

Looking Well to Her Household

Proverbs 31:27, 28

Living with an Unbelieving Spouse

I Corinthians 7:13-16

In What Does Life Consist?

Luke 12:13-21

Aged Women: Holy Teachers

Titus 2:3-5

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November 6, 2016 — No. 3853

November 27, 2016 — No. 3856

have much in the way of sage advice to pass on to them. And younger women ought to learn to take heed to you too.

III. Their Honor

The honor that belongs to the aged women of the church is found in the last phrase of verse 5: that the Word of God be not blasphemed. So, so much depends on the women of the church. The world is watching the church and the way she conducts herself in this world. The wicked watch to see what kind of men and women are produced by the church. This task falls largely on the shoulders of women. The world will judge the church of Jesus Christ to a great extent by the behavior that the gospel produces in its women. If you fail in the tasks given in these verses, women of the church, the Word of God and the gospel will be blasphemed. The world will mock the church for her inconsistencies and her failure to produce members that are godly and upright. The scorn of the world will be leveled at the church.

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God's Word says here that the blame for God's Word being blasphemed will lie on you, young women of the church. Quite the burden? No! Not at all! Quite the challenge! Work hard in the church to show yourselves approved of God. Show your godliness by your works! Live in faith and the grace of God that bringeth salvation. Then the world cannot blaspheme, but the church will shine forth in the beauty of God's holiness! That is how honorable is this task you perform for the church.

But then, you young women must honor the aged women in the place God has given them in your lives. Do not push them aside as if they do not understand. They do. Do not dishonor them by ignoring them. Honor them by respecting their place in your lives. Listen to the wisdom they can pass on to you. That is the order God has established in the church. And, elderly women, embrace your place and do the church well. You are highly honored too. We thank God for the God-fearing women of the church. Shine for us! The world will see your witness and God's name will be praised.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*November 6, 2016
No. 3853*

*Looking Well to Her Household
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear radio friends,

Introduction

The virtuous woman is now married. She no longer displays her virtue in single life as she did, but now she has been led by God to marry. In our last sermon in this series we considered her godly role as a wife, that is, in her relationship with her husband. The woman who fears Jehovah has become the object of the work of God's grace. The Spirit dwells in her and she seeks to do what is good in the eyes of God. For that reason seeks to do her husband good all the days of her life. She loves him and gives of herself to him to make him happy. She becomes that perfect counterpart that completes him. This we considered in connection with a godly wife.

Now, the Lord has chosen to give her and her husband children in the marriage. This makes their hearts glad because children are the heritage of the Lord to them. There is nothing that makes a god-fearing man and his wife happier than to see children in their life. Now we consider the role of the virtuous woman as a mother in the home. What is her calling in the home toward the family God has given

her? We consider this subject from the point of view of Proverbs 31:27-28: "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." We concentrate in our broadcast today on the role of a wife and mother in the home among her family. What is her place and what is she called to do?

LOOKING WELL TO HER HOUSEHOLD

I. The Place of Labor

We learn here in Proverbs 31 that the virtuous woman "looks well to the ways of her household." This, of course, makes the place of her labor as a wife and mother the "household." The household—that term in the Hebrew, in its basic meaning, refers to the house itself. This already defines for us that the main work of this mother of Zion was in the place where she and her family lived. The context shows that this does not mean she did not do anything outside of her house. She worked in her field and traveled

to the marketplace to buy and sell her wares. But the point of the verse we consider is that she did this in order to look well to the ways of her house. Her labor centered in her house. That was her workplace, so to speak. And this is supported by Scripture too. We read, for example, in Psalm 128:3, 4: "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD." In the New Testament this is confirmed when instruction is given to younger women in the church in I Timothy 5:14: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Or again when God speaks to elderly women in the church in Titus 2:4, 5: "That they

(aged women) 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." In a day and age when having children is considered by many as a strenuous burden, in society given over to the pursuit

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of comfort and entertainment, Scripture tells us that God will "that younger women marry, bear children, and guide the house." So, Scripture indeed emphasizes that the place of a virtuous mother of children is in the home, busy with the care of the home and children.

Neither is this place of labor degrading for a woman. Over the past three generations since women entered the work force after World War II, more and more a woman who is a homemaker has become an object of mockery and scorn. She is said to be the victim of male chauvinism and a slave to her husband and children. She is said to be a menial laborer who is unable to think for herself, brainwashed by antiquated

mores that no longer fit our modern society. Or, on the other hand, she is accused of the easy life.

"It would be nice to be able to stay home, but I have to work for a living. Most of us women are not as fortunate as you!" Oftentimes my wife has been asked: do you work? Meaning, a homemaker does not really work. The Bible, on the other hand, speaks of mothers in the home in the most glorious terms. Without disparaging the place of the single woman in

in all things, disciplined. Again, both single and married young women need to be taught this virtue, especially in today's world that is given to instant gratification, selfishness, self-indulgence. Self-discipline is sorely lacking in today's world, and oftentimes this is true in the church too. The aged women ought to teach younger women by example

and word to be discreet. And younger women need to accept this instruction of older women. Finally, to be chaste. In speech, in actions, and in dress. We need not get into this, since we already spoke in an earlier broadcast about the adornment of a virtuous woman. But this too must be taught our younger women by the elder women of the church, specifically by mothers and grandmothers who remind the younger generation of the modesty that is befitting a virtuous woman.

Then there is also the instruction that elderly women in the church must give to young married women to love their husbands and children, to be keepers of the home, good, and obedient to their husbands. We are not going to go into each one of these in detail either, since we learned of these too in earlier broadcasts. But there is

one thing that presses itself on us in all of these: aged women must by example and word teach the younger married women to throw their all into their families. We cannot stress it enough: the home and family are the most important unit in life. There is nothing better than

life in the family. And the wife and mother make it such! She must devote herself to her husband and children and love them—love them more than possessions and careers. Love them more than the world around her. She must give of herself freely to home and family, sacrificing her all to make her home happy and satisfying. And mother and grandmothers in the church must teach this to the generation of women to come. A genuine love for home and family must be impressed on young women by the older women of the church. Let the daughters of the church see and hear from you, older women, your love for, and the glorious fulfillment you have found in, your homes. Show them the good you have shown to your own families. This does not leave out those women of the church who are older but unmarried. You too have so much to offer in the way of wisdom to the younger generation of women. You too

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right now. Older women have not forgotten anything. They remember because they had to deal with children too. They remember because they were single women at one time too. And 2), mothers and grandmothers do not understand what life is anymore. Their generation did not have to confront what we do now. What they did to raise children then is no longer applicable to the way we raise children today. We know so much more than they did.

Solomon says there is no new thing under the sun. Older women have indeed experienced everything you have. They have been given wisdom through all of their experiences. They know a whole lot more than you do! They know, and have now been given wisdom by God, how to deal with the problems we confront. And we need to listen to them. That is our calling. Otherwise, the instruction given to aged women in our text is invalid. Within the realm of the church, where we have been given mothers and grandmothers to teach us, their instruction must be utilized. This is the place of elderly women in the church. And this is their prayer: "O God, forsake me not until I have showed thy strength unto this generation and thy power to every one that is to come!"

So then, here is what they must teach the younger.

The young women in general, whether single or married, must be taught to be sober, discreet, and chaste. The word sober, as we well know, means the opposite of drunk. But here and elsewhere in Scripture it points to more than merely not given to much wine. It is true, younger women too, as must be true of their husbands, are poor witnesses of the life of Christ in His people when they are known for their "drinking." Neither in single life nor in married life must they be given to wine or strong drink. There is nothing uglier than a woman who walks about with the smell of alcohol on her breath. By the soberness of the elderly women in the church they must be taught godliness. That must be seen in the young women of the church.

But more. They must be known for sober thinking. Those who are given to strong drink do not think straight. Their mind and their conscience is clouded, and they say and do things that are foolish and often sinful. Elderly women must teach young women of the church to think straight, that is, to use God's Word to direct their ways in this world. Young, unmarried women must be taught this before marriage. Then married women must be taught this for the sake of their home and family. Likewise, they must be taught to be discreet. This word means self-controlled, moderate

the church or those wives from whom God withholds children, the Bible does speak of the work of a mother in the home in the most noble manner. In other words, the place of a mother in her house laboring among her family is an honorable job, highly esteemed by God. It is the best job a woman can have. It takes a highly intelligent woman, a skilled woman, a motivated and zealous woman to fill the requirements of a virtuous mother. And it takes a woman with scads of energy! When a woman who fears Jehovah fills these qualifications, then God is pleased with the work she performs because it is performed on His behalf.

Now that the place of her labor is established we must turn to those

with whom she labors. The term "household" here in our text implies more than just the house where she labors. It refers by implication to the family that is born and raised in that house. From this verse it is evident that this wife and mother actually looked out for the welfare of her children as well as the maidens that helped her in the house. Yep, this virtuous woman did not do the whole task by herself! She had maidens in her home

to help her. Of course, we must remember that this instruction was passed on to Solomon by his mother who was a queen in a palace. She had the wealth to hire help. That would be nice, wouldn't it, ladies? But we cannot afford that most often. This is why it is necessary that the husband and children help their wife and mother in the home. We will speak of that in just a little while.

What is on the foreground, of course, is the need of a mother to be with her children while they grow up in her home. If there is one thing that ought to stand out in the account of Proverbs 31 it is the great amount of work a god-

If there is one thing that ought to stand out in the account of Proverbs 31 it is the great amount of work a godly mother has in her own home.

ly mother has in her own home. You see, God created Eve for Adam because it was not good that man should be alone. God created woman a help for him. A man needs help. He needs another to bring forth the next generation, but he also needs help in raising that next generation of children. The responsibility falls upon him. But a father needs help to raise them. He is called by God usually to go outside of his home and labor to earn money to raise the family. While he is gone his children need him too

in order to grow up in the fear of the Lord. They need training. But the father cannot properly do both. For this reason God gives to him a wife who can be busy in the house raising the children.

The labor of a virtuous mother therefore is to be busy with her children. This idea is expressed when we learn that the virtuous woman looks well to *the ways* of her household. That little word

“ways” refers to the manner of life that goes on in the home. She

looks to the way her children must live—their manner of life. She attends to the lives of her children. They need to be fed and clothed. They need the love, care, and attention of their mother and father. During the daytime when father is gone, mother is able to provide this for them. Her children need to be instructed and disciplined. They need to be taught how to behave in society. They need to be taught orderliness, respect for authority, and self-discipline and obedience. Likewise, they need to be taught their responsibilities toward God. They need to be carefully nurtured in the things of God’s kingdom. They must be shown their sin and then taken to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Children need their mother’s tender touch and her compassion when they are hurting or struggling with the difficulties of their own lives. They need to be comforted. Likewise, they need to be disciplined when they are walking in a sinful manner. While father is gone mother is there shaping and molding their children to behave properly and honorably. As she shapes them, so also will they grow up to be when they become adults. All of this belongs to the task of a mother—a full-time job I

would dare say. But then also she is a keeper of the house too! A man’s home is his castle, so the saying goes. Well, it is true: that is where he wants to be when he comes home in the evening—with his wife and children. But that means his castle must be clean too. It is a house, after all. It is not a barn. These menial tasks also are placed upon a mother. She looks to these tasks. They are a part of her sphere of labor. Husbands, children, do you know the amount of work your wives and mothers are called to do? I can understand the saying well: “From morning unto setting sun, a mother’s work is never done!” I pray that we are not so unthankful or callous toward what our wives and

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On the other hand, they must be teachers of good things. This was behavior that became holiness: teach good things. A teacher. Did you know that of yourselves, older women? You are teachers. Whether you want to be or not, you are teachers. The younger women, and even the younger men,

look at your behavior and they learn from you. If you are loud, slanderous, given to wine, you are teaching the generation to come to be such too. You are teaching them the way of unholiness, just as well as elderly men who do this. The next generation watches you and will learn from you their behavior and will carry it one step farther. This is why you must be teachers of good things, that is, of noble and excellent things. This refers to godly behavior in the church, first of all. You must, by your very behavior, be an example of godliness. You must exhibit by your actions the fear of God, the love of God, the love you have for His church and His people. By this you will teach good and godly things to those who follow you in the next generation.

But noble and excellent things are also the outward behavior that becomes holiness.

You must lead a good and orderly life. You must live a quiet and peaceable life in your home. You must show honor and respect toward your husband. You must be clean. You must be mannerly. You must be organized,

in order by your very respectable example to show this to the generation to come.

Then you are a teacher of good things and behave yourself in a respectable and reverent way.

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II. Their Instruction

What will you teach? What is the instruction you are called to give? This is found in verses 4 and 5 of Titus 2. You must teach “the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, and obedient to their husbands.” There is a lot to teach, is there not!

But, before we get into this instruction, a word needs to be said to younger women in the church. The older women of the church are your teachers. You may not take the attitude: 1) that these women no longer are relevant to you in your lives. They have forgotten how to deal with what you are dealing with

the saintly women in the church. They must be dedicated to the cause of the Lord. They must speak as such and conduct their lives as such. When others in the church observe their behavior they will hold such women in high esteem and respect them in their service of God. Their lives will be that of purity and holiness. They will show their own personal dedication to the cause of the church and those in it.

This will, in turn, show itself in these concrete ways: they will not be false accusers, that is, slanderers. They may not tell lies about others. But more, they may not be gossipers or backbiters. They may not spread rumors about others, whether true or untrue. This must be true of every one of us, but Paul emphasizes this especially with respect to aged women. Why this sin? Because this is a sin in the church that can destroy the church from within. Slander and gossip ruin the peace and the beauty of the church of Jesus Christ. While men may be busy in their labors, women in particular are given more of an opportunity to be busybodies in other people's matters. They are more apt, given their particular position in the church, to sit with one another and allow the conversation to drift into the way of gossip. The older women of the church must not be given over to this sin. They must be

godly examples to the younger women of the church. Indeed, if they are to behave themselves as becomes holiness, that is, in a way that demands of them the respect of others, then they must watch their tongues.

A second sin of which they ought not be guilty is that they must not be given over to much wine, or literally, they must not be enslaved to wine. This does not forbid them from drinking wine, quite obviously. There is no sin in drinking wine. Wine was and still is a common drink. But as is true in our culture, so also in that culture, there were many who drank too much wine or were enslaved to wine. They could not get together with others without the wine flowing freely. Then, when too much wine was imbibed, their tongues were loosed. When their tongues were loosed, they began to speak vainly and loudly. They said things that were unholy and inappropriate. They did things that were inappropriate because they had a buzz. They were not thinking soberly. Paul instructs the elderly women of the church that this may not characterize them because it is not that which becomes holiness. It was the opposite. Neither would they be respected and looked up to as a godly example. Surely, if the church expected the younger women to be free of this sin, so also must the aged women be free of this sin.

mothers are called to do in the course of day to think we do not need to help them in their work. Oh, that is a woman's work! Really! Where does the Bible say that this virtuous woman did all the work in her home and family without the family itself assisting her in as much as possible? The place of labor and the sphere of labor that is given to a virtuous mother is a great one—an important one. Never may her family take her labor for granted.

II. Her Labor

Solomon also describes for us how the virtuous mother performs her labors. We are told she looks *well* to the ways of her household. That does not mean that she does an excellent job in looking to the ways of her household, though this is true too. But it means she watches carefully and assesses with close observation the ways of her household to see to it that they are carried out in a godly manner. A mother is an overseer of her home. She watches the home and the affairs of the house carefully. She does this to keep out the enemies of God's people. She keeps the evil influences of sin away from her home. She punishes sin when it appears.

But more, she is the *keeper* of the home. She guides the home and family. She sets the spiritual tone for the family. She sees to it that the family is an organized and orderly unit that runs according to routine and schedule. That is what lies behind that word "looketh well." Again, what a difference a virtuous mother can make in the home and in the conduct of her children. Not even the father's job outside the home is as important for the church of Christ as that of a godly mother in the home.

The wife and mother, in this way, becomes the very hub around which the family turns. Once in a while God reminds us of that too when He lays our wives and mother's low with sickness or affliction or takes them away from us in death. The whole family runs smoothly when a godly mother is there looking well to the ways of her household! The observer, the guide, the guard of the home!

Solomon further describes the labor of a virtuous woman in the last part of verse 27, "she eats not the bread of idleness." A virtuous woman is not lazy. Idleness is doing nothing when there is much to do. A person is idle or lazy when he or she sees

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work to be done but walks right by it leaving it undone simply because he or she does not feel like doing it. That is idleness. A virtuous mother is not lazy! She does not therefore eat mere bread as a result of laziness. She eats well because she and her husband labor hard! You know, many think that a mother in the home who is not in the work force has a life of leisure. She lies around all day with little to do. She is out visiting and having a good time with others. And it is true too that, if a mother is not self-motivated, she can be like that. She can sit around her house with clutter piling up and her children running loose while she pursues her own interests. But that is not true of a virtuous mother. She is always busy with her work. You may not weary, mothers, of the labors God has given you in your family. It is a noble work you do!

You must discipline yourselves therefore to be organized and energetic in your work. If you were sitting at a desk in an office or teaching in a classroom or working with the accounts of others, do you think you could allow yourselves to be undisciplined and disorderly? That would probably result in your getting fired! Well, you cannot get fired as a mother. But you can fail in your task. You may not therefore eat the bread of idleness but must be busy in the most honorable of work: raise

your children in the fear of the Lord in a home where is peace and safety. Make your homes such! That takes work!

III. Her Payment

The financial returns for your work are meager. The position of a mother in the home does not earn money. But you do receive a payment. It is a payment that is more valuable than money. It is more worthwhile than a six-figure paycheck. We read of it in verse 28: "Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." I cannot imagine, women, working in a home without the praise of husband and children. I know the work you do is for the Lord. But to work in a home where children and husband just expect you to do things for them or to wait on them hand and foot, and then walk away with no thanks, is unthinkable. Husbands and children, do we understand the importance of a wife and mother in our lives? I pray we are not so callous that we do not care when we hurt her with our remarks or our disobedience? Do we ever take the time out to give our mother a hug and a kiss and tell her how much we love her, how much she means to us, how much we appreciate what she does for us day and night? That is her pay, you understand! That is the only remuneration

in the church excludes me!" I am not old. I am not an aged woman. Perhaps, then, the best way of understanding who these aged women are is to consider the elders who are called to rule in the church. It is striking that the Greek word that describes the elder as a *presbyter* is the same word used here to describe the aged women of the church. The word *presbyter* means elderly one, a senior, one advanced in years. Or, as we might say, an older person—not an old person, mind you—but an older person in the church.

Those men appointed by the church to be elders are appointed because they have experienced much of life. At the same time, elders are not so old that they wane in strength and are unable to put much time and energy into the church. Elders are able to work actively in the church while making wise decisions. Well, this is the same term used for aged women in Titus. They are older women who have served their families and church in their youth. They are beyond middle-aged years and now entered into their senior years, yet have plenty of strength to be useful in the church. I know that women who have reached this time of their lives do not like to be called aged.

The term makes them sound old. But the word "aged women" used by Paul here in Titus does not mean that such women are so old and decrepit that they have little life left in them.

The behavior of these women in the church is given us in verse 3: it becomes holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things. The chief characteristic of older women is behavior as becomes holiness. Holiness. The term used here

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should be translated "sacredness." This means that aged wom-

en must reveal behavior that is not secular or profane, but respectable and reverent. She must reveal by her walk of life that she is a woman that fears God. We have already pointed out in our past broadcasts that a virtuous woman is a godly woman—a God-fearing woman. Well, this must show itself in the way that she conducts herself in the church. She is not loud, gaudy, and profane as are the wicked women of this world. But she conducts herself in a way that gains for her respect and honor. The term *sacred* actually makes reference to the work of the priest and Levite in Israel. Their office entailed sacred obligation toward God, performing a duty of purity dedicated to the cause of God. So also must it be true of

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

*November 27, 2016
No. 3856*

*Aged Women: Holy Teachers
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

One last consideration of the virtuous woman. This one pinpoints another class of women in the church: the aged women. It is easy for us to overlook the elderly women of the church, since they are finished with raising their children. These women, however, whether married or not, have yet an important function in the church that Scripture everywhere recognizes.

We have chosen to consider one such passage today, Titus 2:3-5: “The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 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.” The idea that the older saints in the church teach the younger is common in Scripture. The aged psalmist writes in Psalm 71:18: “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy

strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.” Proverbs 23:22 imparts this point of wisdom to younger men and women in the church: “Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.” You see, a godly woman who has gone through life has gained much in the way of wisdom. A younger person that is experiencing life as a single, or even as a wife and mother, may *think* she has a thorough knowledge of life. But she is still learning. The older women of the church have learned and now are able to pass what they have learned to the younger women. So it is necessary to consider the place of the older virtuous women of the church too.

**AGED WOMEN:
HOLY TEACHERS**

I. Their Behavior

Immediately we must determine who these aged women of the church are. The first reaction of most women, unless they are in their 70s or 80s, is, “Well, I guess this category of women

she receives for her labors! If a man does not receive enough money for his work, he quits and goes somewhere else to work. A mother cannot quit! But let us hope that her wages are not so meager that she loses all joy in her work.

Her husband and children rise up and call her blessed. That simply means they tell her what a blessing she is in their lives! They tell her how thankful they are for her hard work and attention. They not only thank her but they thank God for her when they pray! Husbands, do you take time out to thank God in your family devotions in the presence of our children how thankful we are for our wives and mothers? There is nothing worse than a home filled with ungrateful men and children who never think about their keeper of the home. But this praise goes beyond words too.

Do we think that what a mother does in our homes is exclusively her work? Husbands come home from work and ignore the work of the family staring them in the face. We are not the only ones who work, men!

Children, when told to pick up, when told to wash up, when told to clean the house or wash the dishes, you must do it. You do not think it is your job? You think you can have a free ride without having to work in your home? *You* are lazy? All you do is play and not work? Then you are not praising your mother in deed, even if you do it in word.

Mothers need us to be ready and willing always to pitch in and help. Husbands must reveal this to their children by means of example and enforce it when they are home. Children must know that to declare their mother a blessing means they show she is a blessing by lending a helping hand when necessary. That is the payment a mother receives from her family. That is what makes a home a happy home. We may not forget to rise up and praise mothers and wives for what they do for us. Thank you, wives. Thank you, mothers. What a blessed place you have in our lives—and in our hearts.

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THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

November 13, 2016
No. 3854

Living with an Unbelieving Spouse
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

The passage before us today addresses a particular class of women in the church. We already learned of other classes of women: there are single or unmarried women, widows, married women, women with children, and elderly women. Today we address those women in the church who are called by God to live with an unbelieving spouse. Why? Because the Word of God gives particular instruction to them too, and since the Bible does this we may not forget them. The verses we consider in our broadcast today are found in I Corinthians 7:13-16. Let me read them a moment: “And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save

thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” As we can tell, this passage also applies to husbands who have unbelieving wives. Neither therefore ought such husbands be ignored in our broadcast today. At the same time, since the focus of our series is on the woman, so also will that be our focus today.

The church praises the virtuous woman. When doing so, we *may* not overlook that wife and mother who must live a life of faith while dealing with the hardship of a spouse who does not share that faith. The marriage relationship takes work when God joins two believers together into one. But they are bound together also in their love for God. Can we imagine the difficulties faced by a believing wife whose husband stands opposed to her faith? These godly women need the support and prayers of the church and of their fellow believers. We take time out therefore to consider what the Word of God teaches us here in this passage.

In this chapter the inspired apostle gives specific and per-

ing church and the functions of the church in order that we might be properly fed? It is all implied in thankfulness, you see. Does our life center in the things of this world and its pursuits, or do our lives center in the kingdom of heaven and its pursuits? How often we must be reminded of that! How often we can be taken in with the pursuits of this present life—not only the earning of money but the spending of it again—sometimes on things that are so earthly and mundane!

And this is where being rich toward God becomes so, so applicable to life. God gives us what we earn in order to fulfill two important functions in this life. First of all, to be able to live. We earn money in order to support ourselves and our family. We labor to do that. We labor to make our life in this present world comfortable. That is not wrong. Give me neither poverty nor riches, Solomon writes. We work to get ourselves above a poverty level and to live comfortably. And yes, we may even work in order that

we might enjoy what God has given us in this life. That is the first reason we earn our money. The second is to help the poor and the needy—those who are unable to live as comfortable a life as we are. We labor not only for ourselves but for our fellow saints. Having fulfilled those functions, if we are still wealthy beyond need, we yet use those riches to lay up for ourselves

treasures in heaven. We realize that all these riches we will leave behind. And just as the Lord asked of that rich fool whose life He took, we ask ourselves the same question: “then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” Those possessions will become someone else’s. We ought not labor therefore for the meat that perishes. But in thankfulness to God today bow before Him and acknowledge that all comes from His hand. God bless you and me in that knowledge in this time of year. And, in all our celebration, remember in what really life consists: that we are rich toward God!

*We will not allow
the things of this present life
to get in the way
of our spiritual growth
and development.*

riches of our Lord Jesus Christ!

So, being rich toward God requires of us a proper understanding of what life consists of. It consists of life eternal—the life that is to come. That life to come must be of essence to you and me while in this life. It must be the main concern of our lives. Then we will begin to look at life in this world not as an end in itself, but as a means to achieve a higher end—that of life to come. It is looking at our spiritual lives in this world as that in which life consists. It is understanding that our relationship with God Himself is the most important thing in all the world. And when we are rich in our hearts toward God, seeking His glory, His kingdom, and His will in all of life, then all the rest begins to fall into place too. Because if that is the motivating principle of our lives, then that will influence us in how we view today what God has given us. That will work in us contentment and joy in what we are given from God—without looking on the next guy and what he has. We will not be motivated by covetousness but by contentment. And when we are content with what God has

again given us in this year gone by, then we can bow before God at this time of year with proper thanksgiving.

And that is true, you see, because when we are rich toward God, this will affect the way we view our earthly possessions. Our earthly possessions will not be in what our lives in this present world consist. We will not live to be rich. We will not obsess over getting more and more in the way of this world's possessions. We will not consume ourselves in making ourselves more and more comfortable in this life. On the contrary, the things of the kingdom of heaven will be our goal and will direct our activities. We will not allow the things of this present life to get in the way of our spiritual growth and development. Do you see what I mean? It is

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hard to be properly thankful to God when we give thanks to Him and then turn around and not seek Him in our lives. We are not properly seeking God when we do not spend time with Him in fellowship and prayer. How much time do we take to pray, to study God's Word, and speak with our families of the things of the kingdom of heaven? How much time do we spend attend-

sonal instruction regarding marriage. In verses 10, 11 Paul reiterates the instruction Jesus gave during His earthly ministry concerning divorce and remarriage. We read, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." Paul then anticipates the question these new believers might raise to this teaching of Jesus: What about when a man is married to an unbelieving wife, or a wife is married to an unbelieving husband. Jesus had not addressed this question specifically. Paul does so now with apostolic authority. You may not divorce that unbelieving man or woman if he or she be pleased to dwell with you. As difficult as life may be, you may not put them away, unless for the cause of unfaithfulness, of course. So the instruction we consider here in verses 13-16 flows out of what Christ teaches us concerning marriage. And that we address today.

LIVING WITH AN UNBELIEVING SPOUSE

I. The Injunction

The apostle Paul writes his letter to a predominantly Gentile church. Most of its members had been converted

through his preaching and had joined themselves to the church institute in Corinth. It was not an uncommon situation in the church there to find a believing man or woman who joined the church alone without his or her spouse. We well know, do we not, that just because God has chosen to work in one person's heart by His grace and Spirit bringing them to faith and repentance, that does not mean He must work in the heart of another. The same was true during the time of the early church. In several cases the Lord may have chosen to bring a man or a woman to faith, but then did not choose to do this with the spouse. The result was that a believing spouse now lived with an unbelieving spouse. As I said, this was not rare *then*—but neither is this scenario strange to us today either. This scenario we will now apply to the believing wife.

There were two possible reactions of an unbelieving husband to this new life that he witnessed in his wife whom God had brought to faith. In some cases the unbeliever was repelled by that new life of faith evidenced in the one he had married. He did not like it. Her faith aggravated him. Her faithful witness was a constant reminder to him of his own sin, and this caused anger and disgust with his wife. Because of this rift in his marriage rela-

tionship, such an unbelieving husband no longer wanted to live with her. And since there was in Roman culture at that time the easy divorce that we find in our own society, the husband sought to put away his wife and depart from her. Paul addresses this scenario in verse 15: “if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace.” I am not going to go into a detailed explanation of this verse. I believe an entire sermon could be preached on it alone, but this would steer us too far from the topic at hand. This verse simply points out to that believing wife that if her husband decides to gain an unlawful divorce from her and leave her, then she need not be filled with guilt over this situation. It is true that his departure was indeed abandoning her. That was painful enough in itself. But the believing wife need not feel guilt on account of what he was doing. The law of God in the seventh commandment did not condemn her. Her unbelieving husband was guilty. If he departed, then let him depart and let peace abide in her home and family. Also, she can have peace with God. That is all we are going to say about this verse—even though more could be said, of course.

The scenario God’s Word addresses in the passage before

us is that of the unbelieving husband who is pleased to dwell with his wife despite the fact that she lives in faith and he in unbelief. To be pleased means that the husband agrees or consents to live together with her. He approves of his life in the home together with his believing wife. The husband, perhaps not caring for what she now embraced, was indifferent toward her faith, perhaps shrugged his shoulders and ignored it. As long as her faith in Christ did not get in his way or upset his own lifestyle, he was pleased to dwell with her. Some unbelieving husbands were perhaps confused and disliked what their wives were doing, yet nevertheless had a natural love for their wives and depended on their wives so they consented to live with them.

These believing wives are enjoined by the Word of God not to leave their husbands. And by “leave” is meant divorce. This is supported by verse 12, where unbelieving husbands are also enjoined not to “put away” their wives, a word that literally refers to divorce. The rule of Christ had been established, the only lawful ground for divorce is that of adultery, unfaithfulness in the marriage bond. That rule needed to be obeyed in this situation. If the husband was pleased to dwell with his wife faithfully, she may not divorce him.

was the essence of life—the life hereafter. Had he laid up in store for himself riches in heaven? Had this rich fool been rich toward God? Obviously not! God Himself called this man a fool! This man was not wise in the ways of God. This man foolishly looked upon His wealth as His own. He did not care about heaven. He cared only about the things of this present world. And for that reason His soul was required of God. His life consisted in those things that perished, and that life perished along with those possessions. In his greed and covetousness he failed to lay up for himself treasures in heaven. Beware and take heed that we be not as this rich fool, who spent his entire earthly life in acquiring those things in which life does not consist but lost his soul.

II. But in Riches Toward God

In what, then, does life consist? In this: being rich toward God. That is how we render to Him thanksgiving today. That is how we render God thanksgiving all our days. That is how we walk in thankfulness before God in all of life. We are rich toward God. Now, that is a nice phrase—but we ought to know concretely what

it means. What is it to be rich toward God? First of all, to be rich toward God requires coming to Him and finding our life in Him. We are to turn away from the things of this present life and the temporary joy they might give us, and we are to turn to God and see Him as life and joy for us. We must see that in Him is found all riches and blessings! Already, if you notice, that directs our attention away from the earthly. That we come to God, of course, is a work of God’s grace in us through the Spirit of our risen Savior. No man can come unto the Father but by me, Jesus explains to us. In order for us to see that all true joy and happiness is found in God alone, Christ must work in us. We must be regenerated through the Spirit in our hearts. Then we are made to see the things of the kingdom of heaven. All of this is true by means of the power work of the cross. There Christ destroyed the power of sin and unbelief. There Christ crushed

the head of the serpent and set us free. Then, by means of His Spirit, Christ bestows on us His resurrection life. As a result we live! And that life is what is of the essence. In what does life consist? In Christ! He imparts all true life to God’s children! To be rich toward God therefore means that we are filled with the

all his time pursuing after the things of this world. He does not necessarily become rich, but nevertheless his whole life is spent trying to gain more to himself in the way of earthly possessions.

Beware!!! Take heed to yourselves, Jesus says, because this is a real temptation to us! Beware lest, instead of giving of thanks in this day, we say, but I need more before I can give thanks. Or, thanks, but I need more. I will continue to give thanks only if I continue to have more! Beware and guard your hearts, Jesus tells us, lest you begin to think that life consists in uncertain riches, and then you become so obsessed with them that you gain the world and lose your soul!

There once was a rich man who had property and barns aplenty. But it just so happened that this rich man's fields brought forth a harvest with an overabundance of fruit. It was not as if this rich man needed this harvest. He was already rich and he already had big barns. But those barns were not big enough to hold the harvest. So, he said to himself, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my goods." Why not? He had the wealth to do it! Build bigger and better! I mean, would we not do that too? No sense throwing our harvest away! Build bigger

and better barns and these will be able to store everything. It is logical. But this rich man added this to what he said: "Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This, together with what this rich man had already said, reveals to us the heart of this man. *I will do this. I will pull down my barns and I will build bigger so I can store all the fruit that I have grown. Selfish sounding, is it not?* This man thought that eating and drinking and making merry with all this wealth is what life consisted of. In other words, he never looked beyond this earth and its wealth. He believed that true joy and ease was found in an accumulation of the possessions of this earth. And that is where this rich man failed. He lived for today and gave no thought for the life hereafter. He was so obsessed with ease in this world, he cared not one whit for that life which is to come. He had it all, did he not? He had come by so much wealth and ease that he need not worry about a thing!

But maybe this rich man should have worried a little more about his soul and where that soul would go when he died. Listen to what God had in store for him: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" That night God required that man's soul to appear before Him. Now, that man faces what

But there is more implied in this injunction of God's Word.

A believing wife must be willing to live in peace and harmony with her unbelieving husband. The home may not be filled with bitter quarrelling and dissension on account

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of the faith of the wife. She must learn to adjust her life in such a way that she can live with her husband in love. There must be peace in the home and family. She must even be willing, as Peter says, to subject herself to the will of her husband as long as he does not demand of her to disobey her Savior. And *that* is the difficult and at times painful life of a person whose spouse is not a believer. We ought to understand that as a church of Jesus Christ. It is oftentimes not easy for such a virtuous woman (or man) to be able to maneuver around the unbelief of her husband. At times she (or again he) has a real struggle in her soul with whether what she is doing is compromising her faith or is necessary to keep peace in her home without denying her faith. Those struggles are not a part of the life of two people who share faith together. That is why I said earlier that we need to pray for such a virtuous woman or man that indeed experiences these troubles in life. It takes a ton of

wisdom and an extreme amount of patience. If that unbelieving husband is pleased to dwell with you, virtuous wife, then you must be pleased to dwell with him. God will then bless you in that marriage relationship and He will bless your home and family too.

II. The Reasons

This blessing of God on your home makes up the two reasons God gives in the verses before us. The first is found in verse 14: "the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." That is a thought-provoking usage of words in this verse. An unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her husband. That term sanctify means to be made holy. Now, it is clear from the passage itself that this verse does not mean that God makes an unbelieving person holy because his spouse is holy. God does not transfer the holiness of a believer to an unbeliever somehow through the bond of marriage. God does this only through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Holiness comes only with salvation. So, Paul

does not mean when he states that the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife that he is holy on account of his wife's holiness.

Rather, this is to be explained in this way. The husband is made holy in connection with or in the person of the believing wife. Why the KJV

||| *But not only is the marriage itself sanctified by the believing spouse, so also is the entire family, the children included.* |||

translates the preposition as *by* the wife is hard to understand. It is clear from the Greek that the preposition is *in*. The unbelieving husband is made holy in connection with his believing wife. There exists a certain sanctity in the marriage itself by virtue of the fact that he is now one flesh with a holy wife. The unbelieving husband with no desire of his own nevertheless has become party to a Christian in marriage. He shares therefore, though he is totally undeserving, in the benefits that are derived from being married to a believer. I am reminded of when Joseph became a slave to Potiphar in the land of Egypt. God bestowed the earthly benefits of wealth on Potiphar for Joseph's sake. Marriage, of course, ought to be sanctified by both parties in the marriage; but according to the Word of God here, one believing spouse also can bring sanctification to the marriage itself. And

though the unbelieving spouse does not even realize it or acknowledge it, it is a beneficial thing for him to belong to a virtuous, God-fearing woman.

But not only is the marriage itself sanctified by the believing spouse, so also is the entire family, the children included. God has a great concern for the children of the

church. This is true because God establishes His covenant with believers and their believing children in their generations. When God grafted these Gentile Christians into the early church, God grafted them into His covenant of friendship. He did not choose some individual adults in the church in Corinth only to leave this church in the next generation and go somewhere else. Where God grafts new believers in, God immediately grafts their believing children into the church too. God has a great concern for the children of the church. We learn from Malachi 2:15 that God has made a man and his wife one in the church *that He might seek a godly seed!* By means of a wife dwelling with an unbelieving husband, God uses such a marriage to seek out a godly seed. By means of a sanctified marriage—and it is because of the believing spouse—God saves

to us, even while we are in this present world, a life that will never end. That means that once we die, our life goes on—it goes on into all eternity! And that truly is life. The spiritual life we have right now, therefore, does not really consist in how many earthly possessions a man can accumulate to himself. These earthly possessions will all be left behind when we die. The Lord gives us these things in this life and then takes them away again at death. Naked we came into this world and naked we will leave it! That is the reality of life. For that reason, too, life, true life, eternal life, does not consist of the abundance of earthly possessions. Neither do these possessions in this world earn for us a place in heaven. We cannot buy our way into heaven with our earthly riches. They are useless when it comes to life because life does not really consist in these things.

For that reason, Jesus gives us the warning of verse 15: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness!" Covetousness is a strong desire to have what another possesses. Covetousness is not being satisfied with life as God gives it to us, but wanting more. Covetousness is driving oneself in this world to accumulate as much to himself

in the way of this world's possessions as he is able. It is looking at one's neighbor and desiring what he has. It is competing with the neighbor and trying to outdo him. It is being dissatisfied with life, always looking to make oneself wealthier and more powerful in this world. Take heed and beware, Jesus tells us!

This Thanksgiving Day we take heed and beware! God has given us more than most people in this world. Even being poor by our standards is still rich by the

||| *Naked we came into this world and naked we will leave it! That is the reality of life.* |||

standards of many others. God has given us houses, plenty of food, clothing, and more. But many who receive these things want and desire—covet—much more. And they drive themselves to gain it! Everything else seems to slip by the wayside in their drive to gain more and more of this world's possessions. Their family life wanes, so much so that there is not even time for them to sit down together as families and read and pray together. Their zeal for the things of God's kingdom flickers and is almost blown out because there is no time for church and life in the church. One is working too hard to gain to himself the possessions of this world. As a result, he finds himself spending

soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” This account and the parable Jesus spoke we wish to consider for a few minutes today. In what does life consist? That is the question we answer: in what does life consist?

IN WHAT DOES LIFE CONSIST?

I. Not in Earthly Possessions

Both before and after the parable of our text Jesus very clearly points out why He tells it. We read in verse 15: “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” In verse 21: “he that layeth up treasure for himself is not rich toward God.” These verses lay out clearly both the negative and the positive answer to the question, in what does life consist? Negatively, we are told that life in this present world does *not* consist in the abundance of the things that a man possesses. Now, we ought to be clear on this instruction Jesus gives us here. When Christ speaks of life, He is not interested in mere earthly existence.

There is no doubt about it that you and I are called to labor in this life. We are to work in

order to be able to supply our needs. Jesus does not promote any kind of laziness on our part. He is not saying, since life does not consist in earthly possessions, do not attempt to acquire them. We have certain needs in this earthly realm in which we dwell. We desire a comfortable existence. We need houses, we need food, we need clothing. And if it is possible we like to have nice homes, good food, and suitable clothing to wear.

We do not desire to live at poverty level, even though at times this may be our lot in life. Christ is not saying that life in this present world does not necessitate possessions. Neither does Christ intend to teach us here that if by means of our hard labors God blesses us with riches, that these riches are in themselves wrong and sinful. Many of God’s people have been blessed with an abundance of riches: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were wealthy men. So were Job, David, and Solomon. Jesus, therefore, does not teach us here that we must not work or even accumulate wealth. What He is saying is that life does not consist in these earthly possessions—not true life—not true life to come or life in this world either. The life that is in us as God’s children is not mere earthly life. We possess eternal life. Christ has worked in us His life. He dwells in us by His Spirit, and that Spirit imparts

to Himself a godly seed. Else were your children unclean. Were it not for this marriage to a believing wife, an unbelieving husband’s children would be unclean together with him. By means of a sanctified marriage, the children of such a family are sanctified—made holy.

No, this does not mean that this virtuous woman can pass on her holiness to her children by some kind of mystical union with them. She can no more pass on her holiness to her children than she can to her unbelieving husband. Every child born into this world, whether in the church or outside of it, must be born again in order to be made holy in the blood of Jesus Christ alone. But certainly there are the benefits of being raised and properly trained in a godly home. Though the unbelieving spouse may not see the necessity of raising his children in the fear of God, the believing wife certainly does.

And she will give of her life to train them diligently in the fear of God’s name. And since God is a God of means, He is pleased to raise up unto Himself a godly seed by means of that believing wife. That then is why a wife ought not to leave her unbelieving husband.

*If God uses our witness as believers
to bring others to Christ,
how much more can God
use that witness of a godly wife
to save her husband!*

The second reason is put in question form in verse 16: “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?” Beautiful! God has given us all to be witnesses, in this world, of the life of Christ that dwells in us. That life of Christ cannot help but show itself in the life of a believer. The same is true of a virtuous woman. She is sanctified in the blood of Christ. And this will show itself in all of her conversation, that is, in the very way she lives—in all of her walk of life. It will show itself in her home when she shows proper love for her husband and a proper submission to his will. It will show itself in how she teaches her children respect for their father and proper behavior in the home. It will show itself in her honest dealings with others. Her life will exude her faith.

If God uses our witness as believers to bring others to Christ, how much more can God use that witness of a godly wife to save her husband! Obviously, once again, the godly wife does not save her husband. Salvation is earned by our Savior on the cross. Only God imparts salvation by His grace. But God does use at times the means of the

godly witness of a believing wife or husband to save the spouse. It is not beyond God and the power of His grace to do this! He is able to do this! I have been asked by a believing wife in her frustration and disappointment when she should quit praying for the salvation of her husband. The answer to that question is clear: you never stop praying for that spouse! Do not grow weary in prayer for him. But do not forget to pray that God's good and free will be done in the matter too. What knowest thou, oh wife, whether thou shalt save your husband?

III. The Joy

There is a versification of Psalm 126, the last stanza of which reads like this: "The sower bearing precious seed may weep as in his toil he grieves. But he shall come again with joy in harvest time with golden sheaves." Brothers and sisters who bear the burden of carrying on alone in a marriage where you are the only believer, do not forget this Psalm. God gives to you a special care or burden that you must carry in your lives. But remember, you are sowing

seed. And as we sow that seed we may weep in our toil. Life is not always so easy. We understand. But toil on. Do not grow weary. Especially if God gives you children to bring up in the fear of His name. Sow the seed of His Word. If those children are already grown, continue to be a faithful witness to them and to your spouse.

There will be a reward for your faithfulness to your spouse. There will be a reward to your labor with your children by yourself in your home. Even if that reward is not seen in this life, it will be seen in the life to come. There comes a time of harvest—perhaps in this life when we see our children grow up and confess their faith with us. Perhaps when we stand at the judgment seat of Christ and hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." When we witness that in this life or in the life to come, we will be given joy unspeakable and full of glory. Truly, that woman who labors in her family where there is an unbelieving husband is a virtuous woman. Be encouraged therefore. And thank you, too, for your loving service.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

November 20, 2016
No. 3855

In What Does Life Consist?
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Dear Radio Friends,

Introduction

Thanksgiving is *not* only for a farming community. Originally, it is true, this holiday was established in order to give thanks for the harvest. It is still that idea behind the thanks we give at this time of year. We are reminded that the harvest is given us from God's hand. And just as we pray for a bountiful harvest in the spring, now we give thanks for that harvest. That many in our day are no longer farmers does not mean that Thanksgiving Day is null and void—without meaning for us unless we have something to do with agriculture.

On the contrary, we are reminded in this day to give thanks for all things we receive from God's hand. Thanks for salvation and the gifts of the Spirit, yes—but thanks too for all things earthly that the Lord has given us. And in the giving of that thanks we are also reminded that the things we have received from God's bountiful hand are not an end in themselves. We need to be reminded that the things of this present world are *not* in what life consists. He that

lays up treasure for himself on earth does not understand in what life consists. This is the instruction of our Savior in Luke 12:13-21, the passage we are going to consider today in light of the Thanksgiving Day holiday. That instruction reads: "And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy