

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Wives Who Hope in God 1 Peter 3:1-7 (699)

Many Christian marriages have fallen apart. Many others are in deep trouble. Still other Christian couples that look happy to the world are, in reality, no more than peacefully co-existing with one another. “The fact that a man and a woman are both saved is no guarantee that their marriage will succeed. Marriage is something that we have to work hard at; success is not automatic. And when one marriage partner is not a Christian, that can make matters even more difficult. Peter addresses this section of his letter to Christian wives who have unsaved husbands ... But no matter what your marital status may be, you may learn from Peter the essentials” (Wiersbe, p. 66) of how a Christian woman is to carry herself with respect to her husband. In **3:1-6** Peter exhorts wives to be submissive. In **3:7** he exhorts husbands to be considerate.

1 Peter 3:1 *In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ² as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. ³ And let not your adornment be merely external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; ⁴ but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable*

quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. ⁵ *For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.* ⁶ *Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.* ⁷ *You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

In the same way, you wives. “The phrase *in the same way* points us back to the example of Jesus Christ in **2:21-25**. Just as Jesus was submissive and obedient to God’s will, so a Christian husband and wife should follow His example” (Wiersbe, p. 67). This is often a bit more tricky for a wife than it is for a husband. For example, in the culture of Peter’s day the wife was expected to embrace and worship only the god (or gods) of her husband. That obviously placed the Christian wife of a non-Christian husband in a most difficult situation. If a husband were converted to Christ, it automatically followed that he brought his wife into the church as well. But for a wife to become a Christian, while her unsympathetic husband remained a pagan, could create a very tense and unstable situation in the home (see Hillyer, p. 92 and Achtemeier, p. 208).

Real problems may face Christian wives whose husbands do not believe the gospel message, and Peter seeks to offer such women the counsel of God in the matter. He does not tell them to leave their husbands. Rather, he encourages them to persevere in seeking to win their husbands to Christ not by preaching at them or by nagging. Rather, the situation requires godly and submissive conduct that commends the gospel of grace.

Be submissive to your own husbands. This is the clear and consistent command of God to Christian wives (**Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5**). Submission does not imply spiritual or intellectual inferiority (**Gal. 3:26-28**). Submission does not require abandoning the exercise of one's abilities and gifts (**I Pet. 4:10**). Submission does not require suppressing one's spirit, zeal, and enthusiasm for life. Husbands, submission does not mean your wife is to never express her opinions or feelings; that she must give in to your sinful demands; that she and your children must stoically endure physical or psychological intimidation dished out by an unreasoning husband and father.

Biblical submission is not an issue of inferiority. It is an issue of arrangement and ordering of the institutions ordained by God – civil government, the church, and the family. “A buck private in the army may be a better person than the five-star general, but he is still a buck private” (Wiersbe, p. 69). The Greek word for “be subject” (*hupotasso*) means *to arrange (tasso) under (hupo)*. This word is used 40 times in the New Testament. In classical Greek the word meant to draw up troops or ships in battle array or to post or station. In His wisdom God has seen fit for there to be a certain functional arrangement in the home. My sister, you may be an Olympic athlete, the CEO of some corporation, a U.S. Senator, the Prime Minister or Queen of England, but in the little domestic kingdom consisting of mom, dad, and children, God has ordained that the husband is the spiritual head and leader. The model of submission in the home is that of the church's submission to Christ. **Ephesians 5:24**, *But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.* I want to credit Dr. Bryan Chapell, President of Covenant Seminary, for his help at this point. How is the church subject to Christ? The role of the church is to honor the lordship of Jesus Christ. The focus, the purposes, the gifts, the beauty, and the

energies of the church are to be employed to the glory of Christ. To be submissive means that you wives are to willingly arrange your priorities and gifts to the end that your husbands are honored. Submission is the expression of gifts in behalf of another. Submission is pouring oneself into the completion of another. **Proverbs 31:11-12**, *The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.*

Why is submission so important? **So that even if any of them are disobedient to the word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.** There are marriages between professing Christians that are so bad that one wonders if either partner knows anything of the grace of God. There are also marriages in which one partner is a believer and the other, although an unbeliever, is kind and considerate. But the situation in view here is a Christian wife who is married to a man who rejects the gospel. Indeed, he may even be actively opposed to it. **I Peter 4:17**, *For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* You can imagine how potentially difficult this could be for a believing wife. Her husband is not supportive, indeed, he objects to her attendance in worship, to her fellowship with other Christians, and to her speaking of this new faith to her family and friends. So what's a wife to do?

Given this situation for a Christian wife to preach to her husband, to nag him, to criticize or condemn him may not be a good idea. It may prove to be more provocative than fruitful. But this does not mean that God is powerless or that His saving grace has been rendered inoperative by the unbelief and opposition of this husband. God can reach the man's heart through the godly behavior of his wife.

This doesn't mean a wife never speaks of Christ to her husband. You do if he is willing to listen. Nor does this mean that your husband by observing your behavior alone will understand the content of the gospel – sin, sin's penalty, that Christ paid the penalty, and that he must receive Christ. But it does mean that as a result of observing your godly conduct and conversation he will be influenced; inclined to listen to the gospel and to embrace Christ as He is offered in it.

“What kind of conduct can lead someone to conversion” (Michaels, p. 158)? **2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.** He sees that you reverence or fear your God. He sees that you are committed to purity and faithfulness to him as your husband. And God works through these things. “Within his heart there is a witness that this is right, this is how God intended men and women to relate as husband and wife. He concludes, therefore, that the gospel which his wife believes must be true as well” (Grudem, p. 139).

Now Peter is going to offer a stunning corrective that apparently was needed then but may be more sorely needed today in our American culture. We've got it all messed up. Women have bought into the idea that “a Christian wife with an unsaved husband must imitate the world if she is going to win her man; but just the opposite is true” (Wieresbe, p. 71). **3 And let not your adornment be merely external-- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses.** The point that Peter is making here is that God uses character not appearance to effect redemptive changes in a husband. Peter is not saying that a woman should not pay any attention to her appearance; that she cannot fix her hair, wear a necklace, or own a nice dress. The issue here is extravagance. It is over-attention to one's physical appearance. It is reliance upon the wrong thing. Our culture is

obsessed with outward appearance. It has gone way beyond braces and a little makeup. We talk now in terms of “extreme makeovers” - cosmetic dentistry, cosmetic surgery, cosmetic cosmetics; actually re-doing a person’s appearance. The extreme makeover most women need to make them attractive is to be converted. That makeover can’t be achieved by a surgeon, only the Spirit of God.

While there are women who possess both physical and spiritual beauty, the beauty spoken of here is not that which catches the eye but the beauty that captures the heart. *4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.* It is this beauty that commends the gospel. It is this beauty that pleases God. It is this beauty that can influence a man redemptively. Michaels, explains, “A person’s heart is who that person is, at the deepest and most private level, and for Christians wives, according to Peter, it is the wellspring of their beauty” (*I Peter*, p. 161). “Even unbelievers are able to recognize this beauty, even if they cannot appreciate its source” (Hillyer, p. 93).

Indeed, gentleness is named in **Galatians 5:23** as a fruit of the Spirit. Christ said of Himself, *“I am gentle and humble in heart”* (**Matt. 11:29**). Gentleness is a kindly, caring attitude toward others. It is the opposite of harshness, roughness, and a bad-temper. The gentle lady or gentle man does not insist on her own rights, is not pushy or selfishly assertive, demanding her own way (see Grudem, p. 140). Quiet suggests a calm, a peaceful, a tranquil soul as opposed to a restless, rebellious, or insubordinate spirit (see Peters, p. 119).

Unlike changing fashions and fads this beauty never decays or fades. Unlike expensive jewelry and fancy dresses these are qualities that will outlast time

itself. Indeed, gentleness and quiet spirits will characterize even glorified saints. These virtues are precious to God because they are present in His Son (**Matt. 11:29**) and are produced by His Spirit (**Gal. 5:23**). Such adornment as spoken of in verse 4 is nothing new.

5 For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. That character which God considers precious has not changed. God's tastes in feminine adornment have remained the same – unaffected by fads, magazines, cultural expectations, public opinion, celebrities, or anything else. **Holy women of former times** refers to the godly women of the Old Testament who demonstrated by their lives that they were of the covenant people of God. Sisters, we're talking about redeemed behavior; behavior of women not driven by the lusts that marked their unregenerate state. It is the behavior of women whose hope is completely fixed on the grace of God (**1:13**).

Indeed, these holy women submitted to their husbands with the assurance that such conduct was, in fact, precious to God; that God would protect them; that God's ordering of their lives and role in the home was wise and good; that God would ultimately avenge and right any injustice they may suffer on account of their obedience to Him.

Now in verse 6 Peter cites a specific example of godly submissiveness – Sarah, the wife of Abraham. *6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.* Physically, Sarah was a very beautiful woman (**Gen. 12:14**). Being married to and following Abraham meant “trusting God in uncertain, unpleasant, and even

dangerous situations (Gen. 12:1, 5, 10-15; 13:1; 20:2-6; 22:3)" (Grudem, p. 141-142). All the same, **Sarah obeyed Abraham**. She listened to him, attended to him, submitted herself to his leadership, and, yes, obeyed her husband (*hupakouo*, see Vine, p. 124). This was manifested even in the way she addressed him. **Calling him lord**. Sarah was childless. Upon hearing the promise of God that she, even in her old age, would bear a son she *laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also"* (**Gen. 18:12**)?

My mother's maiden name was Robertson. My father always called my mother's parents Mr. and Mrs. Robertson. I have always called Julia's parents Mr. And Mrs. Cummings. I think it is an appropriate expression of respect. Peter calls upon these words of Sarah to let us know the depth of respect that she had for her husband. She honored him with a title of respect, even a measure of reverence (see **Eph. 5:33**, *phobos*).

And you have become her children if you do what is right. Women young and old desperately need role models. You may say, "I'd like to be numbered among *the holy women of former times*. I'd like to trace my heritage back to Sarah." My sister, you can. You can, *if you do what is right*. In I Peter *doing what is right* is conduct or behavior toward your husband that is in conformity to the will of God as revealed in the word of God. As you do this you take on the spiritual family likeness of Sarah in the sense that you mirror her conduct; in the sense that you reflect her character; in the sense that you share her convictions; in the sense that you possess her courage (**without being frightened by any fear**).

Submission is always a function of one's faith; of one's trust in and reliance upon God. This is so because when we submit we place ourselves in a position of

vulnerability; a position in which we may be taken advantage of, mistreated, abused, taken for granted, left unprotected. Wives surely can and do feel this. Wives hope in God without any fear the same way Jesus did. Indeed, *He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (2:23)*. Sisters, you are called to the same reliance on your heavenly Father. “The believing wife who submits to Christ and to her husband, and who cultivates a meek and quiet spirit will never have to be afraid. God will watch over you even when your unsaved mate creates problems and difficulties for you” (Wiersbe, p. 72).

Now Peter speaks to the husbands. *7 You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.* The marriage relationship is never a one-sided affair. In this relationship there are mutual obligations. Brothers, to live *in an understanding way* is pretty simple to explain. It means we are to be considerate, understanding, and sensitive to the feelings of our wives. We are to be courteous in our behavior and treat our wives with respect (see Hillyer, p. 97). And we are to do this mindful all the while that she is the *weaker vessel*. In other words, that physically she is not as big or as strong and that, on account of the physical disparity, she is more vulnerable. I mean how hard would it be for a 6’-2”, 200 lb. man to intimidate his wife or even to abuse his wife? Indeed, Peter kicks it up a notch and says we are to **grant her honor**. You know what this means? It means that you act like a gentleman and not a jerk (see **Prov. 31:29**).

“Peter gives two reasons for this command. First, such action recognizes what society does not, that before God husband and wife are equal, joint heirs of God’s gracious gift, which is eternal life ... Second, a failure to keep your marriage

loving ... will injure your relationship with God, hindering your prayers ... As the closest human relationship, the relationship to one's spouse must be most carefully cherished if one wishes a close relationship with God" (Peters, p. 123).

"One of the greatest examples of a godly wife and mother in church history is Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. God used Monica's witness and prayers to win both her son and her husband to Christ, though her husband was not converted until shortly before his death" (Wiersbe, p. 70). Listen to what Augustine wrote in his book, *Confessions*: When she "came to marriageable age, she was given to a husband and served him as her lord, and did all she could to win him to you, speaking of you to him by her deportment, through which you made her beautiful and reverently lovable to her husband ... Finally, when her husband was coming to the very end of his earthly life, she won him to you" (9.19, 22).

Sisters may God grant you every grace, especially as you pursue His will in your homes.

Let's pray together.