

1 Peter 3:1-6, Part 1 | “The Beauty of Submission”
Preached on May 2, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 3, verses 1 through 6.

I was originally planning on preaching verses 1 through 7, which covers both the husband and wife’s role, but after looking at this passage, there’s just way too much here to include it.

And then after that, I was planning on preaching 1 through 6 and leaving it at that, but again, there was still way too much to put in one sermon.

And it so happened that next week is Mother’s Day, so that made me start thinking even more. *[pause]*

And so what I’m going to do is I’m going to preach verses 1 through 6 in two parts. *[pause]*

This week (the first part) will focus solely on wives and their role.

And then for Mother’s Day next week, I’m going to use the end of this passage and apply it to mothers. *[pause]*

If you’re confused yet, that’s OK, you can just take each week as it comes and you’ll figure out what I did eventually. *[pause]*

So this week’s sermon will be focused mainly on wives, next week will be kind of wives and mothers, and then, Lord willing, on May 16th I’ll speak to the husbands.

So women, don’t worry, your husbands will be taught about their role, too, you just have to wait a couple weeks for it.

And men, don’t shut off your brain for these two weeks...

...For if you think about it, it’s essential for you to actually know and understand what your wife’s role is and what it’s *not*, coming to understand what God’s desires for the marriage roles. *[pause]*

Let’s READ OUR PASSAGE to begin. *[pause]*

This morning we have come upon a controversial topic in our modern culture, that is, the command for wives to submit to their husbands.

To our culture, this passage is seen as degrading to women.

It’s seen as promoting the patriarchy and putting down women.

In fact, modern-day feminism teaches that submission is oppression, and it is simply something advocated by men to keep men in power. *[pause]*

You see, our culture claims that if you are called to submit then you have no say and you are inferior.

And in essence, the world teaches women that you can only be fulfilled if you have what men have. *[pause]*

But if you think about it, what they are saying is that your worth is found in your position, authority, or role.

Is that really where you want to find your worth?

Or do you find your worth in Christ, which is much more deeper, unchanging, and lasting? *[pauseeee]*

Our culture pushes the idea that this role of submission that the Bible calls for - is wrong, unethical, and oppressive.

And the sad truth is that this thinking has infiltrated churches all across America. *[pause]*

Bring up the topic of submission in a group of people in a church and see what happens.

People start to squirm, their brows start to become sweaty, anger starts to rise, and conflict ensues.

Because of the culture's push to attack submission in marriage, those in the church have tried to shy away from it. *[pauseeee]*

But if we are honest, we can't blame everything on our culture, for really our sin nature leads us to the same place.

Because of the Fall all the way back in Genesis 3, God said that there would be conflict in marriage.

So our sin leads us to the same place - resisting God's good structure in marriage. *[pause]*

What we find historically is that Christians and churches have responded to God's divine roles for marriage in a few ways...

First, some have rejected the truth of submission altogether.

This is seen in the fact that some churches are egalitarian churches, getting rid of gender roles entirely. *[pause]*

But a second way that some churches have responded to this is by going to the other extreme.

They promote submission but an incorrect understanding of it by teaching that men should be domineering tyrants and women should be passive doormats. *[pause]*

And then there's a third way.

This is seen when Christians hold to submission, but try to water it down a little bit so as not to offend, but the result is that it doesn't even look like submission anymore. [pause]

So which way should we respond?

There's another way!

We don't have to do any of those, but there's another way forward.

We can hold to the Biblical view of submission, and not water it down, not misuse it, or reject it.

But in order to go that way, you need to do some things as you approach this text. [pause]

First, *get rid of all the baggage* that you bring to this topic.

What happens is that we have this incorrect view of submission that we bring to the table when we hear about passages like these and it acts as a barrier to the truth. [pause]

One piece of baggage that we bring is a *misunderstanding* of Biblical submission.

Maybe we have heard from the culture that submission is slavery and dominance and now we bring that definition to the table as we hear about submission in marriage.

And of course with that misunderstanding, you will want to reject the idea.

But submission is not defined by our culture, but by God! [pause]

Or maybe you have this misunderstanding that the wife has to leave her brain at the door of marriage, or that she can't have her own opinion.

Maybe you have this picture of submission as a woman who never says a word, never corrects her husband, and just merely does whatever her husband says as a slave.

That's not Biblical submission, that's a misunderstanding of submission.

Submission is not defined by our misunderstanding, but on what God means by submission. [pauseeee]

A second piece of baggage that you may bring to the table is your experience of the *misuse* of marriage roles.

You have seen husbands who don't love their wives, and who dominate their wives, and you say, "Look! See! Submission is not right!"

Or maybe you have seen wives who have been passive doormats and you say, "Look! See! I don't want that!"

But the misuse of the roles in marriage by others does not determine the rightness or wrongness of what God calls us to do.

Submission is not defined by the misuse of marriage roles by others. *[pause]*

So get rid of that baggage, and see the beauty of submission.

Come with empty hands, open hearts, and a willingness to learn and understand what God says. *[pauseeee]*

Another key to understanding and holding to Biblical submission in marriage is having a correct view of God and Scripture and obeying to Him.

Think of it this way...

We believe that God is Creator; He is good, perfect, and wise.

We believe that the Bible is His Word, which is perfect, authoritative, necessary, and sufficient.

So that means whatever God says in His Word is going to be good and perfect, even if it doesn't seem like it. *[pause]*

If God says that wives are to submit to their husbands it means that this is good, beautiful, right, and it is the way that the Creator made marriage to function.

So when a man and woman function correctly in their marriage roles, they are not only obeying God, but their marriage will be healthier as a result. *[pause]*

The world and feminist movement sees submission as the opposite of beauty, but God says, "Submission is beautiful because I, the Creator of marriage and all things beautiful, have made it this way."

Let's stop following the culture's cues as to what is right and wrong in marriage, and let's start following the Creator of marriage's instructions. *[pause]*

Since all of these things are true, then that means if we reject or water down the truth of submission in marriage, then we are in rebellion against God.

We are basically saying to God, "Submission is wrong, therefore you are wrong. Submission is not good, therefore you are not good. Submission is flawed, therefore you are flawed in how you made marriage."

Or we are saying, "I know you said this, but I don't want to do it."

That's a big deal, folks.

We can't pick and choose where we want God's authority in our lives based on how it makes us feel...

...But we obey Him and submit to His Word completely, realizing that His ways are always best.
[pauseeee]

I'll give two more preliminary items quickly before we jump in.

First, the husband's role is not to be a domineering tyrant, for we see in Scripture that he is a loving, servant-leader, so just get that out of your mind, for it's not Biblical.

And secondly, we believe that men and women are equal, but that they have differing roles.

These differing roles do not change the essential equality they have as humans made in the image of God.

Just because you have different roles doesn't change your worth, we inherently know this when it comes to the jobsite, but apparently not when it comes to marriage. *[pause]*

Even in the Trinity there is equality, yet differing roles.

For Jesus, the Son, while he ministered on earth submitted to his Father and it wasn't demeaning, but beautiful. *[pause]*

Alrighty, let's get into the text...the first point that comes out in verses 1 and 2 is this...

I. There is beauty and power in submission.

Why is there beauty in it? Because God made it this way, and commands it. *[pause]*

Verse 1 starts out by saying, "Likewise, wives..."

That "likewise" reflects back to the other relationships he just talked about and how they were also called to submit.

Remember?

He said, "Be subject...to every human institution." (2:13)

And then, "Servants, be subject to your masters." (2:18)

And now he says, "*Likewise*, wives be subject to your own husbands."

With the same motive, attitude, and respect as those other relationships, so also, wives are to submit to their husbands. *[pause]*

But what exactly does submission look like in marriage?

We have to admit that it's a little different than a citizen and the government.

It's a little different than an employee with his or her boss, for a man and his wife are one flesh.

Yet there's still roles and submission called for. *[pause]*

So again, I ask what is submission in marriage?

As we learned, submission is voluntarily yielding to an authority.

It is willingly placing yourself in your proper role, according to God's divinely ordered structure in marriage. *[pause]*

It involves a good attitude, for God cares about how we obey Him.

He doesn't want us to reluctantly or resentfully obey Him, but he wants us to joyfully do it.

So submission means having a good attitude and disposition to yield to the leadership of your husband. *[pause]*

Since God commands submission in marriage, then by submitting to your husband, you are ultimately obeying God.

And if you aren't submitting, you are disobeying God. *[pause]*

Now this isn't blind compliance to your husband, for as in each relationship that we learned so far, we don't submit in doing something that is evil and against God.

We obey God over man in each relationship.

So this isn't robotic submission or slavish obedience, but it's simply this: willingly submitting to your husband's authority and leadership.

It's allowing your husband to take leadership and placing yourself in your role. *[pause]*

Submission can be seen in your attitude, actions, and words.

Does your attitude show submission? How about your actions and words?

Do they show respect towards his leadership, and an understanding that the final decision lays at his feet? *[pause]*

Wives, how do you talk about your husband to others? How do you talk *to* your husband?

Does the way you talk show respect or are you always putting him down?

Do your words nag, tear down, or manipulate - or do they show honor and respect? *[pause]*

Wives, what is your attitude towards your husband when his decision goes against what you wanted?

Do you listen to what he has to say and strive to implement, help, and support these goals?

Do you pray for him?

Do you give your input and let him take the leadership role of making the final decision?

[pauseeee]

Sometimes wives will say, “But I have a passive husband, so someone has to do it!”

But really that’s making matters worse.

For by stepping into the leader role, you are not only stepping outside of your own role, but actually making him become *more* passive. *[pause]*

What actually helps is to encourage him as a leader and not try to take things into your own hands. *[pause]*

Husbands tend to step up more when you encourage them, appreciate them, and affirm the good times they do step up, and really inspire them to step up.

So encourage the good things you see, pray for him, and finally realize that he’s accountable to God for how he performs his role, just like you are for yours. *[pause]*

I find this interesting - what I’ve found is that even the wives who are incorrectly taking leadership in the marriage, deep down they strongly desire their man to be their leader.

They become frustrated when he won’t make decisions or step up.

It shows that God has made it so that these roles are how He has wired us to function, but because of sin, these roles become dysfunctional. *[pauseeee]*

John Piper gave this really good example of what it looks like to have a submissive attitude, even when you think your husband is making the wrong decision...

A wife could say, “I know you’ve thought a lot about this, and I love it when you take the initiative to plan for us and take the responsibility like this...

...but I really don’t have peace about this decision and I think we need to talk about it some more. Could we? Maybe tonight sometime?”¹

Do you see the respect coming out? Do you see the submissive attitude in view? *[pause]*

In that example, even though the wife disagreed with her husband, you see her recognizing his leadership role and her submissive role...

...You see her affirming his leadership abilities, which inspire him even more to be a good leader...

¹ Piper, John. “The Beautiful Faith of Fearless Submission.” Sermon preached on April 15, 2007. Desiringgod.org.

...And yet she is still able to share her feelings of being uneasy with the decision in respect.
[pause]

There's a huge difference between saying that and saying, "I don't agree. I think you're wrong. That's so dumb. We are not doing that."

Or even trying to manipulate with your emotions and words to get your way. *[pause]*

Many times when a wife responds with a submissive, respectful disposition, a husband is led to respond differently because her response was kind and respectful, and not brash and defiant.
[pauseeee]

This is the beauty of submission.

It's not a demeaning or low thing, but it's the way that God has made marriage to function correctly. *[pause]*

If that godly submissive attitude seems foreign to you, that's a testament to how much we all have been influenced by our culture in the wrong direction.

And we would all do well to follow God's ways rather than our own ways. *[pauseeee]*

Not only is submission beautiful, but it's powerful.

Now at first you might be thinking, "That's an oxymoron, how can submission be powerful?"

But it's because of what Peter says next.

He just told wives to be subject to their own husbands and he says, "so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives..."

...when they see your respectful and pure conduct." *[pause]*

Wow, now that's powerful!

Peter is talking about a situation with a Christian wife and an unbelieving husband, and he says that a wife's godly submission has the power to lead her husband to be saved.

And yet many think that submission is low and not needed.

And yet many think that submission should be rejected or watered down.

Well Peter says, "No way, don't view submission that way, for it has power!" *[pauseeee]*

Now if you have an unbelieving husband, he does need to hear the Gospel message.

Everyone who responds in faith responds to the good news message.

But this is talking about those situations where you have shared the Gospel with him, and he just keeps rejecting it, what do you do then?

Do you badger him into being a Christian?

Peter says, “No, but rather, let your submission and way of life reflect Christ.” *[pause]*

An unbelieving husband can actually be won to Christ by the godly conduct of his believing wife.

How? It says, “When they see your respectful and pure conduct.” *[pause]*

Husbands watch and observe the way their wives live.

Is he going to be won to Christ by a domineering, harsh, and disrespectful wife? Certainly not, for he finds it irritating.

He’s going to be won by a Christian wife, who lives out her faith and submits to him.

As an aside, this reminds us that submission in marriage doesn’t depend on the character of your husband. *[pause]*

But going back to winning the unbelieving husband - how can godly conduct win him?

First, I said that God wired marriage to function this way, so when submission is done well...

...It’s beautiful, it resonates in his heart, and it displays that God’s ways are true, which can lead him to believe the Gospel.

He realizes that, “Wow, this is the way that God made marriage to function.” *[pause]*

But even more than that it’s that the wife’s life reflects the grace of God.

He begins to think, “How can my wife live this way, when I am such a bad husband?

How can she still respect me and respect my leadership?!

How can she stand up for what’s right even if it means suffering?

This can only be God! It must be true!” *[pauseeee]*

Augustine describes the faithful witness of his Christian mother to his pagan father, when he says...

“She served her husband as her master, and did all she could to win him for You, speaking to him of You by her conduct, by which You made her beautiful...

...Finally, when her husband was at the end of his earthly span, she gained him for You.”²
[pause]

That’s the power of godly submission! It can lead an unbelieving husband to turn and believe the Gospel! *[pauseeee]*

Have you believed the Gospel?

Have you repented of your sins and turned in faith to Jesus Christ, who died for your sins?

He died for you and rose again, and when you believe in him, by His grace, he forgives you and changes you to become more like Him...

...So that when others look at our lives, they see that it can only be Christ that did it. *[pause]*

There is beauty and power in submission, but Peter also shows us that...

II. There is beauty in a gentle and quiet spirit.

Peter just told wives to submit to their husbands, and now he tells them not to let their adorning be the external things, but the internal things. *[pause]*

“Adorning” here refers to that which is well-ordered and beautiful.

It refers to something that enhances beauty. *[pause]*

Women love to adorn things.

They love to adorn their houses with decorations to make it more beautiful and attractive.

They also love to adorn themselves by using things to make themselves look more beautiful.

Just go to a shopping mall and you will see aisles of what? Make up, jewelry, clothes, and hair products. *[pause]*

This is an undeniable fact, and no one can dismiss it...

I’m sure there are some exceptions out there, but generally, women like to beautify things. *[pause]*

And did you know that Peter *isn't* saying to stop adorning things, but rather, he’s saying to adorn the *right* things.

Women were made to want to look beautiful, and there’s nothing wrong with that, but the question is, which part of you do you focus on the most? *[pause]*

² Augustine’s *Confessions* 9:19-22 are quoted in E.P. Clowney’s book, “The message of 1 Peter: the way of the cross,” p. 130.

Peter says to not be focused on adorning external things, like hair, accessories, or clothing.
[pause]

Now I don't believe that Peter is saying you can't look nice at all and you must look like you just rolled out of bed everyday.

But he's going after the excessive adorning of your outward appearance, so he emphasizes elaborate hairstyles and expensive jewelry. *[pause]*

Some evaluative questions you could ask yourself are these: Are you enslaved to looking outwardly beautiful?

How much time do you spend on your hair, makeup, and clothing?

How much money do you spend?

What matters most to you? The external or the internal?

Are you putting so much time and effort into your external looks that you neglect what's on the inside? *[pause]*

There's nothing wrong with being beautiful! But what are you seeking? External beauty or internal beauty? *[pause]*

When your priorities are on your outward appearance to the detriment of your character, then you are essentially saying, "This is what matters most, my outward appearance."

And yet God cares most about the beauty of your heart! *[pause]*

You might even be thinking, "But this is what men find beautiful!"

But the question should be, what does God find beautiful? *[pause]*

One thing I absolutely love doing in my sermon prep is looking at what the Greek words actually mean - I know I'm kinda nerdy like that.

But something that was neat was that if you look where he's talking about wearing gold and all these other things that are costly...

...He then says, "but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very *precious*."

That word "precious" is actually: costly, expensive, or something that is of great value.

So it's like it's saying, "Clothes and jewelry are the things of great value and worth to many, but God says, 'No, a gentle and quiet spirit is actually what is of great value and worth to me.'" *[pause]*

Ladies, there is far superior value in inward beauty.

The external, outward things fade away over time, but the inward character of your heart has imperishable beauty. *[pause]*

Where is your focus? Where do you find your source of beauty? *[pauseeee]*

As Peter continues, he tells women what specifically God cherishes inside: a gentle and quiet spirit.

I think we all know what gentle looks like.

It's to be kind and meek.

This is not a bad thing, ladies!

Gentleness is a fruit of the spirit³, in the Sermon on the Mount, the meek are said to inherit the earth⁴, and even Jesus is said to be gentle.⁵ *[pause]*

Meekness is not weakness, but strength under control.

So gentleness is not being a weak woman, but a strong woman, who can control her emotions and words to show kindness and care towards others. *[pauseeee]*

To understand this a little better, it's helpful to think of the opposite of gentleness: harsh, unkind, and mean. *[pauseeee]*

Wives, are you gentle with your husband? Or are you unkind, mean, and harsh towards him?

What about with other people? *[pauseeeee]*

Not only are wives called to have a gentle spirit, but also a quiet spirit.

Now this does not mean quiet as in she barely talks, but rather the word 'quiet' here means tranquil.

It means her disposition is to be calm and peaceful.

She's not always flustered, easily agitated, or turbulent.

Like a still sea, even under pressure, she has an inward calm and trust in the Lord, rather than being constantly anxious and fretful. *[pause]*

³ See Galatians 5:23.

⁴ See Matthew 5:5.

⁵ See Matthew 11:29.

By the way, this isn't a personality thing, where you say, "I can't be like that, for loud, assertive, or fiesty is just my personality."

No, you can be talkative, outgoing, and confident and yet you can still be gentle and calm.
[pause]

A good question to ask yourself is this: when my husband or kids interact with me on a normal day, do they experience someone who has a gentle and calm spirit, or a harsh and anxious one?

What a difference this could make in your home!

You could provide a place of refuge where your husband and children experience an atmosphere of gentleness and peace away from the chaos outside of the home. [pauseeee]

So how are you doing, wives?

Maybe you feel like a failure - there is forgiveness and grace in Christ, seek Him!

Don't throw up your hands in despair, rather rely upon God to change you, lean into Him for help to be this kind of woman.

Only He has the power to change you. [pauseeee]

Wives, what do you adorn yourself with? The external or the internal, which God deems precious? [pauseeeee]

Peter then moves to talk about an example of this kind of thing as he talks specifically about Sarah. [pause]

I love this quote by commentator Edmund Clowney, "The contemporary world resists the aging process at all costs, yet the youthful body that it idolizes quickly fades.

Christians need God's values to reject the futility of the worldly search for beauty. Can real beauty still be blooming along with wrinkles?

Peter offers the answer of a long-established beauty school: the daughters of Sarah (3:5-6)."⁶
[pauseeee]

Peter says that holy women of the past adorned themselves with the beauty of submission to their husbands. [pause]

Sarah is a prime example of this in the way that she talked about Abraham.

In her speech, she showed respect for him and his leadership in their marriage.

⁶ Clowney, E. P. (1988). The message of 1 Peter: the way of the cross (p. 132). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

And Peter tells women that you are a child of Sarah, “if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

That is, you demonstrate that you are a spiritual child of Sarah when you do good and live fearlessly. *[pause]*

Wives, when you adorn yourself with godly submission, then you are following in the footsteps of Sarah.

You are truly a daughter of Sarah and it is truly a beautiful thing in the sight of the Lord.

And that’s what I want to leave you with this morning...

Wives, adorn yourselves with the beauty of godly submission to your husband!

Do you adorn yourself with godly submission to your husband?

Women, don’t neglect submission!

It’s beautiful! It’s powerful! It’s the way that God made you to function and the marriage to function!

God’s ways are always best! Please remember this!

Don’t let the culture tell you that it’s lame or outdated, but stand upon the truth of God’s perfect, infallible Word. *[pauseeee]*

The truth is this: when you have respectful and pure conduct, submitting to your husband, it’s truly a miracle of God’s grace.

For it is only by God’s grace that a woman can live this way.

Your sin nature, our culture, and bad husbands are pushing you in the opposite direction, so it can only be God’s grace that any woman can live this way. *[pause]*

But when you do live this way, it’s a powerful testimony of what God can do in a life, so powerful, in fact, that you become a woman the world can’t explain. *[pause]*

Submission is beautiful to God, is it beautiful to you?