

FIRST PETER

Lesson 13

Duties of Saved Wives to Unsaved Husbands

1 Peter 3:1-6

Each of us probably knows at least one family where the wife is a Christian and the husband is not. In many cases the wife is sincere and dedicated and longs to see her husband become a Christian, but he shows no interest at all. It is only natural for her to want her husband to love her “first love,” Jesus Christ, and without her husband’s love for Christ that family will never be united as it could be or should be. There may be peace and even degrees of harmony, but there will not be unity, because, on the fundamental spiritual issues, there is disagreement.

Peter addresses this situation in 1 Peter 3:1-6. The questions are: How should a saved wife live with an unsaved husband? How can a saved wife lead her unsaved husband to Christ? What should be the response of a saved wife to a cruel and unjust husband?

To understand this section of Scripture, we have to put it in the context of 1 Peter 2:11—2:12. In 2:11, Peter called his readers “aliens and strangers” because they were heavenly citizens on a journey through life, headed for their heavenly country. As aliens and strangers, they might wrongly conclude that they had little or no social responsibility on this earth. Peter points out that because they are Christians they have more accountability to act responsibly toward all social institutions such as government, slavery and marriage. In 3:1-6, the issue is the saved wife’s responsibility to an unsaved husband in the God-ordained institution of marriage.

As aliens and strangers, Christian women were “to abstain from fleshly lusts” (passions). In context, these fleshly passions were related to the whole concept of submission, which is the major thought in 1 Peter 2:11—3:12. These fleshly passions raise their ugly heads when we feel we have been treated unjustly and we demand that people treat us right. How easy it would be for a saved wife to feel defensive, resentful, vindictive and want to retaliate when she has an unsaved husband who treats her with mental or physical cruelty.

In 2:12 Peter says that the Christian is to produce good deeds in order to silence men who accuse them of being evil doers. Christians are to manifest good works by having attitudes of submission. Just as Christian citizens were to be loyal to the state, even under the reign of tyrannical Caesar, as Christian slaves were to obey masters who were cruel and unjust, so wives were to render loving obedience to their husbands, even when they were unsaved.

First Peter 3:1-6 is divine revelation, not secular reasoning, and it sets forth principles that will work to make a spiritually mixed marriage better. However, there is no absolute guarantee that when these principles are applied a non-Christian partner will be saved, for salvation is ultimately of God. But if an unsaved partner is to be saved, these principles are the human means whereby it will be accomplished. Surely, if a woman applies these truths it will make her home a better place to live, and it may well bring about the salvation of her husband.

While this section speaks directly to saved wives as they are related to unsaved husbands, these principles can also be applied to Christian wives with Christian husbands.

CHRISTIAN WIVES ARE TO BE IN SUBJECTION TO THEIR UNSAVED HUSBANDS (3:1a)

“In the same way (likewise) . . .”

This obviously refers to the previous context which is about Christ who suffered innocently, silently and vicariously. His suffering was innocent in that it was all undeserved; silent in that He spoke nothing to His accusers; and vicarious in that He sought to bring a people to Himself by suffering in their place.

At all times Christ was in submission, first to God and then to human authority, even though it was wrong, harsh, cruel and vicious. In this kind of suffering, there is an enabling rather than a demeaning feature. Christian wives are to remember how Christ suffered and was under authority, even when He did not deserve it, for He was treated unjustly and unfairly. They are to follow the example of Christ in suffering.

“You wives, be submissive”

Christian women are to be in submission to their unsaved husbands. We may assume that these spiritually mixed marriages did not come about because the women married unsaved men, for this is forbidden in Scripture. *“A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).*

These situations arose because both husband and wife were unsaved pagans and then they heard the gospel. The woman responded to Christ and the man did not. Now these women are to be in submission to their husbands. The word “submissive” is a military term which means “to take a place or position under” or “to take a place in rank.” It has the basic idea of being placed under authority or leadership.

In the first century, the worst institution was slavery; the next worse was marriage. Women were ruled by male chauvinists who felt that wives should be seen and not heard. Women had very few rights and were thought of as sex objects, child bearers and housekeepers. Even in a good marriage in those days a woman had a rough time of it, but it could be miserable if a woman had a cruel, vicious and harsh unbelieving husband. The tendency would be to bolt out from under this man’s authority and seek a divorce, but Peter tells the Christian women to be submissive.

It should be pointed out that this is voluntary submission because a Christian wife makes up her mind that she will willingly submit to her husband and suffer innocently as Christ suffered, trusting God to right the situation as she commits herself into the hands of a God who judges righteously.

The submission is not that of fear but of love. It is voluntary selflessness which involves the death of pride, the abasing of self and the distinctive desire to serve another. The wife submits because she loves God and wants to be obedient to His Word. This simply says a Christian wife is to be the best possible wife she can be, not perfect but trying and progressing. She is to be a good communicator, a good companion, a good

homemaker, a good lover and a good mother. She is to submit to and attempt to please her husband even when he mistreats her.

A woman is to be submissive to her husband, but this does not mean she is to break the moral law of God to please him. If he asks her to rob a bank or cheat by co-signing his income tax or lie for him, she must refuse, but in all other things she is to be submissive to him as long as she does not have to do anything which wounds her conscience morally.

If an unsaved husband wants his saved wife to go nightclubbing with him, as she used to do before she was saved, but she feels this is a violation of her conscience, she should not go. To be placed back into her old worldly environment would wound her conscience.

“ . . . to your own husbands.”

Notice carefully that this says a woman is to be submissive to her own husband, not someone else's husband. A wife has to be in submission to her husband, not to men in general. There is no scripture that clearly teaches that women are to be submissive to the leadership of men in general.

There are only two spheres in which a woman must be in submission to men: to her husband in a marriage and to elders in the local church who are to be men. Outside of these two spheres, a woman can exercise leadership, whether in politics, education or business. The Old Testament is filled with examples of women who were in positions of leadership, such as Deborah, Esther, Jael and others. However, within the home there is to be an order of authority, and the man has been appointed by God for that authority. This is a functional type of submission, for there can only be one head of a home.

The problem of headship has to be solved in every home, for someone is going to take leadership whether it be the wife, the children or the husband. God's way is to make the husband the head of the home. God has ordained that husbands should be loving leaders and wives should be submissive, obedient followers. This surely is not a popular position today with many, especially the Women's Liberation Movement, but we must listen to God, not to any feminists who call submissive wives slaves.

Perhaps another reason that Peter declares that wives are to be submissive to their own husbands is that a Christian wife might get discouraged with her unsaved husband and begin to be attracted to some other Christian man or husband who displays qualities of leadership and love. How many loved starved women have fallen in love with their doctor, counselor or minister because they have given up in with regard to their own marriages.

Women must remember that submission is not the same as inferiority. Women are not inferior mentally or socially to men. In fact, a wife may be more intelligent and endowed with more common sense than her husband, but she still has the responsibility to submit to her husband if she is a Christian woman.

Suppose a Christian woman should become the President of the United States of America. She could most certainly hold this position if she were qualified and all American citizens, men and women, would have to be in submission to her. However, when she came home to her Christian husband, she would have to be in submission to him because God has ordained that he should be the head of the family.

CHRISTIAN WIVES ARE NOT TO NAG THEIR UNSAVED HUSBANDS (3:1b)

“so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word.”

This verse clearly teaches that saved wives are to win or gain their unsaved husbands to Christ without saying a word to them. This is non-verbal witnessing to a husband who not only knows the gospel, but totally rejects it; he is an antagonist to Christ.

Most women love to communicate and a saved wife might think that she has a responsibility to do a little “sanctified nagging” and say to herself, “This guy is an unbeliever and I’m going to hound him to death until he gets fed up and receives Christ by giving in to me.” Unsaved husbands have a better chance to be won to Christ if their wives stop nagging them and allow them to see Christ in their lives. A life speaks louder than words in this kind of a situation.

Surely this does not mean that a woman can never share Christ with her husband. She should share whenever her husband wants to talk about it, but if the husband is antagonistic to Christ, there comes a time when communications cease and it becomes nagging. The husband sees this as a threat to his leadership and an implication that his wife wants to assert her own will in the home. If the wife continually pecks away at the way her husband dresses, acts, eats, thinks and talks in that these things are not Christian, the man will just clam up or rebel even more because he is alienated by what he thinks is superpiousness in his wife (and it might be).

There are women who are so desirous to see their husbands saved that they drag them off to church and to every evangelistic or revival meeting; they put tracts on their pillows at night and in their bowls of cereal in the morning; they may even go so far as to write on the bathroom mirror with shaving cream or lipstick the words, “God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life,” so the husband cannot miss these words when he shaves. There are even those women who might say, “My husband plays golf on Sunday morning and I want him in church with me.” They should let him play golf on Sunday and win him to Christ by a quiet, godly life. When he gets saved, he will want to be in church with God’s people.

Remember, men hate nagging. When a wife nags, the husband will either give in, smolder with resentment, become stubborn or just blow up, and will be driven further from Christ. A woman may have the best motives, but these trumped up situations are not God’s method for winning an unsaved man to Christ.

Christian women should never argue with their unsaved husbands about spiritual matters, for this only drives the wedge deeper and makes it that much more difficult to reach them. Just as Christ suffered silently before his accusers, so Christian wives are to suffer silently with their unsaved husbands.

“by the behavior of their wives”

Women are to win their husbands to Christ by good deeds. Their behavior is to make an impact on their husbands because they can see that Christ has really changed their lives. These husbands will see that their Christian wives really do have a life of trusting God and that Christianity is real to their wives.

Christian wives, there are times to be silent with your unsaved husbands. Here is where your concept of the sovereignty of God comes into play. If you believe that you

must do something to save your husband, if his salvation depends upon you or your human effort, then you are always going to be scheming and thinking of ways to confront your husband with the gospel. Yet, if you believe God must convict, draw, regenerate and save your husband, then you can rest back in God to move on your husband in His timing. Then you can win your husband without saying a word, by preaching a silent sermon with your life.

Women should pray, live godly lives and wait for opportune moments to speak to their unsaved husbands about Christ. There will be those precious moments when he is ready to communicate, and even then, a wife must choose her words carefully so as not to give the husband the feeling that she has arrived and he has not. The Christian wife should concentrate on her own Christian life and not on her husband's non-Christian life, for this will ultimately bring a softening to the husband's heart.

CHRISTIAN WIVES ARE TO BE AN EXAMPLE TO THEIR UNSAVED HUSBANDS (3:2)

“as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

Non-Christian husbands are going to observe or scrutinize the lives of their saved wives, causing them to sit up and take notice. The word “chaste,” while it includes sexual faithfulness, is a broader term meaning purity of any kind. A godly life is the best witness, and the wife should seek to live in a way that her unsaved husband could not criticize her. She is also to have “respectful behavior;” that is, she is to give respect to her husband even when he is undeserving of it.

A woman might say, “Well, you don't know my husband. That bum sits around the house in his shorts and dirty tee shirt, watches TV, drinks beer and when he speaks, he constantly uses the Lord's name in vain. He never shows me any attention or affection. He is never interested in the kids. He does not care about the family and thinks only of himself. Why should I respect him?”

You are to respect him as the head of the home because God asks you to do it. This is not an easy task, but you as a Christian wife must not deride him, ridicule him, make fun of him, put him down, or speak evilly of him to his face or behind his back. Why? Because he is the head of the home by God's appointment, even if he is unsaved and is not functioning as the head.

Christian women are to live positive, active testimonies before their unsaved husbands, for it is far more profitable to practice than to preach. When a man sees a positive Christian life in his woman, this will hopefully whet his appetite to know something about Christ.

Christian wives are to follow the example of Christ who suffered vicariously to bring His people to salvation. Christian wives cannot suffer vicariously, but they can endure unjust suffering in order to bring their unsaved husbands to Christ.

CHRISTIAN WIVES ARE NOT TO EMPHASIZE EXTERNALS ALONE IN WINNING THEIR UNSAVED HUSBANDS TO CHRIST (3:3)

“And let not your adornment be external only”

Peter speaks to an issue that would be very close to a woman's heart—her physical appearance. A woman wants to look beautiful. She wants to dress well. Peter is not saying that women should not adorn themselves, but that outward apparel should not be their only adornment.

“braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and putting on dresses”

The issues for these women were in the areas of hairstyle, jewelry and clothing (togas). The first thing we should notice is that Peter is not speaking against hairstyles, jewelry or dresses because a woman would obviously put on the outer clothing of a dress (toga). Peter is speaking about excess or abuse in these matters.

Most of these women to whom Peter was writing were saved out of rank heathenism and their lives before conversion to Christ conformed in every detail to the world's standards. It appears that when their husbands did not respond to Christ, the women began to turn to worldly, seductive methods to lure their husbands to Christ. They turned to worldly adornment that they wore before they were saved.

In those days, unsaved women would have sensual hairdos, so much so that Juvenal, a Roman writer said,

“The attendants will vote on the dressing of the hair as if a question of reputation or of life were at stake, so great is the trouble she takes in quest of beauty. With so many tiers does she load, with so many continuous stories does she build up her hair, she is as tall as Andromache in front, and behind she is shorter. You would think her another person.”

They would also place gold jewelry on certain parts of their bodies so as to attract attention to them. Also, they would wear very seductive dresses. When these Christian women did these things to lure their husbands, they became immodest, gaudy and conspicuous. These women made the mistake of thinking that if they would dress as the world dresses that this would please their husbands, and they would be influenced to take the Lord Jesus as their Savior.

Again it must be stressed that this is not saying women cannot dress attractively, or wear jewelry, or have a fancy hairdo. While the Christian woman is not to nag, neither is she to be a hag. Women should be attractive and they should use all the curves God has given them to His glory. Women should dress in the conservative styles of the day, and yet never be seductive in appearance. Really, only the Holy Spirit can direct a woman in her outward appearance.

Peter's whole point is that women ought not to stress externals alone in the reaching of their husbands for Christ.

CHRISTIAN WIVES ARE TO EMPHASIZE THE SPIRITUAL, INNER LIFE TO THEIR UNSAVED HUSBANDS (3:4)

“but let it be the hidden person of the heart”

The “hidden person of the heart” refers to a woman's personality and temperament which is inward and not outward. The most attractive, winsome adornment of a Christian

woman should be the beauty of her life. A woman should not depend on her outer beauty alone to win her husband to Christ, but should concentrate on her inner, spiritual beauty.

Women are not to be obsessed with external beauty, but are to long for and work at internal beauty, for this is what is truly attractive to a man. Hair will gray, wrinkles will come, clothes will wear out, but inner beauty never perishes and is always fashionable to God and men.

“with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”

The true beauty which delights God and will charm her husband is the loveliness of a gentle and quiet spirit. A Christian woman is to develop a non-argumentative, non-hostile, non-aggressive, non-domineering spirit. She is to have a spirit of quiet rest, a quietness that comes not from trusting in her husband but in God. This kind of spirit is “precious” or “priceless” in the sight of God. It is this kind of spirit that will win the heart of a non-Christian husband. In fact, it will probably totally disarm him.

Again it should be emphasized that Peter is not against Christian women looking attractive. There is no particular spirituality in looking like a warmed over corpse. A wife is not to ignore these externals, but she is to give more effort to developing the spiritual internals. It is what she is and not what she wears that counts most. The apparel which wears best and never gets “out of style” is a gentle and quiet spirit which does not worry or cause worry.

CHRISTIAN WIVES ARE TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF OLD TESTAMENT WIVES (3:5-6)

“for in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.”

The Christian woman who is submissive to her husband, whether saved or unsaved, and who has a gentle and quiet spirit, has joined a very elite group—the holy women of the Old Testament. The word “holy” is probably speaking of women who had reached a point in their progressive sanctification whereby they were mature enough to truly subject themselves to their husbands.

These saved, more mature Christian women were distinguished from the anxious and uptight women around them who were trying to drive their husbands or dominate them, even in the ancient world. The Old Testament women were different because they “hoped in God”; that is, they trusted God in their lives, and because of this they had a different attitude about marriage and the role of the husband in the family.

“Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord”

Now Peter uses an illustration from the Old Testament. Sarah was an obedient and submissive wife to Abraham. Peter goes back to when Sarah, in a time of unbelief in her own life, referred to Abraham as “lord” or “master.” *“And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?’”* (Gen. 18:12).

The word “lord” means “sir” or “master.” It was a title used of kings, emperors, and even the Lord Jesus Himself. It is a term of respect and, in the case of Sarah, she put herself under the authority of Abraham.

When Sarah was in unbelief about God’s ability to provide a child for her through Abraham, she recognized her husband as “lord.” If Sarah could call Abraham “lord” in a state of unbelief, she could certainly do so when she was in a state of belief.

Sometimes Christian wives fail in their marriages because of unbelief. They become discouraged and want to give up on their unsaved husbands, but even in unbelief, Christian women can call their husbands “lord.”

A wife with an unsaved partner might protest that being married to Abraham was not nearly as demanding as being married to her husband. After all Abraham was a godly man and obedient to God’s Word. However, Sarah had her problems with Abraham; he was not an easy person to obey.

Abraham may have been the father of the faithful, but as a husband he was a poor example. It took him 125 years to grow up. Twice he lied about his relationship with Sarah, calling her his sister, putting Sarah’s reputation and life in great jeopardy. He did this once in Egypt and once in Philistia (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-8). On both occasions Sarah almost ended up a harem girl. Surely Sarah did not enjoy Abraham’s trickery and deceit, yet she was obedient and submissive because she trusted her life to God. She believed that God would take care of her and He did.

There may be some question as to whether Sarah broke the moral law of God to please Abraham. We must remember that she did not have all the revelation we have today, and undoubtedly concerning these two incidences, she felt she was doing right. However, we today do have full revelation and we must remember that if an unsaved woman is asked by her husband to do something illegal, immoral or contrary to Scripture, she must kindly and courteously refuse. But in every other area, when the husband’s demands do not contradict with the moral law of God, she is to obey her husband.

“and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.”

Women who learn submission to their husbands, whether saved or unsaved, become in a spiritual sense the daughters of Sarah. Christian wives are not to be “frightened by any fear.” Sarah had reason to fear when Abraham twice pawned her off as his sister, putting her in a very vulnerable situation, but God took care of her. Christian wives who have unsaved husbands who treat them unjustly, viciously and cruelly, do not have to be afraid. They can entrust themselves to God who will take care of them.

As long as a wife is confident that her conduct is right before God and shaped by an honest love for her husband, she is not to have any fear. Christian wives do not have to be alarmed or fall apart at the seams by threats of ill treatment because of their quiet confidence and steadfast hope in God. What a great promise to Christian wives trying to cope with the attitudes and actions of rebellious, unsaved husbands.

CONCLUSION

A Christian woman does not have to live with a husband who constantly abuses her, verbally or physically. Nor does she have to submit to a husband who is in an

adulterous affair or have sex with him who potentially may be HIV positive. Yet, if she is in any situation where she is not sure what to do, she does not need to be frightened and commit the situation to God.

Are you a husband who is not a Christian? Has your wife lived in a Christian way before you and prayed for you for years? Have you over and over again spurned the message of Christ and taken your frustrations out on your dear wife? You know your wife has something you do not have because you see it in her godly, quiet, submissive life. She has Christ and you too must have Christ if you are to understand her actions, and if you are to be in total unity in your family.

Unsaved, husband, I beg you to trust Christ as your Savior and Lord. Bow to Christ as your King. Admit you are a Sinner and run to Christ for forgiveness. Christ will save you. Christ will give you eternal life. No matter how bad you have been, no matter how harshly you have treated your wife or other Christians, Christ will forgive you and give you a new life. When you turn to Christ by faith, this will first please God, and second, it will please your wife. Won't you receive Christ today?