

**Winning Without Words:
The Value of Godly Conversation
Wisdom for Wives – Part 2
Palmetto Baptist Church**

Biblical Texts:

“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, 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. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 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. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.” (1 Peter 3:1–6)

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:11–12)

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” (1 Peter 5:6–10)

Introduction:

For some weeks now we have been looking at the instructions Paul gave to believers living in the midst of a pagan culture in order that they might display the power, wisdom, and grace of God that is found in Christ, advanced by the Gospel, and displayed in the Church.

We observed the massive disruption sin caused and the disorder that it produced in both in this earthly realm as well as in the spiritual realm Paul talks about in Ephesians.

There are massive, powerful, wicked forces hostile to His purposes, disobedient to His will, disrespectful of His word, who disregard His worth and defile His people. These spiritual forces are implacably un-submissive to His authority in every way. They are seeking to thwart His purposes and diminish His glory however and whenever they can. They have seized temporary power and control over this planet and as a result, they have created massive disorder and instigated global rebellion against God all over the planet.

However, through an amazing work accomplished by Jesus Christ – these enemies have been defeated and put to cosmic shame through the victory He gained by His obedient life and sacrificial death. Through Christ, God is at work restoring “shalom” to His universe. And the present display of this future universal shalom can be seen in the personal lives and the households of a group of people who have been called, justified, cleansed, and adopted into God’s family, the Church.

Last week we looked at the instruction that God gives to Christian wives who wish to display and promote “shalom” in their marriages. We noted that Paul gave these wives three specific instructions in three particular NT texts:

- A. Support and follow your own husband’s leadership as he follows Christ (Eph. 5:22-24)***
- B. Strive to make it easy for your husband to love and serve you (Col. 3:19).***
- C. Love and serve Christ by loving and serving those in your household – your husband and children (Titus 2:1-5).***

But we noted a fourth text (***1 Pet 3:1-6***) that addresses a very difficult situation confronting many Christian wives in cities like Ephesus who were married to unsaved husbands who were disobedient and hostile to the Gospel. What is such a Christian wife to do? What hope and help does God extend to her?

I. The Surrounding Pagan Context

Peter was writing to believers who lived in pagan cities located in five Roman provinces – Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia – all part of what is today known as Asia Minor or Turkey. The people who lived in these cities were marked by lifestyles that were in total contrast to the demands of the Gospel.

These Christians were surrounded by what Peter described as a “flood of debauchery” (4:4) that threatened to overwhelm their good intention to live in ways that pleased the Lord as opposed to fulfilling the desires of their old nature (4:2).

This “flood of debauchery” is described by six terms that describe what pagan people and pagan cities were like: *“For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.”* (4:3)

A. Described as Immoral behavior

- Sensuous sexuality
- Unbridled Lust

B. Described as Intemperate behavior

- Drunkenness
- Orgies
- Parties marked by carousing and drinking

C. Described as Idolatrous behavior prohibited by God

- The worship of pagan idols
- The worship of pagan leaders such as emperor worship
- The defiling practices involved in pagan worship

This behavior was expected as part of one’s personal, social, civil, and religious interactions in these cities. So, it was shocking and offensive when a person became a Christian and refused to

continue to participate with them in these behaviors. When a believer renounced this way of life, it produced both perplexity and animosity from unbelievers. This animosity often resulted in verbal revilement and vilification (4:4) – Christians paid a high price for living a holy life.

What would God expect from any obedient Christian, and more specifically, what would He expect from a Christian wife who lived in a city like this, was surrounded by a culture that was immersed and flooded by this debauchery, and who was married to an unsaved husband who was regularly engaged in these behaviors?

II. The Scriptural Injunction

A. Prepare Intentionally for Spiritual Conflict and Suffering

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1:13a)

B. Set Your Confident Expectation on the Grace and Enablement that comes from God.

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1:13b)

C. Do not be Conformed to Your Former Behavior but conduct yourself with Reverence toward God who Delivered you from your Former Lifestyle.

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,” (1:14–18)

D. Submit to all Legitimate Authority in ways that Honor God.

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.” (2:13–14)

E. Serve Christ Wholeheartedly.

“Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.” (2:16)

F. Suffer Patiently for Righteous Conduct

“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” (2:19–23)

G. Do so for a Worthy Spiritual Purpose

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (2:12)

III. The Specific Situation for Christian Wives (3:1a)

*“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that **even if some do not obey the word**, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives,”*

A. With Regard to Her Spouse

1. He Dismissed the Gospel
 - Marked by active disobedience to its demands to repent and believe
 - Marked by hostile rejection of its claims
2. He was Disobedient to God’s Word
 - in his worship - idolatrous
 - in his work – his worship would penetrate his work
 - in his ways – driven by his flesh to be a glad participant in the “flood of debauchery” that characterized the surrounding culture in the city.

B. With Regard to Her Spiritual Obligation

1. As a Christian she could not participate in idolatry by worshipping his gods

2. She could not participate in immoral behavior (sensuality and unbridled lust)
3. She could not join in his intemperate activities (drunkenness, orgies, and licentious parties)

C. With Regard to Her Social Standing

- Her posture and practice in these matters would be viewed as rebellion against her husband's authority ... and his inability to subjugate his wife in these areas would bring great shame upon him due to his apparent inability to manage his household.
- Her posture would dishonor him, damage his reputation in the city, and potentially disqualify him for certain honors and offices thus having negative social and economic impact on the household over which he stood as *Pater-Familias*.

And Peter exhorts her to prepare to endure in her own hostile environment just as all believers are called to endure for Christ in the larger social context of living holy and blameless lives in a pagan city marked by pagan beliefs and behaviors.

IV. The Spiritual Objective for Christian Wives (3:1b)

*"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, **they may be won** without a word by the conduct of their wives,"*

And yet, in spite of her posture against her husband's idolatrous worship, immoral desires, and intemperate behavior, she is called to "win him."

The idea behind this term is to persuade, to gain, to win over to a position or a place. Her husband is actively disobedient to the Gospel and openly hostile to its demands – yet she is called to win him over to the very message (logos) that he currently rejects and disregards.

In other words, she is called to win him to Christ by persuading him of the beauty and truth of the gospel by means of a particular kind of beauty she is called to display.

Peter could have told her to abandon the marriage. Instead, like Paul (1 Cor 7:13-14), he exhorts her to win her husband for the gospel and ***to use her marriage as the means*** for this amazing ministry.

So... what could a wife do to counter the negative impact her conversion to Christ might have on her husband's standing in society or her standing with him now that she had become an obedient Christian? What could she possibly offer him that would be so compelling that it would win him for Christ?

V. The Surprising Strategy for Christian Wives (3:1-4)

A. What a Christian Wife Must Do(3:1-2)

*"Likewise, wives, **be subject to your own husbands**, 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."*

She must do in her marriage what God tells all Christian's living in pagan contexts to do – she must properly arrange herself under her husband's authority. She must follow his leadership without engaging in prohibited worship or sinful behavior.

B. Why She Should Do It (3:2)

they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct."

She must strive to win her husband without words. In other words, she should do all she can to persuade him by her gospel conduct more than by her gospel words. Peter is not prohibiting or discouraging a wife from using Spirit-prompted

words to share the gospel or appeal for right behavior. Peter is noting that in a marriage, there is a “word” that is far more powerful and persuasive – her conduct.

Peter is implying that gospel-shaped conduct will be far more effective than words that reprove, rebuke, or argue against his natural behavior. (Note: this does not mean a Christian wife should not graciously appeal and encourage her husband to do what is right in the sight of God and man).

What they see in their wife’s consistent conduct before them will be more effective than what they hear from their wife.

And the specific conduct that will be a powerful persuasion is conduct that is consistently respectful and pure toward her husband and before his eyes.

- This conduct is morally pure and clean – chaste.
- This conduct is motivated by a reverence to God.
- This conduct is to be manifested in a respect for her husband.

Her reverence for God placed important moral, ethical, and spiritual boundaries around her obedience to God over her husband.

Her respect for her husband put important boundaries on how she obeyed her husband when doing so did not involve disobedience to God. It also shaped her response to her husband where and when her obedience to God made it difficult or impossible to obey him. Here are examples:

- She could not lie to steal to advantage her husband.
- She could not worship his gods or attend the religious, civil, or social ceremonies that involved idolatrous practices that

were prohibited by God (for example, participating in temple meals where food was offered to idols (1 Cor 8).

- She could not engage in the immoral activities that so commonly marked the parties and social gatherings her husband would have expected her to attend with him or to arrange and host for him.
- She could not neglect the spiritual imperatives of the Christian life – Christian worship, prayer, baptism, etc.

Since her goal was to win him, ***the way she rendered her obedience*** to God in these areas was important ... and Peter reminds her that her husband would best be won by a life of consistent obedience to God rendered in respect for her husband.

C. How She Should Go About It (3:3-4)

“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 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.”

1. Not by means of the perishable beauty of the physical body created by external adornment – although such adornment is not prohibited.
2. But by means of an imperishable beauty of the inner person cultivated by a disposition that is gentle (*meek*) and peaceful/gracious (*quiet*) and not harsh or argumentative in the face of pressure, rebuke, and even revilement.
3. This disposition, over time, has compelling persuasive power with her husband who sees and experiences this from her consistently over time.
4. This disposition and conduct is of great value to God.
 - Roman/Greek culture placed great value on expensive clothing, costly jewelry, and elaborate hair styles.
 - God placed great value on the inner beauty of a disposition marked by gentleness and gracious quietness.

5. Sourced and grounded in her confident expectation in God's provision and protection in the face of hostile circumstances and dangerous consequences.

VI. **The Striking Example For Christian Wives (3:5-6)**

"For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."

A. Choose the Right Role Models

- Don't use the cultural norms of the day to determine how you should render your submission to your husband
- Instead, look to holy women who hoped in God and do what they did.

B. Embrace the Right Approach

- So... what did these holy women do? ***They arranged themselves under their own husbands and followed and supported their leadership without disobeying God.***
- In other words, in submitting to their own husbands, they did what was right in the sight of God (good) and they did not allow fearful circumstances or consequences to deter them or dissuade them.
- And the specific example Peter pointed to was the consistent life-long submissive disposition that Sarah displayed to Abraham. The way Peter identifies Sarah's disposition was in her willing recognition and acceptance of his leadership over her when she identified him as her God-given leader (Sarah called him "lord.")
- There is a particular time when this actually occurred – Gen 18:12 when she overheard the angelic messengers announcing to Abraham that by this time the following year she would give birth to the child God had promised.
- This was ***humanly impossible*** – she was 90 and Abraham was 100 and both she and Abraham were "worn out" –

literally beyond the ability to father or to bear a child. But it was also ***physically dangerous*** and life-threatening – imagine the physical duress and danger of bearing a child at that age in that time period.

- And though she initially laughed, Sarah followed her husband in this endeavor and became pregnant at the risk of her life and bore Isaac.
- Where did she learn to do this? Where did such a disposition bolstered by faith in God actually come from? Answer – watching God care for, protect, and preserve her when following Abraham had put her in dangerous places before due to his own lack of faith in God.
- On two prior occasions Abraham led in ways that put Sarah in hostile and dangerous circumstances – and she followed him without sinning and without disrespecting him before others.
- Genesis 12:10-20 Abraham goes to Egypt to escape the famine and because he feared for his life, he asked Sarah to say something that was true – that was his sister. Sarah was the daughter of Abraham’s father but by a different mother – she was his half-sister. And as a consequence, Pharaoh brought Sarah into his house thinking she was Abraham’s sister and not realizing she was also his wife.
- Genesis 20:1-18 Many years later, Abraham was again in foreign territory ruled by pagan king named Abimelech. He had been told that Sarah was Abraham’s sister and, not realizing she was also his wife, he brought her into his harem.

C. Understand What Was Actually Done

- ***Peter tells us that Sarah did not participate in sinful behavior but did what was good*** – in all three occasions mentioned above, God did not rebuke Sarah nor did he punish her as he did with Saphira who conspired with her husband and actually lied to God’s Spirit.

- ***In each occasion, she did not let fear and fearful consequences deter her*** from following Abraham appropriately for her context, yet without sinning.
- ***God protected and vindicated Sarah*** – to Pharaoh (Gen 12:17-18), to Abraham (Gen 18:14; Heb 11:11, and to Abimelech (Gen 20:3-7).
- ***Her gracious conduct was worthy of Peter’s praise because it was highly precious to God.*** We are not given full insight into all the actual details of the events in Gen 12, 18, and 20. We are told that when Sarah followed Abraham’s leadership, God protected and preserved her life and moral purity, and vindicated her to Abraham when pagan leaders rebuked Abraham for his lack of faith in God.
- ***Her willingness to trust God in the face of fearful circumstances was so valuable to God that He honored Sarah by making her an example of faith in Hebrews 11!***

VII. The Special Considerations for Christian Wives (3:6)

“And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

You must submit attractively, suffer patiently, and obey God confidently. And this will involve to commitments:

A. In following your unsaved husband, you must do what is good and right before the Lord.

B. You must not let the fear of the consequences deter you from doing what is right before the Lord.

C. An important caveat – this text is not supporting the idea that a Christian wife is called to endure physical or sexual abuse – Peter prohibits this, Jesus died to deliver her from this, the Gospel is damaged by this, and God is not pleased by this – so do not

remain under physical or sexual abuse yourself (or your children) out of fear – trust God to protect you and preserve you!

Two examples will help:

Esther 1:1-19 When the Persian Queen Vashti was asked by her husband King Ahasuerus to present herself in an immoral context before his court, she refused in spite of the severe consequences for doing so.

1 Samuel 25:1-43 When Nabal put his entire household and family at risk being destroyed by the wrath of David by his foolish behavior and rash words, his wife Abigail rose up and took action that delivered her whole family (along with her wicked husband) from danger and death by appeasing David and granting him what was right in the sight of God that her husband had wrongfully withheld from David.

Conclusion:

- What is the outcome of this kind of faith-filled submission? It is very precious in God's sight.
- God sees; God prizes, God protects, God vindicates, and God rewards such a Christian Wife – and often her earthly reward is the conversion of her husband to the gospel he once spurned.