

What should a wife's priorities be? Can she work outside the home?

Scripture: Titus 2:3–5; Ephesians 5:25, 28; 1 Timothy 2:15

Code: QA115

Is it okay for a wife to work outside the home, and what are a wife's priorities?

The question of whether a wife should work outside the home cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. It can only be addressed in the context of a clear understanding of God's priorities for women. A fundamental priority for every Christian woman is to live sensibly. At its most basic level a sensible woman is one who understands God's priorities for her life and lives a self-controlled and an orderly life consistent with those priorities.

What are God's priorities for women? Seven priorities of a godly wife are spelled out in Titus 2:3-5 where Paul exhorts the older women to teach "young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

Failure to live according to these seven priorities will cause the Word of God to be dishonored. Conversely, a wife who orders her life according to these priorities will honor God's Word.

Seven Priorities of A Godly Wife

First, *wives are to love their husbands*. This command is simple and unambiguous. There are no conditions or exceptions. It is not simply that love of husbands is a virtue but that not loving them is a sin. Paul is not referring to romantic or sexual love, although that has an important and proper place in marriage. He is speaking of committed love that godly wives choose to have for their husbands, just as godly husbands choose to have for their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 28). The term refers to willing, determined love that is not based on a husband's worthiness but on God's command and that is extended by a wife's affectionate and obedient heart. Even unlovable, uncaring, unfaithful, and ungrateful husbands are to be loved. This sort of love of husbands and wives for each other involves unqualified devotedness and is a friendship that is strong and deep. And when a wife does not truly love her husband she must, in obedience to the Lord, train herself to love him.

Second, *wives are to love their children*. Whether the children are their own offspring or adopted they are to be loved with a love that, like the love of spouses for each other, should be selfless and sacrificial. As with love for their husbands, love for their children is not an option. It isn't based on the personality, intelligence, attractiveness or worthiness but on their need. The most important responsibility of love for believing parents is to lead their children to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But Paul's admonition is inclusive. Mothers are to love their children in every way - practical, physical, social, moral, and spiritual - with a love that has no conditions and no limits. This kind of love, to be fully expressed, is extremely demanding as the mother seeks to fulfill her obligation to raise godly children (see 1 Timothy 2:15).

Third, *wives are to be sensible*. This is the same quality that should characterize elders (1:8), all older men (2:2), and, in fact, all believers (2:12). Common sense and good judgment should improve

with age, but they should be evident even in early adulthood.

Fourth, *wives are to be pure*. This refers primarily to moral purity, and, especially in this context, to sexual purity and marital faithfulness. Like older women, in fact like all Christian women, young wives are "to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness" (1 Tim. 2:9-10). "Modesty" refers to a healthy sense of shame at saying anything, doing anything, or dressing in any way that would cause a man to lust. "Discreetly" refers to moral control, to keeping passions, especially sexual passions, subdued. First Peter 3:3-6 gives similar instruction to women.

Fifth, *wives are to be workers at home*. One of the hardest things for many contemporary wives to do is be satisfied with being a homemaker. Part of the reason is that modern appliances and other conveniences greatly simplify and reduce housework, and time that is not used for something constructive inevitably produces boredom, dissatisfaction, and often increased temptations.

Women who have no children or whose children are grown obviously have fewer obligations in the home and therefore much more time available, and the point is not so much that a woman's place is in the home as that her responsibility is for the home. She may have a reasonable outside job or choose to work in the church or to minister in a Christian organization, a hospital, a school, or many other ways. But the home is a wife's special domain and always should be her highest priority. That is where she is able to offer the most encouragement and support to her husband and is the best place for extending hospitality to Christian friends, to unbelieving neighbors, and to visiting missionaries or other Christian workers.

In regard to being workers at home, young Christian wives today must take special care to be sensible, as they are admonished earlier in this verse. In consultation with their husbands, they must use good judgment in deciding how much time can justifiably and wisely be spent in activities outside the home, whether at a paying job or in some form of service. When they have a genuine desire to obey and honor the Lord in all things and to conscientiously seek guidance from His Word and in prayer, they can be assured that He will provide the necessary wisdom and resolution.

Sixth, *wives are to be kind*, the meaning of which is obvious. They are to be gentle, considerate, amiable, congenial, and sympathetic, even with those who are undeserving and unkind to them. To be kind is to be godlike, "for [God] Himself," Jesus said, "is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35). Similarly, Paul admonishes believers to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

Seventh and finally, *wives are to be subject to their own husbands*. Like all other Christian wives, they are to "be subject to [their] own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:22-24; cf. 1 Tim. 2:11-14).

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).

Adapted from *The Fulfilled Family* by John MacArthur, pp. 224-6, and *Titus: Commentary*, pp.76-90.

For more information on this subject, here are some resources you'll find helpful:

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