

1 Peter 3:1-6

Introduction

This morning, we come to the last of Peter's three sections on submission. But before we begin, let's remember where we started. In chapter two verses 11-12, Peter wrote this:

- 1 Peter 2:11-12 — Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and foreigners to abstain from the cravings of the flesh, which wage war against your soul, keeping your conduct among the Gentiles good, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and give glory to God on the day of visitation.

So we see, here, that what Peter has in mind is how to live as sojourners and foreigners in relationship to the unbelieving world around us. In the first place we are to submit ourselves to the governing authorities, even when these authorities consist of men like a Nero or a Pontius Pilate. In the second place, slaves are to submit themselves to their masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. And now, in the third place, we read in verse 1 of chapter 3:

I. 1 Peter 3:1 — Likewise, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, so that even if some are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your pure conduct in fear [your pure conduct rooted in the fear of the Lord].

If we can remember all that we've seen in the last several weeks about submission, we'll already be prepared to understand and love our passage this morning. In the first place, as Christians we are never to see submission as something forced upon us against our will. Exactly the opposite! Submission is always my tool—our tool—that we use as the ultimate expression of our freedom in Christ and in His Gospel. And so, as he does with the slaves, Peter addresses the Christian wives directly as full and equal members of the covenant community and he calls on them as independent, morally responsible people to submit themselves to their own husbands: “Likewise, **wives, submit yourselves** to your own husbands.”

The Biblical Foundation of Submission

As we think about submission, one of the very first things that we need to have deeply ingrained in our hearts is the reality that submission is rooted not only in the creation of the world, but even in the very nature of God. That right there is a massively revolutionary thought. In other words, authority and submission is not simply a necessary result of sin, to keep order in a sinful world by punishing evil and rewarding righteousness. Authority and submission was already a reality even when all was still perfect, and even in the eternal being of God Himself. We see this most clearly in the relationship between God the Father, and God the Son, but also in the relationship between the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. There's an ancient heresy called “subordinationism” which says that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father in their nature and being so that they are not fully God. We reject this heresy with all our hearts, but we still affirm that the Son, being fully equal to the Father in His divine nature and being is also subordinate to the Father in His functions and roles. This is something we may be familiar with, but maybe we've never really fully appreciated how completely mysterious and profound this is.

We see this “subordination” of the Son to the Father in that it was the Father who *sent* the Son into the world (and also the Father and the Son who *sent* the Spirit; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 2:32-33).

- 1 John 4:14 — We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.
- John 10:36 — [The Son is the one] whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world...

It was the Father who *granted* the Son to have life in Himself.

- John 5:26 — For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

If we see in these verses the language of the Father’s authority, we also see in other verses that the Son *obeys* and submits to the Father.

- John 5:30 — I can do nothing on my own...
- John 5:19 — The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.
- John 6:38 — I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.
- John 8:28 (cf. 14:10) — I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

Now we might think at first that we have no problem with the idea of authority and submission between the persons of the Godhead. After all, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are all perfect and holy and each one partakes fully of the being of God, and there is only one God – so why should we have a problem with authority and submission here? But don’t you see? This is precisely why we really *should* have a problem. What can possibly be the need for authority and submission within the being of God Himself?

I’m certainly not going to try and solve this mystery. But what I do want us to see right now is that it’s nothing less than our own salvation that’s dependent on the willing obedience of the Son to the authority of His Father.

- Hebrews 10:5–7 — When Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God...’”
- Hebrews 5:8 — Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.
- Philippians 2:8 — Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- 1 Corinthians 15:28 (cf. Acts 2:18; 1 Cor. 3:22-23; 11:3) — When all things are subjected to [the Son], then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

We may not be able to fully understand authority and submission in the Godhead, but we can at least see its beauty and loveliness in the salvation that has actually flowed out of this reality to us.

So, if there's authority and submission even within the Creator God, then why should we be surprised when the Creator weaves the realities of authority and submission into the very fabric of His very good creation? When God created mankind, He created him male and female—both equally after His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:27)—but He didn't create both simultaneously or in the same way. God created the man first from the dust of the ground. Then, **afterward**, seeing that it was not good for the man to be alone, He created the woman **from the man** and brought her **to the man** to be **named by him** and to be his **helper**. (Gen. 2:7-8, 18-23) So, even as in the Creator the Son lives in eternal submission to the authority of the Father, so also in the creation, the role of the wife is to live in continual submission to the authority or headship of her husband.

- 1 Corinthians 11:7-12 — A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.
- 1 Timothy 2:11-15 — Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

One of the things we learn from seeing submission in the Garden and submission in the Godhead is that submission is not just isolated actions, and it originally had nothing to do with any stubbornness or rebellion. Instead, submission is an *existence*, and so for us it's a **holy lifestyle** – it's a spirit and an attitude of deference and willing obedience.

But the other thing we see here is that in the relationship between the man and the woman in the Garden, God actually laid the foundation for submitting to authority in whatever arenas might later arise in the world: children to parents, citizens to government, students to teachers, athletes to coaches, musicians to conductors, employees to employers, church members to elders, and yes, even slaves to masters. In other words, it's not just marriage that's a creation ordinance—it's actually the reality of authority and submission in and of itself, whether or not it's in the context of marriage or in any other context.

So what about sin? What about the fall? We know that the effects of sin, here, have been massive and devastating. Sin sets the one in the position of submitting *against* the one in authority and sin also sets the one in the position of authority *against* the one under authority. Sin causes those in authority to use their authority for selfish and proud and oppressive and unjust purposes. And sin causes those under authority to resist and resent and undermine and rebel against those in

authority. Sin takes the beauty of true biblical authority and submission and perverts it into a measure of one's intrinsic worth and value.

But now here's what's so amazing. It was actually the Son's submission to the Father in coming into this world and being obedient even to the point of death on a cross—it was this ultimate act of submission that has now set us free again to reflect the realities of authority and submission as these things have always existed even in God Himself. The Gospel of our own deliverance from sin and death was accomplished *through* the realities of submission and authority, and so it's this same Gospel that restores submission and authority in our human relationships to its true beauty.

Even as the Gospel calls wives to **submit to their husbands in everything**, and even as the Gospel calls husbands to **exercise their headship over their wives only as the means for loving their wives as Christ loved the church**, so also that **same** Gospel that calls husbands and wives to headship and submission has also created this born-again covenant community where, Paul says:

➤ Galatians 3:28 — There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel sets us free from the power of sin and enables us to experience the beauty of true Biblical authority and submission within the context of the covenant community – as covenant husbands and covenant wives, and covenant parents and covenant children, and covenant church members and covenant elders. But Peter's point here in this letter is that the Gospel does even more than this. Peter's point is that the Gospel sets us free to live holy lives of submission even to those outside the covenant community – even to Nero's and Pontius Pilate's, even to unjust masters, and even to husbands who are disobedient to the Word. There's a sense in which this is where the full power and beauty of the Gospel is fully unveiled. There's a sense in which this is actually the *ultimate* expression of the freedom that we have in Christ. It must always be against this backdrop, then, that we read what Peter says in verse one:

II. 1 Peter 3:1 — Likewise, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, so that **even if some are disobedient to the word**, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your pure conduct in fear [the fear of the Lord].

Husbands who are disobedient to the word are unsaved husbands,¹ but more than that, in the context of Peter they can also be antagonistic husbands who persecute their wives because of their faith in Jesus. (cf. 1 Pet. 3:13-17) Peter mentions the hope of them being “won without a word” because many unbelieving husbands would likely forbid their wives from ever speaking to them about their faith. Plutarch gives us a window into what was commonly expected in Peter's day:

“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 and to shut the door to superstitious cults and strange superstitions.” (Plutarch; Quoted in Schreiner)

¹ Cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Romans 1:5; 2:8; 15:18; 16:26; Acts 6:7; 1 Peter 1:2; 4:17

Do you see the obvious tension here? The moment a wife confesses Christ as her Savior and Lord and refuses to worship the gods of her husband she'll be automatically perceived by her unbelieving husband and by all the community around her as a rebellious and unsubmitive wife. But it's precisely in this context of apparent insubordination and rebellion—and it's precisely to these disobedient husbands who may be antagonizing and persecuting their wives—that Peter calls the Christian wives to submit. He calls them to submit, yes, but only in the full power and freedom that is theirs in the Gospel. We see this not only in that Peter addresses the wives and exhorts them to submit themselves, but also in how he describes this submission.

III. 1 Peter 3:1 — Submit yourselves to your own husbands, so that even if some are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word **by the conduct** [*anastrophe*] of their wives, **when they observe your pure** [*hagnos*] **conduct in fear** [*phobos*] [**the fear of the Lord**].

Now do you know where all this language is coming from? Peter has already used this same language when he described the calling of all of us as God's children.

➤ 1 Peter 1:14–17, 22 — As obedient children, not being conformed to the lusts of your former ignorance; but as he who called you is holy, you also be **holy** [*hagios*] in all your **conduct** [*anastrophe*], since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, **conduct yourselves** [*anastrepho*] **with fear** [*phobos*] throughout the time of your sojourning... Having **purified** [*hagnizo*] your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another unwaveringly from a pure heart.

Peter sees the wife's submission to her disobedient husband as nothing more and nothing less than the context for living out her high and holy calling as a daughter of God – the *very same* high and holy calling that we all have as sons and daughters of God. You see, what we have to remember is that the ultimate problem is never just the Nero's and the Pontius Pilate's, or the unjust masters, or the disobedient husbands (those in authority), the problem is always also my own pride and self-will and rebellion as one under authority. And so we can rejoice to know that the Gospel doesn't wait to change and transform us (those under authority) until it has changed and transformed those in authority over us. The Gospel is powerful to change us now so that we might submit even to those who are still disobedient to the Word. This is a miracle of God's saving grace!

So *what is it* that Peter says the disobedient husbands will observe in their wives so that they *may* even be won to the faith? It's not simply their submission. It's the entire holy calling that they live out in the context of that submission – it's the application of their holy calling and their freedom in Christ to their specific station in life as wives under the authority of their husbands. So we go on to read in verses 3-4:

IV. 1 Peter 3:3-4 — Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but [let your adorning be] the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable [beauty] of a meek and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.

In Peter’s day, as in our day, a woman’s adornment could easily become a statement of her “independence.” It’s one thing to want to be “beautiful,” but it’s another thing when that pursuit of beauty becomes in subtle ways an expression of “power,” or of pride, or of immodesty. The NASB says, “Your adornment must not be **merely** external...” in order to be clear that it’s not wrong to wear fancy hairstyles or jewelry—or clothes! But I think the simplicity of Peter’s words captures the meaning better: “Do not let your adorning be external...” Don’t ever think of your true beauty as consisting in outward appearance. One’s true “adorning” is not to be external at all, but rather the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable [beauty] of a meek and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.”

Now, has Peter said anything here that doesn’t already apply to all of us? Remember what the Lord said to Samuel when he went to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the next king of Israel:

- 1 Samuel 16:7 — Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

The externals of dress and hair and jewelry should always be expressive and representative of what’s on the inside – of a humble, and modest, and submissive spirit – or as Peter says, of “a meek and quiet spirit.” But now I have to ask again: Is it really only wives who are called to be meek and quiet? Not at all! These are qualities to which we’re all called as God’s holy children, and we’ll see in a minute that this is actually really important to Peter’s point.

Many translations translate “gentle” instead of “meek” because what this Greek word has in mind is not only the meek and humble attitude of our hearts, but also the gentle and deferential conduct that always flows out of such a heart – the conduct that never demands its own rights or insists on its own way.

- Ephesians 4:1-2 (cf. Col. 3:12-13; Titus 3:1-2) — I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and **gentleness**, with patience, bearing with one another in love.
- Matthew 11:29 — Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am **gentle** and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
- Matthew 5:5 (1 Pet. 3:13-15) — Blessed are the **meek/gentle**, for they shall inherit the earth.

All of us as Christians are called equally to meekness and gentleness, in the same way that we’re also all called equally to “quietness.” (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:2) Once again, what Peter has in mind here is not just a quiet *spirit*, but a peaceable, quiet *conduct* that flows **out of** a spirit within us that’s quiet and at rest. You see, Peter’s point here isn’t keeping our mouths shut and not talking (though that may be the result at times), but rather a spirit within

us that's quiet and at rest and truly at peace, and, because of this, able to live peaceably with others – even with a husband who is disobedient to the word.

These two simple words—meekness and quietness, or gentleness and peaceableness—are together just a simple summary description of true Christian character. So do you see that Peter is not calling wives to a Christianity that no one else is called to? He's calling wives to live out the same holy calling that we all have, only within the specific context of their station in life—the same holy calling that we all have, only within the context of their submission to their husbands. In fact, it's this calling that we all have to a meek and quiet spirit that creates and enables the wife's submission.

Is Peter calling the Christian wife to slavery?—Especially the one who's married to a disobedient husband? Not at all! He's actually calling her to freedom – to the fullest realization of her holy calling (which is the same for all of us) and her true identity as a daughter of the King. None of this has ever been *just* about submission – or even *mainly* about submission. It's about Christianity – a Christianity applied faithfully to every circumstance and in every station of life. In other words, submission isn't just one of God's commands (though it is this). For the wife in relationship to her husband, submission is also a context for living out all of God's commands.

Peter reminds wives (and so he also reminds all of us!) that it's this meek and quiet spirit that is, in God's sight, very precious. I wonder, How much is the “opinion” of God *really* worth to us? In 1 Timothy 2, Paul uses this same word for “precious” to describe the “*costly* attire” that some women are given to. (1 Tim. 2:9) In secular Greek, this word was also used in the same way. So Peter's once again setting up a contrast between the external adornment that may be beautiful or cute or sexy in the world's sight but worthless in the sight of God, and that inward adorning of a meek and quiet spirit that in God's sight is costly and precious. Peter calls it an “imperishable” beauty. And do you know why this is? It's because he's already spoken of the “imperishable” *seed* by which we've been begotten anew (1 Pet. 1:23) and the “imperishable” *inheritance* that's kept in heaven for us. (1 Pet. 1:3-4) So now he wants us to see that it's this imperishable beauty and adorning of a Christian wife that enables her to fully rejoice in her new life in Christ and her future hope in heaven. Do you see once again how the Christian wife's submission even to a disobedient husband is seen fully in the light of her identity as a child and an heir of God? So Peter goes on to write in verses 5-6:

V. 1 Peter 3:5–6 — For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you have become her children, if you are doing good and not fearing anything that is frightening.

Sarah wasn't perfect, and neither was Rebekah, or Rachel, or Leah, but they were all “holy” women because they were all chosen by God and because they all hoped and trusted in God (in His word and His promises). And how did these holy women who hoped and trusted in God adorn themselves? By submitting to their own husbands. In the end, it was because Sarah's hope and trust was in God that she was free to obey Abraham, calling him “lord.” (Gen. 18:12)

In the same way, how can Christian wives today have the joy of knowing that they, too, are holy women—daughters of Sarah—who’ve been chosen by God and are trusting and hoping in Him? Peter writes: “And you have become her children, if you are doing good and not fearing anything that is frightening.”

What is the good that the Christian wife does? It’s the same good that we’re all called to. It’s all her pure conduct that flows only from her fear of the Lord and not from her fear of any man. (cf. Prov. 31:30) It’s her gentleness and peaceableness that flows always from a meek and quiet spirit. It’s *this* good (that we’re *all* called to), **lived out faithfully in the context of her submission to her husband.**

Conclusion

Peter sets before us the Christian wife as an example and model for us all.

First, we see in the example of a Christian wife married to a disobedient husband a model of how we’re all to live as sojourners and foreigners in this world. Later on in this same chapter, Peter writes:

- 1 Peter 3:13–15 — Now who is there to harm you if you are **zealous for what is good**? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. **Have no fear of them, nor be troubled**, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; **yet do it with meekness and fear...**

In the second place, we see in the example of a Christian wife a model of the submission and obedience that should characterize us all as those who hope and trust in God. Remember that for those under authority submission is a holy lifestyle – it’s a continual spirit and attitude of deference and willing obedience. Do we see our Christian lives as always characterized by active and purposeful submission? And do we see in this willing submission our true liberty and freedom in Christ?