

Intro

As we remember mothers today, let's ponder biblical womanhood. I've titled my message "God-fearing Womanhood." Not only are the traditional roles of women highlighted in today's passage frowned upon as restrictive and out of date, the very concept of womanhood is debated. Women are now being called "people who menstruate" or a "menstruating person." As if the word woman is a dirty word. On a Maine license you can identify your gender as m, f, or x. X being "non-binary."

Calling someone a woman is judged morally wrong because you're speaking in terms of binary absolutes: people are born either men or women. Our culture wants to make gender something that's optional and self-determined rather than Creator determined. That's why it's a baited question to ask Supreme Court nominees how they define the term woman.

This morning I aim to uphold the beauty of womanhood instituted by God. This morning we ask this question:

BIG QUESTION: What does biblical womanhood look like?

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Sermon Focus

Before jumping in I want to consider womanhood, the fear of the LORD, the passage context, and how attainable this womanhood is.

Womanhood

- 1) Simple definition: a human being with the potential for motherhood.
- 2) Fitted for motherhood.
- 3) Fitted for nurture.
- 4) Fitted to help Adam take dominion over the world.
- 5) The expected norm is wife and mother.
- 6) For a variety of reasons these norms aren't realized by every woman, but this doesn't make you less female.
- 7) For those who aren't mothers, there are other avenues to practice excellent womanhood.

Fear of the LORD (31:30)

- Fear of the LORD drives the excellent wife.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. – Proverbs 1:7

- A prerequisite to learning from God. Fearing God = being teachable. Willing to be corrected. Not being wise in our own eyes (Prov 3:7). Humbly accepting what God says.

The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
– Proverbs 8:13

- Opposing what God opposes. Affirming what God affirms. Not treating sin casually.

Fear in the relational context is reverence and awe for God without fear of his rejection. We can be free from fear of punishment for our sin through faith in Jesus. If we've repented and believed, Jesus took the punishment we deserve and we're declared righteous and not guilty. Peace with God comes through turning from rebellion to faith in Jesus, his death, and his resurrection. But we should fear hardening our heart against God and having to receive his discipline (Prov 28:14).

Fear is a function of trust. We trust what God says about himself and how he deals with us. So we respect God, which **overcomes our tendency to refuse correction and pursue sin.**

Passage Context

Context: father writing to a son (intended audience is children!).

- The woman you must pursue [to my children!].
- Treasure this woman more than gold. Treasure fear of the LORD, don't treasure beauty! Avoid women who reject God's Word regardless of how beautiful they are.
- To my daughter: aspire to be this sort of woman!
- This closes Proverbs = a woman embodying the concepts of wisdom found throughout Proverbs. Fearing God results in this sort of womanhood. [In different ways men should pursue these attributes too!]

Is this sort of womanhood attainable?

- YES!!! This isn't an impossible ideal. This is a way of a life, a standard to strive after.
- This woman is rare, but she is out there. She can be found (31:10).
- These are attributes that should be present, but not yet perfected.
- The message today is not try harder and you can do it. The message today is don't be discouraged if you don't perfectly measure up. The message today is strive after these qualities in the fear of the LORD.
- Our passage is saying these attributes should be true of every Christian woman to some degree. If you're not married, these characteristics can be true of you too.

Thoughts on the new birth

Our confidence to live the ideal is the indwelling Holy Spirit:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. – Philippians 2:12-13

- Strive after the ideal in the fear of LORD with confidence that God is working change in you. That's God confidence not self-confidence. That's confidence that as we engage in spiritual disciplines like confession of sin, prayer, Bible intake, good Christian books, attending our weekly gathering, fellowship with God's people, etc. God will work these attributes in us over time. ("work out" = our duty). No quick fix. No instant

character. Effort rooted in faith that yields new patterns in our lives. Godly direction not instant perfection. We expect change because of the new birth.

- Do you have confidence in the Word of God and the Spirit of God?
- Don't say: "This is impossible so why bother. Say I can be these things through Christ in me."
- My aim isn't to arouse guilt or shame or despair. My aim is set forth an ideal. To inform. And then to arouse effort and movement towards this ideal. For this sort of spirituality to be our church culture.

Point 1: Trustworthy and stable (31:12-13, 23, 28)

Trustworthy and stable

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. ¹² She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. – 31:12-13

Her husband has no worries because she's stable and consistent, not up and down ("*all the days of her life*").

Illustration: revival/experiential spirituality

When I was dating my wife I perceived something very ironic: she met the biblical standard for a godly woman but she didn't meet the standard those who discipled me set. I'll call it the experiential/revival woman:

- 1) Emotional experiences during services (raising hands, weeping, always going to the "altar" for prayer).
- 2) Lets everyone know how excited they are about Jesus. Talks a lot about their love for Jesus.
- 3) Christian bumper stickers. Christian book marks. Listens to the latest Christian music.

They'd call this the "on-fire" Christian. Look for this woman. I was humorously puzzled. Kaitlin wasn't "on-fire" for the LORD by this definition. No she was just godly. Obedient. Trustworthy. Stable. Consistent. Wise. Shaped by Scripture. Somehow I was to think that a woman who matched up with Scripture wasn't good enough? A bizarre spirituality indeed. **Biblical spirituality is practical, tangible, concrete.**

What I'm saying is we ought to be stable, dependable people that others can count on. What's the result?

Her husband succeeds in the community (31:23). Her children and husband bless her (31:28). Being trustworthy creates affection and respect. Thus the phrase, "respect in earned, not given." Through her conduct, the excellent wife has earned respect and affection.

Point 2: Hard working (31:13-15, 31:18b, 31:19, 31:21-22, 31:24, 27)

Explanation

This theme is most prevalent:

- 1) She obtains materials (31:13).
- 2) She produces goods (31:19).

- The doubling spindle makes clothing.

3) She sells goods (31:24).

4) She uses the proceeds to bring food home (31:14).

She is like the ships of the merchant; She brings her food from afar. – 31:14

- Trading ships sell and buy.

She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant. – 31:24

5) She gets up early (31:15) and works late into the night (31:18) = great work ethic.

- She refrains from idleness (31:27). She doesn't stay home to watch soap operas or play video games.

▪ The picture is a woman on the lookout for needs in the home who makes sure everything necessary is covered. Not lazy. Not that rest is sin. Just that duties must be fulfilled.

6) She takes care of those in her household (31:15, 21-22).

- They have clothing appropriately for cold weather and bedding to sleep in (31:21-22).

▪ She's not afraid of the snow because through hard work she's prepared for it.

Application

I just want to note that her work ethic is a consequence of her fear of the LORD. She works hard because she fears God. In other words, our attitude towards the dishes reveals a presence or absence of the fear of the LORD.

Yes we have blind spots galore. As we learned in Matthew, Jesus' commands touch all of life because faith in God touches all of life. Including the dishes.

Point 3: Decision-making (31:16, 31:18a, 31:26a)

Explanation

The excellent wife has wisdom. She makes good decisions.

1) She selects a field, purchases it, and plants a vineyard (31:16).

- Note the vineyard succeeded. She purchased a good field.

2) "*She perceives that her merchandise is profitable*" (31:18a) = good business sense.

3) "*She opens her mouth with wisdom*" (31:26a).

- Her words are characterized by wisdom. Anywhere from business sense to moral sense.

Application

Part of fearing God is having good sense. The Proverbs themselves are rules of how life generally works. If you work hard you'll generally have money. If you plan in advance, things will usually turn out well. If you use your speech well, your life won't be filled with contention. Wise living doesn't guarantee success. There are exceptions (economic conditions beyond our control, difficult people who are difficult regardless of how you speak to them). But generally a life that is wise is a life that prospers (not just finances!).

Do you use biblical principles to guide your decisions? Wisdom = sound application of biblical principles.

Point 4: Kindness (31:20, 31:26b)

Explanation

The excellent wife deals kindly with others:

1) *She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.* – 31:20

▪ Open checkbook and looks to help.

▪ This is people in need through no fault of their own. In the Proverbs the poor is a different category than the fool or the sluggard.

2) Her teaching is characterized by kindness (31:26b).

She cares for the needs of her maidens (31:15).

Application

The way we relate to God shapes the way we deal with others. In other words, if we fear God we'll deal kindly with those people whom God has chosen to bring into our lives. We love our neighbor because we first love God. Loving our neighbor is one way we fear God. In loving our neighbor, we're humbly following God's instruction.

Point 5: Takes care of herself (31:17, 25)

Explanation

While beauty isn't her calling card (31:30), she does take care of her body.

She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. – 31:17

She is capable of doing the work because she makes herself able. I'm not trying to shame those of you who have impossible physical problems that hinder natural function. Just saying that she does these things as a result of determination to be able. A physical goal with effort to meet that goal.

Let's tear down another unbiblical spirituality I've encountered. Godliness = ugliness. A woman prides themselves on physical beauty and then becomes a believer. Grieved by their vanity and convinced that beauty is vain, she proceeds to let herself go because to desire beauty would be sinful. Is she right?

I don't think so. I once heard on an Iron Sharpens Iron message something like "a woman that doesn't care about beauty is a scarred woman."

Illustration

Women like Phyllis Thorne and Bobbi have on more than one occasion asked me what I thought about the flowers. The honest answer is I didn't notice. I really don't care about floral arrangements. But women do. Because treasuring beauty is part of their God-given design. If it's natural for women to care about beautiful flowers and beautiful clothing and beautiful home décor, it's natural for women to care about their physical appearance.

Application

There's several problems. First, beauty can't be preeminent. Beauty can be "deceitful" (31:30). Physical beauty can mask character flaws. Men are tempted to pursue physical beauty at the expense of character. One of my pastor's said when all the men in the church flock to the physically beautiful, immodestly dressed woman it sends the wrong message to the women in the church.

Second, beauty is "vain" which could be translated "fleeting" or "passing" or "transitory." Beauty isn't permanent. Women age. Men need to look for something permanent, namely, character grounded in the fear of the LORD.

Was I physically attracted to my wife? Absolutely. But without the accompanying Proverbs 31 character it would have been a no go.

Men are designed to be attracted to women. Women are designed to prize beauty. We get in trouble when things are out of proportion.

Conclusion (this isn't me!)

Maybe you're a Christian hearing this and saying this isn't me. I want to be this, but I fail. It's just too hard. I can't do it. Good news. God is patient. God is merciful. God wants to help us become something we're not. It's through fearing God that change takes place. By humbly receiving God's instruction through faith and calling on his help to live it. Remember, change is a process. No quick fix.

Or you're saying I've never heard about this sort of womanhood. God must be really be disappointed with me. Good news. God is aware of our ignorance. Again, he's patient and merciful and wants to help us live a life pleasing to him. A life that functions according to his design rather than against it. He wants us to thrive in this life through faith. A changed stance towards God makes all the difference.

I invite you to gather with us each Sunday morning to discover what the Christian life is all about.