

Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY TEACHER'S PACKET

3rd - 5th Grade

Sunday Morning

Study 35

The Virtuous Woman

Proverbs 31

The Objective is the key concept for this weeks lesson. It should be the main focus of the study

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verse support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the "reward box" found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

Objective To show the children that while the world may pressure us to look a certain way, God cares about what we do, not about what we look like.

Key Verses

Proverbs 31—Main teaching Passage

Memory Verse - Proverbs 31:30

"Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised."

Hook

Review last week's memory verse, Romans 1:20.

Ask the students to name their favorite shoe brand.

Ask the students to imagine someone wearing those shoes and someone else wearing no-name, store brand shoes. Is the person wearing the brand name shoes more important to God? Does God care less about the person wearing the no-name, store brand shoes?

If God doesn't about whether we wear "cool clothes," what does God care about?

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

Proverbs 31 is the second section of the appendix to the Book of Wisdom. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first deals with the wise sayings that King Lemuel's mother taught him as a boy. He is warned to avoid the lusts of the flesh and to not succumb to passion, to beware of alcohol and its ability to dull the mind, and finally that the duty of the king is to care for all the oppressed and needy.

The second section is the famous description of the virtuous woman. You will notice that in this description there is not one physical attribute mentioned. The virtuous woman is defined by her heart and her attitude. She is diligent and hard-working, she cares for her family and for others, and she above all is devoted to the Lord.

She is praised for her hard work, her preparation, her attitude towards the needy, her faithfulness to her family and her words of wisdom and grace. All of those things, however, are secondary to what we read in verse 30, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised."

Of course while these verses are directed towards women, we can apply all of these things to men as well, especially verse 30. Verse 29 may be the goal of all believers. To stand before the Lord as an adopted child and hear, "Many have done well, but you excel them all."

The interpretation/
exegesis of the passage.
What does this passage
mean? How does this
passage apply to my
life?

LOOK

We live in a world that puts a high value on appearance. In many ways, what you look like is given more importance than who you are, or what you do. Makeup tutorials on YouTube receive millions of views, celebrities attain and lose fame based on their looks, and whole TV shows are devoted to judging who wore a dress better at an awards ceremony. There is a pressure that is placed on kids at an early age to look and act a certain way. You are supposed to wear certain clothing brands, wear certain kinds of shoes, and wear your hair a certain, "trendy" way.

You and I are judged on the way that we look every single day, but this is not how God judges us. This truth cannot be stated more forcefully: God cares about who you are and what you do, He does not judge your appearance, He judges your actions.

LOOK (Continued)

Proverbs 31 talks about a virtuous woman. Virtuous means upright, pure, good or righteous. The chapter lists 18 things that make a woman virtuous, and not one of them talks about how that person looks. The world might judge you on how you wear your hair, but the Lord judges you on whether or not you show compassion to the poor and the lonely. The world might praise you because you look good, but the Lord praises you when you love your neighbor as yourself.

Proverbs 31:30 says, “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” Beauty is passing, charm is deceitful. The way that we look changes. When you grow older your hair might turn grey, or worse, it might fall out completely. You might have to start wearing glasses, your skin changes, you start to look different. The most beautiful woman or most handsome man in the world today, will look very different in 25 years. Looks change, but the things that are done for the Lord never do.

Don’t confuse what the world wants from you with what God wants from you. God wants you to love and honor Him, He wants you to be compassionate and kind to one another, and He wants you to know His voice and to do His work. Those are the things that are important. Those are the things that make you virtuous.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

TOOK

As a class, memorize Proverbs 31:30.

Ask the class if they think that the things written in Proverbs 31 are for girls only or if the same words can be applied to the boys?

Pray: Ask the Lord to help us discern the important things. Ask Him to help us overcome the pressures that our culture puts on us, and to live and honor Him above all.

Parent Question: According to Proverbs 31, what makes a person virtuous?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Proverbs 31 by Matthew Henry

Chapter 31

This chapter is added to Solomon's proverbs, some think because it is of the same author, supposing king Lemuel to be king Solomon; others only because it is of the same nature, though left in writing by another author, called Lemuel; however it be, it is a prophecy, and therefore given by inspiration and direction of God, which Lemuel was under in the writing of it, and putting it into this form, as his mother was in dictating to him the matter of it. Here is,

I. An exhortation to Lemuel, a young prince, to take heed of the sins he would be tempted to and to do the duties of the place he was called to (v. 1-9).

II. The description of a virtuous woman, especially in the relation of a wife and the mistress of a family, which Lemuel's mother drew up, not as an encomium of herself, though, no doubt, it was her own true picture, but either as an instruction to her daughters, as the foregoing verses were to her son, or as a direction to her son in the choice of a wife; she must be chaste and modest, diligent and frugal, dutiful to her husband, careful of her family, discreet in her discourse, and in the education of her children, and, above all, conscientious in her duty to God: such a one as this, if he can find her, will make him happy (v. 10-31).

Pro 31:1-9

Most interpreters are of opinion that Lemuel is Solomon; the name signifies one that is for God, or devoted to God; and so it agrees well enough with that honourable name which, by divine appointment, was given to Solomon (2 Sa. 12:25), Jedediah-beloved of the Lord. Lemuel is supposed to be a pretty, fond, endearing name, by which his mother used to call him; and so much did he value himself upon the interest he had in his mother's affections that he was not ashamed to call himself by it. One would the rather incline to think it is Solomon that here tells us what his mother taught him because he tells us (ch. 4:4) what his father taught him. But some think (and the conjecture is not improbable) that Lemuel was a prince of some neighbouring country, whose mother was a daughter of Israel, perhaps of the house of David, and taught him these good lessons. Note,

1. It is the duty of mothers, as well as fathers, to teach their children what is good, that they may do it, and what is evil, that they may avoid it; when they are young and tender they are most under the mother's eye, and she has then an opportunity of moulding and fashioning their minds well, which she ought not to let slip.

2. Even kings must be catechised; the greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of God.

3. Those that have grown up to maturity should often call to mind, and make mention of, the good instructions they received when they were children, for their own admonition, the edification of others, and the honour of those who were the guides of their youth.

Now, in this mother's (this queen mother's) catechism, observe,

I. Her expostulation with the young prince, by which she lays hold of him, claims an interest in him, and awakens his attention to what she is about to say (v. 2): "What! my son? What shall I say to thee?' She speaks as one considering what advice to give him, and choosing out words to reason with him; so full of concern is she for his welfare! Or, What is it that thou doest? It seems to be a chiding question. She observed, when he was young, that he was too much inclined to women and wine, and therefore she found it necessary to take him to task and deal roundly with him. "What! my son? Is this the course of life thou intendest to lead? Have I taught thee no better than thus? I must reprove thee, and reprove thee sharply, and thou must take it well, for,'

1. "Thou art descended from me; thou art the son of my womb, and therefore what I say comes from the authority and affection of a parent and cannot be suspected to come from any ill-will. Thou art a piece of myself. I bore thee with sorrow, and I expect no other return for all the pains I have taken with thee, and undergone for thee, than this, Be wise and good, and then I am well paid.'

2. "Thou art devoted to my God; thou art the son of my vows, the son I prayed to God to give me and promised to give back to God, and did so' (thus Samuel was the son of Hannah's vows); "Thou art the son I have often prayed to God to give his grace to (Ps. 72:1), and shall a child of so many prayers miscarry? And shall all my hopes concerning thee be disappointed?' Our children that by baptism are dedicated to God, for whom and in whose name we covenanted with God, may well be called the children of our vows; and, as this may be made a good plea with God in our prayers for them, so it may be made a good plea with them in the instructions we give them; we may tell them they are baptized, are the children of our vows, and it is at their peril if they break those bonds in sunder which in their infancy they were solemnly brought under.

II. The caution she gives him against those two destroying sins of uncleanness and drunkenness, which, if he allowed himself in them, would certainly be his ruin.

1. Against uncleanness (v. 3): Give not thy strength unto women, unto strange women. He must not be soft and effeminate, nor spend that time in a vain conversation with the ladies which should be spent in getting knowledge and despatching business, nor employ that wit (which is the strength of the soul) in courting and complimenting them which he should employ about the affairs of his government. "Especially shun all adultery, fornication, and lasciviousness, which waste the strength of the body, and bring into it dangerous diseases. Give not thy ways, thy affections, thy conversation, to that which destroys kings, which has destroyed many, which gave such a shock to the kingdom even of David himself, in the matter of Uriah. Let the sufferings of others be thy warnings.' It lessens the honour of kings and makes them mean. Are those fit to govern others that are themselves slaves to their own lusts? It makes them unfit for business, and fills their court with the basest and worst of animals. Kings lie exposed to temptations of this kind, having wherewith both to please the humours and to bear the charges of the sin, and therefore they ought to double their guard; and, if they would preserve their people from the unclean spirit, they must themselves be patterns of purity. Meaner people may also apply it to themselves. Let none give their strength to that which destroys souls.

2. Against drunkenness, v. 4, 5. He must not drink wine or strong drink to excess; he must never sit to drink, as they used to do in the day of their king, when the princes made him sick with bottles of wine, Hos. 7:7. Whatever temptation he might be in from the excellency of the wine, or the charms of the company, he must deny himself, and be strictly sober, considering,

(1.) The indecency of drunkenness in a king. However some may call it a fashionable accomplishment and entertainment, it is not for kings, O Lemuel! it is not for kings, to allow themselves that liberty; it is a disparagement to their dignity, and profanes their crown, by confusing the head that wears it; that which for the time unmans them does for the time unking them. Shall we say, They are gods? No, they are worse than the beasts that perish. All Christians are made to our Godkings and priests, and must apply this to themselves. It is not for Christians, it is not for Christians, to drink to excess; they debase themselves if they do; it ill becomes the heirs of the kingdom and the spiritual priests, Lev. 10:9.

(2.) The ill consequences of it (v. 5): Lest they drink away their understandings and memories, drink and forget the law by which they are to govern; and so, instead of doing good with their power, do hurt with it, and pervert or alter the judgment of all the sons of affliction, and, when they should right them, wrong them, and add to their affliction. It is a sad complaint which is made of the priests and prophets (Isa. 28:7), that they have erred through wine, and through strong drink they are out of the way; and the effect is as bad in kings, who when they are drunk, or intoxicated with the love of wine, cannot but stumble in judgment. Judges must have clear heads, which those cannot have who so often make themselves giddy, and incapacitate themselves to judge of the most common things.

III. The counsel she gives him to do good.

1. He must do good with his wealth. Great men must not think that they have their abundance only that out of it they may make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it, and may the more freely indulge their own genius; no, but that with it they may relieve such as are in distress, v. 6, 7. "Thou hast wine or strong drink at command; instead of doing thyself hurt with it, do others good with it; let those have it that need it." Those that have wherewithal must not only give bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty, but they must give strong drink to him that is ready to perish through sickness or pain and wine to those that are melancholy and of heavy heart; for it was appointed to cheer and revive the spirits, and make glad the heart (as it does where there is need of it), not to burden and oppress the spirits, as it does where there is no need of it. We must deny ourselves in the gratifications of sense, that we may have to spare for the relief of the miseries of others, and be glad to see our superfluities and dainties better bestowed upon those whom they will be a real kindness to than upon ourselves whom they will be a real injury to. Let those that are ready to perish drink soberly, and it will be a means so to revive their drooping spirits that they will forget their poverty for the time and remember their misery no more, and so they will be the better able to bear it. The Jews say that upon this was grounded the practice of giving a stupifying drink to condemned prisoners when they were going to execution, as they did to our Saviour. But the scope of the place is to show that wine is a cordial, and therefore to be used for want and not for wantonness, by those only that need cordials, as Timothy, who is advised to drink a little wine, only for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities, 1 Tim. 5:23.

2. He must do good with his power, his knowledge, and interest, must administer justice with care, courage, and compassion, v. 8, 9.

(1.) He must himself take cognizance of the causes his subjects have depending in his courts, and inspect what his judges and officers do, that he may support those that do their duty, and lay those aside that neglect it or are partial.

(2.) He must, in all matters that come before him, judge righteously, and, without fear of the face of man, boldly pass sentence according to equity: Open thy mouth, which denotes the liberty of speech that princes and judges ought to use in passing sentence. Some observe that only wise men open their mouths, for fools have their mouths always open, are full of words.

(3.) He must especially look upon himself as obliged to be the patron of oppressed innocency. The inferior magistrates perhaps had not zeal and tenderness enough to plead the cause of the poor and needy; therefore the king himself must interpose, and appear as an advocate,

[1.] For those that were unjustly charged with capital crimes, as Naboth was, that were appointed to destruction, to gratify the malice either of a particular person or of a party. It is a case which it well befits a king to appear in, for the preserving of innocent blood.

[2.] For those that had actions unjustly brought against them, to defraud them of their right, because they were poor and needy, and unable to defend it, not having wherewithal to fee counsel; in such a case also kings must be advocates for the poor. Especially,

[3.] For those that were dumb, and knew not how to speak for themselves, either through weakness or fear, or being over-talked by the prosecutor or over-awed by the court. It is generous to speak for those that cannot speak for themselves, that are absent, or have not words at command, or are timorous. Our law appoints the judge to be of counsel for the prisoner.

Pro 31:10-31

This description of the virtuous woman is designed to show what wives the women should make and what wives the men should choose; it consists of twenty-two verses, each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, as some of the Psalms, which makes some think it was no part of the lesson which Lemuel's mother taught him, but a poem by itself, written by some other hand, and perhaps had been commonly repeated among the pious Jews, for the ease of which it was made alphabetical. We have the abridgment of it in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:9-10, 1 Pt. 3:1-6), where the duty prescribed to wives agrees with this description of a good wife; and with good reason is so much stress laid upon it, since it contributes as much as any one thing to the keeping up of religion in families, and the entail of it upon posterity, that the mothers be wise and good; and of what consequence it is to the wealth and outward prosperity of a house every one is sensible. He that will thrive must ask his wife leave. Here is,

I. A general enquiry after such a one (v. 10), where observe,

1. The person enquired after, and that is a virtuous woman—a woman of strength (so the word is), though the weaker vessel, yet made strong by wisdom and grace, and the fear of God: it is the same word that is used in the character of good judges (Ex. 18:21), that they are able men, men qualified for the business to which they are called, men of truth, fearing God. So it follows, A virtuous woman is a woman of spirit, who has the command of her own spirit and knows how to manage other people's, one that is pious and industrious, and a help meet for a man. In opposition to this strength, we read of the weakness of the heart of an imperious whorish woman, Eze. 16:30. A virtuous woman is a woman of resolution, who, having espoused good principles, is firm and steady to them, and will not be frightened with winds and clouds from any part of her duty.

2. The difficulty of meeting with such a one: Who can find her? This intimates that good women are very scarce, and many that seem to be so do not prove so; he that thought he had found a virtuous woman was deceived; Behold, it was Leah, and not the Rachel he expected. But he that designs to marry ought to seek diligently for such a one, to have this principally in his eye, in all his enquiries, and to take heed that he be not biassed by beauty or gaiety, wealth or parentage, dressing well or dancing well; for all these may be and yet the woman not be virtuous, and there is many a woman truly virtuous who yet is not recommended by these advantages.

3. The unspeakable worth of such a one, and the value which he that has such a wife ought to put upon her, showing it by his thankfulness to God and his kindness and respect to her, whom he must never think he can do too much for. Her price is far above rubies, and all the rich ornaments with which vain women adorn themselves. The more rare such good wives are the more they are to be valued.

II. A particular description of her and of her excellent qualifications.

1. She is very industrious to recommend herself to her husband's esteem and affection. Those that are good really will be good relatively. A good woman, if she be brought into the marriage state, will be a good wife, and make it her business to please her husband, 1 Co. 7:34. Though she is a woman of spirit herself, yet her desire is to her husband, to know his mind, that she may accommodate herself to it, and she is willing that he should rule over her.

(1.) She conducts herself so that he may repose an entire confidence in her. He trusts in her chastity, which she never gave him the least occasion to suspect or to entertain any jealousy of; she is not morose and reserved, but modest and grave, and has all the marks of virtue in her countenance and behaviour; her husband knows it, and therefore his heart doth safely trust in her; he is easy, and makes her so. He trusts in her conduct, that she will speak in all companies, and act in all affairs, with prudence and discretion, so as not to occasion him either damage or reproach. He trusts in her fidelity to his interests, and that she will never betray his counsels nor have any interest separate from that of his family. When he goes abroad, to attend the concerns of the public, he can confide in her to order all his affairs at home, as well as if he himself were there. She is a good wife that is fit to be trusted, and he is a good husband that will leave it to such a wife to manage for him.

(2.) She contributes so much to his content and satisfaction that he shall have no need of spoil; he needs not be griping and scraping abroad, as those must be whose wives are proud and wasteful at home. She manages his affairs so that he is always before-hand, has such plenty of his own that he is in no temptation to prey upon his neighbours. He thinks himself so happy in her that he envies not those who have most of the wealth of this world; he needs it not, he has enough, having such a wife. Happy the couple that have such a satisfaction as this in each other!

(3.) She makes it her constant business to do him good, and is afraid of doing any thing, even through inadvertency, that may turn to his prejudice, v. 12. She shows her love to him, not by a foolish fondness, but by prudent endearments, accommodating herself to his temper, and not crossing him, giving him good words, and not bad ones, no, not when he is out of humour, studying to make him easy, to provide what is fit for him both in health and sickness, and attending him with diligence and tenderness when any thing ails him; nor would she, no, not for the world, wilfully do any thing that might be a damage to his person, family, estate, or reputation. And this is her care all the days of her life; not at first only, or now and then, when she is in a good humour, but perpetually; and she is not weary of the good offices she does him: She does him good, not only all the days of his life, but of her own too; if she survive him, still she is doing him good in her care of his children, his estate, and good name, and all the concerns he left behind him. We read of kindness shown, not only to the living, but to the dead, Ruth 2:20.

(4.) She adds to his reputation in the world (v. 23): Her husband is known in the gates, known to have a good wife. By his wise counsels, and prudent management of affairs, it appears that he has a discreet companion in his bosom, by conversation with whom he improves himself. By his cheerful countenance and pleasant humour it appears that he has an agreeable wife at home; for many that have not have their tempers strangely soured by it. Nay, by his appearing clean and neat in his dress, every thing about him decent and handsome, yet not gaudy, one may know he has a good wife at home, that takes care of his clothes.

2. She is one that takes pains in the duty of her place and takes pleasure in it. This part of her character is much enlarged upon here.

(1.) She hates to sit still and do nothing: She eats not the bread of idleness, v. 27. Though she needs not work for her bread (she has an estate to live upon), yet she will not eat it in idleness, because she knows that we were none of us sent into this world to be idle, that when we have nothing to do the devil will soon find us something to do, and that it is not fit that those who will not labour should eat. Some eat and drink because they can find themselves nothing else to do, and needless visits must be received with fashionable entertainments; these are eating the bread of idleness, which she has no relish for, for she neither gives nor receives idle visits nor idle talk.

(2.) She is careful to fill up time, that none of that be lost. When day-light is done, she does not then think it time to lay by her work, as those are forced to do whose business lies abroad in the fields (Ps. 104:23), but her business lying within-doors, and her work worth candle-light, with that she lengthens out the day; and her candle goes not out by night, v. 18. It is a mercy to have candle-light to supply the want of day-light, and a duty, having that advantage, to improve it. We say of an elaborate piece, It smells of the lamp.

(3.) She rises early, while it is yet night (v. 15), to give her servants their breakfast, that they may be ready to go cheerfully about their work as soon as the day breaks. She is none of those who sit up playing at cards, or dancing, till midnight, till morning, and then lie in bed till noon. No; the virtuous woman loves her business better than her ease or her pleasure, is in care to be found in the way of her duty every hour of the day, and has more true satisfaction in having given meat to her household betimes in the morning than those can have in the money they have won, much more in what they have lost, who sat up all night at play. Those that have a family to take care of should not love their bed too well in a morning.

(4.) She applies herself to the business that is proper for her. It is not in a scholar's business, or statesman's business, or husbandman's business, that she employs herself, but in women's business: She seeks wool and flax, where she may have the best of each at the best hand, and cheapest; she has a stock of both by her, and every thing that is necessary to the carrying on both of the woollen and the linen manufacture (v. 13), and with this she does not only set the poor on work, which is a very good office, but does herself work, and work willingly, with her hands; she works with the counsel or delight of her hands (so the word is); she goes about it cheerfully and dexterously, lays not only her hand, but her mind to it, and goes on in it without weariness in well-doing. She lays her own hands to the spindle, or spinning-wheel, and her hands hold the distaff (v. 19), and she does not reckon it either an abridgment of her liberty or a disparagement to her dignity, or at all inconsistent with her repose. The spindle and the distaff are here mentioned as her honour, while the ornaments of the daughters of Zion are reckoned up to their reproach, Isa. 2:18, etc.

(5.) She does what she does with all her might, and does not trifle in it (v. 17); She girds her loins with strength and strengthens her arms; she does not employ herself in sitting work only, or in that which is only the nice performance of the fingers (there are works that are scarcely one remove from doing nothing); but, if there be occasion, she will go through with work that requires all the strength she has, which she will use as one that knows it is the way to have more.

3. She is one that makes what she does to turn to a good account, by her prudent management of it. She does not toil all night and catch nothing; no, she herself perceives that her merchandise is good (v. 18); she is sensible that in all her labour there is profit, and that encourages her to go on in it. She perceives that she can make things herself better and cheaper than she can buy them; she finds by observation what branch of her employment brings in the best returns, and to that she applies herself most closely.

(1.) She brings in provisions of all things necessary and convenient for her family, v. 14. No merchants' ships, no, not Solomon's navy, ever made a more advantageous return than her employments do. Do they bring in foreign commodities with the effects they export? So does she with the fruit of her labours. What her own ground does not produce she can furnish herself with, if she have occasion for it, by exchanging her own goods for it; and so she brings her food from afar. Not that she values things the more for their being far-fetched, but, if they be ever so far off, if she must have them she knows how to come by them.

(2.) She purchases lands, and enlarges the demesne of the family (v. 16): She considers a field, and buys it. She considers what an advantage it will be to the family and what a good account it will turn to, and therefore she buys it; or, rather, though she have ever so much mind to it she will not buy it till she has first considered it, whether it be worth her money, whether she can afford to take so much money out of her stock as must go to purchase it, whether the title be good, whether the ground will answer the character given of it, and whether she has money at command to pay for it. Many have undone themselves by buying without considering; but those who would make advantageous purchases must consider, and then buy. She also plants a vineyard, but it is with the fruit of her hands; she does not take up money, or run into debt, to do it, but she does it with what she can spare out of the gains of her own housewifery. Men should not lay out any thing upon superfluities, till, by the blessing of God upon their industry, they have got before-hand, and can afford it; and then the fruit of the vineyard is likely to be doubly sweet, when it is the fruit of honest industry.

(3.) She furnishes her house well and has good clothing for herself and her family (v. 22): She makes herself coverings of tapestry to hang her rooms, and she may be allowed to use them when they are of her own making. Her own clothing is rich and fine: it is silk and purple, according to her place and rank. Though she is not so vain as to spend much time in dressing herself, nor makes the putting on of apparel her adorning, nor values herself upon it, yet she has rich clothes and puts them on well. The senator's robes which her husband wears are of her own spinning, and they look better and wear better than any that are bought. She also gets good warm clothing for her children, and her servants' liveries. She needs not fear the cold of the most pinching winter, for she and her family are well provided with clothes, sufficient to keep out cold, which is the end chiefly to be aimed at in clothing: All her household are clothed in scarlet, strong cloth and fit for winter, and yet rich and making a good appearance. They are all double clothed (so some read it), have change of raiment, a winter suit and a summer suit.

(4.) She trades abroad. She makes more than she and her household have occasion for; and therefore, when she has sufficiently stocked her family, she sells fine linen and girdles to the merchants (v. 24), who carry them to Tyre, the mart of the nations, or some other trading city. Those families are likely to thrive that sell more than they buy; as it is well with the kingdom when abundance of its home manufactures are exported. It is no disgrace to those of the best quality to sell what they can spare, nor to deal in trade and send ventures by sea.

(5.) She lays up for hereafter: She shall rejoice in time to come, having laid in a good stock for her family, and having good portions for her children. Those that take pains when they are in their prime will have the pleasure and joy of it when they are old, both in reflecting upon it and in reaping the benefit of it.

4. She takes care of her family and all the affairs of it, gives meat to her household (v. 15), to every one his portion of meat in due season, so that none of her servants have reason to complain of being kept short or faring hard. She gives also a portion (an allotment of work, as well as meat) to her maidens; they shall all of them know their business and have their task. She looks well to the ways of her household (v. 27); she inspects the manners of all her servants, that she may check what is amiss among them, and oblige them all to behave properly and do their duty to God and one another, as well as to her; as Job, who put away iniquity far from his tabernacle, and David, who would suffer no wicked thing in his house. She does not intermeddle in the concerns of other people's houses; she thinks it enough for her to look well to her own.

5. She is charitable to the poor, v. 20. She is as intent upon giving as she is upon getting; she often serves the poor with her own hand, and she does it freely, cheerfully, and very liberally, with an out-stretched hand. Nor does she relieve her poor neighbours only, and those that are nigh at hand, but she reaches forth her hands to the needy that are at a distance, seeking opportunities to do good and to communicate, which is as good housewifery as any thing she does.

6. She is discreet and obliging in all her discourse, not talkative, censorious, nor peevish, as some are, that know how to take pains; no, she opens her mouth with wisdom; when she does speak, it is with a great deal of prudence and very much to the purpose; you may perceive by every word she says how much she governs herself by the rules of wisdom. She not only takes prudent measures herself, but gives prudent advice to others; and this not as assuming the authority of a dictator, but with the affection of a friend and an obliging air: In her tongue is the law of kindness; all she says is under the government of that law. The law of love and kindness is written in the heart, but it shows itself in the tongue; if we are kindly affectioned one to another, it will appear by affectionate expression. It is called a law of kindness, because it gives law to others, to all she converses with. Her wisdom and kindness together put a commanding power into all she says; they command respect, they command compliance. How forcible are right words! In her tongue is the law of grace, or mercy (so some read it), understanding it of the word and law of God, which she delights to talk of among her children and servants. She is full of pious religious discourse, and manages it prudently, which shows how full her heart is of another world even when her hands are most busy about this world.

7. That which completes and crowns her character is that she fears the Lord, v. 30. With all those good qualities she lacks not that one thing needful; she is truly pious, and, in all she does, is guided and governed by principles of conscience and a regard to God; this is that which is here preferred far before beauty; that is vain and deceitful; all that are wise and good account it so, and value neither themselves nor others on it. Beauty recommends none to God, nor is it any certain indication of wisdom and goodness, but it has deceived many a man who has made his choice of a wife by it. There may be an impure deformed soul lodged in a comely and beautiful body; nay, many have been exposed by their beauty to such temptations as have been the ruin of their virtue, their honour, and their precious souls. It is a fading thing at the best, and therefore vain and deceitful. A fit of sickness will stain and sully it in a little time; a thousand accidents may blast this flower in its prime; old age will certainly wither it and death and the grave consume it. But the fear of God reigning in the heart is the beauty of the soul; it recommends those that have it to the favour of God, and is, in his sight, of great price; it will last for ever, and bid defiance to death itself, which consumes the beauty of the body, but consummates the beauty of the soul.

III. The happiness of this virtuous woman.

1. She has the comfort and satisfaction of her virtue in her own mind (v. 25): Strength and honour are her clothing, in which she wraps herself, that is, enjoys herself, and in which she appears to the world, and so recommends herself. She enjoys a firmness and constancy of mind, has spirit to bear up under the many crosses and disappointments which even the wise and virtuous must expect to meet with in this world; and this is her clothing, for defence as well as decency. She deals honourably with all, and she has the pleasure of doing so, and shall rejoice in time to come; she shall reflect upon it with comfort, when she comes to be old, that she was not idle or useless when she was young. In the day of death it will be a pleasure to her to think that she has lived to some good purpose. Nay, she shall rejoice in an eternity to come; she shall be recompensed for her goodness with fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

2. She is a great blessing to her relations, v. 28.

(1.) Her children grow up in her place, and they call her blessed. They give her their good word, they are themselves a commendation to her, and they are ready to give great commendations of her; they pray for her, and bless God that they had such a good mother. It is a debt which they owe her, a part of that honour which the fifth commandment requires to be paid to father and mother; and it is a double honour that is due to a good father and a good mother.

(2.) Her husband thinks himself so happy in her that he takes all occasions to speak well of her, as one of the best of women. It is no indecency at all, but a laudable instance of conjugal love, for husbands and wives to give one another their due praises.

3. She gets the good word of all her neighbours, as Ruth did, whom all the city of her people knew to be a virtuous woman, Ruth 3:11. Virtue will have its praise, Phil. 4:8. A woman that fears the Lord, shall have praise of God (Rom. 2:29) and of men too. It is here shown,

(1.) That she shall be highly praised (v. 29): Many have done virtuously. Virtuous women, it seems, are precious jewels, but not such rare jewels as was represented v. 10. There have been many, but such a one as this cannot be paralleled. Who can find her equal? She excels them all. Note, Those that are good should aim and covet to excel in virtue. Many daughters, in their father's house, and in the single state, have done virtuously, but a good wife, if she be virtuous, excels them all, and does more good in her place than they can do in theirs. Or, as some explain it, A man cannot have his house so well kept by good daughters, as by a good wife.

(2.) That she shall be incontestably praised, without contradiction, v. 31. Some are praised above what is their due, but those that praise her do but give her of the fruit of her hands; they give her that which she has dearly earned and which is justly due to her; she is wronged if she have it not. Note, Those ought to be praised the fruit of whose hands is praiseworthy. The tree is known by its fruits, and therefore, if the fruit be good, the tree must have our good word. If her children be dutiful and respectful to her, and conduct themselves as they ought, they then give her the fruit of her hands; she reaps the benefit of all the care she has taken of them, and thinks herself well paid. Children must thus study to requite their parents, and this is showing piety at home, 1 Tim. 5:4. But, if men be unjust, the thing will speak itself, her own works will praise her in the gates, openly before all the people.

[1.] She leaves it to her own works to praise her, and does not court the applause of men. Those are none of the truly virtuous women that love to hear themselves commended.

[2.] Her own works will praise her; if her relations and neighbours altogether hold their peace, her good works will proclaim her praise. The widows gave the best encomium of Dorcas when they showed the coats and garments she had made for the poor, Acts 9:39.

[3.] The least that can be expected from her neighbours is that they should let her own works praise her, and do nothing to hinder them. Those that do that which is good, let them have praise of the same (Rom. 13:3) and let us not enviously say, or do, any thing to the diminishing of it, but be provoked by it to a holy emulation. Let none have an ill report from us, that have a good report even of the truth itself. Thus is shut up this looking-glass for ladies, which they are desired to open and dress themselves by; and, if they do so, their adorning will be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.