This week following Mother’s Day I thought it would be timely to look at some biblical characteristics of godly and ungodly women. Accordingly I will attempt to exhaust respective passages from Proverbs as well conduct a quick survey of what I call the “Eight Bad Babes of The Bible.”

If you are acquainted with her, the Proverbs 31 woman comes across perfect, and in that everyone struggles with the character deficiencies found in the eight women, this study could prove quite intimidating.

Therefore may I suggest that you receive this study in the spirit in which it has been prepared. In that we all desire to be more like Jesus, study Proverbs 31 in that light. Since she emulates the perfect lady no one will ever quite measure up to her standards in this lifetime. So give yourself grace; she’s a tough act to follow!

It is only through the power and timing of the indwelling Holy Spirit that any of us, male or female, can attain Christ-likeness. So rather than look at this as a measuring stick demanding immediate performance, view this as a tool God can use in His own way and timing to help mature you in Christ, bringing you into a more intimate relationship which will bear this fruit.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF GODLY AND UNGODLY WOMEN

I. INTRODUCTION

Interpretation of the OT book of Proverbs need always keep in mind the tightest context the book. Proverbs is about a King (Solomon) preparing his son (Rehoboam) for political leadership over a nation. In that specialized, tight context, one’s future selection of a wife is deemed extremely important: One need choose/be “An excellent chayil (elite, noble, valiant) wife…” (Prov. 12:4 and 31:10). The Bible does not forget nor diminish the importance of a political leaders’ wife over the course of a nation. Therefore the Proverbs that talk about women most specifically relate to a woman who will be, or is married to a governing authority. This contextual insight explains why the Proverbs 31 woman is of the highest caliber, why she needs to be “excellent.” Indeed she need be and set a higher standard. In the same way that 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1 need be and set a higher standard for a male’s leadership in the Church, Proverbs need be and set a higher standard for a female’s partnership in the State! Accordingly, if you are a wife of a governing authority take note! More broadly, these are transcendent qualities that God desires for every mother and daughter. As a young woman, a married lady or grandmother, what are the virtues of female godliness? What specific qualities should you continue to seek after and polish?

II. LEARN THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT WOMAN

Both mother and father should be training their sons and daughters to have discernment regarding the existence or non-existence of godly virtues in a woman. What follows is an outline of all that Proverbs states about this specific subject as well as additional passages pertaining to the subject.

A. SHE IS INDUSTRIOUS

14:1 The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.

31:13-18 She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight. She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar. She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong. She senses that her gain is good; Her lamp does not go out at night.

31:24-25 She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen. Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future.

31:27 She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.

All of these Proverbs condemn laziness. Certain cultures, including America increasingly embrace a lack of mental and physical exertion: Characteristic slothfulness by-in-large explains the differences between the northern and southern cultures of the European Common Market and their pending potential for collapse. Entitlement cultures defy this perspicuous scriptural precept. More about talk than task, idleness has become an idol. The woman of Proverbs is just the opposite: capable, physically able, business smart and prosperous. Notice in contrast to Miss/Mrs. Industriousness:

1Timothy 5:13 At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.

Now note and synthesize the following:

Titus 2:3-5 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their
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own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

One of the specific descriptors of a godly woman in the shopping list of 2:5 is translated workers at home oikourgos. This passage begs for particular attention: How does one synthesize it with the aforesaid Proverbs, wherein a most excellent wife is found in the marketplace? For the sake of readability the preposition at is supplied in many English Bible translations—but it is not present in the original Greek language (oikos: home; ergon: to work). In addition, elsewhere ergon is often translated good deeds. I therefore believe the English-supplied preposition at is inap, along with the choice of the English word work versus translating ergon as good deeds. Workers at home tends to incorrectly connote where the woman is supposed to be. But the Greek does carry this idea. In light of Proverbs, perhaps the better English-supplied (for the sake of readability) preposition should be the word for and work should be translated good deeds. An excellent woman is one who does good deeds for home (cf. Gen. 2:18; 1Tim. 2:11-15). How she goes about that does not necessarily mean she works at home all day long—per Proverbs and the analogy of Scripture. Accordingly, is it not legalistic to say a wife should not work at all? More importantly is this question:

IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY OF HER HEART TO BUILD UP HER HOME?

The later is the heart issue that will govern the former. (You probably know of legalistic churches where the elder’s wives are forbidden to work). However a husband and wife work this out, the godly woman is industrious and that industriousness is most importantly manifest first and foremost in the building-up of her home.

B. SHE IS PRUDENT

19:14 House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD.

In contrast to a lazy wife who is often unprepared, sloppy, not thinking ahead, characterized by excuses and an overall lack in excellence, Prudence sakal means “wisdom shown in the exercise of reason, forethought, and self-control.” A godly woman pushes herself. She uses her mind to think ahead and gets ready. Her proper prior planning is a preventative to poor performance. Qualities only inbred from above, she is deemed a gift from the LORD.

C. SHE IS WISE AND UNDERSTANDING

24:3-4 By wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; And by knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches.

The Bible says the primary role of the wife in marriage is to build and establish the home while the husband works outside as the breadwinner (cf. Titus 2:3-5). Whereas both are of similar value before God and society, they function in different capacities, teaming to build the Kingdom, their country and the next generation: Ideally, it takes a symbiosis of husband and wife to achieve all of the above. A godly woman is wise, understanding and knowledgeable of God’s blueprint and design; this is how God made marriages and families to function most effectively, the foundation of society. When one follows the Owner’s manual the figurative results are rooms...filled with all precious and pleasant riches. Accordingly, a wise man will marry a wise woman who has her high calling, role and function in marriage settled in her mind.

D. SHE CARES FOR THE POOR

31:19-20 She stretches out her hands to the distaff; And her hands grasp the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.

A godly woman is selfless. Not only does she care for her husband and children—investing far more time in them than “playing,” being self-absorbed in

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trivial events so prevalent in our society—but in addition she cares for the poor and needy. She flatly rejects the narcissism of her culture and “considers others as more important” (Phil. 2:3). In giving up her life to others she finds it (Matt. 10:39) and her husband calls her blessed (Prov. 31:30).

E. SHE HAS CLASS

31:21-22 She is not afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

A godly woman does not dress in an ungodly, suggestive, slovenly or slipshod manner. Her outer adornment reflects her inner demeanor.

31:17 She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong.

31:25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future.

She dresses with dignity, meaning she gives thought and care for the occasion and in view of her husband’s position. She’s not distracting.

Because she is industrious and a good steward of her resources, fine clothing are affordable and an appropriate priority. Such sensitivities telegraph the evidences of God’s blessings and grace bestowed as a reward for faithfulness, selflessness and the care of others who are less fortunate.

F. SHE IS KIND

31:26 She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Kindness הקסッド is a rich Hebrew word denoting deeds of devotion, favor and loveliness. It carries the OT idea of the NT word for love ἀγάπη, meaning unchanging, unconditional graciousness. This woman’s speech is flavored with tenderness and mercy; others enjoy talking to her for endless hours! She’s not rigid and legalistic, full of self, harsh or gossipy; she’s kind and gracious in speech.

G. SHE IS TRUSTWORTHY

31:11-12 The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.

I am blessed to have a trustworthy wife in Danielle. Our kids have turned out great because of her and I wouldn’t be where I am serving the Lord if it weren’t for her godliness and maturity.

This is an apt summary passage for what a man should look for in a wife, and what a woman who desires to be married should strive to become. Here is a woman who will complement her husband’s path, one who will not detract, but encourage, a positive partner all the days of her life.

THESE ARE THE SEVEN QUALITIES EVERY WOMAN SHOULD STRIVE TO DEVELOP, AND EVERY MAN SHOULD SEEK TO FIND

How does this apply to you—especially if you are called to public service?

III. LOCATE A GREAT WOMAN

18:22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD.

Knowing his son’s destiny, Solomon wanted Rehoboam to find an excellent wife. Such a quest and attainment would be favorable in his eyes and God’s. Notice what results…

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

IV. LAVISH A GREAT WOMAN

Once one has learned the characteristics of a great wife, located and married her, he best not take her for granted. Lavish the excellent woman with love and give her more of everything than desired; don’t be stingy. One should never stop doing what they agreed to do when they married.
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A. SHE IS WORTHY OF HONOR
11:16 A gracious woman attains honor, And ruthless men attain riches.
12:4 An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, But she who shames him is like rottenness in his bones.
31:10 An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

B. SHE IS WORTHY OF PRAISE
31:28-29 Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: "Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all."

Make sure this is the “speak” in one’s home as it pertains to one’s wife—and the way the kid’s address their mother.

V. LOOK OUT FOR NOT-SO-GREAT WOMEN

Scripture also teaches what woman should not be like. Here are the eight not-so-great women.

A. LICENTIOUS WOMEN
Like the woman at the well in John 4 prior to her conversion to Christ, licentious women are those who lack moral discipline or sexual restraint. This kind of woman is paraded in Proverbs more so than the other that follow—perhaps because she is so dangerous to office holders. Licentious people (be they male or female) destroy marriages. Adultery is one of the surest ways to instantly and forever destroy a great marriage. Notice how Solomon hammers away on sexual temptation as it relates to those in authority:

5:15-19 Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.

6:29 So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished.
27:8 Like a bird that wanders from her nest, So is a man who wanders from his home.

Sexual immorality of any kind will greatly, greatly harm not only marriage, but the opportunity for public service—to say nothing of staff and all those around a morally-fallen individual. Is such a selfish momentary act worth such an enormously high price? “And be sure of this, your sins will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).

In addition to licentious women, the Bible is full of other females who emulate a smorgasbord of disgraceful behaviors. Beware of each.

B. DECEIVABLE WOMEN
2Corinthians 11:3 states “the Serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness.” Deceived exapatao means “to seduce wholly;” “to persuade into disobedience.” Eve is an example of a woman who was persuadable to do wrong. She did not possess personal spiritual fortitude. Accordingly, when away by herself she was vulnerable. Is your faith your own? Don’t have a borrowed and dependent faith.

C. MATERIALISTIC WOMEN
Genesis 19:26 states regarding Lot’s wife, “But his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” Earlier in verse 17, as Lot and his family escaped the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Angel told them specifically “Do not look back.” Seemingly a small thing, the passage serves as a powerful figurative illustration of someone whose affections are tied to the things of this world (cf. Luke 17:29-33). Are you heavenly minded? Or are you attached to the material things of this world? Seek first the Kingdom of God.

D. CONTENTIOUS WOMEN
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King Saul gave his daughter, Michal to David to be his wife. Laden with sarcasm, 2Samuel 6:20 records but one incident of her lack of respect for her husband: “How the King of Israel distinguished himself today!” Michal is illustrative of a contentious woman. Proverbs has much to say about this:

21:9 *It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.*

21:19 *It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman.*

25:24 *It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.*

27:15-16 *A constant dripping on a day of steady rain And a contentious woman are alike; He who would restrain her restrains the wind, And grasps oil with his right hand.*

The Hebrew word *contentious madon* appears in each of these Proverbs (Solomon states one twice for emphasis). It means “an often perverse and wearisome tendency to quarrel and dispute.”

**E. CORRUPTING WOMEN**

In 1Kings 16:31 Israel’s King Ahab marries Jezebel, the daughter of the King of the Sidionites, who were Baal-worshippers. Needless to say Ahab made a huge mistake! Jezebel illustrates a woman who corrupts others, leading her husband and others astray (Cf. 1Kings 21:25). She is a leading contender for the greatest of the not-so-greats.

**F. DISCOURAGING WOMEN**

In the midst of life’s downturns some women fall apart—they can’t handle the pressure; lacking endurance in the midst of a trial, they reason incorrectly, “I didn’t sign up for this!” Job’s not-so-great wife is indicative of such when she states to her distraught-in-everyway husband, "Curse God and die!"(2:9; contr. James 1:2-4). Be encouraging!

**G. MANIPULATIVE WOMEN**

In Matthew 14:3-8 Herodias seduces her husband’s brother in order to get her way. In this case that meant the head of John the Baptist. Proverbs 31:30 states it well, “Charm is deceitful.” Be on the lookout: Some women are masters at using their powers to get their way; don’t be among them.

**H. DECEITFUL WOMEN**

Whereas Eve was deceivable (point A), Sapphira was deceitful (as was Eve). In Acts 5:1-11 she and her husband postured themselves inaccurately to an on-looking world and they paid the full price for pretense, hypocrisy and fake spirituality. Don’t be a woman who makes a career out of acting.

**VI. LASTLY ABOUT GREAT WOMEN**

When it comes to the future of our country, women are way more important than men. God charges wives with the primary responsibility of raising up the next generation, and apart from nurturing a godly heritage there will be no tomorrow for America. The investments of godly woman pay the greatest dividends to society. What a high calling! Praise God for His design!