

## This Exiled Life – Part 3

### The Beauty of a Submissive Wife

1 Peter 3:1-6

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<sup>1</sup> Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they see your respectful and pure conduct. <sup>3</sup> Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— <sup>4</sup> but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. <sup>5</sup> For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup> as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. 1 Peter 3:1–6 (ESV)

This week a much-anticipated book was released entitled *The Benedict Option*. I will be reading this important book not because I will agree with everything in it, but because it is attempting to address what 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians should do in light of the decay of our culture. It is one strategy of many, and it needs to be understood.

The author, Rod Dreher, encourages Western believers to look to the example of St. Benedict of Nursia, a sixth-century monk who navigated the collapse of the Roman Empire and the Dark Ages by creating thriving Christian communities within an ever-changing and challenging culture. Here is one insightful quotation:

*The first Christians gained converts not because their arguments were better than those of the pagans but because people saw in them and their communities something good and beautiful – and they wanted it. This led them to the Truth.<sup>1</sup>*

Dreher is trying to find a strategy for how to live “in” the world when the world becomes increasingly hostile. His book is another attempt to help 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western Christians think through how to navigate the culture, and he examines the lessons from Benedictine monasteries as a possible roadmap.

Now I’m somewhat skeptical of yet another monastic movement, but I understand his concern. The heart behind this series on 1 Peter has been to try and get our heads and hearts around this issue. How do we live in our present culture? How do we live out the gospel? How do we evangelize the world? What should our church look like? What kind of people should we be?

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<sup>1</sup> Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, (New York, New York: Sentinel, 2017).

Or, in the case of our specific text today: how does a Christian wife live when her marriage has become the place of her exile? You see, this text is often cited in the context of various treatments about marriage, and that certainly applies on many levels.

But I don't want you to miss the fact that this text is part of a broader message about living in a world when your faith in Jesus is really costly. And I would argue that there are few places more painful than when a godly wife is trying to follow Jesus while being married to an ungodly man. This text shows us that married Christian women live as exiles first and foremost through God-honoring submission.

Whether you are married or single, in a good marriage or a bad one, married to an unbeliever or a believer, whether you are a man or a woman, there are important lessons to learn here.

### **This Exiled Life**

Today we are back in 1 Peter, and we are starting chapter three where Peter continues to press the application of what it means to be a Christian exile. We took a four week break to talk about stewardship, and I'm sure that you do not remember where we left off in our study, so let's do a quick review.

Peter is writing to a group of believers who became exiles without ever leaving their homeland. They had come to faith in Jesus, and they found themselves in a counter-cultural position. Their belief in Jesus and the requisite gospel-shaped lifestyle created a tension with their culture. Peter writes to believers to help them navigate a complicated and potentially hostile world.

In chapter one Peter points us toward our heavenly inheritance, reminds us that suffering results in praise and glory at the final day of judgment, and calls us to be a holy people. Christian exiles see the world differently, and they live differently. We are to embrace the calling of our Christian exile. We are to understand why we are on earth, how to interpret suffering, and why we should be godly.

Peter further expands that idea in chapter two in regards to how we should think about our identity. Christian exiles are a chosen race, a holy people, a people for His own possession in order to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Now that gospel-shaped identity might sound like it could foment rebellion or anarchy, and that is why Peter talks about the importance of godly submission.

When Christian exiles understand who God is, who they are, what their future is, and what culture is like, their response is godly submission. Our normative posture is willing obedience when it comes to "every human institution" (2:13) and even masters who are not very kind (2:18-20). In other words, one of the main ways that believers live out their exile is by joyful, God-centered, eternally-minded submission. And it is more than just our fallback position, as if we are giving up.

Rather, submission is a divinely-given means of living out the gospel in a way that makes Christianity powerful and transformative. It is counter-intuitive, even counter-cultural, and it follows the example of Jesus:

*<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:21–23 (ESV)*

This instruction to married women is simply the next expression of what the exiled life is supposed to look like. It needs to be seen, not as a random command given only to married women, but as a part of the overall message to everyone who is trying to find their way forward in a potentially hostile culture. And yet for married women, this is a very important command to understand and embrace.

### **Three Affirmations of Submission**

1 Peter 3:1-6 identifies that married Christian women live out their exiled life first and foremost through godly submission. To make that point clear and commendable, Peter gives three affirmations of submission.

#### **1) It is a strategy with imperfect husbands**

Verse one begins with the word “likewise,” and that is why I believe that what follows through verse 6 is connected to what has been said previously to everyone about human authorities: to slaves in dealing with their masters, and about the example of Jesus. Submission is how a godly woman lives out her exile.

Now what do we mean by submission? The word means to arrange under, to obey, or to follow. It carries the idea of joyfully and willingly following another’s leadership. When we talked about this in relationship to the government, we learned that we should respect and follow the laws of the land, even if we don’t believe the human institution is ultimate. When it comes to servants and masters, believers should follow the leadership of their masters, even if they are not kind or reasonable. Submission involves attitudes and actions that see beyond the earthly authority and look to honor God through how the believer lives in relationship to earthly people and situations.

Peter applies this important biblical word to “your own husbands.” He says this for two reasons. First, Peter has a particularly challenging situation in view where a wife has become a believer and the husband has not, or she is trying to live a godly life and he is not interested in doing the same. Peter is speaking into one of the most intimate and painful circumstances that a woman can find herself in. What does a woman do if her husband is not on the same page spiritually? How do you live with a man who is not godly? What is your playbook? We’ll talk about this in a minute.

The second reason he writes this is because Peter is not saying that all women should submit to all men as if women are somehow less in value. Sometimes people have used this text as the basis for communicating that women are inferior, that they shouldn’t have opinions, or that they should submit to every man. In fact, the New Testament teaching was quite progressive for the day in which was written identifying an equality between men and women in Christ (Gal 3:28) and a mutual authority over one another’s body in terms of sexuality (1 Cor 7:4).

So, we need to be careful that we celebrate and affirm God's plan for order and authority in the home as wives joyfully submit to their husbands, but we also need to be sure that we say what submission does not mean. It doesn't mean that a woman cannot disagree with her husband, that she shouldn't think for herself, that she should tolerate abuse, or that her life is totally wrapped up in her husband's.<sup>2</sup>

Submission is a gift that a wife gives her husband to follow his leadership, to affirm his God-given role, and to do whatever she can to support him as he sets the pace for the family. Submission is an attitude of honoring an earthly husband out of love and reverence for your heavenly Lord and Master.

That is what submission is. So if you are a husband, be sure that you are an intentional, godly leader. Most women that I've talked with about this subject crave for their husbands to be the spiritual pace-setter of the home. Often the challenge in regards to submission is that there is nothing to keep pace with. Rather, some women are left in the unenviable position of trying to follow someone who isn't leading. Second, if you are a wife, you need to see submission as part of your overall plan for the Christian life. It is one of the main ways that you express what it means to be a Christian exile. It is your main strategy.

Now, this text is amazing because it not only commends submission in general, but it also affirms the strategic value of submission in reaching disobedient husbands. Verse one says "even if some do not obey the word," which can mean disobedience or outright unbelief. What is a godly woman to do if she is married to an ungodly man? How does she win him toward obedience or belief?

The answer is a life of godly submission. Rather than nagging him, berating him, or being condescending to him, she is to win him "without a word." Now this certainly does not mean that she cannot talk with him. The idea is that she wins him by living Christ-like before him and with him. She focuses her attention, not on his short-comings or on what she wishes he would be, but on her own pursuit of righteousness.

She lives a life that is full of "respectful and pure conduct." I think this puts some color on what submission is like. The words "respect and purity" are speaking to her relationship with God. Her husband is able to see her godliness, especially under pressure, and it serves to woo him toward the gospel. In so doing, her submission is an effective strategy for living as an exile and winning her husband's heart.

If you are married to an imperfect husband, this is a very important verse for you to understand. What's more, if you are married to a man who is terribly disobedient or an unbeliever, this verse is especially important for you. Joyful, God-centered, and obedience-oriented submission is a powerful strategy that the Lord can use to reach your husband's heart. I can only imagine the level of pain and discouragement that you must battle. Living as an exile in your own home is uniquely costly. It takes faith to believe that God can use your submission as a means of evangelism or conviction. But living by faith in God in every arena – even the most intimate and personal – is what this exiled life is all about. You can trust the Lord's strategy of submission.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2007/03/01/what-biblical-submission-does-and-does/>

## 2) It is the essence of true beauty

The second affirmation in this text connects submission to true beauty. I find it amazingly insightful and pastorally smart for Peter to speak into this. After all, God's design for women included a built-in desire for attractiveness. Every woman, at a very young age, feels this longing. Here is yet another way that being an exile transforms the basics of life and culture.

Verse 3 starts with a command for a woman not to be focused only on external beauty. Peter even provides a few illustrations: "the braiding of hair, the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear." Every culture and the various sub-cultures within each culture has various markers of beauty. Just think about how much time, energy, and money is spent trying to achieve or maintain attractiveness. I read a few articles that suggested that women in the United States spend 7 billion dollars a year on make-up, that the average woman in Britain will spend 474 equivalent days – a year and three months – standing in front of mirror applying cosmetics. This averages out to about three hours a week. Just be aware this week of how many commercials, advertisements, various magazines, and social media posts that focus on beauty. It is everywhere.

Now before you think I'm advocating for denim jumpers and culottes shorts, Peter is not suggesting that these things connected with beauty are inherently wrong; he merely identifies the things in culture most often associated with beauty and attractiveness. Being a Christian exile does not require you to be unattractive or to look odd. The problem here relates to the focus. That is why the NASB translates verse three as "your adornment must not be *merely* external..."

Peter is not arguing *against* being attractive; he is concerned about *only* being physically beautiful. He wants Christian exiles to get underneath the standard cultural definition, and to see the true beauty of a submissive spirit. Christian exiles understand and value what is truly beautiful.

Notice the praised beauty in verse 4: *4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 1 Peter 3:4 (ESV)*

A few observations about this verse:

- the clear focus is on the internal aspect of the person, the heart.
- this kind of beauty does not fade
- the beauty is connected to a "gentle and quiet spirit" which is the spirit of submission
- this kind of beauty is precious in God's sight

Peter's vision is for a certain kind of woman who lives in the world as a Christian exile. He affirms the beauty of a God-centered, gentle, respectable, and quiet spirited woman. Peter upholds the kind of woman whose heart is set on Christ, whose identity is secure in the gospel, and who is pursuing godliness. This kind of woman is attractive and powerful.

She is attractive because she reflects what is truly lovely – namely, the glory of God. She is powerful because she is modeling a counter-cultural and transforming way of living. There are plenty of pretty

but nasty women in the world, and Peter paints a different picture of what it means to be a woman when you are a Christian exile.

Now I may be on a bit of thin ice here, but let me ask a few pastoral questions for all of us to think about.

Men, what kind of beauty and attractiveness do you praise? If you are single, what kind of woman are you looking for and attracted to? Where does a submissive and quiet spirit fall in the order of priority for you? How are you helping your wife, your daughters, or your sisters in Christ to cherish and love a beauty that is heart-based?

Women, what kind of beauty and attractiveness is valuable to you? Do you find your security first and foremost in the gospel? Do you love godliness and a “gentle and quiet” heart as much as being “hot” or turning heads? Do you think about how to be careful with your appearance so that you are sending the right message about what is really important to you and even what you really love? Is modesty something that you consider as you ready yourself for the day?

Older women, how are you helping the younger generation understand how to live in a way that fits with this text? We need godly, older women who can model the unfading beauty of a submissive, godly heart expressed over decades. We need you to help push back the tsunami of a culture that defines beauty in categories that do not fit with 1 Peter 3. We need women like you to help affirm the attractiveness of godly submission.

What is truly attractive? What is really beautiful? The biblical answer is that true beauty is deeper than just what you look like on the outside. Real attractiveness and living as Christian exile means embracing the value of godly submission – a gentle and quiet spirit.

### **3) It is a legacy of godly hope**

The final affirmation in verses 5-6 connects the value of submission to an historical record. Peter aims to anchor what he says here to an extensive legacy. It’s almost as though he anticipates that some would say, “But you don’t live in my city. You don’t know the pressures. You don’t know what my husband is like.”

That’s why Peter makes the statement in verse five about history and hoping in God:

*<sup>5</sup> For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 1 Peter 3:5 (ESV)*

This verse is really important because it connects history, submission, and hoping in God. In order to embrace a mindset of biblical submission you have to hope in God. How so? Submission requires you to believe that God’s definition of beauty is better than the world’s definition. You can’t believe in the definition of beauty if you don’t hope in God. Second, submission is only pursued with intentionality when someone truly believes that God’s glory is worth pursuing. A woman who seeks to learn how to be submissive must hope in God. And third, submission as a strategy for a disobedient or unbelieving husband requires a great amount of hope in God. A person’s natural tendency will tilt toward other

responses if hoping in God is not primary. A wife will find herself nagging, manipulating, worrying, or pressuring her unbelieving husband. To have a gentle and quiet spirit when you are married to a difficult man requires an enormous amount of faith in God.

That's why Peter cites Sarah. He takes his readers back to perhaps the most revered woman in Israel's history. Verse 6 cites the example of Sarah in calling her husband "lord." This is likely coming from Genesis 18:12, where Sarah refers to him in this way despite their old age. Sarah's respect and honor for her husband was a part of the fabric her entire life.<sup>3</sup> Despite Abraham's imperfections and even his moments of disobedience, Sarah had a great deal of respect for him.

Therefore, Peter calls Christian women to be godly exiles by following her example. Verse 6 says, "And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening" (1 Peter 3:6). Submissive, godly women join the ranks of amazing women throughout biblical history who lived with imperfect husbands and still honored God.

So if you are a woman who has a godly man trying to follow Jesus and lead your home, be sure that you regularly cheer him on. Be an encouragement to him and affirm his leadership in your life and in the home.

And if you find yourself, as a married woman, in a situation where you are having to be submissive to a man who is ungodly or an unbeliever, read verse 6 very carefully: "do not fear anything that is frightening." There are few things more discouraging and scary than the hopeless sense of living with someone who is not on the same page or perhaps even trying to discourage you in your walk with the Lord.

The Bible is calling you to not be afraid, and instead to follow the Lord in how you demonstrate Christlikeness by doing your very best to be a godly, submissive woman. Resist the temptation to become the personalized version of the Holy Spirit for your husband. Resist the trap of discouragement because your marriage is disappointing to you. Don't go down the path of bitterness, resentment, criticism or disobedience to the Lord.

Instead, follow the example of Jesus and entrust yourself to the one who judges justly, realizing that submission is affirmed for exiles as part of a long legacy of godly women, as what true beauty looks like and as an effective strategy to reach an imperfect husband.

Wives, your submission is not giving up. It is the most strategic and powerful way that you live as an exile.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 156.