

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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The Virtuous Wife—and Her Husband

A curious detail in the well-known description of the virtuous wife highlights her role in her husband's success. The wise husband will honor her for it.

"Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. . . Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land" (Prov. 31:10, 23).



Solomon's description of the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31 has been the foundation of many sermons on the qualities of a good wife. Her hard work, generosity, devotion to her family, kindness to others—all of these traits are lauded as the attributes of a woman who will be highly esteemed by her family and her community.

But there is an oddity in this text that bears a closer look. The entire section of v. 12-27 is devoted to a description of the wife—except for v. 23. Right in the middle of extolling her many fine qualities, the author inserts a comment about her husband's reputation in the community. I suppose it's possible to draw a connection from his reputation back to her character, but the comment seems out of place. What is it doing there?

The answer is found in a common literary device often found in the

Hebrew Scriptures: *chiasm* (pronounced KI-as-um). A chiasm is a structural arrangement that links thoughts in an *ascending* order up to a key pivot point, or central concept, then repeats the same thoughts in *descending* order. In Proverbs 31, for example, "She works with her hands" (v. 13) is mirrored by "she does not eat the bread of idleness" (v. 27). Likewise, "she makes tapestry for herself" (v. 22) links to "she makes linen garments and sells them" (v. 24). It's a fun exercise to go through this passage and find the parallels going up to and down from the central verse.

So what is the central verse in this chiasm? It's v. 23—"Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land." This is not a random observation thrown in to break the monotony. His place in the community is the whole point of this paean to feminine virtue: *a good wife makes a successful husband*. Note that the entire passage begins with "her husband trusts in her" (v. 11) and ends with "her husband praises her" (v. 28). Thus, the beginning, middle, and end of the text

stresses her primary objective in life as empowering her husband to be successful in society.

Naturally, modern feminists go nuts with this. The very idea of a woman's worth being tied to a man is considered demeaning. But that criticism fails to see the beauty of this arrangement. Yes, her contributions at home enable her husband to go out into the world and make a name for himself. *But she shares the honor*. This passage is emphasizing the symbiotic relationship of a husband and wife in a healthy marriage. She helps him get ahead in his career by maintaining a happy and productive home; *and* she enjoys all the perks of being the life-companion of a successful man. Everybody wins (including, by the way, the children who are fortunate to be raised in such a balanced family).

It is a wise woman who recognizes the unique role God has placed her in, and stays busy fulfilling it. And it is a wise husband who recognizes the value of such a wife, and goes out of his way to praise, honor, and dignify her for her sacrifices.

— David King