



Women's
Issues

WOMEN OF GOD

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(Proverbs 31)

She's a mystery to most. She's mind-boggling to many. She's the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31. The word translated "virtuous" is the same Hebrew word translated "able" in Exodus 18:21. This word describes someone who is capable, strong, and valiant. The end of the Proverbs passage contains the secret to this remarkable woman's success: She feared the Lord (Prov. 31:30). Her reverential awe of God motivated and guided who she was and what she did. Consequently, this beloved wife and mother represents an ideal for women of God through the ages. But she is not the only virtuous example in Scripture. There are many inspiring women who should be admired.

BIBLICAL WOMEN OF GOD

Several virtuous Old Testament women can be noted. There is Moses' sister, Miriam, a patriot and prophetess who proclaimed in song God's goodness to Israel (Ex. 15:20, 21). In Exodus 35:20-29, unnamed women worshiped God and ministered to the believing assembly with their generosity and their creative skills. Ruth learned to trust God through her relationship with a godly mother-in-law (Ruth 1:16, 17). Hannah trusted God for a child, and kept her promise to God when the boy was born (1 Sam. 1:8-28). Esther bravely did her part to save her people (Esth. 4:13-17).

In the New Testament, Mary the mother of Jesus responded with astonishing faith to the angel's declaration (Luke 1:38). The prophetess Anna spoke of Israel's Messiah to all who came to the temple (Luke 2:36-38).

Jesus Himself repeatedly shattered cultural and ceremonial expectations by His interactions with women. For example, in John 4:7-42, Jesus revealed His identity to an unnamed woman, many times married, who subsequently became the first Samaritan evangelist. Both Mary and Martha were women of God. In settling the conflict between them, Jesus must have

shocked bystanders by explicitly affirming Mary's better choice to be a disciple (Luke 10:38-42).

In the early church, women of God ministered wherever they were. Lydia, a successful businesswoman, became the first Christian convert in Europe (Acts 16:14). Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, ministered to Paul and many other believers (Acts 18:2, 24-28; Rom. 16:3-5).

BEING WOMEN OF GOD

In a culture where values and expectations appear to shift constantly, women of God need to anchor their lives in timeless truths of Scripture and the examples of the godly women (and men) of the Bible. The following are some guidelines to successful living:

Make Knowing God the Top Priority

This is not easy when a woman is busy with family and/or career as well as church and community service. Nevertheless, cultivating ever-increasing intimacy with God needs to be a lifelong priority. To really know God, as opposed to merely knowing about God, Christians must intentionally create a spiritual environment. This means God is given one's undivided attention in ways that foster an intimate and interac-

tive relationship and success in thoughts

Commit to This means systems to based on this misbeliefs often seen were most and neglected help understand reality. A can provide ability for Seek Help.

An unbalanced relationship addiction. praise of. Sometimes al worth ships. If s "fix" even if they outlines sibility to Find or E Titus 2:3

mentoring women. living an struggles ing men: fying and flow in b rience a with on godly o. needed i tural ass Maintai Reality: in their

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tive relationship. It requires times of solitude and stillness to develop inner quietness in order to hear God speak His thoughts from His Word and by His Spirit.

Commit to Knowing and Living in Truth

This means sifting through one's belief systems to retain and strengthen biblically based thinking and to discard unbiblical misbeliefs. The idea of committing to truth often seems most frightening to those who were most wounded in the past by abuse and neglect. A Christian counselor will help untangle childhood perceptions from reality. A Christ-centered support group can provide encouragement and accountability for the journey.

Seek Healthy Christian Relationships

An unbiblical overdependence on human relationships can lead to an "approval-addiction" that has the power to elevate the praise of people above the approval of God. Sometimes women draw a sense of personal worth from the quality of their relationships. If so, they are apt to believe they can "fix" every relationship with every person if they try hard enough. Romans 12:18 outlines the limits of a Christian's responsibility to live in harmony with others.

Find or Become a Godly Mentor

Titus 2:3-5 refers to a healthy model of mentoring between older and younger women. A mentor models Christ-centered living and encourages others during their struggles. For the mentor and the one being mentored, the experience is both edifying and humbling. Learning and blessing flow in both directions when people experience a purposeful and honest relationship with one another. Connection between godly older and younger women is sorely needed in churches today to offset the cultural assault upon biblical values.

Maintain Realistic Expectations

Reality-based expectations benefit women in their approach to themselves, to others,

and to God. With regard to themselves, it means that they seek increasing maturity in Christlikeness rather than perfection. This is not an apologetic for sloppy or sinful living; it is an acceptance of reality and of realistic expectations. Women do well to maintain an attitude of humility, never assuming that they have completely mastered any lesson. They must stay teachable by walking very close to the Teacher.

Having realistic expectations for others means that women can freely cultivate friendships and pour themselves into their families while remembering that even the best of people cannot meet their deepest longings. Others will disappoint them. Only God can do all things perfectly.

WOMEN OF GOD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Women of God were the last to leave the cross of Christ and the first to arrive at the tomb. Since that time, rules and roles for women have changed dramatically. Yet as the twenty-first century unfolds, one constant remains amid personal transitions and cultural upheavals: Like their biblical ancestors, women of God still worship, serve, and proclaim His goodness with their words and with their deeds.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of women's issues include:

- > Genesis 2:18-25
- > Proverbs 9:1-18; 11:16; 14:1
- > 1 Peter 3:1-6

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on women's issues at Titus 2:3-5 on page 1615. See also the personality profile of the virtuous woman on page 845.

- 5 Lest they drink and forget the law,
And pervert the justice of all the
afflicted.
- 6 Give strong drink to him who is
perishing,
And wine to those who are bitter of
heart.
- 7 Let him drink and forget his poverty,
And remember his misery no more.
- 8 Open your mouth for the speechless,
In the cause of all *who are* appointed to
die.^a
- 9 Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And plead the cause of the poor and
needy.

THE VIRTUOUS WIFE

- 10 Who^a can find a virtuous^b wife?
For her worth *is* far above rubies.
- 11 The heart of her husband safely trusts
her;
So he will have no lack of gain.
- 12 She does him good and not evil

- All the days of her life.
- 13 She seeks wool and flax,
And willingly works with her hands.
- 14 She is like the merchant ships,
She brings her food from afar.
- 15 She also rises while it is yet night,
And provides food for her household,
And a portion for her maidservants.
- 16 She considers a field and buys it;
From her profits she plants a vineyard.
- 17 She girds herself with strength,
And strengthens her arms.
- 18 She perceives that her merchandise *is*
good,
And her lamp does not go out by night.
- 19 She stretches out her hands to the
distaff,
And her hand holds the spindle.

31:8 ^aLiterally *sons of passing away*
31:10 ^aVerses 10 through 31 are an alphabetic
acrostic in Hebrew (compare Psalm 119). ^bLiterally
a wife of valor, in the sense of all forms of
excellence

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Women's Issues

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

(PROVERBS 31:10-31)

For years, women have read this portrait of the virtuous woman and sighed at the seeming impossibility of doing all that she does. If this woman represents perfection, then it's an unattainable perfection, as impossible as the touched-up perfection of the model on the magazine cover. Many women feel that they simply can never meet the ideal.

Throughout the Book of Proverbs, wisdom has been portrayed as a woman, with the pronoun "she." In this final chapter, wisdom is once again embodied—this time as a virtuous wife. These verses form an acrostic poem, meaning that each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The description of this woman, then, includes many characteristics—all noble, but not all necessary in the same woman in order for her to be considered wise, virtuous, or ideal. However, her life should challenge our steps daily. This woman is a good and devoted wife, a hard worker, a manager of wealth and of servants, a discerning consumer, and a caring mother. She reaches out to help the poor. She runs her own business. She is praised by her family.

It would be incorrect to hold up these verses as the ideal which any woman who wants to be virtuous must achieve. Instead, the picture is meant to inspire women to be faithful wives and mothers, to run their households well, to have strength of character, and to use their gifts for God's glory. This woman is virtuous because her life is ordered by her reverence for God. All Christian women can aspire to that.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about women's issues on pages 846, 847. See also the key passage note at Titus 2:3-5 on page 1615.

- 20 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.
- 22 She makes tapestry for herself;
Her clothing *is* fine linen and purple.
- 23 Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the
land.
- 24 She makes linen garments and sells
them,
And supplies sashes for the merchants.
- 25 Strength and honor *are* her clothing;
She shall rejoice in time to come.
- 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue *is* the law of
kindness.
- 27 She watches over the ways of her
household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.
- 28 Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband *also*, and he praises her:
- 29 "Many daughters have done well,
But you excel them all."
- 30 Charm *is* deceitful and beauty *is*
passing,
But a woman *who* fears the LORD, she
shall be praised.
- 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her own works praise her in the
gates.

SOUL NOTE



The Ideal Woman (31:10–31) Who was this "virtuous wife," and why all these characteristics of perfection? This picture of the ideal is meant to be a guideline, not a list of demands. While many of the characteristics focus on this woman's household duties and responsibilities, she also works outside the home and has servants and wealth to manage. Obviously, not every woman has everything in common with this one—individual lives are different. But women can learn from this woman's wise use of her blessings and abilities, her love for and helpfulness to her husband, and her positive guidance and example to her children. **Topic: Women's Issues**

to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,^a sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.^a

⁹Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things,

2:7 ^aNU-Text omits *incorruptibility*. 2:8 ^aNU-Text and M-Text read *us*.

KEY PASSAGE



Men's
Issues

GODLY EXAMPLES

(2:2)

The "older men" to whom this verse refers are not necessarily elders or leaders in the church. These are the senior members of the church community, and that stature carried a responsibility to be examples to the young Christian men. Paul identified four characteristics that older Christian men should model in the church and to the community:

- *Be sober* can mean the opposite of drunkenness, but a broader meaning describes being balanced, showing moderation and clear-headedness.
- *Be reverent* means worthy of respect, dignified, honorable.
- *Be temperate* means having self-control, monitoring one's words and actions, being sensible about how to live in a heathen society.
- *Be sound in faith, in love, in patience* reveals a soundness in life, with healthy personal faith, positive relationships, and earnest steadfastness.

Christian men, whatever their age, have the responsibility to live well before God and before others who are watching them.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about men's issues on pages 1600, 1601. See also the personality profile of Titus on page 1613.

KEY PASSAGE



Women's
Issues

MODELING

(2:3-5)

Christian older women have a responsibility to set a good example for the younger women. These older women in Paul's day had lived much of their lives before knowing Christ. They could help the younger women to avoid their mistakes by teaching about the change Christ had worked in their lives and by modeling the qualities of a godly lifestyle. Older women are to be respectable, good teachers, not gossips, and not heavy drinkers. Then they can teach Christian young women.

An important lesson for young women is that they learn to place a high priority on the family. Young women should be taught to love their husbands and children, placing those needs before their own. Christian young women, married or not, must be discreet, pure, and good. No matter what other activities fill their lives, they are responsible for their homes, and married women must submit to their husbands as the head of the household. Women honor Christ when they place Him first and follow His guidelines for living.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about women's issues on pages 846, 847. See also the personality profile of the virtuous woman on page 845.

⁶And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁷"The daughters of Zelophehad speak *what is right*; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. ⁸And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. ⁹If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. ¹⁰If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. ¹¹And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it.' " And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

JOSHUA THE NEXT LEADER OF ISRAEL

¹²Now the LORD said to Moses: "Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. ¹³And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. ¹⁴For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes." (These *are* the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)

¹⁵Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: ¹⁶"Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, ¹⁷who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

¹⁸And the LORD said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; ¹⁹set him

before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. ²⁰And you shall give *some* of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. ²¹He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation."

²²So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. ²³And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

DAILY OFFERINGS

28 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Command the children of Israel, and say to them, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.'

³"And you shall say to them, 'This *is* the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. ⁴The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, ⁵and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. ⁶*It is* a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. ⁷And its drink offering *shall be* one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to the LORD as an offering. ⁸The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering

SOUL NOTE



God Is Fair (27:1-11) Land was customarily inherited by the sons of a family. This would keep the land in the family generation after generation. When daughters married they went to another family and so were not included in the settlement of the estate. The daughters of Zelophehad, however, appealed to Moses to allow them to inherit the land because their father had died without leaving any sons. God allowed the women to inherit the land, showing His concern for them. God treated them fairly, even making an exception in the Law for them.

Topic: Women's Issues

cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ¹⁰The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. ¹¹So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

EHUD

¹²And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. ¹³Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. ¹⁴So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

¹⁵But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. ¹⁷So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) ¹⁸And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. ¹⁹But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king."

He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him.

²⁰So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for

you." So he arose from his seat. ²¹Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. ²²Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out. ²³Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

²⁴When he had gone out, Eglon's^a servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber." ²⁵So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.

²⁶But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah. ²⁷And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them. ²⁸Then he said to them, "Follow me, for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. ²⁹And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. ³⁰So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

SHAMGAR

³¹After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.

^{3:24} ^aLiterally his

SOUL NOTE



She Saved the Day (4:4-10) Deborah, who was a prophet, was also the only woman judge mentioned in Judges. Her spiritual influence and practical leadership saved Israel in a time of crisis. Barak hesitated to lead the nation into battle and would go only if Deborah accompanied him. Deborah predicted that the battle would be won at the "hand of a woman" (4:9). This woman turned out to be Jael, who killed the enemy's commander. These women were both rescuers for their nation. God uses anyone—man or woman—who trusts in Him. **Topic: Women's Issues**

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Greeks or to the church of God,³³ just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.

† † Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.

HEAD COVERINGS

²Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. ³But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head. ⁵But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. ⁶For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. ⁷For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man is not from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. ¹⁰For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head*, because of the angels.

¹¹Nevertheless, neither is man independent of

woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. ¹²For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.

¹³Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? ¹⁵But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her^a for a covering. ¹⁶But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God.

CONDUCT AT THE LORD'S SUPPER

¹⁷Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. ¹⁹For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. ²⁰Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. ²¹For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²²What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?

11:15 ^aM-Text omits *to her*.

SOUL NOTE



Assorted Scruples (10:23–33) Christian freedom does not mean that believers can live as they please. Christians have freedom *with* responsibility to live according to the guidelines found in God's Word. Some Christians make guidelines for themselves based on their own scruples. These guidelines should not be forced upon others, but believers should respect one another's guidelines. To force others to live according to our scruples is legalism; to show respect for another's scruples exhibits Christian love. **Topic: Legalism**

SOUL NOTE



R and R (11:2–6) The concern over head coverings for women was most likely a cultural need in order to keep harmony in the church in Corinth. While head coverings may not be required in many cultures today, the principles behind Paul's words are timeless. Christian women should show respect for Christian men and exhibit reverent behavior in worship. Reverence and respect are always important to maintain the church's witness to the watching world. **Topic: Women's Issues**

incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. ⁵For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

A WORD TO HUSBANDS

⁷Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

CALLED TO BLESSING

⁸Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;^a ⁹not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For

*"He who would love life
And see good days,*

*Let him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking deceit.
¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.
¹² For the eyes of the LORD are on the
righteous,
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the LORD is against those
who do evil."^a*

SUFFERING FOR RIGHT AND WRONG

¹³And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."^a ¹⁵But sanctify the Lord God^a in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷For it is better, if it is the will of

3:8 ^aNU-Text reads *humble*. 3:12 ^aPsalms 34:12-16 3:14 ^aIsaiah 8:12 3:15 ^aNU-Text reads *Christ as Lord*.

SOUL NOTE



Beautiful (3:3, 4) These words do not mean that women cannot style their hair or wear jewelry. Peter's point was that women should not let their adornment merely consist of outward trappings. Instead, Christian women should focus on developing "the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit." Christian women certainly can have flattering hairstyles, clothing, and jewelry, but they should not be obsessed with their outward appearance. Their focus should always be on Christ and on developing character that is pleasing to God. Women who develop Christlike character are truly beautiful. **Topic: Women's Issues**

SOUL NOTE



Love and Honor (3:7) Husbands should honor their wives. Both Paul and Peter wrote that wives should submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22; 1 Pet. 3:1); yet, both also wrote that husbands should love and honor their wives. A man who honors his wife will love, respect, encourage, and protect her. He will listen to her opinions, take her advice when he can, consider her needs, and encourage her gifts. When a husband treats his wife this way, she will have no fear of following the biblical instruction to be submissive to him. This paves the way for a healthy marriage and family. **Topic: Honor**