



Moms who Work

There is no higher calling for a woman *with children* than that of motherhood. But such a high calling requires dedication; it calls for 'blood, sweat and tears.' All moms are called by God to work, and to work *hard*.

In this article I want to emphasise the need for mothers to prioritize the calling of motherhood. Now, rather than allowing this thesis to die the death of a thousand qualifications, I will not take the time here to address legitimate questions such as, 'Is it necessarily wrong for a woman to work outside of the home?' and, 'Is it categorically wrong for a woman to pursue a career?' In a subsequent article I *will* address those questions. But for now my focus is narrower. Please don't let the noise of 'exceptions' hinder you from hearing what I trust will prove helpful.

Women have always made up a significant portion of the labour force but this has been especially the case over the past 40 years. But what *has* changed has been the *motive*. In the past, mothers were in the workplace as a matter of financial necessity (usually to avoid abject poverty). But today many are working outside of the home due to matters of 'significance' as well as out of materialistic concerns.

Women have increasingly been bombarded with the lie that being a wife and a mother is a cop-out and that you cannot 'be all that you can be' unless you are pursuing a 'career.' Women are told by a secular media and an elitist educational system that true significance can never be found within the home but rather only in the workplace. And so when a woman is asked, 'Do you work?' the implication is, are you *significant*? Or more to the point, 'Are you *more* than a mom?'

My wife holds to a wonderful confidence that her biblical role is, well, biblical! She has little problem accepting that God knows what is best for her and for her family. This has given her a 'holy boldness.' And so when asked, 'do you work?' Jill has always responded, 'Yes, I work very hard thank you very much.' Years ago when filing some tax forms for the US we both had to sign on the dotted line and state our 'occupation'. Not being shy she wrote, 'Homemaker: Shaper of the Future!' Since I did not want the potential hassle of an audit by an outraged feminist Government official I asked her to please erase the exuberant explanation! Yet her point was valid. That is *precisely* the role of a homemaker, for good or for bad she is shaping the future. And the apostle Paul made this very point nearly 200 years ago; a point and a position that must be recaptured by the Church.

In 1 Timothy 2:8-15 Paul, having instructed the men in the congregation concerning their disposition as they gather for corporate worship, now does the same regarding the women. It appears that the spirit of Gloria Steinem had influenced many women (and men) resulting in unbiblical role reversals. Amongst other issues, women were being tempted to exercise authority over men when the church assembled. In response Paul very succinctly makes the point that a woman does *not* find her significance in leading the flock of her local church but rather she finds her significance in fulfilling her role in shaping the flock of her *home*. Verse 15 makes this clear when Paul writes, '*Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control.*'

The word 'saved' speaks of discovering ones purpose or significance. It is used this way in Matthew 16:25, '*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*' Clearly Jesus was making the point that to 'save' one's life was an attempt to 'finding your life'; to being 'fulfilled.' But for this to occur one must approach life *God's way*, the way

of the cross. The cross was a symbol of death in ancient days; it was a means of capital punishment, particularly under the Romans. So Jesus was making the point that if one will be fulfilled, if one will experience the significance which God intends than one must embrace the symbol of death; one must die to self. In applying this concept of 'save' to motherhood, we can conclude that the way of the cross, not the way of the career is the key to fulfilment.

While understanding that Paul is addressing a local church, it remains a universal principle that a woman who has children will find her significance as a godly mother. Mothers therefore should be committed to the hard work required of such a high calling.

The verse says that this however will only be the case *'if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.'* Who is/are the 'they'? It could be referring to the mothers. In other words, if the mother is characterized by such godliness then she will indeed experience 'success' as a mother. No doubt that is true. But also consider that the *'they'* may also refer to the *children*. That is, if the *children* become characterized by such qualities then the mother's life has been 'saved.' She enjoys the fruit of her labours. There is no honour greater than when a mother's children love and serve her God.

Having considered the two interpretive options I am inclined to say that the ambiguity is *purposeful*. In other words, a mother who pursues such a godly character will produce children with the same godly character. Both win because both are *saved*.

If you consider each of these qualities – 'faith, love, holiness and self-control' – then you will realize that hard work is required. Such fruits of sanctification do not grow easily in the soil of sinners; either in mothers or in their children. That is why mothering is a full-time occupation. Raising a godly seed requires hard work. Of course there are the laborious necessities of washing, cleaning, cooking, and all else that accompanies managing a household. But added to this is the hard work of shaping the character of children by shepherding their hearts, including disciplining other parts of their anatomy! But all of this to say that being such a mom is a full time occupation; and an eternally rewarding one.

Of course in addressing this issue many questions arise, as mentioned earlier, including, 'Can a mom work hard *both* in a job as well as in the home?' But at this point I trust that Christians can agree that there is no argument that Scripture calls for a wife and mother to be *'home-makers'* (Titus 2:5, NKJV). And this means far more than merely being *at home*. Rather as the ESV translates, she is to be *'working at home.'* In the light of what she is called of God to produce – godly children – there can be no legitimate debate that women with children indeed need to be moms who *work*.

In the beginning of the article I sought to make the biblical case that a woman who is blessed to be a mother is called to *work* as a mom. She is to work hard at raising a godly seed. This is clearly the calling of a woman with children, as indicated in such passages as 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

But whenever this issue is broached a lot of questions surface such as, 'Is it wrong for a mother to work outside of the home?' 'Is there not a place for a mother to aid in adding to the household finances?' 'Is it sinful for a mother to pursue a career?' 'How should single women view studies and being career oriented?' 'Once the children are grown then is it good for a wife to work outside of the home and/or to pursue a career?' Now perhaps you can appreciate why I chose in my initial article to limit the scope of the subject matter!

In approaching these important questions it is essential that we begin with the paradigm of what is patently clear in Scripture: children are a gift from God and motherhood is the highest calling of a woman *with children*. Once this is solidified in our minds and hearts then the above questions pose little difficulty – especially if such questions are faced *honestly*.

An important Caveat

From the outset I want to emphasize that we should not say such things as ‘motherhood is a woman’s highest calling.’ There are many women who will remain single throughout their lives and there are married women whom for whatever good reason the Lord has chosen to not give children. It would be wrong to conclude in either case that these women are doomed to live a life of less fulfilment. On the contrary, as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 7, they are in a position to live exceptionally full lives to the glory of God. Yet while noting this biblical caveat we must at the same time acknowledge the Scriptural injunction that a woman with children is to prioritize raising them for the Lord. That is her highest calling. Of course we would also confess that a married woman’s highest calling is as a wife.

Now having come to such a conviction the several questions that we noted earlier really become quite simple to answer. This is one of the wonderful blessings of biblical wisdom. The principles in Scripture are rather easy to discern and then it is merely a matter of honestly applying them to the various questions with which life confronts us. Let’s do so now.

First, ‘Is it wrong for a mother to work outside of the home?’ I do not know of a single passage or verse in Scripture which prohibits this. It is clear from Titus 2:3-5 that a wife/mother’s priority is her home. If she can lovingly, joyfully, faithfully, passionately, holily and effectively care for her family and yet still have time to work outside of the home then why not? But a good deal of honesty needs to be applied when making such a decision. If a wife/mother is spending 40-50 hours a week away from her primary calling then she and her husband (for he is ultimately responsible for such a decision) need to honestly assess whether the home has been prioritized. Think long and hard about the wisdom of separating a mother from her children for the best hours of the day. Further, I would especially appeal for clear-headedness regarding the common but unbiblical practice of shifting our parental responsibilities to others. Neither maids nor Crèches nor au pairs nor grandmothers(!) are to be raising our children.

Second, ‘Is there not a place for a mother to aid in adding to the household finances?’ Most certainly. The godly wife epitomized in Proverbs 31 is commended for doing so. We read in verse 16: ‘*She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard.*’ Clearly such a virtuous wife is industrious and through her labours the family’s ‘profits’ are increased. In fact such a passage serves as a wonderful template for ‘home industry’. Many moms can use their homes as a place from which they can add to the financial coffers of the home while still prioritizing their higher calling. It should also be mentioned that part-time jobs may also fit into this category. My only caution is that it remains part-time and that it does not take away from the privileged calling of motherhood.

Third, I want to address the following two questions together. ‘Is it sinful for a mother to pursue a career?’ ‘How should single women view studies and being career oriented?’

First, why would a wife/mother wish to do so? Why would she want to pursue a lesser opportunity while turning from a greater one? I am concerned that the prestige of having a career or the pull of wanting to have ‘more’ is all too often behind such a pursuit. For some strange (read: sinful) reason the idea prevails that a woman cannot be fulfilled at home and she will not have enough to ‘fill her time.’ But the truth is that if the Lord gives a woman a husband and then children, she *will* have her hands and her *life* very full *if she makes her home her priority*. My wife Jill would tell you that she faces many challenges running her home but boredom has never been one of them!

Again, I would simply appeal for honesty when considering such a decision. I have known many women who have trained for a career and yet they laid it aside when the Lord gave them children. Many have continued in the meanwhile to maintain their skills yet children have taken precedence over career and mothering is more important than money.

This of course raises the question concerning educating young women for careers. Should we as parents be encouraging this?

There are some voices in the Church at large who are adamant that since women are encouraged by Scripture to marry and to have children, then to educate them at post matric level is unnecessary. Some argue that do so is even irresponsible as it might tempt them to pursue a course in life that would take them away from prioritizing the home. Though I can appreciate their concern I disagree with their blanket prohibition. Rather I am of the opinion that an education is never a waste and therefore the knowledge and skills that a woman can acquire in a field of study may be very fruitful. After all, if she never marries then an education may serve her well (though we need to be wise about sending our daughters into the world; that needs another article!).

There is no doubt that God gifts women as He does men and so their skills can be put to good use in the Kingdom. My caution however is that we must present to our daughters that marriage and child-rearing (if God wills) is a wonderful calling. I fear that too often we create the very problems that we need to avoid in the area of having a biblical family. And when I say 'we' I am referring to wrongheaded parenting. That is, we teach our daughters that the primary pursuit is a secular education so that they can have a career. And then we wonder why they are so slow to get married! Further, because our values are so often skewed by the world we pressure our daughters to study for the more lucrative and prestigious careers rather than encouraging them to follow their God-given, though sometimes less lucrative passions. Fathers, stop it!

Finally, consider this question, 'Once the children are grown then may a wife turn her attention to working outside of the home and/or to pursue a career?' My initial response to this would be to ask another question, 'Why?' Seriously, when considering the opportunity consider the motive for doing so. Clearly there is biblical liberty to do so, but at what expense? If there is a pressing financial need then perhaps wisdom would dictate doing so. But for many the issue is not that of finances but rather one of boredom. Yet I can assure you that there are plenty of opportunities to use the blessing of having more time on your hands to minister to the Body of Christ as well as to your neighbours for their good and for the glory of God.

Again, the Scriptures do not prescribe a particular course of action in this matter and so we need to respect the liberty of others to make choices. My appeal is simply that you consider the motives as well as what you and others may miss out on as a result of your decision, one way or the other.

And so in conclusion, let's be committed to searching the Scriptures asking the Lord for the wisdom we need to help moms who work. Again, as the Bible makes clear, *all* moms are called to work.

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