unchanged, and still the same?
Though to our board no menial train
Shall bear the plenteous feast again,
With willing hand will I prepare
The frugal meal thou art to share,
And joy to find my housewife care is not in vain;
And loving voices shall be here

With social mirth thy breast to cheer;
And sounds of household minstrelsy
The hymn, the song, the well-known glee
How often shall they win from thee no bitter tear!

— Wife's Manual

Perhaps it would be impossible to better demonstrate the value of a loving wife and the sanctuary of home which her love makes than by reference to Cowper. No one could have written "The Task" whose heart was not warm with the joy of a Christian wife's love and of consoling domestic scenes.

Cowper was, to an unusual degree, a man of despondency and sorrow. His mental sufferings were most acute. Every fiber of his poet's soul seemed to shrink from contact with the world. It was the fireside which afforded the only retreat he could find to soothe his feelings. He found comfort in his wife and in their home. As soon as he was out in the crude world, the gloom settled deep and heavy on his mind. His delicate feelings could not endure contact with earth's cold blasts. Had it not been for the soothing influence of his wife's love and his happy home, Cowper would never have escaped being a frantic inmate in the mental hospital.

What an insight does Cowper give us to his own heart, as he says; "'Tis pleasant through the loopholes of retreat, to peep at such a world; to see the stir of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd; to hear the roar she sends through all her gates at a safe distance, where the dying sounds, falls a soft murmur on the uninjured." Behind those words is the joy and blessing of a good wife and the sanctuary of home she made for him away from the storms of life.

Mrs. J. Hudson Taylor, in a letter written to her husband on November 10, 1873, beautifully exemplifies the wisdom and kindness that belongs to the Christian wife.

I feel, darling, that we must lean fully and constantly on Jesus if we are to get on at all, and I have been seeking to do it, and in believing prayer to bring our many needs to Him. I have written down the names of our foreign and native helpers, that I may be able to plead for them all daily. If we would have power for what Jesus calls us to do, we must not expend it in bearing burdens that He would have us cast on Him, must we? And there is abundant supply with Him for all this work, for all we need, isn't there? It's unbelief that saps our strength and makes everything look dark; and yet He reigns, and we are one with Him, and He is making everything happen for the very best: and so we ought always to rejoice in Him, and rest, though it is not always easy. We must triumph with God, and then we shall succeed with men, and be made blessings to them. You know these things, and can put them much better than I can; but still it does us good to remind one another, doesn't it?

THE CHRISTIAN WIFE FEARS THE LORD

"Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

Here is the heart of this grand portrait of a virtuous woman and precious wife. Here is the motivation for her deeds of mercy, the fountainhead of all her domestic praise, the quickening power for her ambition and moderation. Here is the source of her strength, wisdom, and kindness that makes her a counselor.

Her fear is not a slavish fear but is based on her love of God. She fears to displease Him because she loves Him so much. She fears to do or say anything that would bring grief to His heart or dishonor to His holy name. She would rather have sorrow with God than the world's joy without God, for she knows that sorrow with God is blessed and joy of pleasure without God is cursed. She has learned from God that beauty without Him is vain and a snare, and favor without Him is deceitful.

With the psalmist, she could exclaim, **“The Lord is my portion . . . I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord! the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together”** (Psalm 34:1-3). Her counsel is wise, for **“the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant”** (Psalm 25:14). In her life she daily demonstrates the truth of God's Word: **“The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way”** (Psalm 25: 9).

Her reverence and love for God is the motivating center for all her work. When she carries out the duties of everyday housework, such as washing dishes, dusting the furniture, baking a cake, or washing clothes, she finds joyful fulfillment in these routine jobs for she obeys Colossians 3:17: **“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”**

Because she does everything for Him, it is ever a delight and always a blessing. This is what Brother Lawrence called “practicing the presence of God.” He worked each day in the kitchen in the name of Christ and for the glory of Christ, and found in that kitchen a “little bit of heaven to go to heaven in.” When Brother Lawrence began his business of the day he said to God, with a childlike trust in Him, “O my God, since Thou art with me and I must now, in obedience to Thy commands, apply my mind to these outward things, I beseech Thee to grant me the grace to continue in Thy presence; and to this end do Thou prosper me with Thine assistance, receive all my works, and possess all my affections.”

Brother Lawrence testified, “We can do little things for God. I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.”

Jeremy Taylor gives five sure results of thus practicing the presence of God.

1. It is *an excellent help to prayer*, producing in us a deep reverence for the majesty of God.
2. It *produces a confidence in God*; a fearlessness of our enemies; patience in trouble and a sure hope of remedy.

3. *It produces joy in God*, for we know He is with us in our natural actions to preserve us; in our public actions to applaud or reprove us; in our recreations to restrain us; in our sleep to watch by us, and in our watchings to refresh us. Realizing all this, it is easy to keep Paul's rule to "**rejoice in the Lord always.**"

4. *It enkindles holy desires of the enjoyment of God.*

5. *It issues forth as a fountain of humility of spirit*; apprehensions of our great needs; our daily wants and hourly supplies; deep admiration of God's unspeakable mercies. It helps to recollection of mind and restrains the scatterings and looseness of wandering thoughts. It is a great cause of moderation in our actions.

THE BRIDE'S PRAYER

Thou that the Author and the Giver art of all good things,
Without whose softening grace and ever present help,
The tenderest and best affections of the heart can yield no certain joy;
To Thee, O God, I turn e'en in the hour of solemn happiness,
Beseeching Thee, from Thy bright dwelling place,
The glad abode of peace on high, to look
Down on Thy trembling handmaid to grant that, as through new and untried
scenes
I take my doubtful way and as fresh duties crowd across my path,
These weak and faltering steps
May be so guided by Thy gentle light
Which shineth only from above, that I
And my espoused fellow traveler with knitted hands and loving hearts may tread,
Unscathed life's rugged wild and reach at last,
The heavenly hills and everlasting rest,
The glorious purchase of the precious blood
That from His wounded side for sinners flowed
In whose great name, and for whose blessed sake
In humble trust, my bridal prayer I make.

— Wife's Manual

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