

## 1 Peter 3:1-6, Part C

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, <sup>2</sup> when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear. <sup>3</sup> Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel-- <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup> as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.**

So far in our two previous studies, we have made four observations that are utterly essential to gain a proper understanding of this passage. The first is that this passage is not primarily talking about an abusive husband, even though it would certainly address one that was abusive. Secondly, it is primarily talking about a husband who is saved, even though it could just as easily address one who was not saved. The passage does not specifically identify the salvation of the husband, but it does use the example of Sarah and Abraham. Obviously, Abraham was neither abusive nor lost. Thirdly, the husband that is identified in this passage is one who is simply not willing to obey the Word of God – the “*logos*”. Then fourthly, the submission that is being addressed is in a Greek tense that grammatically implies a willing submission, a voluntary submission on the part of the wife. I.e., this is something that the wife understands that God wants her to do, so she yields herself to God’s sovereignty which she sees as the primary influence that God will use to help bring her husband to a place of obedience.

Now, once again I want to make one very important clarification relative to this fourth observation before we get started. The word “**submissive**” in v1 is a participle in the middle voice. In the Greek Interlinear it is actually translated as “**Likewise the wives, being submissive...**” Because it is in the middle voice, it could be correctly translated as “**Likewise the wives, being submissive themselves...**”, and it is in the middle voice which helps identify that this is a verb of voluntary submission. A participle is a word that has the characteristics of both a verb and an adjective at the same time. It is often called a “verbal adjective”. Now, what is important about this parsing of the word “**submissive**” is that participles do not have what is called “mood”. There are four moods in the Greek language – indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and optative. So, because the participle “**submissive**” does not have “mood”, it is given an implied mood called in the Greek language as the “imperative sense”. What that means is that it “functions” as an imperative mood verb, but with a voluntary implication embedded within it. This really is very critical to correctly interpreting this passage because God knows that it is not always just an easy thing for a wife who is married to a disobedient husband to just “submit” herself to her wayward husband.

In contrast to this “imperative sense” meaning, in a similar passage on husbands in [Ephesians 5:25](#) it says “**Husbands love your wives...**” However, the verb for “**love**” is not a participle, so it does have mood – or in this case, it is in the imperative mood. It also is not in the middle voice, but is in the active voice. So, the language to the husband to “**love his wife**” is an imperative mood verb that we call a command. This is something that God has commanded the husband to do. It is not optional or voluntary for the husband. This is not “*love your wife if you want to*” – not at all. That is why I have been saying

all along that the word to the husband to love his wife is a stronger word than it is to the wife to be submissive to her disobedient husband. In [Peter 3:7](#), both of the verbs to the husband to “ **dwell** ” and for “ **giving honor** ” are both participles with an imperative sense, but they are not commands like [Ephesians 5:25](#). None of this means or implies that the wife who has a disobedient husband can just ignore what Peter has encouraged her to do. Now, this may seem a little complicated at first glance, but the parsing of the verb for “ **submissive** ” is Peter’s way of making this verb strictly voluntary – and that is crucial to understanding how to handle these verses. Peter is not actually demanding anything from the wife, but he is calling on the wife with a disobedient husband to voluntarily yield herself to God’s ways in the same way that Christ yielded Himself to the Father’s will in [1 Peter 1:23](#). For both the husband and the wife who are engaged in a difficult marriage, their attitude towards their marriage partner is what God will use to restore the marriage. Their attitude is what will determine their direction. Their outlook is what will often determine their outcome.

Now, it is important to make some crucial observations relative to a healthy or unhealthy marriage that is found in [Ephesians 5:18 – 21](#).

Eph 5:18 (NKJV) **And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,**  
<sup>19</sup> **speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,** <sup>20</sup> **giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,** <sup>21</sup> **submitting to one another in the fear of God.**

In this passage, which is not addressing marriage per se, the believer is told to have two crucial attitudes. The first is to “ **be filled with the Spirit** ” in v18. We have studied that word often and it simply means to allow yourself as a believer to be under the control and the influence of the Holy Spirit. I.e., simply let the Holy Spirit lead you, direct you, and create His life within you. This is actually a command in the imperative mood and not a participle. However, when we get to v21, the phrase “ **submitting to one another** ” is once again a participle with an imperative sense. So, once again, it is voluntary on the believer’s part. It is the idea of submitting ourselves to one another in the body of Christ that actually creates the unity and oneness that God wants His church to have. So, then v22 says “ **Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.** ” Now, it is critical to understand several things about this verse. First, there is no break between v21 and v22. V22 is simply a continuation of v21 that is building on the idea of submitting ourselves to one another, and especially in the marriage. However, what cannot be seen in the English translation is that the word “submit” in v22 is not actually in the Greek text, but is understood to be there because of its connection with v21. The actual Greek text reads this way – “ **The wives to their own husbands as to the Lord** ”. So, the word “ **submit** ” is there to clarify that it is a continuation in thought of v21 and that the verb for submitting is a participle. The added word “ **submit** ” in the flow of the text of v22 is understood.

So, here is the idea that we want to glean from all of this. In a marriage, two things need to happen. First, as a husband or a wife, we need to be filled with the Spirit, to be living under His control and His influence over our lives. There is no substitute for this in a marriage. This is utterly critical to the success of any marriage. I am personally convinced based on [1 Peter 3:1-6](#) that in principle that if only one of the partners is obedient to this in their life that God is able to use their being filled with the Holy Spirit to greatly enhance the possibility of meaningful restoration in the marriage. This is not a guarantee, but simply God increasing the potential for success in a difficult situation. Please appreciate that this is not

a short term effort, but requires a great deal of patience and perseverance on the part of the yielding partner.

Secondly, as a husband or wife, we are to voluntarily submit ourselves to one another. It works this way. The more demanding and insistent one partner becomes towards the other partner, the less that other partner will be responsive and the less they will want to submit themselves to one another. In the case of the wife, Proverbs has several verses delineating the impact that a “nagging” or “**contentious**” wife will have on her husband. Listen to these verses from Proverbs.

**Pr 21:9 (NKJV) Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.**

**Pr 21:19 (NKJV) Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.**

**Pr 25:24 (NKJV) It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.**

**Pr 27:15 (NKJV) A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike;**

The Hebrew word for “**contentious**” refers to anyone (husband or wife) who quarrels about things, someone who is always arguing and debating every little issue that happens. The Hebrew meaning always refers to disputing and quarreling, to arguing and contending, and it is what creates barriers between people.<sup>1</sup> Contending with the wrong attitude always creates tension in the marriage, and it can be created by either the husband or the wife. Obviously, the use of this Hebrew word does not limit itself to the wife, because Proverbs has just as many references to men and their anger as it does to women and their contending. However, what is important to see from these verses is the reaction that contending has on the other person. For the man, it drives him from the marriage – “**to the corner of a housetop**”, “**in the wilderness**”. If a husband is always contending to get his way and always holding this idea of “submission” over his wife’s head, it will do the same thing to the woman. The point is simple – our actions, good or bad, always create consequences that we may or may not ultimately like.

Marriage should never have a nagging or demanding aspect to it by either partner. All it will do is drive the marriage further into the ditch. I want to call what we are actually addressing as the “spirit of a marriage”. Once the spirit of a marriage is gone, it seems almost impossible to ever regain it back. Once the spirit of a marriage is damaged and lost, love is lost and both the psychological and physical aspects of the marriage relationship may be irreparably damaged. That is normally the result. Why does it happen? Well, it is because either one or both of the partners have refused to allow the Holy Spirit to control their attitudes, their speech, and their actions. If you are someone who always has to have your way about everything, then you will not have a successful and intimate marriage. You may be married, but there will absolutely be no intimacy or oneness in the marriage.

When the “spirit of the marriage” is lost, the corresponding result is that neither partner becomes willing to yield himself or herself to the other partner. The marriage just becomes a psychological tug of war and neither partner wins. The children lose as well. The saddest part is that the couple often gets a divorce, get remarried, but because they never figured out that they were not yielding themselves to the

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, #4066, 571-572.

Holy Spirit, and therefore not to each other, the second marriage eventually begins to experience the same problems. A little later in the study as we progress through these seven verses, we will examine some of the major attitudes, barriers, and improper ways of responding to differences that cause the spirit of a husband or wife to react to the spirit of their partner. Please do not forget that once the spirit of the marriage has been severely deteriorated, it is almost impossible to restore it.

Now, what we want to do with all of the preceding as our backdrop, is to begin to look at several principles relative to the wife and her relationship with her husband. These principles are not directed at the wife, but are just mentioned for her benefit. Some things in marriage work and obviously some things do not work, and we all have to figure that out and what those things are. Obviously, being contentious does not work, but only solidifies the disunity and the barriers that already may exist. We cannot be successful when we are all the time contending about every little thing in life. I am not a male chauvinist, so please be patient because we still have a ways to go before we get to the husband and God's instruction for him.

The first overarching principle is that **it is important for the wife to allow room for her husband to fail**. The reason for that is simple. It is because God teaches men much more through their failure than He does through their success. Failure is a great teacher and an amazing friend. The consistent testimony of God's Word is that godly men always fail in their life, and often times in very strategic areas. Unfortunately, some wives often times demand perfection from their husbands, and that is a well-documented pathway to disaster in the marriage. Every husband and every wife has spiritual areas of their life that they need to work on within the marriage. It includes their relationship with each other and their relationship with their children. Every marriage partner is always undergoing some area of God's sanctifying work in their life, so it is crucial to the well-being of a marriage that both partners realize that the other partner will always have areas of their life in which they need some improvements, and especially spiritual improvements. So, the wife needs to provide ample time for God to work in her husband's life. It will not be beneficial for her to demand too much too quickly simply because spiritual growth and spiritual maturity do not happen overnight. We all grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and this is nowhere illuminated any more than in the marriage setting.

When we get to [1 Peter 3:7](#), we will look very closely at the husband and his role in the marriage, which I have said time and time again is the more demanding. The man has the greater spiritual responsibility in the marriage – **“to love his wife as Christ loved the church”**. That one phrase is as demanding of a portion of Scripture as anyone could ever be given, so for you wives we are not going to let the husband off the hook just because it is one verse and you have six. What we want to do in the upcoming studies is to look at the actual kinds of conduct that the wife is to demonstrate to her husband who is not being obedient to the Word of God as identified in [1 Peter 3:1-6](#) and other passages. Then we will do the exact same for the husband. Please do not forget that the wife's **“conduct”** most likely will not be successful if she does not develop an attitude of “voluntary” submission. By using the words **“be submissive”** with its biblical definition of being voluntary, it should be obvious that God is not trying to force the wife into submission, but simply encouraging her to trust Him and His ways. Obviously, we all know from personal experience that this is not always easy – nor is it designed to be easy. The verb for **“be submissive”** that we studied is very much a word of willing, intentional, and deliberate submission to God's ways – not a forced submission. That is very important to understand.

When I worked at the Savannah River Site, I willingly, intentionally, and deliberately subjected myself to those whom God had placed over me. I respected their position and their role in my life. The more that I did that, the greater voice and input that I had with them. **When I showed respect, I was given respect.** I never once demanded anything of those who were my managers. The Greek verb “*hypotasso*” for being submissive is just that. It is the idea that it is a voluntary submission, not one where God is trying to force a wife into submission just because it is an imperative “sense” command. None of this means that the wife is just to become a doormat for the husband, or to do everything that he may “demand” just because he is the husband. If a husband told or demanded his wife to do something that was not biblical, she is under no obligation to do it – none. I managed five different groups at the Savannah River Site at one time totaling nearly 400 people, and the last thing I wanted was for those that I was managing to just always agree with me because I was their manager. I wanted them to respectfully challenge me if they did not think that a particular decision I was making was the correct one. I was as prone to making wrong decisions as anyone was, so being surrounded by people who had the freedom to disagree with me was critical to my personal success as a manager.

It is no different in the marriage. Both partners must be willing to accept the constructive input and assessments that the other partner may make in their life. On either side, there will always be room in our life for our partner’s constructive input – always. So, the idea of being submissive does not Scripturally mean that the wife has to always be compliant with everything that her husband demands of her. It does not mean that she has to acquiesce and accommodate everything that he expects of her. That is both unbiblical and unhealthy for the marriage. Some women have understood it that way and have actually created an environment that almost invited the husband to take advantage of them – and many husbands will.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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