

Are Women's Biblical Roles Impacted by Income?

I read a couple of articles that bring up an interesting conversation—how our **theology** affects our view on **poverty** and **social class**.

The first is an article on the shrinking of the **middle class** in America. It shows that the class divide in America is expanding. The number of households making less than \$35,000 and the number of households making more than \$100,000 have grown, but those in the middle have shrunk dramatically.

The second is about “**biblical womanhood**” and how one's social class, let alone **marital status** and reproductive ability, might fit into that model.

As a third part of the puzzle, last week David Hayward—whose theology is often more liberal than I'm comfortable with—wrote an analysis of the emerging sides of the women-in-ministry debate. His premise is “the more dissenting an opposing group becomes, the more fundamentalist the group in power becomes.”

In the Junia Project article, Kate Wallace points out that in the stance of many, “biblical womanhood” requires **marriage** and **fertility** in a **Christian** household that is able to live on one income.

Yet according to the statistics, this is becoming less plausible in America. I can hear some critics voice that this wouldn't be the case if America had not thrown God out of the country so blatantly. Even if this is true, those who live here still must seek to pursue God as individuals living in the time and space where God has placed them.

We can't decide that because people made decisions for the nation years before we were born that God requires us to live in poverty or to live unbiblically. For many, this is the decision. Single-job incomes that are high enough to support a

family are shrinking, and the number of people who have the income to access higher education and higher-paying jobs are also shrinking.

In pre-industrial households, both men and women worked—and worked hard. The female role was around the house, but the amount of work required to keep the family fed was more difficult than many industrial jobs today. The advent of the stove, refrigerator, dishwasher, washing machine, vacuum—not to mention modern canning methods—created the space for men and women to use their time differently.

During the small portion of time where income had not yet overcome cost and one-income households were still the norm, the woman's role became the altruistic branch of the family. While men spent their time providing, women spent their time adding purpose to the family structure. This is why even today women volunteer and attend church in greater numbers than men.

This created a problem in the family—women felt they had no power, and men lost sight of the deeper purpose of life. Then economics sent women to work, which reduced the volunteer hours, which in turn reduced the sense of purpose for the overall family.

The answer isn't to return to poverty but to deepen purpose for both men and women. The answer lies in bridging the divide between work and church, helping people live with purpose on the job.

One might consider that those with more income would have the power to balance the power and education gap. Yet the case for "biblical womanhood" creates a myopic stance for the family. Those we spend time with every day tend to shape our focus of the world and of ourselves. When success looks like piano lessons, soccer trophies and dance recitals, we have little tolerance for those whose success is defined by 30 days of sobriety and 60 days at a menial job.

When many in our society are struggling to keep their families together and provide in the most basic ways, when increasing

numbers of families in shelters have one or both parents working, we need a better solution. We need to find God's view of our reality, not hold those who have higher incomes up as those who have "obviously done something right."

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