

"A Woman of Honor" Mother's Day, Tryon FBC, May 8, 2008

Proverbs 31:10-31; Ephesians 6:1-3

My Mother turned 88 this month, and we sent a barrage of cards proclaiming her priceless value to us all! She has lived out her love for The Lord and shared the values that have shaped my life. She has a lifetime collection of handwritten notes and dozens of crayon pictures with stick figures drawn by us children that all say, "To Mom with Love!" She is proudest of our childish attempts at poetry, and we all remember the one where I used the dreaded term, 'housewife' and was soundly corrected to use the more honorable term 'homemaker!'

'Homebuilder' was more like it! My Dad was a typical work-aholic of his day, and Mom carried the load of providing everything from dinner to discipline, from laundry to love, teaching to toilets, and sports to spiritual matters. Dad would sometimes come home to the occasional crisis when Mom had had enough, and we could get the double dose of lectures, or whippings or restrictions, all of which were to protect Mom's sanity and her revered spot as the one who was always on our side!

King Lemuel wrote the inspired verses we have in Proverbs 31 that made it into Holy Scripture. He drew attention to the diligence and commitments that made his mother a woman of honor. The woman of honor has 5 characteristics in these verses:

1. She builds her home with tireless attention to the needs of those in her care.

2. She protects the home as a nurturing place and a life support system. This includes being a positive support for her husband's role in the family, a role that often gets fuzzy by the demands outside the home.

3. She somehow finds the time to serve the needy also, including encouraging her husband's participation in the

community needs. 4. **She uses her talents** wisely and profitably, and lives her virtues out in such a way that she is the inspiration that prompts this kind of reflection, praise and respect that this portion of the Bible contains.

This Proverb praises a woman who has kept her focus on her responsibilities as God given privileges. These verses have set a high standard *for more than just the woman* who would read this staggering list, it sets an aim *for the church* to strive for as she helps women become all that God would have them be. Here are objectives that may build our ladies into women of honor for years to come. A church can support them in their journey!

How can we as a church honor our Mothers this day? A onetime response on a single day should serve us well by inspiring our respect all year long! But to make over Mom only once a year and extol her tasks and dedication to us all is like dusting off the family Bible just because we heard the preacher might come for a visit!

You may have heard of the man who went to the post office with a package to be mailed. As he handed it over the counter to be weighed, the postal clerk routinely asked, "Anything breakable in this package?" "Yes" said the man with a smile. "There is something breakable in it, the Ten Commandments. The package is my Bible."

The Commandments are breakable, and though we may break or fracture them slightly from day to day, we would not want to intentionally ignore such a simple and important one as this as a church, failing to honor our Fathers and our Mothers. We would be taking lightly or even disregarding the very thing that we are charged with to strengthen every individual who seeks after God.

Let me suggest 4 ways that we can fulfill our calling as Christ's body, His church today, in order to encourage women of honor.

1. We can keep God's standards of honor before us all.

Though the Bible has a few statements about keeping women silent in church, wearing hats to cover the head, and avoiding jewelry and not cutting hair, all of these are part of another time, another world, another culture. We find these encompassed in the charge to nurture inward beauty, God's true standard of honor. *"Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain...."* says the Proverbs, *"but a woman who fears the lord shall be praised!"*

Our culture has missed this simple truth. It seems we are all about the outward appearances. We need a corrective on the constant, exploitive commercialism of our age. Every advertisement tantalizes our women with products that enhance charm and beauty, to the exclusion of a healthy spirit and an attitude of grace. These are the 2 most critical measures that Jesus taught for a man or woman of honor. That's what God offers, and that's what we must discern and teach.

2. We can keep our church committed to children and their faith development. Women raising children spend 95% of their waking hours giving full attention to their children and their welfare. When these women come to church they need fellowship, worship, the freedom for Bible study and prayer. We as their church must provide the time for them to have their spirits renewed in the Lord. We must keep the nursery, not they.

We must make an unwavering commitment to faith development of children and keep that commitment up with a real knowledge of what it takes for their care, for well trained workers, for updated classrooms and resources. Public schools are challenging places. Why would anyone think that our children's learning environments would be capable of attracting them much less

teaching them without fresh ideas, trained and inspired workers and fresh supplies? Church is the only place to learn the Bible, to be challenged to know the Lord personally, to grapple with the Lord's will for our lives. We are the only place that teaches and claims our children's hearts for the Lord. Without the church reaching out to families with assurance that we are committed to getting that job done, we will raise a next generation without Christ and without hope. The church is always just one generation away from a disappearing faith and from being forgotten. A church without a commitment to children's religious education is a dangerous place to be.

3. We can address the issues of marriage and family in our day. Face it, marriage has become disposable. Other offers, other partners are on every corner. If one isn't an easy fit after trying it out, we can change partners. Why would a generation with a multitude of options want to stay and slug it out when it gets difficult? Church has to be the place that teaches not only that God is good to his word, but how he does it and how we hang on.

A pastor recently spoke about the sacred experience of the WE in the marriage experience....."We gather together to join this man and this woman..." The 'WE' is the congregation, and WE join them in a holy covenant. When they fail, WE FAIL, WE the church who joined them before God with the assurance that, though marriage takes work, the experience is holy and the results are every bit worth it, and that God would be their present and available help as they stepped out together. Godly marriages are OUR business and our responsibility! This generation has more reasons not to keep homes together than ever before, and we have more reason than ever to be committed to teaching young adults how to navigate the waters of relationships in our generation with God's ever present help.

4. We can provide opportunities to grow and serve the

Lord. The Proverbs speak of the amazing strength of a woman of Honor. In fact it almost sounds super human! She is up all night sewing, all over the world in her selections of cloths, goods, food, and still serves the poor with her leftover time! Where does that kind of woman come from? I believe it is just like the Proverb says, this kind of woman is so committed that it SEEMS that she is everywhere at once. We know many of those women right here in our fellowship, ones who run circles around us all, and whom we have come to depend on for most of the main elements of our fellowship! Where does that strength come from?

When a church wants to develop its youth we create a youth ministry. We call on ministerial direction. We provide budgets, space, and cover everything from an activity oriented building to mission experiences, choir opportunities and cultivated leaders. All women may grow into honorable servants of God, because they have God given gifts, talents and abilities. They can discover these in the fellowship of encouragement!

As Nehemiah said, *"The joy of the Lord is my strength!"* When a woman is availed of all that the Lord has to offer, there truly is superhuman strength! Bible study changes lives, and Ladies Bible Studies change Ladies' lives! We can provide these. We can provide many things that can meet the needs of today's women. And they can become Women of honor because they find that the Joy of the Lord, His truth, His touch, His Teaching, His spirit made readily available to them, especially in critical times of need..... these all make what some find burdensome work to really be life giving and real joy. For women of honor their only complaint is that there just aren't enough hours in the day to do all they want to do. Their hymn, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise!"

As God's people our ranks are full of honorable women. If we want to honor them we will reflect that in the kinds of plans and commitments of our time and resources that we will make! We will still gather at family places and say thank you's in the month of May, but we will live everyday searching for ways that we can be partners with the women God has gifted to serve him. We will live as a congregation that is marked by commitments that encourage, instruct, inspire and share their lives.

END (1st Draft)

Rena walks in. "Good grief! Are you doing another one of those women sermons again? That's ridiculous! You don't know anything you're talking about! You ought to let me do this one!" To which I said, "AMEN!"