

1 Peter 3:1-6, Part E

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.**

As we continue in our study, we come to the idea in v1-2 that a disobedient husband “**without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives**”. There are several key words/phrases that are critical to understand in this portion of the verse – “**without a word, won, conduct, observe, chaste**”. Now, it is important to reiterate again that what is in question with the husband is not whether or not he is a believer, but the simple fact that he lives with an attitude of disobedience to the Word of God. Stated another way, he simply is not a very good spiritual leader in his home. The key word to validate in this is the word “**obey**” (*apeitheo*). Peter does not say “**even if some do not believe the word**” as the NIV indicates.

However, to be exegetically objective in handling this passage, there are many commentaries that take the position that the phrase “**do not obey the word**” refers specifically to husbands who are lost – and that could certainly be the case. We have addressed this previously, and I have no quarrel with that possibility. The reason for them taking that position is because of the word for “**do not obey**”. The Greek word which we have previously studied is “*apeitheo*” and it means to willfully and perversely disbelieve. It implies that the individual is unpersuadable, that they do not believe, and that they are disobedient.¹ The word has a strong sense of active, willful disobedience to the Word of God, even a sense of rebellion towards it.² So, it is that nuance of the word that serves as the basis for many of the commentaries concluding that it is primarily talking about wives with husbands who are lost. Based on the context, the word “*apeitheo*” can be translated as either “do not believe” (NIV) or as “do not obey”, but is primarily translated as “**do not obey**” in the vast majority of the translations. Both ideas are very strong in the meaning of the Greek word. It is the idea of not allowing yourself to be persuaded or to believe. You probably know some people like this. You could talk until you were blue in the face and no matter what you said to them, their mind is already made up that they are not going to believe the gospel message. They are unpersuadable.

However, the overall message that we need to take from v1 is that the husbands spoken about are in all likelihood actually saved, “**even if**” a few of them are not. The phrase “**even if some**” seems to definitely imply that the vast majority of the husbands that Peter is addressing were most likely saved – even if some or a few may not have been. In either case, whether the husband was lost or saved, what is clear is that they were not obedient to the word of God. From a purely practical perspective, it would be wrong for us to assume that a lost husband even could or would obey the word of God. Why should he?

¹ Strong, *apeitheo*, 970.

² Grudem, 138.

They have no motivation, no incentive, and no power to be obedient. Obviously, there were plenty of women who became believers **after** they were married, so many of them had husbands who were definitely lost, and certainly this passage would apply to those husbands as well. The simple conclusion is that this passage can include husbands who are saved and husbands who are lost. We do not need to make it an either / or scenario.

Historically, we have to appreciate that Christianity is still under development when Peter wrote this epistle and that the paradigm concepts that Christ brought into the Roman-Greco world were still not fully understood by everyone that may have claimed to be a Christian. The idea of a wife being submissive to her husband in all things was actually the norm for the Roman-Greco culture. That culture consistently promoted men as being superior to their wives, so the wife was to stay at home and obey their husbands in everything that he would want them to do. If the wife chose to do otherwise, then the husband had the legal right to actually deal with her in any way that he wanted to deal with her, and that included legal physical abuse. What Christ introduced into the culture was a radical departure from the norm of that day. What Christ placed in motion was the spiritual equality of the husband and wife that demanded both love and respect from the husband for his wife. This was a very radical departure from the cultural norm of that day. So the idea in these two opening verses is not primarily that the wife is trying to get her husband “saved” (which she might have been if he was lost), but rather that she is simply trying to be an encouragement to him in his spiritual walk and she is demonstrating that through her personal “**conduct**”. The way that I am going to approach the passage is that the primary emphasis of this passage is not on a wife who has an unbelieving husband, but a wife who has a disobedient believing husband and how she is to respond in the face of his ongoing disobedience. If her husband is actually lost, I do not think that anything changes. She is still to yield herself to God’s principles gleaned from this passage.

Now, at the first reading, it seems that what Peter is saying is that the wives never have to say one word (v1) to their husbands if the husband is disobedient to the word. The Greek term for “**word**” in this case is “*logos*” and it refers specifically to actually talking, to holding information forth to someone else, to having dialogue with them. However, in this specific context, it refers much more to the idea of teaching, of preaching, and of giving instruction to someone. For instance, how this word is used in this passage occurs elsewhere. [1 Corinthians 2:4](#) says,

1Co 2:4 (NKJV) **And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**

[1 Timothy 5:17](#) says,

1Ti 5:17 (NKJV) **Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.**

This verse is specifically speaking about preaching, as was the context of [1 Corinthians 2:4](#). So, the phrase is not implying that the wife cannot have dialogue and conversation with her husband about their marriage. That is probably a very dangerous position – to just eliminate meaningful dialogue from the marriage. The idea is that she is not to always be preaching at him, always talking to him about his salvation, or correcting him everytime he fails. It is not that she cannot do that, but simply the fact that if the husband is already adverse and opposed to obeying the Word, that a wife’s constant contending

with him will only make matters worse. It will actually deepen his resolve towards continued disobedience even more. In this verse, the term for “**word**” does not use the definite article “the”, but the indefinite article “a”. In the actual Greek text there is no article at all, whereas in the first use of “**word**” there is – implying “**the**” actual “*logos*” or Word of God itself.

Peter’s message is actually very simple. His message is that when a wife has a husband (lost or saved) who is disobedient to God’s Word, that it is the wife’s behavior that God will actually use to draw him to Christ and to a life of obedience to His Word. This is emphasized in v2 when it uses the phrase “**when they observe**”. Other translations say “**behold**” or “**see**”. In v1 Peter uses the word “**conduct**” and in v2 he amplifies it some and calls it “**chaste conduct**”, or behavior that is saturated with purity. Of the 13 times that this word “**conduct**” is used in the New Testament, it is used 6 times in [1 Peter](#) and twice in [2 Peter](#). The Greek word for “**conduct**” is “*anastrophe*” and it refers specifically to someone’s behavior and to how they live out their life. [1 Peter 1:15](#) says,

1Pe 1:15 (NKJV) but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

If I can say it this way, God is to be our model, our pattern, and our moral and ethical compass for how we live out our life. Now, please appreciate that how we live out our life is never dependent on what someone is doing or how they are living. How we live is always governed by the fact that God is our Father and that He is glorified and honored when we yield ourselves to His ways. [1 Peter 3:16](#) says,

1Pe 3:16 (NKJV) having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

I know that for a wife who does have an unbelieving husband or a disobedient believing husband, that none of this is easy, nor am I trying to paint that picture. When we are treated indifferently or without kindness and respect, it is never easy to just smile and move forward without complaining. We are all cursed with a propensity to complain about things we do not like, but that does not change the demands that God places on each of our lives to honor Him before we honor ourselves by doing what we think is best in the face of mistreatment. Ultimately, it is how we respond in the face of unmerited difficulty and criticism that provides the most effective and powerful testimony that we have to others. In the case of these verses in [1 Peter 3](#), it is the wife’s quiet reverence **for God, not her husband**, that is put on display. It is her faith in God and His Word that is clearly seen by her husband. Trust me, but he knows when he is not what God wants him to be, and when he constantly sees the quiet and reverent work of God’s Spirit in his wife, it is very difficult for him to continue to ignore what he sees. He is able to see God working in his wife and that is what God uses to draw the husband to Himself. It may take years. These verses do not provide any timeframe for the outworking and influence of the wife’s godly behavior to impact her husband.

To make things even more difficult for the wife who does have a lost or disobedient husband is the fact that we live in a culture that highly values personal rights. Every day we are bombarded with encouragements to stand up for ourselves, to fight for our rights, and to literally fight back when we believe that we are being wronged. This happens all of the time in a marriage gone sour where one of the marriage partners feel that they have been defrauded of their right to personal happiness because of their marriage partner. So, they feel that they have the right to seek their personal happiness over the virtue of working through something difficult, and often times the result is dissolving the marriage. For

the wife who finds herself in this situation, she has to learn how to handle things such as her frustrations, her disappointments, and ultimately her anger. She has to learn how to handle her emotions and her responses in a way that honors God. Her hope has to be in God, not her husband. [1 Peter 3:5](#) says it this way,

1Pe 3:5 (NKJV) For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,

I have said it often and will keep repeating myself for emphasis, but the issue is ultimately one of trusting God even when things are not going as we might want. The issue in this passage is no different from what was said in [1 Peter 2:23](#) about Christ Himself,

1Pe 2:23 (NKJV) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

This is everyone's supreme example of what it really means to trust ourselves into God's care and into His protection. God generally allows us to be placed in difficult situations to refine our faith, not the faith of someone else. Our tendency is to see the abusing or disobedient partner as the one who needs the help, and that is probably so, but very often the trials are for us personally so that our character can be more fully developed in alignment with the character of Christ.

It is simply my opinion only so it actually has very little to no value whatsoever, but I believe that nothing will drive a man further away from his wife than a contentious and nagging wife. Whenever a wife continues to pester and badger her husband on various issues, he will most likely do one of two things. Either he will resist her even more and become even more stubborn towards her, or he will simply acquiesce to her constant complaining and nagging. Listen very carefully. Neither one of those is good for the wife. If he becomes more obstinate, he will most likely be inclined to become abusive at some later time. All any of this does is create distance in the marriage and destroy the spirit of the marriage. If he acquiesces to his wife, he then becomes very passive about everything and the wife becomes the primary decision maker in the family. At that moment, the wife has destroyed the protection that God has given to her in her husband.³ The wife must recognize that her husband is the **God-ordained** and functional leader for the home, but by constant complaining and nagging about every issue that arises, the wife destroys that functionality and the marriage becomes very unbalanced spiritually. If a wife has to have her way over the marriage, it is virtually impossible for the marriage to have any meaningful level of intimacy to it.

Clearly the emphasis of [1 Peter 3:1-6](#) is on the wife's "**conduct**" more so than what she actually says. What Peter is saying is that a wife's godly behavior has a kind of magnetic and compelling impact on her husband. It is what God will use to soften the husband's stubborn and hard heart. This is the divine power of the wife's testimony being released into the husband's heart. It is what God uses to open the husband's heart to the Word of God, and in many cases to the gospel message itself. However, what Peter is saying is that the husband has to first "**observe**" and actually see the Word of God being lived out in the wife's life before what she has to communicate can be appreciated. If the husband sees no appreciable difference in the wife's life – no patience, no forgiveness, no understanding, no kindness,

³ Precept, *1 Peter 3*, ep.

no verbal self-control, then why would he ever be compelled to change his own life. How any of us lives is what makes the gospel and the Word of God believable.⁴ So, if a wife truly wants to make a difference in her husband's life, then she should be spiritually compelled by this passage to sincerely live out her faith before her husband without preaching at him about his faults and failures. Constantly reminding a husband of his failures will only serve to reinforce those failures in his own life.

Here is the issue for the wife. If she has a husband who is disobedient to the Word of God, then her role and her function in the marriage is to become as much of a godly example of the Christian life as she possibly can. Once again, that does not mean that she has to acquiesce to everything he may demand or that she can never say anything to him when he does make bad decisions. Providing good input is important, but her input is not critical to what this passage is teaching. If a wife does not have a meaningful and life transforming relationship with God herself, then none of this will work simply because she has nothing to offer to her husband. What she is ultimately doing is honoring God more than she is honoring her husband. That is good. She is yielding herself to God and to His ways. She is trusting that God can use a godly wife to greatly impact an ungodly husband – and He can and He does. Listen very carefully. The role and the attitude for the wife is always the same. She is to yield herself to the pattern and function that God has divinely ordained for the marriage, and that pattern and function is the same no matter whether her husband is saved or unsaved, godly or ungodly, obedient or disobedient. She lives her life primarily before God and that is what God will honor on her behalf.

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⁴ MacArthur, 178.