

The Psychology and Methods of Sin ***-contrasted with-*** ***The Mindset and Fruits of the Spirit***

“The heart is deceitful above all things...who can know it?” (Jer 17:9)

“Abuse and the Doctrine of Headship and Submission – Part 3”

January 9, 2011

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:1-7

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 25

Introduction

“Society usually labels women who are victimized by abusive men as fools for ever having gotten involved with them. But the word of God identifies the angry and abusive man as the one who is the fool.”
[Elreta Dodds as quoted in Woman Submit! By Jocelyn Andersen]

And so it does! Nabal – the fool.

This morning we come to the last message in this series on Abuse and Domestic Violence which we have also called The Psychology of Sin, because in studying the mindset of the abusive person, we find ourselves gaining real insight into the very nature of sin. Sin, like the abusive man, craves power and

control. It sees itself as profoundly entitled to have that power and control and entirely justified in using whatever means are necessary to get it and maintain it. What this evil does to its victims, we have only learned in part.

And we have also learned – I hope we all believe it – that abuse surrounds us. There is not a person here this morning who does not have an acquaintance with a victim of abuse – though you may still not realize it. Sadly, in spite of the fact that this evil is so widespread, people in general and the church in particular continue to turn away rather than face up to the thing and confront it. Just recently I was speaking with a woman who has become educated about abuse and who recommended to her church that this subject be studied in the church. Her proposal was, classically, met with a degree of indifference, ignorance, cowardice and selfishness – all of these reasons and more keep us in the darkness of the abuser’s deceptiveness. We must keep this subject right in the open and keep bringing people back to it so that the abusive man or

woman cannot continue hiding and deceiving, especially behind the façade of “Christianity.”

And we have also been learning that these very same tactics and deceptions of abuse rise up in other relationships of life. In friendships. In the workplace. And, sadly, even in the church. Many churches are in slavery to the domination of some Diotrophes who loves to be first.” We must cease to permit this to happen.

We need to deal further this morning with this subject of headship and submission in marriage, as presented in the Scriptures. Specifically, we want to examine the instruction given to husbands and wives in 1 Peter chapter 3. Here it is –

1Pe 3:1-7 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. (7) Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

“By the English common law, her husband was her lord and master. He had the custody of her person, and of her minor children. He could ‘punish her with a stick no bigger than his thumb,’ and she could not complain against him.” [Harriet H. Robinson, 1881 – quoted in Woman Submit!]

The Bible, of course, is *not* the source of such laws. It instructs husbands to love their wives as themselves – just as Christ has loved His Bride and given Himself up for her.

Now, just what *is* this – “*wives, be subject to your own husbands...*”? Here are some “takes” on it –

- “*The primary responsibility for a good relationship in marriage lies with the wife. If the wife is submissive to her husband, they will have a good relationship.*” [Well-known evangelical pastor]
- “*The Scriptures say a woman must ignore her feelings about the will of God, and do what her husband says. She is to obey her husband as if he were God Himself.*” [From a conservative Christian book on submission and headship]
- *And from an evangelical talk show –*

Caller – *How should I respond to my husband’s anger, alcoholism, adultery, and abuse?*

Host – *You are a missionary in your marriage. If he is willing, you should hang in there and pray for him.*

Jocelyn Andersen notes that before “reeling off this traditional but very possibly dangerous piece of advice, the minister-host made *no effort whatsoever* to find out the extent of the abuse this woman was experiencing or if there was the possibility of an immediate threat to her physical safety....The ‘stay and

pray’ counsel...only serves to enable the abuser to comfortably continue his sinful and illegal behavior while keeping the victim in harm’s way. But such counsel is commonly accepted among evangelicals as the Biblical solution to domestic violence.”

Many times, “expert” Christian counselors and teachers give this kind of horrible and dangerous and *unbiblical* advice to victims. One woman who wrote to a very well-known Christian counselor that the violence in her marriage was *escalating*, received the counsel that her goal should be to change her husband’s behavior, not to get a divorce. This woman’s husband was *a highly respected leader in his church*, and yet the counselor made no mention at all of church discipline nor of calling the police.

On his Grace to You website, John MacArthur has a “questions and answers” section. I did a search there under the word “battered” and I found this question, and the answer which MacArthur gave –

<p>Question: Adultery is not the only extremely painful ingredient in a marriage, what do you recommend in your counseling where there is child molestation or wife beating or extreme alcoholism or some of those situations</p>

that become not just marginal but really intolerable for a wife we'll say?

John: I think [1 Corinthians 7:10](#) says, very simply, I'll read it to you, that there is an answer to that and I think perhaps that's what is in view in this text, it says; "If she divorces" and it doesn't give you any reason here, it just says if she divorces, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband but don't let the husband divorce his wife." What it is saying there is there may be a situation without adultery where you divorce and it may be, in my mind, it's one of those situations. You know, I can't counsel a mother who says, "What am I going to do? This man has committed incest with my child and he beats me up and etc. or beats up the children and so forth and so on. Do I just sit there and take it? And the chairs on my head and the stuff he throws at me and the cigarette burns on my arm and **battered** wives and all this stuff? What do I do?" Well, certainly there is nothing in the Bible that says you just stand around until you are just beaten to a pulp. You know, God has built into the human being a certain sense of self-preservation. Right? And it's normal to separate yourself in that kind of situation. And maybe that's what Paul is thinking about. There may come circumstances where divorce occurs but if it isn't on biblical grounds, that's it. I mean, you can remain unmarried or be reunited. But I would say that's only a possibility in that text.

I really feel that if we are obedient to the word of God in that kind of a situation God would give us the grace to endure a lot more severe things than we think. So what we do is this. We counsel people this way, if you're in an abusive situation, there's not adultery involved it's just abusive, cruelty or something like that, I don't think alcoholism is necessarily in the same category but where there is beatings where it affects you or the children there's nothing to say that you shouldn't step away, get away to preserve your own health and your own safety and your own security. You don't need to stay there and just be beaten to a pulp. God's given us a self-defense mechanism. But I don't think that's grounds for divorce biblically. I think you have to hang in there and that's what makes great prayer warriors People who can turn that kind of a thing into a draw nigh unto God kind of relationship. You know, when all your family has forsaken you the Lord will be your family.

This is, of course, absolutely terrible *and unbiblical* counsel. In his zeal to guard the authority of Scripture, MacArthur has, in my view, exceeded the Scripture and placed damaging and unnecessary burdens upon victims. His intent is a noble one and I still admire John MacArthur, but in this point he is very wrong.

Husbands “Disobedient” to the Word

There are two particular phrases here in 1 Peter 3 that tend to be the most troublesome, and it is these in particular I want to deal with this morning. They are –

- Even if some do not obey the word
- A gentle and quiet spirit

These phrases have often been used by Christians *and by abusive men themselves* to argue that a wife must –

1. Obey their husband even when he is walking in sin – ie, obey him no matter what,
2. Silently obey him, be soft and non-confrontive at all times

From what we have learned about abuse, it should be plain to us that such responses by an abuse victim *will never move the abusive man to repentance, but will in fact enable and empower him in his sin.*

Alright then, first – what is a husband who does not obey the word?

1Pe 2:6-8 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and

whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." (7) So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," (8) and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Right here then in this very same letter, what kind of people does Peter mean when he says of them that they “disobey the word”? The answer is obvious – unbelievers.

This is exactly what Peter means then in 3:1 when he is speaking of a husband who “does not obey the word.” He is speaking to wives in general, and specifically to *Christian women who are married to an unsaved husband.*

So Peter is NOT teaching that a woman is to submit to her husband no matter what wickedness and sin he is committing against her or someone else, or demanding that she participate in with him. His meaning is “*be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some are not believers...they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives.*”

This conclusion is also supported by the fact that verse 1 begins with the word “likewise,” referring us back to a previous principle now being elaborated upon –

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (2:12)

Peter then goes on (vs 13ff) to give specific examples of honorable conduct “among the Gentiles” –

- Be subject to the emperor/governor (vss 13-14)
- Live as free people, but as servants of God (vs 16)
- Servants be subject to your masters with all respect

This is all very much the same structure as found in Ephesians 5, where we are told to submit to one another, then Paul gives examples of that submission – wives to husbands, children to parents, slaves to masters.

Now, someone might argue that Peter tells slaves (vss 18-21) that they are to submit to even an unjust master, to endure sorrow while suffering unjustly, even if they are beaten for doing good. “This is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”

Therefore, the argument might go – that is parallel to the wife of an abusive husband. Christ suffered unjustly. He is our example to look to. He didn’t revile in return, He simply entrusted Himself to God.

How do we answer this? Well –

1. Wives are not slaves. Husbands are not masters.
2. The slave had no alternative.
3. Some wives have no alternative in some cultures and countries today – what are they to do? They must entrust themselves to the Lord. But here in our country, women do indeed have legal alternatives. It is right for them to seek remedy for themselves under the law.
4. It is one thing to submit to the righteous headship of an unsaved husband, the wife setting a Godly example in her conduct – conduct that comes from a beautiful heart. It is quite another to be a victim of an abusive husband. When an authority established by God (government, church leaders, employers, husbands, parents) ceases to exercise that authority as God requires them to do, they are forfeit to that authority and they have no right to demand their subjects

to submit to them. The Bible gives us numerous examples of this ('we must obey God rather than men' etc).

This is why we always see instruction to those who are *under an authority* (children under parents, wives under husbands, citizens under the king, slaves under their master) accompanied by God's instruction to the person in authority to exercise it as Christ does! Masters are to give up threatening their slaves; husbands are to love their wives; parents are not to exasperate their children; church elders are not to lord it over their people.

NOTE – Once again, we want to use caution here and not swing wildly to the opposite unbiblical extreme. Listen to this caution from Wayne Grudem in his book Evangelical Feminism –

“There is tremendous pressure in present-day culture to deny male leadership in the home and the church. To prove that, just ask any pastor if he enjoys preaching and teaching about male headship in marriage and the church today. Almost nobody wants to tackle the subject! It is ‘too controversial’ which means it will stir up objections and people will be upset.

It is not easy to stand against the culture. It is much easier to give in and say women can do whatever men can do in the church and in the home.

But what about all those Bible verses that talk about male leadership in the home and church? Something has to be done with them, so for the last 30 years, evangelical feminist scholars have devised thousands of pages of arguments attempting to show that those parts of the Bible don't apply to us today, or don't mean what people have always thought they mean, or aren't part of the Bible, or are contradicted by experience, or are simply wrong. And so, as I explain in the following pages, the authority of the Bible is undermined.

When that happens, little by little, step by step, colleges and churches and denominations start to slide toward liberalism. This is because the claims and arguments that evangelical feminists adopt about these specific passages in the Bible set in motion a process of interpreting Scripture that will be used increasingly to nullify the authority of Scripture in other areas as well. One by one, the teachings of Scripture that are unpopular in the culture are rejected, and one issue at a time the church begins to

sound more and more like the secular world. This is the classic path to liberalism and I believe that evangelical feminism is leading Christians down that path one step at a time today.”

Understand? This is vital! We are rejecting the idea that the Bible demands that a woman passively subject herself to abuse – or for that matter, that anyone is required to remain in an abusive relationship because somehow that is “suffering for Christ.”

1Co 7:21 Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)

Just take some time this week to think of as many times as you can where we find examples in the Bible of Godly men and/or women leaving or fleeing an abusive relationship.

- David from Saul (though recognizing Saul’s kingship)
- The Lord telling Joseph not to return to Nazareth but to go instead to Egypt
- Moses’ mother hiding her baby in the river to escape Pharaoh’s death order

WE MUST GUARD AGAINST what the Bible calls “*asceticism and severity to the body*” as some kind of means of glorifying God. Paul tells us that such things are in fact worthless in regard to our sanctification. That is, severe treatment of our physical flesh is of NO value at all in mortifying our sinful flesh – in fact, it only feeds it. (see Colossians 2:23). It is one thing for Christ to lead us into His sufferings – but quite another for us to pronounce things ourselves as suffering for Christ. *If there is an escape, take it!*

Think carefully about this. We evangelicals are rightly critical of the ascetic practices found in the Roman Catholic church. Severe treatment of the body that is supposed to “crucify our flesh” or effect some kind of spiritual benefit. And yet, it is not that difficult to find examples of evangelical Christians who embrace very similar ideas, especially in regard to suffering. This kind of thinking is often reflected in our counsel to victims of abuse.

“Because one of the common effects of abuse on its victim is confusion, false guilt, wrong thinking – remaining in that abusive relationship is not going to somehow bring the victim into some

clearer understanding of God's truth. Many Christian women in an abusive relationship conclude 'I deserve this mistreatment because I am such a sinner.' However, the Lord Jesus Christ has taken upon Himself all that we deserved to have put upon us. God does not continue to punish His people because they are 'sinners.' Furthermore, no husband has a right to abuse his wife and maintain that somehow he is giving her what she deserves before God."

As Debi Pryde and Robert Needham write in their book A Biblical Perspective of What to do When you are Abused by Your Husband –

"An abuse victim may think 'If I submit to this mistreatment with a loving and good attitude, God will help me and intervene.' But submitting to unjustified, impermissible evil is never blessed or righteous, not the least because it means the abuser is reinforced in his habituated wickedness, as well as being passively encouraged to lose out on God's intended blessings promised to husbands who cherish their wives."

"Being persecuted for righteousness' sake (ie, our confession of Christ and our walk with Him) does not obligate us to

passively receive or to submit to evil without resistance, but rather, the Scripture obligates us to overcome evil, actively. To be unwilling to expose a husband's abusive behavior is actually a profound lack of Christ-like love toward him and a selfish putting of one's own short-term safety ahead of his long-term spiritual good."

A Gentle and Quiet Spirit

Now, what of this matter of a "gentle and quiet spirit" of which Peter speaks? Look at it again in vss 3-4,

1Pe 3:3-4 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.

Whatever a gentle and quiet spirit is, it is powerful, precious in God's estimation, and beautiful. If you will consider carefully what we have learned in this abuse series, you will recognize that *saying nothing and accepting the blame the abuser places on his victim is anything but powerful, precious and beautiful.*

Yet this is very often the “take” on the meaning of Peter’s words here.

“A meek and quiet spirit means I am to say nothing and accept blame.” If this is true, then Moses was regularly in sin for all the times he strongly confronted sin, both in Pharaoh and later on in the Israelites. Yet Scripture testifies that he was one of the meekest men that ever lived. Taking blame for another’s sin [something Jesus did on the cross but something we cannot do], is not only unrighteous, but is actually idolizing him and denying him the God-commanded feedback he needs in order to repent. Saying nothing and accepting blame can also be an expression of understandable fear, and an unwillingness to trust God to bless obedience in difficult circumstances. Meekness is not passivity. Meekness is, rather, the essence of humility. A quiet spirit does not describe one who does not speak up, but one who has an inner peace with God and security in His love.” [Pryde and Needham]

This is the very thing we have been learning recently in the Sunday School class (those lessons are also on sermonaudio.com/crc). Gentleness is not doormat softness, it is as we heard it put – well-managed strength. Someone else

has compared gentleness to the power of a stallion who gently nuzzles its master, though it has the power to kill. Gentleness is an awareness of one’s position under God – true humility. It is strength and power and authority wielded in wisdom and under perfect control.

A quiet spirit is indeed a spirit and mind mastered by one’s peace with God and security in His love. It is that quality of being unshaken, unrattled, and rather than raging out of control like a storm, it speaks powerful truth out of a quiet, peaceful, calm confidence. We see this perfectly illustrated in Abigail as she speaks of her husband, the fool.

Finally, notice what Peter says again in vss 5-6,

1Pe 3:5-6 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.

Let me suggest to you (we don’t have time to consider why Peter picked Sarah, of all people, as the example here!) – let me suggest that the last part of verse 6 is Peter’s

definition of a gentle/quiet spirit. See it?

“...do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

DO good. DO it. Gentleness is doing good.

DO NOT fear anything – even if something is frightening. This is quietness.

Conclusion to the Series

There is always more that we could say on any subject and this one is no exception. We have not had an opportunity, for instance, to really consider just what the abusive man’s thinking is regarding women in general (as opposed to men). This is very important and I would like to challenge every man here to ask yourself this question very, very honestly – *“What do I really think about women?”*

And I want you to very soberly consider what kinds of media you are putting into your minds. Ask yourself, for instance – how do the movies and TV and magazines that I read or watch portray women? What are we teaching our sons and daughters about the character and nature of women?

Remember, men, that God has told you your wife is your own flesh. What kind of a man would hate his own flesh? Yet this is exactly what many men do today through their low and mean estimation of women and thus, of their wives.

Men, what did your father teach you about women? Has he passed on a truly biblical view of the helper created for man by God? Or some sub-biblical or anti-biblical view? Does your father tell jokes and stories that make women look like fools? Does he demean your mother, treating her as if she were a first-grader? If so, you might be surprised just how much of that thinking has been passed down to you.

Your wife is one-flesh with you – she is your flesh. What kind of a man hates his own body? I can tell you – a Nabal, a fool.

Please do NOT forget these things you have been taught in this series. You WILL come across victims of abuse. We are all accountable now to give them true, biblical help and may this church never be guilty of enabling abusive men, permitting them to hide among us, unchallenged and undetected. May the Lord be faithful to expose all things hidden.

