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## VIRTUOUS WOMANHOOD

#196

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## CHRISTIANITY'S INFLUENCE ON THE CONDITION OF WOMEN

**John Angell James (1785-1859)**

*"There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"—Galatians 3:28.*

**WOMAN WAS THE FINISHING GRACE OF THE CREATION.** Woman was the completeness of man's bliss in Paradise. Woman was the cause of sin and death to our world. The world was redeemed by the Seed of the woman. Woman is the mother of the human race. She is either our companion, counselor, and comforter in the pilgrimage of life; or she is our tempter, scourge, and destroyer. Our sweetest cup of earthly happiness or our bitterest draught of sorrow is mixed and administered by her hand. She not only renders smooth or rough our path to the grave, but helps or hinders our progress to immortality. In heaven we shall bless God for her aid in assisting us to reach that blissful state; or amidst the torments of unutterable woe in another region, we shall deplore the fatality of her influence...

My subject is religion; my object is the soul; my aim is salvation. I view you, my female friends, as destined for another world; and it is my business to aid and stimulate you by patient continuance in well-doing to seek for glory, honor, and immortality and to obtain eternal life. I look beyond the painted and gaudy scene of earth's fading vanities to the everlasting ages through which you must exist in torment or bliss; and, God helping me, it shall not be my fault if you do not live in comfort, die in peace, and inherit salvation.

**OUR FIRST ATTENTION MUST BE DIRECTED, OF COURSE, TO THE CONDITION OF THE SEX BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF CHRISTENDOM....** In some countries, [woman is] not even allowed the rank of a moral and responsible agent; so tenderly alive to her own degradation that she acquiesces<sup>1</sup> in the murder of her female offspring; immured<sup>2</sup> from infancy; without education; married without her consent; in a multitude of instances sold by her parents; refused the confidence of her husband and banished from his table; on his death, doomed to the funeral pyre or to contempt that renders life a burden.... Sometimes worshipped as a goddess, next fondled as a toy, then punished as a victim, she could never attain to dignity, and even with all her brightest charms could rarely appear but as a doll or a puppet.

**LET US NOW CONSIDER WHAT THERE IS IN CHRISTIANITY THAT TENDS TO ELEVATE AND IMPROVE THE CONDITION OF WOMAN....** From Christianity woman has derived her moral and social influence, yea, almost her very existence as a social being. The mind of woman, which many of the philosophers, legislators, and sages<sup>3</sup> of antiquity doomed to inferiority and imbecility, Christianity has developed. The Gospel of Christ in the Person of its divine Founder has descended into this neglected mine, which even wise men had regarded as not worth working, and brought up many a priceless gem, flashing with the light of intelligence and glowing with the lovely hues of Christian graces. Christianity has been the restorer of woman's plundered rights and has furnished the brightest jewels in her present crown of honor. Her previous degradation accounts, in part at least, for the instability of early civilization. It is impossible for society to be permanently elevated where woman is debased and servile.<sup>4</sup> Wherever females are regarded as inferior beings, society contains within itself the elements of dissolution and the obstruction of all solid improvement. It is impossible that institutions and usages, which oppose and stifle the instincts of our nature and violate the revealed Law of God, can be crowned with ultimate success. Society may change in its external aspect; it may exhibit the glitter of wealth, the refinements of taste, the embellishments of art, or the more valuable attainments of science and literature. But if the mind of woman remains undeveloped, her tastes uncultivated, and her person enslaved, the social foundations are insecure and the cement of society is weak. Wherever Christianity is understood and felt, woman is free. The Gospel, like a kind angel, opens her prison doors and bids her walk abroad and enjoy the sunlight of reason and breathe the invigorating air of intellectual freedom. And in proportion as pure Christianity prevails, this will be ever found to be the case... Christianity elevates the condition of woman by its genius<sup>5</sup> as a system of universal equity and benevolence. When it descended from heaven to earth, it was heralded into our world by the angel's song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luk 2:14). The offspring of infinite love, it partakes of the spirit and reflects the character of its divine Parent. It is essentially and unalterably the enemy of all injustice, cruelty, and oppression, and the friend of all that is just, kind, and courteous. The rough, the brutal, and the ferocious are alien to its spirit, while the tender, the gentle, and the courteous are entirely in unison with its nature. It frowns with indignant countenance upon tyranny, whether in the palace or the parlor, while it is the friend of liberty and the patron of right. The man who understands its genius and lives under its inspiration, whether he is a monarch, a master, a husband, or a father, must be a man of equity and love. Christianity inspires the purest chivalry,<sup>6</sup> a chivalry shorn of vanity, purified from passion, elevated above frivolity; a chivalry of which the animating principle is love to God, and the scene of its operation the domestic circle and not the public pageant. He who is unjust or unkind to anyone, especially to the weaker sex, betrays a total ignorance of or a manifest repugnance to the practical influence of the Gospel of Christ...

**The personal conduct of our Lord during His sojourn upon earth tended to exalt the female sex to a consideration before unknown.** Follow Him through the whole of His earthly career, and mark the attention that He most condescendingly paid to and as condescendingly received from the female sex. He admitted them to His presence, conversed familiarly with them, and accepted the tokens of their gratitude, affection, and devotedness. See Him accompanying His mother to the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee. See Him conversing with the woman of Samaria, instructing her ignorance, enduring her petulance,<sup>7</sup> correcting her mistakes, awakening her conscience, converting her soul, and afterwards employing her as a messenger of mercy and salvation to her

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<sup>1</sup> **acquiesces** – consents or complies passively or without protest.

<sup>2</sup> **immured** – shut off; excluded.

<sup>3</sup> **sages** – men of profound wisdom; wise men.

<sup>4</sup> **debased and servile** – lowered in value and thought of as slaves.

<sup>5</sup> **genius** – distinctive character and tendency.

<sup>6</sup> **chivalry** – brave, honorable, courteous character, especially towards women.

<sup>7</sup> **petulance** – rudeness.

neighbors...[Christ's] treatment of woman raised her from her degradation without exalting her above her level. He rescued her from oppression without exciting her vanity and invested her with dignity without giving her occasion for pride. While He allowed her not only to come into His presence, but to minister to His comfort; and while He conciliated<sup>8</sup> her grateful and reverent affection, He inspired her with awe. And thus, He taught man how to behave toward woman and what return woman was to make to man.

**The conduct of Jesus Christ towards the female sex was one of the most attractive excellences of His beautiful character, though perhaps it is one of the least noticed.** To Him they must ever point not only as the Savior of their souls, but as the Advocate of their rights and the Guardian of their peace....The actual abolition of polygamy by Christianity is a vast improvement in the condition of woman. Wherever polygamy prevails, the female sex must ever be in a state of degradation and misery. Experience has abundantly and painfully proved that polygamy debases and brutalizes both the body and the soul....Here, then, is the glorious excellence of Christianity: it revived and re-established the original institution of marriage and restored to woman her fortune, her person, her rank, and her happiness, all of which she had been cheated by polygamy. It thus raised the female sex to the elevation to which they were destined by their wise and beneficent Creator...the springs of national prosperity rise from beneath the family hearth, and the domestic constitution is the mold where national character is cast. And that mold must of necessity take its form from the unity, sanctity, and inviolability of marriage.

**The jealousy with which Christianity guards the sanctity of the marriage tie must ever be regarded as having a most favorable influence upon the condition of woman.** Let this be relaxed or impaired, and that moment, woman sinks in dignity, in purity, and in happiness. There have been nations in which the facility of divorce took the place of polygamy and of course was accompanied with some of its vices and many of its miseries too....With what devout and reverential gratitude should she then turn to that divine Teacher, Who has interposed His authority to strengthen the marriage bond and to guard it from being severed at the demand of illicit passion or the dictates of temperament or caprice. How should she rejoice to hear Him say, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Mat 19:9)...

**I may surely mention the equal participation in religious blessing to which women are admitted by the Christian religion.** How explicitly and how firmly has the Apostle claimed for women all the blessings obtained by Christ for the human race when he says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). There is the charter granting to woman all the blessings of salvation...There is not a blessing necessary to eternal life which she does not receive in the same measure and in the same manner as the other sex....Christianity places the wife by the side of the husband, the daughter by the side of the father, the sister by the side of the brother, and the maid by the side of the mistress at the altar of the family, in the meeting of the church, at the table of the Lord, and in the congregation of the sanctuary...Male and female meet together at the cross and will meet in the realms of glory. Can anything more effectually tend to raise and sustain the condition of woman than this? God in all His ordinances, Christ in His glorious undertaking, and the Holy Spirit in His gracious work gave woman her proper place in the world by giving her a proper place in the church. It is for her with peculiar emphasis to say, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us...hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4, 6).

**But the finishing stroke which Christianity gives in elevating the condition of women is by inviting and employing their energies and influence in promoting the spread of religion in the world, and by thus carrying out, through them as well as men, the great purposes of God in the redemption of the world by the mission of His Son....**Christianity has thus carried out its genius and its precepts in the actual elevation of the female character wherever it has gone....In every view that we can take of Christianity, whether we contemplate it in its aspects towards another world or towards this one, in its relations to God or society, in its sublime doctrines or its pure morality, we see a form of inimitable beauty sufficient to captivate every heart but that which is petrified by false philosophy, avowed infidelity, or gross immorality. But never does it appear more lovely than in its relation to woman. With what equity does it hold the balance between the sexes! With what kindness does it throw its shield over the weaker vessel! With what wisdom does it sustain the rank and claims of those whose influence is so

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<sup>8</sup> conciliated – gained.

important to society, and yet so limit their claims that they shall not be carried to such a length as to defeat their end!...Woman's virtue, dignity, honor, and happiness are nowhere safe but under the protection of the Word of God. The Bible is the aegis<sup>9</sup> of the female sex. Beneath this protection they are secure in their rights, their dignity, and their peace. It is their vine and fig tree, under which, in calm repose, they may enjoy the shade and relish the fruit. It protects their purity from taint and their peace from disturbance....Woman! Regard your Savior for the next world as your Emancipator for this present one. Love the Bible as the charter of your liberty and the guardian of your bliss. And consider the church of Christ as your asylum from the wrongs of oppression and the arts of seduction.

From *Female Piety* reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

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**John Angell James (1785-1859):** English Congregationalist preacher and author; preached and wrote to common people of every age group and station in life; held in high esteem, yet a humble and unpretentious man, who said, "My design is to aid the Christian in the practice of Scriptural truth." Author of *Female Piety, A Help to Domestic Happiness, An Earnest Ministry*, and many others.

## WOMAN'S MISSION

**John Angell James (1785-1859)**

*"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him"—  
Genesis 2:18.*

**WOMAN, AS SUCH, HAS HER MISSION.** What is it? What is precisely the rank she is to occupy? What is the purpose she is to fulfill, above which she would be unduly exalted and below which she would be unjustly degraded? This is a subject which should be thoroughly understood in order that she may know what to claim, and man what to concede; that she may know what she has to do, and that he may know what he has a right to expect.

I shall endeavor to answer this question and point out the nature of woman's mission. In doing this, I shall consult the infallible oracle<sup>10</sup> of Scripture and not the speculations of moralists, economists, and philosophers. I hold this to be our rule in the matter before us: God is the Creator of both sexes, the Constructor of society, the Author of social relations, and the Arbiter<sup>11</sup> of social duties, claims, and immunities. And this is admitted by all who believe in the authority of the Bible. You are content, my female friends, to abide by the decisions of this oracle. You have every reason to be so. He Who created you is best qualified to declare the intention of His own acts, and you may safely, as you should humbly, [trust] Him to fix your position and make known your duties. In common with man, woman has a heavenly calling to glorify God as the end of her existence and to perform all the duties and enjoy all the blessings of a religious life. Like man, she is a sinful, rational, and immortal creature, placed under an economy of mercy, and called by repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Religion is as much her vocation as that of the other sex. In Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female, but all are on a level as to obligations, duties, and privileges...

**To know what [woman's mission] is, we must, as I have said, consult the pages of revelation and ascertain the declared motive of God for her creation.** "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen 2:18). This is further expressed, or rather repeated, where it is said, "And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (Gen 2:20). Nothing can be more clear from this than that woman was made for man. Adam was created as a being with undeveloped social propensities,<sup>12</sup> which indeed seem essential to all

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<sup>9</sup> **aegis** – shield; defensive armor; impregnable defense.

<sup>10</sup> **oracle** – divine revelation.

<sup>11</sup> **arbiter** – one who has power to decide or ordain according to his own absolute pleasure.

<sup>12</sup> **propensities** – a tendency to demonstrate particular behavior.

creatures. It is the sublime peculiarity of deity to be entirely independent of all other beings for happiness. He, and He only, is the theater of His own glory, the fountain of His own felicity,<sup>13</sup> and a sufficient object of His own contemplation, needing nothing for His bliss but self-communion. An archangel alone in heaven would pine, even there, for some companionship, either divine or angelic.

Adam, surrounded by all the glories of Paradise and by all the various tribes it contained, found himself alone and needing companionship. Without it, his life was but a solitude, Eden itself a desert. Endowed with a nature too communicative to be satisfied from himself alone, he sighed for society, for support, for some complement to his existence, and only half-lived so long as he lived alone. Formed to think, to speak, to love, his thoughts yearned for other thoughts with which to compare and exercise his soaring aspirations. His words were wearisomely wasted upon the wanton air, or at best awoke but an echo, which mocked instead of answering him. His love, as regards an earthly object, knew not where to bestow itself and, returning to his own bosom, threatened to degenerate into a desolating egotism. His entire being longed, in short, for another self, but that other self did not exist; there was no help meet for him. The visible creatures that surrounded him were too much beneath him, and the invisible Being Who gave him life was too much above him to unite their condition with His own. Whereupon God made woman, and the great problem was immediately solved.

It was then the characteristic of unfallen man to want someone to sympathize with him in his joys, as it is of fallen man to want someone to sympathize with him in his sorrows. Whether Adam was so far conscious of his wants as to ask for a companion we are not informed. It would appear from the inspired record as if the design of this precious boon originated with God, and as if Eve, like so many of His other mercies, was the spontaneous bestowment of His own free will. Thus, Adam would have to say, as did one of his most illustrious descendants many ages afterwards, “For thou preventest<sup>14</sup> him with the blessings of goodness” (Psa 21:3).

**Here, then, is the design of God in creating woman: to be a suitable helpmate to man.** Man needed a companion, and God gave him woman. And as there was no other man than Adam at that time in existence, Eve was designed exclusively for Adam’s comfort. This teaches us from the beginning that whatever mission woman may have to accomplish in reference to man, in a generic sense, her mission, at least in wedded life, is to be a suitable helpmate for that one man to whom she is united. It was declared from the beginning that every other tie, though not severed by marriage, shall be rendered subordinate, and a man shall “leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

**If woman’s mission in Paradise was to be man’s companion and joy, such must be the case still.** Her vocation<sup>15</sup> has not been changed by the Fall. By that catastrophe, man needs still more urgently a companion, and God has rendered this mission of hers still more explicit by the declaration, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen 3:16). It has been often shown that by being taken from himself, she was equal to man in nature, while the very part of the body from which she was abstracted indicated the position she was intended to occupy. She was not taken from the head, to show she was not to rule over him; nor from his foot, to teach that she was not to be his slave; nor from his hand, to show that she was not to be his tool; but from his side, to show that she was to be his companion. There may perhaps be more of ingenuity and fancy in this than of God’s original design; but if a mere conceit,<sup>16</sup> it is at once both pardonable and instructive.

That woman was intended to occupy a position of subordination and dependence is clear from every part of the Word of God. This is declared in language already quoted: “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” This referred not only to Eve personally, but to Eve representatively. It was the divine law of the relation of the sexes, then promulgated for all time. The preceding language placed woman, as a punishment for her sin, in a state of sorrow; this placed her in a state of subjection. Her husband was to be the center of her earthly desires and to a certain extent the regulator of them also; and she was to be in subjection to him....Man was made to show forth God’s glory and praise, to be in subordination to Him and only to Him; woman was created to be, in addition to this, the glory of man by being in subordination to him, as his help and his ornament. She was not only made out of him, but for him. All her loveliness, comeliness, and purity are not only the expressions of her excellence, but of his honor and dignity, since all were not only derived from him, but made for him.

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<sup>13</sup> **felicity** – intense happiness; bliss.

<sup>14</sup> **preventest** – went before and met; welcomed.

<sup>15</sup> **vocation** – the action on the part of God of calling a person to exercise a special function.

<sup>16</sup> **conceit** – personal opinion.

This then is woman's true position; and if anything more need be said to prove it from the records of Christianity, we may refer to Apostolic language in other places, where wives are enjoined to "be subject to their husbands in all things, even as the church is subject to Christ" (Eph 5:24). Nor is the Apostle Paul alone in this, for Peter writes in the same strain. Let woman then bow to this authority and not feel herself degraded by such submission. It has been said that in domestic life, man shines as the sun, but woman as the moon with a splendor borrowed from the man. It may be said with greater truth and propriety and less invidiously<sup>17</sup> that man shines as the primary planet reflecting the glory of God, Who is the center of the moral universe. And woman, while she equally derives her splendor from the central Luminary<sup>18</sup> and is governed by His attraction, is yet the satellite of man, revolves around him, follows him in his course, and ministers to him.

**Behold, then, I say again, woman's position and mission is summed up in love and subjection to her husband.** Everything connected with the relationship of man and woman has, however, since the Fall, a more serious character. Her love has become more anxious; her humility more profound. Bashful of her own defects and anxious to reinstate herself in her husband's heart, woman lives to repair the wrong she has inflicted on man and lavishes upon him consolations, which may sweeten the present bitterness of sin, and warnings, which may preserve from the future bitterness of hell.

Woman, then, whatever relation she may bear to society at large, whatever duties in consequence of this relation she may have to discharge, and whatever benefits by the right discharge of these duties she may have in her power to confer upon the community, must consider herself chiefly called to advance the comfort of man in his private relations. [She will] promote her own peace by promoting his; and *to receive from him all that respect, protection, and ever assiduous affection to which her equal nature, her companionship, and her devotedness give her so just a claim.* She is, in wedded life, to be his constant companion, in whose society he is to find one who meets him hand to hand, eye to eye, lip to lip, and heart to heart; to whom he can unburden the secrets of a heart pressed down with care or wrung with anguish; whose presence shall be to him better than all society; whose voice shall be his sweetest music, whose smiles his brightest sunshine; from whom he shall go forth with regret, and to whose converse he shall return with willing feet when the toils of the day are over; who shall walk near his loving heart, and feel the throbbing of affection as her arm leans on his and presses on his side. In his hours of retired conversation, he shall tell her all the secrets of his heart, find in her all the capabilities and all the promptings of the most tender and endeared fellowship, and in her gentle smiles and unrestrained speech enjoy all to be expected in one who was given by God to be his associate and friend.

In that companionship, which woman was designed to afford to man, must of course be included the sympathetic offices of the comforter. It is her role, in their hours of retirement, to console and cheer him; when he is injured or insulted, to heal the wounds of his troubled spirit; when he is burdened by care, to lighten his load by sharing it; when he is groaning with anguish, to calm by her peace-speaking words the tumult of his heart and to act in all his sorrows the part of a ministering angel.

**Nor should she be backward to offer, nor he backward to receive, the counsels of wisdom which her prudence will suggest,** even though she may not be intimately acquainted with all the entanglements of this world's business. Woman's advice, had it been asked for and acted upon, would have saved thousands of men from bankruptcy and ruin. Few men have ever had to regret their taking counsel from a prudent wife, while multitudes have had to reproach themselves for their folly in not asking, and multitudes more for not following, the counsels of such a companion.

**If, then, this is woman's mission according to the representation of her Almighty Creator, to be the suitable helpmate of that man to whom she has given herself as the companion of his pilgrimage upon earth, it of course supposes that marriage, contracted with a due regard to prudence and under all proper regulations, is the natural state of both man and woman.** And so, I affirm, in truth it is. Providence has willed it and nature prompts it. But as the exceptions are so numerous, is there no mission for those to whom the exception appertains? Is it married women only who have a mission and an important one? *Certainly not.* In these cases, I fall back upon woman's mission to society at large. And is not this momentous? Has it not been admitted in all ages and by all countries that the influence of female character upon social virtue and happiness, and upon national strength and

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<sup>17</sup> **invidiously** – likely to cause resentment.

<sup>18</sup> **Luminary** – a natural light-giving body, i.e., the sun; metaphorically here of God.

prosperity, is prodigious,<sup>19</sup> whether for good or for evil?...Every woman, whether rich or poor, married or single, has a circle of influence within which, according to her character, she is exerting a certain amount of power for good or harm. Every woman by her virtue or her vice, by her wisdom or her folly, by her dignity or her levity<sup>20</sup> is adding something to our national elevation or degradation. As long as female virtue is prevalent, upheld by one sex and respected by the other, a nation cannot sink very low in the scale of ignominy<sup>21</sup> by plunging into the depths of vice.

**To a certain extent, woman is the conservator of her nation's welfare.** Her virtue, if firm and uncorrupted, will stand sentinel over that of the empire. Law, justice, liberty, and the arts all contribute, of course, to the well-being of a nation; beneficial influence flows in from various springs, and innumerable contributors may be at work, each laboring in his vocation for his country's weal.<sup>22</sup> But let the general tone of female morals be low, and all will be rendered nugatory,<sup>23</sup> while on the other hand, the universal prevalence of womanly intelligence and virtue will swell the stream of civilization to its highest level, impregnate it with its richest qualities and spread its fertility over the widest surface. *A community is not likely to be overthrown where woman fulfills her mission, for by the power of her noble heart over the hearts of others she will raise it from its ruins and restore it again to prosperity and joy.* Here then, beyond the circle of wedded life as well as within it, is no doubt part of woman's mission, and an important one it is. Her field is social life, her object is social happiness, her reward is social gratitude and respect.

If I am right as to the nature of woman's mission, I cannot err as to the proper sphere of it. If she was created for man, and not only for the race of man, but for one man, then the easy and necessary inference is that home is the proper scene of woman's action and influence. There are few terms in the language around which cluster so many blissful associations as that delight of every...heart, the word "home." The Elysium<sup>24</sup> of love, the nursery of virtue, the garden of enjoyment, the temple of concord,<sup>25</sup> the circle of all tender relationships, the playground of childhood, the dwelling of manhood, the retreat of age; where health loves to enjoy its pleasures, wealth revels in its luxuries, and poverty bears its rigors; where sickness can best endure its pains and dissolving nature expire; which throws its spell over those who are within its charmed circle and even sends its attractions across oceans and continents, drawing to itself the thoughts and wishes of the man who wanders from it to the antipodes<sup>26</sup>—this home, sweet home is the sphere of wedded woman's mission.

From *Female Piety* reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

## A VIRTUOUS WOMAN DESCRIBED

Charles Bridges (1794-1869)

*Proverbs 31:10-31*

**SO RARE IS THIS TREASURE THAT THE CHALLENGE IS GIVEN:** *who can find a virtuous woman?* (Cp. Pro 20:6). Abraham sent to a distant land for this inestimable blessing for his beloved son (Gen 24:3, 4). Perhaps one reason of the rarity of the gift is that it is so seldom sought. Too often is the search made for accomplishments, not for virtues; for external and adventitious<sup>27</sup> recommendations, rather than for internal godly worth.

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<sup>19</sup> **prodigious** – impressively great in size or power; enormous.

<sup>20</sup> **levity** – undignified behavior.

<sup>21</sup> **ignominy** – dishonor; disgrace; shame.

<sup>22</sup> **weal** – well-being; prosperity.

<sup>23</sup> **nugatory** – worthless; of no value or importance.

<sup>24</sup> **Elysium** – a place or state of ideal happiness.

<sup>25</sup> **concord** – harmony; agreement between persons.

<sup>26</sup> **antipodes** – places on the surface of the earth directly opposite to each other.

<sup>27</sup> **adventitious** – from outside.

The enquiry also implies the value of the gift when found. Even Adam's portion in innocence was not complete, until his bountiful Father made "an help meet"<sup>28</sup> for him" (Gen 2:18). Truly, her price is above rubies. No treasure is comparable to her...

**Verses 11-12: the price of the virtuous woman has been told; her different features will now be given.** The first lines of the portrait describe her character as a wife. Her fidelity, oneness of heart, and affectionate dutifulness make the heart of her husband *safely to trust in her*. He feels his comfort to be regarded, his burdens relieved, and his mind exempted from many teasing vexations.<sup>29</sup> He is at ease in constrained absence from home, having left his interests safe in her keeping, while he is sure that his return will be welcomed with the gladdening smile. A faithful wife and a confiding husband thus mutually bless each other. With such a jewel for his wife, the husband has no misgivings.<sup>30</sup> His home is the home of his heart. He needs not to look into the matters entrusted to her with suspicious eye. He has no reserves or jealousies. Ruling in this sphere without, he encourages her to rule in her sphere within. All is conducted with such prudence and economy that he has *no need of spoil*,<sup>31</sup> no temptation to unjust gain, *no need* to leave his happy home in order to enrich himself with the soldier's *spoils*. The attachment of such a wife is as lasting as the time of their union—constant—consistent. Instead of abusing confidence, she only seeks to make herself daily more worthy of it, not fretful and uncertain, caring "how she may please her husband" (1Co 7:34), *doing him good, and not evil, all the days of her life*. Would that it were always so! But look at Eve—the help-meet becoming a tempter; Solomon's wives drawing away his heart; Jezebel stirring up her husband to abominable wickedness; Job's wife calling upon her husband to "curse God, and die" (Job 2:9); the painful cross of "the brawling woman" (Pro 21:9; 25:24)—this is a fearful contrast—*evil, not good*. Often again is it a mixture of *evil with the good*....But in this picture it is *good, and not evil*.

**Her husband's comfort is her interest and her rest.** To live for him is her highest happiness. Even if her minute attentions to this object are not always noticed, yet never will she harbor the suspicion of indifference or unkindness; nor will she return fancied neglect with sullenness,<sup>32</sup> or by affected or morbid sensibility<sup>33</sup> force on a feverish interchange of expression,<sup>34</sup> which has little substantial foundation.

This course of disinterested regard<sup>35</sup> and devoted affection, when conducted on Christian principles, commends most graciously the holy and honorable estate of matrimony. If it implies subjection, it involves no degradation. Indeed no greater glory could be desired than that which is given to it, that it should illustrate "the great mystery"—"Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32), the identity of interest between them: her trials His; His cause hers.

**Verses 13-27: this lovely character is drawn according to the usage of ancient times, though the general principles are of universal application.** It describes not only the wife of a man of rank, but a wise, useful, and godly matron in her domestic responsibilities. It is "a woman professing godliness," adorned "with good works" (1Ti 2:10); a Mary no less than a Martha....One thing, however, is most remarkable. The standard of godliness here exhibited is not that of a religious recluse,<sup>36</sup> shut up from active obligations under the pretence of greater sanctity and consecration to God. Here are none of those habits of monastic asceticism<sup>37</sup> that are now extolled as the highest point of Christian perfection. One-half at least of the picture of the virtuous woman is occupied with her personal and domestic industry. What a rebuke also does this convey to a self-indulgent inactivity!...

**But let us look more minutely into the features of the portrait drawn before us.** Her personal habits are full of energy. Manual labor, even menial<sup>38</sup> service, in olden times was the employment of females in the highest ranks. Self-denial is here a main principle. *The virtuous woman* goes before her servants in diligence, no less than in dignity, imposing nothing upon them, which she had not first bound upon herself, ruling her household most efficiently by the government of herself. Thus, *she seeks* out her materials for work. Her needle is at the service of

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<sup>28</sup> **help meet** – Eve was an "help," who was *meet* or suitable for Adam.

<sup>29</sup> **teasing vexations** – annoying irritations or distresses.

<sup>30</sup> **misgivings** – feelings of mistrust or loss of confidence.

<sup>31</sup> **spoil** – goods, property, territory seized by force, often taken from an enemy during war.

<sup>32</sup> **fancied...sullenness** – acting moody or gloomy because of imagined neglect.

<sup>33</sup> **affected...sensibility** – unreasonable suspicion.

<sup>34</sup> **feverish...expression** – excited, agitated reaction; overreaction.

<sup>35</sup> **disinterested regard** – unselfish care or concern.

<sup>36</sup> **religious recluse** – one secluded or shut off from society for religious reasons.

<sup>37</sup> **asceticism** – extreme self-denial characteristic of monks or nuns in monasteries.

<sup>38</sup> **menial** – work that requires little skill or training; work of a household servant.



her family. Instead of a suppressed murmur at some inconvenient demand, she sets the pattern of working *willingly with her hands*. Instead of loitering<sup>39</sup> herself, while they were laboring, she counts it no shame to be employed at the *spindle and distaff*.<sup>40</sup> She is early and late at her work, *rising in the night*. The fruit of her work she turns to good account. She exchanges it in commerce for *food brought from far*. Her *merchandise* is good in quality—*tapestry, fine linen, and girdles delivered to the merchant*. Her whole soul is in her work—*girding her loins with strength and strengthening her arms*—ready to do any work befitting her sex and station. The land has also her due share of attention. Ever careful for her husband's interests, *she considers* the value of a *field*; and, if it be a good purchase, she *buys* it and *plants the vineyard* for the best produce.

**We now again observe her conduct as a mistress.** And here also her praise is not that she spends her time in devotional exercises (though these, as “a woman that feareth the Lord” (v. 30), she duly prizes); but that according to the Scriptural canon, “she guides her house” (1Ti 5:14), watching carefully over her charge, distributing both her meat<sup>41</sup> and her work in due proportion and “in due season.” This is her responsibility. If a “man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening” (Psa 104:23), the woman finds her work as “a keeper<sup>42</sup> at home” (Tit 2:5). And beautiful indeed is it to see, how by her industry, self-denial, and heartiness she “buildeth her house” (Pro 14:1). *She rises while it is yet night*, not for the sake of being admired and talked of, but to *give meat to her household*. The delicacy also, with which she preserves her own sphere, is remarkable....*So well does she look to the ways of her household*, such untiring energy does she show in every department, that none can accuse her of *eating the bread of idleness*. In her household, order is the principle of her rule....Nor is her provident<sup>43</sup> care limited to her own dependants. Her *spindle and distaff* are worked, not for herself only, or for her household, but for *the poor and needy*. And, having first drawn out her soul (Isa 58:10), *she stretcheth out her hands* (Deu 15:7, 8), to embrace those at a distance from her with the flow of her love; and thus “the blessing of those that were ready to perish cometh upon her” (Job 29:13; Act 9:39). Her spirit and manner also are of the same character, all in full accordance with her professions...the godly matron has not only the law of love in her heart, but *wisdom in her mouth and in her tongue the law of kindness*. The same love that binds her heart governs her tongue....Thus indeed “a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband” (Pro 12:4). *He is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land*, as blessed with no common treasures of happiness; as indebted perhaps for his promotion to the wealth acquired by her management at home, and, it may be, for the preservation and establishment of his virtue, to the encouragement furnished by her example and conversation.<sup>44</sup> For herself—manifest and manifold blessings rest upon her. *Strength is the clothing of her inner man*. Christian courage and resolution lift her up above appalling difficulties. *The clothing of honor* stamps her with the Lord's acceptance, as His faithful servant, the child of His grace, and the heir of His glory...

**Verses 28-31: the virtuous woman is obviously subserving<sup>45</sup> her own interest.** For what greater earthly happiness could she know than *her children's* reverence and her husband's *blessing*? We may picture to ourselves her condition—crowned with years, her children grown up, perhaps themselves surrounded with families and endeavoring to train them as [they] had been trained. Their mother is constantly before their eyes. Her tender guidance, her wise counsels, her loving discipline, her holy example, are vividly kept in remembrance. They cease not to *call her blessed* and to bless the Lord for her as His invaluable gift. No less warmly does *her husband praise her*. His attachment to her was grounded, not on the *deceitful and vain charms of beauty*, but on *the fear of the Lord*. She is therefore in his eyes to the end, the stay of his declining years, the soother of his cares, the counselor of his perplexities, the comforter of his sorrows, the sunshine of his earthly joys (Ecclus<sup>46</sup> 36:23, 24). Both children and husband combine in the grateful acknowledgment—*many daughters have done virtuously; but thou excellest them all*.

But why, it may be asked, do external recommendations form no part of this portrait? All that is described is solid excellence; and *favor is deceitful*. A graceful form and mien<sup>47</sup> often end in disappointment, more bitter than words can tell. Often do they furnish a cover for the vilest corruptions. And then *beauty*—what a fading *vanity* it is!

<sup>39</sup> **loitering** – wasting one's time in idleness.

<sup>40</sup> **distaff** – a rod on which a fiber, such as wool or flax, is wound for spinning by hand.

<sup>41</sup> **meat** – food in general.

<sup>42</sup> **keeper** – one who stays at home and oversees the house; homemaker.

<sup>43</sup> **provident** – foresight of and making provision for the future; frugal; economical.

<sup>44</sup> **conversation** – manner of conduct; behavior.

<sup>45</sup> **subserving** – furthering; promoting.

<sup>46</sup> **Ecclesiasticus** – also known as *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* or simply *Sirach*. Bridges is here quoting from the *Apocrypha*, a collection of books, which Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy consider canonical. Though the *Apocrypha* was included as a separate collection between the OT and NT in the original version of the 1611 KJV, neither the Jews nor the Protestant churches believed that the apocryphal writings were inspired, infallible Scripture.

<sup>47</sup> **mien** – expression; appearance.

One fit of sickness sweeps it away (Psa 39:11). Sorrow and care wither its charms. And even while it remains, it is little connected with happiness. It proves itself the fruitful occasion of trouble, the source of many hurtful temptations and snares; and without substantial principle, to a well-judging mind it becomes an object of disgust rather than of attraction (Pro 11:22).

The portrait, here penciled by divine inspiration, begins with the touch of a virtuous woman and fills up the sketch with the lineaments<sup>48</sup> of *a woman that feareth the Lord* (31:10, 30). For the lovely features described—her fidelity to her husband, her active personal habits, her good management and diligence in her family, her consideration for the necessities and comforts of others, her watchfulness of conduct, her tenderness for the poor and afflicted, her kind and courteous behavior to all—this completeness of character and grace could only flow from that virtue which is identified with vital godliness. They are the good fruit that prove the tree to be good (Mat 7:17). They are such fruit, flowing from a right principle, as the natural corrupt stock of man could never produce.

**How valuable also is this picture as a directory for the marriage choice.** Let *virtue*, not beauty, be the primary object. Set against the *vanity of beauty* the true happiness, [which is] connected with *a woman that feareth the Lord*. Here is the solid basis of happiness. “If,” says Bp. Beveridge—“I choose her for her *beauty*, I shall love her no longer than while that continues; and then farewell at once both duty and delight. But if I love her for her virtues; then, though all other sandy foundations fail, yet will my happiness remain entire”...“Thus, and once more,” says Matthew Henry, “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 honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

From *Proverbs* reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust.

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**Charles Bridges (1794-1869):** a leader of the Evangelical party in the Church of England. Best known for *The Christian Ministry*, *Proverbs*, and *Psalm 119*.

## CHRIST’S CALL TO YOUNG WOMEN

Thomas Vincent (1634-1678)

*“Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him”—Psalm 45:10-11.*

**THIS PSALM IS CALLED A SONG OF LOVES**, the most high, pure, and spiritual, the most dear, sweet, and delightful loves, namely those loves which are between Christ the Beloved and His Church, which is His spouse. Here is set forth, first, the Lord Jesus Christ in His majesty, power, and divinity, His truth, meekness, and equity; and then the spouse is set forth in regard of her ornaments, companions, attendants, and posterity. And both are set forth in regard of their loveliness and beauty. After a description is given of Christ, an invitation is made to His espousals,<sup>49</sup> and that of the children of men, called by the name of “daughter.” Therefore, it is particularly applicable unto the daughters of men, yet not so as excluding the sons of men as any more than when God speaks unto the sons of men He excludes the daughters. I shall now speak unto the words, and from hence observe this doctrine, as comprehensive as I can make it...

**1. Christ espouses and betroths people unto Himself in this world.** The public solemnization of the marriage is reserved until the last day when His spouse shall be brought to Him in white robes and raiment of perfect righteousness, more rich and curious than any needlework. The marriage feast will be held in His Father’s house in heaven, where they shall be received into the nearest and closest embraces of His love. The espousal between them and the marriage knot is tied here.

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<sup>48</sup> **lineaments** – distinctive features or characteristics.

<sup>49</sup> **espousals** – the promise to enter into marriage.

2. **Christ invites all the children of men, and particularly the daughters of men, to be His spouse.** This is that which they are invited to in the text. It is upon this account that Christ sends His ministers to be His ambassadors, to whom He gives commission in His name to call the children of men unto this most near and sweet relationship. They represent His person and are to invite and woo in His name so that people would come and join themselves unto Him. The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians how successful His embassy<sup>50</sup> was among them in 2 Corinthians 11:2: “I have espoused you unto one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ.” And when any ministers are instrumental in the conversion of any, they espouse them to Christ. In conversion, sinners are divorced from sin and are married unto the Lord Jesus...

Does the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory, [call] all the children of men, and particularly the daughters of men, to be His spouse? And is He so greatly desirous of the beauty of such as are joined to Him? This, then, should put all of you upon inquiry whether you are espoused unto Jesus Christ. You have been called hereunto; have you hearkened?...If you are espoused unto Christ, then:

1. **You are disjoined<sup>51</sup> from sin.** Is the cursed league broken which naturally exists between sin and your hearts? Before you are espoused to Christ, you are, as it were, espoused and married to sin. Sin is your husband, and you are tied in its bonds. Sin inhabits you and dwells in the embraces of your dearest love and delight. You care for the things of sin, how you may please your flesh and gratify your inordinate<sup>52</sup> desires. And while this Husband and Beloved of your hearts lives, you are not at liberty to be espoused and married to Jesus Christ. Sin lives in the affections while it possesses the most prevailing, liking affections; and as long as you are knit and linked to sin, examine whether or not sin has yet received its death wounds in your hearts; whether the false mask of sin has ever been plucked off, and the odiousness of it has ever been made manifest to you; whether your hearts have been brought to a loathing and detesting of it; whether sin has been killed in your affections, and the knot loosened which has tied your hearts to it. Do you indeed hate sin with the greatest and most implacable hatred? Is sin mortified and subdued as to its reigning power? If sin is dead, you are at liberty to be espoused, and it is a good sign that you are espoused to Jesus Christ.

2. **If you are espoused unto Christ, then you have been drawn to Him by the Spirit.** “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). You have had external calls of the Word to come unto Christ; have you been called effectually, and drawn powerfully, irresistibly, and yet most sweetly by the Spirit unto Jesus Christ? Have you had a discovery by the Spirit not only of your necessity of and lost estate without an interest in Christ, but also of His beauty and transcendent loveliness, His excellency and great willingness to entertain<sup>53</sup> you in this relationship? And have you been moved and drawn hereby unto Him?

3. **If you are espoused unto Christ, then you have laid hold on Him by faith.** The Spirit draws unto Christ by working the grace of faith and enabling persons to believe in Him. By faith Christ is received. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). By believing on Christ’s name, people receive Christ in this relationship. Faith is the hand of the soul which lays hold of Christ; and by this joining of the hand with Christ, the knot is tied and the soul is united to Christ in the relationship of a spouse. Have you this grace of faith wrought in you with power? Have you received and applied Christ to yourselves? Have you received Him upon His own terms? And do you by faith draw quickening and strengthening influences from Him?

4. **If you are espoused unto Christ, then you embrace Him in the arms of your dearest love; then you love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and you love Him with the supremacy of your love.** If you love father or mother, houses or lands, riches or honors, delights or pleasures, or anything in the world more than Christ, you have no true love to Christ. Be sure that you are not espoused to Him, if that is the case. But if Christ is chiefly loved, it is an evidence that you are joined in this relationship to Him.

5. **If you are espoused unto Christ, you have acquaintance and converse<sup>54</sup> with Christ, and you like His company best.** You highly value and diligently attend upon all those ordinances which are the means of bringing you and Christ together. This is the great thing you desire and seek after in hearing and prayer and the Table of the Lord:

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<sup>50</sup> **embassy** – the mission of being sent as an official messenger.

<sup>51</sup> **disjoined** – separated; parted from.

<sup>52</sup> **inordinate** – exceeding reasonable limits; excessive.

<sup>53</sup> **entertain** – to receive.

<sup>54</sup> **converse** – spiritual communion.

that you may have a sight of your Beloved and a taste of His love and more intimate communion with Him. And is acquaintance begun with Christ and further intimacy desired by you? Are pure and powerful ordinances of great esteem with you? Do you give all diligence to wait upon and look for your Beloved in them?

**6. If you are espoused to Christ, then you endeavor to promote His interest and advance His name in the world.** While others seek their own things, you seek the things of Jesus Christ and look upon them as your own. When others labor chiefly to lift themselves up in the esteem of men, you labor above all to lift up Christ in men's esteem. You are commending your Beloved above all others and endeavor to bring others to love Him and into the same relationship with Him.

**EXHORTATION:** you who are not as yet espoused unto Christ, I shall direct my speech unto you, and that to both men and women, but particularly to you *who are young women*, whom I am especially called now to preach to....Come, virgins, will you give me leave to be a suitor<sup>55</sup> unto you, not in my own name, but in the name of my Lord? May I prevail with you for your affections and persuade you to give them unto Christ? May I be instrumental to join you and Christ together this day? Do not be coy, as some of you possibly are in other loves. Modesty and the virgin blush may very well become you when motions of another kind are made to you; but here coyness is folly, and backwardness to accept this motion is a shame. And you have ten thousand times more reason to blush at your refusal of Christ as your Beloved than at the acceptance, when otherwise the devil and sin would ravish your virgin affections. Never did you have a better motion made to you....Consider Who the Lord Jesus is, to Whom you are invited to espouse yourselves. He is the best husband; none is comparable to Jesus Christ.

**1. Do you desire one who is great?** He is of the highest dignity; none ever did or could climb into so high a feat or attain to such excellent majesty as that to which Christ is exalted. He is exalted above all the kings of the earth. "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev 19:16). Yea, He is exalted above the angels of heaven, and none have such authority: "Who is gone into heaven; angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto Him" (1Pe 3:22). He is the Firstborn of every creature, by Whom and for Whom all things were created. "He is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col 1:17-18). "Who being the brightness of his [Father's] glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3). He is the glory of heaven, the darling of eternity, admired by angels, dreaded by devils, and adored by saints. If the meanest<sup>56</sup> beggar should be matched unto the greatest earthly prince who ever lived, it would not be such an advancement unto her as for you to be espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory, Whose honor and dignity you will partake of in and by this relationship.

**2. Do you desire one who is rich?** None is comparable unto Christ, Who is the Heir of all things (Heb 1:2), in Whom all the fullness dwells (Col 1:19). Not only the fullness of the earth belongs to Him (Psa 24:1), but also the fullness of heaven is at His disposal, all things being given and delivered unto Him by the Father (Joh 3:35; Mat 11:26). The riches of grace and the riches of glory are at His disposal. In Him are hidden all treasures (Col 2:3). The Apostle speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8). The riches of Christ are unsearchable in regard to their worth; they are inestimable; the value of them is past finding out. And they are unsearchable in regard to the abundance of them. They are inexhaustible; none can draw Christ's fountain dry. None can search and find out the bottom of Christ's treasury. If you are espoused unto Christ, you shall share in His unsearchable riches; you shall receive of His fullness grace for grace here and glory for glory hereafter. And He will make all needful provisions for your outward man while your abode is here in this world.

**3. Do you desire one who is wise?** There is none comparable unto Christ for wisdom. His knowledge is infinite and His wisdom corresponds....Christ is not only wise, but wisdom (Mat 11:19). He is the wisdom of God (1Co 1:24). Christ is infinitely wise in Himself, and He is the spring of all true, spiritual, and heavenly wisdom, which is derived unto any of the children of men. "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). If you are espoused unto Christ, He will guide and counsel you and make you wise unto salvation.

**4. Do you desire one who is potent,<sup>57</sup> who may defend you against your enemies and against any kind of injuries and abuses?** There is none equal to Christ in power. Others have some power, but Christ has *all* power (Mat 28:18).

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<sup>55</sup> **suitor** – one who seeks a woman in marriage.

<sup>56</sup> **meanest** – lowliest; poorest.

<sup>57</sup> **potent** – possessed of great power.

Others may be potent, but Christ is omnipotent. Others have power, but Christ is power, the power of God (1Co 1:24). And if you are espoused to Christ, His infinite power is engaged in your defense against your enemies. He will subdue your iniquities (Mic 7:19) by that power whereby He is able to subdue all things (Phi 3:21). He will bruise Satan under your feet (Rom 16:20). He will keep you from the evil of the world (Joh 17:15). He will make you more than conquerors over all your spiritual enemies, who, without His help, would not only abuse and injure you, but also ruin and destroy you (Rom 8:37).

**5. Do you desire one who is good?** There is none like Christ in this regard. Others may have some goodness, but it is imperfect. Christ's goodness is complete and perfect. He is full of goodness, and in Him dwells no evil. He is good and He does good; and if you are espoused unto Christ, however bad you are by nature, He will make you in some measure good like Himself.

**6. Do you desire one who is beautiful?** Christ is fairer than the children of men (Psa 45:2). He is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand (Song 5:10). His mouth is most sweet, yea, He is altogether lovely (Song 5:16). His eyes are most sparkling. His looks and glances of love are most ravishing. His smiles are most delightful and refreshing unto the soul. Christ is the most lovely and amiable person of all others in the world. None are so accomplished in all regards as He is accomplished; and therefore He is most desirable in this relationship. However unlovely you are in yourselves, however deformed and defiled by sin, yet if you are espoused unto Christ, He will put His comeliness<sup>58</sup> upon you. He will wash you from your defilements in a bath made of His own blood and beautify you with His own image, and so you shall become exceedingly fair. And as you may have leave to delight yourselves in Christ's beauty, so He will greatly desire and delight in yours...

**7. Do you desire one who can love you?** None can love you like Christ. His love is incomparable, and His love is incomprehensible. His love passes all other loves, and it passes knowledge too (Eph 3:19). His love is first, without any beginning. His love is free, without any motive. His love is great, without any measure. His love is constant, without any change. And His love is everlasting, without any end.

It was the love of Christ which brought Him down from heaven, which veiled His divinity in a human soul and body, which put upon Him the form of a servant, which exposed Him to contempt, reproach, and many indignities. It was love which made Him subject to hunger, thirst, sorrow, and many human infirmities, which humbled Him unto death, even the painful and ignominious death of the cross. And when out of love He had finished the work of redemption on earth, as to what was needful by way of satisfaction, it was His love which carried Him back to heaven where He was before, so that He might make application of what He had purchased; that there He might make intercession for those whom He had redeemed and prepare a place for them, even glorious mansions with Himself in the house not made with hands, which is eternal in the heavens. It is out of love that He sends such tokens to His people from heaven to earth, which He conveys through His ordinances by His Spirit unto them. And His love tokens are infinitely beyond all other love tokens in worth and excellence. Sure, then, none is so desirable as the Lord Jesus Christ for you to espouse yourselves unto. If you are espoused to Christ, He is yours—all that He is and all that He has. You shall have His heart and share in the choicest expressions of His dearest love.

And now put all these things together. The Lord Jesus Christ, being incomparable in dignity, in riches, in wisdom, in power, in goodness, in loveliness, and in love, I think you should need no other motive to persuade you to willingness to espouse yourselves to Him.

From "Christ the Best Husband" in *The Good Work Begun* reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

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**Thomas Vincent (1634-1678):** English Puritan preacher; beloved and respected author of *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture, True Christian's Love for the Unseen Christ* and others.

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<sup>58</sup> **comeliness** – pleasing and wholesome appearance; attractiveness.

# GRACE FOR A WIFE'S SUBMISSION

William Gouge (1575-1653)

*“Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject to their husbands in every thing”—Ephesians 5:22-24.*

**FOUR GRACES NEEDFUL TO SEASON A WIFE'S SUBJECTION:** this general conclusion might be applied to the *matter* of subjection as well as to the *manner*. For the Church acknowledges Christ her superior, fears Him inwardly, reverenceth Him outwardly, obeys Him also both by forbearing to do what He forbids, and also by doing what He commands...there are four virtues which are especially needful hereunto, whereby the Church seasons her subjection to Christ and wives also may and must season their subjection to their husbands...

**I. Humility is that grace that keeps one from thinking highly of himself above that which is meet**<sup>59</sup>...if humility be placed in a wife's heart, it will make her think better of her husband than of herself, and so make her the more willing to yield all subjection unto him. The Apostle requires it of all Christians as a general sauce to season all other duties (Phi 2:3; Eph 4:2). But after a peculiar<sup>60</sup> manner is it needful for inferiors:<sup>61</sup> most of all for wives because there are many prerogatives<sup>62</sup> appertaining to their place, which may soon make them think they ought not to be subject, unless they be humbly minded. That the Church does herewith season her subjection is clear by the book of *Song of Solomon*, where often she acknowledges her own meanness<sup>63</sup> and the excellency of her spouse. Therefore, as the Church is humbly subject to Christ, so let wives be to their husbands.

*Contrary is pride, which puffeth up wives and makes them think there is no reason they should be subject to husbands.* They can rule themselves well enough, yea, and rule their husbands too, as well as their husbands rule them! [There is] no more pestilent<sup>64</sup> vice for an inferior than this. It is the cause of all rebellion, disobedience, and disloyalty: “Only by pride cometh contention” (Pro 13:10).

**II. Sincerity is that grace that makes one to be within, even in truth, what without he appears to be in show.** This is that singleness of heart, which is expressly required of servants and may be applied to wives, for indeed it appertains to all sorts (Eph 6:5). Because it is only discerned by the Lord, Who is the searcher of all hearts (Act 1:24), it will move a wife to have an eye to Him in all she does and to endeavor to approve herself to Him above all...Though there were no other motive in the world to move her to subjection, yet for conscience sake to Christ, she should yield it. Saint Peter testifies of holy women, that they trusted in God and were subject to their husbands (1Pe 3:5). [This implies] that their conscience to God made them be subject to their husbands. Was not Sarah's subjection seasoned with sincerity, when within herself, in her heart she called her husband “Lord” (Gen 18:12)?

Great reason there is that wives should in sincerity subject themselves: 1. *In their subjection even to their husbands, they have to do with Christ, in whose room their husbands stand.* Though their husbands, who are but men, see only the face and outward behavior, yet Christ sees their heart and inward disposition. Though their husbands see only the things which they do before their faces and can hear only of such things as are done before others, yet Christ sees and knows the things that are done in the most secret places that can be, when no creature beside themselves is privy thereunto. Now let it be granted that in their outward carriage they give very good contentment unto their husbands and please them every way, yet if sincerity have been wanting, with what face can they appear before Christ? He will take another manner account of them. Before Christ, all their outward complement will stand them in no stead at all.

2. *Herein lies a main difference between true, Christian, religious wives and mere natural women.* [Natural women] may be subject on by-respects,<sup>65</sup> as namely, that their husbands may the more love them or live the more quietly and peaceably with them; or that they may the more readily obtain what they desire at their husbands' hands; or for

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<sup>59</sup> meet – fit; appropriate.

<sup>60</sup> peculiar – particular; special.

<sup>61</sup> inferiors – in our day *inferior* is used primarily in the sense of “low quality”; however, Gouge's sense is *position*: “lower in rank, not quality or nature; subordinate.” For example, a private is inferior to a sergeant in rank, but equally human by nature.

<sup>62</sup> prerogatives – exclusive rights or privileges.

<sup>63</sup> meanness – humility; lowliness.

<sup>64</sup> pestilent – morally, socially, or politically harmful.

<sup>65</sup> on by-respects – with an ulterior motive.

fear of their husbands' displeasure and wrath, knowing him to be an angry, furious man. So as otherwise it might be worse with them, they might [lack] many needful things or carry away many sore blows if they were not subject.

But [Christian women] have respect to Christ's ordinance, whereby their husbands are made their head, and to His Word and will, whereby they are commanded subjection. Thus, holy women subjected themselves (1Pe 3:5). They cannot be holy that do not thus subject themselves: for this is a sweet perfume that sends forth a good savor into Christ's nostrils and makes the things we do pleasant and acceptable to Him.

3. *The benefit of this virtue being planted in a wife's heart is very great, and that both to her husband and to herself.* To her *husband*, it will make her manifest her respect of him before others, behind his back, as well as before himself in his presence. And [it] will make her faithful to him and careful to do his will wheresoever he be—with her or from her. To *herself*, in that it will minister inward sweet comfort unto her, though her husband should take no notice of her subjection or misinterpret it or ill require it. For she might say as Hezekiah did, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight" (Isa 38:3)...

*Contrary to sincerity is dissimulation<sup>66</sup> and mere outward, complemental subjection,<sup>67</sup> when a wife does even despise her husband in her heart as Michal did David (2Sa 6:16) and yet carry a fair face before him....* Though such a wife should perform all the duties named before, yet would those all be nothing to God, if they were done with a double heart and not in singleness of heart...

**III. Cheerfulness is more apparent than sincerity and makes subjection the more pleasing not only to God, but also to man, who by the effects thereof may easily discern it.** For God, as He does Himself all things willingly and cheerfully, so He expects that His children should therein follow Him, and thereby show themselves His children. God loveth a cheerful giver (2Co 9:7), not only a cheerful giver of alms, but of all duty to God and man.

For men, it makes them also much better accept any duty when they observe it to be done cheerfully. This did even ravish David with joy, to see his people offer their gifts willingly unto the Lord (1Ch 29:9). When an husband sees his wife willingly and cheerfully perform her duty, it cannot but raise up love in him. This cheerfulness is manifested by a ready, quick, and speedy performance of her duty. Sarah's readiness to obey shows that what she did, she did willingly. That thus the Church subjects herself to Christ is evident by that which David says, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Psa 110:3). Therefore, as the Church is cheerfully subject unto Christ, so let wives be to their husbands.

*Contrary to this cheerfulness is the sullen disposition of some wives, who will indeed be subject to their husbands and obey, but with such a lowering<sup>68</sup> and sour countenance, with such pouting and muttering, as they grieve their husbands more in the manner, than they can be pleased with the thing itself that they do.* Herein they show themselves like to a cursed cow, which having given a fair sop<sup>69</sup> of milk, casts all down with her heel....Such subjection is in truth no subjection. It can be neither acceptable to God, nor profitable to their husbands, nor comfortable<sup>70</sup> to their own souls.

**IV. Constancy is a virtue which makes all the rest perfect and sets the crown upon them, without which they are all nothing.** This is in those who, after they have begun well, continue to do well unto the end and thereby reap the fruit of all. It has respect both to continuance without intermission and to perseverance without revolting and giving clean over.<sup>71</sup> So as it is not enough to be subject by starts and fits<sup>72</sup>—one while yielding all good obedience, another while stout<sup>73</sup> and rebellious—neither is it sufficient in former times to have been a good wife and after prove bad. But there must be daily proceeding and holding on from time to time, so long as husband and wife live together. This grace was in her of whom it is said, "She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Pro 31:12). Such were all the holy wives commended in Scripture....This grace does the Church add to all her other virtues, she in all parts of her subjection remains constant and faithful unto the death, whereby it comes to pass that at length she receives the reward of her holy obedience, which is full and perfect communion and fellowship with her spouse Christ Jesus in

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<sup>66</sup> **dissimulation** – concealment of one's true feelings or intentions; hypocrisy.

<sup>67</sup> **complemental subjection** – a false submission in which a woman pays compliments to her husband but does not submit in her heart.

<sup>68</sup> **lowering** – frowning; scowling; angry-looking.

<sup>69</sup> **fair sop** – abundant quantity.

<sup>70</sup> **comfortable** – encouraging; strengthening.

<sup>71</sup> **revolting...clean over** – rebelling and entirely giving up.

<sup>72</sup> **starts and fits** – in intervals; starting and stopping.

<sup>73</sup> **stout** – obstinate; stubborn.

heaven. In regard of her unmovable constancy, it is said, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mat 16:18). Therefore, as the Church is constantly subject unto Christ, so let wives be to their husbands.

**OF THE EXTENT OF A WIFE’S OBEDIENCE:** the extent of a wife’s subjection is set down under these general terms “in every thing,” which are not so generally to be taken as if they admitted no restraint or limitation. For then would they contradict such cautions as these: “in the fear of the Lord,” “as to the Lord,” “in the Lord” (Eph 5:21-22; Col 3:18). For man is so corrupt by nature and of so perverse a disposition, that often he wills and commands that which is contrary to God’s will and commandment: which when he does, that Christian principle laid down as a ruled case by the Apostle must take place, we ought rather to obey God than men (Act 5:29)...From that extent, I gather these two conclusions: 1. *A wife must labor to bring her judgment and will to her husband’s.* 2. *Though in her judgment she cannot think that most meet which her husband requires, yet she must yield to it in practice.* In the former of these, I say not simply that a wife is bound to bring her judgment to the bent of her husband’s. For he may be deceived in his judgment, and she may see his error; and then unless her understanding should be blinded, she cannot conceive that to be true which he judges so....This submission even of her judgment respects not only things necessary, for which her husband has an express determinate warrant out of the Scripture, but also things doubtful and indifferent. For even so far does this clause “in every thing” extend. The subjection of a wife respects not her practice only, but her judgment and opinion also, which if she can bring to the lawfulness and meetness<sup>74</sup> of that which her husband requires, she will much more cheerfully perform it...

*Contrary is the presumption of such wives as think themselves wiser than their husbands and able better to judge matters than they can.* I deny not but that a wife may have more understanding than her husband: for some men are very ignorant and blockish.<sup>75</sup> And on the other side, some women [are] well-instructed, who thereby have attained to a great measure of knowledge and discretion. But many, though they have husbands of sufficient and good understanding—wise and discrete men—yet think that that which they have once conceived to be a truth, must needs be so. And such is their peremptoriness,<sup>76</sup> that they will not be brought to think that they may err. [They] say they will never be brought to think otherwise than they do, though all the husbands in the world should be of another opinion....The latter conclusion concerning a wife’s yielding in practice to that which her husband requires, though she cannot bring her judgment to think as he does about the meetness of it, has respect to indifferent things, namely, to such as are neither in their particulars commanded, nor forbidden by God: as the outward affairs of the house, ordering it, disposing goods, entertaining guests, etc.

**QUESTION:** may she not reason with her husband about such matters as she thinks unmeet and labor to persuade her husband not to persist in the pressing thereof, yea, endeavor to bring her husband to see the unmeetness (as she thinks) of that which she sees?

**ANSWER:** with modesty, humility, and reverence she may so do; and he ought to hearken unto her, as the husband of the Shunammite did (2Ki 4:23-24). If notwithstanding all that she can say, he persist in his resolution and will have it done, she must yield....If her husband command her to do that which God has expressly forbidden, then ought she by no means to yield unto it. If she do, it may rather be termed a joint conspiracy of husband and wife together against God’s will—as Saint Peter said to Sapphira, the wife of Ananias, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” (Act 5:9)—than subjection to the image of God in her husband.

Secondly, her yielding in indifferent things tends much to the peace of the family, as subjects yielding to their magistrates in such cases makes much to the peace of the commonwealth. For in differences and dissensions one side must yield or else great mischief is like to follow...

**OF THE REASONS TO MOVE WIVES TO DO THEIR DUTIES:** the main ground of all the reasons which the Apostle here intimates is taken from the place wherein God has set an husband, which is first by consequence implied in these words *as to the Lord*. Then more plainly and directly expressed in these: *the husband is the head of the wife*....Upon an husband’s resemblance unto Christ, he infers that a wife should have a resemblance unto the Church, and so concludes, “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.”

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<sup>74</sup> **meetness** – appropriateness; suitability.

<sup>75</sup> **blockish** – senseless, like a block; extremely dull; stupid.

<sup>76</sup> **peremptoriness** – the character of not allowing contradiction; dogmatic; obstinate.



**REASON 1:** the place wherein God has set an husband as it serves to direct a wife in the manner of her subjection, whereof I have spoken before, so also it serves to move a wife to yield such subjection as is required, which will evidently appear by these two conclusions following from thence: 1. *A wife by subjecting herself to her husband therein is subject unto Christ.* 2. *A wife by refusing to be subject unto her husband, therein refuses to be subject unto Christ.* That these two conclusions are rightly and justly gathered from the forenamed ground I prove by like conclusions, which the Holy Ghost infers upon the like ground. It is evident that Christ Jesus, even incarnate and made flesh, was in the room and stead of His Father, whereupon Christ said to Philip that desired to see the Father, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Now mark what Christ thence infers both on the one side, “He that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (Mat 10:40); and on the other side, “He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23). It is also evident that ministers of the Gospel stand in the room and stead of Christ, for thus says the Apostle of himself and other ministers: “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead” (2Co 5:20).... To apply this reason, I hope such wives as live under the Gospel have so much religion and piety in them as to acknowledge, it becomes them well to be subject unto the Lord Christ Jesus. Here then learn one especial and principal part of subjection unto Christ, which is to be subject unto your husbands. Thus shall you show yourselves to be the wives of the Lord Christ, as the Apostle says of obedient servants, they are the servants of God (1Pe 2:16).

Again I hope none are so void of all religion and piety as to refuse to be subject unto Christ: here then take notice, that if willfully ye refuse to be subject to your husbands, ye willfully refuse to be subject to Christ. Fitly on this ground may I apply that to wives, which the Apostle speaks of subjects: whosoever resisteth the power and authority of an husband, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves judgment (Rom 13:2)

A strong motive is this first motive. If it were duly considered of wives, they would more readily and cheerfully be subject than many are; they would not so lightly think of their husband’s place, nor so reproachfully speak against God’s ministers who plainly declare their duty unto them, as many do.

**REASON 2:** the second reason is like unto this, taken from an husband’s office: he is the wife’s head (1Co 11:3), which is also urged to this very purpose in other places. This metaphor shows that to his wife, he is as the head of a natural body, both more eminent in place and also more excellent in dignity. By virtue of both, he is a ruler and governor of his wife. Nature teaches us that this is true of the head of a natural body, and the Apostle by entitling an husband an head, teaches us that it is as true of an husband...

Go therefore, O wives, unto the school of nature, look upon the outward parts and members of your bodies. Do they desire to be above the head? Are they loath<sup>77</sup> to be subject unto the head? Let your soul then learn of your body. [Is] it not monstrous for the side to be advanced above the head? If the body should not be subject to the head, would not destruction follow upon head, body, and all the parts thereof? As monstrous and much more monstrous is it for a wife to be above her husband, and as great, yea, and greater disturbance and ruin would fall on that family. The order which God has set therein would be clean overthrown thereby. And they that overthrow it would show themselves oppugners<sup>78</sup> of God’s wisdom in establishing order. [Since] this reason drawn from nature is of force to move very pagans and savages to yield subjection, how much more Christian wives, it being also agreeable to God’s Word and ratified thereby?

**REASON 3:** the third reason taken from an husband’s resemblance unto Christ herein, adds an edge unto that former reason: in being an head, he is like Christ. There is a kind of fellowship and co-partnership between Christ and an husband: they are brothers in office, as two kings of several places.

**OBJECTION:** there is no equality between Christ the Lord from heaven and an earthly husband. The disparity between them is infinite!

**ANSWER:** yet there may be resemblance and fellowship...There may be a resemblance where there is no parity<sup>79</sup> and a likeness where there is no equality. The glorious and bright sun in the firmament and a dim candle in an house have a kind of fellowship and the same office which is to give light. Yet there is no equality between them.

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<sup>77</sup> loath – unwilling; reluctant.

<sup>78</sup> oppugners – opponents.

<sup>79</sup> parity – equality.

So then, an husband resembles not only the head of a natural body but also the glorious image of Christ, and is that to his wife which Christ is to His Church...

**REASON 4:** the fourth reason taken from the benefit which a wife receives from her husband, does yet further press the point in hand. Though Christ be properly the Savior of the body, yet even herein an husband carries a resemblance of Christ and is after a manner a savior. For by virtue of his place and office, he is on the one side her *protector*, to defend her from hurt and preserve her from danger; and on the other side, a *provider* of all needful and necessary things for her, in which respect she is taken from her parents and friends, and wholly committed to him...she herself and all she has is given to him. And he again communicates whatsoever he has to her good and for her use. David compares a wife to a vine in relation to her husband (Psa 128:3), intimating thereby, that by him she is raised to that height of honor she has, as a vine by the tree, or frame near unto which it is planted. By his honor is she dignified, by his wealth is she enriched. He is, under God, all in all to her: in the family he is a king to govern and aid her, a priest to pray with her and for her, a prophet to teach and instruct her. As the head is placed in the highest place over the body and understanding placed in it, to govern, direct, protect, and every way seek the good of the body; and as Christ is united to the Church as a spouse and made her Head that she might be saved, maintained, and provided for by Him; so for this end was an husband placed in his place of superiority. His authority was committed to him to be a savior of his wife....As the Church is wisely governed and safely protected by subjecting herself to her Head, Christ Jesus; and as the body partakes of much good and is preserved from much evil by subjecting itself to the Head, so if a wife be subject to her husband, she will fare much the better thereby. All the ease, profit, and benefit thereof will be hers. If therefore she render her own good, this is a way and means ordained of God for this end; let her herein seek it...

**REASON 5:** the last reason taken from the example of the Church is also of good force to persuade wives unto subjection. Example more prevails with many than precept. If any example may be of force, then this most of all. For it is not the example of one only, but of many; not of many ignorant and wicked persons, but of understanding, wise, holy, and righteous persons, even all the saints that ever were, are, or shall be. For the Church comprises all under it, even that whole society of saints, which are chosen of God in His eternal counsel, redeemed of Christ by His precious blood, and effectually called by the Gospel of salvation, God's Spirit working inwardly and powerfully upon them, those very souls of just and perfect men now triumphing in heaven not excepted. Note how this Church is described in the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> verses. Let this example therefore be often thought of: it will never repent any to follow it, for it treadeth the only right path to eternal glory, whereunto they shall assuredly come that follow it.

But to show the force of this reason more distinctly, note these two conclusions following from it: 1. *Wives are as much bound to be subject to their husbands as the Church to Christ.* Else, why should this example be thus pressed upon them? Why are husbands set in Christ's stead and resembled to Him? 2. *A wife's subjection to her husband, answerable to the Church's subjection unto Christ, is evidence that she is of the Church, guided by the same Spirit that the Church is.* For it cannot be performed by the power of nature; it is a supernatural work and so an evidence of the Spirit.

Wherefore, O Christian wives, as your husbands by their place resemble Christ, so do you by your practice resemble the Church. Of the two, this is the more commendable: for that is a dignity, this a virtue. True virtue is much more glorious than any dignity can be.

These reasons being well poised and the force of them all joined together, they cannot but work on the stoutest stomach<sup>80</sup> that is. Wherefore, if this point of subjection seem to be too bitter a pill to be well digested, let it be sweetened with the syrup of these reasons, and it will much better be swallowed and have the more kindly work.

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**William Gouge (1575-1653):** minister for 46 years at Blackfriars, London, considered the number one preaching center of that day. Many believe thousands were converted under Gouge's heart-searching expository preaching. Mighty in Scripture and prayer, Gouge preached for thirty years on Hebrews, the substance of which became a famous commentary. Born in Stratford-Bow, Middlesex County, England.

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<sup>80</sup> **stout stomach** – stubborn, rebellious heart or disposition.

# FOR MOTHERS, EXPERIENCED OR NEW

John Angell James (1785-1859)

*“The aged women likewise, that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed”—Titus 2:3-5.*

**WHAT ASSOCIATIONS WITH ALL THAT IS LOVELY** are connected with that blissful word *mother!* To that sound the tenderest emotions of the human heart, whether in the bosom of the savage or the sage, wake up. The beauty of that term is seen and its power felt alike by the prince and the peasant, the rustic and the philosopher. It is one of the words which infant lips are first taught to lisp, and the charm of which the infant heart first feels. It is a note to the music of which it is difficult to say whose soul most responsively vibrates, that of the parent or the child. Humanity, however semi-brutalized by oppression, ignorance, or even vice, has rarely been sunk so low as to have the last spark of maternal love extinguished or the last sensibility of this kind crushed out of it. This strength of woman’s love for her child must be turned to good account and be directed in its exercises to the best and most useful purposes...

At a pastoral conference held not long ago, at which about one hundred and twenty American clergymen united in the bonds of a common faith were assembled, each was invited to state the human instrumentality to which, under the divine blessing, he attributed a change of heart. How many of these, do you think, gave the honor of it to their mother? Of one hundred and twenty, over one hundred! Here then are facts, which are only selected from myriads<sup>81</sup> of others, to prove a mother’s power, and to demonstrate at the same time her responsibility. But how shall we account for this? What gives her this influence? What is the secret of her power? Several things:

**First, there is, no doubt, the ordinance of God.** He, Who created us, Who formed the ties of social life, and Who gave all the sweet influences and tender susceptibilities of our various relationships, appointed that a mother’s power over the soul of her child should be this mighty. It is God’s ordinance, and the woman who forgets or neglects this is disobedient to a divine institution. God has made the child to be peculiarly susceptible to this power over his nature.

**Then comes a mother’s love, which is stronger, at any rate *more tender*, than a father’s.** There is more of instinct, if not of reason, in her affection. She has had more to do with the physical being of her child, having borne him in her womb, fed him from her breast, and watched him in his cradle. All this naturally and necessarily generates a feeling which nothing else can produce. Now love is the great motivating power in and for human conduct. “I drew them,” said God, “with cords of a man, with bands of love” (Hos 11:14). Here is the true philosophy of both man’s natural constitution and evangelical religion. Human nature is made to be moved, governed by love, to be drawn with the cords of affection rather than to be dragged with the chains of severity. *Woman’s heart is made to love*; and love is exerted more gently, sweetly, and constringently upon her child by her than by the other sex. It makes her more patient, more ingenious,<sup>82</sup> and therefore more influential. Her words are more soft, her smile more winning, and her frown more commanding because they are less terrific and repulsive. The little floweret she has to nurture opens its petals more readily to the mild beams of her countenance...

**The mother has most to do with the child’s character while yet in the flexible state in which it receives its shape.** The earliest exercises of thought, emotion, will, and conscience are all carried on under her eye. *She has to do not only with the body in its infancy, but with the soul in its childhood.* Both mind and heart are in her hands at that period when they take their first start for good or for evil. The children learn to lisp their first words and to form their first ideas under her teaching. They are almost always in her company and are insensibly to themselves and imperceptibly to her receiving a right or wrong bias from her. She is the first model of character they witness; the first exhibitions of right and wrong in practice are what they see in her. They are the constant observers of the

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<sup>81</sup> **myriads** – countless numbers.

<sup>82</sup> **ingenious** – marked by inventive skill or imagination.

passions, graces, virtues, and faults, which are shown in her words, temper, and actions. She is therefore, unconsciously to herself, educating them not only by designed teaching, but by all she does or says in their presence....It is therefore of immense importance that everyone who sustains this relation should have a high idea of her own power. She should be deeply and duly impressed with the potency of her influence...

**Mothers, then, should be thoroughly acquainted with the work that is allotted to them.** I speak not of the physical training of the children, nor primarily of their intellectual culture, but of their social, moral, and religious education. *A mother's object and duty is the formation of character.* She has not merely to communicate knowledge, but habits. Her special department is to cultivate the heart and regulate the life. Her aim must be not only what her children are to know, but what they are to be and do. She is to look at them as the future members of society, and heads of families of their own, but above all as probationers<sup>83</sup> for eternity. This, I repeat, must be taken up as the primary idea, the formation of character for *both* worlds....A mother should look upon her offspring with this idea: "That child has to live in two worlds and to act a part in both. It is my duty to begin his education for both and to lay in infancy the foundation of his character and happiness for time and eternity too. What ought to be my qualifications and my diligence for such a task?" Ah, what?

**Deep thoughtfulness certainly on the momentous nature of your charge.** It is an awful<sup>84</sup> thing to be a parent, especially a mother, and to be responsible for the training of men and women, both for time and for eternity....O woman! Your child's welfare for all time and all eternity too depends much upon your conduct towards him during the period when he is under your influence, in the first years of his being. To you is committed the care of the infant's body, the healthfulness, vigor, and comfort of which for all his future existence upon earth depend much upon you. What would be your feelings of poignant remorse if, by any neglect of yours, whether by a fall or an accident, the result of your carelessness, the poor babe was injured in his spine or distorted in his limbs! Oh! To see that young cripple injured for life in bodily comfort, ever presenting to you the sad reminder of your guilty neglect! Yet what is this to the sadder spectacle of a deformed and crippled *soul*, a character distorted into crooked and frightful shapes, and to have the tormenting reflection that this was the result of your neglect!...

**Qualify yourself for maternal duties above all things by sincere and eminent piety.** A mother should never forget that those little engaging creatures which sport about the room so gaily and so innocently with all the unconsciousness of childhood are young immortals....One should almost think that solicitude about this matter would be so overpowering as to extinguish parental delight. But a mother cannot look at the babe that is feeding at her breast, and smiling sweetly in her face as if it meant the thanks it had not yet learned to speak—or watch his slumbers in his cradle, breathing as softly as if he lived without breathing at all—and at the same time feel her soul shiver and shudder in the dark shadow cast over her spirit by such a thought as "Oh, should you live to be a profligate<sup>85</sup> in this world, and a fiend in the next!"

Instead of a reflection so harrowing to every maternal feeling, she exults in the hope that the dear babe will be a holy, useful, happy Christian on earth and then a glorified immortal in heaven. Such reflections ought to be, at some times, in the mind of every parent. All should realize the sublime idea that their houses are the seminaries for eternity, their children the scholars, themselves the teachers, and evangelical religion the lesson. Yes, with every infant born into the family comes the injunction from God, "Take this child and bring it up for Me." It is one of God's own children by creation, sent to be trained up in the way he should go, that is, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord....We shudder at the cruelties of those who sacrificed their babes to Moloch; but how much more dreadful an immolation<sup>86</sup> do they practice who offer up their sons and daughters to Satan by neglecting their religious education and leaving them to grow up in ignorance of God and their eternal destiny.

**But can anyone, will anyone, teach or teach effectually that religion which she does not feel and practice herself?** Therefore, I say, a mother's heart must be deeply imbued<sup>87</sup> with piety if she would teach it to her children. Without this, can she have the will to teach, the heart to pray, or the right to hope? Mothers, can you conceive of a higher, nobler elevation to which, in your maternal relation, you can rise than when, to the opening mind of your wondering child, *you give the first idea of God?* Or than when you direct him to that divine Babe Who was born at

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<sup>83</sup> **probationers** – those qualifying for; candidates.

<sup>84</sup> **awful** – awesome; awe-inspiring.

<sup>85</sup> **profligate** – given over to evil and immorality.

<sup>86</sup> **immolation** – sacrificial slaughter of a victim.

<sup>87</sup> **imbued** – filled with a particular quality.

Bethlehem; Who was subject to His parents; Who grew up to be the Savior; Who said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me” (Mar 10:14), took them in His arms and blessed them, and then died for their salvation upon the cross? Or than when you talk to them of heaven, the dwelling place of God and of His angels? Oh, to see the first look of holy inquisitiveness and the first tear of infant piety start in the eye; to hear the first question of concern or the first breathing of prayer from infant lips! How has many a woman’s heart amidst such scenes swelled with delight until, in an ecstasy of feeling, she sank upon her knees and breathed a mother’s prayer over the child of her heart, while he looked wonderingly up and felt a mysterious power come over him which he could neither fully express nor understand!

Your religion, if it is genuine, will teach you at once the greatness of the work, *and your own insufficiency to perform it aright in your own strength*. Your business is to train mortals for earth and immortal beings for God, heaven, and eternity...Cultivate, then, a trembling consciousness of your own insufficiency; and cast yourselves by believing, constant, and fervent prayer upon God. Be, in an eminent sense, praying mothers. Distrust yourselves, and, by believing prayer, secure the aid of Omnipotence.

Do not forget what I have already said, that affection is the golden key fitted by God to the wards of the lock in every human heart, to the application of which the bolts that nothing else could move will fly back and open with ease. Severity is out of place in anyone, but most of all in women. But beware of allowing affection to degenerate into a fond and foolish indulgence...while I enjoin affection, it must not be allowed to impair *authority*. A parent must not be a tyrant, but neither must he be a slave to his children. It is a painful and, to the parents, a disgraceful spectacle to see a family like a state where rebellion reigns rampant, the father deposed, the scepter broken, and the insurgent children possessed of sovereign rule. And a mother as well as a father must be obeyed, and it is her own fault if she is not. A persevering system of government, where the reins are held tightly in the hand of love, will be sure to produce submission at last. But it must be a mixture of kindness, wisdom, and authority. Submission must be felt by a child to be a duty yielded to authority, and not merely a compliance won by affection. Authority must not stiffen into severity, nor love degenerate into coaxing. Commands should be obeyed not only because it is pleasant to obey them, *but because it is right that they should be obeyed*.

**A judicious mother will exercise much discrimination and will adapt her treatment to the disposition of her children.** There are as many varieties of temperament in some families as there are children....One is forward and obtrusive, and should be checked and rebuked; another is timid and retiring, and needs to be encouraged and emboldened. One is more easily wrought upon by appeals to her hope, another by reasonings addressed to her fear. One is too close and reserved, and needs to have frankness and communicativeness encouraged; another is too open and ingenuous,<sup>88</sup> and should be taught caution and self-restraint. Every child should be a separate study. Quackery should be banished from education as well as from medicine. One treatment will no more suit all minds than one medicine or kind of food all bodies...

**The woman who would fulfill the duties of her relationship must surrender herself to her mission and be content to make some sacrifices and endure some privations.**<sup>89</sup> Who can witness the patient submission of the mother bird to her solitude and self-denial during the term of incubation without admiration at the quiet and willing surrender which instinct teaches her to make of her usual liberty and enjoyments? A woman must be willing, for the sake of her children, to do, under the influence of reason and religion, what the bird does from the unintelligent impulses of nature. Her children are a charge for which she must forego some of the enjoyments of social life, and even some of the social pleasures of religion. She who would have a maternal power over her children must give her company to them....I would not have a mother incarcerated<sup>90</sup> in her own house, so as never to go abroad or enter into company. She who is devoted to her family needs occasional relaxation amidst the pleasures of society, and especially the exhilarating engagements of public worship. Some mothers are such absolute slaves to their children that they scarcely ever stir from home, even to the house of God. This is an error in one extreme, which might be avoided...those run into an opposite extreme who will not, even for the benefit of their children, give up a social party or a public meeting. The woman who is not prepared to make many sacrifices of this kind, for the sake of her children, her home, and her husband should never think of entering into wedded life.

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<sup>88</sup> **ingenuous** – straightforward; candid.

<sup>89</sup> **privations** – losses; instances of being deprived of certain necessities or pleasures.

<sup>90</sup> **incarcerated** – shut up as in prison.

**Be ingenious, inventive, and studious as to the best method of gaining the attention and informing the minds of your children while young.** There are too many who imagine that education, and especially religious education, consists in just hearing a chapter read, a catechism taught, or a hymn repeated, and that when this is done, all is done. The memory is the only faculty they cultivate; the intellect, affections, and conscience are wholly neglected. A Christian mother should set herself to invent the best mode of gaining attention and keeping it; she should never weary it or keep it so long that it wanders off itself.

**Be familiar in your religious instruction.** The freedom of incidental conversation, rather than the formality of set and stated lessons; the introduction of religious topics in the common intercourse of life, rather than the grave and forbidding annunciation of a change from secular to sacred subjects; and the habit of referring all things to God and comparing the truths and maxims of the Bible with the events of every hour, rather than merely lighting a Sabbath lamp and forcing all things out of their channel when the season of devotion returns—these are the means of opening the avenues to the youthful heart and rendering religion with its great Author the object not of aversion or terror, nor only of cold and distant homage, but of mingled reverence and love. “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deu 6:6, 7).

**Mothers, invested as you are with such an influence, often dwell upon your responsibility.** With such a power conferred upon you by God, you are responsible to your children themselves....You are responsible to your husbands. They entrust the education of their children to you....You are responsible to the church of God, for family education is, or ought to be, in the families of the godly, the chief means of conversion. It is a fatal error for Christian parents to look to the ministers of religion for the conversion of their children. And, alas! It is the error of the day. The pulpit is looked to for those benefits, which should flow from the parents’ chair...

**In all things, it is of importance to begin well.** The beginning usually determines the progress and the close. Errors, both in theory and practice, however long and pertinaciously<sup>91</sup> persisted in, may by intelligence, determination, and the blessing of God be corrected. Reformation would otherwise be hopeless. But how much better and easier is it to avoid faults than to amend them! Many mothers have seen their mistakes when it was too late to correct them. Their children have grown up under the influence of a bad system of domestic government and maternal guidance and have acquired a fixedness of bad habit which no subsequent wisdom, firmness, severity, or affection could correct. And the parents have had to pour out bitter but unavailing regrets that they had not begun life with those views of their duties with which they were closing it.

If a mother begins well, she is likely to continue well, and the same is true if she begins ill. Her conduct towards her first child is likely, of course, to determine her conduct with respect to all the following ones. How momentous is it, then, at this stage of her domestic history, to weigh well, and solemnly, and prayerfully her responsible situation! Indeed, it is quite clear that this subject ought not to be driven off by any wife till she becomes a mother. The very prospect ought to lead to a due preparation for the expected new duties...It becomes us to prepare ourselves for any situation into which we have a confident expectation of soon entering. Forethought is given to man for the purpose of meeting with propriety the situation and duties to which we are looking forward. The woman who never *studies* maternal responsibilities and duties till she is called actually to sustain them is not very likely to do herself much credit in that very important relationship....Unhappily, a young wife, in prospect of giving birth to a child, is in some cases so bowed down with an unnecessary solicitude about her own safety, and in others so absorbed with the preparations which are made for the physical well-being and the elegant habiliments<sup>92</sup> of her promised baby, as to forget to prepare herself for those more important duties which devolve upon her in relation to the mind, heart, and conscience of the child.

**A mother who wishes to fulfill her duties to her children should take special pains to educate herself for those momentous functions.** She should read to store her mind with knowledge. She should reflect, observe, and gain useful information from every quarter. Her principles should be fixed, her plans laid, and her purposes formed. She must cultivate all the habits and tempers which will fit her to teach and to govern. She must seek to acquire thoughtfulness, careful vigilance, quick observation, and discretion in various forms. Habits of activity, dispatch,

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<sup>91</sup> **pertinaciously** – stubbornly; obstinately.

<sup>92</sup> **habiliments** – garments; items of clothing associated with an occasion or office.

order, and regularity are indispensable for her; so is the exercise of all the good and benevolent feelings. She must unite gentleness with firmness and attain patience and the entire command of her temper. *It is of immense importance also that she should have a correct knowledge of human nature and of the way of dealing with the human heart.* And, above all things, let her remember that piety is the vivifying<sup>93</sup> spirit of all excellence, and example the most powerful means to enforce it. She should never let the recollection be absent from her mind that children have both eyes and ears for attention to a mother's conduct. Not content with preparing herself for her important functions beforehand, she should carry on the education of herself simultaneously with that of her children. There are few situations which more imperatively require preparation, and yet few that receive less.

Again, we often see in a mother such a solicitude about the health and comfort of her babe; such an engrossing attention to all matters respecting its physical well-being, united with such an exuberant delight in the child, as a child; such a mother's pride and joyousness in her boy, that her mind is diverted by these circumstances from all the serious thoughts and solemn reflections which ought to be awakened by the consideration that a rational, immortal, and fallen creature is committed to her charge, to be trained for both worlds. Thus, her attention is absorbed month after month, while all this while her infant's faculties are developing. Its judgment, will, affection, and conscience, at least in their capabilities, are opening, but neglected, and its natural bias to evil grows unnoticed and unchecked. The very time when judicious care over the formation of character could be most advantageously exerted is suffered to pass by unimproved; passion is allowed to strengthen unrestrained, and self-will to attain a resoluteness which stiffens into obstinacy. And the careless mother, who at some time or other intended to begin a system of moral training (always saying there was time enough yet), when she does commence, wonders that the subject of her discipline is so difficult to manage. And then she finds that she has so neglected to prepare herself for her duties that she knows not how to set about them, or what in fact she has to do. An ill-managed child continues growing not only in stature and in strength, but in his wayward disposition and obstinate self-will; the poor mother has no control; and as for the father, he is too much taken up with the cares of business to aid his imperfect helpmate; thus the scene is exhibited, described by Solomon, of "a child left to himself" (Pro 29:15)...

Young mothers, begin well, then. Manage that first child with judgment; put forth all your skill, all your affection, all your diligence and devotedness in training him; and, the habit thus acquired, all will be comparatively easy with the others that follow. It is the novelty of that first child, the new affections which it calls forth, and the new interest it creates that are likely (if you are not careful) to throw you off your guard and divert your attention from the great work of moral training. The first child makes the good or injudicious mother.

And as it is of immense consequence to begin your maternal excellence with the first child, so it is of equal importance to him, and to every one who is added, as I have already said, to begin *early*. Education, as has been observed, does not begin with the alphabet. It begins with a mother's look; with a father's nod of approbation or sign of reproof; with a sister's gentle pressure of the hand, or a brother's noble act of forbearance; with a handful of flowers in green dells, or on hills or in daisy meadows; with creeping ants, and almost imperceptible emmets;<sup>94</sup> with humming bees, and glass beehives; with pleasant walks in shady lanes; and with thoughts directed in affectionate and kindly tones and words to nature, to beauty, to the practice of benevolence, and to the remembrance of Him who is the Fountain of all good. Yes, and before all this can be done, before lessons of instruction can be taught to the child from flowers, insects, and birds, the moral training can commence: a mother's look, her nod of approbation or sign of reproof.

**One of the greatest mistakes into which mothers fall is that of supposing that the first two or three years of a child's life are unimportant as regards his training.** The truth is that in the formation of character they are the most important of all. It has been truly said that from the impressions made, the principles implanted, and the habits formed, during these years, the child's character for time and eternity may take its complexion. It is perfectly clear that a child, before he can speak, is susceptible of moral training. The conscience, or moral sense, may, by a judicious woman, be developed soon after, if not before, the child has spent his first birthday. So early may he be made to distinguish between what his mother considers right and wrong, between what will please and what will displease her. Why, the brute creatures will do this; and if they can be taught this, may not very young children? It is admitted that there is more of reason in many brutes than in very young children. Still, even very

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<sup>93</sup> **vivifying** – life-imparting; animating.

<sup>94</sup> **emmets** – ants.

young animals may be trained to know what they may and may not do; and so may very young children. I often hear mothers say that their children are too young to be taught obedience. The mother who acts upon the maxim that children may have their own way for a certain number of years, or even months, will find to her cost that that lesson at least will not speedily be forgotten. Moral training may and should precede that which is intellectual. The cultivation of the affections and conscience should be the commencement and foundation of education, and will facilitate every succeeding effort whether of the child or of those who train or teach him....Fearful, timid, and anxious mothers, be not afraid! Prayer will bring God's help and God's blessing.

**Injudicious indulgence is the most common, as it is the most injurious, danger into which a young mother can fall.** Be kind; you ought to be. An unloving, hard-hearted mother is a double libel upon her sex and her relationship. Love is her power, her instrument... She can do nothing, worse than nothing, without it. But then her love must be like that of the divine Parent who said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev 3:19). Can you say "No" to a child when, with winning smiles, beseeching voice, or weeping eyes, he asks for what it is not good that he should receive? Can you take from him that which is likely to be injurious to him, but which it will give him pain to surrender? Can you correct him for his faults when your heart rises up in opposition to your judgment? Can you put him off from your arms, at a proper season for so doing, when he clings to your neck and cries to remain? Can you exact obedience in what is to him a difficult, but to you a necessary, command? Can you stand out against his tears, resolute in purpose, unyielding in demand, and first conquer your own heart, so stoutly resisting you, in order to conquer his? Or do you allow yourself to be subdued to put an end to the contest, and, by soothing his sufferings, foster the temper which ought to be eradicated at any pains and any cost? She who cannot answer all this in the affirmative is not fit to be a mother. There must be discipline in a family. A parent must be obeyed. *Give this up, and you train your children for evil and not for good.* Here again I say, begin early. Put on the soft and easy yoke quickly. The horse is broken in while still a colt. Wild beasts are tamed while yet they are young. Both the human species and animals soon grow beyond the power of discipline....Viewing your children as immortal beings destined to eternity and capable of the enjoyments of heaven, you will labor even from infancy to imbue their minds with religious ideas. It is immortality, which rescues from littleness and insignificance all that it appertains to, and hence arises in no inconsiderable degree the exalted honor of a mother.

She has given birth, by the sovereign ordination of the Almighty, not to a being of a mere momentary existence, whose life will perish like that of the beast of the field, but to an immortal! Her sucking infant, feeble and helpless as it may appear, possesses within its bosom a rational soul, an intellectual power, a spirit which all-devouring time cannot destroy, which can never die, but which will outlive the splendors of the glorious sun, and the burning brilliance of all the material part of heaven. Throughout the infinite ages of eternity, when all these shall have served their purpose and answered the beneficent end of their creation, and shall have been blotted out from their position in the immense regions of space, the soul of the humblest child will shine and improve before the eternal throne, being filled with holy delight and divine love, and ever active in the praises of its blessed Creator. Mothers, such is your dignity, such your exalted honor. Feel and value your rich distinction in being called to educate the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty, and to prepare the holy family who are to dwell in those many mansions of His Father's house, which the Lord Jesus is gone to prepare. Give yourselves up to this glorious work. But be judicious in all you do, lest you produce prejudice against true religion, instead of prepossession<sup>95</sup> in its favor. Let your warmest affection, your greatest cheerfulness, your most engaging smiles be put on when you teach religion to your children. Approach as nearly as possible to a seraphic<sup>96</sup> form. Represent religion in all its beauty, loveliness, sanctity, and ineffable sweetness. Let them see it in your character as well as hear it from your lips.

From "To Young Mothers" in *Female Piety* reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

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<sup>95</sup> **prepossession** – a impression or opinion.

<sup>96</sup> **seraphic** – angelic; showing ecstasy of devout contemplation.



# CHRIST'S WORK AND SINGLE WOMEN

W. K. Tweedie (1803-1863)

ONE OF THE MOST PECULIAR CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE is the last to the Romans. The insight which it gives into early Christian life—the light which it sheds, in hopes at least, upon the home scenes of the first Christians; the depth of affection which it displays; the unity of aim, of action, and of spirit which it manifests, and the prominence which it gives to female activity and zeal—all combine to render that portion of Scripture one of the fairest sights where all are green and goodly. He who would understand the spirit of apostolic life should often study it with care. It gives prominence, we say, to female exertion for Christ, and as there are many homes where the single reside and devote themselves to His cause, it may be well to glance for a moment at such abodes.

**They may be centers of influence for good such as only the religion of Jesus can produce.** And it is not too much to say that from those homes, where the Spirit of wisdom dwells, there emanates much of what is fitted to soothe man's sorrows, to restore happiness to the wretched, and promote Christ's glory upon earth. Single women often have a mission of mercy such as is not entrusted to these who have the cares of a home to carry or the duties of a home to discharge. It may be among relatives—it may be in the homes of the poor or the diseased—it may be in the prison to clothe and teach and pray for—or the workhouse<sup>97</sup> to cheer—or the schoolhouse to instruct—or by the deathbed to point to life everlasting. But wherever it is, in all the varied scenes of sorrow or of toil, an unmarried woman, if the Spirit of God be her teacher, has such means and such power of doing good as God has entrusted to no other class.

Nor is this wonderful.<sup>98</sup> The unmarried, if they be also the Spirit-taught, can leisurely cultivate the graces of the divine life, can without distracting cares give themselves calmly to work the work of God; and hence there is probably not a minister, if he be zealously watching for souls, who would not confess how much he is indebted to the aid of this class. Rising by grace above all that is deemed irksome<sup>99</sup> or isolating in their solitary position, they often learn to spend and be spent in work of doing good. Phoebe, “the servant of the Church” (Rom 16:1) and “the succourer” of the Church and of Paul (Rom 16:2); “Mary, who bestowed much labor” on the Apostles (Rom 16:6); “Tryphena and Tryphosa” with others who will be held in everlasting remembrance have still their sisters and successors in the churches (Rom 16:12). And if sometimes a feeling of loneliness or insulation do creep over them, it is dispelled, we believe, or it may even be turned into gladness by a more intense devotedness to the service and the glory of our Lord. He is with us always. There need, therefore, be no loneliness—at least, the lonely are as safely guarded as the Prophet was by his chariots and horsemen of fire (2Ki 6:17). Thus kept in safety, communion with God becomes the secret at once of their happiness and their efforts.

**No need then for such devoted souls to flee to nunneries<sup>100</sup> for peace**—they find it in the full, free service of their God. In feeding the hungry, in clothing the naked, in drawing out the soul to the poor, they have enough to make the heart and the home perennially happy. The tear of misery dried, the wanderer reclaimed, the fallen raised up, may surely impart a joy with which the world cannot intermeddle.<sup>101</sup> And while the frivolous flutter life away in the pursuit of shadows, delusions, follies, sin, those whom we now describe are walking in the footsteps of Him who “went about doing good” (Act 10:38). With Dorcas, they make garments for the poor (Act 9:36, 39); with Priscilla, they are helping forward the cause of truth in its death-strife with all that is false (Act 18:2, 18, 26); and when God gives the means, they are as ready to distribute as to sympathize. Some of them at least know, that an idle day is worse than lost—it will meet us at the Judgment demanding why we lost it. And under that conviction they do good—it may be by stealth, yet resolutely. “Fearful of fame, unwilling to be known,” they shrink from public notice, yet are they unwearied in their work of faith. Some are even self-sacrificing in that cause, and, rising above “self, that narrow, miserable sphere,” welcoming the work, which their Lord has in His holy providence allotted, they try to cheat pain of its groans and grief of its tears, and by a blessing from on high, they often

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<sup>97</sup> **workhouse** – workshop; factory.

<sup>98</sup> **wonderful** – surprising; astonishing.

<sup>99</sup> **irksome** – annoying; tedious.

<sup>100</sup> **nunneries** – residences where nuns live under religious rule and discipline; convents.

<sup>101</sup> **intermeddle** – interfere.

succeed. In a word, we look in vain for more devoted servants of Christ than may often be found in the homes of unmarried females.

**And the tact<sup>102</sup> of such workwomen is often not less remarkable than their zeal.** There are no doubt silly women who yield to mere emotion and deem it principle—who give so unwisely, that their gifts are bounties on deception, or idleness, or vice. As there are some whose very charity savors of insult, or whose compassion is like smoke to the eyes or niter<sup>103</sup> to a wound, there are also some so lavish and unwise as to promote the very evils which they try to cure. But in other cases, a skill in detecting and a firmness in resisting imposture,<sup>104</sup> as well as a tenderness in aiding, are acquired by experience, lend a moral weight to all other actions. The family just sinking silently into want is helped with a delicacy, which saves every feeling. The gentlewoman in decay is treated as a companion and a friend in the act of being relieved. The pale and dying mother is aided in a manner so feminine and kindly, that no poignancy is added to the coming pain of separation. And these are truly Christian sights: they help to reconcile us in some degree to sorrow, or if we still weep, the tears of gratitude are mingled with those of grief.

**Now, in all this we are just telling how happy are the hearts and the homes of those single women who are thus employed.** The position which they occupy and the work which they do approximate closely to the character of the redeemed, or the “zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14), while by the grace of God, they are brought within the sweep of the beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Mat 5:7). They correspond to the standard of the King and Judge, Who says, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me” (Mat 25:35).

From “Home of the Single” in *Home: A Religious Book for the Family*.

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**W. K. Tweedie (1803-1863):** Free Church minister and author; minister of the Tolbooth Kirk in Edinburgh, leader of the disruption in 1843 when the Free Church broke away from the Established Church in Scotland. Born in Ayr, Scotland.

Women, by men’s wretched idolizing them, are vainly proud of their beauty and more jealous lest their faces be deformed than their souls. Now what is flesh and blood, but a mixture of earth and water? What is beauty, [but] a superficial appearance, a flower blasted by a thousand accidents? How soon are the colors and charms of the face vanished? How often does it betray them to those sins that are signally punished with the foulest deformity and rottenness? The most beautiful are not less mortal than others: they must shortly be the prey of death and pasture of worms. And can such a fading toy inspire pride into them?—*William Bates*

## TO A RECENT WOMAN CONVERT

**Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)**

*(Some time in 1741, a young lady residing in Smithfield, Connecticut, who had lately made a profession of religion, requested Mr. Edwards to give her some advice as to the best manner of maintaining a religious life. In reply, he addressed to her the following letter...)*

**DO NOT LEAVE OFF SEEKING**, striving, and praying for the very same things that we exhort unconverted persons to strive for, and a degree of which you have already had in conversion. Pray that your eyes may be opened, that you may receive sight, that you may know yourself and be brought to God’s footstool, that you may see the glory of God and Christ and be raised from the dead, and have the love of Christ shed abroad in your heart. Those who have most of these things have need to still pray for them; for there is so much blindness and hardness, pride and death remaining that they still need to have that work of God wrought upon them, further to enlighten and enliven

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<sup>102</sup> **tact** – ready and delicate sense of what is fitting and proper in dealing with others.

<sup>103</sup> **niter** – a salt, also called saltpeter.

<sup>104</sup> **imposture** – giving a false appearance.

them...

*When you hear a sermon, hear for yourself...* let the chief intent of your mind be to consider, “In what respect is this applicable to me? And what application ought I to make of this for my own soul’s good?”

*When you engage in the duty of prayer, come to the Lord’s Supper, or attend any other duty of divine worship, come to Christ, as Mary Magdalene did (Luk 7:37-38).* Come and cast yourself at His feet and kiss them, and pour forth upon Him the sweet, perfumed ointment of divine love out of a pure and broken heart, as she poured the precious ointment out of her pure, broken alabaster box.

*When the exercise of grace is low and corruption prevails, and by that means, fear prevails, do not desire to have fear cast out by any other way than by the reviving and prevailing of love in the heart.* By this, fear will be effectually compelled, as darkness in a room vanishes away when the pleasant beams of the sun are let into it.

*In your course, walk with God and follow Christ as a little, poor, helpless child.* [Take] hold of Christ’s hand, keeping your eye on the marks of the wounds in His hands and side, whence came the blood that cleanses you from sin, and hiding your nakedness under the skirt of the white, shining robes of His righteousness.

From *God’s Call to Young People* reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

## A GRANDMOTHER IN GLORY

Jabez Burns (1805-1876)

**AS I WAS SITTING**, says an American writer, at my door, one of the unusually lovely evenings with which we have been favored this spring, watching the playfulness of my two little children, who were running through the walks of the garden, and now and then stopping to gather a sweet-scented purple or white violet with which the whole air was perfumed, I saw at a little distance the carriage of a dear and intimate friend, which quickly drove to the door, and my friend alighted. I noticed nothing peculiar in his demeanor, until he drew my little girl toward him and with a solemn manner said, “Lizzie, your grandmother is dead. You will never see her.” “Dead!” I exclaimed, “Have you a letter?” “Yes.” And as he turned to hand me the letter, I saw the look of utter despondency and felt that he had lost a mother.

That mother and that son were equally devoted to each other. He was the youngest of six children. They had been for years separated, and he had bright anticipations of seeing her in a few short weeks and presenting his two little cherished ones whom she had so often heard of, but never seen. Alas! Alas! These anticipations are all blighted now, and, “Lizzie, your dear grandmother is dead. You will never see her,” still rings in my ears as when I first heard it.

But the aged mother was a Christian. The letter says, “Her reason was clear during her whole sickness; not a murmur did she utter, but was anxious to depart.” And doubtless, long ere this, she has beheld “the king in his beauty” (Isa 33:17) and been introduced to scenes of glory, where even the cherubim, so long accustomed to celestial visions, veil their faces. What now to her seems the pilgrimage of threescore years and ten? She has entered eternity. What to her the sorrows and afflictions which once grieved her? “Not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). With holy rapture, she bows before the throne and adores the Trinity. I think I see her, not as once I saw her, clothed in sable robes<sup>105</sup> and mourning that death had entered her household. No, death has at last proved her friend, separated the mortal from the immortal, and ushered her into the felicities<sup>106</sup> of heaven. There, clothed in a white robe, with a crown upon her brow, a harp in her hand, unfading youth in her countenance, and the fullness of joy in her heart, she looks to the completion of time upon earth, as the perfection of her existence, in eternity, in heaven. Then, at the sound of the Archangel’s trumpet, that friend which so long had enshrined her spirit and been the servant of her will, that body, purified, ennobled,

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<sup>105</sup> **sable robes** – black garments, the symbol of mourning.

<sup>106</sup> **felicities** – happinesses; blessings.

immortalized, will rush once more to her companionship, and they two being one shall “ever be with the Lord” (1Th 4:17).

The resurrection of the body, the immortality of the soul, the divinity, the atonement, the intercession of Christ, the perpetuity of happiness—what elevating—what glorious doctrines are these! A wonderful destiny is ours!—entering the world the most helpless of all earthly beings, progressing, step by step, until we become but “little lower than the angels” (Heb 2:7), reaching an elevation superior to that of any created intelligence.

Does that sainted mother now regret having given her lifetime to her Maker? Does she wish she had lived the life of the moralist<sup>107</sup> and enjoyed some of the pleasures of sin for a season? If a blush of shame can burn upon the countenances of the inhabitants of heaven, it is when they think of the inexhaustible love of God toward them and their unaccountable ingratitude.

The lamp of the moralist may serve to light his steps as far as a sickbed, but we may rest assured, so soon as death appears, even in the distance, its flame will weaken and then expire. There will be naught to direct his path through “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psa 23:4), but the lightnings of Divine wrath, the glarings of the lake that burneth forever and ever.

The Christian’s pathway through the dark valley is first cheered by the dawnings of the Sun of Righteousness. The further he advances, the plainer becomes the passage and the more dazzling the brilliancy, until at length he enters heaven, where there is “no need of the sun...for the glory of God did lighten it” (Rev 21:23).

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A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.—Proverbs 12:4



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<sup>107</sup> **moralist** – one who lives by a system of natural moral principles; a merely moral person.