

Submission In Marriage: For Wives

1 Peter 3:1-6

Pastor John Miller

Peter says, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word,”—that’s the description of the husband being an unbeliever—“they also may without the word be won by the conversation”—or the conduct or the behavior—“of the wives; 2 While they behold your chaste”—or pure—“conversation”—again, manner of living or conduct—“coupled with fear,”—which is, no doubt, a reverence and a respect for God and also your husband. Verse 3, “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4 But let it be the hidden [person] of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.”

I want to set the context for this text in the book of 1 Peter. Go back with me to 1 Peter 2:12. Peter began in verse 12 and said, “Having your conversation,”—which again, like our text in chapter 3, literally means the way that you live—“honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” Beginning in that verse back in 1 Peter 2:12, Peter was telling us that we’re to live lives that are exemplary. He described it as “beautiful” before the watching world. Now, we live beautiful lives before the Gentile or the unbelieving world, “. . . that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers,”—but as they watch your beautiful life, they will come to—“. . . glorify God.”

Peter points out four places that we are to live beautifully before the watching world or before the Gentile or unbelieving world. We saw in 1 Peter 2:13 that we’re to walk before the state in submission and in beautiful life; we saw in 1 Peter 2:18, that in the workplace we’re to be submitted to those who have authority over us; and tonight, 1 Peter 3, we’ll see that the wives are to be in submission in the home, and the husbands are to love their wives “. . . giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel;” and in 1 Peter 3:8, we’re going to look at two weeks from tonight, the church, how we have submission in the church. In all four of these beautiful life submissive attitudes, we see that we are to walk in a way that brings honor and glory to God and others will see that and the idea of Peter is that they be won to Christ.

Peter is speaking to wives and has mainly Christian wives who are married to non-Christian husbands in mind. The command Peter gives here applies to wives with Christian husbands as well as seen in other parallel passages. If you have a piece of paper and a pencil and you’re taking notes down, let me give you those other passages that you should write down, Ladies. In Ephesians 5:22-33 is a clear teaching that the Christian wife is to be subject to her husband. In Colossians 3:18-19 is the same command—it’s an imperative—wives be subject to your

husbands. In Titus 2:4-5, again, husbands are to be loved and you're to be submitted to as Titus describes.

There's no question about it, the institution of marriage is in big trouble in the United States and of other parts of the world. We actually see a decline right now in people getting married and people having children; but marriage, before we even begin to unpack this text, is the foundation of society—as goes marriage, so goes the nation. The nation is based upon healthy, strong marriages. When we as a government sought to redefine what marriage is, and it's no longer a man and a woman joined together and the two becoming one, but it can be a man and a man or a woman and a woman or any combination of those two, we see the destruction of marriage spilling over into the destruction of our culture because marriage is a divine institution. Marriage is God's idea—God made it, God created it, God designed it—and it's not open for redefinition. In Genesis 2, when God made man, He made the woman, brought the two together. Moses, writing his commentary on that said, “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh . . . therefore [what] God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

When they asked Jesus about marriage, He quoted Genesis as well. He said, “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.” Jesus affirmed the teaching in Genesis that marriage is one man, one woman, joined together for life. That's marriage as God designed it, so we must get back to God and His Word in order to thrive in the God-given design of marriage that God has ordained.

There's three things we're going to look at. We're going to see her behavior, her beauty, and her belief—her behavior, her beauty, and her belief. First of all, let's look at verses 1-2, and it talks about her behavior. Notice it starts, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 2 While they behold you,”—pure manner of living—“coupled with fear.” Go back in verse 1. He uses the phrase “Likewise, ye wives,” or “in the same way.” The same way as what? Well, it goes back to 1 Peter 2:13 where we are to “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man”—the government;” then in 1 Peter 2:18, “Servants, be subject to your masters.” That doesn't mean that a wife's submission to her husband is the same as you obeying the governmental laws or a wife's submission to her husband is the same as a slave and a master; but it does mean that there's that characteristic of submission, and that's the theme that runs through this whole section in Peter's letter. We have salvation and then submission.

Peter says in verse 1, “. . . be in subjection to your own husbands,” or literally in the Greek it's submit yourselves which indicates that it's a voluntary submission. You cannot command or demand your wife to submit to you. It's not going to work if you say, “Submit, in the name of Jeeezuzah, hallelujah.” You duck and the pan goes flying by. It's not going to work. It has to be a voluntary submission, but it is based on obedience to God and the desire to keep His Word and to honor and glorify God. I'll give you those verses in just a moment.

What is submission? The word “submission” means to place yourself under or to rank under. Yes, it is a military word, but again, you don’t bark out orders and expect your wife to say, “Yes, sir; no, sir. I’ll get on it right away.” It’s not that kind of submission. It is a military word that conveys the idea of submitting yourselves under or ranking under. No personal inferiority is implied. There’s no indication or application that this means the wife is inferior or of less value than her husband. So, no personal inferiority is applied.

If you look down, we’ll look at it next Wednesday, in verse 7, when he’s talking to husbands, he says that you and your wife are “ . . . heirs together of the grace of life,” which obviously means in verse 7 when he talks to the husband, he’s talking to the husband of a believing Christian wife, but in the Lord they are on equal standing before God. God doesn’t love men more than women; God doesn’t love women more than men; we’re equal in our salvation and our standing before God. We’re “ . . . heirs together of the grace of life.” The same concept is used of Jesus who submits to the Father in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Jesus is subject to the Father. Then, also in 1 Peter 5:5, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another . . . for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” Submission is not just for wives. Submission is for citizens, it’s for employees, it’s for wives, it’s for husbands, it’s for all believers. We need to learn to submit to God and submit to one another.

It’s voluntarily arrange yourself under your husband to serve a greater purpose. The submission is for the sake of function and order. It’s for the sake of function and order in the home. Also, it’s to be done as unto the Lord. Write down Ephesians 5:22, “ . . . as unto the Lord.” Submission is to be done with a purpose and a design that, “I’m doing it as unto the Lord.” If you look at your husband, and you get your eyes off the Lord, you’re going to have a hard time submitting to your husband. It’s like, “Look, Lord. Just look at him. You want me to submit to that?! You know, I believe that if my husband had been born when Peter wrote these words, he wouldn’t have put it in the Bible.” You’re looking at the Lord saying, “Lord, I want to honor You. I want to do it as unto You.” As well as Colossians 3:18, it says pleasing to the Lord. So, you’re doing it as unto the Lord and not as unto your husband or to men. You’re doing it as to please the Lord, and it’s because your “ . . . husband is the head of the wife,” Ephesians 5:23.

I know you’re familiar with a lot of these verses and these other references, but we need to keep all of them in perspective. Also write down 1 Timothy 2:9-15 where Paul actually says there that the husband is the head of the wife because the husband was created by God first, “For Adam was first formed, then Eve.” It’s not culture, it’s creative order so there be not chaos and confusion. Rank voluntarily yourself under your husband for the sake of function and the sake of the Lord and doing it as unto the Lord.

Peter points out that there’s a mission in submission because the question now is, What if you’re a Christian wife and your husband is a full-on heathen? He’s not a Christian. He’s not a believer in Jesus Christ. Does that mean you’re free to divorce him and to find a Christian man that loves the Lord and has a really nice Bible and comes to church and raises his hands during worship and that’s the man I want to marry? No. You’re still to be subject to your unbelieving

husband, and Peter's going to break it down.

In that culture...and it's probably the reason why there was six verses for the wife and only one verse for the husband in this text. When you ladies get to heaven, you can gather around Peter and ask him why. I don't know why. You'll have to ask Peter. Probably more women were getting saved than men, and that can be a common scenario even today. If the man got saved, it'd be easier for them culturally for the woman to follow his lead. But if the wife gets saved, the unbelieving husband is less likely to come to the Lord, but he tells you what you're to do so that you can win your husband to the Lord.

Notice that he describes the situation, verse 1, “. . . if any obey not the word.” So, “Likewise, ye wives,” that phrase “Likewise, ye wives,” again notice in verse 7, we'll get it next week, “Likewise, ye husbands.” That word “likewise” is being used in the sense of “Like this is my next point.” It's a sequential statement, and he uses it all through this section, “Likewise,” “Likewise,” “Likewise,” so it'd be like us saying, “Next, next, next, next, next.” So, “Likewise . . . be in subjection to your own husbands”—why?—“that, if any obey not the word,”—that's the first qualification, they are unbelievers. He uses that figure of speech, “obey not the word” this is the Word of God, this is the gospel of Christ, this is the truth about Jesus. So, they don't believe it, they don't accept it, they reject it. They're basically unbelievers, and most likely the wife was saved whilst married.

So, she wasn't single, got saved, and married an unbeliever. This would be a grave mistake, by the way. If you're a Christian, whether or not you're a man or a woman, you should never marry an unbeliever. The Bible says, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial?” You're going to have problems in your marriage, why would you do that?

“. . . if any obey not the word,” that's a description in verse 1 of them being unbelievers. Secondly, “they also may without the word be won,” verse 1. So, without a word from the wife, that is, you don't preach at them, you don't nag them, you don't belittle them, you don't tell them that they need to get saved. If God opens the door for you to speak and share, you should tell them the gospel, but what he's emphasizing here is that you're going to be most effective in evangelism by not the way you speak but by the way you live. Your best way to win your husband to the Lord is not by preaching at him, not by putting a track in his sandwich. When he takes a bite, he opens up a little track, “Repent or go to hell;” or taking some glue and gluing his radio dial in his car on K-WAVE or something, Christian radio; or writing “repent” with your lipstick on the mirror in the morning when he comes in to shave. It's not going to work. It's the way that you live, not the way that you speak. It's not your talk, it's your walk. “. . . that . . . they also may without the word be won.” I love that phrase “be won.” They are actually being won over literally or they are won to the Lord. By what? “. . . the conversation of the wives.”

I'm reading from the King James translation, and this is one of those archaic, old English words that people get confused by. It's not your talk that he's referring to, it's your walk. When he

uses the word “conversation,” he’s talking about your behavior or the way that you live. So, “. . . by the [behavior] of the wives.” Don’t leave your husband; don’t divorce your husband. Live a beautiful life, a godly life. Remember it went back to 1 Peter 2:12, that we should be living beautifully in front of the Gentile world that when they see your good life, they will “. . . glorify God in the day of visitation,” which is the same as God came to them and they were saved.

First Corinthians 7 as well should be consulted, especially by the wife that is a believer married to an unbeliever. You’re not to divorce your husband simply because he’s not a Christian. The Bible says, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife,” and the children then are sanctified. So, you have this sanctifying influence on your husband, on the family, and on the home. You’re to stay there.

I encourage you to do these things: submit to your husband, pray for your husband, and live a pure life. That word “pure life” in verse 2 is not talking about just sexual purity, it’s talking about all manner of morality and purity and piety and devotion to God. It’s a broad, general term which means you should be living an honest and praiseworthy life. You should live a pure life, and you should have a fear or reference for God, verse 2.

If you’re a Christian, married to an unbelieving husband, then you need to also remember Galatians 6:9 where Paul the apostle says, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” Don’t get discouraged, don’t get tired, don’t give up, and say, “Oh, it’s no use.” Keep praying. Keep living a godly life so that they can come to know the Lord. That’s what the instructions are there for the believing wife. Verse 2, “While they behold your [pure manner of living] coupled with”—a reverence and respect for God.

Now, we move secondly to her beauty. These are fascinating Scriptures, and they’ve caused some confusion in the body of Christ. Verse 3, “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4 But let it be the hidden man”—or person—“of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” The main point of this text, and I want to do that so I don’t get too bogged down in the particulars, is basically that, Ladies, your focus, your priority, should be spiritual beauty—the inner beauty of God in your life. It doesn’t mean you shouldn’t take care of yourself physically. It doesn’t mean that you can’t wear jewelry. It doesn’t mean that you can’t wear makeup. It doesn’t mean that you can’t wear a nice dress or apparel, which is listed here; but it means that the priority and the focus should not be external, it should be internal. That’s a beauty that is not corruptible, that gets more beautiful as time goes on.

There have been Christians who foolishly read these verses and say, “Well, here it is in the Bible, Christian women should not plait their hair,” which is referring to elaborate braiding of their hair. There’s actually pictures they found in some of the catacombs and some of the Greek mosaics of how the women were so exotic in those days, the Greek women especially in the Greek culture. They piled their hair really high, did all this kind of weaving their hair with gold and silver, bells, and jewelry in their hair. They just went very elaborate with all these

massive hairdos, so there are some that say, “Well, you know, a Christian woman should not ever, ever cut her hair. She should not wear it up; she should wear it down, and she should never wear makeup.” You know that there are some Christian denominations that actually have this as their rule—that a woman can only wear a dress, that a woman cannot wear makeup, the woman can’t cut her hair, and the woman can’t wear jewelry. That’s not what Peter is saying in this verse. Praise God, hey, Ladies? Praise God, hey Men, because we have to look at you.

J. Vernon McGee, with that great statement he was asked, “Is it okay for Christian women to wear makeup?” What did he say? “If the barn needs painting, paint it.” I didn’t say that, he did. But don’t make that the priority. Don’t spend hours and hours in front of the mirror putting your makeup on and spend two minutes in the Bible. Don’t spend hours doing your hair and one second reading your Bible. Make sure that the focus is spiritual. That’s the beauty that is the Lord shining through you that only gets more beautiful with time. Now, if you can have the outward beauty and the inward beauty as well, then you’ve got the two combination. That’s a real dynamic duo, that’s great, but that’s not the focus.

Nor should it be the focus of a young Christian man looking for a wife. You don’t pick a wife just based on her appearance. The number one priority of what you’re looking for in a wife, or for a husband, is that they love the Lord, they fear the Lord, they obey the Lord, and they follow the Lord. Amen? So, you have to have that commitment to God. That’s the threefold cord in marriage that’s not easily broken. It’s so very, very important.

I want to make it clear that Peter’s not saying, “You can’t wear a dress,” or “You can’t wear clothes,” “ . . . or of putting on of apparel,” he’s just saying, “Don’t make that your main priority or your main focus.”

It’s interesting that the word “adorning” in verse 3, we actually get our word cosmetics from. It’s the Greek word *kósmos*. It means to arrange in order, so it’s where we get our word cosmetics from. Peter is saying that wives ought to be focusing on their walk with the Lord. Peter is saying, “Don’t be unduly concerned with outward adornment,” verse 3. Don’t focus only on the outward beauty, we’re to look for the inward beauty as well. That’s to be the priority.

Verse 4, focus on the inner beauty, “But let it be the hidden [person] of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.” You can do all you can to make yourself look great, but eventually we’re all going to get old, and we’re all going to die. I just thought I’d encourage you. That doesn’t mean you should, again, just let yourself go, but it means that the focus and the priority of your walk with the Lord. He breaks it down, “But let it be the [inner person] of the heart,” verse 4, and then he says, “in that which is not corruptible . . . meek and [gentle] spirit.” “Meek” means gentle or humble; and “quiet” means calm. It means a spirit of tranquility—you’re not stressed, you’re not uptight, you’re not freaking out. You’re trusting the Lord. And, it is in God’s sight very precious. So meekness, gentleness, humility, calm, tranquility God views as very, very precious. Remember the Bible makes it clear that God looks not as men look, God looks —where?— on the heart. We look on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart.

I love what Warren Wiersbe said, "Glamour is artificial and external. True beauty is real and internal. Glamour is something a person can put on and take off, but true beauty is always present. Glamour is corruptible; it decays and fades. True beauty from the heart grows more wonderful as the years pass. A Christian woman who cultivates the beauty of the inner person will not have to depend on cheap externals. God is concerned about values, not prices," so make the emphasis to be the woman of the heart.

Write this down, Ladies, Proverbs 31:30, "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." She shall be praised. So, "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." Inner beauty is always in fashion. How does that happen in a woman's life? When she spends time in the Word of God, when she yields to the Spirit of God, when she spends time praying and talking to God, and when she walks in a life of obedience to God brings that inner beauty.

We have a third and last section, her belief, verses 5-6. We see her behavior, her beauty, and then her belief, verses 5-6, "For after this manner in the old time the holy women,"—he's going to tell the wives that they should get older women that are holy and use them as patterns or models for their life—"also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as"—he picks out a woman named Sarah, who is Abraham's wife—"Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well"—or do what is right—"and are not afraid with any amazement." You're the daughters of Abraham because you believe in God, you trust in God, and you live by faith. Peter says that Christian wives should look to other holy women of old in the past who were models for their conduct.

I do believe that it is valuable and beneficial for us to have people that can mentor us and model for us and influence us. Don't get your models and your influence from Hollywood. Don't get them from the movies. Don't get them from the rock stars. Don't get them even sometimes from the sporting world, get them from the world of the church, women of God. Let them be your models, from the women in the Bible, women who loved God and feared God and served the Lord. You younger women, follow good role models; and older women, younger women are watching you. They are influenced by you, and you need to be a role model and a blessing to them.

In verse 5 Peter tells women three things about Old Testament women that they should follow. First of all, they were holy, verse 5. They were holy. It means that they were called by God, and set apart by God, and sanctified by God.

Holiness is not a hairdo, by the way. Years ago at my former church I pastored, I had some guy call me and say, "I see all these women coming in your church. They look like Jezebels!" I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, they're all painted up, wearing pants, bob hair." He was serious. He's freaking out. We need to be women who are women who seek to love the Lord and model for other women, not worrying about the externals or how women dress. So, younger women should follow good role models, but these women should be known by their holiness.

Holiness is not a hairdo, but here's the principle that you should go by, men as well: the outward beauty should reflect the inward beauty. What is inside of you should radiate outside of you, so the way that you adorn yourself should be a reflection of God's glory and God's beauty. That's what we want to promote; that's what we want to let shine. They were holy women, so find a model that's a holy woman.

Secondly, they trusted in God, verse 5. The idea means that they put their hope in God. They were holy women who hoped in God. They were women of faith. Ladies, do you trust God? Are you living in holiness, and do you trust the Lord? Do you trust Him with your marriage? Do you trust Him with your children? It's so unbecoming when a Christian wife worries or frets or is constantly stressed or upset instead of trusting in the Lord. The Bible says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart,"—right?—"and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths,"—or make your path straight. Trust Him with your marriage. Trust Him with your children. Trust Him with your family. Trust Him with your ministry. Trust Him with your life. Put your life in God's hands.

Notice, thirdly, that these women who were to be models, they adorned themselves with submission to their own husbands. This is how they adorned themselves, verse 5, by submitting to their own husbands. ". . . adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands." These were submissive women. They were holy women. They were women who trusted the Lord. They were women who were submissive to their own husbands. They had godly behavior—God-like behavior based on their relationship to God, love for God, and faith in God.

I really believe that the key to having a blessed and happy and successful marriage is both the husband and the wife knowing the Lord, surrendered to the Lord, filled with the Spirit of the Lord, and walking in obedience to the Lord. Not just, "Oh, we're both Christians. We both go to church," but that you really know the Lord, you really love the Lord, you really seek to honor the Lord, and you're grounded and growing in His Word and you're filled with the Spirit, and that is so very important.

Before Paul tells the wives to submit in Ephesians 5, before he tells the husbands to love their wives in Ephesians 5, he actually says, ". . . be filled with the Spirit," which is a command. Be filled with the Spirit, and if you're filled with the Spirit, you'll be joyful, thankful, and submissive. That's going to take care of the home.

Notice the illustration of Sarah, as they believed, so they behaved, verse 6. "Even as Sara,"—a beautiful name. My oldest daughter's name is Sarah. It means princess—"obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." When did Sarah call Abraham lord? This is not teaching that you call your husband, "Lord." "Yes, my lord. Yes, my lord." "Honey, can you iron my shirt?" "Yes, my lord." "Honey, can you make dinner?" "Yes, my lord." No, that's not what it's saying. It just means that she spoke respectfully to her husband. Genesis 18:12 is the verse where she found out that even in their old age, she and her husband, Abraham, were going to have a son. "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being

old also?" She says, "Now that I'm old and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure and my lord also?" She made that statement in Genesis 18:12 referring to her husband, Abraham.

In verse 6, the NIV translates that, "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear." So, you're following in the footsteps of Sarah. Don't be afraid to submit and obey your husband. The more you believe in God, trust in God, and put your faith in God and that you seek to honor God, God will be your protector. God will be your provider, but you got to get your eyes off your husband and get them on the Lord and keep in mind you're doing it as unto the Lord to be pleasing unto God.

Notice at the end of verse 6 you become Abraham's daughters, " . . . as long as ye do well, and are not afraid,"—that means as long as you do what is right, and you're trusting in the Lord—"with any amazement." So, her behavior is submission; her beauty is inner, spiritual beauty; her belief is trust and hope in God.

Again, Proverbs 31, "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. 11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. 12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life," and her value is beyond rubies. She's valuable, she's trustworthy, and she is a blessing. Proverbs 18:22 says, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD." This instruction was for the wife, but it ought to also encourage the husband, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD." Amen? Let's pray.