

#110 “The Excellent Wife”
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Before we dive into the primary text of Proverbs 31:10-31, let me mention just a few things about the wife. God says in Proverbs 12:4, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rottenness in his bones.” In other words, a wife can bring the greatest joy to her husband or the greatest misery. The excellent wife is the crown of her husband, the best thing he has in life. He is proud to be seen with her and to call her his own. Proverbs 19:14 says, “House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.” In other words, all you need to do to be given wealth and a large inheritance is to be born into the right family. But in order to be given not just any wife but a prudent and an excellent wife, you must receive a blessing from God, a divine and gracious gift. Certainly, a wealthy father could arrange for a marriage for his son to a woman of higher society and class. But to find a woman of excellence, that will require divine intervention. Solomon, who really botched up the idea of one woman for life in marital fidelity, says in Ecclesiastes 7:27-29, “Behold, I have discovered this,’ says the Preacher, ‘adding one thing to another to find an explanation, which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these. Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.” The man to whom the Lord gave the greatest wisdom of any man ever to live says that there is another thing for which he cannot find the answer. He has no explanation for why there is such an incredible lack of righteousness among mankind. He points out that he has found one righteous man in a thousand, but even among a thousand women, as in his harem, he has not found one righteous. The point is not whether there are more righteous men or women on the earth, seeing that Solomon wasn’t looking in the right place given that he had a harem, but rather that among both men and women there are few righteous, let alone excellent. God has set His standards for excellence very high, but a pursuit of excellence in this manner will yield great joy.

Proverbs 31:10-31 says:

¹⁰An excellent wife, who can find?

For her worth is far above jewels.

¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her,
And he will have no lack of gain.

¹²She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.

¹³She looks for wool and flax
And works with her hands in delight.

¹⁴She is like merchant ships;
She brings her food from afar.

¹⁵She rises also while it is still night
And gives food to her household

And portions to her maidens.
¹⁶She considers a field and buys it;
 From her earnings she plants a vineyard.
¹⁷She girds herself with strength
 And makes her arms strong.
¹⁸She senses that her gain is good;
 Her lamp does not go out at night.
¹⁹She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
 And her hands grasp the spindle.
²⁰She extends her hand to the poor,
 And she stretches out her hands to the needy.
²¹She is not afraid of the snow for her household,
 For all her household are clothed with scarlet.
²²She makes coverings for herself;
 Her clothing is fine linen and purple.
²³Her husband is known in the gates,
 When he sits among the elders of the land.
²⁴She makes linen garments and sells them,
 And supplies belts to the tradesmen.
²⁵Strength and dignity are her clothing,
 And she smiles at the future.
²⁶She opens her mouth in wisdom,
 And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
²⁷She looks well to the ways of her household,
 And does not eat the bread of idleness.
²⁸Her children rise up and bless her;
 Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:
²⁹"Many daughters have done nobly,
 But you excel them all."
³⁰Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
 But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.
³¹Give her the product of her hands,
 And let her works praise her in the gates."

The excellent wife is rare, as we have already pointed out. Her worth is more than jewels; she is a "priceless" find. Here is a list of the characteristics presented in the text:

- She is trustworthy. (v. 10-11)
- She only does her husband good. (v. 12)
- She is a diligent worker. (v. 13)
- She makes sure that there is ready food, physically and spiritually. (v. 14-15)
- She works on the side to make a profit for the home. (How much a woman can and should work outside the home is dependent on the specific circumstances, though her chief responsibility is to see to things in the home (see Titus 2:5)). (v. 16)
- She is strong physically, emotionally, and spiritually. (v. 17)

- She rejoices in the fruit of her labor. (v. 18)
- She is mindful of the needs of her family even if it means having to get up at night. (v. 18)
- She is able to take care of needs around the home such as for clothing. But more than that, she reaches out to others, especially those in need, with a sensitivity that only a woman can possess. (v. 19-20)
- She makes sure her family is well-clothed and able to present themselves with dignity. (v. 21-22)
- Her husband has achieved respect and recognition by the leading men at least partly because of her on him and in the community. (v. 23, also cross reference verse 31)
- She uses her gifts and training to make quality items for the community in return for a profit for her home. (v. 24)
- She is not living in fear and worry because she draws her strength from the Lord and realizes that a person of dignity lives in confidence in Him. (v. 25)
- When she speaks, she speaks wisdom and sound teaching which is given with kindness and grace. (v. 26)
- She is not lazy but takes great care to make sure her household is taken care of and in order. (v. 27)
- Her children and husband bless her, thank her, and praise her because of who she is and how she lives. (v. 28-29)

King Lemuel, author of the 31st chapter of Proverbs, closes with a commentary. He says in effect, “In light of all that I have just described as being what characterizes the excellent wife, can’t you see how charm can be shallow and superficial and how mere physical beauty is insufficient to becoming a woman of excellence? Rather, it is the fear of God and not mere beauty or charm that leads to being a woman of excellence. The woman who fears God will be praised by her family and by Almighty God. Her community will respect her, and her deeds and all that her hands have labored to create, serve, and give will be evidence of her excellence.”

Titus 2:3-5 says,

“Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.”

Young women, future mothers and wives, take this passage to heart. God wants wives to love their husbands and children, which they cannot do if they are off pursuing their own agendas. It is not wrong to work since the excellent wife of Proverbs 31 did. But wives must not let work get ahead of their children and husbands. Wives are to be sensible, pure, workers at home, and kind. Many well-meaning Christians take this passage to

mean that the woman's place is in the home, period. Scripture does put the emphasis on taking care of the home front, so the wife must not neglect such an important ministry and calling. However, this does not mean that she cannot or should not ever work. In fact, there may be instances where she will have to bear the brunt of earning income for the family. This is just reality. The final thing this passage teaches is that women must be subject to their husbands, otherwise the Word of God will be dishonored. If God commands that a woman ought to submit to her husband and she does not, then it is obvious that God is being dishonored. But let's look into Ephesians 5, another key passage on marriage, to determine more of why God desires the wife to be subject to the husband and what that actually means.

Ephesians 5:21-33 says:

“21and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

22Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

23For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

24But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

26so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

28So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

29for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,

30because we are members of His body.

31FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

32This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

33Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”

Verse 21 tells us that we need to be subject to one another. This is not saying that there is no separation of roles in the marriage. All it is saying is to put the interests of our spouse ahead of our own. As Philippians 2:3-4 says, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” This principle must be understood in order for submission and headship to work in marriage. Verse 22 begins the specific commands to the wife. The wife is to be subject to the husband as to the Lord. How are we subject to the Lord? We follow His lead because we know that He has our best interests in mind. We submit to His will for our lives because we know that He understands our needs and desires and will do what is best for us. We lean on Him as our source of strength, as our authority, as our protector, and as our provider. We feel secure and at rest in His presence and in His arms. We don’t have to bear the load and responsibility ourselves. This is the idea that the Lord wants us to see here in the subjection of the woman. It has nothing to do with giving in to the whims and desires of a slave driver or brutal taskmaster. Nobody would want to submit to such people. Our marriages are to reflect the relationship of Christ and His church. The husband, says verse 23, is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. Why and how is He the head? Because He Himself was the Savior of the church. He is the head because He made Himself low by giving up His privileges in heaven, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. He went to the cross and gave up His life so that we may live. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. Our Head did this. As a church, we have no qualms about submitting to this kind of a Lord. Ladies, would you get embittered if you had to submit to a man who would love you like Christ did, putting your interests so ahead of his own that you know he would go so far as to give his life for you if the need arose? Can you imagine being with a man who would love you so wonderfully that it is a reflection of how much Christ loved you? The idea of submitting in marriage is not one of getting bossed around or not thinking independently. Neither is it a position of weakness. Marriage is not an authoritarian relationship. It is one where the husband loves his wife more than himself and does everything to serve and cherish her. The wife gets the love that she needs, and the husband gets the respect that he needs. All is then in balance. Verse 24 tells us that wives need to be subject in everything to their husbands. That does not mean that they need their husband’s permission before their every thought, word, and action. It means deferring final decision-making power and responsibility to the husband. There is no fear in doing this if the husband values the wife’s input and needs. He will seek God’s will with her and lead the family together.

The conclusion of the Ephesians passage is that our marriages represent a great mystery. God uses the husband to sanctify the wife and draw her into a more perfect expression of love, submission, and holiness, reflecting the church’s intended purpose and posture. The wife’s submissive and respectful spirit encourages the husband to step up and be a man and lead, make decisions, and take initiative. When both wife and

husband live according to their God-given roles, peace and joy will be the result. And we will be providing a clear picture to the world of how much Christ loves His church and how joyful and easy it is to submit to His plan and purpose when we are secure in His love for us.