

The Worthy Woman of 2011

A Study of Proverbs 31:10-31

Proverbs 31:10-31 sets the tone for God's expectation of women for all time. While there is much to be said about a man and his duties in the home this study examines the wife and mother. Proverbs 31:10-31 serves as a commentary explaining Paul's admonition for women to "*rule the household*" (1 Timothy 5:14) and be "*workers at home*" (Titus 2:5). The chapter expands upon and removes the cloud of uncertainty as to what being a "*help meet*" is all about (Genesis 2:18). Keil and Delitzsch remark that "The housewife is depicted here as she ought to be; the poet shows how she governs and increases the wealth of the house, and thereby also advances the position of her husband in the common estimation, and he refers all these, her virtues and her prudence, to the fear of God as their root" (Keil and Delitzsch volume 6, page 480). The worthy woman is a rare person among humanity because she aids the man in every aspect of the home. Not many women have the desire, grit, health, physical strength, and stamina to do what this woman does. To examine the worthy woman of God in the scriptures is to embark upon a journey that leaves a man at awe in relationship to this person's faith, work ethic, love, devotion, and trustworthiness. This article shall serve to identify the worthy woman as revealed in God's divine revelation.

Before examining Proverbs 31 we must note that the 30 chapters leading up to this chapter have constructed concrete pictures in our minds regarding this woman. This woman is gracious (Proverbs 11:16), discrete (Proverbs 11:22), concerned about the spiritual welfare of her children (Proverbs 10:1), and she is the "*crown of her husband*" (Proverbs 12:4). Carefully note that Solomon wrote, "*Every wise woman **builds** her house; but the foolish pluck it down with her own **hands***" (Proverbs 14:1). The HANDS of a woman play a large part of identifying the worthy woman as we shall see in our textual study below. The hands that work are praised while the hands that are slothful are condemned (Proverbs 6:6ff). A woman's hands aid (help meet) her husband in every aspect of the home (i.e., rearing children, promoting love and discipline, promoting spiritual growth, keeping up with the chores of the home, and providing food, shelter, and clothing).

One grave mistake brethren make today is to condemn a woman who works in this world. Bible women worked! Eve was Adam's help meet (Genesis 2:18). Ruth, the Moabite proselyte was known as a worthy woman because of her extreme work ethic and kind disposition toward her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:8, 14; 2:2, 7, 11, 17-18, 23; 3:10-11). Lydia was a seller of purple from Thyatira who had a household (Acts 16:14-15). Priscilla shared a "*trade*" with her husband as "*tentmakers*" (Acts 18:2-3). The worthy woman of Proverbs 31 was a literal work horse. Bible women worked and God commands that such women who aided their husbands in every aspect of the home were to be praised rather than condemned (Proverbs 31:30-31).

It is fascinating to note that Proverbs 31:10-31 is written in alphabetic acrostic form known as *Abecedarius*. Each verse of Proverbs 31:10-31 begins with a letter in the

Hebrew alphabet beginning from the first to last. Psalms 119 is a more notable form of *abecedarius* writing that we are familiar with. Other Bible writings in this form are the book of Lamentations and Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145. The objective of acrostic literature is to serve as a memory aid. It was the obvious intention for the author to have his readers remember these divine instructions through this method of writing. Psalms 145 is said to be cited three times a day in Jewish services due to its acrostic style. To be sure that Bible women would forever remember their duty to the home the author wrote in a style of writing that would help them do this. Let us now consider Proverbs 31:10-31.

"A worthy woman who can find? For her price is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10).

The Hebrew word "*worthy*" (*chayil*) is found 243 times in the Old Testament and translated in various forms in various context. The word may mean strength, might, efficiency, wealth, force, or army. The King James Bible translates the word as "**virtuous**" (the idea of being honorable and upright). We shall permit the text before us to precisely define the word "*worthy*."

Note first that the worthy woman is valued "*far above rubies*." Like precious stones of great worth so the worthy woman is such a treasure that is hard for men to find ("*who can find*" such a woman??). Solomon wrote, "*Whoso finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor of Jehovah*" (Proverbs 18:22). Solomon had earlier said, "*House and riches are an inheritance from fathers; but a prudent wife is from Jehovah*" (Proverbs 19:14). Solomon also wrote, "*My soul searches but I have not found: one man among a thousand I have found but a woman among those I have not found*" (Ecclesiastes 7:28). **Here is a woman who is hard to find and extremely valuable to a man. She is not common among women.** What is it that makes this woman so different and valuable? A study of Proverbs 31 yields the answer. This woman is a rare jewel in that she stands out as one strong, willing, and able to meet all the work that is involved in having a home. Most women can only handle parts of the home's needs.

"The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he shall have no lack of gain" (Proverbs 31:11).

The "*gain*" (spoil - ASV footnote) that such a blessed husband has from this woman is her aid in all aspects of the home (i.e., rearing children, promoting love and discipline, promoting spiritual growth, keeping up with the chores of the home, and providing food, shelter, and clothing). The woman who meets the identity of "*worthy*" has the **trust** of her husband. The husband will trust this woman's marital fidelity and her genuine love for their children's spiritual well being (Proverbs 10:1). The "*worthy woman*" gives no cause for the man to be concerned of adultery, ruinous behavior around children, or the home period. Her desire for the overall well fare of her home is well known. The worthy woman is a "*crown of her husband*" in that he trust her and is not ashamed of her ways (Proverbs 12:4 / 7:17-20). The woman who lacks discretion, lacks kindness, flirtatious with other men, lazy, and odious is an embarrassment and rottenness in the bones of her husband (Proverbs 7:9-12).

"*She doeth him good and not evil All the days of her life*" (**Proverbs 31:12**).

Note the relationship between a husband and the worthy woman to this point. Her words and actions have brought a high degree of **trust** to the relationship. The trust the husband has toward this woman is due to the fact that he receives **gain** and **good** from her "*all the days of her life*."

The godly woman is depicted as one who "*builds her house*" as opposed to the foolish woman who "*plucks it down with her own hands*" (Proverbs 14:1). Solomon had wrote at Proverbs 9:1 that wisdom builds her house upon seven pillars. The seven "*pillars*" of wisdom are consistently identified in Proverbs as truth, instruction, knowledge, understanding, prudence / discretion, a diligent work ethic, and the fear of the Lord. The wise woman will apply these principles to her approach of her house. She has nothing but the best intentions for her household and this is why she "*doeth good and not evil*" to the husband.

Some women "*doeth evil*" to their husbands and thereby wreck the home. We see over and over the admonition to steer clear of adultery in Proverbs yet many women give no heed to such warnings. Some wives are like a leaky faucet that drips and drives a man mad by bickering, arguing, nagging, pride, never wrong, never wanting to loose and argument, never receptive to any kind of advise, rejecting even the loving caring words of her husband (see Proverbs 19:13; 21:19; 25:24; 27:15-16; 31:23).

"*She seeks wool and flax, And works willingly with her hands. 14 She is like the merchant-ships; She brings her bread from afar*" (**Proverbs 31:13-14**).

Young's Literal Translation reads, "*She hath sought wool and flax, And with delight she worketh [with] her hands.*" Note the word "**hands**." The worthy woman's hands are working hands rather than idle hands. The chapter will repeatedly bear out the importance of this woman's hands.

"Wool and linen were the most common fibers woven into cloth for garments (Leviticus 13:47ff etc.), although any blending of the two was expressly forbidden (Deuteronomy 22:11). Wool was of considerable commercial value and was accepted as tribute from Moab by the king of Israel (2 Kings 3:4; Isaiah 16:1)... Wool provided clothing for the rich (James 5:2, by implication), in contrast to the rough sheepskin clothing of the destitute (Hebrews 11:37)" (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia {hereafter - ISBE} v. 4, page 1101). "**Flax**" is the oldest known textile fiber, and in antiquity linen was the preferred fabric for clothes, especially in Egypt, where the priestly garments were of pure linen... Flax is produced from the herbaceous plant *Linum usitatissimum* which grows up to 4 feet in height and is probably native to Mesopotamia. The tough fibers of the stalks are separated from the soft, nonfibrous parts by prolonged soaking in water. When dried the fibers are removed by combing" (ISBE v. 2, page 313).

The husband trust in this woman because she brings him gain and good. Here she is depicted as "*seeking*" wool and flax working "*willingly with her hands*." Her diligent

work at gathering the stalks for flax and getting wool with her labors brought gain to the home. Her home was clothed and she obviously, like a "*merchant ship*" loaded down with products for sale, takes the extras and sells them for gain.

"She rises also while it is yet night, And gives food to her household, And their task to her maidens" (Proverbs 31:15).

While everyone else is sleeping she is at work for her family. The family must eat and she works diligently to see to it that there is food on the table for her husband and children. Not only is she making sure her family is fed but she diligently sees to it that the "*maidens*" are taken care of as well. During these days some Israelites had slaves that worked around the house to accomplish its goals. This worthy woman has slaves and she takes care of their needs for their work too. Many women today have all they can handle around the house during the day yet the one rare jewel is not finished in the day she works through the night. This is what separates her from most other women.

*"She considers a field, and buys it; With the fruit of her **hands** she plants a vineyard" (Proverbs 31:16)*

Here is a woman whose husband trust her because she has proved herself to him by bringing him gain and good through hard work of seeking wool and flax. She has sold the wool and flax and clothed her family thereby taking care of the family's body and financial needs. Again, not many women are willing or able to do such.

This woman's **hands** of labor do not stop at wool and flax. After careful consideration of various land this worthy woman purchases a field, with the money she earns selling the wool and flax, to construct the vineyard (see Proverbs 31:24). Once again, with her **hands** "*she plants a vineyard.*" Planting a vineyard was no piece of cake. Extreme labor went into constructing a vineyard. Consider these words from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia volume 4, page 986-987. "The common grapevine is mentioned in Scripture from the time of Noah... it became an important item of the Hebrew economy (Deuteronomy 8:8; 6:11 etc.); wine represents one of God's best gifts to human beings (Judges 9:13; Psalms 104:15). Viticulture (the cultivation of grapes) has always been prominent in the hill country of Samaria and Judea where the natural contours provide excellent terraces (cf. Isaiah 5:1ff). In early days the vine lay along the ground or trailed over walls and rocks (cf. Genesis 49:22), but later it was supported by poles or trellises (cf. 1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4 etc.). Constant care was necessary to ensure a fruitful vine. After the rains any damage to the terraces was repaired, and the ground was dug and cleared of weeds. Because of the delicate structure of the vine, damage was easily sustained by the plant, whether from storms, animals depredations, or the destruction caused by trespassers or pillagers. As in other plants, the quality of the fruit was safeguarded by the pruning of the branches. This operation was performed with pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:4; 18:5 etc.). Dead branches were pruned in spring (Leviticus 25:3ff etc.) and were gathered for burning (John 15:6). Foxes and jackals menaced the ripening grapes and in some districts wild boars damaged growing vines (Psalms 80:8, 12ff etc.). In the vineyards one or more stone towers were erected, in which the vinedressers

lived (Isaiah 5:2; Matthew 21:33 etc.). The vintage season usually began in September and was a joyful occasion. Towns were often practically deserted as the people moved to temporary lodges in the vineyards. The grapes were gathered and carried in baskets or on a yoke to the big stone winepresses, which usually consisted of two containers, one above the other, hewn out of the solid rock (Joel 3:13 [Matthew 4:13] etc.)." For more on the labors involved in the vineyard read Matthew 21:33-34.

The point is obvious and only those who are willfully blind miss it. This woman was an extremist when it came to labor. The vineyard would not only include buying the land and planting the vines but also all that goes with a vineyard (i.e., purchasing the vines, preparing soil, planting vines, erecting poles or trellises, repairing damaged plants, keeping ground free of weeds that would suck up the needed nutrients for the vines, guarding against trespassers, pruning the vines with pruning hooks, gathering pruned deadwood and burning it, guarding the vines from jackals and boars, erecting a tower and wall for vineyard's protection, harvesting, and processing grapes into wine). The worthy woman was involved in this. Again, these types of works is what separates her from women who can only take care of the immediate needs of the home such as laundry and dishes. While there is nothing wrong with taking care of these necessities we must note that the worthy woman goes beyond the simple work of "house wife" duties. Not all women are willing or able to do such things. A rare jewel indeed!

"She girds her loins with strength, And makes strong her arms" (Proverbs 31:17)

Here is a strong armed woman whose callous hands are not that of holding a remote control to the television but with shovel and pruning hooks in hand she digs, plants, prunes, and builds in extreme labor. This woman, as is further brought out below, is not only physically strong but mentally strong. There is no circumstance of the economy or weather that she fears because she knows and is confident that her labors will bear fruit. When things get hard she works harder. Indeed, a rare jewel.

*"She perceives that her merchandise is profitable: Her lamp goes not out by night. **19** She lays her **hands** to the distaff, And her **hands** hold the spindle" (Proverbs 31:18-19).*

This hard working strong armed woman **knows** that "*her merchandise is profitable*" (i.e., the wool, flax, and wine from the vineyard). These products are sold and she thereby brings her husband gain and good. Note that this hard working woman burns the candle at both ends (*Her lamp goes not out by night*). While all else are sleeping she "*lays her **hands** to the distaff*." The distaff is the idea of "reaching to pull the prepared fibers from the stick on which they were held" (ISBE v. 1, pp. 969) (to understand what is under consideration see notes regarding flax and wool above at Proverbs 31:13). Please note that over and over the worthy woman's **HANDS** are being referred to. These are not the hands of idleness! Many women's work ends with daylight but not the worthy woman. Indeed, a rare jewel.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy regarding the church's responsibility to financially support widows who were over 60 years of age at 1 Timothy 5. Paul commanded;

however, that widows under 60 not be supported. Paul writes, "*And withal they (widows under 60 years old) learn also to be idle, going about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I desire therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children, rule the household, give no occasion to the adversary for reviling:*" (1 Timothy 5:13-14). Both Greek works of Moulton and Liddell and Scott define the word idle as used by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:13 as "**unemployed, living without labor, and lazy**" (Moulton 50; LS 114). God intended for these women to work like Priscilla the tent maker (Acts 18:1-2) and Lydia a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God (Acts 16:14). When these women were fully taking care of their homes they were "ruling the household" well.

Notice also that Paul speaks of the public's perception of this woman. If she goes about not working and being a busy body she gives "*occasion to the adversary for reviling.*" The exact issue is brought up at Titus 2:3-4 where Paul writes, "*that aged women likewise be reverent in demeanor, not slanderers nor enslaved to much wine, teachers of that which is good; that they may train the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sober-minded, chaste, workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed:*" (Titus 2:3-5). The **reputation** of the Cretans was sloth and gluttony and for this cause they were not "*sound*" (Titus 1:12-13). If Christian women were have the reputation of "*sound in faith*" they were not to be idle in the home. Those who were idle gave cause for the world to have a faulty view of the Christian. The Lord is very concerned about the public's perception of what a true Christian is (see 2 Samuel 12:14; Philippians 1:28; 2:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:14; 6:1). When people looked to the worthy woman's work ethic her husband is magnified at the gate (he enjoys a good **reputation** in that his wife is a hard worker, lovingly in subjection to him, and she sees to it that the affairs of the home are taken care of... he trust her and has great gain and good because of this) (see Proverbs 31:23).

It was Ruth's work ethic that caused Boaz to say, "*And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou sayest; for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a worthy woman*" (Ruth 3:11). All the city witnessed Ruth's extreme work ethic in addition to her kind care and concern for her mother-in-law (see Ruth 2:1-2, 7, 17, 23).

The worthy woman's perception among those of her local society should be that of a hard working woman who sees to the needs of her home. She, and all who would wear the name worthy, are "*workers at home*" (Titus 2:5) and thereby they "*rule the household*" (1 Timothy 5:14). Her work of great labor is all for the home (i.e., **her concerns are domestic**) (more on Titus 2:5 at Proverbs 31:24).

"She stretches out her hand to the poor; Yea, she reaches forth her hands to the needy" (**Proverbs 31:20**).

Notice that the worthy woman's cup runs over due to her work ethic. She is such a hard worker that she has excess of that which her immediate family needs and she is able to

help the poor (those who have experienced a calamity in life that causes them to be unable to sustain themselves).

"She is not afraid of the snow for her household; For all her household are clothed with scarlet" (**Proverbs 31:21**).

While the slothful woman sits around twitting her thumbs and fretting over how her family will survive the harsh weather the worthy woman is *"not afraid."* **There is no fear in those who are willing to work!** The worthy woman is not waiting for a handout from anyone. The apostle Paul said, *"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, if any will not work, neither let him eat"* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Note that the phrase, *"let him eat"* is one word in the Greek and is neuter (i.e., male and female under consideration) (Friberg's Analytical Greek New Testament page 632).

The worthy woman's *"household are clothed with scarlet."* Scarlet "is applied to fabrics or yarns used in association with royal or gorgeous apparel (see 2 Samuel 1:24; Proverbs 31:21; Lamentations 4:5; Jeremiah 4:30; Nahum 2:3; Matthew 27:28; Revelation 17:4; 18:12, 16)" (ISBE v. 1 page 732). The worthy woman's family did not run around town looking like poverty stricken people with holes and shabby clothes. Her children and husband wore the clothes of gorgeous royalty. They were able to have these things because of the wife and mother's extreme work ethic.

"She makes for herself carpets of tapestry; Her clothing is fine linen and purple" (**Proverbs 31:22**).

No one can accuse the *"worthy woman"* of being a slothful sluggard (see Proverbs 6:6-11 etc.). Once again we see her at work *"making for herself carpets of tapestry."* Tapestry was a "fabric used both for bed coverings (Proverbs 7:16) and, perhaps, for clothing (Proverbs 31:22)" (ISBE v. 4, page 726). Seeing that her clothing is addressed secondly in this verse it seems likely that her bed coverings are under consideration in the first clause.

Now the attire of the worthy woman is addressed. Did the worthy woman go around with sack cloth or old worn out poverty stricken clothes while her household dressed like royalty? No! The worthy woman's *"clothing is fine linen and purple."* Purple, "The most highly prized dye in the ancient world obtained from the secretions of four mollusks native to the eastern Mediterranean. Various shades could be produced by mixing secretions from different species, by adding salt or other substances, or by using procedures such as double dyeing... Since approximately eight thousand mollusks were required to produce one gram of purple dye, purple cloth was extremely expensive, and the Bible refers to it almost exclusively as used by kings or for cultic purposes... it indicated the awe-inspiring luxury of King Solomon's palanquin and of the hangings in the palace of King Ahasuerus (Ester 1:6)... they could also be a sign of well deserved prosperity (Proverbs 31:22)" (ISBE v. 3 page 1057). The worthy woman of Proverbs 31 wore luxurious clothing fit for kings because of her extreme work ethic. The fine things the family had were products of her hard work. The book of Proverbs brings out the fact

that those who work hard and fear Jehovah have the luxuries of this life and those who will not have nothing (see Proverbs 22:4). Though these fine things of life belonged to the worthy woman they were not what defined her. This woman was rather defined by her "*fear of Jehovah God*" (Proverbs 31:30; see also 1 Timothy 2:9ff; 6:9).

"Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land"
(Proverbs 31:23).

Please note that the context of these verses is dealing with the wife identified as "*worthy*." Though her husband's position is mentioned it is only to illustrate where he is in the eyes of others due to the devotion and extreme work ethic of his wife. This man, who is blessed with a worthy woman, is "*known in the gates*" (where affairs of the city were discussed) due to his wife's labors. What are men known for today? The old saying, "Behind every great man is a great woman" is not used to often anymore because there are few worthy women. As stated earlier, a man or woman's reputation in the public's eyes says much about their character. The worthy woman's husband enjoyed a good reputation due to his wife's good work.

"She makes linen garments and sells them, And delivers girdles unto the merchant"
(Proverbs 31:24).

Again this wife identified as worthy is depicted as a work horse. She works with wool and flax, sells these linens, buys a field with the money, plants a vineyard (extreme labor and enormous project not to be tackled by the slothful - see Proverbs 24:30-34). With the monetary gains from the vineyard she feeds and clothes her household like royalty. She also, with the excess, is able to help the poor and needy.

While many today claim that if a woman steps out of the house for labor she is in sin the worthy woman of God's word leaves the home to take her merchandise to the market and sells to merchants. Brethren confuse the man being the head of the home with being the only one permitted to work. That is a man made concocted idea no where found in the Bible. Again, others turn to Titus 2:5 and claim that she must work only in the home without examining context and the entirety of the role of the woman throughout the Bible. Our denominational friends do this kind of studying when they look to passages like Romans 10:9 and conclude that believing and confessing Jesus as Lord is the only thing people have to do to be saved. God's people are commanded to handle aright the word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). I often refer to Bible study as an exercise in connecting dots. The more I study a given subject within its context and within the confines of the subject throughout the entire Bible the more clear the picture becomes. Paul's point to Titus is that the woman is not to be lazy and idle like the Cretans (Titus 1:12). The word used by Paul, "*workers at home*" (Greek *oikouros*) is found this one time only in the entire Bible (Titus 2:5). We cannot thereby go to other text to see how the word is used to get a greater understanding as we would with other word studies. What we must do is look to the meaning of the word and the entire Bible's teaching on women. The Nestle and Marshal text translates the one Greek word "home-worker" (NM 847). When we divide the word up into syllables its root word "*oikos*" = "home, or one's house" (LS

546) and “*ergon*” = “work... mind your own business... one’s business or proper work” (LS 311 – 312). Proverbs 31 and the examples of Eve, Ruth, Priscilla, and Lydia help us understand that this woman's work revolved around the family and home but that cannot be interpreted to mean that she cannot work outside the home. Why? Because the Bible gives many examples, as we have sited, of women who did. The work involved in having a home exceeds the raising of children, teaching Bible, providing secular education, sharing and promoting in the love of a family, and doing every day house chores. A home can only exist if money is being earned and bills paid.

Here is a woman whose work has everything to do with the home! The husband may be involve in the matters of city and foreign affairs at the gate yet the worthy woman's care and concern is directed at the home. Whether the woman of the year 2011 has a job, works hard schooling the children at home, stays at home to work or takes work when available in various forms the thought is clear, she is to work hard for her family. Many judgments must be made in every home. Women with infants would be limited in what they could do in relation to laboring in linens and constructing a vineyard. Each family will assess their current condition and do what is best for the home.

"Strength and dignity are her clothing; And she laughs at the time to come" (**Proverbs 31:25**).

The wife wearing the identity of "*worthy*" clothes herself in strength and dignity. When other women throw up their hands and give up, claim exhaustion and quit, or are too lazy to take care of the home the worthy woman digs in and prepares for the worst. She has a never quit attitude no matter the circumstances of life.

Here is a woman not easily discouraged by bad news or changes in the financial landscape. If she has to work harder to make the same amount she did when days were good she will. This woman is not moved by adversity but rather embraces and is mentally prepared for all the curve balls of life that are thrown at her. This woman is mentally and physically strong. A rare jewel in today's world of pampered do nothing women. Solomon said, "*The **desire** of the sluggard killeth him; For his hands refuse to labor*" (Proverbs 21:25). Many women want the fine things of life yet are unwilling to lift a finger to work. Women who demand or expect the things of this life from their husband yet lift no finger to aid their husbands with the home can never meet the identity of "*worthy*" so long as they make such demands.

"She opens her mouth with wisdom; And the law of kindness is on her tongue" (**Proverbs 31:26**).

The worthy woman is not only concerned with the physical things of life but she is also identified as wise and kind. Solomon had earlier said, "*A **gracious** woman obtains honor*" (Proverbs 11:16). Here is a woman whose mannerism is that of being courteous, polite, kind, and considerate of others. Furthermore, her wisdom defines an intense interest for spiritual matters. Solomon has revealed to us that the woman of God's

approval is expected to act with **discretion** (Proverbs 11:22) and **prudence** (Proverbs 19:14).

"She looks well to the ways of her household, And eats not the bread of idleness" **(Proverbs 31:27).**

Are you seeing a pattern here yet? God's divinely ordained worthy wife is not lazy but rather a hard worker. The Lord condemns the "idle" (see, as was stated above, 1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 1:12ff). The entire study of Proverbs proves God's **INTENSE** hatred for the sluggard (see Proverbs 6:6-11 and a multitude of other passages). This woman's conviction of "**idle**" time is made well known. Only those women who share an equal intense work ethic can relate to these words.

Here is a woman who hears other women talk of soap operas, computer games, sleeping in, and boredom and says, "such words are foreign and unbelievable." This woman is not concerned with boredom because her plate is overflowing as she burns the midnight oil working. Her attention is to her household and she is not bitter about this. She embraces her God ordained role with her Lord, husband, and children.

"Her children rise up, and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: 29 Many daughters have done worthily, But you excel them all" **(Proverbs 31:28-29).**

This wife and mother is observed by her family as well as the society she lives in. Her children see how hard she works without complaining providing for their food, clothing, and spiritual well being. Such acts of love are returned with great respect, honor, and praise. The children have a high estimation of their mother because she makes it evident by her works that she loves her children.

Likewise her husband also sees all his wife's hard work and praises her saying, "*Many daughters have done worthily, But you excel them all.*" Women are not given a free pass in the realm of respect but they must rather earn it from their husband and children (see Proverbs 12:4) . As this woman lives, works, and conducts herself in wisdom her husband's natural response is that of great respect, honor, and love. He knows her love for him and he returns that love to her (see 1 Peter 3:7).

The worthy woman's husband makes an observation. He looks at other wives and their work and compares them to his wife's work. He acknowledges that many have done worthily (they aid their husbands in all aspects of the home the best they can). Yet there is something that separates the worthy woman from all else. This woman excels all other women in that she provides aid in every aspect of the home. Some would ask the question, "Is it sinful for a woman not to have some source of income to aid the husband in the home?" The answer is found here. Not all women have the grit, strength, health, and passion for the home as the "worthy woman." Again, we must note that she is a rare jewel. Not all women can measure up to this woman. Not many will at all. If you have a worthy woman give her praise and let no man condemn her.

"Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; But a woman that fears Jehovah, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

Grace and beauty are "vain" (i.e., worthless) in relation to the husband and children's needs. The worthy woman is on the opposite spectrum of worthlessness, "*For her price is far above rubies*" (Proverbs 31:10b). Solomon said, "*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion*" (Proverbs 11:22). A woman who is elegant and beautiful has nothing on a woman whose whole life is devoted to God and her family and she will work till all her families needs are met. Note; however, that we would be in error to think that this woman walks around haggardly looking, with no makeup, lowly or poverty stricken clothing, as though she were attempting to "look the part" of a worthy woman. This woman worked hard and dressed herself like royalty (remember, "*her clothing is of fine linen and purple*" - Proverbs 31:22). She made herself up to look appealing to her children and husband; however, her personal beauty was only a byproduct of her extreme labor. **Her real concern was meeting Jehovah's requirements for a God fearing worthy woman.**

The woman who is truly "*praised*" is the woman who "*fears Jehovah.*" The idea of "*worthy*" is now complete. The worthy woman is one who is trustworthy, loves her family, and is a diligent worker. Such a disposition is identified as "*fearing Jehovah.*" The subject of "*fearing Jehovah*" comes up often in the book of Proverbs. Note that "*fearing Jehovah*" means: To be wise (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:34), to depart from evil (Proverbs 3:7), to hate evil, pride, arrogance, the perverse mouth, and the evil way (Proverbs 8:13), and to walk upright (Proverbs 14:2). The wise woman who hates evil and walks upright before Jehovah is the woman in whom her husband trust as she brings him gain and good in this life through an intense work ethic. The woman who takes care of all aspects of the home is identified as fearing God.

"Give her of the fruit of her hands; And let her works praise her in the gates" (Proverbs 31:31).

Such a hard working woman deserves the "*fruit of her hands.*" **One last time this woman's hard working hands are mentioned.** The fruits of her hands would include not only the money from the sell of her linens and wine from the vineyard but also the respect, praise, and honor for working so hard.

This woman's reputation precedes her and is manifested in her products she brings to the merchants for sell. She is certainly due the praise she receives. She is well dressed, well mannered, and enjoys a well reputation among all who know her. The apostle Paul said that we are to give "*honor to whom honor*" is due (Romans 13:7). Such a woman deserves honor as the "*weaker vessel*" (1 Peter 3:7). Such a woman is to be praised rather than condemned by uninformed brethren.

Conclusion:

God's expectation for the woman is set in His divine standard. When the Lord created the woman he referred to her as man's "*help meet*" (Hebrew *ezer*) (Genesis 2:18). The Hebrew word *ezer* is found 21 times in the OT and is usually translated "*help*" (i.e., "to give assistance to; aid" [American Heritage Dictionary 604]). What did the man need assistance and aid doing? The man needed assistance in keeping God's laws (Genesis 2:16), replenishing the earth through reproduction (Genesis 1:28), subduing and having dominion over animal life (Genesis 1:28), and tending the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15) that they may eat food (Genesis 1:29). She was to be his partner in this work. The Lord never intended for the man to do everything in the home. God's arrangement was for there to be a man and woman working together. Many women are limited in what they can do. Some are limited by strength and health. Others are limited by an unwilling and lazy heart. Still some are limited by preconceived ideas of what God's worthy woman is. Each man ought to consider his wife's abilities and not demand more out of her than what God does knowing that she is the "*weaker vessel*" (1 Peter 3:7). Many do well but there is one that excels them all.

Man's help meet is a woman who fears Jehovah in that she "*rules the household*" (1 Timothy 5:14). She has a never quit attitude and is not easily discouraged. She is the workhorse among workers. She is very uncommon in that she knows her place. She is in subjection to her husband, her head, yet continues without complaint in her God ordained work in the home (Ephesians 5:22ff). She is careful to not to have "*dominion over a man*" as God has ordained (see 1 Timothy 2:12-15). She voluntarily remains silent in the assembly of saints on the Lord's day and thereby displays a spirit of lowliness before men and respect for God's order (1 Corinthians 14:34ff). Truly such a woman is a find that can scarcely be put into words. Such a hard working woman may be inclined to demand a greater role in the church and society; however, the worthy woman loves being a woman of God. A lovely person indeed! Not many women are willing to accept such a place. Not many women will accept such a place. She is a rare jewel indeed (Proverbs 31:10). Men who have found such a prize ought to praise her and thank the Lord.