

# Wives Be Under Submission

1 Peter 3:1-6

1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. (1 Peter 3:1-6 (ESV))

Much in the same way that the word “therefore” directs us back to previous words, so also does this beginning word “likewise” direct our thoughts back to instructions given just a few verses earlier. There in chapter 2, God gave us resolute instructions and exhortations regarding the matter of submission to authority, saying that aside from a few and rare exceptional times and circumstances, our usual, our common, our only “acceptable” manner of conduct and behavior towards all the many people and the human institutions that have been placed in authority over us, our government, our government leaders, our employers and all such leaders is to be that of honor, respect and obedience.

And there God also reminded us of “why” we are to honor, respect and obey our leaders. It is because those leaders, those “masters” have each been put into their positions of authority over us by God Himself. And because of that, our responses toward them are actually toward God Himself, a concept that is so very difficult for most of us to accept and to follow . . . but we must!

And now here in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3, God extends these same instructions about authority to include the behavior that a wife is to have towards her husband, submitting to his authority; that much in the same way a servant is to humbly obey and serve his master even when the master is unfair and harsh, so also a wife’s submission to her husband is to continue even when her husband is not walking in obedience to God’s word. Listen again!

1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. (1 Peter 3:1-2 (ESV))

Again, this kind of honor and respect and obedience is so very difficult for most all women, especially given the dynamics of the culture of our day. Today's women are being influenced and pressured from every quarter to be "self-reliant", "self-defining", "self-oriented", even "self-absorbed" and "self-consumed".

And may I say that much wrong counsel seems also to be coming from pastors and counselors and preachers and other church leaders, glowing sermons and advice that speak only about equality and such other things that are so prominent and popular within politically-correct secular agendas.

To be sure, yes, equality between a man and his wife is absolutely right and is in keeping with these scriptures. One is no better or more important than the other in God's eyes. And so it should be with each of us.

But these scriptures do tell us that men and women have differing responsibilities, different callings, and therefore different authorities given to each by God. And we are to honor and respect God's plan for the working out of His design.

And yes, unfortunately too often misguided husbands will pull out scriptures such as these and use them to make demands upon their wives that should not be made, demanding obedience from them.

And those husbands are most often very foolish for doing that. Why would that be so? Simply put, God has given husbands only one pathway of prompting love and obedience from his wife, and that is for him to first love, honor and respect her. Then she will gladly and willingly show back love and obedience towards him.

And may I also pause here to say that, to be sure, God does not instruct us to obey the laws of political correctness that are so popular within our culture. He instead commands us to obey the Spirit of His laws that are given within these scriptures.

Here, the law of God is "love", that if and as a husband and a wife "love the Lord their God with all their heart, their soul, their mind and their strength, and then they also love each other as the Lord Jesus loves them," then right and Godly behavior will easily flow out from each of them.

And as for us church leaders and the counsel and advice that we give, we need first and always to reach to these scriptures for our truths rather than regurgitating out the foolishness that we learn from secular sources.

But with all that being said, these few words here in verse 1 really do bring some troublesome thoughts along with them. Listen!

1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct.(1 Peter 3:1-2 (ESV)

These words, “even if some do not obey the word”, can cover a wide variety of behaviors by a husband, even to the point of physical and emotional abuse. If a husband is not obeying God’s word, he is completely without good guidance and can have wrong behavior and not even realize how wrong he is being. And no, that does not excuse a husband. It is just a simple fact about truth.

And misguided behavior can lead to serious forms of abuse. But as for these particular scriptures in front of us here today, God does not seem to be addressing the worst of circumstances that can arise, but instead is speaking about the usual, the ordinary, the common behavior that develops when a husband is simply “not listening”, “not hearing” the voice of God and not walking in His ways.

And here, God is drawing our attention to one of the simplest but most effective ways of bringing Godly changes to a marriage relationship. Here, God is telling us that He has put a “provision” and “power” within most all husband and wife relationships in which “Godly behavior” and “Godly responses” can work seemingly “impossible wonders” to bring about “Godly changes”. Again, these words . . .

1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. (1 Peter 3:1-2 (ESV)

Folks, I know that so many, many wives will read these words of scripture and quickly respond that “Oh, we are much too far down the road for this to work in my marriage”. But please understand that the one who uttered these words is the Almighty God who created all things just by the power of His spoken words. And if He can “speak” a whole world into being, He can surely “speak” a marriage relationship back into shape . . . but only if a wife will do her part.

And take note here that this Godly response from a wife has a far greater purpose than just keeping the scales balanced on who is most important or who is, or is not, in authority. It may even have to do with the eternal salvation of her husband’s soul. And here also God is using the first and most foundational of all the equipping that He has put within a woman’s soul, that of her being a “suitable helpmeet” to her husband.

The implication within those words, “suitable helpmeet” is that a man often has needs that he, by himself, is not able to fulfill, and he needs his wife to help him.

Here in these words, the need is made clear. All men are born with a bent towards arrogant self-sufficiency, denying God and God’s authority over him. And here, God is clearly saying that the spirit of a man can be ministered to and even changed by the “Godly, pure and respectful behavior of his wife”.

Listen wives . . . the simple truth is, you exert a special mystical influence over us husbands that no other person possesses. And no, it is not as if you can actually “save” us! Only the Spirit of Christ is able to do that. But, your Godly and pure and respectful behavior can be so filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit that we men will be compelled to stop and take notice.

A quick note . . . these words speak directly to a husband with his own wife and to a wife with only her own husband. This does not work in any other way. Listen!

1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands . . . (1 Peter 3:1 (ESV))

This might seem like an obvious point of understanding, but it has been put here by the Lord for a reason and we must accept it exactly as it is given. So then, wives, your obligation is only to your “own” husband and not to any other man.

Before we move on forward into these next verses, may we take another moment to emphasize again that a wife’s submission, honor and respect is to be shown even when her husband is not very honorable and respectable.

And this is a point that I often dwell on when I counsel husbands and wives concerning their marriage relationship. I explain to the wife that while yes, her husband is “commanded” to love her regardless of her responses and her behavior; she can really make his loving her a lot easier if she presents herself as a “loveable” person, “easily loved”. And likewise, it makes the wife’s responses and behaviors easier if the husband presents himself as being an “honorable” and “respectable” man.

And to the man, I remind him that God has equipped our wives with a special measure of “intuitiveness”. She can sense things that we men cannot. I have often said of my wife that she actually knows me better than I know my self. So men, be really “honorable” and “respectable” so that your wife’s task of submission is not made more difficult.

And then note also this other condition given here in these words, that of the wife being a “quiet witness” to her husband. It is far more common for a wife to want to “talk” her husband into being righteous than for her to “speak the truth” silently.

And no, these words do not preclude a wife’s need to be well-studied in these scriptures. It actually bespeaks the need for her to be even more knowledgeable about them so that she can know how to respond in each circumstance. The exhortation here is simply that the wife can sometimes, perhaps most often, be more effective when she is silent, but all the while demonstrating Godly character in her behavior. Those words again . . .

1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct.(1 Peter 3:1-2 (ESV)

May I say again that this is an especially difficult part of the marriage relationship for most every wife? But here, she has the privilege of being an “emissary” direct from God to bring her husband into a righteous relationship with Christ.

And though in these verses, the word “humility” is not used, it is obvious that “humility” will be the most important ingredient that needs be present within a wife’s soul before she will be able to show such Godly conduct, especially if her husband is not being very cooperative. Humility!

These next words that speak about the way a wife is to adorn herself may seem to be a whole other matter from that of being under submission to her husband, but it is not. It is all very integral to the basic heart attitudes that women, especially wives, are to have. Here, she is told,

3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. (1 Peter 3:3-6 (ESV)

The commentaries on this portion of scripture tell us that in the Apostle Peter’s day, certain “braided” or “plaited” hairstyles along with ornate jewelry and other such forms of women’s adornment were intended to “send a specific and especially immoral message”.

One commentator tells us,

Let not outward adorning be that only and principally; let not that be solely or chiefly attended to, nor anxiously sought after, nor ever in order to allure and ensnare others, or to fill with pride and vanity; nor should it be indecent and luxurious, immodest and immoderate, and unsuitable to the age, character, and station of persons; otherwise clothing is both convenient and necessary; and a decent garb, neat and modest apparel, and what is suitable to the years, rank, and quality of persons, is very commendable.

The sense of this instruction is not that all forms of adornment are sinful and therefore prohibited, but rather that such adornments always be modest and within the bounds of righteous behavior.

Sadly, we find in today's culture, that this very form of adornment and accompanying behavior that's being prohibited here in these words are our accepted "cultural norm". And also, shapely, revealing clothing, expensive jewelry, and enticing mannerisms are often as common within the church as they are on the streets.

Here, God is saying very clearly and simply . . .

4 . . . let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. (1 Peter 3:4-6 (ESV))

And again, what a contrast to the usual behavior of so many otherwise devoutly believing women within our churches today!

Is this all the woman's fault? Not theirs alone. The blame must also be shared with us preachers and pastors and other church leaders who have not spoken strongly to these issues, who, too often knuckle under to fears that we might offend someone.

There is one last very important word used within this passage that is foundational to a wife being able to carry out this command about submission. It is in verse 5 and it speaks about "holiness"; and I hope to speak more about it next week. Wives, this is your most important calling, to "be holy". It is only if and as, you have the Spirit of Christ living and abiding within your soul that you will be able to carry forward with this special call to submission.

So then, may I finish these thoughts for today by simply saying, “Wives,  
4 . . . let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. (1 Peter 3:4-6 (ESV))