

The Importance of Home

I. The Modern Home

- A Current Controversy: feminist Linda Hirshman and her *Get to Work* manifesto

“The real glass ceiling is at home. . . . The family – with its repetitious, socially invisible, physical tasks – is a necessary part of life, but it allows fewer opportunities for full human flourishing than public spheres like the market or the government. This less-flourishing sphere is not the natural or moral responsibility only of women. Therefore, assigning it to women is unjust. Women assigning it to themselves is equally unjust.”¹

- “Cocooning” as a marketing trend: larger homes, more possessions, fewer residents.
- In 1963, feminist Betty Friedan railed against women stuck at home in soul-less suburbia. A direct reflection of how much the home had changed in the 20th-century.
- The home, once a place of productivity, had become a place of consumption. And no one can ever be satisfied with more things.

II. The Old Testament Home

- The windowless, four-room courtyard structure
- Simple furniture, bedrolls
- Rudimentary bread ovens and open-hearth cooking
- The importance of hospitality
- Same workplace, differentiated tasks

¹ Linda Hirshman, “Homeward Bound,” *The American Prospect*, November 21, 2005, as archived on <http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=10659>.

Child-bearing remained the primary responsibility of the mother or wife, who had the authority to manage the household. She rationed and allocated food supplies, prepared food and processed and stored it. She served as administrator with economic responsibilities as she managed the “family budget,” and judicial responsibilities as she adjudicated responsibilities within the household. And while the father or patriarch designated an heir, the mother often exercised the power (note Bathsheba’s role in the selection of Solomon to be king). The mother taught the children. This is an important point to keep in mind when we think of all the pagan women in Solomon’s harem—incapable of bringing up children in the ways of God and thus contributing to the rise of idolatry. When boys became young men, fathers took over the responsibility for their education, but mothers continued the responsibility of teaching girls after they became young women. Although women often helped out with herding and farming, the primary responsibility for such activity rested with the men.

In modern feminist discussion the assumption is often made that women in ancient Israel had inferior roles. But the women in Hebrew households had a status equal to or greater than the status of many men. And the biblical pattern is to honor one’s “father *and* mother” (e.g., Exodus 20:12; 2 Samuel 19:37; Proverbs 15:20). Honoring involved respect, deference to, obedience to, and caring for in old age or adverse circumstances in a society that had no social security provisions.²

III. The New Testament Home

- o A meeting place for the church

By the New Testament times, Palestine had become greatly urbanized. Town industry became more common, with practiced crafts such as tailors, cobblers, masons, stonecutters, carpenters, bakers, perfumers, butchers, weavers, potters, doctors, scribes, and more. Workers in the same crafts tended to live near each other in town, like rudimentary guilds.³ Due to being part of the Roman Empire, trade had increased significantly. Therefore there was a great range of goods available to the average housewife on market day—traditionally held on Friday, the day before the Sabbath. Because it was a “Day of Assembly,” Friday was also the day for public occasions such as weddings or legal hearings.⁴

When the church expanded to Asia Minor, slavery was primarily restricted to household service. Women, assisted by household slaves, produced wool thread and did some weaving at home. Even commercial textile producers then did not do much spinning or weaving.⁵ In Greek households, such as in Corinth, wives supervised the household property, male and female slaves, the kitchen, the nursing of the sick, the production of clothes, and the rearing of the children. In a nutshell, the wife controlled all domestic activities.⁶

² Howard E. Vos, *New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1999, p. 208.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-381.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

- Hospitality still an important part of the culture and increasingly important to Christians.

The paragon of virtue, the Proverbs 31 woman, knew how to run a home that was a blessing to all connected to it. The many verses that commend her activities are summed up in verse 27: “She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.” In contrast, the harlot described earlier in Proverbs does not tend to her home: “And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart. She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait” (Proverbs 7:10-12).

Every sphere has its repetitive tasks that contribute to the larger goal of productivity. The point of being a keeper at home is to provide a haven for a godly family to thrive (a requirement for church leadership, according to 1 Timothy 3:1-5), to offer hospitality to fellow Christians and non-Christians alike, and to provide a place for the church to meet.

IV. The Impact of the American Revolution on the Home

- Domesticity a matter of unadorned routine, essential to survival.

“In 1750 the Colonial American home was an essential locus of production for the entire society.”⁷

- The impact of the Boston Tea Party and tea boycott.
- The need to raise good citizens in the brand-new republic.

“There were no precedents for a republic on the scale of the United States. Many people believed that the new nation would require the support of a uniquely public-spirited citizenry. If citizens must learn to place a high value on the public interest, this was a lesson they would need to begin in childhood. Thus the home became crucial to the success of the nation and women—whose education began to be taken much more seriously than ever before—gained the role of ‘Republican Mother’...”⁸

- The rise of the “cult of domesticity”

V. The New Middle Class Home

- Urbanization and the invention of domestic goods.

⁷ Glenna Matthews, *Just a Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford Press), 1987, p. 3

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

“The second quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of explosive economic growth, and the material culture of ordinary households began to reflect the new abundance. Even in fairly remote areas, a woman might have been able proudly to display a China tea set. In the cities the possibilities for acquiring such objects were much greater. In Philadelphia in 1850, for example, a hardware store offered its customers two hundred and fifty kitchen tools. Presumably, these tools could give the woman in charge of the household an enhanced sense of craft and mastery.”⁹

“Another technological change that had profound consequences for the style of domesticity was the development of the stove. The transition from open-hearth cookery to cook stove was effected in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. . . . Affordable for almost all American households, the cast-iron stove made it easy to carry on several different cooking operations simultaneously—a feat much more difficult to accomplish over an open hearth—and thus contributed to a more varied menu in non-elite households. In short, the stove led to the demise of the one-pot meal.”¹⁰

- The moral authority of the home in the public sphere:
 - ☞ Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
 - ☞ Sarah Josepha Hale, *Codey’s Lady’s Book*, and Thanksgiving

VI. Marketing to Mrs. Consumer

- The “servant problem” and labor-saving devices
- The surprising roots of “home economics”
- Housewives as the new consumer

“All of these changes—brand names, installment buying, the heyday of American advertising—crystallized to produce what has been called the culture of consumption. As Warren Susman argued in a recent essay, the culture of republicanism of the nineteenth century was based on limits, restraint, and sacrifice, with “character” as the essential mode of self-presentation. This culture gave way to one based on abundance, fulfillment, gratification, and consumption, with “personality” replacing character in importance. The constellation of hedonistic attitudes that emerged in the 1920s, “the Jazz Age,” symbolized the birth of a new era, an era that could not fail to have enormous consequences for the status of domesticity.”¹¹

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

- The isolation of women in suburban housing patterns and the lack of community
- The rise of the *Playboy* culture and its denigration of domesticity

VII. The Importance of Home in a Latch-key World

- Get to work? The statistics are actually in favor of the stay-at-home wife.

“According to work-first feminists, the scariest bogeyman looming over women who stay home is divorce. Men leave their wives high and dry all the time, she insists. In fact, they don’t. Women initiate about two-thirds of divorces, so the idea that droves of middleclass men are blindsiding their spouses with abandonment is almost as much a fantasy as Prince Charming once was. . . . The statistics are also favorable for stay-at-home mothers in general. During the 90s, stay-at-home wives were 40 percent less likely to get divorced than their working counterparts. A 2004 study in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* revealed that couples have a much greater chance of splitting when the husband and wife earn equal incomes than when one partner is the primary breadwinner. When the higher-earning partner does leave, it is most often the wife.”¹²

- Outsourcing the private sphere
- “The new alone” in a marketplace culture
- The home as a mission field and discipleship center for the next generation

Our eternal abode — a home, not an office.

“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:2-3)

¹²Megan Basham, “Stay-at-Home Economics,” Townhall.com, May 25, 2007, as archived on http://www.townhall.com/columnists/MeganBasham/2007/05/25/stay-at-home_economics