

1 Peter 3:1-6, Part B

1Pe 3:1 (NKJV) **Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,² when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear.³ Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel--⁴ rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.⁵ For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.**

In our last study we identified the two primary issues that are in focus in this section. The first area dealt with what it meant for a wife to “**be submissive**” and the second area dealt with the issue of the “**conduct**” of the wife. What we gleaned from that observation is that these two concepts are an integral part of each other. I.e., the level of godly conduct will be directly proportional to a proper understanding of the idea of submission. One of the key points that we made previously is that this passage is not dealing with an abusive husband, or someone who is abusive physically, relationally, verbally, and/or financially, as well as abusive with the children. There is nothing in the language of this passage that intimates that the husband is abusive. However, if a husband is abusive, we saw briefly that God has called the wife to “**peace**” and that in the case of an abusive husband (lost or saved) it is biblically legitimate for the abused wife to separate both herself and her family from the volatility that is ongoing in the home. I have never counselled a wife to remain in an abusive relationship, and I never will. Being abused by a husband who has no self-control is a recipe for something very tragic to happen, not only to the wife, but also to any children that may be involved. The long-term damage that an abusive husband creates is often times emotionally irreparable, both to the wife and to the children. That husband needs a great deal of help, and it remains very unhealthy for the wife and children to remain in that kind of ongoing volatility.

So, what this passage is primarily dealing with is a non-abusive husband who simply is not obeying the word of God. Ultimately, his disobedience can lead to abuse, but there is nothing in [1 Peter 3:1-6](#) that intimates that the husband is abusive, but rather just disobedient and unpersuadable. The first Greek word for “**word**” in v1 is the primary term for the Word of God – “*logos*”. It actually has the definite article “**the**” referring to a specific word. The second use of the word – “**may be won without a word**” uses the indefinite article “**a**”, and is referring to what the wife actually says. It would not make any exegetical or contextual sense for the first term “**word**” to mean something else other than the actual Word of God. We could just ask the simple question – “*do not obey what word*”, and it seems to immediately clarify that in the context of a passage on being submissive to Christ that it is clearly speaking about a husband not being obedient to his God-ordained role in the marriage and his overall conduct as clearly defined by the Word of God. There is nothing in this text that states that the husband is actually saved – nothing. To be consistent with the overall context from [1 Peter 2:13](#) to this point, obviously the government is not Christian, and the masters of the slaves were not Christians, and those who afflicted Christ were not Christians, so it would probably be wrong to read into the [1 Peter 3:1-6](#) passage that the husband is saved. However, the wording of the passage simply does not identify the husband’s salvation. I think the reason for that is simple. It is because the role and the attitude of the

wife in either case is the same. I think, right or wrong, that is why Peter uses the word “**may be won**” rather than “**may be saved**”. The word “**won**” can easily apply to either a lost husband or a saved husband, but the word “**saved**” could only apply to a lost husband.

The scenarios are endless. It may be that the husband has simply become indifferent to his spiritual and marital responsibilities, or that he is involved in ungodly activities such as pornography. It could be that he has become lazy and simply does not take care for the couple’s physical home and property. It may be that he never spends anytime in the Word of God or has any interest in being with other Christians, so it is almost impossible for him to be a spiritual leader in the family, and the burden of that responsibility continually falls on the wife. It could be that he drinks or curses or gets angry very often. It could be that he is not a good provider for his family and is always wasting the family’s revenue on his personal hobbies. It could be that he violates [Ephesians 5](#) and does not really demonstrate any love for his wife. It could be that he is constantly exasperating the children with unreasonable demands, or simply becoming angry with them when they may disobey. The list could be endless. There are plenty of those kinds of husbands within the Christian landscape – men who have made a kind of outward profession of faith, but who have wandered away from biblical Christianity.

Now, as we try to better define whether or not Peter is talking about a husband who is lost or saved, it is important to take a closer look at the actual words that Peter uses to describe the condition of the husband. The Greek word for “**do not obey**” is “*apeitheo*”, and it means to willfully and perversely not obey.¹ It is composed of the negative prefix “*a*” and the verb “*peitho*” which means to convince or persuade, or literally to not be persuaded or convinced.² It means that the husband is unwilling to be persuaded about how he should live. It is the distinct idea that the husband will not allow himself to be persuaded.³ This is really a very strong word that only occurs six times in the New Testament, but in every case it is translated as “**do not obey**” or “**disobedient**” in the NKJV. The NIV translates it as “**do not believe**” which in my mind is very different from “**do not obey**”. I really like the way that the ISV translates it – “**refuse to obey**”. The word “**refuse**” picks up on the idea of willfully not obeying, and of simply resisting to do what they know is right. A husband with that kind of resistant attitude will be a challenge for any wife.

Some of the commentaries clearly take the position that the passage is addressing wives who have unsaved husbands – and there is nothing in the text to contradict that, but there is also nothing in the text to confirm it either. Their reasoning is that many of the women who had been saved in the early church under the preaching of the gospel were also previously married to unsaved husbands who did not get saved. The husband was an unbeliever and remained an unbeliever. To make it worse, at the time that Peter wrote this passage, the wife was viewed as being inferior to the husband (which she was not), and so the likelihood of the husband being embarrassed and shamed by his wife’s decision to leave his faith could easily be viewed as an act of defiance and ultimately create a great conflict in the marriage. Under the Roman-Greco law, fathers were granted an ultimate life or death authority over the children living in their home. In like manner, the women were viewed as mere servants whose sole purpose in life was to stay at home, bear children, and obey their husbands. The husbands were granted a similar ultimate

¹ Strong, 970.

² Zodhiates, 209.

³ Wuest, *Volume 2, 1 Peter*, 71.

power to that of the fathers, so if a woman converted to Christianity, it could easily result in her husband becoming angry and abusing her in some way – and I am sure that happened often. To make it worse for the woman, there were no laws to protect her. Today, we do have laws to help protect a wife, but the wife in 1 Peter 3 could easily find her herself on a cultural island with no help available to protect her.⁴

So many of the commentaries state that it appears that a good number of these wives were trying to find a way to win their unsaved husbands to Christ. They simply read that historical scenario into the passage. However, that is not a good way to hermeneutically handle this passage. The historical probability of that being the case is realistic, but not definitive in this passage, and we just simply cannot read that into the text. Once again, even though it certainly can and does include unsaved husbands, the text is not definitive that it has to be, or that it is only unsaved husbands. Why say that? Well, it is because of the words “**even if some do not obey the word ...**” The construction of the words “**even if some**” can just as easily indicate that the majority of the husbands were believers, and many of the commentaries postulate that reality and position. It is the idea that most of the husbands do obey the word, but “**EVEN IF some do not obey the word**”. That is why we looked at the verb “*apeitheo*” for “**do not obey**” because it is a word that focuses on disobedience to the gospel rather than unbelief in the gospel – and that is very important to understand.⁵

Let me state all of this another way, and please appreciate that I am not trying to make all of this complicated, but if the passage only applied to how a believing wife responded to an unsaved husband, then how should a believing wife respond to a saved, but disobedient husband? If we limit the passage to only speaking about unsaved husbands, then we will be severely limiting the instruction to a wife with a saved husband who is unwilling to yield his life to the Word of God. In many local churches today, that certainly would be a more prevalent probability.

Now, as we get started on this passage, we are not going to rush into all of the details and word studies of the other verses just yet. That will come, but it is important to stay up at a higher level and to just talk some about marriage and the conflicts that naturally arise in marriage, and to try and see some of God’s overall purposes for the order that He Himself has created for the marriage and for the home. We know that the term “**submission**” can be a volatile term for many people, especially if they have been exposed to an abusive marriage partner, and since it seems in this passage to only apply to the wife, that creates an entirely different level of tension. I have sat in many counselling sessions and had a wife ask me how in the world I could ever ask her to submit to a husband who was failing miserably as a husband. My answer has always been the same – “*I am not asking you to do anything*”. I did not write [1 Peter 3](#), or [1 Timothy 2](#), or [Ephesians 5](#). “*It is God who is creating that direction in your life, not me.*” Every believer has to understand that God’s ways are not our ways. They never have been and they never will be. However, please appreciate that Peter is commending the idea of submission, but he is NOT, and I emphasize NOT, he is not endorsing the Roman-Greco patriarchal perspective that enforced submission. We stated it in the last study, and I emphasize again that the term “**submission**” includes a very strong voluntary aspect that cannot be overlooked or ignored. That is why it would be biblically wrong for a husband to demand of his wife “*You must submit to me!*”

⁴ MacArthur, 176-177.

⁵ Schreiner, 149.

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