

**Question:** *What is your biblical justification for advocating that, as a rule, married women should not work outside the home?*

**Answer:** The Bible, on a number of issues, does not give us black and white declarations about certain lifestyle choices, including women working in a vocation outside of the home. But it does give us an overall worldview regarding God-ordained relationships and callings which it sees as necessary as a general rule for a world which functions as God designed it, which brings us maximum sanctified satisfaction and joy and brings God most glory. I believe the Bible clearly indicates that, as a rule, that kind of world is best achieved when married women, and especially married women with children, see the home, not the workplace, as their primary calling.

That worldview begins not with questions about women but men. Genesis 1:26-28 placed both men and women over His creation to exercise godly dominion over it as responsible stewards, but Gen. 2:15 reveals that God placed the primary care of His creation on the man and v. 18 reveals the woman as his helper. Vv. 16-17 show that the man, not the woman, was given the responsibility to protect his wife against the sinful threats of the world. He is to lead, rule, provide and protect and she is to find her comfort and purpose under the auspices of her husband's God-given commission to care for the world and keep it. The idea of the man having a career in one realm and his wife having a career completely dislocated from his in an independent realm is completely foreign to God's original design.

The Bible consistently puts the responsibility of leadership, provision and protection on the shoulders of husbands and fathers. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, in the context of taking care of female relatives whose husbands have died, "...if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for the members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." The Bible's assumption is that men will provide for women. In Genesis 6 God called Noah to build an ark and a new race of humanity. In Gen. 12 God called Abram to establish a covenant of grace leading to Christ. He called Jacob to be the patriarch of a nation and then orchestrated the birth of his 12 sons to lead 12 tribes. He called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt and Aaron to be His priest and the nation to be led by male elders. Among the priests and Levites only the men were called to lead and serve in the Tabernacle. And the NT shows us the same thing in the church. Throughout the Bible God establishes a pattern of godly male leadership in order to accomplish His purposes through us and to communicate to women and children that the burden of responsibility for leadership, provision and protection is not on their shoulders but on their men. Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Why doesn't Paul tell the mothers not to do that – after all they're the ones spending most of the time with the children? It's because the father shoulders ultimate responsibility for the children's discipline and theological education. Therefore, this entire issue actually centers not on women but men whose God-ordained responsibility is to lead, protect and provide for their families.

Added to that the Bible reveals for women not only a God-ordained life of holiness but a general, God-honoring orientation. 1 Timothy 5:14 tells us what it is when Paul writes, "So I counsel younger women to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander." And Titus 2:3-5 says, "Teach the older women....Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be keepers of the home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God." And 1 Peter 3 is helpful too (read vv. 1-6). So we see that a woman's orientation is to be homeward and husbandward.

Does that necessarily exclude the possibility of a woman working a job outside the home? No, but such a choice must only be made in submission to and in harmony with what we've already seen. Consider what John MacArthur has to say on this subject:

There is nothing in Scripture that specifically forbids a woman from working outside the home as long as she is fulfilling her priorities in the home (Proverbs 31).

Whether or not a woman works outside the home, God's primary calling is for her to manage the home. That is the most exalted place for a wife. The world is calling many modern women out of the home, but not the Lord. His Word portrays the woman's role as one preoccupied with domestic duties. It is a high calling, far more crucial to the future of a woman's children than anything she might do in an outside job.

The ultimate decision is a personal one that each woman must make in submission to her husband's authority. Obviously, a single woman would be free to work and pursue outside employment. A married woman with no children is perhaps a little more restricted in the amount of time and energy she can devote to an outside job. A woman who is a mother obviously has primary responsibility in the home and would therefore not be free to pursue outside employment to the detriment of the home. In fact, from a parental perspective it is difficult to see how a mother could possibly do all that needs to be done in the home with the upbringing of children, hospitality, care of the needy, and work for the Lord (cf. 1 Timothy 5:3-14) and still work in an outside job. Indeed, any wife who fulfills God's priorities in her life and home will be a busy lady. However, her children and her husband will rise up and call her blessed, and a woman who fears the LORD shall be praised (Proverbs 31:28,30).

Consider too the following questions which Jennie Chancey challenges ladies to ask themselves before taking a job outside the home:

1. Will it require me to leave my children, who God entrusted to me, in the care of someone else?
2. Will it require me to neglect my primary role as my husband's helper?
3. Will it place me under another man who is not my husband which may marginalize my husband's authority over me or ability to depend upon my assistance?
4. Will it cause me to neglect my duties to my local church, my extended family or my neighbors?

Pastor David Padfield also challenges Christian working women to ask the following question: What is my core motivation for working outside the home?

Because it's just what women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century do?

Because I am bored as a homemaker and feel stifled and unfulfilled?

Because I long for more money and a higher standard of living?

Because my children 'get to me' and I want to hand them off to others?

Here are still other questions to ask yourself:

1. Will working outside the home increase or decrease the centrality of my calling as a keeper of the home, a mother of my children and my husband's primary helper?
2. Will it increase my intimacy with and submission to my husband?
3. Will it increase the interdependence of my marriage and family or make me more independently minded?

These questions can help a woman weigh primary responsibilities with optional ones.

What we've been considering is the rule for godly women who are married with children. But there certainly are exceptions like single women, divorced women, single mothers or women married to unbelieving or disobedient husbands who require them to work outside the home. Most of these exceptions remind us that the ultimate health of a marriage stands or falls with the man.

Considering all we've seen, the question which seems most relevant is not "*Why shouldn't married Christian women work outside the home?*" but rather "*Why would a married Christian woman want to work outside the home?*" Or to reframe the original question, "*What is your biblical justification for women working outside the home?*"

Are there valid exceptions which might require or compel a married woman to work outside the home? Yes. But, as a general rule should most married Christian women choose to devote their time to keeping their home, raising their children and helping their husbands fulfill their callings? I believe so.

*Written by Andy Perry, Winter 2008*