

A virtuous woman

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[0 : 00] The purpose of our address this evening and of looking at this passage is simply to give an exegesis or to try and give an exegesis of the passage.

So that the bulk of what I have to say really is quite in a way detailed to the words, to the grammar, to the constructions that we find in these particular verses of this chapter.

And therefore we won't go beyond the bounds of exegesis a great deal at least. Setting the passage in context, we must immediately be aware that it is indeed dealing with a figure, the figure of the woman.

But we must be aware that it is not just a list of characteristics about the figure of woman as a whole, but that it is in fact related to that figure as it is presented in the book of Proverbs as a whole. We should not imagine that this particular part of chapter 31 is isolated from the rest of the book of Proverbs. Looking at 31 and these verses is not just to be met with a list of particular characteristics, but it is something that is thematically related also to this figure of woman.

[1 : 27] As she is presented in the book of Proverbs as she is presented in the book of Proverbs and as indeed the writer in Proverbs uses that figure to put across certain messages.

In particular related to wisdom and to foolishness. And so in the opening chapters for example we can find this dark figure of a woman looked at as one who allures or entices.

In chapter 2 verse 18, whose house it says leads down to death. It is a figure against which the fatherly advice, we may call it, of these opening chapters is directed.

But then again when we come to the subject of wisdom itself, we find another very significant connection with this passage in Proverbs 31.

Because again the figure of the woman dominates the presentation of the material on wisdom. Wisdom is portrayed as a woman who is standing and who is crying out.

[2 : 34] Who has spread her table, who invites all to partake of what she has spread. Come and eat my food and drink the wine which I have mixed. Chapter 9 verse 5.

So there does seem to be, in the unfolding of the book of Proverbs, a deliberate contrast in setting side by side the woman foolishness and the woman wisdom.

And side by side with that we have the consequences of following each respectively. The ways of the one leads to death, whereas the ways of following the other wisdom leads to life.

Now to state that there is that connection between this passage and the figure of woman as a whole is much easier than to state what that connection is precisely and definitely.

We cannot on the one hand say that no such link exists. Yet neither can we say that the picture in verses 10 to 31 is entirely figurative.

[3 : 37] And only meant to represent wisdom in a final summing up kind of way. Here is a woman, a picture of a particular individual woman who has an excellent character, virtues, who organizes, who works hard with her hands, who leaves nothing at all to chance, whose wisdom and faithfulness are almost boundless.

But these qualities are qualities which colour the whole canvas of Proverbs. It's a picture painted with the same materials, by the same brush, if you like, that has already gone through the whole book as it stands before us.

And at the very root of it all we find the recurrence of this important phrase, the fear of God. It is not only essential to a woman's character, but it is of course also the beginning of wisdom itself.

It is the first principle of wisdom. It is central to the woman wisdom and to the virtuous woman that we have described.

And as we look more immediately at the passage, we find that it is an acrostic that each verse begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence.

[5 : 04] Scholars say that that was used for an aid to memory. There are some scholars, however, that maintain that in some places at least, such as in the acrostics of Lamentations, that we find the idea of completeness brought out for us, so that the use of that acrostic in Lamentations, for example, would bring out the completeness of the subject of grief.

In any case, we have that acrostic in these verses. And as far as its authorship is concerned, while the book of Proverbs is associated with wisdom, with Solomon, it is not certain whether these verses in chapter 31, whether they are immediately to be subsumed under the sayings of King Lemuel in the earlier part of the chapter, or whether in fact they are separated from it.

It seems as if we should regard them as separate, in the sense that they are not directly under the sayings of Lemuel, because, for one thing, this husband of this woman is one that has obtained a position, not by heredity, but by the position that his wife occupies.

We'll see a little more of that when we come to that particular verse. In any case, the Septuagint places the verses that we're going to look at at the end of the book of Proverbs, but not immediately following the first nine verses of this chapter.

That might suggest that these verses that we're looking at existed as a unit in themselves before their inclusion or being brought together along with the rest of the sayings and the rest of the Proverbs in the book as a whole.

[6 : 58] Now, turning more closely to the text of the verses itself, what I propose to do is simply to give a very literal translation of each verse in turn, and then look more closely at some of the significant words and phrases or any constructions that might be important for us to look at.

Verse 10, then, is a woman of virtue who can find, for above rubies is her value. And in that compound, woman of virtue, eshet, chayil, we find the basic meaning of that word chayil is strength or might.

It's used as often as not with a man in the word gebor, a mighty man of strength. And when attributed to a woman, such as in Ruth 3.11 and in the context in Proverbs, it's often translated virtuous, good or worthy.

And as far as this construction is concerned, the idea seems to be that of strength of character, especially in the moral and spiritual sphere.

So that the word virtue, as the authorised version uses, virtuous woman, would really capture for us that overall idea of moral or spiritual strength of character, a woman of such virtue.

[8 : 24] And the writer asks who can find such a woman. Such are the attributes and qualities that go towards the constitution of this strength.

That only rarely, if at all, will such a woman be found. But these are the qualities that the writer is now going to set out for us as he takes us through these succeeding verses.

In the meantime, he concludes the verse by stating her real worth. We could leave the vav that is there before rachok untranslated, or take it with a sense of for instead of and.

A woman of virtue who can find for far above rubies is her value. And that word, a value, that's translated value, is a word which comes from the root machar, to sell.

And so it takes us from that into the area of something of value, something that is valuable in the sense of that one would sell it. So that that opening verse makes that conclusion of looking at this woman as one who has this strength of character and who is placed in a position of value that far exceeds any earthly riches.

[9 : 45] Moving on to the next verse. Her husband's heart has total confidence in her and he is not in need of spoil. Now as you know, batak is one of two Old Testament words for trust or reliance.

The other one being chassa. Batak seems to express the sense of confidence or security that comes from having something or someone to rely on or trust in, something stable that is leaned on. And it's interesting that the Septuagint never translates batak by pistuo, to believe in, but rather by el pizzo, to hope in.

It may be that that indicates for us that the meaning of batak is not as full, if you like, as what we would call under the New Testament idea of faith, so as to include will and intellect and so on. But batak literally means one who has confidence from leaning on something firm. It's a major Old Testament theme, of course, for reliance upon God.

[11 : 03] And just in passing, the passage in 2 Kings and chapters 18 and 19 are significant, for this at least, that they frequently set out for us the use of the word batak in that sense.

But within human relationships, that word can be used either in a sense of false security or the sense of proper confidence as here.

This woman's husband has total confidence in her. The woman's husband leaves certain roles to her exclusively. He has a real sense of security because of her character.

And when we come to the second half of the verse, we encounter a little difficulty in coming to the exact meaning. And the difficulty really is provided by the word shalal, spoil, and the verb chazir. Taking that word shalal first, it's used of spoil or booty or plunder. Very often for the spoils of war in the Old Testament following particular conquest.

[12:15] And it's when we come to the verb that we find the most difficulty. It can be either to be lacking or to lack or to be in need of or to have a need of.

It's a word that is most frequently used in the way that God's grace is sufficient for his people. For example, they go through the wilderness and did not lack manna or sustenance.

But coming to bring the two together, we meet the difficulty there. And if we compare the translations in the way that the NIV and the AV brings it out, we might get more of an idea of what I mean.

On the one hand, the meaning could be that because this man has such a virtuous wife, he has everything that he could wish for already in a contented life because of her.

He does not have a need in the sense that he already has all valuable things already. And that seems to be the idea behind the NIV. He does not lack anything of value.

[13:23] On the other hand, it could be that if we take the meaning of shalal, spoil, literally, then the sense is that this man, having such a wife as he has, he doesn't need to go to achieve things by way of booty or plunder or spoil.

He does not need to go to gain things in an illicit way. And whichever of these we choose, the basic idea is still the same, that this wife's characteristics are such that her husband has full confidence in her.

He leans upon her in such a way that he has all of life's necessity and not by any illicit gain. If we move along to verse 12 next, And the meaning here really is quite straightforward, with the main emphasis on the way that this woman is directed or positively oriented towards her husband.

He has full confidence in her, but she does him good. She is positively inclined in good towards him. All the days of her life.

And that verb, gamal, which means to deal out or to recompense, to render, can be used in respect to good or evil. Or, as here, the two are contrasted.

[14:55] She renders him good, not evil, all the days of her life. She is actively, positively dispensing good and not evil.

And the word tov, good, of course, as you know, is a very wide-ranging word, especially when we take it into the context of seeing it in respect to God himself.

God is, in the highest sense, good. And goodness is imparted, dispensed by God to us. And in a passage, for example, such as Psalm 34 and verse 8 following, this word is used repetitively, really, bringing out the very rich combination of ideas that we have there using tov.

So that in this particular context, good is really describing something that is superior to other things. She is really rendering to him goodness in its all-embrasive sense all the days of her life.

[16:17] In every way that harm can be contrasted, she is rendering that to her husband. And then we find in the next verse that it takes us into the area of her particular manual activities.

She looks for wool and flax and takes delight in working with her hands. And that verb, darash, to seek, differs from the other verb, bakesh, a bakashan, that it carries the idea of seeking with care or with inquiry.

And in fact, darash can sometimes be translated to care for. The woman is not just looking for certain materials to use in her home and in her actions.

She is searching out with care. She is discriminating in the choice of her materials. And in setting to work with such materials, she takes delight in labour and in chores.

If we were taking these things into the area of application, here is one particular area, for example, where we could set that against some of the modern trends to womanhood that see manual labour as degrading, that doesn't fit in with the particular trend of feminism that they are engaged in.

[17:44] Here is a woman who takes delight in such labour and chores. She takes delight in working with her hands. And it's interesting that the word delight, chapitz, which is used, coming

from the verb *chapatz*, to take delight in, the verb includes a considerable emotional involvement. It's not just that she's engaged in it out of mere duty. She's taking delight in it. But it's a delight that arises from the intrinsic quality of the work itself.

There is something in the thing itself that gives her delight. The delight is, in other words, from the object that arouses that delight.

In the work of her hands, she finds delight. Here is one husband who doesn't have to leave his socks out for weeks on end, waiting for them to be darned, waiting for a button to be sewn on. This is a woman who gets down to it, who actually engages in the work with delight. And then in the next verse, she goes on to speak about how she brings in food for the family.

[19:06] She is like the trading ships. She brings her food from afar off. I remember when I was in college, going through the principal's class, we were dealing with the subject of marriage.

And he told us the story of a particular minister who had announced as the text, on the occasion of a certain marriage, these very words at the beginning of verse 14, She is like the merchant ships. And of course that aroused a figure of quite considerable bulk. But in actual fact, of course, the good man intended that the woman would be regarded as like the trading ships in the way that she procured for her family.

Well, here is the writer saying, She is like the trading ships. She is like ships that are going from one particular place to a distance. To bring the goods from there to the location of their own base. This woman is like these ships. She brings her food from far off. She has to go to great lengths to procure food. She doesn't have supermarkets on her doorstep.

[20:25] She doesn't have the modern amenities that we have. She has to graft. She has to walk distances. She has to go to lengths to bring benefits to her family, even in the essentials.

And then related to that, we have the next verse. But she still rises while it is night. And she sets food for her household and a portion for her servant girls.

Now the word, the *vav*, at the beginning of the verse, comes in naturally in the sequence of the acrostic. So we could really take it without translating it and making any grammatical point about it. But we could actually also take it in the sense of but. Because then we're setting the two verses together. She has to go a great distance to bring her food to her household.

But that doesn't prevent her from actually rising while it is still night time. And setting things in order for her household before they get up.

[21:37] And the word that we find for food is not, as in the previous verse, the common word *lechem*. It's rather the word *tereph*, derived from the verb *tereph*, to tear or to rend something.

So the word is really literally a prey. It's used for game of some kind, possibly. And the writer really is setting before us the kind of food that this woman goes to get is gained by hard labor.

But then there are certain processes that must be gone through before that is ready for cooking. Never mind ready for the table. No such things as ready-made fillets.

No such things as something out of the deep freeze. This woman not only has to go distances to get the food, she then has to prepare that for cooking.

And her day is so busy that the only way she can slot that in is to rise up early before the dawn. Every moment of the day is used.

[22:47] Now the next verse leads us into her activities in financial things. She considers a field and buys it.

Out of the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. That word considers, the verb *zamam*, has the basic meaning of plotting or devising.

And in fact it also is used of God himself when he's seen in scripture to be carrying out his plans, his purposes as his plans unfold.

He devises. But here it's used in the sense of considering something. This woman actually goes to a particular field, an agricultural proposition, and she considers it.

And having considered it, she buys it. And then she uses it and plants a vineyard in it from the fruit of her hands, from the gain that she has made from her other many and manual activities.

[24:02] Well I wonder how many of us would let our wives out to buy a car. How many of us have such confidence in womanhood as we know it, that would go to trust in her to such an extent that we would actually leave that type of thing entirely to them.

But here is a woman whose qualities extend to the purchasing of this particular field after considering it. And then she's using it in order to bring further gain to herself and to her family.

And having seen these particular issues of strength of character in the way that she works with her hands, in the way that she goes out to acquire these things, he now brings us again to speak about strength.

Only this time he's saying she girds up her loins with strength and makes her arms strong. And of course to gird up the loins is frequently used to indicate a readiness or preparedness to engage in strenuous activity.

Find it of course also in the New Testament, carrying over, girding up the loins for some work. And when combined here with the word owes strength, what is meant is that she works industriously with hard physical labour.

[25 : 34] But then she has a constant readiness for that kind of work. She's never caught out, in other words, by any particular graft that has to be engaged in.

She is ready for it. She girds up her loins with strength. And she makes her arms strong. The idea of strength there also, in the physical strength, and it's an intensive form of the verb, the PL stem that's used, to make strong or to strengthen.

And what seems to be indicated as a whole is that this is woman in the sense that she has this readiness, but also the physical capability to carry through her considerable mental energy in all that she devises.

Well, then she's seen so far to be many-faceted. In building up the picture, this composite picture, is really taking us into a woman that is complete in every sense.

He goes on to say, She perceives that her gain from merchandise is good. By night, her lamp does not go out. And this word, perceiving, is a word that is used in the sense of tasting or evaluating.

[26 : 54] It's used of food, for example, tasting it in order to reach an evaluation of it. She perceives that her gain from merchandise is good.

The verb seems to indicate and emphasize that there is insight or perception that is reached, but it's reached through the experience of something rather than simply on an intellectual apprehension.

And again, Psalm 34 and verse 8 uses that, and we've already seen that verse used in the sense of good, where it says, taste, and see that God is good.

So that the two there are brought together perceive by experience that God is good. Here is perception that the gain from her merchandise is good.

The wife again then gains insight into the value of her goods, so much so that by night her lamp does not go out. she works late into the night as well as rising up early before the dawn.

[28 : 09] We might say, where does she find all the time? But there are not any spare moments in this woman's day. Then the writer takes us into the area of being charitable to others other than her own family.

But he begins that by saying, she reaches out her hands with the distaff and her palms also grasp the spindle.

These two words, kishor and pelic, which are translated distaff and spindle, seem to refer to the various instruments used in the preparation, in the spinning of wool, in the preparation of yarn for use in making garments.

Whether or not they're used here as parallel terms, it could be that it is very much the same instrument that's pointed to. The woman in the picture is nevertheless familiar and busy with the whole business of producing clothing.

this is really the remarkable thing about this portrait, that it takes us in all these spheres really right back to basics. It tells us that here is a woman who has to begin right with the very initial raw materials, who has herself to engage in dirtying her hands, who has to begin there with basics and then carry things through to completion.

[29 : 46] She has all that to do. And he's saying to us all these things fit into a picture of virtue. If we want to know a virtuous woman, if we want to know strength of moral character and spiritual character, we mustn't imagine that it's simply a matter of engaging in certain religious activities or businesses.

There is a whole composite picture from basic activities through into other areas of life.

And the verse that seems to be very intimately connected with that, verse 20, she spreads out her palms to the poor and she reaches out her hands to the needy.

And it's really a lovely follow on from the previous verse, isn't it? And the intention of the writer seems to be deliberately placing side by side or following on a picture of an industrious followed by

a charitable use of hands.

He is saying she's reaching out her hands with the distaff and her palms to the spindle, but she's also spreading out these same hands to the poor. She's reaching out with these hands to the needy.

[31 : 10] She's not self-centered in her busyness. She is reaching out to others with the very same products. And that particular thing also is brought here under this idea of virtue.

She's spreading out to those less well-off from her own activities. The verb *paras* is very often used in a context of prayer, where the hands are spread out or held up, held out before God in a posture of supplication.

But here they are used in respect to this woman who is spreading out her hands, that is, emptying herself liberally in order to give to the poor. And the two words for poor, the poor and the needy, describe a particular social class in the Old Testament.

And sometimes, very often, there's no distinction made in the translations of these two words. We find them both translated poor, except where the two words occur together.

And it's quite interesting really to look at the various subtle differences to be made between the two particular words. While both describe one class of people, this word *ani* focuses on material deprivation.

[32 : 43] They are poor in the material sense. And the other word, *ebion* or *needy*, connotes rather some disability or distress.

And of course, the two are related together. And yet, there is this particular emphasis on each side. material poverty and some particular distress exist together.

So that this class in the Old Testament fall prey very often to those who are better off. And how often do we find the prophets, for example, denouncing those who have plenty, but whose attitude is to trample on the poor and the needy.

They have no defenses. these *ani* and *ebion*. They have no recourse to the machinery that is available to those that have plenty.

And of course, one of the virtues of kingship is that it takes care to shepherd the poor and the defenseless.

[33 : 55] Here then, the virtue of this woman includes that regard for this particular class of people, so often abused, but here reached out to.

She has no fear for her household from the snow, in verse 21, because all her household are clothed with scarlet.

the verb there that's used for clothed, to be clothed with something, it doesn't just refer to the idea of putting on particular garments, it's very often in the Old Testament related to a context that shows something about the wearer of these garments.

For example, garments can show royal status, they can show grief, they can show repentance, they can show luxury, prosperity, poverty, and so on.

It's not just referring to particular clothes for their own sake, but there's something behind the wearer of such clothes, something about the character of the wearer.

[35 : 09] And while the main point there in the verse to be made is that this woman has prepared clothes that meet the rigors of winter, it's still the case that this word *scarlet*, *shanim*, points to well-being, prosperity.

It's a particularly good quality cloth, dyed with this rich scarlet colour. And of course Isaiah, that marvellous passage in his first chapter in verse 18, takes this word *shanim*, *scarlet*, and where God is through him there, showing the marvel, the miracle indeed of God's washing and regeneration and cleansing.

Though your sins be as scarlet, not just in the sense of red and colour, but with this idea of a cloth that is deep dyed, though they be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

This thought is carried on into the next verse, the thought of having this luxurious kind of cloth, where the woman's own particular clothing is described.

She has provided for her family and now she wears particular things herself. We may translate, she makes coverings for herself, her clothing is of fine silk and purple.

[36 : 35] The first reference there to coverings is either to a table covering or a bed covering.

These common household matters. She makes these for herself. But in addition to that, she has the very best materials for her own particular clothing.

She has shish, which means fine linen. Or, she also has what is called purple argaman, often associated with royalty or nobility.

Her garments are made out of fine linen or silk and purple. She has all these things for herself through her industry, through her many sided virtuous character.

She has procured that position that she has not only a family well prepared in clothing, but she has this herself. But, is there not something there that might seem contradictory to the New Testament idea of womanhood?

[37 : 50] is there not something there that seems to smack of luxury as against sobriety? Well, if I may be permitted to give you a quotation at that point, just taking us very briefly beyond the bounds of exegesis into this comment that comes from Charles Bridge's commentary on proverbs.

And he says on this verse, this does not contravene the New Testament rule of sobriety. It only commends her station in consistency with the purest simplicity of godliness.

It is possible to pay too little as well as too much attention to this point. And it is not always that Christian women pay to it the regard precisely due, separate from both extremes.

No increase of active exercise can excuse the neglect of those graces which, trifling as they seem, when set out on right principles, form a component part of an attractive profession.

The primary respect inculcated to the inward adorning in no way renders the exterior grace a nullity.

[39 : 20] Unquote. Here is a woman who has an inward grace, an inward gracefulness, and has a corresponding outward dress, a corresponding outward gracefulness that she can use the very finest materials in a graceful, in a godly fashion.

And moving to verse 23, brings us to the subject of her husband. He's leaving the woman for a moment, and he's taking us into the area in which her husband is engaged for the day.

Her husband is known in the gates when he takes his seat with the elders of the land. Now that's not a picture of somebody who's left his wife at home to do all the work, and he's away loafing around, sitting about with his chums for the rest of the day.

Because the word gates, of course, refer to the gates of this community, and very often in the Old Testament carry that meaning, the gates are really the centre, the hub, of the social, the commercial, the administrative life of this particular community or society.

Sitting in the gates is therefore not a picture of idleness. It's a picture of one who has a prominent position in running the affairs of the community.

[40 : 56] He is as an elder of the land, engaged in making important decisions. It is the place of local government where the elders in prominent position in the community, administering the affairs of the community, they regularly meet in the gates of the city.

But there is, it seems, a particular relation between that and the woman's own character. character. Because I think it's right for us to see that the woman's character and position and virtue in some way lie behind his position.

He is well known in the gates, but then that is immediately related to what she is. And it may well be the case that the writer intends us to see his position related in a particular way to his wife's.

He has gained his position in the gates through all that his wife is and has done in the community. Her virtue in some way lies behind his promotion.

While that seems to be hinted at, the church men with virtuous wives should not place too many aspirations of eldership on the virtue of their wives.

[42 : 26] But here is a man who can say that through certain qualities in his wife, he himself has achieved distinction in the community.

That at least seems to be the indication of that connection between the wife and the husband's position. And then again we've taken into the area of what she makes and what she supplies and sells.

She makes a linen cloak and sells it. She supplies the merchants with sashes or with girdles. And again very briefly that refers to wrapping or a cloak of some kind made of linen.

She makes this particular product for commercial gain and then she sells girdles or belts, sashes probably worn around the waist, to the merchants.

the word cana'ani. Of course the same word Canaanites. And the Canaanites well known for their trading abilities.

[43 : 31] For that reason sometimes the word cana'ani is difficult to translate because it can either refer on the one hand to the race or as here to the profession of trading.

She makes these things for the traders and sells them. Verse 25 Her clothing is strength and honour.

She shall laugh at the days to come. Now again that's a very literal rendering of the language used. We've already come across the word strength where we saw in verse 17 it means strength or might. the word hadar is a noun which indicates honour or even splendour. For example it's used in Psalm 8 and verse 6 of man the created work of God.

In some other particular passages the word is used where that glory has departed. God has withdrawn himself his presence.

[44 : 41] It's often used of royalty pointing to the splendour of royal endowment and activity. And here the two words are brought together for us in the construction so that the idea would seem to be here is strength and splendour.

The two things are very closely compacted. A woman who has for her covering for her garments strength and splendour. she is strong she has a glory belonging to virtuousness.

Now that is a very literal translation also that we used in the second half of the verse she laughs at the days to come or she has a particular attitude to the future.

The verb shakhakh literally laugh when it's used in combination with this preposition le sometimes is used as a description of defiance.

We find it in the attitude of certain kings towards their enemies. They're laughing at them. They have a particular defiant front towards them.

[45 : 57] And we may take that meaning here. While the element of laughter or rejoicing is not absent yet this combination really as a whole suggests to us that we should see in this woman's character that she has a certain position whereby she can afford to as it were defy the future.

She has no fear of what the future may hold. She is prepared for anything that will unfold. She is not caught out.

She shall be defiant. towards the days to come. Now moving on to the final few verses.

Verse 26. She opens her mouth in wisdom and the law of love is on her tongue. Her speech is now considered.

Her speech is characterized by wisdom. And that word of course chokhmah really takes us back to all the references to wisdom threaded right throughout the book of Proverbs as a whole with all the various and indispensable connections between wisdom and the fear of God the first principle of wisdom.

[47 : 21] wisdom. This is the substance of her speech. She's not only strong in the way seen previously but her strength comes primarily through this that she is wise as a woman of God.

It is the fear of God that is central in the whole composite character that now comes forth in her speech.

She opens her mouth in wisdom. And then of course the word Torah often translated law takes us also into the area of teaching or instruction often used as the body of literature that is used as a basis of instruction and of course we know that that law very often refers to the giving of the law through Moses and so on in the Old Testament.

But teaching is a particular aspect or a particular duty a particular work of what scholars would call the wisdom school in Israel and of course that's a huge subject in itself but here is a woman whose particular instruction is in line with the very school of wisdom that seeks to set across the substance of the fear of God she moves in that way herself and she is an example to others in her instruction teaching is her special task there and her teaching is in wisdom how to teach others how to conduct themselves and live a blessed life her mouth opens in wisdom and then of course the word that we've translated love is the important

Old Testament word chesed different translations covenant love steadfast love or the old fashioned but very compact and instructive authorized version loving kindness there are again very large areas to the word chesed itself some scholars take it in reference of course to God that it is especially related to covenant that it is covenant love or covenant steadfastness other scholars do not see any relation when used of God to any particular covenant context but in any case in this particular context used in human to human relationships it refers to this attitude of love which includes the actions of kindness and that's why the word loving kindness in the AV seems to capture very well the basic meaning of chesed in that context putting it together then the woman is a teacher of wisdom her language is seasoned with a teaching of loving kindness and that carries through into the activities that follow on in her life as a virtuous woman then 27 she watches over

the ways of her house and she does not eat the bread of idleness we find some things there that have already come up so we don't want to repeat what we've already said but that word *sopia* that begins the verse it's really a participle an active participle from the verb *sappa* literally to keep watch over something it includes the idea of being fully aware of a situation so that for example we are not caught out in a context where an approaching enemy is seen this keeping watch means to be aware of the developing of a situation the woman is on the lookout the woman has a position in the home she watches over the ways of her house she is not in a position again where she's caught out by unexpected developments she's prepared as a lookout over the ways of her family and then she does not eat the bread of idleness we've already seen her industriousness that she doesn't have a table that she has gained without hard labour verse 28 then her children rise up and call her blessed her husband also he praises her perhaps there isn't any specific action referred to in the verb come to arise it does usually mean to rise up from a prone or sitting or lying position but here it might well be taken simply to refer to the process of growing

[52 : 37] I suppose of these children her children rise up and call her blessed as they rise up as they grow as they're weaned and so on they come to call her blessed and such is that progress that in calling her blessed the writer here uses a word that is very often used in the old testament as you know there are two words for blessed in the old testament the verb *ashar* and the verb *barakh* and this word here *ashar* is never used when God blesses somebody it is always *barakh* that's used of God's blessing and in the same way as the old testament speaks and as we sometimes ourselves speaks when we bless God we never use the word find the word *barakh* used we never find the word *ashar* used rather and it's interesting again to take the septuagint translations the septuagint always translates *barakh* by *eulogetos* and *ashar* by *makarios* *barakh* seems to be very much a benediction whereas *ashar* is more in the area of a congratulatory pronouncement the two sometimes do merge or overlap but *barakh* especially is a benediction it is in the highest sense

God's blessing from that of course we render blessing to God in the way that we speak when we bless God but here this word used is by way of blessing in the way of congratulations yes indeed there's lots behind it but it reaches this particular point her children rising up call her blessed they have much in her to be thankful for to congratulate her for and her husband also pronounces his blessing the whole family concur in other words in the opinion that she is blessed that they owe much to her verse 29 whether right or no begins to sum up to reach his conclusion many daughters have exercised virtue but you excel them all he's telling us that there are many examples of virtue but here is one who surpasses all the rest and that word is emphatic here you excel many have done virtuously many are examples of what we're speaking about but you this woman this complete woman she you excel them all you have ascended over all of them literally and verse 30 favor is deceitful and beauty is fleeting but a woman who fears the

Lord she shall be praised what we find in this verse as the writer comes to this concluding remarks is a contrast between the beauty that is simply external and that which is internal with a corresponding outward side to it the word *favor* gain is favor or grace and again an important old old testament word used in fact for the grace of God himself for the favor undeserved favor that we receive from God from the grace of God and as in chapter 11 verse 16 gain usually means grace in the complete sense inward as well as outward but here in verse 30 the meaning seems to be more along the lines of favor in the sense of charm it's much more of a hollow thing not from a proper inward character and motives and such gain is said here to be deceitful or fraudulent *sheker* alongside of that we have the word *beauty* *yippy* fairness it refers in this case to aesthetic the outward beauty the outward form and it's said here to be *chebel vapor* something which evaporates putting the two together this exterior thing favor and beauty is deceitful and a vapor and in contrast to that he now brings us to the fear of the Lord a woman that fears the Lord that is true beauty and that is true fairness he is telling us that is the picture that we should promote this woman bringing us to the heart of the matter shows again that the fear of God is central to it seems however that there's another aspect to that which comes out in the final words of the verse not only does the woman provide in herself a contrast to outward beauty but she's well worthy of being praised in herself in other words he's telling us that compliments are very often paid by us when there is no such complete no such worthiness in those that we pay compliments to but he's saying here is a woman and whatever compliments we pay her she deserves them favor is deceitful and charm or beauty is a vapor but here is a woman who deserves all that she will be given and the final verb there *halal* means to praise or to boast again used of praising

God but here used of exalting true human beauty this woman of virtue who fears God she shall be lifted up in praise she is the subject of being exalted and that verbal form according to one particular lexicon while used while often in an active reflexive personal senses in a passive sense here she is to be praised she has worthiness in herself for others to praise her just in passing it's very interesting that these two words chen and yapi favor or grace and beauty and beauty although it's the verb that I'm going to speak about the verb from which this yapi comes are used in psalm 45 verse 2 and indeed studying this particular verse led me into that particular verse in psalm 45 where you remember it speaks about that glorious figure of the king in that messianic context he has a fairness above the sons of men and a beauty above the sons of men grace is poured into his lips these two words there bringing us really essentially to the beauty and the grace of the saviour and the final verse ends the passage for us with an imperative an imperative and an exhortation give to her from the fruit of her hands and let her words praise her in the gates and the writer closes that by saying all that she has done all the fruit of her hands let that be what praises her take note of all that she is and does all the worthiness that is hers and let the gates let the whole community praise this virtue her works are to be talked about there in a way which will bring this well deserved praise to her well then we've seen a very composite and very lengthy picture that the writer here has given us of this woman of virtue what we might call the A to

Z of womanly beauty here indeed is a woman who fulfills her role in God's creation who is an help meet for man who fulfills the words that God himself declared in the creation of womanhood it is not good that the man should be alone I will make and help meet for him the woman with the fear of God with this many sided virtuousness is truly that woman that indeed is the picture of the truly liberated and the truly fulfilled woman thank you for your attention thanks to the thanks to the people for his careful exegesis of the passage I think I don't know if any of us here are qualified to question his exegesis and I certainly can't guarantee that the questions that follow will be confined to exegesis

[62 : 46] I imagine that as we are hearing these things we were thinking about what is the place of the woman in the home in the light of new testament teaching so when we thank you again now I'm sure the questions will be away from exegesis into application so the floor is yours brethren most of us will be all for women if the women that are living fulfill these requirements I was thinking that if a woman is doing all these things how does she have the time to look after the children are there is there a retinue of servants yes I think that is a reference in the passage certainly to when it mentions she spreads the table when she gets up early in the morning for the family and for her servant girls so presumably there would be certain roles within the family to servant girls but again it really does leave one as somebody said this morning fairly breathless to look at the whole composite picture of it and even bringing that into a new testament context and taking the new testament revelation alongside of that there's still a lot there for preaching material in the sense that there isn't really a single moment of time and yet that is a truly liberated in the proper scriptural sense of a woman how do you use this passage in preaching you would use it for pastoral counselling prior to marriage what would be the path of application in the passage well I think the easy answer to that is that I haven't used it as yet

I would suggest that it would make a very admirable approach to counselling for marriage and particularly as Mr. Stone was saying in a study of particular family situations or a family context it does bring in the relationship of the woman to others in the home you could very easily do quite a bit on the husband the relation between him and his wife and how as I was saying he's owing so much to her particular virtue would you say that her work is specifically in this passage related to her home rather than the work outside of the home one of the questions with which presumably husbands and wives wrestle today is the question of should the wife be occupied outside of her home now we've all got conversations about that individually but you were explaining the work she does and do we tell you that this work is very specifically related to her home if I might try and answer that I think that really we're working in a context nowadays where religion or religious life taking the church broadly if you like we've reached the stage

I think where religion is so very much departed out of a family context by that I mean going back in generations we had products and activities of the home very much keyed into a religious and a spiritual life whereas I think now it tends to be very much against that where you have a detachment of religion from family life even amongst certain Christian contexts there doesn't seem to be the same integration of religious life and community or family life and that's probably related to

industrialization and so on but I think in that kind of context we would see the whole thing really as a composite picture of that everything is included in the sense that the products of the home even are used with a religious or spiritual significance also but how he said that it is obviously as you say something that we have to decide on how much our wives are to be active outside the home and how much that is going to encroach upon family responsibility

I do think that that passage would give quite a bit of information on that I think there are two things that stand out here that we have of this woman the one is her foresight the other is her discipline the way you get those two things and especially made up to a woman going out to work I know women who go out to work and the home does not suffer because they've got the force of looking ahead they're not scrambling they're not living from hand to mouth and so every 12 plans their whole life as discipline and have their priorities right I know other instances where women going out to work is a total disaster because there's scramble and there's irritation there's no but one of the ones that you so clearly brought out there was she looks ahead she looks for things to come and that's a key factor not mainly for this woman but for all of us I think that this is a lesson for us all in the discipline of time and in the foresight we have in planning how to make use of that time and I think that would help us to answer the question that knocks rest some can do it and do it well some can't and never would and it ties in I think with that whole question of how what is the priority is it the home is it advancement or is it the use of talent in a disciplined way yes I think in a context in which just to go back to David's question context in which we are preaching and working today where there is so much of both partners out at work and children for example very often neglected in that

I would say that that particular passage would enable us to preach in that context of a woman's work out with the home in biblical perspectives in the sense as the professor is saying to look at woman's work but to what end is it geared is it just selfishness materialism or is it in fact to the benefit of the family is it to do with the essence of godliness is it really self-centered or is it actually god-centered can I ask a question please this is perhaps a negative it's to do with the question of Jeth why is it that we have here a picture of a virtuous woman what I'm asking is what about a virtuous man why is it a virtuous woman and do we have information in the book of proverbs saying about what would be the essence of a virtuous man or how are we to understand why is the omission why is it one sided what does appear to be

[70:27] I don't think I can really answer your question unless just to say that the sign of a virtuous man is to follow a virtuous woman but I think that as I was saying it's related to the presentation of the figure of wisdom for example and so on although we have to take it that this is a specific woman wife that is intricate I really don't know perhaps some more experienced and better qualified to speak on that would be able to answer your question it's perhaps something to do with the fact that women had such a subordinate role in the Old Testament times and perhaps due to the fact that women tended to be despised and here is the author of Proverbs raising women as it were and you know looking at the virtue of women assaulting women women's position it was taken for granted that some men would be virtuous and the whole of

Proverbs is really dealing with virtue of male or female as it were but this passage is as it were to include women in to bring them in and to show that true virtue belongs to them too and I thought it was a very helpful comment to conclusion relating in fact to Genesis that she is a helper suitable for him and the realm really and the pressure of this purchase from that context at the beginning you related to the picture of women earlier in the book were you ever meant to see it as a wife a woman literally that was being described here but in some figurative way yes I think that temptation is very much there I tried to indicate that there were two extremes

I thought which we could go to on the one hand to simply look at it as a list of wifely attributes divorced from the other figures in the book of Proverbs and on the other hand to see it simply as a final extension of a figurative message perhaps I don't know I was really quite conscious of having very little information to hand about the basic approach to that problem so really I more less took the middle course and took both sides but I think personally I would think that would be the more correct approach that here is a particular woman who has certain characteristics but which are yet characteristics of wisdom as a whole is it possible that we're told that this chapter is the beginning of was from

Lemuel the one that his mother taught is it possible that he had a picture of this a bit of the excellent woman in mind a machine the pattern really in which he drew the figure yes I think that's possible too most of the opinions I came across seem to go against that I think a lot of that mind you was

based on the Septuagint which has the passage concluding the book of Proverbs but not immediately after verses 1-9 the other idea was that the woman's husband here being promoted as it were by her virtue wouldn't fit the context of King Lemuel who would more be a hereditary promotion but I think that's probably a very loose ground on which to actually separate them off completely but possibly Lemuel if it is mother in mind with better ground for describing woman as she did than

Solomon would have had describing Robert this woman I think didn't very much virtue any more questions brethren you all satisfied an do a you you