

Work and Gender, Marriage and Stage of Life

Last week, we saw the ethical dilemmas of working like a Christian in an unChristlike world. Some of the most difficult situations regarding work have to do with not what we do, but who we are: men or women, fathers or mothers, single or married, students or workers. The Christian view of men and women, married or single, retired or working does not fit easily with the world.

Christians face the fact that the world we live in does not easily accommodate a stay-at-home mother; most homes need two incomes just to survive. On top of that, we are in the middle of massive confusion about gender, sexuality, and marriage. Some voices are pushing for young people to understand their God-given sex as an irrelevant accident of biology, that they can be “gender-fluid”, phasing between different shades of masculinity and femininity or combinations thereof, or supposed other genders. Marriage is disparaged, young people just live together for years to “find out if they're compatible.” Into this madness come the social justice warriors, who tell us all distinctions in society between male and female, young and old, married and single are just vestiges of a corrupt power-system, trying to oppress others and use their power.

If you keep drinking this Oros, you'll be in bad shape. As one of my favourite authors said, the problem with stupidity is that it just doesn't work. At some point, this insanity will be like a tent that collapses in on its inhabitants. If we have protectors and providers abdicating their roles of protection and provision over to the people they're supposed to protect and provide for, eventually the whole charade will come tumbling down. The stage collapses, the actors are killed by falling debris, and the screaming audience scatters. In 1000 years, historians will write about the 21st century as the century of delirious moral insanity where up was down and down was up, and everyone pretended to believe it.

But while the museum burns down and the vandals try to destroy everything in it, someone needs to carry out the works of art and preserve them. Those people are Christians, born-again believers, who must preserve the biblical way of living even while orcs and philistines try to destroy everything we know and love.

Preserving a biblical view of men, women, marriage in the workplace is complicated, but it is not impossible.

In particular, we need to clarify the roles of women and men, and the difference marriage and the home makes. We then need to understand how to approach unemployment, and finally retirement.

Let's begin with the one that generates the most questions. Should a Christian woman have a career? Should they all be stay-at-home mothers? Can a Christian woman be in a role of managing and leading men in the workplace?

I. Work and Christian Women

3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 *to be* discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. (Tit. 2:3-5)

Here Paul tells Titus that as different people come into his local church, he should teach the older men to be a certain way, the younger men to be a certain way, the older women to be a certain way, and then tells us that the older women, who are passed the child-bearing years, should teach the younger women to do seven things.

1. They are to love their husbands. 2. They are to love their children. 3. They are to be discreet, which means to be sound in mind, not over-emotional. 4. They are to be chaste, meaning pure, morally upright. 5. They are to be homemakers. This word occurs only here in the Bible, and it means the guardian of the home, the one who looks to the wellbeing of everyone who lives in her home: her husband, her children, and everyone else who might live there. 6. She is to be good, which is morally beautiful. And, 7. she is to be obedient to her own husband. Her husband has authority as the final decision-maker in the home, and she must follow God's order, by submitting to him.

You'll notice that the Bible regards women as oriented to their home in a way that husbands and men are not. Back in Genesis, when God makes Adam and Eve, Adam is given the task of tending the Garden and expanding it, and Eve is given the task of assisting Adam. In marriage, God orients the husband to the task and orients the wife to the husband.

This shows that God's pattern is unity, not division. There is no clear division between the work, the marriage and the home. The husband primarily works to provide for the home, the wife works to support her husband's vision and build the home, and the home is the nourishing center for husband and wife and the work they do.

In other words, one big way she's her husband's helper is to create a home that's the nerve center for work, family, ministry, and more.

You see the same thing in 1 Timothy 5.

14 Therefore I desire that *the* younger *widows* marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. (1 Tim. 5:14)

Managing the household has the idea of truly being the ruler in matters domestic. She plans, organises, budgets, oversees matters domestic. Obviously not independently of her husband, or in conflict with her husband, but being in a managerial role for the administration of the home. You see a beautiful picture of this in Proverbs 31.

11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. (Prov. 31:11-12)

15 She also rises while it is yet night, And provides food for her household, And a portion for her maidservants. (Prov. 31:15)

27 She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. (Prov. 31:27)

21 She is not afraid of snow for her household, For all her household *is* clothed with scarlet. (Prov. 31:21)

But, you will also notice that the Proverbs 31 woman is a manufacturer, an entrepreneur, a merchant, a provider, an investor, a farmer. She is clearly working in the home, and also out of the home. But the great difference between her and her husband, is that all her work is oriented towards her family and her home.

The question is not, can a woman work? She's a human being, and all humans must work! Indeed, Paul warns us about what happens when a woman has no work, and no home to tend to.

13 And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. (1 Tim. 5:13)

When men are idle they tend to become destructive to their own bodies and to society at large. When women are idle, the destructiveness tends to become a social and community destructiveness:

too much interest in other's affairs, too much idle chatter about other people's problems, too much nosing about and wanting to know what doesn't need to be known. And now you can do it without leaving your home using social media.

The real question is, can a married woman work outside the home? The answer is, yes, but not in a way that is parallel or symmetrical to her husband's work outside the home. The biblical ideal is not two people pursuing independent careers. The biblical ideal is: a home, where the husband shoulders the burden of seeking to provide and protect, and the wife joins him and supports him in building a home for him, their marriage, and their children.

She may earn much. There may even be times and reasons when she earns more, though she will require great meekness and humility if this happens, and so will the husband. It is not ideal, but it is not sin if it happens. Instead, she should again orient her earning and income towards the health and happiness of the home, while he continues to plan and work for the provision and protection of his home.

What about unmarried women? In the years before marriage, your focus should be Ephesians 4:28.

28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. (Eph. 4:28)

The goal there is: provide for yourself, and be generous. Work so as to not be dependent on others, and to have enough to share. But should you get married, your career goals will change in a way that your husband's won't. He was focused on provision before marriage, he's still focused on provision after marriage. Once you get married, your career goals shift because your orientation has changed to that of a helper. That means that for you, flexibility will be a major goal in career planning. You're looking for flexibility so that if you get married, you'll have the option to work part-time, or work from home if you choose. You're looking for flexibility so that when you get married you can change careers or, if children come, even drop out of the workforce if you choose. This is a good reason to be wary of massive student loans that you will be paying off for years. It should caution you against 10-year contracts or things which tie you down unnecessarily.

What about the question of femininity and the workplace? Are there jobs a woman shouldn't take? I think the obvious ones are where sheer physical strength and aggressiveness are needed. Hollywood tries to make the female soldier and the female tough-guy look sexy, but it is really warped and offensive to God's design. It's a just a perverted schoolboy fantasy: a woman with a curvaceous, feminine body who can supposedly beat men twice her size black and blue. But beyond those, there are jobs or careers that a Christian woman should either avoid, or become very thoughtful about how she handles herself in them.

Biblically, manhood in its best form is the desire to provide for and protect women. Biblical womanhood in its best form, is a desire to receive and nurture strength in worthy men.

Now if your career places you in a role where all you can do is dominate and control men, then your career is going to grind against your God-given femininity.

You need to be who you are. You may be a very industrious, assertive, creative woman. But you still need to be yourself: a godly, biblical woman, who knows and loves God's design. You can still lead, but do so in a way that honours and respects worthy men. You can still manage, but do so in a way that looks for and encourages initiative from men. If you have to act like a man to even survive, then you should pray about another career. If you have to live in continual tension between who you really are, and how you have to act in the workplace, then your work is undermining your identity.

Be who you are. Men and women are different, so it is to be expected that male managers and female managers will be different. And that difference is part of God's good creation.

A word to married men. You need your wife in every area of life. Adam needed Eve as his helper for all the work he was assigned by God. As a married man, there should be no area of your life where you're operating independently of your wife—otherwise you're foolishly thinking you can handle the assignments God's given you without the help He thinks you need. Some of us think that a successful husband keeps his family entirely insulated from his job. But while boundaries are helpful in life, a complete separation between work and family is exactly the opposite of why God created marriage.

Every husband should see his wife's work, whether it is in the home, or outside of it, as part of what makes him able to do what he does.

This is the principle of how two become one, and build one home. It is not the world's idea of two people pursuing independent careers, for “self-fulfillment” and “personal growth”. It is the Bible's idea of building homes that glorify God. If your marriage is two people living independent lives so they can share the expense of feeding and housing some children until they can feed and house themselves, you're missing the big picture. God wants homes that glorify God, and raise believers that glorify God, who begin the cycle all over again in their homes.

Now, what about those who are seeking a job, but are either studying towards one, or simply haven't found one yet?

II. Work and the Unemployed Christian

Students are unemployed because they are preparing for their vocation. If you're a student, aim to get Christ's praise and commendation, not your teacher's. What if instead of studying hard to get an A, or to be at the top of your class, or to compete, what if you devoted yourself to doing every single assignment with your utmost effort, as though working for the Lord?

You're preparing for a career, so your time is spent differently, but remember that Christ owns your time. So let His purposes for your education take center stage in what you do.

See your education as preparation for all your callings, not just your job. Single men should prepare with the idea of supporting a family in mind. Single women should prepare with the idea of building a home. Those advancing their skills and increasing their knowledge should maintain a heart of humility and gratitude as your skill and knowledge deepens.

In our country, 29% of those who can work are unemployed. It's a difficult season of anyone's life.

First, work hard to find a job. Perhaps most obviously, we can work hard as unto the Lord, even in a season when it looks like we're not working. You've often heard it said that during a time of unemployment, it's good to treat your job search as a job. In other words, set goals for yourself, set work hours, get others to hold you accountable. That's true for the non-Christian who only thinks about finding a job; it's even more true for the Christian who recognizes that even during unemployment he has a job: to serve the Lord in everything he does.

Second, use the time well. Of course, most likely it's impossible to use all your time to find a job. So just as in retirement, unemployment provides a season of special and exceptional service to others. Titus 3:1 should be close to our hearts Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to

obey, to be ready for every good work, (Tit. 3:1) Use that extra flexibility, that extra time, to do good you probably couldn't during a time of employment. Read those books on your "to read" pile. Think about scheduling that lunch with a younger Christian brother who needs mentoring, help with some of the repairs to the house of one of the elderly believers in the church. If you're a husband, take on what your wife normally does so that she can enjoy some of that additional time and flexibility. Make your season of unemployment a time of spiritual growth and blessings to others.

Third, provide opportunities for others to do good. One of the humbling things about a time of unemployment is that it makes us lean hard on others. That's a good thing; don't run away from it. You'll need others to provide leads for jobs. To help you prepare for interviews. If your savings runs out, you may need others to navigate the UIF fund, or to secure some loans or gifts. You may need to talk with a deacon about depending on the church's mercy fund. Part of our reluctance to do this is godly; after all, Paul told the Thessalonians that they should be dependent on no one (1 Thes. 4:12). But much of our reluctance comes from a wrong-headed, prideful self-sufficiency. So we need to recognize that it's good for others to love us in this way—because in so doing they can participate in God's care for us. Where appropriate, Christians should embrace the ministry of dependency.

What about those who have completed their season in life of working to earn, and are now in the retirement phase?

III. Work and the Retired Christian

Many people go through a kind of later-life crisis in retirement. For so many years, one's identity is wrapped up in work, or in raising children. But then, before you know it, you have an empty nest, followed by retirement, and more than one person feels lost, adrift, rudderless. Some start to either decline into morbid self-introspection or a sense of resentful, resigned loss. Others try to live in the good 'ol days, and never fail to regale others with stories about their good 'ol days. But this is not what we have to do as believers.

The Bible of course knows nothing of saving up enough money so as to be largely at leisure and idle for twenty years. Not only is that not sustainable financially for a country, but it brings about massive decline mentally and physically. Someone said that many men don't die of old age, they die of retirement.

But the Bible does know something of believers in old age who are still serving Him. 13 Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, (Ps. 92:13-14)

There is no need for a person to waste the last years of his life watching TV. He may still have a productive place in God's Kingdom if only he will.

Instead, let's say the goal is to have enough money to live on when physical and mental health no longer allow the same amount of work. How should a Christian approach retirement?

First, embrace the flexibility. Choose to declutter your schedule as your years of employment end. For some of us, that choice is made for us because of our health, or maybe the needs of spouse. But either way, we need to recognize that being faithful as God's stewards doesn't mean necessarily filling every available moment. There is great value in being the one who's often available for unplanned opportunities. Those could be opportunities to serve your children, or your neighbours,

or your church. Be available to volunteer in a ministry at church. Look out for younger believers wanting and needing discipleship.

Second, grow your biblical knowledge and wisdom. Now is the time to work through all those recommended Christian books, to beef up on theology, to actively work on Bible memorisation. Now is the time to read some of those books on counselling others and being able to marry your experience with biblical wisdom to guide those who are looking for help and advice.

Third, testify of God's goodness. Because of their age, elderly believers have a unique opportunity to witness to others regarding God's goodness 17 O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this *day* I declare Your wondrous works. 18 Now also when *I am* old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to *this* generation, Your power to everyone *who* is to come. (Ps. 71:17-18)

Fourth, turn your money into trust and joy. Probably in most cases, retirement becomes a time of financial uncertainty, not being sure if we will have enough, and having to trust God to see us through. For others, there's the growing realisation that we won't need all we've set aside—and so retirement can be a wonderful opportunity for generosity. Randy Alcorn says in his book, *The Treasure Principle, Pilgrims travel light.... Five minutes after I die, what will I wish I would have given away while I still had the chance?.... Why not give it away now?*

Retired believers do not retire from the Lord, or from the church, or from usefulness.

Whether you are single or married, man or woman, student or working, working in the home or out of it or both, unemployed or retired, all of us can follow the biblical pattern. The world, according to Paul will get worse and worse. But as it gets darker and darker, faithful, obedient believers will shine brighter and brighter.

So, as Paul puts it, may this be true of us: Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, (2 Cor. 9:10)