

February 24, 2008 by Steve Brandon



Christ-Like Wives: Submit to Your Husbands

1 Peter 3:1-2

My text this morning comes from the first two verses of 1 Peter, chapter 3. However, in order to put them all into context, I would like for you to consider the first seven verses of this chapter.

1 Peter 3:1-7

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any [of them] are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be [merely] external--braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but [let it be] the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. 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. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. You husbands likewise, live with [your wives] in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

My message this morning is entitled, "Christ-like Wives." I get my title from the very first words of the text. Peter begins by saying, "In the same way, you wives." Obviously, Peter is addressing the married women in his congregation. He is exhorting them how to act. Fundamentally, they are to act in the same way that Christ did. I believe that this is the intent of Peter's first words, "In the same way." Peter had just finished lifting up Christ as an example of how we all should live. And now, Peter points out how wives should follow after His steps. Particularly, wives should follow Him in the path of submission.

Now, there are those who maintain that Peter was not referring to Christ with these words. They say that he was referring to the citizens (2:13), who were told to submit to their governmental authorities, and to the servants (2:18), who were told to submit to their masters. However, in each of these examples, Peter lifted up Jesus as our supreme example of submission, especially when that means suffering by saying, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Citizens (2:13) and servants (2:18) were told to follow after the example of Christ, who suffered in his submission. Likewise, the message to wives is the same (3:1), just like citizens, just like servants, wives also are to follow the example of Christ, submitting to your own husbands.

Thus, my message title is "Christ-like Wives." When we get to chapter 3, verse 7, we will look at "Christ-like Husbands." Regarding the wives, I have three exhortations that come to you straight from the first six verses of chapter three. This morning, we will look at the first: submit to your husbands (verses 1-2). In weeks to come, we will pick upon the other verses.

My exhortation comes directly from Peter's words, "**You wives, be submissive to your own husbands.**" Your translation may say, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands" (ESV), or "Wives, be submissive to your husbands" (NIV, NKJV). In all of these translations, the idea is the same. The Greek word here is *upotassw* (*hupotasso*), which literally means, "line yourself up under." It is always used in the context of some authority figure in your life. In this case, it is the husband who is in authority. Wives are to submit themselves to their own husbands, who are the God-ordained authority in their lives.

Peter's counsel is consistent with other New Testament teaching on this subject. Whenever the New Testament gives instructions directly to wives and husbands, instructing them how to relate to each other, this is the counsel that is always given to wives: submit to your own husbands, "line yourself up under your husbands." In Ephesians 5:22, Paul says, "Wives, [be subject] to your own husbands, as to the Lord." The return admonition is, "Husbands, love your wives." And in Colossians 3:18, Paul says, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." The, Paul writes, "Husbands love your wives." Peter does much the same thing. He first exhorts the wives to "be submissive to your own husbands," which is followed by an exhortation to the husbands.

So, wives, you are to "line yourself up under your husbands." Be their help. Be their servant. Follow their lead.

In our day and age, such an exhortation is often despised. We live in an age of women's rights. We live in an age of freedom for women. We live in an age where women are demanding equal opportunity. We live in an age in which women want their independence. We live in an age in which women don't want to submit. It makes them feel inferior and degraded. And so, to exhort women to submit to their husbands appears to be "old fashioned" to many people in our society today. But, the Bible is very clear on this. Wives are to place themselves under their husbands authority and leadership. People may call this "old-fashioned." I prefer to call it Biblical. It is God's tried and true wisdom. And, by the way, it is the path to great blessing.

One of the things that we teach our children, especially when they are young, is that obeying mommy and daddy is the way that you can be "happy and safe." When children disobey their parents, it leads the child down the path of danger, as they move outside of God's hand of protection upon their lives. When children walk down this path of disobedience, it doesn't lead to happiness. They may think that it is leading to their own happiness, but it isn't. The happiest children that I know are the ones who are walking in obedience to their parents.

It's the same here with this exhortation. The path of happiness for wives is for them to submit to their own husbands. Before we proceed, let me flush out a few things for you of what it means to submit to your husband, and what it doesn't mean to submit.

1. Submission deals with roles, not abilities.

A wife's submission to her husband doesn't mean that she is in any way inferior to her husband. In fact, in many marriages that I have witnessed, it is the wife who is more intelligent than the husband. In all marriages, there are areas in which the wife has more wisdom than the husband. Perhaps she deals with the finances better than he does, or perhaps she is more mechanically inclined than he is, or perhaps she has more insight into discerning the character of others. As a wife submits to her husband, it doesn't mean that he is more able than she is. It merely means that he has been placed in the role of the leader. Submission deals with roles, not abilities.

2. Submission isn't demeaning to a wife.

The big example to this is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:3). That is, God, the Father, is in a position of authority over God, the Son. In no ways is Jesus less than God in value or worth. And yet, in the eternal mystery of the Trinity, Jesus is in a role of submission to His heavenly Father. Submission isn't a demeaning thing. If anything, a husband is to lift up his wife and place her in a position of honor. Later, Peter will instruct the husbands to "show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

3. Submission does carry with it the idea of obedience, but it is a bit different than obedience.

Obedience is something that can be forced upon you. For instance, God calls children to obey their parents. And if they don't obey, God calls the parents to use the rod and reproof to make them obey. It's important that children learn to obey, especially when they are young. Once the cement hardens, it is impossible to mold it again.

But this isn't so with submission, submission must come from within a person. In the Greek language there are three voices used to modify a word: active, middle, and passive. The active voice is something you do. For instance, "the boy hit the ball" is an active verb. The passive voice is something that is done to you. For instance, "the boy was hit by the ball." The middle voice is something that you do for yourself. This voice emphasizes your own participation. The English use of the reflexive is the closest parallel that we have. For instance, "the boy, by himself, hit the ball." would be close to the idea of a middle voice.

In our text this morning, Peter uses the middle voice in calling wives to submit. The idea, then, is this, "wives, in and of yourself, willingly obey your husbands." As you can see, this does contain the idea of obedience, but it's not a forced obedience. So, when your husband instructs you to do something, the submissive wife will do it, unless, of course, he is calling you to sin. In that case, you will obey God, and not man. But, if you can obey, the submissive wife will obey.

4. Submission does not mean that a wife doesn't input into her husband's decision making process.

The submissive wife will seek to inform her husband of her perspective of matters in their marriage and home. The submissive wife will seek to influence the decisions of her husband, in accordance with her own intelligence and independent thought. In fact, a wife ought to use these things to persuade her husband in the wise way to walk. But, in the end, a submissive wife will allow her husband to lead, and she will follow.

5. Submission doesn't remove all authority and responsibility from the wife.

The wise husband will be delegating much of the decisions around the home to his wife, according to his giftedness and her giftedness. Perhaps she is in charge of managing the food in the home or in charge of tracking the finances in the home, in charge of keeping up on some of the maintenance tasks required in the home (garbage, cleaning, decorating.), perhaps she is in charge of the landscape outside the home. In these areas of delegated authority, the wife is free to exert her authority.

6. Submission means that you acknowledge his authority and follow his lead.

As you work through issues surrounding your marriage, home and children, the submissive wife will seek to discern the preferences of her husband and follow them. When a large decision comes to mind, it is the husband who is responsible to make the final decision regarding matters in the home.

That's a picture of Biblical submission. Now, having said these things, there are still several reasons why women resist this command.

First of all, I don't think that there are any of us who really like to be in submission to others. To be sure, we endure it at times, but it doesn't

come naturally. And so, it is natural for women to resist this.

But, another reason why some women resist this clear command of Scripture is because of their own experience. Some wives have found themselves married to a husband, who, quite frankly, is not worthy of being followed. See, it is one thing for wives to submit to their husbands when he is a great leader. When he loves you and seeks for your own good and your ultimate purity (Eph. 5:28). When he cherishes you and nourishes you (Eph. 5:29) and honors you (1 Pet. 3:7). When he makes great effort to serve you, as any good leader does (Mark 10:41-45). When his decisions aren't motivated merely by his own desires, but are motivated by considering his wife as more important than himself (Phil 2:4). When he is willing to help you in your own weakness (Heb. 4:14-15). When he willingly bears your burdens (Gal. 6:1). Under these circumstances, submission is made much easier. When these things are true of a husband, wives often have little trouble submitting to their husbands.

Before we continue, I want to give a brief exhortation to the husbands. Help your wives submit to you, by being the sort of husband that makes submission easy for her. Love your wife like you love your own body, nourish her and cherish her, as you do yourself. Honor her and speak well of her to others (1 Pet. 3:7). Serve your wife, by helping ease her load, asking her how you can serve her better. Make life enjoyable to her (Rom. 12:15). Cry with her in her hurts (Rom. 12:15). Bear her burdens with her (Gal. 6:1).

And now, back to wives. If you are in a situation where things are not like this. Perhaps your husband doesn't love you. Perhaps your husband doesn't care about your needs and wants. Perhaps your husband doesn't honor you, but speaks ill of you; doesn't desire to serve, but only to be served; or perhaps your husband is self-centered in all of his decisions. Perhaps he is like the Pharisees of old, laying huge burdens on you, but unwilling, so as even to raise a finger to help you (Matt. 23:4). If this is your situation, please know that my exhortation still stands. You are still called to submit to your husbands (verses 1-2).

Peter knew full well of those women who were in this situation, where submission was particularly difficult. In the last half of verse 2, Peter is dealing with this very situation. Peter addresses the situation of a wife who is dealing with an unruly husband. And he says, "you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any [of them] are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, (2) as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior" (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Catch what Peter is saying, **"even if any of them are disobedient to the word."** This means that these husbands have heard the word. They have heard the gospel and have rejected it. They don't believe in God. But, it's worse than that. Not only have they simply not believed, but they have become "disobedient to the word." There is an active rebelliousness against the Lord that is manifested in the lives of these men. They haven't heeded the call to love their wives as their own bodies. They haven't died to themselves. They aren't sensitive to your needs. They look at you as a slave. In this case, Peter is still calling you to submit.

Perhaps your situation isn't quite this bad. But, your husband has been known to be quite rebellious at times, realize that this portion of Scripture still has great application for you. You simply need to apply it whenever your husband fails you in any way.

Notice that Peter's comments here are fully consistent within the context of this passage. When Peter was addressing the servants, he was telling them to "be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable" (2:18). And then, Peter goes on for two more verses to describe particularly how it is that you should deal with your "unreasonable" master (verses 19-20). Peter took the same approach when addressing our role as citizens. In chapter 2, verse 13, Peter told his readers to "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution." A way to do this is mentioned in verse 12, by "keep[ing] your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, [even when] they slander you as evildoers." In fact, this is the message of 1 Peter. Suffering is for now. But, live righteously through your suffering, because you know that you will be in glory later!

Recently, I had a conversation with Frank Yonke at Kishwaukee Bible Church. We were talking about 1 Peter. He has been spending much time in recent days thinking about 1 Peter. He handed me a card that has a short little phrase that sums up the message of 1 Peter. This card says, "Holiness in Him when it's Hard, For the Gospel and the Glory of God." That's it! He nailed it perfectly! When things are hard, it's precisely then that you should continue to walk in holiness, because of the implications of the gospel now and the glory of God later."

Peter gives a purpose for such wives to submit to their husbands in this way. It has to do with evangelism! It has to do with lifestyle evangelism. He says that your submission may "Win them without a word by your behavior" (verse 2). In other words, live out your Christianity before your husband. Let your life be a living parable. Let him see your faith. Let your light shine before him, that he may see your good works and glorify God. Let him see your trust in the Lord above all things, and as you submit to your ungodly, disobedient husband. It's your actions that will win him, rather than your words.

Never underestimate the power of your example. Yesterday, I spent the day at Knox College, in Galesburg, Illinois, where I went to college. While in college, I had the opportunity to play on the basketball team. My former coach is still at the school coaching basketball. He has been doing this for 24 years. Well, yesterday was his very last game as a coach. So, I went down to support him and honor him for a job well done. As I came into the gymnasium yesterday, he happened to be talking with someone else at the time. He introduced me to him. And then, he looked straight at me and said, "Steve Brandon, your faith was tested while you were at Knox College, wasn't it!" My coach (who is not a Christian) knew this firsthand, because he was one of those who tested it. By God's grace, I was able to give him the testimony, "It was. And it was found true!"

Not long after this encounter with my former coach, I had a chance to catch up with the former athletic director of the college, who had coached basketball for 24 years prior to my coach. During my time at Knox, I was able to get to know him a bit as well. He is a very nice man who has been in liberal Christianity his entire life. Anyway, he shook my hand, and looked me in the eye from about six inches away and said, "Steve Brandon, please tell me that you still love Jesus." He was unaware that I was now pastoring a church. So, I was able to give him my testimony, telling him of how God had convicted me with the words of Christ, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21)."

With both of these men, it's not like I spent hours talking to them about the gospel. Certainly, there were conversations during my four years at Knox College. But, mostly, it was a life that made the impact upon these men to bring up my faith as the main issue as they remembered me. So also, with wives and husbands, it won't be the hours of conversation that will make the impact upon the husband. Rather, it will be the life that will make a difference. In fact, the manner of your life may be strong enough to convert your husband!

Peter describes the sort of behavior that will work to convert your husband, "**as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.**" It is "chaste" and "respectful." Chaste simply means, "pure, clean, free from defilement." Respectful literally means, "fearful." I believe that it has reference to the Lord. You walk in purity before God, because you fear God.

Consider the power of these behaviors! They are powerful to convict the heart of an unbeliever and lead him to Christ, "without a word." These are the qualities to which every woman ought to strive for whether married or not. Whether young or old, a woman should seek to be "chaste" and "respectful," living in purity and humility.

Now, getting back to the case of those living with a disobedient husband, it's not that you never talk to him about the gospel at all. In fact, the assumption here in this passage is that you have told him and that he fully understands. He has simply rejected it and chosen to live an unruly, disobedient life. In this case, Peter's counsel is to live the gospel out before your husband. Peter's point is that your actions will speak far louder than your words. It is your behavior that will have more effect to convert your husband than your words will ever have.

I ran across the story of Alice and John Cross, who lived in the 1800's. Alice had come to faith in Christ, but, her husband, John, had not. Rather, he remained in his old ways. She determined to obey the Lord and attend worship without her husband. As she left the home, she would often call out to her husband at the door, "John Cross, will you go to heaven with me? If you won't, I am determined not to go to hell with you!" With that, she would leave to participate in the weekly worship. Eventually, John yielded to Christ. Together, they became mighty warriors for Christ. John had a pulpit installed in the largest room of his home and often held services right there in their home. The mighty William Grimshaw often preached in their home. ^[1] Now, we don't know the full story, but, I would suspect that it was much more the life of Alice Cross and her walk with the Lord that won her husband, than it was her constant nagging about his need to repent.

Another historical example comes in the life of Monica, the mother of the great church father, Augustine. The story has often been told of how God was faithful to answer Monica's prayers regarding the life of her wayward son. But, less often has the story been told of her conduct before her pagan husband, Patricius. In his confessions, Augustine thanked the Lord for Monica's influence upon her own husband. He prayed, ...

She served [her husband] as her master. She tried to win him to you, preaching you to him by the beauty of the character which you had given her and by which you made her able to provoke love and respect and the admiration of her husband. So she endured his infidelities and never had a single quarrel with him on this subject. She was waiting for your mercy to be shown upon him so that he might believe in you and be made chaste. ... Finally, toward the very end of his earthly life, she won her husband over to you, and now that he was a believer she no longer lamented in him the things which she had put up with in him before he was converted. ^[2]

Augustine put it perfectly. There is something beautiful about a woman submitting to her husband, even when things are difficult. Wayne Grudem pulls this out well in his commentary on 1 Peter. He writes, ...

The attractiveness of a wife's submissive behaviour even to an unbelieving husband suggests that God has inscribed the rightness and beauty of role distinctions in marriage on the hearts of all mankind. The unbelieving husband sees this behaviour and deep within perceives the beauty of it. Within his heart there is a witness that this is right, this is how God intended men and women to relate as husband and wife. He concludes, therefore, that the gospel which his wife believes must be true. ^[3]

In other words, God has inscribed upon our heart a feel for the way He created the world. He created Adam to lead. He was responsible for cultivating and keeping the garden (Gen. 2:15). He created Eve to help (Gen. 2:18). Their marriage was a prototype for all marriages (Gen. 2:24). When a wife is fulfilling her role, the husband is led to see how God's ways are indeed best.

This is a hard thing for a wife to do. There are areas in all of your relationships where your husband is failing you (which brings application of this message to many areas of your marriage). As I spoke with my wife about my message this week, she continued to marvel at this phrase, "without a word" and remarked how difficult this is.

Lot's of people can play the part of the hypocrite at church. They can dress up, come to church, do their thing, and make you believe that everything is fine with their soul! But, were the reality fully known, everything is not fine with their soul! It's merely that it is simple to hide. But, you can't play the part of the hypocrite at home with your husband. What you profess with your mouth is being tested every moment of the day.

I remember being in college, professing to be a Christian. At one point, I remember sinning. An atheistic man at the college jumped all over me and asked me, "Is that how a Christian is supposed to act?" He was very right. I was very wrong. But, it demonstrates how difficult it is to live out your Christianity before others who were living closely with one another. It wasn't as if I had many conversations with this man, but I had made my claim that I was Christ's.

The unbelieving husband will easily see sin in his Christian wife's behavior and can point out the inconsistency. It is hard to live like this when you are married to an unsaved man, who is seeing whether or not this faith of yours is really true. When he is being unreasonable with his

wife, he knows that he is being unreasonable with his wife. And when his wife still submits to him, not because it's easy, but because of a higher calling--her fear of God. Then, he will have an opportunity to see the genuineness of his wife's faith. His observations may well lead him to ask her, "Honey, I see the way that you act. Even when things are difficult, you are always cheerful. You have consistently traveled the path of righteousness. When you have had no earthly hope, you have clearly placed your faith in God. I have seen him deliver you. I see that you are different. Would you give me an account again for the hope that is in you?" (1 Peter 3:15). And it may be the case that God will use your words at this moment to convert his soul.

Now, I am under no delusion this morning that this is an easy thing. In fact, as I preach this, I'm not even sure that I can understand how difficult it is for those experiencing it. There is one thing about experiencing trouble that gives you greater ability to sympathize with others in this situation. Regarding this situation, I have not been there. I grew up in a wonderful home. My wife grew up in a wonderful home. Our home is wonderful. I can try to imagine the difficulty, but I know that I cannot fully comprehend how difficult this situation is.

As I have counseled with women in this situation, I have seen firsthand of the suffering that takes place in their lives. The suffering is incredible! The suffering often goes on for years! I have seen women in this situation want to die, so that the pain may finally be removed! I have seen women give up and simply walk out on their marriage. I remember talking to one woman who was dealing with this situation, "Steve, without question, this has been the most difficult thing that I have ever dealt with in my entire life."

And so, for those of you who rub shoulders with those who are dealing with this, be gracious and patient with those women who are in this situation. Don't be like Job's friends, who were highly critical of a man who was suffering immensely. A woman who is trying to be Christ-like in a home where her husband is disobedient to the word, may well be suffering every bit as much as Job did. Such women don't need to be told, "Well, if you were just a little bit more obedient, perhaps your husband would come along and believe. C'mon, get your act together! What kind of wife are you?!" A suffering woman doesn't need to hear this. Rather, she needs to hear the gospel.

A suffering wife needs to hear of the suffering of Christ. She needs to hear of how Jesus suffered for her. She needs to hear of how Christ didn't revile in return or utter threats in His suffering. She needs to hear that Christ suffered this for her. "He took your sin upon His shoulders." This burden you have with your unsaved, disobedient husband is great. But, believe it or not, your burden of sin was greater. And He has taken that off of your shoulders. He can certainly bear the lesser burden for you as well. So, give it over to Him. Cast all your anxieties upon Him, because He cares for you (1 Pet. 4:7). Entrust your soul, your life, and your suffering entirely to Him. He will heal you. He will help you. Continue to trust in Him!"

Encourage such a woman with such passages of the assurance of God's favor as they continue to endure. Tell them, "Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed" (1 Peter 3:14). Or, quote other verses from Peter to her, "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ... if [anyone suffers] as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name" (1 Peter 4:3-14, 16). Tell them, "Your suffering is for the cause of Christ. So, rejoice! You are blessed!"

And finally, as you have opportunity, pray with her and for her.

If your husband is disobedient to the word, I would still exhort you to Submit to Your Husbands (verses 1-2). If you have a wonderful husband this morning who loves Christ, thank the Lord. And then, submit to your husbands (verses 1-2)

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For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] J. C. Ryle, *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century*, p. 122.

[2] *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book 9, chapter 9.

[3] Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, p. 139.