



1 Peter 3:1-6

Picture of a Godly Woman

NKJ 1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,

2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward -- arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel --

4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,

6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

You'll have noticed that Peter begins these verses with the words "***Wives, likewise be submissive...***" or in some translations, "***Wives, in the same way, be submissive...***" That "likewise" or "in the same way" should remind you that Peter is still pointing to the example of Christ, and in particular to Christ's example of patient submission even in suffering.

At the end of the last chapter, Peter points out that Jesus, the Son of God was willing to become a *doulos* or slave for our sakes, to come to earth, and to patiently suffer that we might be saved.

Jesus who had all authority in heaven and on earth, who only had to pray in order to summon a heavenly army of more than twelve legions of angels, had been willing, for instance, to do the work of the lowliest of servants, putting on a towel and washing the dirty of his disciples. He had submitted to the unjust judgment of the Sanhedrin and then Pilate, even though He himself was the source of any authority those bodies might have had, and then gone to the cross to suffer the just punishment for sin that would have fallen on you and me.

Peter had essentially said to slaves in chapter 2 that Jesus was willing to become a slave for your sakes, the Lord of Lords has consented to become a slave of slaves. And so it is your calling to follow his example, to trace out the outline of his life onto your own. You too must learn the hardest thing for our rebellious hearts to master, you must learn to patiently submit to authority for Christ's sake – and not just wise, and good, and kind, Christian authorities. Every authority, every ordinance of man as he put it in 1 Peter 2:13 it is in this very act of submitting that we will set the example of how a godly Christian lives before the world. And that example will be noticed. In a world were everyone is zealous for their own rights, striving to be in control, and constantly in a state of rebellion against God and man, the Christian will stand out, so much that the people who persecute Christians will be ashamed.

So Peter here is saying wives, you too need to follow the example of Jesus, and be willing to submit to your husbands and not just the wonderful, kind, considerate, and believing husbands – you know, the kind of husbands you all are married to – Peter includes even unbelieving husbands.

There would have been a lot of those unequally yoked marriages at the time Peter was writing. As the Christian spread, then as now women tended to be converted more quickly than men. And so the question often came up, what should the believing wife do? Should she divorce her unbelieving husband? The Corinthians wrote Paul to ask that specific question and Paul answers the same way Peter does, saying no she should remain and submit especially because the aim of that believing wife should be the conversion of her unbelieving husband.

Now before I move on I want to briefly deal with the caricatures that are sometimes thrown up in opposition to this teaching:

1) ***Often it is assumed that wife is being told to submit because she is inferior to the husband:*** If you've been following the train of the argument, then you know that isn't the case. Our model for submitting was the Lord Jesus Christ, and who was he inferior to? These wives are the elect of God, his chosen and precious possessions, coheirs with Christ. In the world submission is a sign of weakness, but in the Christian faith, it is a sign of maturity and spiritual strength.

2) ***That the wife is being called to a submission without any bounds:*** That too is untrue, she is not to submit to her husband in anything sinful. And that at Peter's time was inevitably going to cause problems, because in Roman and Greek society it was assumed that the wife would submit to the religion of her husband. These Christian women could not do that, they weren't going to follow their husband into the temples of false gods or in burning the pinch of incense or raising their children as pagans. This inevitably would cause considerable friction as well as social embarrassment and shame. The unbelieving husband would be perceived as weak if he couldn't control his wife in these regards. Those difficulties continue today [example from Christ Covenant – RC baptism and raising of son].

3) This is just old-fashioned chauvinism and Christians see wives as just a form of slave: while there are religions that do, Islam for instance, Christianity is not one of them. Christian marriage is a wonderful one flesh relationship, and the submission of a wife in it is voluntary, not forced. And that isn't some sort of modern gloss on Christianity, that has always been the teaching of the Reformed faith. Here for instance is John Bunyan writing in 1674: ***“But yet, do not think that by the subjection I have here mentioned, that I do intend women should be their husbands' slaves. Women are their husbands' yokefellows, their flesh and their bones; and he is not a man that hateth his own flesh, or that is bitter against it (Eph 5:29). Wherefore, let every man 'love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband' (Eph 5:33). The wife is master next her husband, and is to rule all in his absence; yea, in his presence she is to guide the house, to bring up the children, provided she so do it, as the adversary have no occasion to speak reproachfully (1 Tim 5:10, 13). 'Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.'”***

None of these Caricatures are true, submission is a critical element for every Christian not just Christian wives. By the example of their submission they are adding a critical component to their presentation of the gospel to their unbelieving husband. He might not believe the word that had been preached to him, but he looks at his wife's character and her conduct in the world, and he sees the visible evidence of a changed heart, he sees the truth of the Christian faith, before him and time and again pagan husbands have been won over by the beautiful example of their wives.

One of the most famous examples of a Godly wife who won over her unbelieving husband was a 3rd century Christian woman named Monica who won over her husband Patricius. Her Son Augustine honored his mother by recording her example in His Confessions:

“she served him as her lord; and did her diligence to win him unto You, preaching You unto him by her conduct; by which you ornamented her, making her reverently amiable, and admirable unto her husband. ... Finally, towards the very end of his earthly life, did she gain her own husband, unto You; nor had she to complain of that in him as a believer, which before he was a believer she had borne from him. She was also the servant of Your servants; whosoever of them knew her, did in her much praise and honor and love You; for that through the witness of the fruits of a holy conversation they perceived Your presence in her heart. For she had been the wife of one man, had requited her parents, had governed her house piously, was well reported of for good works, had brought up children, so often travailing in birth of them, as she saw them swerving from You.”

That kind of submissive character and devotion to ministering to the needs of others is beautiful in way that the world simply cannot mimic, because it springs from within, it is the good fruit of a faithful heart. And that is the secret of the Godly woman’s true beauty, it is a beauty that is not thin veener applied in morning and removed at night, or that fades with age. It comes from within and it is incorruptible, instead of fading, as she grows in grace and holiness that it grows and she becomes more and more truly beautiful. That is beauty that God sees and which he desires most; *“For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*

It is that kind of inner beauty that has always been the adornment of the great women of the faith, not physical beauty. We remember Mary the mother of Christ, for instance, not as a great beauty, we have no description whatsoever of her physical appearance, but for her gentle, humble, and submissive spirit. The handmaiden or servant of the Lord.

Peter reminds us of Sarah the wife of Abraham, and her willingness to submit to Him and call him Lord. As Christians are the spiritual descendents of Abraham, so the Godly woman is truly a daughter of Sarah.

By comparison to that inner beauty or a gentle and quiet spirit, external beauty and adornment is of little worth. At the time Peter was writing that would have been shocking, extravagant hairstyles and rich adornment where the norm for genteel Roman society. Today fashion and outward appearance are just as important, although we have gone well past the Romans and the Greeks in terms of immodesty of dress.

Now please understand, Peter is not saying here that all outward adornment is forbidden to Christian women and that you should all be wearing black canvas sacks, with unkempt fly away hair, and doing the best you can generally to make yourself look physically repulsive to your husbands. That has been the way some Christians have interpreted this passage. That kind of misinterpretation depressingly frequently, the bible says of something “don’t do it too much” and it is reinterpreted as “Don’t do it **at all**” So historically we’ve had absolute prohibitions on drinking and lifelong vows of Chastity. In these verses some have read them as saying let there be *NO arranging the hair, No wearing of Gold.*

Interestingly enough you can see that isn’t Peter’s point from his last statement regarding clothes, the NKJV translates it as putting on fine apparel but in the Greek its just ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων Literally *wearing clothing*. Thankfully no church has as yet issued a blanket prohibition on wearing clothing.

Calvin grabs the right sense of these verses: *“it would be an immoderate strictness wholly to forbid neatness and elegance in clothing. If the material is said to be too sumptuous, the Lord has created it;*

and we know that skill in art has proceeded from him. Then Peter did not intend to condemn every sort of ornament, but the evil of vanity, to which women are subject. Two things are to be regarded in clothing, usefulness and decency; and what decency requires is moderation and modesty.”

Well let me close with some applications: What makes a woman a godly woman? These days submission is just about the last thing on the broad church agenda in answering that. It is typically answered in the things she does that thrust her into the public spotlight.

Let me set before you three applications particularly for the women of the congregations, these are intended as a diagnostic, and don't worry, the men are going to get their own next week!

Are you patiently submitting to your husband, or would you if you were married? Do you have what could be called a gentle and quiet spirit? Or picking up on the last part of verse 6 are you living fearfully saying, “*I cannot submit to Him because of what might happen if I do!*” Can I gently suggest that that betrays less than a perfect trust in God and that he really will work all things to your good? Also, keep in mind that the one asking you to submit is Christ, and he has gone on before you, setting the example.

You gain nothing by holding back your submission and lose much, particularly when it comes to converting an unbelieving husband or encouraging a very weak Christian. Peter doesn't say “that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,

2 when they observe that “**you are as fiercely independent and unwilling to submit as everyone else...**” What difference does your Christianity make in that case?

Also what are you teaching your children, both your daughters and your sons, by an unwillingness to submit. It's a hard thing to teach your kids to honor their parents if you don't honor your spouse.

Are you taking care of the hidden person of the heart? Are you seeking an incorruptible beauty? There are women in this world who spend literally hours on their outward appearance every day, they are tireless in their pursuit of a beauty that fades like flower petals. Are you pursuing an incorruptible beauty via the means of grace and obedience to God's word? Many women spend hours reading fashion magazines of watching makeovers learning to beautify their appearance. If you would be truly beautiful inwardly then the only way to do so is to follow Christ, to live a life conformed to his image. So you need to be studying to do that.

And does the way you dress tell people that is your goal? Is your clothing and adornment moderate and modest? Or is it frankly designed to display your physical beauty to best effect? Obviously we are not Muslims and we don't want Hijabs and Burkas, but if I can put it this way as a man, any help you can offer your brothers in guarding the eye gate is appreciated. Ladies we so need your help.

Now will any woman ever perfect model Christ's submission here on earth? No. That's part of the reason why you need the real thing so much. His perfect submission atoned for our lack of it!

We all need the actual atoning work of Christ, his submission opens the way to the celestial city. Only because Christ blazed that trail can we follow. We may shed blood for the faith, but only Christ's shed blood cleanses us from sin. That is why you never truly have a picture of a Godly woman if Christ is not the most prominent part of that portrait.