

Christian Women Are Individual

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We are unique. Science is only now learning just how unique. The discovery of DNA, which contains all of the genes—the genetic code—that make up a human being, has brought about amazing knowledge. We should not have been surprised, however. When God created Adam and Eve and told them (and later Noah’s family, Gen. 6) to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth (1:28), he built into us all of these characteristics and a myriad of possible gene combinations. Indeed, DNA is a powerful argument for a Divine Creator rather than for evolution.

Just as no two snowflakes are alike, neither are any two human beings—even identical twins—exactly alike. Although it is very difficult when we are just starting out (it takes years of experience for us to learn to know ourselves with our capabilities and limitations), we must compare our lives and our attributes with what the Scriptures teach that we should be (mirror—Jam. 1:22-25) rather than what others think we should be.

Sometimes it takes a lot of trial and error for us to discover our strengths and our weaknesses. All of us can more readily see other people’s faults than we can see our own! Jesus’ humorous account of a man who tries to take a splinter out of his brother’s eye while a log is protruding from his own eye is quite graphic and pointed (Mat. 7:3; Luke 6:41; see also Gal. 6:1).

A careful study of 1 Corinthians 12:14-27 gives us a place to begin trying to develop the individuality into which we hope to grow. Paul makes it very clear that no Christian is more important than any other Christian. Even the lowliest of us have our places and functions.

Many, many who teach and direct teachers’ workshops (and those who write books and articles for teachers) insist that there is only one way to do things, and naturally that one way is their way. The use of what we call “visual aids” has been stressed and emphasized over the last fifty or so years, to the point that many believe sincerely that one cannot be a good teacher (even of adults) without using visual aids. Many of the workshops I have attended “suggest” that more time should actually be spent on preparing the visual aids than what is spent on studying the actual lesson. The tail seems to be wagging the dog. Of course, the ages and knowledge of the students will figure into this question. Some of us have absolutely no talent for finding or making visual aids, but that lack should not and does not mean we have no talent for teaching.

Through the years when I was questioning and doubting myself, my qualifications, and my judgment, my mind kept going back to my own childhood. Many, many of the church buildings where my father preached were little wooden frame boxes without a single classroom (nor even a restroom, for that matter, although there was that little house at the end of the path out back) and no porch. (Some had small shelves around the room to hold the kerosene lamps people would bring to provide light for evening services. Some came to worship in a horse-drawn buggy or even a wagon.) The custom was usually for the “little class” to meet in the front right corner (I can close my eyes and still see those little red Windsor chairs many churches had); the older children in the front left corner; and the “old folks” in the back. Each teacher had to try to raise his or her voice to get above the other teachers and classes. But we learned!

Later, when some of the church buildings where my father preached and where we worshiped did have classrooms, the children’s classrooms were often in the basement (with the furnace pipes overhead), with maybe one small, dingy window (at ground level, hence above our line of vision), and a pronounced aroma of mold, which I can smell to this day. It was not thought that children needed any special treatment or advantage. In fact, the rule (oft quoted by my father, although it was fading by that time) was that “children should be seen and not heard.”

My point is this: The only lesson material I can remember as a young child was a 3 x 5” card, printed by a well-known (and once-sound) publishing company, which had a picture (usually a copy of a painting by some artist—famous or otherwise) on one side and the lesson on the other. There was always a “Golden Text,” which we were expected to memorize and recite. When I got a little older and advanced to the next class, there was a folded paper rather than a card, with a more detailed lesson. Same picture, same “Golden Text.” Those were the only visual aids we ever had.

There were no pictures on the walls, no attendance charts (although we did sometimes get gold stars to stick on our papers), no posters, no flannel boards, no colorful signs on the doors. And yet we somehow learned the Bible! Our uneducated parents and grandparents did, too. My father as a teenager would carry his New Testament in his overalls pocket while he was working in the fields. When he had a chance for a break, he would stand on a tree stump “pulpit” in the pasture and practice preaching to the cows.

Don't misunderstand—I am not knocking visual aids. I just believe our emphasis has shifted from the message to the method, and we need to reverse this order. I know people of all ages can learn the Bible if they are willing to study and listen. I also know young children can sit (under duress, perhaps!) and pay attention to their teachers, even before they can read.

The point of all of the above is this: Be the person you are. Learn from others when and if you can. Improve yourself as much as you can—but give up trying to be someone you are not. It will not work, and it will cause you much strain and stress, not to mention feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Our families, backgrounds, and upbringing are different. Our husbands and children are different. Our financial situations, which would include our houses with their furnishings, are different. The financial situation would also include the amount we can afford to spend on food and other household needs.

On the other hand, we should never be stubborn or close-minded when it comes to trying to improve ourselves. There are many activities that, although we have never yet tried them, we may find that we can learn to do quite well and even enjoy ourselves in the process. Remember the five-talent servant and the two-talent servant (Mat. 25:14–30)? They were rewarded for using the talents they were given and then developing other talents besides. While these talents were money and not abilities, the same principle applies. Those who are blessed with more talent or ability bear more responsibility (Luke 12:47ff; 21:1–4; John 9:41; 15:22ff; Jam. 4:17—teachers receive “greater condemnation”).

In order to be prepared to teach, we must study. No collection of good works, no matter how impressive, can ever take the place of serious study of God's Word (Mat. 7:21–23). We will not, contrary to the beliefs of some members of the church, absorb our husbands' knowledge by osmosis. We have no business teaching if we aren't willing to study, which places some of us on the horns of a very perplexing dilemma: It is not a matter of **either** good works **or** study, but of **both** good works **and** study. We must “study [give diligence, ASV] to show ourselves approved by God, rightly dividing [handling aright] the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 3:15–17; 2:15). “When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that someone teach you again what be the first principles...for ye have need of milk and not strong meat” (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Our senses are exercised by use, and thereby we grow (Heb. 5:11–14; 1 Cor. 3:1–3).¹

If the wife of any church leader has children still at home, it is my carefully considered judgment that she should not work outside her home unless it is absolutely necessary—not for luxuries, but in order to survive. Paul wrote, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,

therewith to be content" (Phi. 4:11). He wrote to Timothy, "Godliness with contentment is great gain," and warned that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil; we should never trust in riches (1 Tim. 6:6, 10-11, 17-19). If the children are school age, there is the possibility that the mother could work, if work she must, during the hours the children are in school.

Children need to have at least one parent available, and in our case, that will not often be their father. While the children are young, and indeed as long as they are still at home, they are their mothers' "good works" (widows indeed, brought up children, etc., 1 Tim.5:3-16). Our husbands should come first, after God. (The children will grow up and leave home all too quickly, and we may be shocked to discover that we have no relationship with our husbands.) Sad to say, sometimes even Christian husbands will try to push their wives into taking a job and leaving their children, or to make them feel very guilty if they are reluctant.

Our children should be third on our list of priorities, after God and husband. Teaching, nurturing, loving, and training them will be the most important work we will ever do: The hand that rocks the cradle does indeed rule the world. The future of the church and of our county depends largely upon us. We are merely caretakers of our children. We are only given one opportunity, and it is so soon over. It will never return. One lady wrote a poem titled "Babies Don't Keep."² The thoughts are excellent. All the other things in our lives that seem so important can wait, but babies and children won't. If we wait until some magical day when we "have time," we have missed our opportunity, and it can never be recalled.

We must be willing to pay whatever price (pearl of great price, treasure in field, Mat. 13:44-46) it takes to "buy up" all of the opportunities we can find for preparing them to lead lives dedicated to the service of God, to Whom we will give an account of our stewardship. Look at it this way: What if we were able to save just our own children (I am not suggesting that we should not attempt to teach others)? How many souls could we take to Heaven? Even if we count the "average" family as having two children, think how the numbers would add up! I suspect the total would be many more than we are teaching right now, not counting our children.

Sometimes I think it is easier to be content with less than it is with more. The sad truth is, the more we have, the more we want. Could there be a relation between the material things (luxuries now become "necessities," purchased with Mother's extra money) and the fact that so many church members have their vision almost entirely focused on earthly, material, physical

things – from sensual “worship” practices to questionable, worldly methods of reaching the “unchurched”?

We forget that this world is not our home, and that we can take none of our possessions with us (Job 1:21; 1 Tim. 2:4; 6:7; Heb. 11:8–10). Only those treasures which are stored in Heaven will survive (Mat. 6:19–21). Surely, to sober-minded parents, our most prized and precious treasures are our children and grandchildren, and we want above all else for them to go to Heaven. These children are not ours. They have only been lent to us, just as surely as Hannah lent Samuel to God. We should be “redeeming the time” (Eph. 5:15–16) against the day when our children are tested.

Never let someone convince you that chores such as kissing wounds, wiping noses, or changing diapers are “demeaning” drudgery and not worthy of an intelligent woman’s time, education, and effort. Any woman, who has stayed at home and devoted herself to caring for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of one child or of several children, is doing a duty – a very taxing and exhausting duty – of inestimable value and far-reaching consequences. She uses both her education and her intelligence constantly! Hers is truly a labor of love, which involves so much more than just words or emotions (1 Cor. 3). She sees the first steps, feels the first tooth, and hears the first word. Nothing is worth missing these things if there is any way to avoid it.

The aforementioned mundane duties are, it is true, not nearly as important as the spiritual training we do, both by our examples and our words, but someone has to do the dirty work as well. The Boston/Crossroads people tried to force their “disciples” to abandon such lowly tasks and leave someone else (a mother would do, if the “disciple” was a teenager) to pick up the slack; the “disciple” had much more important “spiritual” work to do.

Consider also that, whatever we are doing, we should be thinking of the message we are conveying to our children by our speech, by our manner, our attitude, our honesty (or the lack of it: “Answer the door and tell whoever it is that Mother is not at home.”), and by our disposition. There is no short cut, no quick fix when it comes to bringing up children. It is a seven-days-a-week, twenty-four-hours-a-day job, of many years’ duration. Parents are to teach their children at all hours of the day (Deu. 6:6–9). Children should have access to their mother when they need her, not “by appointment only.”

We have been duped into believing that we can give our children twenty or thirty minutes after we get home from work, call it “quality time,” and consider our duties done – on to the important things. But the need children have for the attention of parents cannot be put off until a convenient time. Yes, the time we give our children should indeed be “quality time,” but quantity time is nevertheless required, for which there is no substitute. There can be no “quality time” apart from “quantity time.” “One-minute bedtime stories” (yes, they are actually on the market!) are pathetic excuses for tender loving care.

I have worked outside my home (after my children were older), and I know how exhausted I was when I reached home after a stressful day. Had there been children to care for in the evening, they would have been seriously short-changed. During some of those years of working outside my home, I also cared for a young granddaughter – taking her to work with me (in fact, taking her everywhere I went!), then caring for her in the evening at home. I am sure she did not get the patience and attention she deserved, but I did the best I could. Patience is hard to come by under those circumstances.

Jesus once asked: “If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father [or, in our case, a mother], will he give him a stone?” (Luke 11:11-12). These words apply with equal force to a mother’s concerns for her children. When we give our children the “leftovers” after we have given our best to others all day, are we not, in effect, giving them a stone, or a serpent, or a scorpion? Unless a “working mother” (is there any other kind?) can afford to hire help, her attention is pulled in many different directions; all those mundane chores at home have to be done or at least supervised. There will often be school activities in the evening requiring parents’ attendance, and/or homework needing assistance.

Cannot we see the connection between the epidemic of violence among children in recent years and the fact that so many children are being brought up, not by conscientious parents, but by day care employees, and are learning by imitating their peers? Those day care centers with which I have had any acquaintance are overcrowded and shorthanded, and many of the employees are there because they can’t find any other work. While some of them might like to give the children time and love, they are spread too thinly to do so.

The atmosphere is often rowdy, uncontrolled, and even physically dangerous. What can we be thinking of, to turn the care and training of our precious children over to the bullying and bad influence of undisciplined peers, to complete strangers (some of whom have been

discovered to be pedophiles!)? Surrendering our children to the entertainment industry is no better. Now we must contend with the Internet, in addition to the other media.

Conclusion

Even though none of us can make specific decisions for others, not knowing their individual circumstances, we must all follow the general guidelines laid out in God's Word for our teaching of others and our care of our husbands and children.

Endnote

1. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Ruth Hulburt Hamilton,

Babies Don't Keep,

Mother, oh mother, come shake out your cloth!
Empty the dustpan, poison the moth,
Hang out the washing and butter the bread,
Sew on a button and make up a bed.
Where is the mother whose house is so shocking?
She's up in the nursery, blissfully rocking!

Oh, I've grown as shiftless as Little Boy Blue
(Lullaby, rockaby, lullaby, loo).
Dishes are waiting and bills are past due
(Pat-a-cake, darling, and peek, peekaboo).
The shopping's not done and there's nothing for stew
And out in the yard there's a hullabaloo
But I'm playing Kanga and this is my Roo.
Look! Aren't her eyes the most wonderful hue?
(Lullaby, rockaby, lullaby loo.)

Oh, cleaning and scrubbing will wait till tomorrow,
But children grow up, as I've learned to my sorrow.
So quiet down, cobwebs. Dust, go to sleep.
I'm rocking my baby. Babies don't keep.

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