

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #11

I Peter 3:1-6

If I were to ask you who the greatest evangelists were, who would you name? I am sure almost everyone would say “Billy Graham.” Billy Graham has been used to point thousands of people to Jesus Christ. But I believe there is an evangelist that has been used even more by God throughout these past 2,000 years and this evangelist has done the work without saying a word. It is the Christian wife. Behavior evangelism has reached more people for Jesus Christ than we will ever know.

One of the most powerful evangelists anyone will ever see is a Christian woman who lives her life in a godly, quiet way. This is an evangelism “without words” (3:1). The eloquence of silence and evangelism by silence. A Christian wife is in a position to evangelize the whole world by her behavior.

When we come to this text of Scripture, it becomes very evident that God monitors all marriages. He sees how a husband treats his wife and He sees how a wife treats her husband. It is a tremendous comfort for a woman to know that God keeps track of all of this especially in view of a context like this one.

Now we will notice that the main challenge to the wife is this: **“You wives be submissive to your own husband.”**

Let us remember that the submission being referred to is a “willing submission” not a “forced submission.” It is the idea of recognizing the rank that God has given to the husband as the leader and willingly choosing to submit yourself to this. I also want you ladies to see from **verse 5** that your hope is in God, not in your husbands. No matter what your situation, you always have hope in God. In other words the reason you do this is because you believe God is watching you and your hope is that one day He will reward you. So we begin by saying that you wives should not ever be forced to submit to your husband. **This is not a submission that men demand; this is a submission that a woman willingly chooses.**

A true understanding of this Biblical idea is that the wife willingly and voluntarily chooses to do this. The decision is yours. You do not have to submit if you don’t want to. However, you need to know this. If you choose not to submit, you will not find the favor of God (I Peter 2:20); you will not reflect a woman who stands firm in the grace of God (I Peter 5:12); you will not receive an abundant entrance into heaven, which includes the praise and glory and honor of God (II Peter 1:7); and you probably won’t see too many of your prayers answered (I Peter 3:7). So the choice is yours. It is totally up to you. I am not going to demand anything. I will handle this text and you decide as a woman what you want to do with it.

The point of the passages is clear:

GOD COMMANDS HIS WOMEN TO DEMONSTRATE HIS GRACE BY A SUBMISSIVE, GENTLE, QUIET SPIRIT TO HER OWN HUSBAND AND THE WOMAN WHO CHOOSES TO DO THIS WILL BE HIGHLY HONORED IN HEAVEN.

Peter is writing in a world of Greek philosophy and Roman power. Both systems taught that a wife should be submissive to their own husbands, but the woman who actually did this would in fact demonstrate a behavior that would make the world take notice. The motive for the Christian wife submitting is completely different. **For the Greeks and Romans it was a man's world, but for the Christian wife, it was God's world.** She realizes she is an alien living in this world for awhile and then will be with the Lord. The woman who lived her life in this quiet submissive way, not only was a great example, but she was headed to great eternal reward.

There are three grammatical points we want to stress before we tackle this section.

(Grammatical Point #1) - Now we may notice from **verse 1** the prepositional phrase “in the same way.”

The Greek word (ομοίως) has been taken by some to have as its antecedent the previous immediate context which challenges slaves to be subject to their masters (2:18). But the word is used again in **verse 7** in connection with husbands so if one were to consistently interpret the text, one would conclude that husbands likewise are to submit to their wives.

We believe the reference is broader and includes every believer who is to be submissive in a variety of contexts, such as in society, government and in employment. This submissive attitude is something that is God-honoring and it is to permeate every context of life. Now Peter brings this same principal into the marriage relationship.

(Grammatical Point #2) - We may notice that twice it is stated “to your own husbands.”
3:1, 5

Peter uses a strong Greek word for “own” ἰδιος which emphasizes the strong relationship between a husband and wife of which God specifically takes special notice. The emphasis here is that the Christian wife specifically is challenged to focus on subordination inside her own marriage, not so much outside of it. God views the husband and wife relationship as very private and very important. Peter is not demanding that wives submit to any man but to their own husbands.

(Grammatical Point #3) - The word “submit” is a middle voice participle.

What this means is this is a willing submission, not a forced submission. The middle voice means that the wife voluntarily decides to submit and be a quiet woman. She is involved in the action and in the results of the action, which includes the blessings of God and the honor of God. She stands to gain by voluntarily submitting herself.

The basic idea behind this word is a military concept to be subordinate by recognizing the superior rank of another and thus making yourself subject to it. **In the military you do not have a choice, but in the marriage you do.**

From what we have been able to discern from the history of the Church, apparently Peter was married to a wonderful godly woman, who did exhibit these qualities even though Peter certainly was not the easiest man to live with.

QUESTION #1 – Why should a woman be willing to submit to her husband?

It can be a very difficult struggle for a wife to submit to her husband, even if a husband treats his wife relatively well. It is extremely difficult when the husband does not treat his wife well. When a wife is not being treated properly, her soul wants justice and revenge. It takes a remarkable, Spirit-led woman to do what is requested in this context. In fact, I am convinced it is impossible for a woman on her own to do this; it takes divine power and divine help.

(Reason #1) - Because it means the woman obeys and honors God. **3:1a**

Now this is a key point to remember. A wife who willingly submits herself to her husband is not doing this to flatter her husband's ego or to "boost his social image," she is doing this for the Lord, who willingly went to the cross and submitted Himself to that for us.

This is a critical factor, the primary reason a woman chooses to have this attitude is because it obeys God. Therefore, if a husband were to make an ungodly request that would mean she would disobey God, she should never submit herself to it. If a husband asks his wife to break the law - rob a bank, steal or do something immoral, she should never submit because this submission is about honoring God.

(Reason #2) - Because God will use this to win your husband. **3:1b**

A key motive for submitting to your husband is not because you are inferior, but because you want to win him for Jesus Christ. This text implies that a wife had become a Christian and the husband had not. God is giving the wife the formula for winning her husband.

Many women take the position, I'll be a submissive wife as long as my husband is doing what he should. You are reversing the Biblical process. The point God makes here to the woman is, you do this out of obedience to Me and I'll use it to win your husband without one word of yours. In other words, when the woman does what she should, God will work in the husband's heart and he'll end up doing what he should.

(Reason #3) - Because godly women who are honored forever had this attitude. **3:6**

God will greatly honor and reward a wife who follows these principles. With the exception of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, there is no bigger name among women than Sarah. She stands out in the Bible and she will stand out in all eternity. This woman totally and completely honored her husband. She obeyed him and even called him "lord." This does not mean that she never called him Abraham or Abe, but it does mean she did respect him and reverence him and on occasion called him "lord" or "master." Now you do not have to obey your husband or esteem him if you don't want to, but if you want honor in eternity, you do.

I. Howard Marshall said he was once teaching a course on I Peter and he asked the class, which had several married men in it, if they took this text literally and believed that a wife should call her husband "master" or "lord." One man said that when he was first married, his wife literally did that. Marshall said I asked him, "What happened?" The husband said, "It didn't last for very long" (*I Peter*, p. 102). Now the point here is not to demand that you start calling your husband this, but a willing attitude of respect for your husband will bring great honor in heaven.

QUESTION #2 – How should a woman be willing to submit to her husband?

There are five specific ways stated in this section as to how a woman should submit. It is so interesting to observe that this is a “without words” type of submission. In other words, this type of submission is not one that talks it, it lives it. If a woman decides she is going to apply this, I guarantee you she will stand out in this world of ours and she will be honored in God’s world.

(Way #1) - By your chaste behavior. 3:2a

The word “chaste” means holy, pure, undefiled. This particular word does not just have to do with sexual matters, but a life that maintains pure character even in the face of trials and tests.

(Way #2) - By your respectful behavior. 3:2b

The word translated “respect” is one that means to reverence and fear. It is possible that Peter has in mind a reverence for her husband, but certainly he has in his mind a reverence for God.

As the husband watches his wife rather than listening to her, and he sees that she is one who is dedicated to God, and out of a reverence for Him she willingly chooses to submit herself to her husband, she will win his heart.

Perhaps one of the greatest illustrations of this in Church history was Monica, the mother of Augustine. God used her to win both her son Augustine and her husband to Christ. Augustine wrote this about his mother in his “*Confessions*.” “She served him (his father) as her lord; and did her diligence to win him unto Thee ... preaching Thee unto him by her conversation (behavior) by which Thou ornamentest her, making her reverently amiable unto her husband” (*The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, pp. 143-45).

(Way #3) - By your focus on the internal, not the external. 3:3-4a

The normal way that the world thinks is that a woman must attract a man from the outside. God says, I have a far better way to attract a man and change him, from the inside. Real womanly godliness is internal, not ornamental.

There are three external things named that some women typically devote much time to:
1) Braiding hair; 2) Wearing jewelry; 3) Put on dresses.

Now braiding hair, in Peter’s day required a professional hairdresser. D. Edmond Hiebert said it was an “elaborate process” (*First Peter*, p. 186). The wearing gold jewelry was the process of putting golden objects around your neck, ankles, arms, and fingers, also dangling them from the ears and even putting them in the hair which was stacked like a tower over the woman’s head. Peter is talking here about an extravagant display of externalism. The phrase “putting on dresses” refers to the practice of putting on a great variety of dresses. What this describes is a woman who is out for show. She is devoting a lot of time to external stuff to attract attention. This is nothing more than a self-centered display which says “look at me.”

Now of course this does not mean that a woman should not make herself look nice. This does not mean she should not comb her hair, wear makeup, wear a nice dress or some jewelry.

However, **when a woman is more interested in the gaudy external and artificial rather than the internal and spiritual, she certainly will never be honored by God.**

There are some women who would never think of missing an appointment at the beauty parlor, but think nothing of not reading their Bible. There are some women who go from one dress sale to another and having done so, live a lie which says they have nothing to wear.

One of the great illustrations of this is Esther, who when it came time for her to go to be with the king, she did not put on anything spectacular and God honored her and she won the competition and became Ahasuerus' wife (Esther 2:15).

I believe there is a terrible evil today that needs to stop immediately and that is the beauty pageants that are for these little girls. This is anti-God and anti the Bible. Little girls are being forced by their parents to focus on the external and forced to parade themselves in front of people to show off. It is sending the wrong message to these little girls that all that matters is the external. I guarantee you nothing good will come of this evil display and it certainly will not be that which produces great women of God.

(Way #4) - By your gentle spirit. 3:4b

The word used for gentle is one that refers to a very considerate and unassuming spirit in regard to others. Jesus Christ used this very same term for Himself, when He said "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). When a woman demonstrates this attitude, she is demonstrating an attitude just like Jesus Christ.

(Way #5) - By your quiet spirit. 3:4c

The word "quiet" is one that refers to a quiet disposition as opposed to a noisy, boisterous, mouthy attitude. Hiebert said this word refers to a spirit that quietly and calmly bears disturbances and does not create them (*I Peter*, p. 188).

QUESTION #3 – What kind of areas of marriage should a wife seek to do this?

Before we tackle this I want to point out that I do not believe a wife is required by God to submit herself to hurtful and harmful things against her or her children. In the United States there are 60,000 forcible rape cases per year and 3-6 million women per year suffer some form of physical violence in the home. There are ruthless and deviant men who do these things and even have incestuous relationships with their children and these things are against the law and no wife should ever think she has to submit to this.

Having said this, the words of this text do challenge a woman to do everything she can to honor and submit to her own husband in a way that is respectful, gentle and quiet. This naturally leads us to ask the question what are some of the areas in which she should seek to do this.

(Area #1) - Areas that do not specifically require a disobedience to God.

For example, if a husband tried to get his Christian wife to lie or sell drugs or be involved in immorality, she should absolutely refuse. I also believe if a husband tried to prevent his wife from going to church, she should refuse. I know of a case in which a husband demanded his wife watch pornography, and since the Apostle Peter says we are to abstain from fleshly lusts, it was a clear violation of the Word of God; she absolutely refused and eventually her husband yielded his life to God.

(Area #2) - Areas pertaining to food and drink.

I heard a Christian woman say to another woman, we have a couple things our husbands always want and one of them is food. When a husband comes home from work and a wife has a nice meal for him, she will have a tremendous impact on him. If a husband has certain foods he likes or certain drinks he likes, this is certainly in the realm of something a God-honoring wife can provide. On the other hand, if the husband comes home and wonders if his wife will even have a meal for him because she is running off to church, he probably will not be drawn to God.

Again, Augustine's mother, Monica, never missed church, but she also made sure her husband never missed a meal and God dramatically used her.

(Area #3) - Areas pertaining to hobbies.

If there are things a husband enjoys and he wants his wife to do them, she should be willing to submit to that if she is able. Or she should be willing to promote that for him and not stand in the way of him doing it.

(Area #4) - Areas pertaining to clothing.

If a husband wants his wife to wear something specifically for him, this is a reasonable request to which the wife may submit. If they are going out, and he wants her to wear something specific such as a dress or outfit and it is modest, certainly that is within the wife's capability to submit to that.

(Area #5) - Areas pertaining to sexuality.

A husband has a right to enjoy his wife physically and the same is true for the wife. The bed is undefiled and the wife should not refuse to be physically exciting and intimate with her husband. A good lover as a wife is a tremendous witness for God.

(Area #6) - Areas pertaining to housing and finances.

The wife who is content and happy with what God has given her is a wonderful witness for God.

These are some of the areas of legitimate submission in a marriage relationship.

QUESTION #4 – What are the results of a woman who is willing to submit to her husband?

(Result #1) - She will win his heart. **3:1**

As Dr. Raymer said, the power of this kind of life in a woman “can soften even the stoniest male heart without a word” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 848).

(Result #2) - She is precious and valuable in God’s sight. **3:4**

The world thinks that a valuable woman is one who puts on expensive clothes and jewelry and parades herself publicly. God says, the most valuable woman in the world, is the godly woman who is developing a quiet, gentle, submissive spirit. It has nothing to do with externals. Genuine beauty is not external, it is internal.

(Result #3) - She connects herself to the godliest women who ever lived. **3:6a**

Sarah is singled out by Peter as a woman who willingly submitted herself to her husband. She obeyed Abraham and she even called him lord. She was not a perfect woman, but she was a woman prized by God for this. She recognized the unique way God had singled out her husband and she lived her life in this attitude.

(Result #4) - She will not live in fear. **3:6b**

The woman who chooses to live her life in this context will discover that she lives it with a great hope and confidence in God and will live her life free from fear and worry as a reward.

A woman is to submit out of faith, not out of fear. The Lord did not submit to those who insulted Him because He feared them, but because He wanted to accomplish the will of God.

The Christian woman who lives her life in this manner will live a full and free life. She will reflect God’s grace and she will be honored in heaven. Ladies, it is your choice. You can choose to live your life as a boisterous liberal feminist or a quiet, submissive woman of God. So you decide what you will do.