

“Distinctive Women in Difficult Marriages”

I Peter 3:1-6

November 17, 2019

*Gratitude Sunday

In every church that I have been a part of, there has been a common demographic: a handful of women following hard after Christ in a difficult marriage to an unbeliever. Occasionally you may find an unbelieving husbands who is somewhat supportive of their wife’s faith. Some would even call themselves a Christian, yet bear no evidence of a heart and life following Christ. And then there are those husbands who are hostile to their spouse’s faith, watching for any possible imperfection for the sake of ridicule. It is to very similar wives that Peter writes—wives who have come to Christ but whose husbands remain unconverted.

It is important to see today’s passage within in the flow of I Peter. To do this, we need to go back to 2:11-12 which functions as the summary exhortation for this part of the book. **[2:11-12]**

Peter is reminding them that they are aliens and strangers in this world—therefore they should be distinctive as God’s people of light in this world. He urges them to get their hearts right—to have right desires so that what the unbelieving world sees in their lives is a true representation of Christ. They are being slandered and persecuted, but their manner of life should be the means by which their true character, as a representation of Christ, is seen. In other words, those who observe their godly character under the pressure of persecution and false accusations, should be drawn to the truth and grace of Jesus Christ.

Then Peter went on to give several categories of society in which we are to live this out by relating to all people in the spirit of Christ. First, in vs. 13-17, we were called to submit to governing authority in the fear of God. The principle we discovered there is that *believers should do everything they can to serve, honor, and obey those in authority over them and only disobey (respectfully so) when obedience to human authority would cause them to personally sin against God.*

Then in vs. 18-20, Peter addressed servants, calling them to be submissive to their masters with all respect, not only those who are good and gentle but also those who are unreasonable and harsh. Again, the principle was to *live a life of submission to authority to the furthest degree possible. However, when earthly authorities clash with God’s authority, we must be ready to obey God and patiently suffer the unjust consequences from the world, knowing that those who honor God will be honored by God.*

Then in 2:21-25, Peter reminds us that this is precisely the example that Christ has set for us. He patiently endured unjust suffering to do what was right in fulfilling His Father’s will and He did it by entrusting Himself to God as the righteous judge. *His response to people was determined by His submission and obedience to God.* And we can do the same because Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

In today’s passage (3:1-6), Peter applies these principles to marriage. He calls wives to submit to their husbands in the spirit of Christ and later in vs. 7 Peter will call husbands to relate to their wives in the spirit of Christ before giving a concluding encouragement for all believers to relate to one another in the same spirit of modeling Christ to one another.

So let’s focus in on 3:1-6, now, where Peter instructs wives who are married to unbelieving husbands, how to influence their husbands for Christ by excellent, God-honoring character and conduct.

Big Idea of 3:1-6: A believing wife should do everything she can to submit to her husband’s leadership, short of disobeying the Lord, so that her godly character and conduct will positively influence her husband in the way of Christ.

1. **Wives of unbelieving husbands must model Christ through the character and conduct of a transformed life (1 Peter 3:1-2).**

The focus here is on character which is the foundation of all behavior. There is a lot in these first 2 verses so lets just pick it apart phrase by phrase.

- *“In the same way”* (likewise)

This indicates that Peter’s instructions to wives parallels something that has preceded this passage. All the commentators that I read this week take this phrase to simply mean that just as citizens are to submit to governing authority (2:13) and servants are to submit to their masters (2:18), so wives are to submit to their husbands (3:1). This makes sense since there is an obvious succession of relationships in which Christians are to submit. However, I’m not convinced that Peter was simply comparing wives to servants and citizens. I believe the “likewise” in 3:1 points back to the example of Christ in vs. 21-23. In other words, in the same spirit/manner in which Christ lived, so wives are to submit to their husbands.

Let me give some reasons as to why I think this is the case. 1) As I mentioned last week, the example of Christ in 2:21-25 functions as the central hub of these exhortations. Or we might think of it as the highest peak in a range of mountains. The next several passages are clearly in its shadow. 2) Peter uses the exact same expression again in vs. 7, regarding husbands. But in vs. 7, husbands are not called to submit but to lead in the spirit of Christ. 3) In 3:8-9, we are all called to humility, not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but to keep our tongues from deceit, confident that God’s eyes of favor are on the righteous while His face is turned against those who do evil. All of this directly parallels the example of Christ in 2:21-23.

So I believe Peter is saying, “wives, in the same spirit and example of Christ, submit to your husbands with pure and God-fearing behavior” (cf. 2:22-23) Why are wives to do this?

- *“so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won...”*

I take this phrase “disobedient to the word” to not merely refer to believing husbands who are caught up in sin, but rather to husbands who do not believe. The reason I interpret it this way is because Peter used the exact same phrase back in 2:8 to clearly refer to the

unbelievers: “...but for those who *disbelieve*, the stone which the builders rejected became the very cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; for they stumble because they are *disobedient to the Word...*” (2:7-8). Furthermore, back in 1:22-25, it was *obedience* to the truth, the Word, by which believers were saved.

So Peter is instructing wives of unbelieving husbands to imitate Christ in their submission to their husbands so that they can be...

- *“won without a word by the behavior of their wives”*

Peter is not saying that the gospel can be received without words. Rather, he is addressing a wife’s primary means of witness. Her primary witness should not be a multitude of words; not preaching to her husband, not debating her husband, not nagging her husband. Her primary witness is to be a life so transformed by the gospel that it can not be explained from a worldly perspective—the witness of a distinctive life.

So what specific kind of behavior should a husband be able to see in his believing wife? How should she be distinctive?

2. **The transformed life of a Christian wife must be adorned with 7 specific godly characteristics** (1 Peter 3:2-6).

a. **Submission to her husband** (vs. 1, 5)

Submission is a very sensitive topic in our culture, especially as it relates to marriage. Many Christians have been more impacted by the culture than by the scriptures on this topic. For the sake of time, let me summarize what the submission in marriage is and is not based on a thorough study of scripture.

Biblical Submission is NOT:

- *Inequality* – Scripture is clear that men and women are equal in personhood, dignity, and worth
- *Servitude or suppression*
- *Mindlessly agreeing with her husband* on all important matters

- *Surrendering personal convictions* grounded in scripture
- *Not following one's husband into personal sin* against God or others
- *Not the husband's responsibility to enforce.* It must come from a woman's love for God, love for her husband, and the conviction, from Scripture, that this is God's design for marriage.

Biblical Submission IS:

- *The divine calling of a wife to voluntarily honor and affirm her husband's God-given leadership and to help carry it through according to her gifts.*¹
- *A noble, divine calling for a wife to pattern her life after Christ who lived in perfect submission to the Father.* Jesus' life was the most noble, honorable life ever lived on this earth!
- *A surrendering of a wife's self-centeredness as a means of serving her husband out of ultimate service and submission to God.* It's a life of following Christ as the ultimate Servant. Husbands are also called to die to self for the sake of their wives as a means of portraying the gospel (Eph 5).

In the culture and time in which Peter is writing, this admonition for wives to submit to their husbands was especially important because it was expected that a wife would worship her husband's gods. The fact that a Christian wife could not do this could poised her to be accused of independence and rebellion toward her husband. And so it was especially important that she demonstrate a life of submission to her husband, to the furthest degree possible, without forsaking her submission to God in order to demonstrate faithfulness to her husband.

b. **Pure and God-fearing behavior** (vs. 2)

I'm referring here to her "*chaste and respectful behavior*" in vs. 2. This is where our interpretation of the first word, "*likewise*", as referring to the example of Christ really gets fleshed out. First, her behavior is to be chaste or pure. The root of the Greek word is holy (*hagnos*), carrying the

¹ Adapted from John Piper, "A look at the Book: I Peter 3:1-6, part 5" at www.desiringgod.org.

idea of without sin. So she is to be imitating Christ who in 2:22 "committed no sin nor was any deceit found in his mouth." So as Christ was with out sin, so a wife should live a pure life. Remember also, that as the suffering servant He was primarily silent before His accusers. He spoke few words during His suffering, just as wives are called to in vs. 1.

Furthermore, notice that a wife's purity speaks to the power of the gospel in her life because the power of sin was broken when Christ bore her sin for her at the cross enabling her to die to sin and live to righteousness (cf. 2:24). And so Peter encourages wives to focus on the purity of the character over the persuasiveness of their words.

Second, Peter calls for respectful behavior which I am going to refer to as God-fearing behavior. Here's why. The actual word that Peter uses in vs. 2 is *fear* (*phobos*). The question is, are wives called to fear their husbands or to fear God? Well, the overwhelming evidence in I Peter is that we are to fear God, not man. The word *phobos* (*fear; respect, reverence*) is used 8 times in 1 Peter always in reference to fearing God.²

And so we take it in the same way in 3:2. What an unbelieving husband needs to see in his wife, is not only a woman who is pure, dying to sin, but also a woman who out of the fear of God is living a courageous life of righteousness. A woman who is entrusting herself to God (cf. 2:23; 4:19) with obedience even when its costly for the sake of a good conscience toward God (2:19).

c. **A gentle spirit** (vs. 4)

[3:3-4] Peter is not suggesting that a woman could not wear her hair nicely or prohibiting here from wearing jewelry or dresses (lit. outer garments) at all. Rather, he is urging her for focus her attractiveness on the inner person of her heart rather than her outward appearance (certainly not seductive dress to attract other men). What will attract her husband to Christ are the very kind of character qualities that are precious in God's eyes, such as a gentle spirit.

² For the use of *phobos* (fear) in 1 Peter, see 1:17; 2:17; 2:18; 3:2; 3:6; 3:14 (uses twice here); 3:15

A gentle spirit refers to a person who is humble rather than harsh. A woman who has a graciousness about her that would not make it hard for her husband to live with her. Note that gentleness does not mean weakness. It takes strength to rule one's spirit. As a fruit of the Spirit, gentleness describes a woman whose life is empowered by the Holy Spirit to relate to her husband and all people in the spirit of Christ.

d. **A quiet spirit** (vs. 4)

The term quiet here refers to being tranquil, still, calm. It refers to a heart that is not in frenzied turmoil. Where does this stillness of soul come from? Vs. 5 gives us the clue: "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." This stillness comes from hoping in God. It comes from trusting in the sovereignty of God.

Imagine what a testimony this is to an unbelieving husband (and what a gift to a believing husband!). He sees in her a quiet confidence that the world cannot explain because she believes her God holds all things in His power, even when trusting God costs her a measure of suffering. She has a peace that cannot be shaken because she clings to the providence of God.

e. **Faith** [*hoping in God*] (vs. 5)

Here we land directly on this phrase, "women...who hoped in God." It takes faith for a woman to submit herself to her husband's leadership, even when he is leading well not to mention when he is leading poorly (*like parent in passenger's seat*).

She needs to trust God to work out His ultimate purposes through the imperfect leadership of her husband. And when out of ultimate submission to God, she cannot follow her husband, she needs faith to trust God in the face of her husband's displeasure.

By faith, she has to be grounded in the truth that her identity is ultimately defined by God's view of her rather than her husband's view of her. And as she trusts in the Lord and experiences God's faithfulness, her husband has the opportunity to see and be drawn to the Almighty God.

f. **Respect toward her husband** (vs. 6)

Finally, we come to wife's respect toward her husband. While the word is not used in vs. 6, we see it in the example of Sarah who obeyed her husband Abraham, "calling him lord." What's interesting is that the only example we have of Sarah calling Abraham, lord, is in Gen 18:12 which was an off-handed comment in response to the seemingly ridiculous news that they would have a child in their old age. The point is that even Sarah's casual response to Abraham was one of dignity and respect, revealing that it was simply a part of the fiber of her life to regard her husband with honor.³

Wives, can your husband take for granted that you treat him with respect? Or is he undermined by your common disrespect?

The question, of course is, what if my husband is not a very respectable man? Your respect for your husband must not merely depend on the honorable course of his performance. It needs to be based on your character, which as a Christian, is rooted in God's character.

Respecting another person is always possible for a Christian based on two principles. First, he is created in the image of God. So your respect is driven not by the other person's life, but by God Himself as the Creator. Second, because Christ is in you and you are in Christ, you can treat him respectfully in the spirit of Christ. Honor is given out of an honorable life.

g. **Fearless obedience to God** (vs. 6)

Vs. 6: "...And you become [Sarah's] children, *if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear*"—literally, without fearing any terror. It's obvious, here at the end of our passage that Peter does not expect wives to

³³ Thomas Schreiner, The new American Commentary: I, 2 Peter, Jude. Pg. 156.

regard their husbands as having absolute rule. There will be times when as a believing wife you must, with a respectful attitude, not submit to your husband out of ultimate submission to God. And when this happens, you must not fear the terror that could result from displeasing their husband. Rather, you are called to endure the unjust consequences for the sake of conscience toward God so that your husband can see your pure and God-fearing character and conduct that Christ is worthy of.

This is the difficult balance between submission to an unrighteous man and fearless obedience to a righteous God that makes a Christian wife truly distinctive in the world. Her humble, pure, and God-fearing life that is displayed with gentleness testifies to the enduring inner peace that only comes from hoping in God.

Pray for her...

- If you know a woman who is married to an unbelieving husband...
- If you know a woman who is married to a wayward husband...
- If your wife, occasionally finds it difficult to both honor you and honor God simultaneously,....

Wives, may the strength of His presence, draw your husband to Christ.

Prayer: 1 Peter 3 qualities for TEFC women