

Keepers of the Home

Ido not envy the position in which our world has placed women in this generation! The mother who chooses to stay at home and raise her children is mocked and ridiculed as one with no ambition or talent. The mother who may be forced to work outside the home, however, is silently scorned as selfish and negligent of her children.

Both conclusions are unfair generalizations that may or may not reflect the truth of the situation.

The Christian wife and mother must wrestle with many difficult choices in our age. She must be obedient to the word of God. She must nurture, love, and mold her children. She must use her abilities unto the glory of God. And she must be prepared to answer the challenges of an ungodly world critical of her choices. What matters in the long run is not what the world thinks about our choices but what the Lord thinks.

The following study is offered as a study tool. It is for the many good Christian women who seek to be obedient to God's will regardless of the different circumstances in which they may find themselves. My prayer is that the information provided below will assist in understanding what the Lord requires of wives and mothers in this age. In addition, I hope it may provide some resources with which to answer those critical of choices made before Almighty God.

Key Passage: Titus 2:5

The Holy Spirit through the pen of the Apostle Paul gave instruction to the preacher Titus to teach the older women to admonish the younger

women, **“to be discreet, chaste, HOMEMAKERS, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed”** (Titus 2:5, NKJV, emphasis mine) This, perhaps more than any other passage in Scripture addresses the issue. If we can understand what the Lord is commanding in this verse we can go a long way towards understanding what the Lord asks of wives and mothers within the home.

Unfortunately, the many English translations that are available today complicate rather than simplify the matter. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. Before the age of the printing press all copies of written material had to be copied by hand. Of the more than 6000 handwritten manuscripts of the Greek New Testament that have survived over the centuries there are minor differences when it comes to spelling or words of similar meaning. What a translator must decide is which manuscripts to rely upon when making a translation.

“Keepers at Home”

Of the handwritten copies which contain Titus 2:5 the majority of the manuscripts have the word *oikourous* (οἰκουρούς) meaning, “*Watching or keeping the house.* II. *Staying at home, domestic...the mistress of the house*” (Liddell and Scott, Abridged, 17th edition, 478). The King James and New King James versions look to this word in their translation—**“keepers at home”** (KJV) or **“homemakers”** (NKJV).

Based on the King James rendering one might draw the conclusion that the point is for the woman to *keep* or *stay* at home.

The emphasis, however, seems to be on the woman's responsibility to the home, not exclusively her presence in the house.

Vincent explains, “The meaning is not *stayers* at home, but *keepers* or *guardians* of the household” (Vol. IV, 342). This word is a compound of *oikos* (οἶκος) meaning “*house*” and *ouros* (οὔρος) meaning “*a watcher.*”



The Erectheum

Scholars tell us that *oikouros* was a common word in the ancient world. Liddell and Scott claim it carried with it the idea of one acting as a watchdog (8th ed. 1032). In Athens four hundred years before Christ there stood a pagan temple called the *Erechtheum* which housed the figure of a snake. The snake symbolized security and protection of the city of Athens. The playwright Aristophanes calls this “the GUARDIAN (*oikouros*) Serpent” (*Lysistrata* 759). Four hundred years after Christ a preacher named Chrysostom used the word to describe a wife's proper conduct. He writes, “The woman *who is KEEPER OF THE HOUSE* (*oikouros*) will be of sound mind; the KEEPER OF THE HOUSE (*oikouros*) practices management of the house; *she is* not about luxury, nor unnecessary goings-out, nor will she be occupied with such things of others” (Homily 4, on Titus).

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Instead of the idea of the wife as “keeper of the house” some manuscripts use the word

oikourgous (οικουργούς) meaning “working at home” (BAG, 561). The American Standard and New American Standard look to this word—“**workers at home**” (ASV, NASB). It also is a compound of *oikos* (οἶκος) meaning “house,” but with the word *ergon* (ἔργον) “work” added to it rather than the word meaning “watcher.”

Scholars tell us this word was less common in ancient literature. The only example of *oikourgous* being used outside of Scripture is that which is found in the medical writings of a Second Century doctor named Soranus of Ephesus. Concerning one having a female illnesses he writes—“Conduct life *as* a HOUSE-WORKER (*oikourgos*) even sitting-still” (1.27). The verb form of this word is found in the writings of the Second Century Christian, Clement of Rome. In a probable reference to Paul’s teachings in Titus 2:5 he writes, “Ye taught them to keep in the rule of obedience, and to MANAGE THE AFFAIRS (*oikourgein*) of their household in seemliness, with all discretion” (*To the Corinthians* 1).

Ancient Translations

The only other clues we have regarding the meaning of what the Lord is teaching us in this text come from ancient translations. When translators in the first few centuries after Christ sought to convey the idea into Latin the translator of the Vulgate (ca. 400 A.D.) used three words – *domus curam habentes* (“**having a care of the house**”—Rheims-Douay Version, from the Vulgate). Another early translation was one done in Syriac (or Aramaic). The Syriac version called the Peshitta (ca. 400 A.D.) connected this thought with the next word in the text—“... **discreet, chaste, GOOD HOMEMAKERS, obedient to their own husbands...**” (Lamsa Version from the Peshitta).

What Can We Know With Certainty?

Several points can be ascertained from this information which can help us define what the Lord is teaching here:

1. *Women are given the responsibility to manage and watch over affairs of the household.*
2. *This management is to be conducted in subjection and obedience to the husband—“The husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23). Women are to be “obedient to their own husbands” (Titus 2:5).*
3. *This is a serious responsibility. They are the “watch-dogs” of the family, the “guardians” of the children.*
4. *This job demands industry, activity, and hard work. They are “workers at home.”*
5. *Whatever demands may be placed upon her by her circumstances she must not surrender her responsibility as “keeper of the house.”*

Kyle Pope

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