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A Rebellious Spouse, Part 2

The book of Proverbs is NOT didactic literature- meaning it was NOT written to give authoritative teaching to God's people. It's wisdom literature. It was written to give wise advice to the man or woman of God to protect them from foolish thinking or living. And so, we read this:

Proverbs 12:21: "No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble."

Is it true that if you are righteous you will not see trouble in this life? And, are wicked people in life *always* "filled with trouble"? Clearly not (cf. Psalm 73:1-14)! However, what this proverb says is generally true when it comes to life. If you do what is right, in most cases, you will

avoid trouble. That is a proverb!¹

That having been said, insofar as the content of a Proverb is elsewhere taught in Scripture as authoritative, we can say that a Proverb is much more than wise advice, BUT a biblical assertion of truth.

Proverbs 4:23, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it *flow* the springs of life.”

Proverbs 16:9, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”

These and many other Proverbs are authoritative, universal truths! We need not think very long before we can quote other verses in the Bible which teach that:

- God most certainly is sovereign over life and so determines the steps of a man (~1 Peter 2:8b; Acts 13:48).
- Our heart determines whether or not we will reap life or death in our lives (~Mark 7:21-23; 1 Timothy 4:16).

That having been said, I take Proverbs 14:1 as a wise observation which I have found to be true.

Proverbs 14:1, “The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.”

It is sad for me to say this, but in the context of ministry, I have seen Christian women destroy their marriage as well as their children on account of what they do and say.² They may mean well for they loudly proclaim:

- *I want my husband to love Christ.*
- *I want my children to want to read the Bible.*
- *I want my home to be an example of what it means to be a Christian.*

But how they go about attaining these ends is akin to “...the thrusts of a sword...” (Proverbs 12:18a)! And so, after years of griping, complaining, moralizing, criticizing, pontificating... they become the poster child of Proverbs 25:24.

Proverbs 25:24, “It is better to live in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.”

So, the question is this: How can a woman of God influence her husband³ for good without coming across as “contentious” or manipulative?

One must see, that is the focus of 1 Peter 3:1-7 with the question of influence! Truly, you can’t be married and NOT influence your spouse. The question is: How? How ought a woman to

influence her husband?

Peter gives the answer. A generation into the Kingdom of God witnessed a social development which did NOT occur in the Old Testament, the wife in a pagan marriage would become a Christian! Recall this was significant because as a pagan woman, she herself, her husband, and the society in which she lived understood her to be:

- Stupid.
- Uneducated.
- As valuable as livestock.
- Without rights.
- Good only for the pleasure of a man or the bearing of children.

Yet in coming to Christ, the woman was introduced to reality where, through discipleship, she learned that she was NOT worthless or stupid, BUT just as valuable as a man! In fact, far from being disposable, she was important to God, bound by His word, and so called to serve NOT simply her husband, BUT ultimately the LORD!⁴ So how was she to be a witness for Christ? That was the question of the hour! God gives us the answer in the text before us. It begins with understanding the foundation of a woman's ministry in marriage:

- It is "submission," yes to her husband, BUT ultimately to the Lord!
- As such, it is a commitment to doing God's work in her marriage God's way — which is the way of honoring, lifting up, and so encouraging her husband. It is placing her wants, desires, and needs beneath her husband's out of love for Christ!

When the godly wife approaches her husband and home in this way, notice the consequences of the wife's call.

1 Peter 3:1. "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."

This text says two things: First, it is possible to be used by God to win an unbelieving (or by application, a rebellious) husband to the Lord. Accordingly, this is something that ought to be desired, sought, and prayed for. But secondly, this is attained NOT by anything she says or does for her husband, BUT as she grows in her walk and so becomes a godly woman! That is God's plan for how an unbelieving husband is won to the Lord! Long before she opens her mouth, she is called to adorn the gospel by her life — which should be no surprise because this is our first and final apologetic as believers!

Titus 2:9-10, "*Urge* bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect."

The word for “adorn” (κοσμέω [*kosmeō*]) comes from a word meaning “to order” and so refers to arranging something in proper order to give it symmetry, comeliness, and beauty. When it comes to our witness to non-believers, way before we open our mouths, the call for us is to begin with a life that reflects the holiness, kindness, and love of God! Dr. MacArthur wrote of this passage:

What makes the church attractive and influential in the world for the Lord is not its strategy or its programs but the virtue and holiness of its people. His people therefore are to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior by their submissiveness, by the excellence of their work, by their respectful attitude, by their honesty, and by their loyal service to their employer- whether he is a fellow Christian or a rank pagan, fair or unfair, pleasant or unpleasant, deserving or undeserving. (MacArthur, 1996, p. 103)

That is the idea in the 1 Peter 3. According to this passage, the behavior of a Christian wife is the most valuable tool God uses to open the heart of her husband to the gospel. As such we conclude that a woman’s ministry and witness to her spouse, first and foremost, is relational! Rebellious husbands are won to the Lord first by the example, graciousness, and kindness of their wife!

You say, *“You mean my first and main resource in influencing my husband is doing nothing to change him, BUT simply being a godly woman? I’m just supposed to trust God?”* Indeed! According to the 1 Peter 3, your primary approach when it comes to influencing your husband is a life of dependence upon God,

1 Peter 3:5, “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.”

So, the question this poses to all women (in Peter’s day as well as our own) is this: Will you submit to the Lord? Are you willing to do it His way? And so, trust God to work His will in the life of your husband through the witness of your godly behavior? Bottom line, that is the calling here! Yet the approach is NOT without its *“Personal”* benefits! Notice, the consequence of the wife’s call in her own life.

1 Peter 3:6b, “Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right [that is, ‘submit’] without being frightened by any fear.”

When a woman resorts to trusting God to change her husband through her godly, submissive behavior, the net effect in the woman’s life is a growing trust and so reliance upon the Lord. How could it be any other way?

Now, when this occurs what is the *personal* result? The wife becomes one who in all circumstance is “...not frightened by any fear.” And so, she becomes one who lives her life in peace and confidence- regardless of the circumstances into which her unbelieving husband

might bring her and the family!

Now, all that being said, how does godly submissive translate to real life? What does it look like? Peter addresses this.

After calling the wife to “submit” (v. 1), Peter described how this translates into life:

1 Peter 3:2b, “As they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

First, notice the word “observe”! It speaks of a careful, prolonged look over the course of years! So first understand, we are NOT talking here about one act of kindness or godliness, BUT a characteristic of life! Chuck Swindoll described it this way:

It may take only a few hours to prepare for an elegant evening, but it takes a lifetime to build an elegant character. (Swindoll, 2014, pp. 187-188)

And it is that character that God uses to change a spouse! That is the idea here.

That having been said, “chaste behavior” speaks of a life that is “undiluted with ulterior motives” and so is pure and free from moral defilement. “Respectful behavior” speaks of a life “driven out of reverence for God.” Translated to life. In the context of a woman’s ministry in marriage, because she is driven out of a love and devotion to God, a wife’s conduct ought NOT to be connected to the acts or attitudes of her husband, BUT to the Lord and His will and work! As such, her conduct in her marriage⁵ is the overflow of her walk with Christ!⁶

Yet, there is more. Here Peter further describes how “submission” translates to a woman’s actions. Speaking of her character, Peter describes the submissive heart this way:

1 Peter 3:4b, “...the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit...”

Far from making them loud, opinionated pontificates, godly submission gives the wife a “gentle and quiet spirit”. Let’s talk about these two words. Gentle: *πραῦς* (*praus*); it is the word for “meekness” in the Bible- which speaks of strength under control. Christ is the best example of this (cf. Matthew 11:29)! It is having the ability to crush the world with a word, yet not breaking a bruised reed (cf. Isaiah 42:3)!

So, while the woman might have the ability to talk her husband under the table, make better business decisions, and the like, she controls herself and so labors to support, encourage, and love her husband (again, ranking her wants, desires, and needs beneath his). This doesn’t preclude her from sharing her opinion or giving wise counsel. Yet this comes well after, when once she has disarmed her husband through a life of godliness, genuineness, love, and care!

Quiet: *ἡσύχιος* (*hēsuchia*); this word speaks of being “still” or “tranquil.” It refers to the “absence of internal disturbances.” The idea here is “not being frightened by any fear.”

Translated to a woman in marriage, it speaks of an internal calmness arising from the knowledge that it is NOT just the king “whose heart is as channels of water in the hand of the Lord” (Proverbs 21:1), BUT also her husband’s- such that she trusts God to “...turn [his heart] wherever He wishes.”

Combined, “submission” translates to a life which is the opposite of a “contentious spirit.” It speaks of a confident love, honor, and care wherein the husband knows that he is both respected and loved by his wife. When a man views his wife in this way, generally speaking he will want her opinion, help, and guidance!

That is the flavor of submission! Again, it does NOT exclude talking about God or sharing the gospel. BUT it most certainly doesn’t begin there when it comes to a rebellious man! That having been said, Peter turns to a natural caution when it comes to the wife in her relationship with her husband. Peter, speaking of the focus of a godly women when it comes to how she adorns herself in marriage, writes this:

1 Peter 3:3-4, “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 person⁷ of the heart, with the imperishable [incorruptible] quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”

Once again, the focus of this passage is on HOW a woman influences her husband. Again, it is going to happen! The question is, “How?” And what is the influence? Well throughout the ages, women have utilized all sorts of “tools” (no doubt unintentionally) to influence their spouse:

- The doing of good things.
- Encouraging words.
- Compliments.
- Affection.
- Hidden love notes.

But when these don’t work, that which was unintentional becomes intentional:

- Crying.
- Threats.
- Withholding affection.
- Criticizing.
- Anger/Clammor.

In fact, in the ancient world where women were viewed as without value and on the level of livestock, the most natural way a woman might influence her husband was through their dress- that is, adorning themselves in such a way that she caught the eye of her husband such that he

might pay attention to her.

Here Peter teaches that that is NOT the way! Indeed! For the woman of God, the way to influence a man is NOT anything external (like her dress). RATHER and again, it must be through her character! Speaking of the role relationship of women in the body of Christ, Paul wrote,

1 Timothy 2:9-10, “Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.”

This is how a godly woman approaches her marriage! In fact, when the womenfolk in Old Testament times stood before their husbands and the world on the basis of their beauty, notice what God did... He humbled them!

Isaiah 3:16-24, “Moreover, the Lord said, ‘Because the daughters of Zion are proud, and walk with heads held high and seductive eyes, and go along with mincing steps, and tinkle the bangles on their feet, therefore the Lord will afflict the scalp of the daughters of Zion with scabs, and the Lord will make their foreheads bare.’ In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of *their* anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings, festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks, money purses, hand mirrors, undergarments, turbans, and veils. Now it will come about that instead of sweet perfume there will be putrefaction; instead of a belt, a rope; instead of well-set hair, a plucked-out scalp; instead of fine clothes, a donning of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty.”

This is God’s estimate of physical beauty as a tool of influence! That having been said, there is nothing wrong with a woman wanting to look good for her spouse (the bride in the Song of Solomon was beautifully adorned, cf. SS. 1:10; 4:11; 7:1).⁸ The issue boils down to motive. Are you doing this to influence your spouse? Or are you doing this because you respect and love your spouse?

So, ladies, heed this caution. The way to influence your husbands is through a life of godliness. This truly is “precious in the sight of God” (v. 4b)!

With that, lastly, we ask the question as twenty-first century men and women: How relevant is this teaching for women living today... 2,000 years later?! How much of what Peter here exhorts was cultural? That brings us to the relevance of 1 Peter 3.

1 Peter 3:5-6a, “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...”

It is important for us to see how Peter’s appeal to “holy women of old” as well as to “Sarah” fits

into his overall argument. When it comes to a godly woman living with a non-Christian husband (or by application, a rebellious husband), Peter has spoken of such concepts as

- Submission.
- Godly behavior.
- Trusting God.
- A gentle and quiet spirit.
- Focusing NOT on the outside of the cup, BUT on the inside.

Furthermore, we've seen that the first century brought a unique challenge for female converts to Christ as her world considered her to be on the same level as livestock, ignorant, silly, and emotional. In this regard, it would be very easy to conclude that Peter's teaching here was applicable only to the women of the first century AD. Afterall, speaking of "submission" is rather archaic and outdated for today's audience!

Yet we must see that what Peter exhorted here was/is NOT confined to the Greco-Roman world, BUT to all ages, times, and places! We know this because of Peter's final appeal! His "proof text" for his teaching here came from a culture 1800 years before his time! So just as when Paul appealed to creation for his argument about the role relationship of a woman in the church (1 Timothy 2:13-14), Peter here goes back 1800 years to "Sarah", effectively saying, "Why should a woman do this? Because that has been God's standard from the beginning!"

Accordingly, we must see that what Peter wrote here is NOT archaic OR inapplicable to today's culture. Rather, it is God's will for all women at all times- whether we go back 3,800 years to the time of Abraham! 2,000 years to the time of Christ! Or last week!

So, that is the call of a godly women living in a hostile home.

References

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End Note(s)

¹ Other examples would be Proverbs 10:4, “Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.” No doubt we’ve all seen diligent workers who are dirt poor. But Solomon here makes a very good point. Generally speaking, if you are not diligent you will be poor. If you are diligent, your needs will be provided for! Or Proverbs 19:6, “Many will entreat the favor of a generous man, and every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.” Are we to conclude from this proverb that “Every man will be your friend” if you just give them gifts?

² The book of Proverbs was written with three types of people in mind: the wise (the growing Christian), the fool (the non-Christian), and the simple (the naïve Christian). Clearly, Proverbs 14:1 has the nonbeliever in mind. However, by way of application, I am here referencing a Christian woman who is battling like a non-Christian!

³ It is clear that 1 Peter 3:1-6 is addressing the scenario of an unsaved husband. As Wayne Grudem wrote, “Those who do not obey the word are husbands who are unbelievers; the present tense verb (apeithousin) suggests a pattern of life characterized by disobedience not only to the gospel but also to God’s standards in other areas of life. The word means not just that they ‘do not believe the word’ (NIV), but has a much stronger sense of active disobedience to the standards of Scripture and even rebellion against them (see note at 2:8 on apeitheō, ‘disobey’).” (Grudem, 2009, pp. 145-146) However, for the sake of application, I will be addressing marriages where the Christian husband is perceived to be in rebellion, not in gross sin which would require the process of Matthew 18 to be followed.

⁴ You must see that this was radical in Peter’s day! Thomas Schreiner made this observation, “Plutarch said: ‘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.’ The wives Peter addressed, then, would be considered socially radical in Peter’s day since they had adopted a different religion from their husbands.” (Schreiner, 2003, pp. 152-153)

⁵ As that is the case, the woman’s submission to her husband is NOT absolute. As she is bound NOT by her husband, BUT the Lord, she is bound therefore NOT to do what her husband demands of her, BUT only that which does NOT violate God’s word! And so, the picture here is that of genuineness and trust in God!

⁶ “What should be emphasized here is that the fear is not directed to the husband, but as we saw in 2:18 (see commentary) ‘fear’ in 1 Peter is always directed toward God. Peter was not suggesting, therefore, that wives should fear their husbands (cf. 3:6), nor was he even suggesting that wives should respect their husbands (though Paul commended such in Eph 5:33). Instead, Peter’s point was that the good conduct of wives should stem from their relationship with God.” (Schreiner, 2003, p. 152)

⁷ “Person is the translation of anthrōpos, ‘man,’ demonstrating the biblical use of the masculine gender to describe even a woman.” (MacArthur, 1996, p. 180)

⁸ “Some have taken this out of its context and opted for a ‘plain Jane’ approach, resulting in an unkempt, even sloppy appearance that draws attention to the externals just as much as an exaggerated, flamboyant adornment does.” (Swindol, 2014, p. 187)