

*Wives Who Hope in God: 1 Peter 3:1-6*  
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church  
Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015

In this sermon series on marriage we started in Genesis. We spent some time in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, in Proverbs and Song of Solomon. We considered the passage in Romans 1 which addresses homosexual activity. Then we went to 1 Corinthians 7 and talked about singleness. Last week was Ephesians 5 which is essential to a Gospel-centered understanding of marriage. And now we'll wrap up the series with 2 sermons from 1 Peter 3. This morning I'll preach on what verses 1-6 say to wives, and then next Sunday I'll preach on what verse 7 says to husbands.

There are several things that are mentioned in verses 1-6 that are characteristics of wives who hope in God. And I want to begin with a word about how this is applicable to us. Obviously, if you're a wife this is directly applicable to you. And if you're a husband, this is how you can be praying for your wife. But that doesn't mean others should tune this out. If you are a single woman who may be married someday, you need to listen to this. And the younger you start understanding this, the better. This is the biblical vision of beautiful femininity. Women who hope in God. Also, if you are a single man who may be married someday, this is the kind of woman you should be looking for. And for anyone who has a daughter, these are the kinds of things you should be teaching to her and praying that God will instill in her.

I also want to remind us yet again that marriage is much bigger than human marriages. As we saw so vividly last Sunday in Ephesians 5, human marriage points beyond itself to the greatest of spiritual realities. It's meant to be a testimony of Christ's marriage to the church. Christ's sacrifice on the cross on behalf of His bride, and the church's glad submission to Him.

So as we continue to learn about marriage, and how a wife and husband are to relate to one another, let's remember that this is meant to honor Christ and display the Gospel. So even as we're thinking about the specific instructions here given to wives, we can all think about how we as the church are to gladly and humbly submit ourselves to Christ, the husband of the church and head of the church.

**1) Submission**

Verse 1 gives the same instruction that Ephesians 5 gave to wives. Submit, or be subject to, your own husbands. It's important to notice that this is a specific command for the wife to submit to *her own* husband. It does not say women submit to men.

It's specifically referring to a dimension of the marriage relationship. Women are not called to submit to men. Rather, a wife is called to submit to her own husband.

The word for submit is the same word that's used in verse 5 in the phrase "submitting to their own husbands." This is also the same word that's used in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 and Titus 2 in reference to wives submitting to their husbands. It's also used in the instruction for younger men to be subject to elders (1 Peter 5:5), for all of us to "be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him (1 Peter 2:13), for servants to be subject to their masters (1 Peter 2:18). And interestingly, it is also used by Paul to refer to the submission of the Son to the Father, in 1 Corinthians 15:28. So we see in this term there is certainly an order of authority that is implied. Servants submit to their masters because the master has authority. We submit to the government because the government has authority over us. The Son submits to the Father because there is an order of authority implied in the Father-Son relationship. And the wife submits to her husband because the husband is the head, the authority.

It's also evident in the way this term is used that a functional difference does not mean there is inequality. The master is not more important or of greater worth because he is in the place of authority. Those with political power are not any more valuable than those of us who submit to them. And certainly God the Son is not any lower than God the Father in essence or being. The three persons of the Trinity are equal in essence. There is One God. But our One God exists in three persons, and those three persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), assume distinct roles and functions. In a similar way the submission of a wife to her husband does not at all mean that she is less important than him.

Peter goes on to apply this fundamental principle of wifely submission to the case of a Christian woman who has an unbelieving husband. The verse is not addressed only to wives with unbelieving husbands. It is an admonition to all wives, but he does especially have this certain situation in mind. He says, "so that *even if* some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct."

## 2) **Wordless Sermons**

The second characteristic of a wife who hopes in God is that she has learned how to preach wordless sermons. This doesn't mean there are never any words spoken about the Gospel. I think the assumption is that the husband has heard the word—he has

heard the Gospel. But he does not obey it. He has not submitted to the Gospel call to repent of sin and trust in Christ.

The hope is that as the believing wife lives a life of holiness and submission before her unbelieving husband, the husband will be dramatically impacted by her example and will eventually “be won without a word.” Not that she never talks about her faith. That’s not the point. But it’s not primarily her words that eventually impact her husband. It’s her wordless sermons that she preaches day after day in the way that she lives.

God uses these wives, who hope in God, to bring their husbands to saving faith. And it’s not because the wife is beating him over the head with the Bible every day and nagging him endlessly to go to church, but it’s because of the way she lives her life humbly trusting in God.

If you find yourself in this situation or know of someone who is, be encouraged by these verses. Be a wife who hopes in God and thus demonstrates the attractiveness of the Gospel.

We do have to ask what this submission looks like in a relationship that is unequally yoked. How does a Christian woman submit to a non-Christian husband? First we can notice some things in our text that tell us what being “subject to your own husbands” does NOT mean. Last week I mentioned that submission does not mean you follow your husband into sin, it does not mean you are a doormat, and it does not mean you subject yourself to abuse. We can elaborate on those points from this passage.

It’s clear that Peter would not want a woman to reject Christ out of submission to her husband. An unbelieving husband may say to his Christian wife, “I want you to stop reading the Bible and praying, and I want you to stay home with me on Sundays rather than going to church.” The wife cannot submit to her husband’s wishes in that scenario. She can try to be respectful and honoring to her husband as she tries to explain to him why she MUST do these things. But the bottom line is that her allegiance to Christ comes first.

That was a pretty radical concept in the first century. Today it’s not that surprising if a husband and wife follow different religions. But in the Greco-Roman world it was assumed that a wife would follow her husband’s religion. Plutarch, a Greek writer who lived in the first century, said this: “A wife should not acquire her own friends, but should make her husband’s friends her own. [that’s demeaning already] The gods are the first and most significant friends. For this reason, it is proper for a wife to recognize only those gods whom her husband worships and to shut the door to superstitious cults and strange superstitions.”<sup>1</sup> So what

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Tom Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, page 152-53.

Peter wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit would have been scandalous in the original cultural context. It would have been radically counter-cultural for a wife to maintain her allegiance to Christ even though her husband rejected Christ. But that's precisely what she is called to do. She should submit to her husband, but she cannot submit to him in a way that would contradict her submission to Christ.

We also see in this situation that submission does not mean that you never try to influence your husband. The hope of these verses is that the wife will be the means of revolutionizing her husband's life. Therefore submission surely does not mean that you sit back passively and avoid doing anything that would influence or change your husband in any way. On the contrary, part of your responsibility as your husband's helper is to change him—to change him in godly ways. But that's not going to happen through control and manipulation.

What is submission, then? As a wife you need to recognize that God has put your husband in a position of leadership in your marriage. He is the head of the home, and it's his responsibility to lead. It's your responsibility, then, to be his helper, and to respect him and encourage him in his role and to follow his lead. This will certainly be a challenge for women who are married to an unbeliever. But all wives are called to live this out. You should be looking for ways to affirm his leadership and encourage him in the areas where he is leading well.

This doesn't mean that you're uninvolved in the decisions that affect your family. And it's not that you avoid influencing your husband. You should be involved in decisions, and you should try to influence your husband with godly wisdom. At the same time you need to recognize that he's the leader, and you're called to support him and follow him.

### 3) **Respectful and Pure Conduct**

Verse 2 speaks of respectful and pure conduct. The Greek phrase translated "respectful" is actually "in fear." The husband sees the wife's pure conduct that is in fear, implying, "in fear of God." Just a few verses earlier (2:17) there was the command to "fear God." In this passage there's a contrast between hoping in God (verse 5) and not fearing anything (verse 6). Therefore it seems best to understand verse 2 as a reference to the fear of God. Wives should respect their husbands. Paul says this very thing at the end of Ephesians 5. However, that doesn't seem to be the point that Peter is making here. Rather, as the wife lives in the fear of God and thus lives a pure and holy life, that can have a tremendous impact on her unbelieving husband.

#### 4) **Imperishable Beauty**

Verses 3-4 instruct women concerning true beauty.

Women want to be beautiful, and that's not a bad thing. Wives want to be beautiful for their husbands, and that's certainly not a bad thing. It's a very good thing. But like everything in a fallen world, these appropriate desires become twisted and depraved. In terms of beauty, the sinful tendency is to make beauty all about outward appearances, all about external adornment. Our culture is absolutely obsessed with this. You can't go anywhere without being bombarded by advertisements for hair products, fancy jewelry, and designer clothing—just the things Peter mentions in verse 3 (hair, jewelry and clothes—and who says the Bible is out of date?) So women are getting the message drilled into their heads every day, If you want to be beautiful, this is what it looks like. You have to have this kind of hair and this kind of jewelry and this kind of clothing and this kind of figure and this kind of skin and this kind of purse.

And God's Word, yet again, collides head-on with the assumptions and ideals of our culture. God's Word says to women, You want to be beautiful? Good. You want to adorn yourself in attractive ways? Good. Here's a definition of beauty, so that you don't waste your life trying to be beautiful based on a false notion of beauty.

Here's the definition in verses 3-4. It's not about external adornment (verse 3). And by the way, the verse is not excluding any kind of hair braiding or wearing of jewelry. We know this because if we were to read the verse in a wooden and strictly literal way like that, it would also exclude the wearing of clothes. And we know that's not what Peter is saying here. He's not saying, Don't braid your hair, don't wear any gold jewelry, and don't wear clothes. No, that doesn't make any sense at all. His point is simply to say that your main focus in adorning yourself should not be those external things like hair, jewelry, and clothes. Rather, the focus should be internal.

Verse 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." Ladies, this is the kind of beauty that will please God and bless your husband and edify the church and make the Gospel compelling to unbelievers. Take this to heart. Maybe you need to evaluate the amount of time and energy and money and thought you put into your outward appearance and then weigh that against the time and energy and money and thought you put into nurturing the hidden person of the heart.

### 5) A Gentle and Quiet Spirit

A gentle and quiet spirit is a very precious thing, although some women may be offended by this statement. Stacy remembers wrestling to understand this verse in her college years after becoming a Christian. She was worried it might mean that she shouldn't be talkative or shouldn't joke and laugh and have a good time. Maybe it meant that she shouldn't express her thoughts and opinions and convictions, many of which she embraces very passionately. She was worried the Bible might be saying that women should be seen but not heard. But that's not it at all. Stacy has come to understand this verse in a different way (and I think it's clear from the context), that this is referring to a matter of the heart. It's a gentle and quiet *spirit*, and it goes along with hoping in God (verse 5) and not fearing anything (verse 6). These are the inner attitudes of a beautiful wife. This is her attractive adorning of the hidden person of the heart.

John Piper, in his book *This Momentary Marriage*, says it like this: "When a woman puts her hope in God and not her husband and not in her looks, and when she overcomes fear by the promises of God, this will have an effect on her heart: It will give her an inner tranquility."<sup>2</sup> That's what a gentle and quiet spirit is. She has an inner tranquility that is the fruit of hoping in God. She is at peace, even though the circumstances around her may be stressful. She is content because of her relationship with the Lord. Therefore she's able to resist the urge to be bossy. She doesn't have to be the one in charge. That would be the opposite of a gentle and quiet spirit—the woman who is always shouting orders, always controlling and manipulating the situation, the woman who "wears the pants" in the marriage, who has to have things just the way she wants them to be or she's going to make everyone around her miserable. That kind of attitude is the direct result of unbelief. A gentle and quiet spirit is the result of a deep faith and dependence on God.

So a gentle and quiet spirit doesn't mean that you can't be talkative. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't have opinions, or shouldn't voice your opinions. It doesn't mean that you should be passionless or passive. But it does mean that you should be submissive to your husband as you hope in God. Cultivate the beauty of that inner tranquility.

### 6) Hoping in God (and Sarah's Example)

Verse 5 describes where this imperishable beauty comes from. With the mention of Sarah in the next verse, the reference to holy women here is probably a reference to Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, the wives of the patriarchs. The important

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<sup>2</sup> Page 98.

attribute that Peter highlights is their hope in God. That's a wonderful phrase to express their supreme allegiance to God and their ultimate security in God. And it points to the fact that they submitted to their husbands, not because they were hoping in their husbands, but because they trusted in God's plan for them.

Then verse 6 offers a specific example from the Old Testament of what this submission looks like, what this gentle and quiet spirit is all about. The mention of Sarah calling Abraham lord is an example of her respect for him. It's from Genesis 18:12 when Sarah was told she was going to have a baby, and she responded by laughing to herself and said, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" This is a really interesting text for Peter to allude to because it does not demonstrate Sarah's obedience to Abraham, but it does demonstrate that even when she's mumbling comments of disbelief to herself, she honors her husband. This would have been like calling him "sir." It was an expression of respect. She was honoring her husband's position of authority over her, and the fact that she speaks like this in this particular situation shows that this was woven into the very fabric of their marriage.

The reminder of the context of Genesis 18:12 is not something that is flattering to Sarah's character. It reminds us that she was not a perfect woman. She struggled at times to believe God's promises. Not only here, but we also think of the infamous scandal with Hagar, when Sarah, who was barren, told her husband to commit adultery with Hagar so that Sarah could have children (see Genesis 16).

Peter's point in drawing attention to Sarah is not to say that she was a perfect woman. She had significant struggles and significant failures. But when you look at her life as a whole you can see that she was a woman who hoped in God and respected and obeyed her husband. Hebrews 11:11 says, "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised."

We also need to make the observation in these verses that submission does involve obedience. This is not the kind of obedience that parents expect of a child. Submission and obedience look different in various relationships, and wives are not expected to submit to or obey their husbands in a way that a child is to obey his parents. But it is a responsibility of the wife to follow the leadership of her husband even if it's not what she would have chosen. Husbands and wives should talk about decisions that need to be made. They should pray together about any big decisions in life. And there should be a healthy give and take in those discussions. Ideally a decision can be reached that both the husband and wife are excited about. But there may also

be times when the husband needs to lead his wife and his family in a particular decision, and the wife needs to be supportive of that even if it's not the direction she had in mind.

### 7) **Doing Good without Fear**

The final characteristic of a wife who hopes in God that we find in these verses is that she does good and does not fear anything (verse 6). The phrase "doing good" shows up several times in this letter, and it's a way that Peter summarizes what the Christian life should look like. It's an especially powerful witness when Christians do good even in the midst of suffering and trials and persecution. 1 Peter 2:15 says, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." And 2:20 says, "For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God." Also 3:17, "For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." And finally 4:19, "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

The focus of 1 Peter 3:1-6 is related to these other verses in that certain Christian women are married to men who don't obey the word. And these women will most likely endure some level of persecution for their faith, even in their own homes.

Peter also recognizes the potential for fear in such situations. And fear is a sin that plagues many women. The exhortation is not to fear. Don't fear anything that is frightening. This is only possible for those who hope in God. As you trust in the promises of God and rest in His sovereignty, you can fight off the fears that come like arrows into your mind.

The interesting thing about fear is that we so often fear things that may never happen. Our imaginations run wild with the horrific trials that may confront us at some point in the future. But what good is that? God's grace will be sufficient for us in those moments of trial, whatever those may be. But as Elisabeth Elliott has said, "There's no grace for your imagination."<sup>3</sup> There's grace for the real trials of life, but not for the imaginary trials we make up in our heads.

Corrie ten Boom, a holocaust survivor and writer of *The Hiding Place*, shares an illustration that her father shared with her when she was struggling with fear. When Corrie was a girl she was fearful that her father might die. A neighbor's baby had died, and Corrie realized that anybody could die. Her father could die. Here's how Corrie describes what her father taught her in that moment.

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<sup>3</sup> Cited here: <http://www.girltalkhome.com/blog/no-grace-for-what-if>



*Father sat down on the edge of the narrow bed.  
 “Corrie,” he began gently, “when you and I go to  
 Amsterdam—when do I give you your ticket?”  
 I sniffed a few times, considering this.  
 “Why, just before we get on the train.”  
 “Exactly. And our wise Father in heaven knows when  
 we’re going to need things, too. Don’t run ahead of Him,  
 Corrie. When the time comes that some of us will have to  
 die [or we could add, get sick, or go through financial  
 difficulties, or whatever the trial might be], you will look  
 into your heart and find the strength you need—just in  
 time.”<sup>4</sup>*

Truly beautiful wives will put their hope in God and trust in God’s grace to be there for them just in time. The Proverbs 31 woman is “not afraid” (verse 21), and “she laughs at the time to come” (verse 25) because she is “a woman who fears the Lord” (verse 30). She fears the Lord, and therefore doesn’t need to fear anything else.

Wives, as well as the rest of us, have a great example to look to in this. There is an individual who is entirely good, who suffered for doing good, and who persevered in doing good without fear as He put His hope in God alone. That individual is Jesus Christ.

In this section of Peter’s letter we find a very powerful presentation of the Gospel message. In this section about submission—citizens being subject to the government authorities (2:13 and following), slaves being subject to masters (2:18 and following), and wives being subject to their own husbands (3:1-6). Right in the midst of this we read a description of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for doing good.

I want to close with this thought, reflecting on the tremendous good that comes to us because of the suffering that Christ endured for us. The perfect One laid down His life to accept the punishment we deserve for our sins. He bore our sins on the cross. He rescued us from our straying and became our Shepherd.

It’s my prayer that every wife, every husband, every man and woman, and boy and girl here today will put their trust and hope in this amazing Savior.

Read 2:20-25

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<sup>4</sup> *The Hiding Place*, page 33. Quoted in Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Overcoming Fear, Worry, and Anxiety*, page 46.