

1 Peter 3:1-6, Part F

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 studying this passage there is one overriding spiritual principle related to marriage that should be obvious. It is that **God has a divinely purposed order in marriage**. It is a functional order, an operational order that allows the marriage to work and provides it with a very stabilizing foundation for success. It is not an oppressive or overbearing arrangement, but a divine order that provides for meaning, stability, and intimacy within a marriage. If couples violate that order, their marriage will ultimately fail. The effort to overthrow the design of God for men and women in marriage is not ultimately a human effort, but a mainline effort of Satan, a demonic effort.

Every meaningful institution on the planet is governed by some kind of functional order that allows it to operate and be successful. It is this functional element that removes the chaos out of the equation. Anytime that a social entity loses its perspective on order, on organization, on methodology, on arrangement, it immediately loses its ability to be successful. Just think of a business that tries to succeed without any operational and organizational direction. People could just come to work whenever they wanted to come, or there was no chain of operational command so that anyone could make a decision without the input or permission of anyone else, or there was no standardization of process. The ensuing result would be chaos, disorder, mayhem, and eventually anarchy. In order for any institution to survive and thrive, it has to have functional order or it will collapse.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture that has done an excellent job of undermining all of the godly principles of marriage, and especially the issue of divine order. To begin with, the very definition of marriage is being rewritten and is no longer being defined as the union of a man and a woman. Lesbian and homosexual marriages are becoming normal. What that does to undermine divine order and to destabilize the overall integrity and sanctity of marriage is almost impossible to describe. Divorce has become a relatively normal option and way of life for many people with pre-nuptial agreements becoming more and more common place. Pornography has replaced intimacy in the marriage and has destroyed the very basis for that intimacy. It destroys the partner's love and affection for the other partner, as well as their love and affection for the children. Then to make it worse, God's divine order has been portrayed as being tyrannical, despotic, and stifling, and so all of the spiritual mores and values and godly standards associated with marriage are being cast aside as marital garbage and as a threat to personal happiness. Our legal system has actually developed a new term to describe this dilemma called the "irretrievable breakdown of marriage", and what that term does is provide a basis for a no-fault divorce in many jurisdictions. We have often heard it referred to as irreconcilable differences. It simply provides a very broad and encompassing ground and basis for divorce that was never intended by God.

We all know couples who were once madly in love with one another and enjoyed being with each other, but now they find themselves very distant from one another and strangers to one another. They could be likened to business partners – two people just trying to keep the family afloat while they entertain their busy schedules and the overall stress of daily life. So rather than ever spending time with each other, they become overly absorbed in their work, making money, raising their children, and maintaining their busy schedules. Once that happens, the overall stress of all of those things put together simply begins to replace the time that they share their lives together.

Study after study has shown that many couples get divorced after about 25 years. Why is that? Well, it is because once all the kids moved out, all they had was an empty shell that had just been maintaining the family unit, but now that it is just the two of them, they realize they have very little if anything in common anymore. They have ignored one another for so long that they no longer have any meaningful love for each other. I have a rule that I developed in my life early on in my marriage, and that rule was that **whatever I did I wanted to do it with my wife**. I always wanted her to be my best friend – and she is. I simply do not like going places and doing things in my life without her. Sometimes we cannot do everything together, but if we can we will. If couples going through these social, family, financial, relational, and stressful marital issues do not find meaningful time and ways to be with each other, what will happen is that their relationship will simply cease to exist altogether. No marriage can successfully exist on “autopilot”. It is not a spiritual option.

Marriages breakdown in all different kinds of areas that are much too numerous to list in this study. However, there are three major areas of breakdown that we do need to mention. First, there are **communication breakdowns**. Once a couple gets so busy and so absorbed in other stressful things, and once their communication with each other breaks down, their relationship breaks down. A marriage simply cannot survive without meaningful communication between the marriage partners. Once a lack of communication becomes more normal than abnormal, it almost like they just are not even willing to try and talk anymore. When couples lack communication, everything becomes misinterpreted. Just presuming things becomes normative and is the seedbed for marital failure. It very often causes partners to become defensive with one another. I have met couples who have been married for a long time, but for the most part seem to have virtually nothing in common and almost live in silence with one another. They seem to be arguing over the same meaningless issues time after time after time. Always having the same routine arguments with no resolution simply means that they probably have no understanding of what it takes to resolve conflict - a very critical element to a healthy marriage.

Secondly, there are **intimacy breakdowns**. In every successful marriage there has to be both emotional and physical intimacy. They go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. Many partners have physical intimacy for their personal pleasure only, and the result is that the other partner feels used, betrayed, almost discarded. Rather than contributing to intimacy, it actually destroys intimacy. If you feel like you can do no right in your marriage, there is an excellent chance that you have already reached a point of intimacy breakdown. It is not good to always be criticizing your partner for every little thing that you do not like or with which you do not agree. If you are a partner who feels like you have to be in control of everything that goes on in the marriage, you will rarely if ever have any meaningful intimacy in your marriage. People who always have to be in control are people who will always be complaining and that is a characteristic that virtually destroys intimacy. If a marriage lacks intimacy, then there will

most likely will be no emotional bonds to sustain that marriage.

Now, I know this may sound a little over the top, but often times one of the marriage couples may have a drastic decline in their physical appearance. If I can say it this way, they do not seem to care if they are attractive to their partner anymore, so they just let their appearance go – wearing bedroom clothes all day, not being well-groomed, not combing their hair, not shaving, being a couch potato and just being lazy with their personal appearance. If that is the case, the message may be that they are taking their partner for granted, and all of this is something that often contributes to the breakdown of the marriage little by little.

Thirdly, there are **trust breakdowns**. Right or wrong, I personally believe that this is the most important element in a healthy marriage – the ability to completely trust your partner. One of the major reasons that many couples struggle in this area is because they had pre-marital sex with one another. In essence, they were defrauding both themselves and their marriage by being unfaithful to God and ultimately to each other before they were ever married. Marriage literally demands total honesty with one another, so if there has been dishonesty and concealment, then there must be a meaningful confession of that dishonesty. This is not easy at all and can be very dangerous if the other partner becomes overwhelmed with what they are hearing, so it is generally best to receive some guidance before becoming transparent, especially in moral related issues.

Now, with all of that as a kind of backdrop, we want to begin to address v3-4 which says,

1Pe 3:3 (NKJV) 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.

Now, what we want to define initially when addressing these two verses is that it is not a passage that is teaching that a woman should not keep herself attractive, as if there were some moral virtue in that. It is not saying that at all. In fact, in the NKJV it reads “**Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward...** with the word “*merely*” having been added to emphasize the intent of what Peter is teaching. I.e., Peter is saying that maintaining a level of physical attractiveness is certainly okay, but there is also an inner beauty that carries an even greater weight in the marriage. What Peter is addressing is what we could call the true beauty, the godly beauty, and the virtuous beauty in a godly woman. What too often happens is that a woman can become overly pre-occupied with her physical beauty to the detriment of taking care of her inner beauty. Please do not forget the underlying principle with which we began this section that what is important is to see life the way that God sees life. Peter makes a very interesting statement when he said that a woman’s inner beauty is “**very precious in the sight of God**”, and I might add to her husband as well. So, in this passage it should be very clear and obvious that Peter is not denigrating a woman for wearing her hair nicely, or for wearing attractive jewelry, or for wearing some nice clothes. Personally, I think all of those are good things when done with the right motive. Paul addressed this same issue in [1 Timothy 2:9-10](#) when he said,

1Ti 2:9 (NKJV) in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,¹⁰ but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

What Paul is clearly addressing in that passage is the issue that many of the women in the fellowship at Ephesus were starting to emulate the women of the Temple of Diana which had over 2000 of these temple prostitutes that would go out into the streets every night to lure men to the temple for sexual reasons. It was a very real problem in Ephesus where Timothy was pastoring, and Paul understood that it was not the outward appearance that was important, but a sense of godliness about her life. Paul is not asking women to conceal their beauty, or to just be drab and mundane. However, he is calling for a very appropriate level of modesty and decency in how they present themselves – and in reality the application is not just in church (which was the ultimate goal in this passage). It does not do any good to be modest in church and immodest and indecent out of church.

So, what Peter is doing is placing the primary emphasis of a woman's adornment on what he calls "**the hidden person of the heart**", or what we might call her inner beauty. He is not eliminating the need for her to maintain her outward beauty – not at all. I love the way that Solomon described his bride and how she was so beautifully adorned. Peter just does not want the wife to dress in such a way that she inappropriately overly draws attention to herself physically and actually hides her spiritual beauty. So, the word that Peter uses to emphasize his message here is the word "**rather**" beginning v4. Many of the translations use the word "**but**" or "**instead**" which give the same sense. It is what is known as an adversative conjunction which is simply a conjunction used to express contrast between the immediate clause and the one preceding it.¹ So, what Peter is doing is emphasizing his real point – that **the inner beauty that a woman displays is what matters the most in the marriage**. We all know this to be true. There are an incalculable number of physically beautiful women who simply have no inner beauty whatsoever. They are so self-absorbed in their physical appearance, that their inner beauty becomes greatly marginalized, and even disconnected from who they are. Their vanity with their appearance precedes any gentleness and purity of heart and actually robs them of the beauty that God wants to emphasize and display in their life.

The word in v3 for "**adornment**" is a very interesting word. It is the very common Greek word "*cosmos*" that is used 180 times in the New Testament, and 179 times it is translated as "**world**". This is the only time that the word "*cosmos*" is not translated "**world**", but "**adornment**" referring specifically to physical decoration and ornaments that people wear. Unfortunately, some of the commentaries almost read as if Peter is completely forbidding a wife to wear things that make her attractive. I have no idea how they can hermeneutically develop a teaching like that from these verses or even logically come to that conclusion. There is absolutely no spiritual value in being unkempt, unattractive, and ugly in appearance. I do not know about you other husbands, but I want my wife to be modestly attractive. I do not want her looking like she does not care about her physical appearance. What Peter is teaching is not a wife's abstinence from making herself physically attractive, but "**rather**" ensuring that she also maintains a deeply reverent and gentle inner spirit about her life because it, combined with her physical beauty, has a much greater weight on the husband's heart. Obviously, Peter does not want the wives to dress inappropriately, to dress gaudy, or to dress in a way that mimics the world's standards. If a woman dresses in that manner, then it obviously can simply nullify the Christian witness that she is seeking to make for the benefit of her disobedient husband. What the context and meaning of the word

¹ Lukaszewski, *adversative conjunction*, ep.

“**adornment**” clearly implies in this passage is that it should be fitting of the wife’s godly character, not something in competition with her character. I love the word that Peter uses to describe the inner beauty of a woman. He says in v4 that it is “**incorruptible**”. We will look at this word in more detail as we continue the study, but it simply means that it is not capable of corruption or decay. The NASB, ESV, ISV, and HCSB translate it as “**imperishable**”. I.e., you simply cannot hide its influence. It is that powerful in a woman’s life.

So, what do we want to take away from this today?

The first principle is that **God has a divine order for marriage and for the functional roles of both partners**. To violate that divine order will have a very detrimental impact on the marriage. To honor that order will create the ability to communicate, intimacy, and trust in the marriage.

The second principle is that **communication matters, intimacy matters, and trust matters**. You cannot have a healthy marriage without those three elements present.

The third principle is that **a woman’s inner beauty will make a more significant impact on her husband than her physical beauty**. That is not to denigrate her physical beauty, but simply to elevate her inner beauty. In reality, she should concentrate on both aspects.

The fourth principle is that **the inner beauty that a woman displays is what matters the most in her marriage**. Without the ornament of a wife’s “**gentle and quiet spirit**”, the heart of her husband may become very distant and removed from her. That is not to excuse him or his actions and attitudes in any way, but simply to reinforce the necessity of a godly and reverent attitude in both partners.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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