

The Ideal Mother
Proverbs 31:10-31
5/8/2016
Mother's Day

A teacher gave her class of second graders a lesson on the magnet and what it does. She told them about the north and south poles of magnets. She brought a bucket of nails, put them on the floor, and had the children pick up the nails with the magnet. The next day in a written test, she included this question: " My full name has six letters. The first one is M. I pick up things. What am I?" When the test papers were turned in, the teacher was astonished to find that almost 50 percent of the students answered the question with the word Mother. Richard Kerr writes, "The most creative job in the world involves fashion, decorating, recreation, education, transportation, psychology, romance, cuisine, literature, art, economics, government, pediatrics, geriatrics, entertainment, maintenance, purchasing, law, religion, energy and management. Anyone who can handle all those has to be somebody special. She's a homemaker." Today we will both honor our mothers, as the fifth commandment tells us to do, and also look at what mothers should be like.

We read Proverbs 31:10-31 for our text. The first thing we have to say about this text is that it is a passage that most women grow to hate at some point or other in their lives. It seems to hold up a perfect ideal that no one can reach. Of course, that is true. Proverbs 31 is about an ideal picture of a wife and mother that no one woman has ever completely fulfilled, though I daresay some have come close. It is helpful at this point to realize how this passage fits in to the context of the whole book of Proverbs.

Proverbs is the teenager instruction manual of the Bible. Of course, it is valuable even before the teen years, but it is especially helpful for teenagers. It is the only book of the Bible written from a father to his young son. Obviously, if you want a teenage boy to desire wisdom, then you need to communicate that in word pictures that he can understand. It is assumed that this boy is entering the stage where girls start to be rather interesting for him. That is the reason why wisdom is pictured as a beautiful woman. As we know, the key verse of

Proverbs is 1:7, which says “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” That phrase is repeated in chapter 9, sandwiched in between the invitations from Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly. So, Proverbs, chapters 1-9 are all about the choice between wisdom and folly. Chapters 10-29 are the famous one-liner Proverbs that we normally think of when we think of the book of Proverbs. Then, chapters 30-31 are words written by Agur, and cap off the book of Proverbs with one last call to the son to choose wisdom over folly. Chapter 31's description of the wise woman is nothing less than a concrete description of what Lady Wisdom would look like if she were a living breathing person. So, some encouragement is in order here for any ladies here today who have despaired over reading this passage. It is a guide, and an aspiration for any woman to seek to match up with this description. It is not, however, meant as a lash to punish a woman for not measuring up. All Christian women have some measure of these gifts, some more than others. There are seven characteristics of the wise wife and mother. These are: value, honor, righteousness, industriousness, wisdom, generosity, and supportiveness. Let's briefly take a look at each one.

The wise woman/mother has great value. Verse 10 says that her worth is more than that of rubies. This does not mean that you can actually put a dollar amount on her value. The point of the verse is that she is priceless. Then, near the end of the passage, in verse 29, the text says that she excels all other women. Her value is without equal.

It is one thing for a person to be that valuable. It is quite another for others to acknowledge that when they see it. But in this case, it is obvious. Verses 11 and 28 show us the second characteristic of this woman: her value is acknowledged and honored. She is honored. She is so valuable that her husband will always trust her, as verse 11 says. In verse 28, both the children and the husband rise up to call her blessed.

The third characteristic of the wise woman and mother is that of righteousness. In verse 12, we find that she does good and not evil all the days of her life. In particular, she does her husband good all the days of her life. Righteousness is defined as an adherence to the ways of God's law. She makes the meditation on God's law her delight, and pursues that study with diligence, so that she may know what is right

and what is wrong.

The fourth characteristic of the wise woman and mother is she is industrious. I prefer the word “industrious” to the word “busy.” The word “busy” has the connotation of frantic energy, but it is not always clear if that energy is directed in positive ways. Here, we see clearly the positive ways in which that energy is directed. In verses 13-15, we find her skill with textiles, wool and flax. She is busy providing food for her family, even rising early to provide food. Verse 19 mentions the distaff and spindle. She weaves her own cloth with which to provide clothing for her family. She not only makes enough for her family, but, as verse 24 mentions, she has extra to sell. The general statement of verse 27 is that she does not eat the bread of idleness. She watches over the ways of her house.

The fifth characteristic of the wise woman and mother is her wisdom. We see this wisdom on display in verses 16-18, where it is plain that she knows the value of fields, vineyards, and the merchandise she makes. She also knows the value of strength, as verse 17 says, and makes sure that she exercises in order to maintain that strength. She is not weak. In verses 21-22, she can laugh at cold weather, because she knows how to prepare for such events. Her words are wise also, as verses 25-26 clearly show. That is, she knows the right thing to do and say at the right time. Verse 30 is the capstone of this characteristic when it says that she fears the Lord. She has the basic principle of wisdom, and she continually grows in that principle. She does not put all her eggs in the basket of how she looks. Verse 30 also says that charm and beauty (meaning outward beauty) passes away or is deceitful. Wisdom is always beautiful.

Sixthly, this woman is generous. In verse 20, we see that she helps to take care of the poor. She extends her hands to the poor and needy, which means that she gives when she sees a need that she can fulfill.

Seventhly, she is supportive. Verse 23 shows what the status of a husband is who has such a wife. They say behind every great man is a great woman. That is almost universally true. As an illustration of this point, consider the case of Thomas Edison, the famous inventor. When he was a young lad his teacher sent him home with a note which said,

'Your child is dumb. We can't do anything for him.' Mrs. Edison wrote back, 'You do not understand my boy. I will teach him myself.' And she did, with results that are well known. The wise woman and mother sees her true power in support. This is, of course, very different from how the world sees power. The world sees power only in terms of how much money you make, or how many people you can convince to your point of view, or how many likes you can get on Facebook. The Bible measures power very differently. Notice in verse 23 that it is no small honor to the wife when her husband sits in the city gate. Sitting in the city gate, of course, meant that the man was an elder of the city. People would come to him to judge problems, and help with difficulties. A man cannot be that kind of a man without this kind of a woman at his side.

As we have said, there is no way that any one woman can exemplify all of these virtues simultaneously. It would also be dangerous to turn this model of perfection into an idol. As we mentioned last week, the idol of perfection is alive and well today in our community, especially among the ladies. Many women expend every ounce of their strength in trying to *look* like this picture without any of the actual substance of it. Remember that we live in an age of grace. We have to accept imperfection in this life. We don't get our best life now. We don't get heaven now. We don't get our perfect, resurrected bodies now. That is all in the future. Now is the time of grace.

You know, Jesus Christ came to earth to purchase His bride, the church. Her worth was far above rubies, if it cost our Savior His life-blood. The church does not look like this either, though, does it? And yet, we have a Savior, who is patiently and kindly purifying his church, washing her free of stain and ironing out her wrinkles, until eventually, she will be the church she was meant to be. The good news is that because of what Jesus has done on the cross, every Christian woman will eventually look like this in the next life! God has promised it. So, don't despair. Aim for these things, to be sure, but do not beat yourself up when you fall short. Remember that God is gracious and kind, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness.

A couple of practical points will flow from this passage very

clearly. I concentrate here on what seems to be most needed. The first point is that of honor. As we have mentioned, the fifth commandment tells us to honor our father and our mother. We have seen in the children's sermon that the definition of "mother" includes more than just our biological mothers. That means that we need to expect and enforce honor from our children. Disagreement is possible, but not sass. Mothers have problems on two extremes. The first is when anything the children say is reprimanded for being sassy, even when that is not clear, and when the child is simply expressing disagreement. Your children are going to disagree with you at times. That doesn't mean that they are sassing you. However, the other extreme seems a bit more noticeable in our church, and that is simply allowing sass without correction. We should never tolerate a violation of the fifth commandment in our homes. Our children must always honor their parents. If you looked at some households, however, the children run the house, because whenever they don't, they throw a fit, and then the parent feels like she has to give in, otherwise the fit will get worse. Children should not be allowed to manipulate either parent that way.

Secondly, the industrious woman will also teach her children how to work. We live in a world where life equals entertainment. Unfortunately, entertainment not only pays no bills, but it creates more bills. Do not let your children be lazy. Teach them how to stick to a task until it is finished. Do not let them become distracted. Our culture is, in general terms, raising the laziest generation that the world has possibly ever seen. Our children seem to expect the world to be handed to them on a silver platter. It doesn't work that way. The only things in life that are worth having, take a lot of work to acquire. We need to remember that, and daily teach our children to work. Yes, they can play and be children, too. But they to be training to be adults so that when they are 18, they can live life on their own, and are not tied to the parents' apron strings.

So, our virtuous woman is of great value and honor. She is righteous, industrious, wise, generous, and supportive. This is the wife and mother of great value, not just in the eyes of her family, but also in the eyes of her God.