

The Covenant Home #4
Christlike Wives
1 Peter 3:1-6

The world despises the role of a wife and her true femininity not because its weak and controlled but because she is fruitful and strong. “Who is she who looks forth as the morning,” Solmon asks, “Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?” (Songs 6:10). It was by a woman that God promised to send His conquering messiah (Gen. 3:15). Just as a husband thrives when he sacrificially loves his wife, so a wife lives fearlessly as a daughter of Sarah when she follows and respects her husband.

Summary of the Text

Peter tells wives to submit to their own husbands, that those who don't obey the word would see their pure and respectful conduct and be won over without a word (vv. 1-2). Don't be adorned only on the outside with hair, jewelry and clothing, but in the hidden person of the heart, the unfading gentle and quiet spirit so highly valued before God (vv. 3-4). The is how holy women before adorned themselves, submitting to their own husbands (v. 5). Thus, Sarah submitted to Abraham, calling him lord, and you are her daughters when you do good and are not fearful with any dismay (v. 6).

Submission

Peter applies the call to follow Christ to wives and uses the fraught word “submission.” Some Christians are troubled by this because they buy into feminist framing, but in Scripture this is the way to affect your husband for your good, his good, and God's glory. We've already seen the commands to husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, which means to die for her, to nourish and cherish her as members of the same body and of Christ together (Eph. 5:25-30). As a husband's duty is to lead his wife, her duty is to follow. This is easier when it's clear he is going the right direction, but Peter does us a service and points out this is the way forward also when he doesn't “obey the word.” He could not be a Christian or just a disobedient one in a specific way, but her way of influence and honoring God is the same. He will be won by her pure and respectful conduct. She won't be acting this way just to get what she wants apart from honoring him, but ultimately as a result of trusting God and respecting him. Scripture speaks to our weaknesses both as husbands and wives, and Peter tells wives to primarily not use words in order to change him. Just as a husband should be a Christian first, so should a wife. She submits to her own husband, not anyone else's, and by honoring him she has more power than anyone else to affect, help, change, and bless him: “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones” (Prov. 12:4). Christians understand this in every other realm. We honor our civil magistrates and work within the system for change. Honor your boss, do what he says, love the company, and you may well transform the place. If you attack the police, federal ICE agents, or revile, you tear yourself down and change nothing for the better. If we play our role in submission and take constructive action, we affect real change—others listen to us. Wives who obey this command are the most influential and fulfilled women, the exact opposite of passive doormats. Think of Abigail saving Nabal's life and Rebekah leading Isaac to repentance. Absolute submission is only given to God, and submission does not mean never giving input—a good husband will seek her wisdom constantly—but it means submitting to and honoring his decisions, glad that he gets to make them.

Respect

The Bible never tells husbands to respect their wives or wives to love their husbands, not because this isn't required but because it happens naturally. It's much harder for men to love and women to respect, so Paul rounds off his instruction: “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and

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let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph. 5:33). “See to it” means you take responsibility to be sure it gets done. To respect means to esteem or honor, and it results in outward action driven by an inner attitude. In first century Greco-Roman culture women would get overdone with ostentatious hair and jewelry, described by Paul as “braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing” (1 Tim. 2:9). They wanted to be looked at by everyone, like dressing for the red carpet today. The problem is not beauty because Sarah, Rebekah, and the Shulamite in Solomon’s Song are all described as beautiful women (Gen. 12:11, 24:16; Songs 6:4). But their beauty is not limited to the outside but rather accompanies and expresses inner beauty: “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” (1 Pet. 3:4). The gentle and quiet spirit is not a personality trait as if no women are extroverted. It’s a disposition toward your husband. A godly woman isn’t clamorous, quarrelsome, and sharp because she respects him too much. Just as love bestows loveliness, respect bestows respectability. She learns from him and asks questions, seeking his input and counsel (1 Tim. 2:11; 1 Cor. 14:34-35). This causes him to want to know more so he has answers. A man’s love gives him patience in dealing with a disrespectful wife, and a wife’s respect causes her to honor him when he lacks it. So far from being idealistic and impossible, Peter says Sarah was adorned this way and called Abraham lord, referring to at least one time when she was old and past childbearing years. She overheard the Lord tell Abraham that she’d have a son, and laughed to herself, saying “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (Gen. 18:12). The Lord asked why she laughed, but she denied it only to for Him to say for the record, “No, but you did laugh!” (v. 15). Imitating Sarah won’t make you believe perfectly or always honor your husband, but you will join her in holiness and victory anyway. Sarah overcame immense fear by respecting and following Abraham, a fallible but faithful man.

Homemaking

Robert Farrar Capon said a woman doesn’t so much make a home as she is a home. A husband provides food, shelter, and gives himself sexually only to her, and she receives what he gives and makes a place out of it: “She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants” (Prov. 31:14-15). She is not decorative in house but central to its industry. Timothy will instruct young women to “marry, bear children, *manage the house*, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Tim. 5:14). She is the *oikodespotes*, the despot of the oikos, ruler of the house. This contrasts with being “idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not” (v. 13). The house needs ruling and overseeing because it’s a productive place where people work, learn, sing, laugh, read, write, build, play music, cook, gather, feast, plan, and launch. The man is blessed in Psalm 128 to gather around the table she has laden with food and with the people she has made. She welcomes her husband sexually into a private garden, receiving his love and bestowing her own, providing him a great protection and joy (1 Cor. 7:5). A wife is not confined or limited to the home, but she is centered there. Out of that abundance she overflows to engage in the ministry of the church as Phoebe did at Cenchrea and Paul co-laborers in Philippi (Rom. 16:1; Phil. 4:3). She uses her words to edify those around her: “The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands” (Prov. 14:1; cf 18:21). “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness” (Prov. 31:26). In all of this she models what church is to Jesus Christ, an increasingly radiant and confident bride.