

The Virtuous Woman

(Proverbs 31:10-31)

The “Proverbs 31 Woman” shines as a bright beacon in this wonderful Old Testament book of precepts and warnings. Today as we see women of all ages following dubious role models, we are refreshed to find a timeless example of virtue, responsibility and good sense. Here, in this lovely picture of womanhood, is a woman who embodies the qualities which every believing woman should strive for in her personal life and appearance, in her family life, and in her daily duties.

The woman described in Proverbs 31 is so exemplary and so virtuous, and so diligent to perform all her duties that women today, who have a heart to please God, may find it difficult or even discouraging to try to follow her example. They might think, “How could I ever measure up to such a godly woman? When I think of how I have carried out my responsibilities as a wife or as a mother or even as an unmarried woman, compared to this person described in Proverbs 31, I am of all women most miserable!”

Let not your heart be troubled. In 1 Peter 2:21 believers are told to follow Christ’s example and follow His steps, and yet who could ever measure up to the quality of life and virtue displayed by the sinless Son of God? We all fall far short. We have not attained to His level of perfection, and yet we “follow after” and “press toward the mark” (Phil. 3:12-14). God has given us a pattern, a mark to shoot for, and though we come short and often fail, yet God’s standard is before our eyes. Though we may fall short, we never want to lower God’s standard.

There are other stellar examples of godly persons in the Scriptures, whose lives often put us to shame; yet it is our joyful privilege to imitate them and follow their example. Think of men such as Joseph and Daniel and Paul (as a converted man). Most Bible characters had their flaws, and certainly these men did as well, and yet nothing negative is said about these three in the Bible. They are wonderful role models for believers.

In and of ourselves we will surely fail in our quest for godly living. We will come to the end of ourselves and recognize our own bankruptcy. With Paul we will cry out, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom. 7:18). God, by His grace and by the power of His Spirit can enable us to live lives that are pleasing to the One who died and rose again for us. May we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (Rom. 6:11) that the life our Lord might be manifested in and through us (2 Cor. 4:10-11). We cannot, but God can! The God who indwells us can enable us.

When we do fail to measure up to the kind of person God wants us to be, we can still rejoice that we have an Advocate with the Father (a Helper in court!), Christ Jesus the Righteous One (1 John 2:1-2). He pleads on our behalf; His work on Calvary’s cross has already satisfied all of God’s just demands. We can confess our sins and enjoy God’s wonderful forgiveness and fellowship (1 John 1:9).

Proverbs 31:10-31

The last part of Proverbs 31, beginning with verse 10, consists of 22 verses. Each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet (in proper order). The same alphabetical pattern is found in some of the Psalms and may have been used as an aid in memorizing Scripture. The most well-known alphabetical Psalm is Psalm 119 where there are 22 alphabetical sections of eight verses each. In the Hebrew text of Proverbs 31, each verse is also clearly divided into two parts (for example, in verse 10---**Part 1:** Who can find a virtuous woman? **Part 2:** For her price is far above rubies). This same two-part format is found in all of these verses. The only exception might be verse 15 which seems to be divided into three parts.

Proverbs 31:10

Who can find a virtuous woman?

The first part of verse 10 literally reads, “Who can find **a woman of strength?**” The term “virtuous” is from a noun meaning strength, efficiency, ability. Here it refers to **strength of character**, that is, moral strength and firmness.

In Exodus 18:21 we find the expression used of men. Moses was to find “able men” (lit.--“men of strength”) such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness. In light of this verse we can say that a virtuous man is one who fears God, loves truth and hates sin. Moses was to look for and find such men, and the implication is that such men were not easy to find. The expression is also used in 1 Kings 1:42 (“valiant man” or “man of strength”) and 1 Kings 1:52 (“worthy man” or “man of strength”). In this latter passage (v. 52) we learn that the opposite of a virtuous man is a man in whom wickedness is found. Thus a virtuous man is a man of great moral strength, in whom wickedness is not found. He is a godly, God-fearing man. So also, the virtuous woman is a God-fearing woman--compare Proverbs 31:10 with 31:30.

The Old Testament uses this expression of a virtuous woman in two other places. In Ruth 3:11 it is used of Ruth. Everyone in the city knew that she was a virtuous woman! When a woman has strength of character (fears God, loves truth, hates sin), then others will take note and recognize this. It will be very obvious because it is so unusual. People are usually so morally weak and so anemic in character, that when a man or woman of strength shows up it is quite evident to all. The other place the term is used is in Proverbs 12:4 where we learn that a virtuous woman (lit--a woman of strength) does not make her husband ashamed.

For her price is far above rubies.

She is far more valuable and worth far more than rubies. The Hebrew term for “rubies” may not refer to rubies, but may refer to pink pearls or red coral. A pink pearl which was found in a mollusk in the Red Sea was considered of great value to the ancients. It is difficult to know exactly which stone or pearl this Hebrew word referred to, but its usage in the Old Testament tells us two things for sure: 1) It was very valuable (see Proverbs 20:15 and Job 28:18); 2) It was reddish in color (Lamentations 4:7--“ruddy”).

Who can find a virtuous woman (a woman of strength)? She is like a rare gem. Precious stones are precious and costly because they are so rare. If you could go out along the roadside and collect hundreds of rubies anytime you wanted to, then they would not be worth much. It is the rare, hard to find gems that are worth so much. Also, for some reason God made most common stones unattractive; yet He made most rare stones very beautiful and brilliant and lustrous. The virtuous woman is a beautiful woman, not necessarily outwardly, but certainly inwardly (see Prov. 31:30). She is not only a rare gem but a beautiful gem.

A godly woman is rare and very hard to find. The same thing could be said about the godly man. Number one on the endangered species list is the *Homo sapiens pius**: “Help, LORD; for the **godly man** ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men” (Psalm 12:1). There are hardly any such creatures around, and the few that do exist will eventually die out! May God in His infinite grace and mercy be pleased to raise up godly men and women in these difficult and trying days. [*Pious is the Latin word for “godly.”]

If a young man is looking for a godly woman, how can he find her? First he should trust God to find her for him. Second, he must realize that a virtuous woman is not going to want just any man. She is going to want to find a virtuous man (a man of strength, a man valiant for the truth, a godly servant of Christ). So if you want to have any chance of finding such a gem, you must be a gem yourself. Exercise yourself unto godliness. Learn the fear of the Lord. Dare to be different. Dare to go against the flow of the world, and to be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:2). Be the kind of a man that would attract the interest of the godly woman!

So in this opening verse we have learned that the godly woman is very hard to find. She is more valuable than a rare gem. She has an inner beauty and a strength of character and a moral firmness that is lacking in the vast majority of women, even believing women.

Proverbs 31:11

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her

Sadly, this cannot be said of most husbands today. They cannot trust their wives (and often their wives cannot trust them). Being able to fully trust your marriage partner is one of the fundamental foundations of a strong God-honoring marriage. Martin Luther said of his wife, “The greatest gift of God is a pious amiable spouse, who fears God, loves his house, and with whom one can live in perfect confidence” [quoted in *Proverbs*, by Charles Bridges, p. 620].

The term “husband” is the common word for husband in the Old Testament. It also means “lord” or “owner.” [It is also the word that is used of the false god “Baal.”]

There are two reasons why the heart of the husband can trust his virtuous wife. The first reason is found in the second part of verse 11 (“so that he shall have no need of spoil”) and the second reason is found in verse 12 (“she shall do him good and not evil”). See the discussion that follows.

So that he shall have no need of spoil

“No need” is the very same expression found in Psalm 23:1--“I shall not want.” It means to be in need, to be lacking. Both here and in Psalm 23:1 it is used with the negative: to not be in need, to not be lacking. If the LORD is my Shepherd, then I shall not be in need because He will supply all my need. If I have a godly wife, I shall not be in need of spoil.

The word “spoil” means “plunder, booty, spoil.” It is often used of booty obtained following a battle as the victorious soldiers would take anything valuable from their defeated foes and thus would **gain** riches from battle. Here in Proverbs 31:11 the word carries the secondary meaning of “**gain**.” [It is certainly not suggesting that if his wife were not virtuous that he would need to go to battle, slay the enemy and take of their spoil!] “He shall have no need of gain” because his wife is a tremendous benefit to the family, even financially. She is not a financial liability (as the verses following will amply illustrate). She manages the home so well and she is so industrious and productive that her efforts result in great gain and even profit.

Sadly today some wives are so slothful and careless that they cause the family to suffer great financial loss. They go on shopping sprees or incur immense credit card debt or waste countless hours each week engaged in unproductive activities (television, etc.). How can her husband safely trust in her? After she has finished destroying the family budget, he has great need of gain considering all that she has lost! Of course, the problem of wasteful spending and unproductive activities is not limited to women only. Men are at fault as well.

Proverbs 31:12

She will do him good, and not evil

Her husband can safely trust in her because he does not need to worry about her being a financial liability (v. 11) and because he knows that she will do him only good, and not evil. “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor from the LORD” (Prov. 18:22). Of course, the man must find the right kind of wife. Job’s wife was a curse who only added to his trials (Job 2:9-10). Some men find “a crown to their head” while others find “rotteness to their bones” (Prov. 12:4). One of the reasons Proverbs 31:10-31 was written, no doubt, was to help guide men in finding the right kind of wife. [Some see Proverbs 31:10-31 as a continuation of what King Lemuel’s mother taught him (Proverbs 31:1-9), concluding with this description of an ideal wife for her royal son.] The key to finding the right woman, is to look to the Lord in prayer and steadfast trust, so that God Himself might be the One who finds her. God knows who my life partner should be.

The verb “will do” is of interest. It is not the common Hebrew verb for “do.” It means to deal out, to deal fully, to deal bountifully. At times it even approaches the meaning of “to reward, to pay back.” Let’s illustrate how it is used. In 1 Samuel 24:17 David had just spared Saul’s life even though he easily could have killed his persecutor. Saul’s response: “Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast **rewarded** me good, whereas I have **rewarded** thee evil.” Saul deserved evil but David dealt with him in a good way. Saul dished out evil to David but David dished out good to Saul who actually deserved evil. In Genesis 50:15,17 the term is used of Joseph’s guilty brothers who remembered what they had done to Joseph: “Joseph...will certainly requite us all the evil which

we did unto him....So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil.” They dealt out and dished out evil to Joseph but he did not pay them back in the same way. Joseph saw God’s good and sovereign hand in it all (Gen. 50:20).

This verb is also used of the LORD who **deals bountifully** with his servants. See Psalm 13:6; 116:7; 119:17; 142:7.

The virtuous woman deals out to her husband that which is good. She dishes out to him and serves him that which is good and not evil. She wants only God’s highest and best for him. Her life and her deeds are a constant benefit and blessing to her husband.

All the days of her life

In doing good to her husband she is consistent. She doesn’t serve him that which is good one day and that which is evil the next day. Her husband can count on her to do him good and to be a blessing to him. He can count on her to do this today, five days from now, one year from now, ten years from now, and all the days of her life. She is not up and down, hot and cold. Her godliness is marked with consistency.

Proverbs 31:13

She seeketh wool and flax

Wool, of course, is the wavy or curly undercoat of a sheep which can be woven into a warm garment or fabric. Even today we wear wool sweaters or mittens to protect us from the cold.

Flax was a fibrous plant used in spinning. The fibers can be drawn out and twisted into yarn or thread for the manufacture of linen. The most famous flax was grown under ideal conditions in Egypt. There was no better linen than the “fine linen of Egypt.” This is one reason why the seventh plague was so terrible. This judgment involved hail stones mixed with fire. The hail stones “smote every herb of the field” (Exodus 9:25), totally destroying, among other things, the flax crop. From flax can be made a variety of materials including coarse canvas, rugged sails for ships and even thin, delicate scarves.

The godly woman “seeks” wool and flax, these two basic materials to use in making clothes and garments. The term “seek” could mean that she “selects” (NIV) the best quality of wool and flax or it could mean that she “seeks with care” or “cares for” the wool and flax. The word has this latter meaning in Deuteronomy 11:12--“A land which the LORD thy God **careth for** (seeks!).” She carefully collects and gathers and cares for the wool and flax that she will use in making clothes for her household and perhaps for others as well.

And worketh willingly with her hands

The word “willingly” is from the word meaning “delight, pleasure.” She takes great delight in her work. Rather than being a laborious and boring chore, it is pleasant and enjoyable. Toil need not be tedious. It can be a tremendous source of pleasure and satisfaction.

In our modern, computerized, electronic, entertainment-saturated society we have lost the art of working with our hands. Most women don’t delight in making clothes with their hands. Instead they delight in shopping for clothes at the mall and thus adversely affecting the family budget. Instead of learning from their mothers how to sew and knit and crochet and mend, many children are too busy watching television or playing computer games. Unfortunately most mothers do not even know how to do these things and could not teach their children even if they wanted to. I used to watch my mother spend countless hours knitting and crocheting and sewing, but these things are becoming a lost art.

Mothers and wives who are not seamstresses may be able to exchange skills they do have for the skills of those who sew. There are times when it may be more economical, in both time and money, to wisely shop for bargains than to purchase patterns, material, zippers, etc. The wise woman uses her time and individual resources in the best way she can.

The godly woman takes great pleasure in working with her hands and providing clothing for her family.

Proverbs 31:14

**She is like the merchants’ ships;
She bringeth her food from afar.**

In verse 13 she is seeking to provide clothing for her family and in verse 14 she is seeking to provide food for her family. The Bible teaches us that with food and raiment we can be content (1 Tim. 6:8) and the virtuous woman plays a key role, as God’s instrument, in providing both.

Notice the simile. The virtuous woman is compared to the merchants’ ships. Merchants are traders who buy or sell commodities for profit, and merchants’ ships are filled with items from far countries. So the godly woman brings in food from afar (from distant places). The word “food” is the common Hebrew word for “bread” but it is also used of food in general.

Does this mean that she travels to far off countries to procure international delicacies for her family? Very unlikely. It probably means that she brought in foods from distant lands by trading for them. She took some of the wondrous garments or clothes that she made with her hands (v.13) and was able to bring them to some merchant men and trade them for food items which had come from afar, even from distant lands.

Today the wife usually says to her husband, “Dear, I need some money because I’m going to town to do our weekly grocery shopping.” The virtuous woman said, “Dear, I’m going to town but I don’t need any money because I’m taking some of the fine linen which I have made and will trade it in for

some items of food which you will really enjoy.” How can he complain about that?

It also seems that she recognized that it would be good for her family to give them great variety in their diet, including international dishes, and not to constantly give them the same foods all the time. Variety is the spice of life.

Proverbs 31:15

She riseth also while it is yet night

She is up before the sun, showing that idleness and laziness have no place with her (compare verse 27). The sluggard (Prov. 6:6-11) should not only go to the ant, but should also go to the virtuous woman to learn a lesson on diligence. There are great benefits to rising up early. It is a quiet time free from the noise and distractions of the day. It is an ideal time to spend with the Lord in quiet meditation and prayer, starting the day with Him.

We also see this principle in the manna which God provided for the children of Israel in the wilderness. Manna had to be gathered anew every morning (Exodus 16:14-22), just as fresh food for our souls is needed each day.

We have the example of our blessed Lord: “And in the morning, **rising up a great while before day**, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed (Mark 1:35). The Psalmist was in the habit of morning prayer: “In the morning shall my prayer come before thee” (Psalm 88:13).

Did you meet the Master, At the break of day, Before your mind was clouded With your work or play?	Yes, I met the Master, In the secret place. Oh! the blessed comfort When He giveth Grace.
---	--

Rising up early also allows us to get a good start on the day. If a person sleeps in late, by the time he really gets going it may seem that half the day is gone and he has time to accomplished very little. Sprinters know that the most important part of the race is how they start the race (how they get off the starting blocks). The key is beginning well. May God help us to start our days well, beginning the day with God and getting a good early start on the tasks and duties that demand our attention and diligence. Needless to say, a mother may have to sleep in after being up during the night with a sick child. The virtuous woman is diligent, yet flexible and realistic.

She giveth meat (food) to her household, and a portion to her maidens

One of the reasons she rises up so early is to provide food for her household. When the father and children get up they are greeted with a hearty, home-cooked breakfast! Nutritionists consider breakfast the most important meal of the day, nourishing the body that has not had any food for many hours (the “breaking of the fast,” that is, “breakfast”) and providing energy for the toil of the day. The virtuous woman makes sure that her family gets off to a good nutritional start. This term “food”

The Virtuous Woman - Proverbs 31

(translated by some as “game”) is also used in Psalm 111:5 of God’s gracious provision of food for those who fear Him.

Young women today, in many cases, hardly know how to prepare meals. Many families eat out frequently or order food that can be brought into the home. How many families take time to sit down at a meal together around the table? Often families don’t eat together, don’t pray together, don’t read together, and as a result don’t stay together.

Her maidens are her female servants. This virtuous woman was blessed with a large household that included female maids or servants. She did not live in poverty. We are reminded that under the Old Testament economy, the Israelites who honored and feared the Lord were promised not only spiritual blessings but also material blessings, and certainly the woman described in Proverbs 31 had both.

One might think that this virtuous woman could command her female servants and tell them to rise up early and prepare the breakfast meal and have it ready for her entire family. But we are told that she gives a portion of food to her maidens. Not only does this speak of her kindness to those working under her, but it also indicates that she demanded of others only what she herself was willing to do. Workers and servants will greatly respect a superior who is willing to “get his hands dirty” and do some of the very tasks which he might require of them. The term “portion” is used in that wonderful passage found in Job 23:12--“Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my **portion of food**” (literal translation).

Proverbs 31:16

She considereth a field, and buyeth it

The word “considereth” is from a verb which often is used to describe the wicked who **devise** evil or are **actively** plotting evil. Here are some examples:

“The wicked **plotteth** against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth” (Psalm 37:12). “While they took counsel together against me, they **devised** to take away my life” (Psalm 31:13b). “And now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have **imagined** to do” (Gen. 11:6b). In this last passage the people of Babel considered in their minds all kinds of evil, and their evil plots would have come to fruition had not God confused their tongues and scattered them.

In Psalm 17:3 this same verb is used of determining a course of action: “I am **purposed** that my mouth shall not transgress” (Psalm 17:3).

When wicked men devise evil they often will put a lot of thought and planning into it. We can think of the horrific terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11/01. These successful attacks were the fruit of enormous planning and premeditation. It was a very carefully thought out operation.

The godly woman **considers** a field (a plot of land in open country). She doesn’t do this rashly or on a sudden impulse, but she has given very careful thought to the matter. She has a plan for her

family and she carefully thinks about what she needs. She decides that a prosperous vineyard would be beneficial to all, and thus she decides upon a field that would be suitable.

“She **buys** it.” Literally, she **takes** it. She acquires the field, probably by purchasing it. The fact that she buys a field indicates that the godly woman was involved in financial decisions relating to the family and involved in financial transactions. From what we know about this godly woman, she did not act independently of her husband. We know that the heart of her husband did safely trust in her (v. 11), which would not be the case if his wife were running around purchasing all kinds of things without his knowledge! The godly wife, under the headship of her husband, can play a significant role in managing family finances. Some wives are very good at keeping a checkbook and managing the family budget, and it would be to the advantage of the family for the husband to delegate this responsibility to her.

How many women buy all kinds of things on the spur of the moment without giving the matter careful thought and deliberation? As she races out to the shopping mall with her friends, can her husband safely trust in her? [We also might ask, can the wife trust her husband when he goes shopping?]

With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard

The purpose of the field was to provide a place for a vineyard so that the family and others could enjoy the fruit of the vine. The fruit of her hands signifies the result of her labor. To cultivate a field and to maintain a vineyard requires much labor. The vineyard was the fruit of her loving toil.

Before we buy something we need to count the cost. Before we buy a field, we need to ask, “Am I willing to work the field?” Many things that we purchase require a good bit of maintenance, and if we are unwilling to provide the labor that is needed for the maintenance, then the purchase is probably unwise. [Think of people who rashly procure a pet, not considering all the time and effort that is required to properly take care of the animal.] When the godly woman planned for the purchase of the field, she also calculated the amount of toil that would be needed to maintain the vineyard.

The “fruit of her hands” could also be understood in another way, as “the fruit of her earnings.” That is, with the fruit of her hands (see verse 13) she was able to earn enough money to purchase and plant a vineyard. Perhaps she employed her servants (maidens, v. 15) to work the field or to help her work the field.

Proverbs 31:17

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms

Inner strength and a tenacious trust in God translates into outer strength and physical vitality and vigor. The “loins” are regarded as the seat of strength (see 1 Kings 12:10; Nahum 2:1). The term refers to the abdominal or hip region of the body (the mid-section), the region of strength and procreative power.

“To gird” means to encircle or bind with a flexible band or girdle (belt). In Bible times both men and women wore outer robes or tunics. If the tunic was ungirded it would interfere with a person’s ability to walk freely. The Bible often makes symbolic use of the girdle. Jesus said, “Let your loins be girded about” (Luke 12:35). In other words, “Be as men who have a long race to run; gather up the folds of your flowing robes, and fasten them with your girdle; that nothing may keep you back or impede your steps.” In Bible language, “to be girded” means “to be ready for action.” “For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle” (Psalm 18:39). [See Fred Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*, page 93].

The virtuous woman has a reservoir of inner strength which is able to energize her and enable her to accomplish physical tasks which require a great amount of physical strength. She is not weakened by sloth or laziness but she is a wonderful example of diligence and industry. George Lawson describes her in this way:

As rust gathers on metals that are seldom used, so sluggishness of disposition contracts a rust on the powers of the body and mind; and idle persons by degrees realize those excuses for their conduct which were at first mere shams. The virtuous woman is of a very different temper. She declines not any part of her duty through aversion to toil; and by exerting her strength with a cheerful mind she improves it. Her labors give her health and vigor, and alacrity for new labors; so that she can with great ease and tranquility go through those duties which appear impossibilities to other women [*Commentary on Proverbs*, p. 564].

Proverbs 31:18

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good

The word “perceiveth” is the Hebrew word that means “taste.” Literally, she tastes that her gain is good. The same word is found in Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” God’s goodness must be tasted; it must be personally experienced. Only those who have truly trusted Him have tasted of His goodness and experienced God for themselves.

The word “merchandise” means profit, traffic, gain received from traffic or trade. The word is found twice in Proverbs 3:14, “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the **merchandise** of it is better than the **merchandise** of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold” (verses 13-14).

The godly woman purchased a field, planted a vineyard, and gave herself to this ambitious endeavor with great strength (verses 16-17). In verse 18 she is experiencing the rewards of her labor. She finds how profitable her industry is as she experiences the sale of its product. She sees that her trading is profitable. She is reaping what she sowed by her diligent industry, and she is finding it to be a good harvest. She is seeing the results of the labors of her hands. She learns that success results from her labors and she reaps the fruits of hard work.

Her merchandise is known to be good, and brings a ready market and a good price; and her

knowledge of this is a sufficient reward of itself for her toils; for when the lazy are perpetually uneasy by their reflections on their own conduct, the consciousness of having done her duty, and the prospect of the advantages arising from it, are a constant source of satisfaction and cheerfulness to the virtuous woman (George Lawson, *Commentary on Proverbs*, p. 564).

Her candle (lamp) goeth not out by night

Homes in Bible times were illuminated at night by olive oil lamps. The virtuous woman's lamp did not go out at night, that is, it was not quenched or extinguished (see 1 Sam. 3:3). What was she doing at night? Probably the activity mentioned in verse 19 (hand spinning). Here was a woman who worked day and night with amazing diligence and fortitude. We might say she "burned the midnight oil." If you were to pass by her house late at night you would see that her light would still be on. We wonder when this woman ever slept because in these verse she is working late at night and in verse 15 she rises while it is yet night. The fact that she rises indicates that she did get some sleep. We have the expression, "early to bed, early to rise," but she seems to have been in the habit of "late to bed, early to rise."

Some women are up late at night pursuing questionable activities (using inferior lamp light), but then they sleep through half the day (missing out on superior sunlight). But the godly woman is diligent both day and night, and is able to get the necessary sleep, without overindulging in sleep. The poverty mentioned in Proverbs 6:9-11 will not be her portion.

Believers need to evaluate their nighttime activities to make sure that they are pleasing to the Lord and profitable for eternity. During the day we normally have our duties and our schedule--things we need to do and places we need to be. Our time is usually well accounted for during the day. But after sunset is usually the part of the day when we have "free time," and it is important to recognize that this time belongs to the Lord. May we be about our Father's business! Then, when we finally lie down on our beds, our sleep will be sweet.

Proverbs 31:19

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

She knew how to use her hands with skill in providing clothing for her family and perhaps others. This verse describes a very ancient method of spinning used in the days before the spinning wheel even existed. The **distaff** was a staff used for holding the flax, tow or wool which would be spun into thread by means of the **spindle**. The spindle would turn and twist the fibers into threads. [See the discussion of wool and flax under verse 13.]

The **spindle** was a round stick with tapered ends used to form and twist the yarn in hand spinning. The spindle and the distaff are the most ancient of all instruments used in the craft of spinning. About eight to ten inches long, spindles were used to guide the thread as it was fashioned into cloth. The weaver sometimes turned the spindle by rolling it across her thigh.

The wool or flax was wound on the distaff, which was stuck upright in the ground or held under the arm. The spindle, which had a circular rim to steady it when revolving, was attached to the thread being drawn out from the distaff. By rotating the spindle, the spinner twisted the thread. An example of hand spinning is found in the ancient book of Exodus: “And all the women that were wise hearted **did spin with their hands**, and brought **that which they had spun**, both of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine linen. And all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom **spun goats’ hair**” (Exodus 35:25-26).

If a woman’s hands are idle and if she is not engaged in worthwhile, constructive pursuits, then watch out! “Idle hands are the devil’s tools” and “If the devil can catch a man (or woman) idle, he’ll set him (or her) to work.”

Proverbs 31:20

**She stretcheth out her hand to the poor;
yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.**

Compare an earlier verse in the same Proverb: “Plead the cause of the poor and needy” (verse 9).

Verse 20 is an example of parallelism that is found so often in Hebrew poetry. In these two phrases parallel ideas are set forth, with the second phrase saying basically the same thing as the first phrase, with only minor variations. Both phrases emphasize the fact that the virtuous woman has compassion toward the poor and needy and she shows her compassion with concrete deeds of mercy. She loves the poor, not in word or in tongue only, but also in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

The word “poor” means “afflicted, humble.” It is used of those who are physically and materially poor as in Proverbs 31:20, and it is also used of believers who recognize their spiritual poverty and bankruptcy (“I am poor and needy”--see Psalm 40:17; 70:5; 109:22; 34:6). No one can make progress in his spiritual life until he realizes how desperately needy he really is, and recognizes that only the Lord can supply that which is needed.

God’s people are to have a heart of compassion for those who are physically and materially poor and needy. In the law, God told the Israelites that the gleanings from their vineyards and fields should be left for the poor of the land (Lev. 19:10; 23:22). The godly woman of Proverbs 31 faithfully obeyed the following command: “For the **poor** shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, **to thy poor**, and to thy needy, in thy land.” (Deut. 15:11). Early in Proverbs 31, believers are encouraged to plead the cause of the poor (verse 9). In Proverbs 14:21 a benediction is pronounced upon those who show compassion to the poor and help them: “He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.”

In studying this Hebrew word which is translated “poor” in Proverbs 31:20, I was surprised to find it used of our blessed Lord Himself during the days of His humiliation: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; **lowly**, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zechariah 9:9). The word “lowly” is the same Hebrew word as “poor” in Proverbs 31:20. We are reminded of our Lord’s

amazing condescension: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet **for your sakes he became poor**, that ye through **his poverty** might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

The word “needy” at the end of verse 20 means “one who is in need, in want; one who is lacking.” When a person lacks basic material necessities such as food and clothing, then he is considered poor, and hence the word is a synonym for poor.

The word “needy” is used to describe the spiritual condition of God’s people. Every believer needs to recognize his spiritual bankruptcy: “I am poor and **needy**.” See Psalm 40:17; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22. What we need, only God can supply. When He supplies that which we lack, then we are rich indeed.

The key Old Testament passage instructing the Israelites on their responsibilities toward the poor and needy is found in Deuteronomy 15:7-11:

7: If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

8: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.

9: Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee.

10: Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteth thine hand unto.

11: For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

Notice that they were not to shut their hand, but open their hand wide unto the poor person (verses 7,8,11), just as the godly woman stretched out her hand to the poor and reached forth her hand to the needy (Prov. 31:20).

In Job 29:16 Job said, “I was a father to the poor (needy).” Just as a father takes care of the material needs of his children, so Job took care of the material needs of the poor. See also Job 30:25 where we see Job’s heart of compassion for the poor.

Proverbs 17:5 teaches that the person who is merciful to the poor and needy is the person who honors God. The Amplified Bible renders it this way, “He who oppresses the poor reproaches, mocks and insults his Maker, but he who is kind and merciful to the needy honors Him.”

As we consider our responsibility to the poor today (see 1 John 3:17-18; James 2:15-17), some words of caution are necessary. Don’t be duped. A man may deceptively beg for money for groceries and end up spending it on alcohol. This writer sadly remembers giving a man money for an emergency car repair only to find out later, to my horror, that it was spent on drugs. Another might ask for gas money and use it to support some sinful, wicked habit. Different approaches need to be used. For example, if a person is truly hungry, and you believe it is proper to help, you can sit down with him

at the restaurant. As he eats his meal there is opportunity to share the gospel with him. Not only are you satisfying his physical hunger, but you are also providing opportunity for spiritual nourishment, which is his greatest need. If a car repair is really needed, don't give the money to the poor man who may wrongly use it, but to the car mechanic. Make sure the money is used for the right purpose. Discernment is needed. There are times when the right thing to do is to not give any money.

There are people who routinely go around to churches looking for handouts and financial gifts. Supporting this kind of behavior will not really help the person to be responsible for the long term. After he profits from you he is off to the next church. We don't want to support irresponsibility.

In Bible times, the poor and blind and lame depended upon merciful almsgiving in order to survive. Things are somewhat different in our American society where (whether rightly or wrongly) there are all kinds of government programs to assist the poor and needy, and wise stewardship should take this into account. Our government is going to spend a great deal of money supporting the poor and needy (and we contribute to this through our taxes), but our government is not going to spend any money on God-honoring missionary efforts. Also we should always remember that meeting a person's physical and material needs does not solve his greatest problem. If we give a person food, clothing and good housing for his entire life, and then he dies and eventually goes to the lake of fire, what have we really done for this man? How much better to support Christ-centered mission agencies which have workers who are concerned about the material needs of the poor, but who are even more concerned about their spiritual and eternal needs.

May God give us much wisdom and discernment in how to best meet the needs of those with whom God puts us in contact.

Proverbs 31:21

**She is not afraid of the snow for her household;
For all her household are clothed with scarlet.**

Snow in Palestine occasionally occurs, but when it does snow it rarely reaches any great depth. During some winters it may not snow at all. "A fall of snow in the rainy season of winter is not rare in Palestine...and is sometimes accompanied with freezing cold" (Keil & Delitzsch). The Bible mentions snow a number of times (Psalm 51:7; Proverbs 26:1; Isaiah 1:18), but only records one instance where snow fell: "And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit **in time of snow**" (2 Sam. 23:20; compare 1 Chron. 11:22).

The virtuous woman, always concerned about the welfare of her family, is not afraid of the snow. Snow is here a symbol of the cold that accompanies it. She is not afraid of the cold because she has made preparations ahead of time to dress her family in warm clothing. "Household" may also include servants.

Her household was "clothed with scarlet." The scarlet color (compare Isaiah 1:18 and Joshua 2:18 where the same word is used), of itself, did nothing to warm them. "The scarlet clothing is of wool, which as such preserves warmth, and, as high-coloured, appears at the same time dignified (2 Sam.

1:24)” (Keil & Delitzsch, see under Proverbs 31:21). Thus they were protected by the wool and the scarlet provided ornamentation. “Scarlet” is “obtained from the Tola, a cochineal-like insect, which, being crushed, produces a fine deep red, or rich crimson dye, much admired by the Orientals. It is the ‘worm’ of Psalm 22:6, to which our Lord likens Himself, He who was bruised and slain that all His redeemed might be clothed in splendor for eternity” (Ironsides, Proverbs/Song of Solomon, pages 477-488).

One lesson here is that believers and the children of godly parents do not need to be dressed in dull clothing. Drabness and dullness of apparel do not add to one’s spirituality. There seems to be an allowance for clothing that is colorful and attractive. At the same time dress should be modest and should not unnecessarily draw attention to self or to one’s body.

Note: The LXX and Vulgate translate “scarlet” as “double-garments” or “doubly-clothed.” It is from a different Hebrew word which is very close in appearance to the Hebrew word for “scarlet.” See *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*. This meaning would make sense with respect to the cold of winter.

Proverbs 31:22

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

“She makes coverings for herself” (NASB). Apparently these were coverings which she made for her bed (see ESV). The only other place in the Old Testament where this Hebrew word “coverings” is found is in Proverbs 7:16 where it is clearly referring to coverings for a bed: “I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry.” The virtuous woman took time to decorate and adorn her bedroom with beautiful bedspreads and coverings.

Her clothing is attractive and beautiful, of the finest material. “Silk” refers not to silk as we know it today, but to the “fine linen of Egypt” which has already been discussed (see under verse 13). The modern translations render it “fine linen.”

“The purple was manufactured by the Phoenicians from a marine mollusk (shellfish). The shell was broken in order to give access to a small gland which was removed and crushed. The crushed gland gives a milky fluid that becomes red or purple on exposure to the air. Piles of these broken shells still remain on the coast at Sidon and Tyre” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, p. 2509). Purple was prized by the ancients and exported far and wide. “Great labor was required to extract the purple dye, and thus only royalty and the wealthy could afford the resulting richly colored garments” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 904). A total of 250,000 mollusks was required to make one ounce of the dye, which helps us to understand how valuable this dye was (*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 288). Purple cloth was used in the furnishings of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:4), in Solomon’s temple (2 Chron. 2:14; 3:14) and in the high priest’s dress (Exodus 25:4; 26:31). It was a royal garment worn by kings (Judges 8:26). It was a symbol of luxury and wealth, worn by the rich man of Luke 16:19 and by the luxurious harlot woman of Revelation 18:16. In Mark 15:17,20 our Saviour was mockingly dressed in purple when a kingly robe was put around Him. Lydia was a seller of purple (Acts 16:14).

What is the meaning of this verse? The virtuous woman did not dress in a shabby manner. She was industrious and enterprising, and she was able to purchase the finest materials, and with her own hands make the finest of garments. She did not consider it a mark of spirituality to go around looking impoverished, dilapidated, and threadbare. Rather, as was often true under the former dispensation, material prosperity was a sign of God's blessing, and was not to be despised. She wore expensive clothing, royal clothing, to match her regal and godly character. Her outward garments of beauty and splendor matched her inner beauty. "The virtuous wife is robed in what bespeaks her true character and dignity" (Ironsides). She was not vain or arrogant and she well understood that external beauty fades (as we will see in verse 30). She was not snobbish in the way she dressed. She understood that the most important clothing was the adorning of the inner man: "strength and honor are her clothing."

It is important to remember that the wearing of costly garments did not come at the expense of her family or the poor, nor did it interfere with any of her God-given duties:

If the virtuous woman has coverings of tapestry for her house, she makes them herself; if she is clothed with silk (or fine linen, as it may be rendered) and purple, she earns it by her labors and good management. She does not starve her charity by her finery, nor spend upon her dress that which might support a poor family, and she does not reckon herself superior to the duties of a wife, nor exempted by wearing silk and purple from using her spindle and distaff. From all this it appears that the inspired writer allows the use of costly array to none but those who can afford it in a full consistency with the duties which they owe to their families, to the poor, and to all men (George Lawson, *Commentary on Proverbs*, pages 566-567).

The temple in the Old Testament was quite elaborate and beautifully adorned, and this adornment included fine linen and purple. As believers, our bodies are the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Should not our "temple" express something of the Lord? "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:4). "That they may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things" (Tit. 2:10). Dressing well, both inwardly and outwardly, is a virtue, not a vice.

The Godly Woman and Costly Array

The godly woman of Proverbs 31 was dressed in costly array. In 1 Timothy 2:9 Christian women are instructed not to adorn themselves in costly array. How do we explain this apparent contradiction? Is it wrong for a believing woman today to go out and buy an expensive dress? Should she instead only shop at thrift stores where she can spend a minimal amount on necessary attire?

In the Old Testament, great wealth and godliness were not incompatible. Abraham had tremendous wealth, as did David and Solomon, and they were not condemned for possessing riches. They were condemned for setting their heart on their riches (Psalm 62:10). Wealthy believers in the New Testament era, though not extinct, are harder to find. It is not easy to amass wealth while being persecuted by a Christ-hating world. Those who are rich are not condemned for their riches, but are told not to trust in them (1 Tim. 6:17) and to be generous in the distribution of them (1 Tim. 6:18).

The Virtuous Woman - Proverbs 31

Homer Kent explains that 1 Timothy 2:9 does not forbid the wearing of expensive clothes:

It should be clear that Paul is not forbidding the wearing of any gold or pearls or expensive garments, any more than Peter in a similar passage was forbidding the wearing of clothes (1 Pet. 3:3-4). But those things are not to be the means whereby the Christian woman makes herself attractive to other Christians. Good taste should always prevail and display for vanity's sake is out of place (*The Pastoral Epistles*, pages 111-112).

R. C. H. Lenski agrees:

Paul is not insisting on drab dress. Even this may be worn with vanity; the very drabness may be made a display. Each according to her station in life: the queen not being the same as her lady-in-waiting, the latter not the same as her noble mistress. Each with due propriety as modesty and propriety will indicate to her both when attending divine services and when appearing in public elsewhere (*The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, p. 560).

There were certain women in Paul's day who would flaunt their wealth and draw attention to themselves by wearing expensive clothes.

The expensive dresses worn by wealthy women could cost up to 7,000 denarii. Pliny the Elder, a first-century Roman historian, described a dress of Lollia Paulina, wife of the Emperor Caligula, which was worth several hundred thousand dollars by today's standards (Natural History 9:58). Dresses of the common women could cost as much as 500-800 denarii. The average daily wage of a common laborer was one denarius. [An average laborer would need to work two years to be able to purchase such a dress!] (John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, p. 80)

Albert Barnes offers a well-reasoned, balanced conclusion:

It is not supposed that all use of gold or pearls as articles of dress is here forbidden; but the idea is, that the Christian female is not to seek these as the adorning which she desires, or is not to imitate the world in these personal decorations. It may be a difficult question to settle how much ornament is allowable, and when the true line is passed. There is one general rule which is applicable to all, and which might regulate all. It is, that the true line is passed when more is thought of this external adorning, than of the ornament of the heart. Any external decoration which occupies the mind more than the virtues of the heart, and which engrosses the time and attention more, we may be certain is wrong. The apparel should be such as not to attract attention, such as shall leave the impression that the heart is not fixed on it. (*Barnes' Notes on 1 Timothy 2:9*)

Proverbs 31:23

**Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sitteth among the elders of the land.**

It is remarkable that in a passage devoted to a godly and virtuous woman we find this verse which says nothing about the woman, but only describes her husband as a prominent leader of the land. It was at the city's gates that public business was transacted and cases were decided (the "gates" served as the city's courtroom). What then do we learn about the virtuous woman from this verse?

A well-known proverb says, "Behind every good man is a good woman." A godly wife contributes greatly to the success and prosperity of her husband. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness to his bones" (Prov. 12:4). Where would the man mentioned in Proverbs 31:23 be without his godly, industrious, loving, faithful wife? The value of a godly wife is illustrated from the life of Daniel Webster. The following is from *High Call High Privilege* by Gail MacDonald (pages 99-100):

By age 31 he had become known as one of America's most effective speakers. One of Webster's earlier biographers, Norman Hapgood, assigns much of the great orator's success to the quality of his marriage to a woman, Grace Fletcher, whom he married at the age of 26. Of her the writer says:

She had the goal of keeping alert to those high principles which her husband held. Her upright New England faith and sweet loyalty must have been one of the strongest barriers resisting the temptations which lay before the impressionable statesman (Norman Hapgood, *Daniel Webster*, Boston: Small Maynard & Co, 1899, page 64).

When Grace Fletcher Webster died, Daniel remarried a year later. The biographer said of Carolyn Roy, his second wife:

She brought him money and social position and nothing else that could be traced in his life.

Two years into that second marriage it was said of Webster:

He steadily declined from a height at which his altering nature could no longer sustain itself.

Daniel Webster began overeating and drinking. His spending habits soared out of control, and his moral life disintegrated. By the end of his political life, the man once known for his great integrity had become typed as a political compromiser. Tragedy mounted upon tragedy, and when he died, he was a beaten and bitter man.

A wife can be a tremendous influence for good or for ill; nevertheless the husband is responsible before God to live rightly regardless of the spiritual and moral state of his spouse. If a man fails spiritually, it is first and foremost his fault. He must not blame anyone but himself. His wife may be a negative influence, but he is responsible to follow God, not her. Think of the example of Job. His wife said, "Curse God and die!" but in spite of her negative influence, Job remained faithful to the Lord. "Behind every good man is a good woman" is not always true. "Behind every good man is a great God!"

Proverbs 31:24

**She maketh fine linen and selleth it,
and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.**

This capable, industrious woman was very enterprising and she operated an amazing home business. She wove fine linen garments, a process which has already been discussed (see under verse 13). Linen garments are mentioned in Judges 14:12-13. Thirty sheets or thirty linen garments were to be the payment to Samson if the Philistines could not figure out his riddle. Linen garments are also mentioned as having been worn by the sinful daughters of Zion in Isaiah 3:23.

She also manufactured girdles or belts (richly adorned belts?) or sashes (ESV) which had value on the trade market. This word "belt" is used in 2 Samuel 20:8 to describe Joab's belt which held a sword. The term "girdle" as used in the Bible refers to an article of dress encircling the body, usually at the waist.

She may have enlisted some of her children to help her in this business. She delivered these goods to the merchants or traders. These were Phoenician traders, according to the meaning of the Hebrew word. Phoenicians were known for their trade and commerce and their skill as a seafaring people. Phoenicia's two major ports were Tyre and Sidon.

The virtuous woman provided a source of income for her family through her business. "When other women impoverish their husbands by buying, she enriches her husband by selling those valuable commodities for which there is a constant demand" (George Lawson, *Commentary on Proverbs*, page 567). "It is only modern pride and laziness which has introduced the idea that it is inconsistent with the dignity of a fine lady to make profit of her own manufactures. This virtuous woman, although her husband sits among the elders, does not think it a discredit, but an honor to herself, to make fine linen and girdles for sale; and the wise will praise her on account of it" (George Lawson, p. 576).

Proverbs 31:25

Strength and honor are her clothing

Her wardrobe is remarkable. These items of clothing are not available at any marketplace or shopping mall. The LORD Himself provides these garments to the believing heart that is looking

to Him. Such clothes adorn the inner man which is renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16).

Those ladies who wear gold and jewels dazzle the eyes and draw the regard of ordinary understandings; but how much brighter are the ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit, of strength and honor, which are the constant dress of the woman of virtue! Those who wear costly array rejoice for the present, because they think themselves the object of all men's admiration; but they are often preparing future sorrow for themselves by their extravagance, and their neglect of those accomplishments which would gain them respect in old age (George Lawson, *Commentary on Proverbs*, p. 568).

Concerning her garment of strength, see the discussion under Proverbs 31:17. The virtuous woman knew that the LORD was the strength of her life (Psalm 27:1).

The word "honor" means splendor, majesty, honor. In Psalm 8:5 it is used of the honor and majesty conferred by the LORD upon Adam and Eve: "and hast crowned him with glory and **honor**." In Psalm 21:5 it is used of the God-given majesty David had as king: "honor and **majesty** hast thou laid upon him."

Of special interest is how this word is used of our wonderful Lord. We learn that honor and **majesty** are before Him (Psalm 96:6), and that the LORD is clothed with honor and **majesty** (Psalm 104:1). This was certainly true of our Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state. We catch a glimpse of Christ in His majesty in Isaiah 6:1-3 (see John 12:41 in context where the glorious King of Isaiah 6 is identified as Christ). This splendid King of the Universe stepped out of His ivory palaces and descended to this world of woe. He laid aside His majestic garments, as it were, and humbled Himself by taking upon Himself our humanity (John 1:14). In Isaiah 53:2 we have a description of God's suffering Servant, the Messiah Himself: "when we shall see Him, there is no **beauty** that we should desire Him." The word "beauty" is the same word as "honor" (majesty, splendor) which is found in Proverbs 31:25. The Lord laid aside His glorious splendor so that He could die as the perfect Substitute for sinners (Isaiah 53), thus making it possible for the believer to be clothed with garments of majesty and splendor; we who were once dressed only with filthy, bloody rags (Isaiah 64:6, "filthy rags"=bloody cloths, menstrual cloths).

And she shall rejoice (laugh) in time to come

The word "rejoice" (KJV) is the Hebrew word meaning "laugh." It is used in Ecclesiastes 3:4--"A time to weep, and a time **to laugh**." In Psalm 37:12-13 we learn that "the LORD shall laugh at him (the wicked); for He seeth that his day (of judgment) is coming."

The virtuous woman will laugh at "time to come" (coming time), a clear reference to the days ahead, the future. She will laugh at the future.

In reliance on her ample stores, and still more her inward strength and skill, she laughs at the future as respects the evil that it may perchance bring. This "laughing at the future" is of course not to be understood as expressive of a presumptuous self-confidence (see Proverbs 27:1), but only of a consciousness of having all

The Virtuous Woman - Proverbs 31

appropriate and possible preparation and competence for the future (*Lange's Commentary* under Proverbs 31:25).

Having been so wisely provident for the morrow, she is not overburdened with its cares (Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, page 626).

There is an analogy between this passage and Psalm 2. In Psalm 2 the armies of the world's nations are gathering together to wage war against the LORD and against His Messiah (the Lord Jesus) at the great final battle of Armageddon. We can imagine the scene. The world's armies aim their weapons toward God (their missiles, their warplanes, their nuclear weapons, etc.). Mankind against God! Puny man taking on the Omnipotent One--how laughable! It would be like a toy sailboat taking on a massive battleship or an ant trying to do battle against an elephant! "He who sitteth in the heavens **shall laugh.**" The word "laugh" is the same word found in Proverbs 31:25. The LORD will laugh because He knows that all the armies of the world are not able to hurt Him or defeat Him. Likewise, the godly woman can laugh at the future because she knows that the future cannot hurt her. She has made provision for the future, to the best of her ability (as we studied in Proverbs 31:21), and because of her trust in God, she knows that she can face the future with great confidence and optimism.

It is the privilege of every believer in Christ to confidently laugh at the future. We have been guaranteed a bright, eternal future. We have been guaranteed eternal security (John 6:37-40; 10:27-30). We have the sure promise of God that the future ("things to come") cannot separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39). In fact, in 1 Corinthians 3:22 we learn that we possess the future! It is ours! The future belongs to us. God has marked out a glorious future for every child of God, that we should be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). This is what predestination is all about. Never does the New Testament teach that a person is predestinated to hell. The term "predestination" is used to teach us that God has marked out a glorious future for every believer.

Unsaved people dread the future and they have good cause to do so. They have nothing to look forward to but eternal punishment and an eternity without Christ (Matthew 25:41,46). Their future promises that, unless they repent, they will perish (Luke 13:3,5). Unless they repent they will someday hear these frightening words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity (lawlessness)" (Matthew 7:23 and compare Matthew 25:41). But the saved person can thankfully laugh at the future, knowing that someday he will hear God's invitation to enter eternal bliss (see Matthew 25:34).

How confident we can be! We do not know what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future. We know that everything that happens to us in the future is for God's glory and for our good (Romans 8:28). We are fully persuaded that the God who began a good work in us will complete that good work in the future (Philippians 1:6).

Proverbs 31:26

**She openeth her mouth with wisdom,
and in her tongue is the law of kindness.**

This is the only verse in this passage which speaks of the godly woman's tongue and the words of her mouth. Our Lord taught that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). What comes out of the mouth is an indication of what is in the heart. Our speech reveals our heart. Out of a wise heart come wise words. Out of a kind heart come kind words. Out of a loving heart come loving words.

Be careful when you speak because your heart is showing.

The word "kindness" is the commonly used Hebrew word *hesed*. It occurs about 200 times in the Old Testament. It is found in the following familiar passages:

Exodus 20:6--"shewing **mercy** unto thousands"

Ruth 1:8--"the Lord deal **kindly** with you"

Psalm 23:6--"surely goodness and **mercy** shall follow me"

Psalm 100:5--"His **mercy** is everlasting"

Psalm 107:8,15,21,31--"Oh that men would praise the LORD for His **goodness**"

Psalm 107:43--"The **lovingkindness** of the LORD"

Psalm 136 (every verse)--"for His **mercy** endureth forever"

Lamentations 3:22--"it is of the LORD's **mercies** that we are not consumed"

Jonah 4:2--"slow to anger, and of great **kindness**"

The King James Version usually renders this word as "mercy." Other versions use "lovingkindness," "love," or "steadfast love." William Wilson in his *Old Testament Word Studies* gives this definition:

The general import of this word seems to be, the full flow of natural affection, corresponding to *storgé* in Greek. The Hebrew word for "stork," so remarkable for affection to her young, is derived from this word. The corresponding word in Arabic is used of the flowing of the mother's milk to the breasts, so nearly connected with affection for her offspring; hence has been derived, probably, the phrase, "full of the milk of human kindness.

The law of kindness [*hesed*] is in her tongue. The term "law" [*torah*] refers to instruction. The term is used in Isaiah 2:3 of the teaching ministry of the Messiah during the millennial kingdom: "...for out of Zion shall go forth the **law** [instruction], and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." "The teaching of kindness is on her tongue" (ESV).

The instruction of the virtuous woman will be characterized by kindness and steadfast love. It will be kindly, faithful, loving and gracious instruction. We assume that the primary beneficiaries of her loving instruction are her children and perhaps her household servants. "My son, hear the instruction

of thy father, and forsake not the law [instruction] of thy mother” (Proverbs 1:8; see also Proverbs 6:20,23).

The godly mother is a teacher. In love she wants God’s highest and best for her children. Women have a valuable and essential teaching ministry according to Titus 2:3-5.

The words which come from the lips of the true wife are as a law giving guidance and instruction to those that hear them, but the law is not proclaimed in its sterner aspects, but as one in which “mercy tempers justice,” and love, the fulfilling of the law, is seen to be the source from which it springs. [F. C. Cook, *Barnes’ Notes--Proverbs*, p. 84]

[She is] not talkative and trifling, as most women, but thoughtful and sensible in her words. As idleness is the source of talkativeness (1 Tim. 5:13), so industry is its antidote. [Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary--Proverbs*, p. 513]

As a sandy hill is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of words to a quiet man; but the virtuous woman plagues neither her husband nor any other man with her talk. She has learned that silence and subjection which the Apostle Paul recommends to wives. She does not lock up her lips in a sullen silence, but when she speaks it is a pleasure to hear her, for she opens her mouth with wisdom. Besides her other labors already mentioned, she rises in the morning, and finds time to read the Bible, and other instructive books; she meditates and reflects, and receives instruction from what she hears, and prays to the Father of lights; and so she improves daily in knowledge and prudence; and when she opens her mouth, she says nothing but what is well worthy of being heard...Kindness is painted on her countenance, and flows from her tongue; for it possesses the throne of her heart, and gives law to all her words and actions. [George Lawson, *Commentary on Proverbs*, pages 568-569]

But the godly matron has not only the law of love in her heart, but wisdom in her mouth, and in her tongue the law of kindness. The same love that binds her heart, governs her tongue, not with the caprice, but with the law, of kindness--a law, which she received from wisdom, and which gives the mould to her whole spirit, so that she says nothing that is foolish, nothing that is ill-natured. [Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, pages 625-626].

Proverbs 31:27

She looketh well to the ways [doings] of her household

She “looketh well” or keeps watch. The verb means to look out or about, to spy, to keep watch. It is used in a bad sense in Psalm 37:32, “a wicked man **spieth** upon the righteous.” It is used of a watchman in 2 Kings 9:17 and Ezekiel 3:17; 33:7. A watchman looks for enemies and for anything that may endanger the city. The godly woman is alertly watching over her household, looking for any danger that may hurt the family: evil companions, vile entertainment, dangers from the internet, etc.

The Virtuous Woman - Proverbs 31

As a spy seeks to gather information about the enemy, so the godly woman seeks to find out what is going on with her children. Some parents do not keep any watch. They don't know what their children do or where they go or what they watch on television or what music they listen to. Parents need to be very much aware of what is really taking place, so that they can best help their children, discipline them, restrict them as needed, and channel them into wholesome and profitable activities. Parents should be "looking well to their moral habits, their religious instruction, and attendance on the means of grace; giving them time for secret prayer, and reading the Word of God, bringing them to the daily ordinance of family worship; inculcating the careful observance of the Lord's Day; anxiously watching over their manners, habits, and connections...Who can have the claim to a *virtuous woman*, who does not feel this weight of family responsibility?" [Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, p. 625]

[Unfortunately, some have used verse 27 and other verses in this passage to argue that this wife is the leader of her home. For instance, Gilbert Bilezikizn says, "Verse 27. She is the vigilant supervisor of her household. The total list of her accomplishments indicates that she is the one responsible for making the managerial decisions" (*Beyond Sex Roles*, p. 78). He wrongly uses verse 15 to show that "she is *the provider* of food for the household" (p. 76), etc. For a helpful discussion of these erroneous ideas, see Wayne Gruden's section refuting "The Description of a 'Good Wife' in Proverbs 31 Overturns Male Leadership in the Family" (*Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, pages 155-158).]

and eateth not the bread of idleness

Idleness is not on her diet. She avoids the carbohydrates of idleness, and does not indulge herself in slothfulness. The word "idleness" means sluggishness, laziness. This word is used in Proverbs 6:6,9; 10:26; 19:15; 24:30. Anyone who reads the description of the godly woman in Proverbs 31 knows very well that she is anything but lazy! One wonders how she has enough hours in the day to do all that she does! Her hours are characterized by diligent industry and laborious involvement in wholesome activities.

"She worketh willingly with her hands."
"She riseth also while it is yet night."
"She layeth her hand to the spindle."
"She maketh fine linen and selleth it," etc.
Etc.

She is the opposite of a sluggard!

Proverbs 31:28

**Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praiseth her.**

She is praised by her own family members. Those who know her the best praise her the most. She invested herself in her loved ones, and she is recognized and rewarded by the same.

I know a godly couple who years ago were facing the challenges of raising their six children, all in their teen years. When the wife came to her husband for encouragement and advice, he remembered Proverbs 31:28 and commented to his wife, “Dear, as hard as things are now, just remember that someday your children will rise up and call you blessed.” His beloved wife wryly responded, “Yes, but right now they are just rising up!”

Her husband and children will “call her blessed” or pronounce her happy. This Hebrew term “blessed” was used by Leah when she pronounced herself blessed: “**Happy** am I, for the daughters will call me **blessed**” (Genesis 30:13). The son born of Zilpah was named “**Asher**” which is from this same Hebrew term, and means “happy, blessed” (Genesis 30:13).

During the millennial kingdom, according to Psalm 72:17, all nations will call Him **blessed** (“Him” referring to the King Himself, Jesus Christ).

Godliness and happiness go together. The godly woman is the happy woman, and she is blessed. The virtuous woman seeks first the kingdom of God, and all these things (including happiness) are added unto her (Matthew 6:33). Happiness is a byproduct of honoring the Lord and putting Him first. It is not an end in itself. Those who seek happiness and who make that their goal, never find it. Those who seek the Lord find in Him their true happiness. He satisfies the heart that is devoted to Him.

God’s formula for happiness is found in the following verses, all of which contain this same Hebrew word “blessed” or “happy” (Asher):

Blessed (happy) is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1).

Blessed are all they that put their trust in him (Psalm 2:12).

O taste and see that the LORD is good: **blessed** is the man that trusteth in him (Psalm 34:8).

Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust (Psalm 40:4).

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee (Psalm 84:5).

O LORD of hosts, **blessed** is the man that trusteth in thee (Psalm 84:12).

Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law (Psalm 94:12).

Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments (Psalm 112:1).

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. **Blessed** are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart (Psalm 119:1-2).

Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways (Psalm 128:1).

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God (Psalm 146:5).

Charles Bridges describes the happiness of the godly woman as follows:

For what greater earthly happiness could she know, than her children's reverence and her husband's blessing? We may picture to ourselves her condition—crowned with years; her children grown up; perhaps themselves surrounded with families, and endeavoring to train them, as themselves had been trained. Their mother is constantly before their eyes. Her tender guidance, her wise counsels, her loving discipline, her holy example, are vividly kept in remembrance. They cease not to call her blessed, and to bless the Lord for her, as his invaluable gift. No less does her husband praise her. His attachment to her was grounded, not on the deceitful and vain charms of beauty, but on the fear of the Lord. She is therefore in his eyes to the end, the stay of his declining years, the soother of his cares, the counselor of his perplexities, the comforter of his sorrows, the sunshine of his earthly joys. (*Proverbs*, pages 626-627).

Proverbs 31:29

**Many daughters have done virtuously,
but thou excellest them all.**

This verse is different from all the others in this section. All of the other verses speak about the virtuous woman in the third person. For example, verses 12-22 all begin with the word "she." She will do him good.... She seeketh wool.... She is like the merchants' ships.... She riseth also... etc. But in verse 29 the second person pronoun is used for the first time: "But **thou (you)** excellest them all." It is more personal, familiar and intimate. Apparently it is her husband himself who is speaking these words.

At the end of verse 28, we were told that her husband praises her. In verse 29 we have the husband's praise in his own words: "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."

The Hebrew term for "daughters" literally means daughters, but here it is used more generally of women (as in Genesis 30:13). The word "virtuously" is the same word as found in verse 10—"Who can find a **virtuous** woman?" The term "virtuous" is from a noun meaning strength, efficiency, ability. Here it refers to **strength of character**, moral strength and firmness. See the fuller

discussion under Proverbs 31:10. This husband knew his wife was not the only godly, virtuous woman on the planet. He knew that there were other God-fearing women of moral strength and of virtuous character. Such women were rare (verse 10) but they were not extinct. How we should thank God for all women who live godly in Christ Jesus and who reflect the Person of their Saviour in their walk and talk! May the beauty of the LORD our God be upon them all (Psalm 90:17).

The husband then directs his praise to his own wife: “but thou excellest them all.” You surpass them all! You have raised yourself above them all. You are excellent and incomparable! You surpass all others. Was this man married to the most virtuous woman in all the world, or did it just seem so to him? When a man has found a priceless gem (compare verse 10), he considers his treasure better than all others. To him, she is the most precious wife anyone could ever have. From his vantage point, no other woman could rival her. “There’s not another woman in the whole world like you!” “When I married you, God gave me the best gift this side of heaven!” He lavishes praise upon her, and she does not mind his exaggerations. In his mind, she excels all others.

George Lawson beautifully observes:

The praises of her husband will be still more delightful to her ears than those of her children. What earthly happiness can a good wife desire, like the affection and approbation of the guide of her youth? and this a virtuous woman can scarcely fail of possessing, for what heart has so much marble in it as to be able to resist those virtues which every hour appear in his other self? He cannot refrain from bestowing praise on one whom he finds the sweetener of all his cares, his faithful adviser in perplexities, his comforter in every distress, the instrument of a great part of his earthly felicity; his best friend, his unceasing joy, and his brightest crown. No wonder if the experience of such goodness and happiness makes him eloquent in her praise, and draws commendations from his tongue, that must be understood in a restricted sense to make them true. He prefers her to every other wife who ever lived upon earth; and he is sincere in doing it, for she ravishes his heart by the beauties of her mind and conversation. Piety will dispose a man to think meanly of himself, in comparison with other men, but highly of his wife, when he compares her with other women (*Commentary on Proverbs*, p. 570).

Proverbs 31:30

Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain

The word “favor” is the Hebrew word for “grace.” In this verse the word “grace” is speaking of a woman’s outward appearance and form. It is paralleled with the word “beauty,” and both words carry the same idea.

Webster, in his original 1828 dictionary, has numerous definitions for grace, one of which is “beauty, whatever adorns and recommends to favor.” Gesenius defines the Hebrew word to mean “gracefulness, beauty.”

In Nahum 3:4 the word is used of a well-favored (beautiful) harlot. In Proverbs 5:19 it is used of a graceful doe (roe).

In Proverbs 17:8 the word “grace” is used to describe a stone. It is a beautiful or precious stone, pleasant and agreeable to the eyes. Precious stones are usually brightly colored and beautiful in outward appearance. So also, a woman of grace is one who is pleasant and agreeable to the eyes, a beautiful woman.

The word “beauty” in the parallel phrase is similar in meaning. It is the common Hebrew word for beauty. It describes that which is fair and pleasing to the eyes. It is used of the outward beauty of Sarah (Gen. 12:11), of Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1), of Abishag (1 Kings 1:3-4) and of Vashti (Esther 1:11).

It is even used of the physical beauty of men, such as in the case of Joseph (Gen. 39:6) and Absalom: “But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his **beauty**; from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him” (2 Sam. 14:25). Absalom’s outward form and beauty covered a deep seated rebellion which destroyed him in the end. His beauty was surface only.

In Proverbs 6:25 a strong warning is given concerning a wicked harlot: “Lust not after her **beauty** in thine heart, neither let her take thee with her eyelids.” The beauty of this woman is only skin deep. It’s like “a beautiful garment on a body covered with loathsome sores” (George Lawson, Commentary on Proverbs, p. 86). Under the surface is great ugliness.

“As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a **fair [beautiful]** woman who is without discretion” (Prov. 11:22). The beautiful gold piece of jewelry does not go well with the beast that wears it, whose nose delights in shoveling mud. Beauty that covers vileness is not true beauty.

In verse 30 we are told two things about outward gracefulness and external beauty: 1) Favor is deceitful; 2) Beauty is vain.

External beauty is deceitful. The Hebrew term refers to that which deceives and disappoints. What you see is not really what you get. It seems that you are looking at a very beautiful person, a very special person, but the surface appearance belies the inner person. The woman’s outer charm covers up her inner deformity. It would be like a nut with a fine looking shell, but when you crack it open you find that the nut inside is rotten and undesirable. Beautiful actresses and supermodels are often known for their broken marriages, substance abuse, personal problems, etc. indicating that under the external shell there lives a sinful and very troubled person who needs God’s transforming grace.

External beauty is vain. “Vain” describes that which is evanescent (tending to vanish like vapour). It is used of that which soon vanishes away, like vapour, breath, or a bubble. The term “vain” is used of the vanity of idols. It is used in Psalm 39:5,11, “man at his best state is altogether vanity.” It is the key word in the book of Ecclesiastes and is used to describe the meaninglessness and emptiness of life under the sun apart from God (“vanity” is used 31 times in Ecclesiastes). External beauty is not long lasting. It is here today and gone tomorrow.

There is great emphasis in our day on external beauty. Makeup is used in such abundance that Jezebel would feel right at home in our society (2 Kings 9:30). All kinds of supplements and health products are offered to try to help people look young and attractive, and to slow down nature's natural deterioration. Surgical procedures are offered which can change and improve a person's outward appearance. Diet programs and exercise programs garner millions of dollars from people who want to look beautiful and feel good. Television shows are devoted to showing how a plain or unattractive person can be transformed and made over into an outwardly attractive person by means of makeup, hair styling, weight loss, exercise, surgery, etc. There is no end to the attempts of mankind to beautify the body and to try to preserve the external.

Real beauty in the sight of God is not the product of cosmetics but the outshining of the indwelling Christ. A lady was once asked the secret of her beautiful complexion. She said, "I use truth for my lips; for my voice, prayer; for my eyes, pity; for my hands, charity; for my figure, uprightness; and for my heart, LOVE." These heavenly cosmetics are worthy of trial, and are supplied free to every applicant at the Throne of Grace.

External improvement and transformation projects can only last so long. A beautiful woman may win a beauty contest, but she is not going to win one thirty years later! Beautiful actresses grow old and in spite of all they do to preserve their youth, they lose the battle with time and their beauty deteriorates. External beauty can be marred and scarred by injury, serious burns, disease, etc., and this can happen even to those who are young. Time will always win, and all humanity will ultimately decline, and end up as dust (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 3:20; Psalm 39:4-5; 103:14; 104:29).

But a woman who feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

Inner beauty comes from a right relationship with the Lord. True beauty is impossible apart from the fear of the Lord. When the Lord is enthroned within, His glory will shine without. "And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Psalm 90:17).

A German proverb says, "Every woman would rather be beautiful than good." Glenn Conjurske has commented on this proverb as follows:

By nature, at any rate. And it is certainly true that most of them sacrifice goodness and godliness in the pursuit of fashion, or whatever else they think may make them beautiful. Yet she who chooses to pursue godliness instead of fashion sacrifices none of her beauty for it. She may indeed gain some, for beauty in the heart puts beauty on the face [*Wisdom Crieth Without--A Collection of Ancient Proverbs*, p. 20].

Peter speaks of that inner beauty that ought to grace the life and conduct of every believing woman:

1 Peter 3:1-6

- 1: 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 (godly conduct) of the wives;
- 2: While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.
- 3: Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;
- 4: **But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.**
- 5: For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:
- 6: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

The fear of the Lord is essential in the cultivation of inner beauty. If the fear of the Lord is absent, then it is impossible to radiate the beauty of the LORD.

Fear can be a bad thing; fear can also be a good and healthy response. If I meet a bear in the woods, I should have a healthy respect for the animal, knowing something of its power and potential ferocity. This is a healthy fear that could save my life. We are to fear and respect God in the right way, knowing that He is a loving, caring Heavenly Father who bids us to cast all of our care upon Him and come boldly to His throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Fallen Adam feared God in the wrong way and hid from Him (Gen. 3:10). The right kind of fear of God causes us to draw near to Him.

The one who fears God believes that God is great and deserves his utmost respect and reverence. He is afraid to do anything that would displease such an awesome God. In Genesis 22 Abraham was faced with the seemingly unreasonable command of sacrificing his beloved son Isaac. In verse 12 God gave this testimony of Abraham: “for now I know that thou fearest God.” Abraham feared God; that is, he believed that God was so great that to disobey Him was **unthinkable!**

Often, instead of fearing God *we fear men!* The fear of man is a great snare (Prov. 29:25). We begin thinking like this:

“What will **they** think of me?” “What will **they** say?” “Will **they** get angry?” “Will **they** be pleased?” “Maybe **they** will see me!” “I’m afraid of what **they** might do to me!” “Will **they** be upset or offended?” “Will **they** still be friendly towards me?” “What will **they** want me to say?” “What will **they** want me to do?” “Where will **they** want me to go?” “I’m afraid **they** will not be happy with me!” “I don’t think **they** will approve of this!” “**They** might frown on my actions!” “I hope **they** will really appreciate what I’m about to do!”

The Virtuous Woman - Proverbs 31

This then is the **fear of men**. What is the **fear of God**? To answer this question, simply read the above sentences again and substitute the word “God” for the word “they.” This is the fear of God.

Here is a little exercise that might be helpful. If a person really fears the LORD, then the following will be true:

Proverbs 3:7; 14:16; 16:6.; Job 28:28.

He will _____

Proverbs 8:13.

He will _____

Exodus 20:20.

He will _____

Nehemiah 5:15.

He will _____

Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:2; 13:4.

He will _____

Who should our close friends and companions be (Psalm 119:63)? _____
_____ How can we learn to fear the Lord (Deut. 4:10; 17:19;
31:11-13)? _____

According to Solomon, what is the conclusion of the whole matter (Ecclesiastes 12:13)?

Here are some personal questions to ponder regarding a healthy fear and reverence of God::

1. Are you afraid of displeasing the Lord?
2. Are you afraid of not being right with the Lord?
3. Are you afraid of sinning against a Holy God?
4. Are you afraid of having less than God’s very best?
5. Are you afraid of not hearing God’s “WELL DONE”?

Each and every one of us is personally responsible to fear the Lord. If we fail to do it, we have only ourselves to blame. The Bible teaches that the fear of God is something that we must choose:

CHOOSE THE FEAR OF THE LORD
(See Proverbs 1:29)

“But a woman who feareth the LORD, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30b).

The God fearing woman will be **praised**. In verse 28 we learned that her husband **praises** her (the same Hebrew word is used). Her children will speak well of her and praise her as well (v. 28). Her maidens and household servants who were privileged to observe her godly walk on a daily basis will also join in her praise (v. 15). The poor and needy who were the objects of her generosity will also offer their commendation (v. 20). But most importantly, on that day when every deed is brought into judgment (Eccl. 12:14), she will receive the only commendation that really matters: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21). At that time the Lord “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor. 4:5). A godly, virtuous life will be rewarded.

Proverbs 31:31

**Give her of the fruit of her hands;
and let her own works praise her in the gates.**

A godly and virtuous woman will be rewarded. What she gives out she will get back. It is the boomerang effect: she hurls out many a good deed, and they are all going to come back to her. In devotion to her God and in love for her household, she is willing to expend herself (“to spend and be spent”). As she steadfastly labors and abounds in the work of the Lord, she knows that her labor will not be in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). God is a very generous Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6), “knowing that whatever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord” (Eph. 6:8). The Lord who knows all our works will faithfully reward all that is done in His Name and for His glory. It pays to live in a right manner. It pays to fear the Lord.

The “fruit of her hands” indicates the result of her labor. In this passage we have seen that her hands have been very busy for good (verses 16, 19, 20). As Frances Havergal wrote, “Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.”

What is the significance of the phrase “in the gates”? In ancient cities, the space inside the gate was a public meeting place, where all manner of business was conducted (like our city hall). Her own works, her own deeds will praise her in the gates. That is, she will be publicly recognized for her good works and accomplishments. The idea of the verse is simply this: Give her the praises which she so richly merits. “Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings” (Isaiah 3:10).

So today may Christian women adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour by their good works (compare Titus 2:10). God’s special people should be “**zealous** of good works (**fervently** seeking to please God in all we do)” (Tit. 2:14). May our light shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

The Virtuous Woman - Proverbs 31

THE VOLUPTUOUS WOMAN	THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN
A SHARP CONTRAST	
Described in the first nine chapters of Proverbs	Described in Proverbs chapter 31
SHE IS LEWD (Proverbs 6:24; 2:17).	SHE IS LOYAL (Proverbs 31:11).
SHE IS A HOME BREAKER (Proverbs 7).	SHE IS A HOMEMAKER (Proverbs 31).
SHE IS EASY TO FIND (Proverbs 7:10-12).	SHE IS HARD TO FIND (a rare gem) (Proverbs 31:10).
SHE IS CHEAP (Proverbs 30:20)	SHE IS PRECIOUS (Proverbs 31:10).
SHE HAS OUTER BEAUTY Surface attraction (Proverbs 6:25).	SHE HAS INNER BEAUTY Heart attraction (Proverbs 31:30; 1 Peter 3:4).
SHE WORKS WITH HER MOUTH (lively lips but no life) (Proverbs 21:9,19; 25:24 etc.).	SHE WORKS WITH HER HANDS (a lovely life producing loving deeds) (Proverbs 31, many verses).
SHE IS RELIGIOUS (Proverbs 7:14).	SHE IS RIGHT WITH GOD (Proverbs 31:30).
SHE IS OUTSIDE THE HOME (Proverbs 7:11-12).	SHE ABIDES IN THE HOME (Proverbs 31:27).
SHE DOES HER HUSBAND NOTHING BUT HARM (Proverbs 2:17).	SHE DOES HER HUSBAND GOOD (Proverbs 31:12).
SHE IS ON THE LOOSE AT NIGHT (Proverbs 7:9,18).	SHE IS RESTING AT NIGHT SO SHE CAN AWAKE EARLY (Proverbs 31:15).
SHE KILLS HER VICTIMS (Proverbs 7:23).	SHE BLESSES HER FAMILY (Proverbs 31:28).
SHE LIVES BY LUST (Proverbs 7:10).	SHE LIVES BY LOVE (Proverbs 31:20).

Comparison of Ruth & the Proverbs 31 Woman		
Devoted to her family	Ruth 1:15-18	Proverbs 31:10,11,12,23
Delighted in her work	Ruth 2:2	Proverbs 31:13
Diligent in her labor	Ruth 2:7,17,23	Proverbs 31:14,15,16,17,18, 19,20,21,24,27
Dedicated to godly speech	Ruth 2:10,13	Proverbs 31:26
Dependent on God	Ruth 2:12	Proverbs 31:25b,30
Dressed with care	Ruth 3:3	Proverbs 31:22,25a
Discreet with men	Ruth 3:6-13	Proverbs 31:11,12,23
Delivered blessings	Ruth 4:14,15	Proverbs 31:28,29

George Zeller,
Revised, December 2016

The Middletown Bible Church

349 East Street
Middletown, CT 06457
860-346-0907

www.middletownbiblechurch.org