



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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We've reminded ourselves on many occasions that when everyone is selfish and self-centered and demanding their rights, there is virtually no chance for flourishing. That story will always end badly. We're also reminded that we as the people of God are called to something different and called to something more. We have been called to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Peter is reminding us that we don't just do that with words; we do it with behavior. How do we silence the critics? It's not through debate...not through arguing, but it's through our behavior that wins them to Christ—as a citizen, in relationships that are unfair—and this morning we want to talk about: what does this look like at home? If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 3. We've been working our way through 1 Peter. We find ourselves in Chapter 3, verse 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. (*NASB, 1 Peter 3:1)

Well, isn't that a little delicate? (laughter) Let's talk about that and kind of make sure we get off on the right foot here. It's really important to understand the historical context—what was going on, and why Peter is saying what he's saying. So first of all, it's worth noting that it starts, In the same way. What that's referring to is we have been told that, “Yes, we are free in Christ, but we aren't free to sin. We aren't free to rebel. We're free to be a bond slave to Christ, which means we're free to surrender and submit in order to accomplish the mission (or the calling) which we have been given.” So, we've all been called to be submissive to government, to be surrendered and submissive in relationships that are even unfair. So, for anyone to walk out the doors, specifically a woman or a wife, and say somehow you are being called to something different from everyone else, that would certainly not be true! We're all called to submit. We're all called to surrender. What God is asking of a wife is no different than what He's asking of a husband or anyone else. But it's helpful to understand the context into which these words are given.

One of the things that's worth noting is: Peter is speaking directly to the women. Now that may not impress us, but to understand in a 1st century culture that was almost unheard of! Philosophers and teachers did not teach women. So already Peter is breaking through some of the cultural codes, and he's actually speaking directly to the women, which is an act of honoring them.

The text tells us that some of these husbands are disobedient to the word, meaning they are unbelievers. So, imagine the scenario: There is a couple with a wife that comes to faith in Jesus.

In a 1st century Roman marriage, there was what they referred to as the household order. One of the ways that Rome controlled the Empire was they had certain expectations in a community and certain expectations in a marriage. It was the man's responsibility to control his home. It was the wife's responsibility to be in submission to that, even to the degree that the wife was considered to be the husband's property. She was not really to have friendships or relationships outside of his relationships, and it was expected that a wife automatically adopts the religious beliefs of the husband.

So, everything's going along fine, and then she comes to Christ. Now, immediately there is a level of disorder according to the Romans. She is no longer embracing the belief system of her husband. If she has community with other believers, she's building relationships outside of his network, which again is out of order in terms of the expectations in a Roman marriage. Now, if that becomes known, the husband will be criticized; the husband will be publicly shamed. If the husband is in business, it would probably cost him business. It would disqualify him from certain honors and positions in the community. By and large they would make his life miserable until he dealt with his home, which was considered to be out of order. Try to imagine just how delicate this has now become.

Imagine what it would be like for a Muslim couple living in Iran, and the wife comes to faith in Jesus. Try to imagine how delicate that would be for her, for her husband, for her children. If she does not conduct herself wisely, the potential ramifications could be severe, even dangerous. So, this is the kind of situation in which these wives find themselves. We've already dealt with the idea that the Christians were being slandered. A big part of the slander is that their Christianity made them rebellious—rebellious against the government, against the Caesar, rebellious against the religious establishment, against the home order. So, we've been told already that the way to silence the critics—those that slander—is by choosing to do good or to do right, and it takes a careful amount of thought and skill and strategy in a very delicate situation, or this could all end badly. That's kind of the idea behind this text.

This text is not intended to teach the biblical overview of marriage. You have to find that other places. This is dealing with a very specific situation. They are foreigners. They are aliens and strangers living in a foreign land with no real rights. They are undergoing a degree of persecution as Christians, and that persecution is about to ramp up dramatically. In the midst of all of this, this is a very delicate situation. So, the idea is not just how does the wife survive, but how does she win her husband to Christ? The text says it's not words, it's behavior, that:

...they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives. (Vs. 1b)

...as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (Vs.2)

The word chaste is a word that literally means without contamination, often referred to as moral purity. But it's really more than that. It's kind of free from any contaminated behaviors, whether that's manipulation, whether that's kind of a passive-aggressive behavior, whether there's kind of a hidden agenda. It's really free from all of that. It's just genuinely seeking to be a good wife.

Now stop and think about how delicate these dynamics are. This couple is going along, and from the husband's perspective everything seems fine. Then she comes to Christ. Now it's become very delicate. He's being criticized; he's potentially being shamed. Now she seems genuinely dissatisfied with him as a husband. She's now trying to change him as a husband, and he views Jesus as not someone who's attractive, but he views Jesus as a competitor for his wife's affections. Everything was fine until Jesus got in the picture. That doesn't make Jesus attractive. As a matter of fact, it's just the opposite. He develops deeper and deeper resentment towards this One who, in his opinion, made a mess of his marriage. That's why it's such a critically important part of the strategy that she is perceived as becoming a better wife—that now this is even a better wife, which makes her more attractive, which causes him to be more interested in this Jesus who seems to have changed her in such a wonderful way! So, the idea of chaste is just that her behavior is pure, and it's genuine as a wife to her husband.

Respectful is the same word we saw in regard to slaves and masters. Part of it carries this idea of respect—how delicate this is! This is not only difficult; this is potentially dangerous. In a 1st century Roman marriage she was viewed as property and he pretty much had the liberty to do whatever was necessary to get her under control. So, both to her and her fellow Christians, respect has the potential for disaster if this is not handled carefully. That's the idea there. Verse 3:

Your adornment must not 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 (or valued) in the sight of God. (Vs. 3-4)

In the 1st century, just like the 21st century, it wasn't uncommon that women would use their externals to try to control their man. It was a very common part of the culture. So perhaps part of the temptation for these women to somehow influence their man, even to Christ, was through an overemphasis on the external. But what Peter is saying, "Ultimately what has been radically changed in you is not on the outside but it's what's on the inside. It's what's on the inside that provides what is necessary to win his heart to Jesus." It's not saying that the outside is not important. It's just saying that the emphasis, the focus, should be on the internal character—what has really been radically changed by the power of Jesus.

It's interesting that he refers to that as the imperishable quality. The literal means the unfading quality. Some of the most insecure women I know are women that are physically very beautiful, because there's a sense in which they know this will fade away. If they've gotten their value on the basis of external beauty, there's a reality year-by-year it's going away, and then what will I have left to give me value? There is this wonderful truth of what matters most is what's on the inside, and it's not a fading glory. It's something that just becomes stronger and more attractive as the years go by. And that's in essence what Peter has said. He describes it as a gentle and quiet spirit. It's really important that you don't misunderstand those terms. The terms do not mean mousy and mild. Some of you ladies simply weren't made that way. "Good for you!" God makes women with strong leadership potential, tremendous talents and gifts. There's nowhere in the Bible where you're ever asked as a woman to be less than the person God created you to be. It's not what the terms mean. As a matter of fact, these terms were used to describe Jesus. The idea

of gentle is the Greek word that sometimes is translated meek. “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” It’s the same word. It’s a term that means strength that is brought under control. It was a term that was used to describe a horse that had been broken to the bit—twelve hundred pounds of raw power that is now useful in the hands of an owner because the horse’s power has been brought under control. The best way to think about it is to think about who you are as the person God’s made you to be and what would it look like for those talents and those strengths and those qualities to be brought under control, so that you would partner with your husband in a way that is productive, in a way that will influence him toward Christ.

Quiet has nothing to do with volume. It has nothing to do with whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert. It isn’t saying if God made you a talker, you need to not talk so much. It doesn’t have anything to do with that. It has to do with someone who is a peacemaker, someone who rather than creating conflict at home, creates peace, creates an environment where there is flourishing. It’s good to remind ourselves—both as husbands and wives—that anger, crabbiness, unpredictability are all forms of manipulation. Nobody wants to come home to that. If there is enough character that my strengths, my talents, my abilities, can be brought under control, that’s gentleness—in such a way that there is peace at home, there’s harmony; this is a wonderful place to be. That’s the idea that makes Jesus very attractive. It’s the most likely scenario where an unbelieving husband is going to say, “You know, whoever this Jesus is, He’s actually made you a wonderful wife and I’d like to know more about Him.” That’s the strategic part of this. Verse 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; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. (Vs. 5-6)

First of all, the idea of lord—some translations use the word master—is super misleading in our vocabulary. It’s not that the wives are supposed to say to their husbands, “Yes, master.” That probably wouldn’t be productive. The term actually is a term that just means a term of respect. In our language it would be a term like Mr. and Mrs. In generations gone by it wasn’t unusual that one partner or the other would refer to the other partner in social settings as Mr. and Mrs. We don’t really do that a lot these days. In terms of master like master over a slave, it’s a completely different Greek word. It’s not this term. So, don’t read into it more than what is there. But it’s also saying that this idea of submission within marriage is not unique to the Roman Empire. It’s always been a part of the plan. You can’t take two people and bring them together in a partnership without both of them being willing to surrender and to submit. That’s the only way a true partnership can work. It’s always been part of the design.

Cara: Thanks Bryan. I appreciate your insight to this passage because there's always a lot of confusion about it. So, before we go any further, "submission", what does that mean in this particular context?

Bryan: Yeah, so great question and there is a lot of confusion and I think a lot of confusion between traditional roles and biblical roles for marriage. They're not necessarily the same, but the reality that Peter's dealing with is we all submit, he's talked about submitting to the government, he's talked about slaves submitting to masters. Now he's talking about life at home, but every day we submit at work, we submit at home, to the government, we submit at school, so it's not right for women to think somehow wives are being asked to do something so radically different than everybody else. It's just this particular context is dealing with specific issues and it deals with the submission of wives to husbands, and part of it because the situation is so delicate and it's so dangerous. If she doesn't respond correctly, it's possible a lot of people might die.

Cara: Right. I appreciated the picture of a gentle and quiet spirit that you gave us, but there's actually a lot of strength there.

Bryan: Yeah, there's a lot of strength. Those are terms used to describe Jesus. So, the idea of gentle is often used to describe a horse that's broken to a bit. So, the horse is still powerful. 1200 pounds of raw muscle, but now the horse is useful, and a horse can even be gentle. I like to say so strong that you become gentle. You know, bullies may be physically strong, but they're not really strong, they're weak, they're weak in character. That's why they act the way they do. But somebody that's so strong can be gentle. The idea of quiet is like a peacemaker. It's not being an introvert or extrovert or loud or soft. As a matter of fact, one of the real helpful ways to think of biblical roles, is if at any point you feel like a biblical role is forcing you to be somebody different than who God made you to be, there's some misunderstanding. So, it's a helpful way to process through it. So, peacemaker, and you put the two together, it's to create flourishing Shalom at home, which is a beautiful picture of the love story between Christ and his church.

One other thing to add to that, that I think Peter's driving at, that's really interesting to think about. And that is he's talking about wives whose husbands are disobedient to the Word -so they're unbelievers - is the goal is to make Jesus attractive to the unbelieving husband. So, one of the worst things you can do as a believing wife is respond in such a way that Jesus feels like a competitor. You know, the marriage was fine. Then she accepts Jesus. Now she's dissatisfied with me. She's dissatisfied with her life, and he thinks Jesus has kind of stepped in here and now is competing for her affection and love. And that doesn't make Jesus attractive. [Right]. So, she needs to think strategically. If I can be like the best wife I can be, then that makes Jesus attractive and that will cause him to want to know what's made such a difference.

Cara: Seeing a positive change in that person, I think. [Yeah, yeah]. And wanting more of that.

Bryan: Yeah, in a way that's meaningful to him.

Cara: Yeah. For themselves.

Arnie: So, you're saying you don't throw the Bible at him?

Bryan: I think I am saying that.

Arnie: Wow. Pretty cool.

Bryan: Right.

Arnie: So, Bryan, Peter talks to us about Sarah here and he encourages wives not to be afraid. I find it very interesting that Abraham drug her through the wringer, took her all these places, all of these crazy scary things. How does that make sense?

Bryan: Well, I think it's a faith issue. So, she's got to trust God. You know, these are persecuted people. So, there's a lot of issues where they just have to trust God. So, you know, I'm a big fan of Sarah. We talked about this when we went through Genesis, [Right], but what an amazing thing that she trusted her husband, that he had heard from God. They left civilization to a place they didn't even know. I mean, I try to imagine that conversation, and she's amazing, that she trusted her husband and her husband's view of God. At that point, she probably knew little to nothing about this God.

So, also in Genesis 12, is what you're referring to, is the famine hits the land and they go back into Egypt and Abraham says, this is my sister. And you know, he's [crazy stuff]. Yeah. And in that ancient culture, there's little she could do, but everything was at risk. I can't imagine how terrified she must have been. But she listened, she obeyed and God steps in and works it out. And she becomes a good example of a submissive wife to a husband that was disobedient to the Word. That's the conversation in Peter. So, she's a woman of faith.