*The Godly Wife*

1 Peter 3:1-6

2/19/23

Ch. 3 opens with Peter addressing to another important relationship that most of us experience. It is the relationship between husbands and wives. He begins by talking to wives, which we will explore today. Next week, we will consider husbands. That does not mean, husbands, that you can check out today, or that wives do not need to hear next week’s teaching. We need to understand God’s instruction for one another so we can learn to do these things well together and lovingly support each other in the process. And for our singles, these are the qualities you should seek to cultivate in your own life, and what you ought to be looking for in a mate.

With that in mind, let us turn our attention to God’s instruction for wives, which we will consider under three headings. First, we see the command for wives to be submissive to their husbands. This is the third paragraph in a row build around the command to submit. In 2:13, believers were to be submissive to governing authorities. In 2:18, servants were to be submissive to their masters. Now wives are told to be submissive to their husbands. This seems like an important subject for believers to get a handle on.

We have given this definition to submission: it is willfully bringing yourself under the authority of another. Applying this instruction to wives in our culture sounds like nails scraping on a chock board. It is such a foreign concept in 21st century life that it is fair for people to ask *why would Peter say that*? The reason is because he understands God design for the husband-and-wife relationship, which our culture has lost. When we looked at Paul’s teaching on marriage in Colossians, we took an entire Sunday morning to explore this theme. I am not going to repeat that information today. If you have questions or want biblical proof for what I am about to say, then you can go to our church website or YouTube channel and find the sermon preached on March 13, 2022 entitled ‘The Christian Home Pt. 1’. I unfold these things more fully there.

But the summary of that teaching is this. God created men and women as equal bearers of His image. That means that they share equal worth, dignity, and purpose in His sight. In His goodness, God assigned men and women distinct and complementing roles. To Adam He gave the responsibility of leading his home, while He called Eve to come alongside him as his companion, helper, and support in fulfilling all that God called him to do. Scripture regularly points to this creative order to help us understand that God has appointed husbands as the spiritual leaders of their homes and men as the spiritual leaders of the church.

We will talk about men’s responsibilities next week, but in vs. 1, Peter calls wives to willingly bring themselves underneath of their husband’s leadership. This means they recognize the order God established for the home and therefore lean into their unique role within it.

Now the call to submission is limited. Women are not called to submit to every man in every circumstance. They are to submit to their own husband. This is not a call for male domination. It is simply women pursuing God’s design for them. Although the submission Peter has in mind is limited to a wife’s attitude towards her own husband, it is not limited to wives who have godly husbands. Even wives whose husbands are not believers are told to be submissive. Marriage is a common grace God gives everyone. The parameters He places on it apply to every marriage. This means wives are to figure out how to display submissiveness irrespective of the spiritual state of your husband.

This causes us to consider the *why* of submission. When Peter called us to submit to the government, we were to do it to *silence the ignorance of foolish men.* Servants were to submit to their masters as an example of Christ’s suffering, pointing their masters to the Savior. Wives are to submit to their husbands for the same reason. When Peter speaks of husbands who are disobedient to the word, he probably has in mind a woman who has come to faith in Christ, but her husband has not. But it could also apply to a believing husband who is not living in submission to the word of God. Yet neither context justifies an insubordinate attitude from the wife. She is to submit *so that they may be won without a word.* In other words, a wife’s conduct is to be a living testimony of the gospel, pointing her husband and children toward the greatness of her Savior. As the husband observes her chaste and respectful behavior, he may be won for Christ.

The chaste and respectful behavior in vs. 2 is focused towards God rather than toward her husband. Chastity here refers purity throughout the woman’s life, encompassing all her behavior. The respect in view here speaks to her reverence towards God. Her husband is to experience God’s grace through his wife’s desire to please God. Because she desires to please God, she will also be concerned about how she treats her husband.

Now, it should be noted that both men and women struggle to fulfill their God-ordained role in marriage. This is because of humanity’s fall into sin. After Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3, God reestablishes the gender roles; yet in doing so, He states that fulfilling them would now be hard. Women will be inclined to usurp their husband’s authority; and husband will be inclined to either abdicate their leadership responsibility or to abuse it. Sin makes fulfill God’s purposes for our marriages so much harder.

This leads to our second observation. If wife’s ultimate concern is to please God, she will adorn herself with godliness. This is the point of vs. 3-4. A woman’s adornment is not to be *merely* external. I love how the NASB translates this. It is not wrong for a woman to present herself well physically. We find beauty praised throughout the Bible. The physical appeal of a woman’s appearance is part of God’s good design. It is not wrong for a woman to seek to present herself well physically within appropriate bounds. Obviously, we know that sin corrupts humanity’s understanding of what true beauty is, and leads to all manner of sin.

Yet Peter says that a woman’s adornment is not to be *merely* external, focusing on surface things like hair, jewelry, and clothes. True beauty is found in the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, for this is precious in the sight of God! God’s vision of what a beautiful woman is very different than the ideals presented in the world world. He looks at the shape of a woman’s soul, not the shape of her body.

Peter highlights two qualities that God wants to see when He looks at the heart of a woman. First, He looks for the gentle spirit. The term translated gentle here is interesting. It means *the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.* The word is translated by words like gentleness, humility, considerate, and meek. A gentle woman does not have an overly inflated view of herself. She does not think the world revolves around her, or that she is God’s gift to the world. Instead, she understands who she is in the sight of God and lives in the light of eternity. These truths control both her thoughts and behavior.

Vs. 2 also speaks of a quiet spirit. A godly woman has an inner emotional calm. This does not mean she is unfeeling or emotionless. It simply means that both her highs and lows are filtered through the lens of God’s word. His truth, not her emotions, hold sway in her life. This is a learned quality that allows her to endure suffering and experience victory in a way that is grounded in the gospel promises of God.

True beauty is determined by the inward qualities of a woman, not her physical features. Time has a diminishing effect on physical appearance; yet time has an amplifying effect on inward beauty if a woman adorns herself with godliness. This has clear application to our culture. Our culture emphasizes the physical appeal of a woman. But God looks to the heart. Ladies, it may be worth comparing the effort you put into maintaining your physical appearance with the effort you put into developing your spiritual health. A godly woman does not neglect her physical appearance; but a truly beautiful woman is one whose life displays the beauty of her Savior.

There is a word of application for men at this point. Men, what gratifies you more, the physical alure of your wife or the hidden person of her heart? Do you even know your wife’s heart? It is good for husbands to ask *am I demanding physical gratification from my wife, or am I seeking to cultivate her spiritual health so that she is beautiful in the sight of God?* And single men, what attracts you to a woman is a window into your own heart. Are you drawn to her because of her physical appeal? Or are you drawn to her because of her godly character?

Finally, Peter closes the text by telling wives to consider the example of other godly women. He does this by pointing to the example of OT women. It is always helpful when a teaching portion of the Bible can be illustrated with something from a narrative portion of the Bible. It helps us see how principles translate into practice. Peter does that here by pointing to how the holy women of old used to adorn themselves with submission towards their husbands. This reminds us that the foundational principle under consideration is submission. The wife’s submission to her husband is an expression of her submission to God. Ladies, this is important to remember when your husband’s behavior makes submission difficult; you do not submit because he deserves it; you submit because you want to please God.

In vs. 6, Peter narrows his focus to Sarah, highlighting two aspects of her attitude towards Abraham. First, he says that Sarah obeyed Abraham. There is a connection between the attitude of submission and our conduct. Yet what does it mean that Sarah *obeyed* Abraham? Does it mean that he dictated to her what she must do and how she must do it? I don’t think so. But if you think about it, God called Abraham to leaved his home an go on an incredible journey of faith into the land of promise. As God guided and directed Abraham, we always find Sarah cooperating with the process. She was not perfect. In fact, she made some major mistakes just like Abraham did. But she saw what God was doing in Abraham’s life and came alongside of him as his partner. She followed her husband’s leadership. In the end, God had a vital role for her to play in the fulfillment of His promises.

She also respected Abraham, which is why she called him lord. That is a title of respect. In Eph. 5, Paul tells wives to respect their husbands. Here Peter holds Sarah forward as someone who embodied that respect. When I do premarital counseling, I always tell the bride to be that how she treats her husband will go a long way towards building him up or tearing him down as a man. I tell them that if they know their wife admires and respect them, they can take on the world. But if they doubt their wife’s love or respect, it cripples them in every area of life. Ladies, it would be odd in our culture if you called your husband lord; but it will be equally odd if you showed respect for your husband. If you will to do that well, you will build him up as a man, as husband, and most importantly as a follower of Christ.

The verse ends by calling wives to do what is right without being frightened by any fear. Women tend to struggle with anxiety more than men. This is true in relationships, and it is true of life’s circumstances. Fear destroys of the quiet spirit that is precious to God. The cure to fear is to trust the goodness of our sovereign God. This is what we are telling one another when we sing *be still my soul, the Lord is on your side. Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain. Leave to Thy God to order and provided, in every change He faithful will remain. Be still my soul, thy best, thy heavenly friend, through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.* We can rest in doing what is right because we know our good God will providentially order our lives according to His sovereign purposes. Even when the path He assigns you is hard, He will give you the necessary grace to walk that road. His perfect love casts out our fear, for we know that God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes.

Ladies, look to the example of other godly women. You can find them in the bible; and you can find them as you interact with other followers of Jesus Christ. Consider the manner of their life and imitate their faith. As you watch them, consider how you can adorn yourself with the beauty of godliness. Happiness in your marriage, contentment in life, and the abiding peace of Christ is learned as you abide in Christ. If you do that well, the inward beauty of your life will draw your husband to you while also pointing him, your children, and everyone else around you to the beauty of your Savior.