

Proverbs 31 and Her Latchkey Kids

I repeatedly hear Christians making excuses for why it's alright to ignore the Bible when it comes to women leaving home to pursue careers. While I have dealt with most of the excuses, I want to go into one particular one at length: that is the outright mutilation of Proverbs 31. Yes, Christians will amazingly pull out this scripture, which describes the godly homemaker, and claim that it presents the career woman instead. This is false.

To begin with, we can know it is false because the Bible contains several plain instructions to the woman to manage the home. We also know scripture cannot contradict itself. So the claim that the Proverbs 31 woman had, so to speak, latchkey kids, and represents the career woman, should smell fishy to begin with. For Titus 2:5 instructs the older women to teach the younger to be "discreet, chaste, homemakers" among other things. These are pretty clear instructions, as are the similar ones in 1 Timothy 5.

While we know the Bible could not contradict itself, I still want to go over most of the verses from Proverbs 31:10-31 just to show you how in agreement it is with the New Testament homemaker, and all the good things common sense tells us a wife can do in the home. I briefly dealt with this objection [in another article](#), but let's look at it more deeply now.

To begin with, the claim that the Proverbs 31 woman is not a homemaker rests on completely false presumptions. That includes the presumption that if we see a woman leave the front door of her home, she must not be a homemaker. Likewise, it is the presumption that if a woman does anything for money, or does anything with money, she must not be a homemaker. I know those presumptions sound absurd, but without them, there is absolutely no case to make in denying that Proverbs 31 presents a homemaker. It obviously does.

Let's start and go through the relevant verses, skipping the opening:

(Vss 13-14)

She seeks wool and flax,
And willingly works with her hands.
¹⁴She is like the merchant ships,
She brings her food from afar.

Here we see an activity that any homemaker does: this woman is bringing supplies for the household. She brings materials as well as food. Homemakers do this regularly. My wife does this. It either means going shopping or bringing things from the garden inside. Very simple. It also tells us she works with her hands, which any homemaker does, whether it is making items at home, cooking dinner or scrubbing things down (although not all of those are in view in these verses) she certainly works with her hands. These are all normal activities for the Christian wife.

(Vs 15)

She also rises while it is yet night,
And provides food for her household,
And a portion for her maidservants.

Here we have another major homemaking activity: providing food. And in her day it was even more labor intensive than today, although it still requires some labor if you desire fresh produce and homemade meals. She is doing the painstaking task of providing food, here for a household large enough to include servants. This is not a quick meal that a career woman might shove down, or fail to make entirely. Rather, it is an involved activity that requires she wake up before dawn, as a part of her managing the home. She spends much time in the kitchen.

(Vss 16-17)

She considers a field and buys it;
From her profits she plants a vineyard.
¹⁷She girds herself with strength,
And strengthens her arms.

Here the woman investigates and makes a purchase. These are also homemaking activities. Wives frequently make purchases. My own wife did most of the work in our finding a house; although I was the one to formally make the payment and sign it, she did the majority of the process. These verses also describe the wife doing some planting, either a garden or a field. While I'm not a farmer, my homemaker wife does help in the garden, and if we did own a field, she may help out in some of the work there, although not the heaviest parts which belong to men.* So here is more work that the homemaking Christian wife can do and regularly does. Buying things and planting. It is a quite involved process, and definitely requires the time that a homemaker has to devote to the home, as opposed to a few minutes or an hour here and there which a career woman might have.

On another note about these verses, they help remind us that Proverbs 31 isn't trying to just sum up every wife's lifestyle. By the purchases she makes, as well as cues in other verses, we know it describes a wealthy woman. A few things we see in here are clearly going to be limited to the lifestyle of the wealthy, especially making major purchases or clothing her family in the finer kind of garments. So while it's not the most central point in showing that it speaks of a homemaker, it's important to remember: this passage is not universally broad in what it portrays. This fact also gives us another angle on Proverbs 31, the fact that this woman, being wealthy, could choose to idle if she wished. But she does not idle. We can see here in her industrious activities that all the chorus of modern women who say there is not enough to do in the home or that there is not enough to do once the children leave, have an answer. They have an awesome answer from the industrious home activities of this godly lady. She doesn't think there is little to do at home. She does much.

**It's always possible that being wealthy she planted a vineyard through hired servants*

(Vss 18-19)

She perceives that her merchandise *is* good,
And her lamp does not go out by night.
¹⁹She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
And her hand holds the spindle.

More fantastic homemaker material here: The wife works hard into the night holding the spindle. Both the words spindle and distaff here refer to spinning garments, something which comes up again later in the chapter. The homemaker portrayed spends what must be many

hours in the household making garments. This too is a part of what a homemaker can do. Career women don't do this. The Christian wife can certainly make things by hand, either for the home or for the market, assuming she has the time among many other activities. My wife does a small amount of work for money, as she has acted as my assistant in setting up my online business, as well as in researching articles which I publish. Those tasks assist in making money.

So while it is not the central goal of the homemaker, an activity which might make money can be a part of the role. In fact the seminal come-back-home book, *Mary Pride*, was written by a woman who dropped her career to return to the home, and the book has likely brought in some good money through its sales. So making money can sometimes be a part of managing the home.

(Vss 20-21)

She extends her hand to the poor,
Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.
²¹ She is not afraid of snow for her household,
For all her household *is* clothed with scarlet.

These verses too describe what have been traditional strong elements of the Christian wife: that of helping the poor. Or to quote Matthew Henry on this, it's "as good housewifery as anything she does." Long-term personal involvement in charity was well-known among Christian wives until fairly recently, as were other services to help the local community. Charity should be a natural highlight of the wife's activities.

The latter verse here refers to how well she keeps her household clothed. That doesn't sound too career woman to me. Keeping family members and perhaps servants clothed is an appropriate activity for a Christian wife. Or to put it another way, most modern feminists would be insulted if you told them an important part of their lives was keeping their husband and children clothed. But any godly Christian woman would agree, and would glow with happiness that she accomplished it. Moreover, we would admire her, much as we admire the Proverbs 31 woman.

(Vss 22-24)

She makes tapestry for herself;
Her clothing *is* fine linen and purple.
²³Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.
²⁴She makes linen garments and sells *them*,
And supplies sashes for the merchants.

Again, here we have more activities that would take hours to do in the home. She makes garments at home, and then sells at least some of them to the merchants. Notice, the making garments portion would be quite meticulous, whereas selling them to merchants is clearly a less involved and less time-consuming process. These days you can do it in seconds. You'd be very hard pressed to find a career woman who has the time to do all of that spinning at home. She'd be more likely to collapse after a long day at work. Spin a tapestry? You've got to be kidding. Moreover, these same verses also emphasize the role of her husband OUTSIDE of the home, as he is sitting among the elders of the land. The man is portrayed as the one who leads, who is publically known and who departs from the home for his work. Feminists who try to twist Proverbs 31 need to take note of those words among others, as it will make the whole picture of this woman's life clearer

(Vss 27-28)

She watches over the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.
²⁸Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband *also*, and he praises her:

I skipped over verses 25 and 26 since they don't relate directly to the home, even though they do reflect wifely character and virtue. Verses 27 and 28 seem to give an overview of what preceded it, and this overview like the previous verses supports her role as the keeper of the home. She watches over the household. She is not lazy in caring for the home. She is praised by her children and her husband. These few lines alone present a picture of the wife who cares for the home, uniquely picturing her as the keeper of the home and with her children and husband praising her for all she does in the household.

I will also pass over the ending, except to note that this woman who manages the home is said to fear the Lord, which is the greatest praise of all for the homemaker.

To review what we've discussed, this passage from Proverbs 31 gives a description of much, though not all, that a homemaker can do; she gets food and needed materials for the home; she prepares meals for the family and servants; she looks for good buys and buys things; she does some planting; she makes garments at home and sells some of them; she keeps her household clothed in the garments she makes; she does charity; she watches over the home. Those are the main activities portrayed. Notice please, the passage does NOT provide what feminists desire it to, which is an excuse for careerism among women. No. Such a conclusion can only be come to if one's definition of a homemaker is so two-dimensional that it can never include walking out the front door. But the homemaker, contrary to this poor stereotype, is a rich and involved female role. I have listed many of the things my own wife does [in another essay](#), activities which surely encompass some of what Proverbs 31 describes.

Does a woman who makes some money from the home cease being a homemaker? No, of course not. Does a woman who does anything out in the yard cease to be a homemaker? That would be absurd. Perhaps one of the reasons that moderns are confused about what a homemaker really does is that the role had already become very minimized before feminism took over. The housewife had already ceased doing some or most of what the traditional homemaker had done. Moreover, the family itself had been greatly minimized by becoming isolated and nuclear, leaving the house wife without the relationships as well as assistance that make up a full household. Many families didn't adapt to those changes well. So the homemaker role thinned out in what it accomplished, and people wrongly starting thinking of it as a woman who sits around the house all day. In reality, it is a lot of work, and involves much labor. Like the Bible describes, she awakens before dawn, and her lamp does not go out by night. This is a hard-working woman.

To end, let me just go to those opening verses which I did not include. We shouldn't miss that they tell us this woman does her husband "good" all the days of her life. Those words are important too, even if they do not describe a daily task. The woman is the man's helpmate. God made her especially for that. He took her from his very own flesh and being. Perhaps that's why God calls the woman to the home, because as a homemaker that is the best way she can help him in being a godly man and help him in pursuing his righteous goals. By caring for the household and the children. This is how she does him good. This is how she helps him. Not by

imitating a man and entering the career world, but by being a woman, bearing the children and watching over the ways of her household. Nothing should sound more attractive to born-again women out there.