

# *SHOULD MOTHERS WORK?*



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# Mothers & Work

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*How does biblical motherhood affect the why, who and what of their work?*

Alan Lam

## 2 Introduction

Typing the phrase *should mothers work*<sup>1</sup> into Google comes back with 35.3 million results.<sup>2</sup> There has been an increase in the percentage of mothers working since 1997 in Australia.<sup>3</sup> Relatedly, work as the main reason for using formal childcare facilities increased from 1999 to 2008 (61% to 70%).<sup>4</sup> Studies which have observed the effects of mothers working on children are at variance. On one hand some studies encourage women to work because children have better cognitive and language development, better school grades and female children find higher paying vocations.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand some suggests that these benefits are due to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Mother's Work', Cited 23 Oct. 2015, Online: <http://i.huffpost.com/gen/1227553/images/o-WORKING-MOTHER-facebook.jpg>. This refers to the picture on the title page.

<sup>2</sup> This search was performed on 7 Oct 2015.

<sup>3</sup> 'Mother's Work', Cited 23 Oct. 2015, Online: <http://i.huffpost.com/gen/1227553/images/o-WORKING-MOTHER-facebook.jpg>. In 1997 59% and 46% of mothers from couple and lone mother families respectively to 66% and 60% in 2009-10.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Australian Social Trends, Jun 2010 - Child Care', Cited 25 Sep. 2015, Online: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features50Jun+2010>. It decreased for *personal* reasons (15% to 12%) and *beneficial for the child* reasons (20% to 18%).

<sup>5</sup> Alan E. Guttmacher, 'The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development: Findings for Children up to Age 4.5 Years' (2006), Cited 25 Sep. 2015, Online: [https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/documents/seccyd\\_06.pdf](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/documents/seccyd_06.pdf). The NICHD study observed more than 1000 children over their first 4.5 years of life. The Sydney Morning Herald, 'Children of Working Mums Do Better at School' (September 29, 2013), Cited 25 Sep. 2015, Online: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/children-of-working-mums-do-better-at-school-20130928-2uktv.html>. A study involving 135000

other confounding factors such as dual-income families having more resources to spend on education.<sup>6</sup> Also, some studies suggests that having children in paid childcare was proportionally linked with behavioral problems.<sup>7</sup>

The topic of mothers and work is a popular and pertinent question because there is no consensus on what to do and it affects not only women but children, men, families and societies. It can be an emotional and spiritual topic as it may impinge upon people's identity and expectations. It can also bring up feelings of guilt, loss, pride, resentment and anger.<sup>8</sup> Michelle Stacpoole sums this up well when she is "feeling bad because they work, and bad employees because they have a family."<sup>9</sup>

### 3 Methodology

"Should mothers work?" is a complicated question to answer because the work environment today is different from that in the Bible. Thus the first task will be to understand the how work has changed throughout history. It is from this

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Danish children observed that children whose mothers worked between 10-19 hours when they were 4 years old had higher grades when they were 14 years old. Rachel Browne, 'Children of Working Mothers Do Better, Says Harvard Business School Study', *The Age* (May 18, 2015), Cited 25 Sep. 2015, Online: <http://www.theage.com.au/business/workplace-relations/children-of-working-mothers-do-better-says-harvard-business-school-study-20150517-gh3ei7.html>. Data from the International Social Survey Program observed 50000 adults from 25 developed countries and found that daughters of working mothers have high employment (69% vs 66%) and were supervisors (22% vs 18%).

<sup>6</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 'Children of Working Mums Do Better at School'.

<sup>7</sup> Guttmacher, 'The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development : Findings for Children up to Age 4.5 Years'.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore much care has been taken to be sensitive especially since I am a father talking about what mothers should do. Also much care needs to be taken when addressing these issues with others especially women.

<sup>9</sup> Michelle Stacpoole, 'The Gullibility of Working Mothers', *ABC News* (July 14, 2014), Cited 25 Sep. 2015, Online: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-07-14/stacpoole-the-gullibility-of-working-mothers/5594660>.

perspective that we can then answer the *what* and *why* of mothers' work. In the end the crucial questions surrounding this issue is where mothers are to find their value, is the work of mothers and fathers different and what types of work should mothers prioritize?

## 4 A History of Work

### 4.1 Pre-Industrial Revolution

Ancient literature was mostly written from a male perspective so "it is often difficult for anthropologists to gain access to the women's world."<sup>10</sup> Yet a sufficient picture can be gained to understand what work means for mothers today and how the Industrial Revolution and Feminism affected this.

It has been correctly noted that in ancient Israel and the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD there was minimal distinction between the activities of men and women. So men usually worked from home unless they needed to travel and women were involved in economic production, work outside of the home and tasks which required heavy labor.<sup>11</sup> Thus the domestic and public spheres were not considered separate.

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<sup>10</sup> Halvor Moxnes, 'Honor and Shame', *Biblic. Theol. Bull. J. Bible Theol.* 23/4 (1993): 167–76.

<sup>11</sup> Derek Tidball and Dianne Tidball, *The Message of Women : Creation, Grace and Gender* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 69, 77-9. This included the production of textiles, milling, grinding and fuel gathered for fire which could require up to ten hours of work per day. Kirsten R. Birkett, *The Essence of the Feminism* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2000), 109. Women had always worked outside the home as a spinner, dressmakers, goldsmith, brewer, metal polisher, button-maker, lace-maker, nursemaid, dairymaid and house-servant.

Yet there were distinctions nonetheless. Mothers had a primary role in the nurture and upbringing of children especially in their first decade of life.<sup>12</sup> So the Roman philosopher Favorinus (80-160AD) encouraged mothers to nurse their children.<sup>13</sup> The Roman politician Vipstanus Gallus (10BC-60AD) concluded that “[E]very citizen’s son, the child of a chaste mother, was from the beginning reared, not in the chamber of a purchased nurse, but in that mother’s bosom and embrace, and it was her special glory to study her home and devote herself to her children...But in our day we entrust the infant to a little Greek servant-girl.”<sup>14</sup> Also, Plutarch was a Greek historian (46-120BC) who wrote a manual of moral codes. In these he expected “the women have more family concerns and business upon their hands.”<sup>15</sup> Thus primary sources indicate that mothers had a large role compared with fathers in the nurture and rearing of children and were expected to mainly labor within the physical boundaries of the home.

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<sup>12</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and David Wayne Jones, *God, Marriage and Family : Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 98.

<sup>13</sup> A. Cornelius Gellius, ‘Noctes Atticae (Attic Nights) by A. Cornelius Gellius’ (1927), 12.1, Cited 1 Oct. 2015, Online: [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Gellius/12\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Gellius/12*.html). He exhorted a lady of rank who was still overcome with fatigue from labor, “For what kind of unnatural, imperfect and half-motherhood is it to bear a child and at once send it away from her?” He goes on to question “that nature gave women nipples as a kind of beauty-spot, not for the purpose of nourishing their children, but as an adornment of their breast?”

<sup>14</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, ‘A Dialogue on Oratory’ (1942), 28-29, Cited 1 Oct. 2015, Online: [http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/tacitus/dialogus\\_e.html#28](http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/tacitus/dialogus_e.html#28).

<sup>15</sup> Lucius Mestrius Plutarch, ‘Plutarch’s Morals’ (1848), 2.209, Cited 1 Oct. 2015, Online: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/plutarch-the-morals-vol-2>.

## 4.2 Proverbs 31

The historical setting parallels the picture of the ideal wife in Proverbs 31.<sup>16</sup> It is similarly noted that there is no clear domestic or business (private or public) divide as the mother works both inside and outside the home.<sup>17</sup> The home is the core of economic activity. Yet her “priorities were thus devoted to the good of her husband and her household.”<sup>18</sup> So her endeavors outside of the home assist her responsibilities inside the home to provide food and clothing for her household (Prov 31:15, 21, 27).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the ideal woman works hard, is not greedy and is not idle because “[A]lthough she was privileged to have servants, she did not use them as an opportunity for laziness.”<sup>20</sup> The result is that her husband trusts her and is known in the gates amongst the elders (verse 23). Her work assists her husband’s work which has been interpreted to be “authoritative counsel and teaching...among the highest local authority from time immemorial in the ancient Near East.”<sup>21</sup> The picture in Proverbs 31 is similar with ancient depictions of mothers where they prioritized and worked to provide for the needs of her household. Thus it is good for mothers to work in order to provide for the family

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 519. This ideal woman is most likely real rather than a personification of wisdom. This is because she is identified as a valiant wife (אִשָּׁת־הַיָּהוָה) which is used in 12:4 to depict a real woman, other occurrences of woman refers to a real woman (14:1, 18:22, 31:3), there are similarities with Ruth (Ruth 3:11), Woman Wisdom is never portrayed as a wife or mother and this valiant wife is portrayed as a homemaker.

<sup>17</sup> Tidball and Tidball, *The Message of Women*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> Tom R. Hawkins, ‘The Wife of Noble Character in Proverbs 31:10-31’, *Bibl. Sacra* 153/609 (January 1996): 20.

<sup>19</sup> Claire Smith, *God’s Good Design* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2012), 210-2.

<sup>20</sup> Hawkins, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*, 531. Walke refers to similar language in Gen 19:1, 1 Sam 11:3, 2 Sam 18:24, 19:8, 1 Kings 22:10.

since all their activity was considered work irrespective of whether it was done inside or outside the house.

### 4.3 Post-Industrial Revolution

The advent of new manufacturing processes in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century revolutionized the world including the definition of work. It pulled *work* out of the home.<sup>22</sup> What contributed as work changed from the medieval notion of all tasks that contributed to the family's sustenance to tasks that contributed to the economy and production.<sup>23</sup> Men tended to work outside the home because their wages were higher since they generally had more formal education than women.<sup>24</sup> Women travelled less because unaccompanied female travelers could be suspected of being prostitutes or thieves.<sup>25</sup> Overall, the Industrial Revolution led to men working outside of the home and women remaining inside.<sup>26</sup> The redefining of work to work only being counted as work if it contributed to production was for women the "lessening the value of their unpaid domestic tasks."<sup>27</sup>

### 4.4 Feminism

The conception of work for mothers was further changed with the coming of Second Wave Feminism in the 1960s and 70s. This movement advocated equality

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<sup>22</sup> Birkett, *The Essence of the Feminism*, 108.

<sup>23</sup> Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105.

<sup>24</sup> Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 110. Despite it being argued that men and women have different types of work they both should have the same job opportunity and be paid the same. This conclusion will not be argued for or explained due to space restrictions.

<sup>25</sup> Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 130.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Kim Peterson, *Keeping House : The Litany of Everyday Life* (1st ed.; San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 129. This was because domestic tasks were not seen as production and thus not work.



through sameness, power and independence.<sup>28</sup> Overall, success was “through achievement of visible goals...careers and professional work for women as intrinsically more valuable than caring for a family.”<sup>29</sup> “The productive work, which brought in money and was thus seen as valuable, was that done by men outside the home.”<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusions

Whereas in the past mothering (childbearing, rearing and managing the home) was valuable and gender-specific, after the Industrial Revolution mothering is less valuable and not gender-specific. The question thus become: (1) Are mothers and mothering valuable? (2) Is mothering gender-specific? (3) What types of work should a mother prioritize?

### 5 Value of Mothers

Mothers do not find their identity, value or significance in what they do but in their Union with Christ based on what Christ has done for them (2 Cor 5:17). Thus the modern exhortation for mothers to find their identity in what they do is unbiblical. This biblical understanding will alleviate feelings of guilt and false expectations (Rom 8:1-4).

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<sup>28</sup> Kirsten R. Birkett, *The Essence of the Family* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2004), 115.

<sup>29</sup> Birkett, *The Essence of the Family*, 120-1.

<sup>30</sup> Birkett, *The Essence of the Feminism*, 108.

## 6 Value of Mothering

### 6.1 God Like

Mothering is valuable because it is God-like. So God comforts Israel like a mother comforts her children (Is 66:13) and God gathers his children like a hen gathers her brood (Matt 23:37).

### 6.2 Creation Mandate

Karl Barth concludes that “the necessity to procreate imposed by the history of salvation prior to the appearance of the Messiah has now fallen away.”<sup>31</sup> However, this fails to take into account the pastoral epistles which do promote procreation (Titus 2:3-5, 1 Tim 5:14-15).<sup>32</sup> Thus the imperative to multiply to achieve the telos of subduing the earth continues.<sup>33</sup>

### 6.3 Hope

Childbearing is good and valuable because it promotes hope in God, the future and the next generation. God provides a future filled with hope through children.<sup>34</sup> So “[C]hildren are a sign of the trustworthiness of God’s creation and his unwillingness to abandon the world to powers of darkness.”<sup>35</sup> Having children is valuable because it expresses trust in God’s future.

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed by. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance; trans by. Geoffrey William Bromiley et al.; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 3.4.143.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Ash, *Marriage : Sex in the Service of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 172.

<sup>33</sup> Ash, *Marriage*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character : Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1981), 165.

<sup>35</sup> Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 227.

## 6.4 Good Work

Paul discourages idleness in 1 Timothy.<sup>36</sup> Thus women are to marry, have children and manage their homes rather than be idle or busybodies (1 Tim 5:11-14). More specifically, Paul highlights that mothering is a good work (1 Tim 5:10). Paul values mothering as a good and godly work. This placed mothering at a higher pedestal compared with his contemporary society where some saw it as a means to seclude women from having a public role.<sup>37</sup> Calvin likewise concludes that “when a woman, considering to what she has been called, submits to the condition which God has assigned to her, and does not refuse to endure the pains, or rather the fearful anguish, of parturition, or anxiety about her offspring, or anything else that belongs to her duty, God values this obedience more highly than if...she made a great display of heroic virtues.”<sup>38</sup>

## 6.5 Conclusions

Therefore, mothering is valuable, good and godly, contrary to post Industrial Revolution and Feminist conceptions.

## 7 Gender of Mothering

There are various arguments which advocate that mothering can be done by either the father or mother. First, Feminists advocate that equality is based on

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<sup>36</sup> This command to not be idle extends to both men and women (2 Thess 3:6, 11).

<sup>37</sup> Korinna Zamfir, *Men and Women in the Household of God: A Contextual Approach to Roles and Ministries in the Pastoral Epistles* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 278.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (ed by. David Wishart Torrance and Thomas Forsyth Torrance; trans by. T. A. Smail; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 219.

sameness.<sup>39</sup> Second, Eve is called *woman* in Gen 2:23 and *mother of all living* in Gen 3:20 which implies that the Fall resulted in men trying to reduce women to just her reproductive capacities.<sup>40</sup> Third, in Gal 3:28 there are no gender distinctions. Fourth, Jane Douglass concludes that Calvin sees this order applicable only in certain situations and can be surpassed for the purpose of building up the Church.<sup>41</sup> Fifth, the adversary (τῷ ἀντικειμένῳ) in 1 Tim 5:14 is the political opposition of their day thus the roles of women are culture dependent.<sup>42</sup>

However, these arguments have flaws. First, equality is an ontological rather than a functional quality. So both the man and woman are created in the image of God despite the woman functioning as a helper (Gen 1:27, 2:28).<sup>43</sup> Second, the function to procreate was present before the Fall (Gen 1:28). Third, Galatians 3 is talking about salvation being available for all nations rather than about gender distinctions. Fourth, Calvin is not ambivalent about gender issues.<sup>44</sup> He notices that “[s]ome women held the office of prophets and teachers and were led to do so by

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<sup>39</sup> Thus the good goal of equality will only be achieved if mothering can be done by either father or mother.

<sup>40</sup> Letha Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 44.

<sup>41</sup> Jane Dempsey Douglass, 'Christian Freedom: What Calvin Learned at the School of Women', *Church Hist. Stud. Christ. Cult.* 53/2 (1984): 160-1. So she states that Calvin thought that "Paul's admonition for women to be silent in church and to cover their heads is historically conditioned advice, not perpetual divine law which should bind the conscience."

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1985), 289.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth J. Stewart, *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), 230. Calvin, along with the Reformed Tradition, disagrees with the Renaissance humanist view that woman was a defective male from Genesis 1:26-27 (both man and woman were equally endowed with the divine image).

<sup>44</sup> Stewart, *Ten Myths about Calvinism*, 230n27.

God's Spirit...but being an extraordinary case, it does not conflict with the constant and accustomed rule."<sup>45</sup> Fifth, the adversary in 1 Tim 5:14 is explained in the following verse to be Satan.<sup>46</sup> Thus the roles of women are a spiritual rather than situational reality.

The Bible consistently depicts mothers to have a different function despite being ontologically the same as fathers. This reality is similar to the relationships within the Trinity where the Father and Son are ontologically identical yet functionally different (John 5:19-23, 1 Cor 15:24). So first, God curses the woman in relation to her gender-specific role of bearing and bringing forth children rather than the man's role to work the land (Gen 3:16-17).<sup>47</sup>

Second, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-11 Paul uses the imagery of a father and mother to describe his labor amongst the Thessalonians. Yet he uses the images differently for both. So the mother nurses and cares (verse 7) whereas the father exhorts, encourages and charges (verse 12). Likewise, fathers are urged to discipline, instruct, guide and manage the overall household in the NT (Eph 6:4, 1 Cor 4:15 and 1 Tim 4:3).

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<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 217.

<sup>46</sup> It is linked to the previous verse by the explanatory conjunction γάρ.

<sup>47</sup> The man is cursed in relation to his work of working the land.

Third, 1 Tim 2:15 depicts a specific role for mothers. Some argue that this command is situation specific.<sup>48</sup> However, Paul's comments are timeless rather than timely because it is based on creation order. *She will be saved* refers to the future eschatological salvation since it is in the future tense-form and σώζω refers to end-time salvation in other parts of 1 Timothy (1 Tim 1:15; 2:4, 15; 4:16). This salvation is *through childbearing* (τεκνογονίας). τεκνογονίας is only used twice in pre-Pauline literature. The philosopher Chrysippus (3C BC) advocated that those who made laws should "belong to those who are zealous both to submit to marriage and to childbirth (τεκνογονίαν)...and to endure for it, if necessary, both pain and death."<sup>49</sup> Both marriage and childbirth are seen together as things that need to be endured. Thus the word τεκνογονίαν most likely refers to not only childbearing but also childrearing. Overall, the translation is *she will be eschatologically saved through childbearing and rearing*. Paul elsewhere says that salvation is through faith in Jesus alone (Eph 2:8-9). So it is not saying that women<sup>50</sup> are saved through childbearing and rearing. But it is saying that just as Adam was formed before Eve (1 Tim 2:13-14) so *women will be saved as they carry out her God-given gender role*. This is in line with the overall biblical picture where

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<sup>48</sup> Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 126. So Witherington suggests that these traditional roles were a remedy for women teaching and domineering men in Ephesus. Tidball and Tidball, *The Message of Women*, 258. Tidball suggests that the commands were given in light of women neglecting their household responsibilities because of heretical teachings which forbade marriage (1 Tim 4:3) and unhelpful gossiping. Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 38. Winters suggests that these commands are made only in light of discouraging the emergence of the New Women.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Andreas J Köstenberger, 'Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15', *Bull. Biblic. Res.* 7 (1997): 140.

<sup>50</sup> This principle is extended out to women in general as the 3rd person singular σωθήσεται changes to the 3rd person plural μείνωσιν.

Paul encourages women specifically to have and look after children and be busy and manage the home (1 Tim 5:10-14, Titus 2:3-5). Therefore, mothering is for women more than men because it is exhorted, part of God's plan and reflects creation order.<sup>51</sup>

## 8 A Theology of Work

### 8.1 Types and Purposes of Work

Christians work to not be a burden to others, earn their own living and share with anyone in need. (1 Thes 2:9, 2 Thes 3:10-12, Eph 4:28). Thus the purpose of work at a basic level is to provide for self, family and others.

Furthermore, Andrew Cameron describes three types and purposes of work.<sup>52</sup> This includes the work of creation<sup>53</sup>, community<sup>54</sup> and God.<sup>55</sup> Cameron proposes that all three are important and necessary. So "the work of God never eclipses nor displaces works of creation and community...The work of God relies upon the work of creation."<sup>56</sup> Thus work in general is intrinsically good.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order : An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (2nd ed.; Leicester, England: Apollos, 1994), 37. O'Donovan concludes that procreation is important because "human sexual love is ordered also to procreation. This is an unchanging principle of order which will continue to be a principle of order even when human beings refuse to procreate...when human beings have passed from the scene altogether."

<sup>52</sup> Andrew J. B. Cameron, *Joined-up Life : A Christian Account of How Ethics Works* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 4094-4263/5161.

<sup>53</sup> To understand, use and care for the created order.

<sup>54</sup> To build and serve others.

<sup>55</sup> Which is based on the final judgment.

<sup>56</sup> Cameron, *Joined-up Life*, 4179/5161.

## 8.2 Priority of Evangelism

Cameron correctly depicts the three types of work as important and essential. Yet he does not adequately distinguish the priorities between them. So Paul exhorts the Corinthians to abound in the work of the Lord because this work is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58). This work is motivated by Jesus' resurrection and has the goal to make more people bear the image of the Son. Thus this work is "the work of proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers and building believers up in that same gospel."<sup>58</sup> In 1 Cor 12:27-31 there are higher gifts so that "in a world where everyone is equally valuable, God has still established an order to the gifts that he has given."<sup>59</sup> In 1 Cor 14:1 Paul encourages the Corinthians to desire the gift of prophecy which builds up the Church and allows unbelievers to repent (1 Cor 14:24-25). Therefore, the work of prophecy, evangelism and edification is more

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<sup>57</sup> Likewise, both the Reformers and Puritans were keen to advocate that sacred and secular work were good and godly. Luther is quoted in Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1986), 228n3. So Luther concludes that housework is "a service of God far surpassing the holiness of asceticism of all monks and nuns." John Calvin, 'Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke', trans by. William Pringle (1845), Cited 5 Oct. 2015, Online: <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/luke/10.htm>. Calvin states "that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God, than when every man applies diligently to his own calling, and endeavors to live in such a manner as to contribute to the general advantage." William Perkins, 'A Treatise of the Vocations' (1605), 15-16, Cited 5 Oct. 2015, Online: [http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Perkins,%20William/Treatise%20of%20the%20Vocations%20\(OTW%20Version\).pdf](http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Perkins,%20William/Treatise%20of%20the%20Vocations%20(OTW%20Version).pdf). The Puritan William Perkins asserts that "the main end of our lives...is to serve God in the serving of men in the works of our callings."

<sup>58</sup> Peter Orr, 'Abounding in the Work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58) : Everything We Do as Christians or Specific Gospel Work?', *Themelios* 40/2 (August 2013): 208. So the use of the word κόπον appears one other time in 1 Corinthians and it refers to the work of building the Church (3:8). The other references to work point to evangelism and edification. Timothy does the same work as Paul who builds up his Church (16:10). The household of Stephanus are God's workers because they serve the saints (16:15-16). Paul consistently encourages the Corinthians to excel in building the Church (14:12) and to imitate Paul so that many might be saved (10:31-11:1).

<sup>59</sup> Paul Grimmond, *God's Plan for Work* (Matthias Minizines; Australia: Matthias Media, 2014), 19. So God has appointed first apostles, second prophets and third teachers.



valuable and desirable than other types of work because it serves both Christians and non-Christians more.

### **8.3 Mothering and Evangelism**

Consequently, evangelism is one reason why mothering should be prioritized.

Mothers teach and model God's values to their children (Prov 1:8, 6:20). God desires godly offspring (Deuteronomy 6, Malachi 2, Ephesians 6). The activity of mothering goes hand-in-hand with evangelism. Mothering is also evangelistic to those outside the family. So young women are to work at home so that the word may not be reviled (Titus 2:5).<sup>60</sup> Therefore, mothers are to prioritize mothering because it involves evangelism and evangelism should be prioritized.

### **8.4 Priority of Mothers with Younger Children**

Yet mothering is prioritized over evangelism for mothers with younger children. So Paul gives the specific exhortation for younger widows to bear children, love their husbands and children, manage their households and to be working at home (Titus 2:3-5, 1 Tim 5:14-15).<sup>61</sup> In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul expounds that the highest priority in the last days is holiness and devotion to God. Yet he acknowledges that married women are rightly anxious about worldly things (verse 34). These worldly things explicitly includes pleasing her husband and implicitly looking after children and the household from other passages (1 Tim 2, 5, Titus 2).<sup>62</sup> Thus

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<sup>60</sup> It is noted from Titus 2:1 that it is teaching and obeying what accords with sound doctrine that leads to the word of God not being reviled. Yet the command for women is embedded and thus included within this general context.

<sup>61</sup> The context of 1 Timothy has already been noted in section 5.4.

<sup>62</sup> In section 5 and 6 it has been argued that mothers are encouraged to mother which not only includes pleasing her husband but also loving her children and managing the household.

mothering is a necessary, good and godly activity even though it may minimize women's devotion to God. Therefore, in 1 Cor 7 and the Pastoral Epistles mothers with younger<sup>63</sup> children are at times to prioritize mothering over devotion to the Lord<sup>64</sup> and other activities including evangelism. Practically speaking, the activities of mothering such as nursing and caring for the children's physical needs do not directly spiritually serve themselves or others although these activities are necessary and still to be prioritized.

### 8.5 Priority of Mothers with Older Children

Conversely, older widows are expected to have participated in other good activities such as showing hospitality and charity (1 Tim 5:10). Thus mothers can and should participate in activities other than looking after children and managing the house yet only when the children are older and do not require as much attending and attention. This also reflects the situation in Proverbs 31 where the woman is able to participate in other activities because her children are older (as seen by the fact that they can call her blessed in verse 28).

### 8.6 Conclusions

Mothers are encouraged to prioritize mothering especially with younger children. This priority and need changes as the children become older. Modern technology means that "[T]he time now spent not doing housework can be spent doing some other kind of (more interesting) work these days."<sup>65</sup> Yet there is a priority of how

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<sup>63</sup> Further research needs to be done to ascertain how young is young.

<sup>64</sup> Even though mothering and devotion to the Lord are not totally separate activities.

<sup>65</sup> Birkett, *The Essence of the Family*, 124. Birkett suggests that the modern day equivalent of first century mothers is the part-time working mum.

they are to use this extra time not mothering. Mothers are to consider how to do the valuable work of evangelism before other types of activities including working to provide for self, family and others and the work of community and creation.<sup>66</sup>

Relatedly, the priority for mothers to mother means that it is also a responsibility shared by the Church. So the Church and family members are to support widows in order that they may not have to worry about how to sustain themselves (1 Tim 5:3-9).

## 9 Conclusions

The question of mothers and work is not solely about wisdom or what produces the best physical, behavioral or financial results. It is not based on culture or context. It is actually a question about identity, gender-roles and doing what is better.

It is acceptable, good and right for mothers to work to produce income whether inside or outside of the home. Yet mothering is primarily a mother's role because it is founded on the creation order, part of God's good design and is a specific exhortation for women. Also, mothering should be prioritized especially with younger children because it is good, godly, God-like, evangelistic<sup>67</sup> and encouraged. As children become older, mothers are encouraged to explore how to prioritize evangelism. Only then are mothers to consider working for profit for the purpose

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Cameron's categories.

<sup>67</sup> Involves sharing the gospel to children and others.

of sustaining themselves, supporting their family and being generous. Arguably, many mothers especially with younger children should consider doing less work for profit and more of the better work of mothering and evangelism since Australians are one of the most wealthiest people in the world.<sup>68</sup> Of course there is much freedom in this yet Paul encourages us to use our freedom to serve others rather than for our own financial-gain, enjoyment or status (Gal 5:13).

Finally, mothering is a good and valuable work yet mothers are to find their identity in their union with Christ rather than in what they do.

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<sup>68</sup> David Uren, 'Australia One of World's Richest, Most Equal Countries: OECD', Cited 8 Oct. 2015, Online: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/economics/australia-one-of-worlds-richest-most-equal-countries-oecd/story-e6frg926-1227364239037>. This is especially the case since Australia is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The only countries with higher average net wealth are US and Canada.

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