

Some Women of the Bible, Part II

by
Dr. Manford George Gutzke

Who Shall Find Her? Virtuous Woman

Can you understand that virtue is not so much the result of deliberate effort to produce it, as it is the consequence of a relationship already established?

The subject of this study is a virtuous woman who is described in the book of Proverbs, chapter 31 from the 10th verse to the end of the chapter. The tone of our title "Who Shall Find Her?" seems to imply that she is only an ideal: that there is no such person. But this is not true. It is quite possible that any good woman would humbly disclaim any notion that she could be the virtuous woman, but actually any woman who is a believer in Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, inspired by the grace of God, will manifest all these traits to some degree, that we are going to be looking at. It is a matter of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

These traits, and there are quite a number of them as you shall see, do not appear singly. These characteristics emerge all at one time as aspects of the manifestation of the one central relationship of a heart and mind and soul of a person committed to God. The virtuous woman is not virtuous because she tried to be. As a matter of fact she may be surprised if anyone points out the very virtues that she has. It will probably be a good deal with her as it was with Moses when he came down from the Mount. His face shone so that no one could look upon it. But he was not aware of it. He did not know it.

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies (Proverbs 31:10).

What is meant by that is that she is a priceless person. This could very well mean you could not buy it, and she could not buy it. This is not the kind of thing that you could buy like a garment to put on.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil (Proverbs 31:11).

That means she is dependable.

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life (Proverbs 31:12).

That means she is benevolent. She is good for him. She is good for the home, for the family. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands (Proverbs 31:13). This means to say to us that she is industrious. This agrees with the New Testament where believers are admonished to do whatever they do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in the Old Testament Scriptures is this phrase, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). And this woman does. She is industrious. She seeks to put things together and gets them done.

She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar (Proverbs 31:14).

This means to say she is resourceful. No doubt she has confidence in God but with her confidence in God she looks around to find the means that are suited to the situation.

She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens (Proverbs 31:15).

She provides. She is the kind of a person that looks around to see in what way she can help. She is in the world to help.

She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard (Proverbs 31:16).

She is frugal. You can just see this woman out there noting a piece of property, and thinking that would make a good garden, a good vineyard, and she buys it and does it. This is how she acts.

We need not think of this woman as being some one exceptional person, but we should think of this description as fitting any person that has in her the grace of God. This is what the grace of God will prompt anybody to do and in this particular passage it has prompted a woman to do these things.

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms (Proverbs 31:17).

She is strong. This reminds us of that old line in the poem, "My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure." She is strong. She stays with it.

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night (Proverbs 31:18).

This means to say she is responsible. She is responsible about the way she does her work, anything that she does. What helps to make her responsible? The Lord is her Master. She is doing it as unto Him and she is careful about it.

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff (Proverbs 31:19).

To many of us those instruments would be quite unknown. They have to do with spinning and weaving cloth. This means she is prepared, she is practical, she is honest, and so she works in this way.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy (Proverbs 31:20).

She is charitable. She is thoughtful of the poor; and that is always pleasing to God. God would prompt her to be that way.

She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet (Proverbs 31:21).

This means that even if the weather were unpleasant, she would go out into it. She went ahead and did things, and she prepared for her people. She took care of them in every possible way. She was diligent.

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple (Proverbs 31:22).

This woman pays attention to her appearance, and she is refined in the way in which she conducts herself and dresses herself. It is pleasant to see her. She makes the situation look better. Again, we should not think this is any exceptional or unique person: any person who is inwardly indwelt by the Holy Spirit is prompted to do this kind of thing.

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land (Proverbs 31:23).

This woman helps her husband in such a way that he is upstanding in the community.

She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant (Proverbs 31:24).

This woman is skilled and serves in the very best way.

Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come (Proverbs 31:25).

This woman will be honored. Scripture records that Almighty God said, "Them that honor me I will honor" (I Samuel 2:30). The kind of a person that is seeking to be well pleasing in the sight of God will be well pleasing in the sight of men.

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness (Proverbs 31:26).

This woman is wise. For anybody to be wise she needs to be guided by the Word and by the Holy Spirit. I am mindful of how it was in our own home. We had a little saying in our home, and we were always glad when our children learned to say this: "A wise old owl sat in an oak. The more he saw, the less he spoke. The less he spoke, the more he heard. Why can't we be like that old bird?" This woman is wise.

She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness (Proverbs 31: 27).

Again she was diligent, faithful in details.

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all (Proverbs 31:28-29).

She was fruitful.

Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised (Proverbs 31:30).

This points out that so far as this person is concerned, so far as this godly individual is concerned, reverence is the basic attitude. This is far more important than what other people think of you, far more important than how other people are pleased with you. One is reminded of the Scripture that says, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (Job 28:28).

And so finally we read:

Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates (Proverbs 31:31).

This whole description is the description of a godly person. We should not dismiss it with the feeling that nobody can be like that. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, ask the Almighty God Himself to give you the grace to let these things emerge in you. This is the way the Holy Spirit will prompt you to do with confidence because God will bless this way of living.

All Things New

Can you understand how it is possible to have an entirely new and different lifestyle through faith in Jesus Christ?

This title, "All Things New," is based upon Paul's statement:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (II Corinthians 5:17).

This needs careful study and exposition. Let us look at it for a moment. "If any man be in Christ." The "if" implies that this state of being "in Christ" is not universal. The natural man would be in the flesh: born of earthly parents, in an earthly society, that is temporal and finite. The spiritual man is in Christ: born again of God, spiritual in nature, that is eternal and infinite.

"In Christ" is a new orientation. To be in Christ is different: it is a new complex of relationships. "All things are become new" is the consequence of this new relationship. The believing woman is not intrinsically changed in herself or different or better than she was. Her relationship is different. In thinking about being in Christ one might consider for example that a stone lying in the middle of the road would be one thing. A stone in the wall would be quite different. Now the stone in itself is not any different than it was, but has a different relationship. It is in a different place. A sheet of paper in a box of stationary is one thing, but a sheet of paper in a letter that you receive, that is something else. A person in the world is natural. A person in Christ is spiritual.

This matter of being in Christ, as I have just said, means a different orientation, a different set of relations. One is now related to invisible spiritual realities, being aware of God, of heaven, of eternity. To be "in Christ" means being involved in the things of the Holy Spirit, aware of other spirits, responding to the living God, to the living Lord Jesus Christ. A person who is in Christ is conscious of the reality of God, and responds to the living Lord praying for him in the presence of God. All these things will be true in the case of the person who is "in Christ."

It is such a common thing ordinarily for us, when we talk about anything that happens to anybody, to look at it from a human point of view. And if we think of any particular case where a woman is in a certain situation that could be improved, and we think there is a goal that she should reach, we ask ourselves, "When should she work at it? How should she do it?" Actually all such thinking ignores God. The Scriptures that we are to consider in Acts 2:1-21 show us how this was first done.

Acts 2:1-4 is the familiar story of Pentecost. Now we are going to be considering when we look at this how it was arranged that these early disciples were to be aware of spiritual things.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2: 1-4).

These four verses give us the simple account of the coming of the Holy Spirit. We might remember other things that have been told in the Bible about the Holy Spirit: the Lord Jesus Himself, speaking about the Holy Spirit, revealed that the function of the Holy Spirit is to take the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and show them unto us. So the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in this fashion.

These outward physical manifestations were there to emphasize and accent to these people that something literally did happen. In the description as given it is obvious that there was nothing those disciples could do to bring in that sound as of a mighty rushing wind. There was nothing at all that they could do that would cause those cloven tongues like unto fire to sit upon each of them. This was not because of anything those praying people did. In other words the idea that God is active, and God is coming into the situation would be so clear to them.

Following this is the description of the conduct of the believers after the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is worth looking at because this is going to be involved when all things become new.

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine (Acts 2:5-13).

That is how it affected the people. This occurrence caused everyone to be aware of the fact that

something strange was happening. Those who mocked of course were accounting for it by the conduct of the believers themselves. They supposed it was something the believers had done. But as we read we know right well that is not the case. It was because God was working in them. Then Peter explained the meaning of this event.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2: 14-21).

What was Peter saying? What they were seeing, Peter told them, was the work of God, as the Prophet Joel said.

What should all this mean to us, as we consider what happened to them? We are to understand that when those disciples were thus conscious of the things of God and aware of the reality of the living God, that is what made everything new to them. So that Paul could say:

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (II Corinthians 5:17).

Let us think again about those disciples, and put ourselves in their place. God regenerates the believer in Christ so that he is born again. All those disciples were born again people, and the truth is that it is to the born again soul that all things become new. Unless a person is born again, this truth does not apply. God sends the Holy Spirit into the heart of the born again person. The Holy Spirit shows the born again person the things of Christ and activates His will in him. In the home, where believers live together, and establish their home, there is the consciousness of God. They are trusting in God. With the husband, so far as the wife is concerned, and all other adult people, there is God who allows these people to be and allows them to do as they do. And with the children so far as the mother is concerned, God is involved. She is trusting God. There is the consciousness of God. God is the one in whose presence they deal with other people. It will be so in the office or in the school. It is when persons are born again that we can say about all the conduct that follows, "all things are become new."

Beneath the Cross – Mary

Do you understand why the record of the Virgin Birth is so incredible to some?

The one sign that all the world recognizes as pointing to Jesus Christ is the cross. This is the focal point of the Gospel message. Here the Son of God died for the sins of the world. Here the sinner comes to see and to receive the open arms of God's invitation. All the Old Testament leads up to it, all the New Testament leads out from it. Here the great transaction is done. Christ Jesus died for the sinner. It is here the sinner comes to receive salvation. The New Testament Scripture (Luke 1:5-56) that we have before us in this study features two persons, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, and John the Baptist the herald of the King. This Scripture tells of the birth of these two, and shows the unusual aspects that in turn show the hand of God.

Man naturally assumes in any case when anything happens that it happened because he did something. In seeking to understand, one looks into the record to find out about the doer, the mover, the one that did it. But the Scripture that we have before us reveals that the Gospel is based definitely upon the

work of God. We will find as we go through with it that the individuals involved did nothing to bring it to pass.

In Luke 1:5-25 we have the amazing supernatural character of the birth of John the Baptist. It is quite a story, all of its own. Then in verses 26-56 we have the simple account of the amazing Virgin Birth of Jesus of Nazareth. In these two events we can see providence manipulating natural affairs, but also there is openly, obviously the super-natural character of the work of God. In the case of John the Baptist the story develops around Zacharias who was his father. Zacharias the priest, an older man, was serving in the temple when an angel spoke to him. The angel told him that his wife would give birth to a child. Zacharias did not believe it, and because he did not believe it, the angel told Zacharias that he would be dumb until the event occurred. When Zacharias finally appeared from inside the temple before the people he motioned to them to indicate that he could not say anything, that he was dumb. And that condition continued until his son, John the Baptist, was born. In the course of the whole story you have the very definite impression that God can do and does do more than man asks or thinks.

In the case of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the story develops around Mary. The Virgin Birth that is recorded here has been widely discussed, and we do well in reading the whole story to keep several things in mind. We could note so far as Mary is concerned, that she was very probably a teenager. She was betrothed, as was customary in that day and time to Joseph. She was betrothed but had not yet been taken as his wife. The angel Gabriel came to her and told her that she was going to have a child.

The event of the Virgin Birth has been widely discussed, but the chief inspiration of any skepticism has always been unbelief. God did something and what God did was done apart from any human participation. God did it and the human mind naturally just will not accept that. In this particular event when Mary had demurred, when Gabriel the angel told her that she was going to have a child, she asked a very practical question, "How can this be possible when I have never been with a man?" The answer came to her that with God nothing is impossible. While it may be true that naturally speaking a human being could not believe this story, the Scriptures actually record the situation so that one can believe.

The Scripture draws attention to God, and God is the Creator. God created Adam out of nothing. So when you have in mind that God created Adam the first man, you are prepared to think that if He wanted to He could create the second man. It is true that the first Adam had no father or mother but God created him. In this case of the Virgin Birth the second Adam had no father. But when a person has in mind what the Bible reveals about God in the Genesis record, he has taken a long step towards being able to believe the Virgin Birth. But that isn't all. The story also presents angels, and in one instance one is named – Gabriel. In addition to that at the time of the actual birth of Jesus of Nazareth there were a host of angels there. This brings to our mind again that something else is true than this world, and this affair is different.

Also all the way through this story you can have in mind the reality of heaven. The invisible world with all its power is real. Now any person whose heart entertains and holds confidence in God, has an awareness of angels, recognizes the reality of heaven, is not far away from being able to believe the story of the Virgin Birth when it is told. Now note more closely. In this story there is no description of Mary. What can I learn from that? I take from that that her human attributes made no contribution to the event. It was not because she was a certain kind of person: not at all. It was because God chose her. I am sure that she was a certain kind of person. I would not be a bit surprised if she had been rather special. I would not object to that. But the Bible does not say it. There is no explanation given about Mary. Mary was told what would happen with no description of the process, no explanation. Her skepticism when she said she did not see how it could happen was natural and valid. It shows that she was just an average ordinary person, and probably an intelligent person. There was nothing in her experience that could have helped her to understand this event. There was no knowledge we are told about that she had that made this seem possible.

I remember when I was a professor at the Seminary, and one of my students asked me one day, "Professor, do you mean to say that you believe, actually believe, the Virgin Birth?" I said, "Yes sir." And then as nicely as he could say it, he said, "Well I am sure that you would not have gotten your college degrees without having some acquaintance with biology." So I told him, "Yes, I took my course in biology. As a matter of fact I made 'A' in biology. I understand very well what your problem is; but you do not have to have any knowledge of biology to have in mind the problem you face." And I remember saying to him, "Do you have room in your seat to move over just a little. I would like to have Mary come and sit there right beside you on your seat. You are asking the question she asked, and she did not have any course in the university on biology. But Mary knew perfectly well that there was no reason at all that this sort of thing could happen naturally and she brought it up and she asked Gabriel, 'How can this be? Describe to me the process'." Then I said to this student, "Did you notice Gabriel told her that with God nothing is impossible." Gabriel did not tell Mary the process. Then I asked the student, "Do you mind if I do not tell you the process? Let me just say to you that with God nothing is impossible." This event, the whole event of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, has all the earmarks of the Gospel. Almighty God is going into action, into operation, to save the souls of those who put their trust in Him.

Women Disciples In The Gospels

Mary Magdalene, Mary, Martha

Do you realize that the Gospels show that women shared an important place in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth?

And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him (Matthew 27:55).

The Gospel accounts record the presence of many women among the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. Our Scripture passages introduce three of the better known ones, Mary of Magdala know as Mary Magdalene, and the sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. The Gospel record of each presents a typical frame of mind occurring among the disciples of Christ.

Mary Magdalene is identified principally as the woman out of whom went seven devils. There is no further description of her personal experience. Nothing specific in the way of identifying any of those demons, nor does it describe the process by which they were exorcised, nor what the change in the woman was. None of those things are mentioned. We are entitled to understand that she was a harassed soul, living in bondage to any elements that impelled her to harmful and sinful behavior. I expect anyone would agree that that would be the state of a woman who had seven demons in her. She was probably notorious, perhaps a woman off the streets socially rejected, but there is no direct word about this. She may have been that unnamed woman in Luke chapter 7, verses 37 to 53, who came to anoint the feet of Jesus of Nazareth and washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She may have been that woman of whom the Lord Jesus said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much" (Luke 7:47).

We do know that Mary Magdalene was one of the company who were last at the cross.

There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome (Mark 15:40).

She is recorded as being first at the grave. The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher (John 20:1).

This brings various things to our mind about the woman. But now perhaps the most striking instance of all occurred. She was privileged to have a private encounter with the risen Christ.

But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away (John 20:11-15).

Mention has been made of the fact that of course she could not have carried Him, but that is the way it is when your heart is involved and when your love is involved. She loved Him and she would have undertaken the impossible.

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her (John 20:16-18).

No soul can ever doubt being welcomed by the living Lord Jesus Christ. Here was a woman of whom so little was known except that she was in a terrible plight when Jesus of Nazareth delivered her. But her heart was filled with appreciation and with affection to this One Who had done her this great service. He had delivered her and she manifested in her life a love for Him that showed in these acts of commitment on her part. She was there when He was dying, and she was there when He rose from the dead. And He appeared to her and gave her the message to take to His disciples. This is the wonderful story of Mary Magdalene, a woman who had been saved.

Now we turn to Mary and Martha. The two incidents that are recorded of Mary that mark her witness as a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth are first the incident that involves both Mary and Martha. We read:

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:38-42).

That is the simple story. It is one of the best known incidents in the New Testament. It is very revealing but easily misunderstood. The distinguishing feature of Mary, however, is right obvious. She sat at His feet and heard His Word. And by the way did you notice the way that is written? It was not that she sat at His feet and listened, but she heard His Word. She paid attention to what He was saying. And she was commended by the Lord. "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." A common error is to equate these two styles as equal alternatives, saying you can be either one or the other and be acceptable. There are any number of people who call themselves "Marys" or "Marthas" as the case might be, assuming that Mary spent her time in worshipping and that Martha spent her time in serving. Now this is missing the whole point of the record, which is that Martha's lifestyle was not as good as Mary's lifestyle, if we can word it that way. Actually the Lord commented about it to Martha and pointed out to her, that whereas she was concerned and worried about many things, Mary had chosen that good part "which shall not be taken away from her."

Actually it may be true that there are those who are more overt, outward in their response and in their activity and conduct, but this does not say that that is better than the original waiting on Him. So far as Mary is concerned we have a second incident in which we see Mary as the most notable disciple. There is no other person with whom Jesus of Nazareth was walking of whom He could say these things, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall

be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:9).

It would be definitely a mistake to discount Martha as a disciple. When their brother Lazarus died and Jesus of Nazareth came to the bereaved sisters it was Martha of whom it is said that as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met Him. But Mary sat still in the house.

We should avoid reading too much of our own ideas into any interpretation so far as these Gospel characters are concerned. Such as an aspect in the incident only reflects differing temperaments of sincere people, but I want especially to emphasize that Martha was a true believer. She was the one who received the assurance, "Thy brother shall rise again." And so there is brought to our minds these three different characters. It is notable that in the New Testament record we have more description of women in their conduct and in their feelings, than we have of men in their personal relation to the Lord. At least that is the way it would seem. In any case we are reminded that among those who followed the Lord Jesus Christ many women followed Him.

Women In The Gentile Mission Eunice and Lydia

Can you understand that a mother has a profound influence in the nurturing of faith in her son?

Our study is focused upon Acts chapters 16 and 17 where we are going to be looking at the women in the Gentile mission. This Scripture records events in Paul's second missionary journey. Our interest in this whole section is in the record of the participation of several women in the course of Paul's ministry. The two major women that we will be noticing, the two major persons, are the mother of Timothy, named Eunice, and Lydia, who was the first convert in Europe. The record about Eunice is a very short item at this point.

Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1-3).

This is the Scripture and the most of it is about Timothy. Our interest is in that, because that is the chief distinction of Eunice, that she was the mother of this great servant of God, Timothy.

The importance of a mother's function can be seen in Paul's understanding of Timothy's faith.

Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also (II Timothy 1:4-5).

Paul was impressed with the genuine unpretended faith that Timothy had in himself. Paul knew something of the history of that faith by pointing out that that faith was first in his grandmother, and in his mother Eunice. It is worthy of note, for our own information and instruction, that this faith that Timothy had was not innate. I mean by that he was not born with it. In other words this is not faith he has because he was the biological descendant of this grandmother and this mother. We should always keep in mind "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." This is brought out even more clearly when we look at what Paul wrote to Timothy, when he had this to say about him:

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:14-15).

That is a remarkable statement. That helps us to see the whole truth. This child had known the

Holy Scriptures. He had a grandmother and a mother, who were the kind of persons who taught their child. He had been taught. "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." He had gotten his acquaintance with Scripture from his folks.

I remember when I was in my first church where I was pastor, I preached a sermon on "Three Model Conversions." I drew attention to the experience of the Ethiopian who was helped by Philip in his chariot to understand about the Gospel. Then I drew attention to Saul the Pharisee who was stopped on the Damascus Road by the Lord Jesus Christ and who became a believer. Then I turned attention to Cornelius, the centurion, who was taught by Peter. Bringing all these together I preached on conversion, how it affected each one of these men. Their experiences were different in form, but each one had come to faith. And when I was through with it, I emphasized the impression that something like that should happen to everybody. A very good friend of mine, a much older man, much older than I, after the service came to me, and very kindly and gently asked me a question: "What about Timothy? What about his conversion?" I knew my book of Acts well enough to know there is not a story of the conversion of Timothy. He is the one person mentioned in the book of Acts that never did have to "turn around." Why? Because his grandmother and his mother had put his hand in the hand of the Lord and had led him just that way. After I had seen this point, this same kind friend smilingly said to me, "You preach that sermon again, and tell them about Timothy." So here I am telling you about Timothy!

And now we turn to the story of Lydia.

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a riverside, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us (Acts 16:13-15).

Lydia's principal distinction was that she was the first convert in Europe. But her short story reveals much. She was "a seller of purple." That means she was a business woman dealing in fine fabrics that would make expensive clothing. She worshipped God, but she was a Gentile. In the case of Eunice, she was a Jewess; but Lydia was a Gentile, who had not heard the Gospel. She had not heard about Jesus Christ, and yet she worshipped God. There can be people who are actually conscious of God, of our God, and who turn to our God, even though they do not understand the Gospel. They can actually seek His face without knowing what Christ Jesus has done for them. Such was Lydia. She came, and she worshipped God. There was a place "where prayer was wont to be made; and the women resorted thither." Lydia was one of these. We may note here the importance of having a place of prayer and a time of prayer. In other words this woman, although she did not know about Jesus Christ, yet knowing about the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Jews, worshipped God. She attended prayer meeting. You and I would say she attended church.

Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened " was there attending church. This happens to folks who attend worship services. "She attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." She listened with attention to a true preacher. She was on the way to learning something. "She attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul," and we know that Paul was resolved to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And so she came to faith.

When she was baptized, there is no record about her making any confession. The report does not tell us the circumstances, but we can understand it without any trouble: she came to faith. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." "And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us." She actually invited the apostolic party, the missionaries, to come in and stay with her. This brings many things to our minds and all of them are helpful.

There are several other things in this portion of Scripture we might note with profit. In chapter 16, verses 16-18, there is an important incident of a damsel who was possessed with the spirit of divination.

This is worth study. I am not sure that you and I can interpret it so clearly in our day and time, but just remember that Paul met this in his ministry. We should not be a bit surprised if a man today would meet things like this in his ministry. I am quite sure that that sort of thing has not all died out. And then in chapter 17 we read in verse 4 that in Thessalonica, "of the devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few," were among those who turned to God and believed. And again in verse 12 in Berea "many believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks." And finally in chapter 17 in verse 34 we see that among the people who responded to Paul preaching in Athens was a woman named Damaris. This brings to mind the fact that the preaching of the Gospel reaches out to all people everywhere: women can hear it and believe it and be saved.

A Woman Who Taught Theology Priscilla

Can you understand how a layman in the congregation may understand the Gospel better than the preacher who is ministering to them? The topic of this study, "A Woman Who Taught Theology," could easily mislead and confuse. Obviously the woman being featured is Priscilla. There is no doubt she is worthy of study, but lest the topic start us thinking in a mistaken direction, it should be noted first that Priscilla is never mentioned by herself, never at anyone time. It is always "Aquila and Priscilla." One time Priscilla is mentioned first but at least four different times that we are noting Aquila is mentioned first. In the second place we should note that nothing known as theology was mentioned in the incident noted.

There are two words often used by us in describing communication of the Gospel. These words are "theology" and "doctrine." Both words have been developed in the course of history of preaching and teaching. Theology means the *explanation* of what we believe. Now doctrine is the *systematizing* of what we believe and teach by summarizing it, arranging it. For instance, what does the Bible teach about God? We gather all that together in various ways and make "doctrine" out of it. If we undertake to explain what the Scriptures say about God, we would be setting forth some "theology."

In Scripture Priscilla is introduced in this way:

And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:2).

There are two illuminating passages that we may note.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles (Romans 16:3-4).

This refers to the very important contribution that this couple made. Then again it is written:

Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord. with the church that is in their house (I Corinthians 16:19).

In these two passages we have evidence that this godly couple was active in the affairs of the ministry of Paul and among his followers. While it is true that Paul lived in their home for one and one-half years, it was not only the influence of his conversation that would affect them; but because their home was the meeting place for believers, Paul could write about "the church that was in their house." A congregation of believers met in their house which means that Aquila and Priscilla for a year and one-half had had Paul as a resident preacher, as it were. And in that time they would have good opportunity to learn the full meaning of the Gospel.

We know that Aquila and Priscilla attended the synagogue in Ephesus, because that is where they heard Apollos.

And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly (Acts 18: 24-26).

As Apollos went into the synagogue among the Jews to preach, Aquila and Priscilla, who were Jews, were in the synagogue at that time. This can be something very illuminating to us. Were they not real believers? They certainly were. They certainly knew the Gospel. They knew it even better than Apollos knew it. And yet they attended the synagogue to worship.

When we say that the couple knew the Gospel better than Apollos, we do not mean to imply anything against Apollos, because he was telling the truth as far as he knew it; and he preached it diligently. It has always been intriguing to me how the Scripture records the fact that Apollos was "teaching the way of the Lord." This he did. He was teaching the way of the Lord in all the truth he knew. But he did not know it all. He only knew "the baptism of John," and when Aquila and Priscilla heard him they took him to their home and showed him the way of God more perfectly.

Some years ago when I was drawing attention to this, one of my listeners who was acquainted with the Greek language became very interested in the phrase, "showing them the way of God more perfectly." He thought that it meant that they were correcting Apollos. I pointed out to him they were not correcting Apollos, they were amplifying him. They were telling more than Apollos told. All that Apollos told was true but he did not tell it all. There was more true than he knew. So my listener looked this phrase up in the original Greek and came to the conclusion that the word in the original could very well be translated "more completely," and that would be just what it was.

What I am particularly interested in here is to point out, and I want to go back to it and refer to it again, that these two people, these godly people who had been so well instructed by the Apostle Paul, who had heard Paul preaching and teaching, actually went to the synagogue to worship. I want to emphasize that, because this implies that we who are believers ought to be in the place where prayer is made, wherever it is. There may be people in that place who do not understand as much as we do, even the preacher, in this case Apollos. He did not understand as much as Aquila and Priscilla, but Aquila and Priscilla went to hear him preach. But that did not mean they left it there.

We should take note they did not openly contend with Apollos before the assembly. They did not call his hand, so to speak, and start any public argument, causing an uproar in that fashion. They arranged a private interview in their own home. They took him into their own home, and there they "expounded" unto him. The word "expounding" means they took the Scriptures which Apollos himself had in his hand, so to speak, and that would be all the Old Testament. All that Apollos had was the Old Testament Scriptures, and the testimony of Jesus of Nazareth and the experience that people had had up until the time of John the Baptist. Apollos did not know about Pentecost apparently, and he did not know about the coming of the Holy Spirit. This becomes clearer when we go on to read in the next chapter.

Before I leave this matter of Aquila and Priscilla talking to Apollos I want to point out something that is very unusual. I suppose every one of you who think on these things will be aware of the fact that it is not an easy thing to go to an eloquent preacher and tell him that he is not complete in his message: actually to tell him, "You are lacking in something." And on top of that to tell him "We know what you are lacking." And then to go further and tell him what it is that he is lacking. I am pressing this point because I want us to realize that any number of us would quail before such a task. But Aquila and Priscilla went through with it and they evidently cared so much for this man, they evidently appreciated Apollos, and I am sure they were being obedient to the Lord, so they risked everything that was involved, and set this out before him. They were that kind of people.

You remember we noted the fact that the Apostle Paul said that for his life's sake they laid down their own necks. They were that kind of people. They put themselves into it to do things on behalf of the

Gospel. They ventured to suggest to an eloquent preacher that something was lacking in his message, and then told him what it was. I have often said that if I was on the point of handing out medals I would want to hand out medals to Aquila and Priscilla for the nerve they had, the courage they had, to go and to criticize an eloquent preacher about what he was saying. But then I would have to have another medal which I would want to give to Apollos. When I think of this: that eloquent man listened to them! Isn't that amazing! That eloquent man who knew the Scriptures so well, it says about him he was "well versed" in the Scriptures, and because he was fervent in spirit he expounded diligently what it was he had. He listened to Aquila and Priscilla and he heard them because we read that he went on to preach further in Achaia and preached mightily.

In the following Scripture, Acts 19:1-7, we find the clue as to what was lacking. In Ephesus when Paul came he met professed believers who had been listening to Apollos preach. After being with them for a time he asked them this question: "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" This opens up a whole line of truth. They said, "We did not even know there was a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Unto what then were you baptized?" They said, "Unto John's baptism," which means "the forgiveness of sins." Paul said that was the truth. John preached the truth, but John said there was One coming after him who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Then Paul told them more about the Lord Jesus Christ. When they heard that they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in this whole record we have the testimony of a godly couple, Aquila and Priscilla. It is worthy of mention that his wife is always mentioned with him. She evidently had an active part, but at no time did she act on her own. Together they witnessed about the Lord to people round about them.