

What's a Wife To Do?

I Peter 3:1-6

There are few commands given in Scripture that strike such a discord in the minds of modern culture than what we will be discussing today. As a matter of fact, it's a very unpopular doctrine. In a culture that demands everything be whitewashed with the bleach of political correctness the command for wives to submit to their husbands sends a shock wave through the battlegrounds of the modern women's movement and left leaning activists. The conflict strikes hard against the reverberating noise of a culture that is rapidly forgetting that Biblical standards are supracultural, transcending time and cultures. These standards are just as relevant and applicable today as they were when written. I believe it's unpopular because it's misunderstood.

Yet, here we are facing a crisis because homes and churches are neglecting to practice what is commanded. These commands and the one we are especially considering today have been undermined by a culture that believes them to be archaic even barbaric. In a society that promotes the notion of self first and the idea that what I believe is all that matters so who cares if it offends you in some way, we are seeing the rotten fruit of a culture that regularly and readily thumbs its nose at authority and clear Biblical teaching.

For many years you can count the numerous television sitcoms that have played to the applause of weak and incompetent husbands who are characterized as imbecilic cast alongside domineering wives who regularly question and undermine the leadership of the husband. This role reversal has fostered a crisis of epoch proportions regarding this issue of submission. I'm not suggesting that women shouldn't have a voice in the home, that they should only speak when spoken to. I read about a pastor who counseled with a Christian couple where the husband firmly believed that his wife had to ask his permission before she

could leave one room and go to another. He was convinced that's what the Bible taught.

I am suggesting the need to revisit this idea of submission to see what it really says and means and how it should be applied today.

After one of my very first weddings I performed, the 70 something grandmother of the bride came up to me after the service and said that she really liked the service and what I had to say except for that thing on submission. She clearly didn't agree.

So, let's dive in and consider what a wife is to do from our passage in I Peter 3:1-6. But men, don't get too comfortable because we'll be talking about us next week.

The call of a submissive wife

The concern of a submissive wife

The character of a submissive wife

The charm of a submissive wife

The case for a submissive wife

I. THE CALL OF A SUBMISSIVE WIFE –

v. 1a

Over the past few weeks we have been discussing this idea of submission. The first was considering it in the very broadest sense that we all are to submit to every authority instituted among men for the Lord's sake. We are to pay our taxes and obey the posted speed signs and so on. We saw that in verse 13. Now that does not mean that I must submit to the laws of Canada or Italy while living here, but if I travel there, then those laws apply to me in the sense that I obey their laws where applicable. From the head of our country on down we are commanded to submit to federal, state, and local authority. Peter was saying that regardless of social status whether free or slave, man or woman, adult or child, everyone was to submit to the governing authorities over them.

Then Peter narrowed the focus a bit further. Slaves were to submit to their masters or in our case

employees to employers. Even if he treated them harshly the slave was still to submit, doing what we are told as if it was the Lord who gave us the order. In both cases the idea is that the Christian should be an example of Christ-like character even when you know you will suffer for doing what is right.

The exception I noted to submission to those authorities is if you are asked to do something that otherwise would go against what God's Word clearly states. God is ultimately the first one we submit to.

Peter now addresses the smallest unit with the social structure - the family. He specifically targeted the married couple. But let's be crystal clear about one thing from our passage. Peter is addressing wives who are Christians married to non-Christian husbands. As Paul writes about the topic of wives submitting to husbands his words are for the relationship where both husband and wife are saved. The approach in both cases whether your husband is saved or not is the same – wives are to submit, but let me emphasize that submission should be approached in love. If you love and submit to God, it will be easier to love and submit to your husband.

Notice what Peter says about her call. "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands."

We see first that her submission is in humility.

A. Her Submission Is In Humility

Let's just come right out and say it because it doesn't matter if you are a man or woman, married or not, submission is not in our nature and neither is humility. We want to be in control and call the shots. We want to be served not serve. Yet that is the exact opposite of what Christ taught and the example He gave us. As a Christian we are all called to put others first, to consider them before ourselves. That includes, wives, submission to your husband. Now it can be easy and tempting to have

an heir of superiority because you are saved over a husband who is not saved. You can start thinking you're better than he. You can go around the house with a bit of smugness and believe that because your husband isn't saved you don't have to submit. But let's be clear on this because the Bible is clear. This isn't me saying it, this is God saying it. Wives submit to your husbands – without exception and without excuse. It is your call to your husband.

Now, let's take a look at what submission is not, but before we do let's get a snapshot of the culture in which Peter is writing. Wives weren't much better off than slaves. They had virtually no rights and received little or no respect. In Roman culture, husbands had legal authority over the wife including the authority over life and death. Wives were regarded as servants and were to stay at home and obey their husbands.

Greek historian Plutarch wrote "A wife should not acquire her own friends, but should make her husband's friends her own. 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."

Submission by the wife toward her husband in the Roman culture was a societal expectation, a duty. The wife submitted because she had to. Remember that her life was held precariously in the palm of her husband's hand. I think Peter is saying that she should submit to her husband because she wants to. The difference is in attitude - humility.

Here's what submission is not.

1. Submission is not the dominance of the husband. The wife does not exist to serve you at your every whim.

Ephesians 5:22-28

Verse 25 says that husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church. He died for the church. But if you go back and read verse 21 it says

that we are to submit to one another. Submission is not dominance of one over the other, and we could add and neither does it mean emotional or physical abuse.

2. Submission does not mean in every area. The command doesn't mean that women are to submit to all men as if women can't lead in the workplace for example. We are only talking about the marriage relationship. And neither does it mean that she should submit to everything the husband asks or expects. Again, if it goes against God's Word then clearly you should not obey.

3. Submission does not mean the husband can use this verse to wield power over his wife. This verse is for the wife not the husband. So husbands don't go around quoting this to your wives. Don't get it framed to stick in every room of the house as a reminder of her obligation. If she isn't submitting then be the kind of husband and leader in the home where it would be a joy to do so.

4. Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says. It's clear from the verse that both of you have a different reference point – you are a Christian and he is not. You can still be submissive in areas where there is not conflict. The exception will be in relation to God. Submission does not mean you have to agree with everything he thinks. The minute you say "I do" you don't have to check your brain at the door. T

This woman heard the gospel and made a conscious decision that it was right to believe in spite of her husband's decision to ignore it. Notice again that it says he disobeyed the gospel, which implies he heard it as well but rejected it. And let me add here that submission does not then mean that she has to give up her commitment to Christ because her husband wants her to. You are not some heartless robot or mindless zombie "yes sir, no sir, right away sir" agreeing to do everything he says as if you no longer had a will or mind of your own.

5. Submission does not mean putting his will before the will of Christ. It can be a challenge for the Christian wife who wants to grow in her faith, but also maintain a joyful home environment. If the wife is running off to every Christian conference or church activity whenever the doors are open and ignoring responsibilities at home that can be a serious problem. If he wants you to stay home, respectfully talk with him to let him know how important your faith is and discuss a balance for both, but if he continues to insist that you stay home, then submit and look for other opportunities to grow in your faith by listening to sermons on the radio or TV when he isn't around and reading your Bible. Don't make it a point of contention where you have to choose between one or the other.

Now I will say this because if he demands that you put this foolish nonsense aside, continue to find ways to be nurtured in the Lord. The expectation in Roman culture was, as we read from Plutarch, that when married, the wife accepted the husband's pagan gods. For a woman to choose otherwise could bring dire consequences. Sometimes the husband attended church with her just to see what this crazy cult was like and why she had changed.

6. Submission is not following the husband into sin. Nothing else needs to be said about that.

So then, what does it mean for the wife to submit?

John Piper defines it this way: "Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts. It's the disposition to follow a husband's authority and an inclination to yield to his leadership. It is an attitude that says, 'I delight for you to take the initiative in our family. I am glad when you take responsibility for things and lead with love. I don't flourish in the relationship when you are passive and I have to make sure the family works.'"

Kathy Keller, wife of Redeemer Presbyterian's pastor Tim Keller explains it this way: "Submission means that in matters of disagreement, I yield to Tim the deciding vote. I get a vote; he gets a vote; he gets the deciding vote." When they were deciding whether or not to move to New York City to plant a church, he felt they should go and she did not. It was one against the other. Tim conceded and she could have it her way to which she responded that he wasn't going to put all the blame on her for not going. As head of the home she told him he had to make the decision and bear the responsibility.

The husband and wife are to complement each other with their unique God given roles in the marriage as designed by Him in the beginning when he said that Adam needed a helper. Instead there is competition about who's in charge. God is clear. There is to be equality in the relationship with man's role as the head and the wife in submission.

Submission does not mean that the husband gets the only vote, but the wife who also has a vote willingly, not grudgingly defers to the final decision of the husband. That's spiritual headship given to the man both at creation, and then confirmed in the fall. Tony Evans puts it this way: "Spiritual headship is God telling the woman to duck so he can punch the man."

Spiritual headship doesn't give the right to demand submission from his wife, but it does empower him to do what is right by her.

It takes great humility and genuine love on the part of the wife to submit to her unsaved husband, but that is what she is called to do.

B. Her Submission Is To Her Husband Alone

The KJV says "to your own husbands." That is an important distinction to note. Peter is clear that submission is to your husband alone – in the context of marriage, not the workforce. Now if

your guest asks for a glass of water, you can serve him for what it is – a request, not a command. You are exercising the character of serving, humility, kindness, and hospitality.

The wife's calling is to submit to her husband in humility. The second part of verse 1 talks about the concern of a submissive wife.

II. THE CONCERN OF A SUBMISSIVE WIFE – v. 1b

The believing submissive wife has two concerns, the first is his deliverance.

A. His Deliverance

The goal of a marriage should be to honor and glorify God but that can't be done when only one is a Christian. Marriage between a man and a woman glorifies God because that's how He designed it in the beginning, but if one or both is not saved, God won't receive glory through the marriage. A marriage where only one is a Christian can't glorify God, but the believing spouse can still glorify God in how he or she lives. So the rightful concern of the Christian spouse in that situation is that the other gets saved. That is implied in the word "won't". That they didn't obey the Word implies she had tried to explain it without success. He heard it but didn't accept it. That leads nicely into how she should instead respond when he remains unconvinced by the preaching of the Word. We see her demeanor.

B. Her Demeanor

You have heard the old adage "actions speak louder than words" and that is definitely the case here.

J. Vernon McGee tells the story of a woman who came to him for counsel. Every Sunday her unsaved husband would come to church with her, but never make a commitment to trust Christ as Savior. Every

Monday morning at breakfast she would go back over the message and plead with her husband in tears begging him to get saved. At dinner that night she would do the same thing. She was at a loss for what to do. Dr. McGee counseled her that she should put a one year moratorium on talking to him about the Lord and just live out the Christian life in front of him. She agreed but also found there were things that she needed to change in her life. After 6 months he gave his life to Christ.

Often times it's not what you say but how you live. Your demeanor can be the impetus that leads an unsaved spouse to the Lord.

Wives, don't leave not so subtle hints lying around the house. One wife would intentionally turn the Christian radio station up when her husband was home so he would hear the message. It's okay to wave a John 3:16 poster around at a ballgame, but don't rub it in the face of your unsaved husband or stick a copy of the Daily Bread in his man cave next to his favorite chair under the remote where he is sure to see it. Peter says your walk is more likely to win him to the Lord than your talk. One author wrote: "her godly life will testify without a word to the truth of the gospel."

What kind of character should a wife exhibit as she submits? Let's look at the next verse.

III. THE CHARACTER OF A SUBMISSIVE

WIFE – v. 2

Two all encompassing character traits are mentioned. First, Peter mentions her purity.

A. Her Purity

Purity here means free from moral defilement. Wives, your Christ-like character will preach a greater sermon than anything you might otherwise say. If as a Christian you are an argumentative, angry, bitter, resentful, unforgiving, divisive, gossiping wife, don't expect your husband to want

anything to do with your Christianity. To make the gospel attractive, exhibit purity in your life.

The second trait mentioned is reverence.

B. Her Reverence

The word is associated with giving honor and in this case it is giving honor to the husband as head through submission. If you are not showing reverence to the Lord, you won't respect your husband. Peter is suggesting that your behavior shouldn't give any reason for the husband to treat you harshly in a culture that gave women little rights even as citizens.

John Phillips says that "the best advertisement for the truth and wonder of Christianity is a wife who daily models the Christ-life. According to Peter, that's how you get a new husband."

In their commentary, Walvoord and Zuck state that "The powerful purity of a godly woman's life can soften even the stoniest male heart without a word."

Exhibiting Godly character in submission is essential in winning anyone to the Lord, especially an unsaved husband.

Notice in verses 3-4 the charm of a submissive wife.

IV. THE CHARM OF A SUBMISSIVE WIFE – vs. 3-4

We see it first in outer adornment that is tasteful

A. Outer Adornment That Is Tasteful – v. 3

Peter is not suggesting that wearing jewelry, nice clothes or getting your hair done is wrong. He isn't saying that you shouldn't do your best to look your nicest. So what is he saying? I think he's saying your focus shouldn't be on the externals.

When God commissioned the prophet Samuel to anoint a new king, Samuel thought some of David's older brothers were certainly God's choice. They were handsome and strong and well poised. But God had rejected them and said that man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart.

The women of the imperial household in Roman culture originated new hairstyles. By the time of Emperor Trajan in the last part of the first century they had developed elaborate curls, braids, high wigs, pins and hair ornaments that were quickly copied by all the well-to-do throughout the empire. A satire written in the first century said "See the tall edifice rise up on her head in serried (close together or stacked) tiers and storeys!" Another source mentioned that they would even take the cut hair of others and stack it up or use as extensions to make their hair longer. Even hair styles come back, so we might expect the beehive from the '60's to make a resurgence.

They wore the latest and most expensive styles in clothes, jewelry and hair fashions. Today Peter would say don't get your fashion sense from Paris. Don't think that *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan* are the definitive word on what looks good. You don't need plastic surgery to look like some actress or musician. Some of you will remember back in the day that many girls had to have a Dorothy Hamill hairdo. Now it's keeping up with the Kardashians. Peter is saying you don't need all that. All the latest, most expensive styles won't win your husband to the Lord. Show some moderation and discretion and decorum in your outer appearance. Be tasteful in your outer appearance.

The complimentary piece of advice Peter gives wives is about inner adornment that is treasured.

B. Inner Adornment That Is Treasured – v. 4

Peter gives two compelling characteristics that are worth pursuing that will be of greater visibility and

a compelling argument for the gospel than outer adornment. They are a gentle spirit and a quiet spirit. Both are signature character traits of a wife who will be both godly and submissive. The word gentle refers to a heart that is humble and meek while the word quiet means still or tranquil.

There is something about inner beauty that is of greater attractiveness than anything you might wear. There is a certain grace from inner beauty that charms, as they say, the savage beast. The wife who exhibits these characteristics is both Spirit filled and Spirit led allowing the Spirit to work in her to develop these godly traits that will attract her husband to the gospel. She is the clay and the Spirit is the potter fashioning her into a child of God that is godly in character. While it is something the godly wife wears, it is something that is not seen in a magazine or storefront window. You can't buy it in a store or online. You can't fashion it yourself or trade for it. When Spirit led, this unfading beauty that won't wrinkle or stain, become chipped or damaged, lose its luster, or get messed up from strong winds, unless you choose not to walk in the Spirit.

Instead of outer adornment emphasize inner character.

There is a striking difference between Queen Jezebel on the one hand, who dolled herself up to try and charm the men who sought to end her life but whose life was rotten to the core and Ruth on the other hand whose inner beauty and character was known by Boaz before he even laid eyes on her.

John MacArthur says "The Lord is most pleased when a believing woman's modest yet thoughtful and lovely adornment reflects the inner beauty Christ has fashioned in her."

When your inner beauty shines through there is an unmistakable outer radiance and beauty that is most readily evident to others. There is great charm in

the life of a submissive wife whose inner godly character is evident by how she lives.

To package it all up, Peter gives us one final point. It is the tie that binds it all together.

V. THE CASE FOR A SUBMISSIVE WIFE – vs. 5-6

In essence he's saying don't take his word for it, look back at history and consider some examples that will point out the validity of what is being said.

First there is the example of holy women.

A. The Example Of Holy Women – v. 5

Peter is inviting these women to take a moment and reflect on history and consider the different women who were godly in character, who modeled these spiritual attitudes and submitted to their husbands. Whether past or present there are godly women to emulate. The example of godly women is not limited to any one particular time or culture.

Now I want to underscore one very important principle from this verse that made these holy women such great examples.

“They put their hope in God.”

So let me ask you ladies and really it's a question for all of us to ponder. Where is your hope? Is it in God?

Psalm 31:24 “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”

Psalm 34:4 “I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.”

Psalm 39:7 “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in You.”

If your husband is unsaved or you know of someone whose husband is not saved or anyone not saved for

that matter, hope in God. Look around and consider the examples of holy women whose hope was in God and strengthened and encouraged and find peace.

B. The Example Of An Honoring Wife – v. 6

Of all the examples Peter could have referred to he selected Sarah and I don't think it was just pulling a name out of the hat. She not only is the mother of the nation of Israel, but is considered the mother of Christians as well because through Abraham all the children of the world are blessed. It was through her descendants that Christ was born who would offer eternal life through faith in Him.

Sarah honored and obeyed Abraham and called him master or lord. She respected him as head of the house. She was not perfect but she was submissive. Peter uses a Greek tense that suggests this is an attitude she had displayed for a long time.

When you submit in such a way you are her spiritual daughters and there is no fear for doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. The hope, the prayer, the desire is that an unbelieving husband will see her godly character and surrender to Christ.