

In the Land of our Sojourn: A Word to Wives

1 Peter 3:1-6

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on September 7, 2014

Introduction

- ❖ Our culture is obsessed with beauty. Some of the most popular shows on television today center on making people beautiful, giving them a makeover. You have shows like Extreme Makeover, Ambush Makeover, What Not to Wear, etc.
 - ▶ The basic premise is that these people on the show don't measure up. There is some standard of beautiful and they fall short – in their own eyes or the eyes of society. They're too fat, too skinny, too wrinkly, too frumpy, too passé. They need a new hairdo, a new wardrobe, a new look. Perhaps a nip and tuck or an injection of Botox or collagen. A scalpel and some silicone should do the trick.
 - **The common concern in all these shows is on how to make the outside beautiful, adorning it with cosmetics and clothing.** Sadly there's no concern with the inner self, adorning one's own character with virtue and honor.

- ❖ **One of the most pressing issues in society today is the recovery of biblical beauty. To understand what true beauty really is and where it really lies.** This is such an important message to drive home, especially for Christian women today. As a man, I try my best to put myself in your shoes. To imagine the mounting pressure you face daily to keep a certain appearance, to maintain an ideal weight, to follow the latest trend or fashion. It grieves me to know that this burden awaits every young woman growing up in our society.

- ❖ I think of my own daughter who is not even in grade school, and yet she's already bombarded with not-so-subtle messages of what is beautiful. From her Disney princesses to her Lego Friends, there is this unrelenting message being communicated: **Beauty is external. Beauty is youth. Beauty is thin. Beauty is fitness. Beauty is strength.**
 - ▶ So as we age, as our waistline increases and our fitness declines, as our strength wanes, as our hair grays, as our skin sags, as wrinkles replace a youthful complexion, we obsess over every product, procedure, or pill that will get us back to looking young, thin, fit, and strong. Because we're convinced *that* is beauty.

- ❖ I know it's said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. **My point is that the one Beholder whose eyes truly matter in the grand scheme of things is the one who Begat you, who formed you from the dust.**
 - ▶ In the biblical worldview, God created every man, woman, and child. He formed our inward parts and knitted us together in our mother's womb; we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:13-14). **So by virtue of being Creator, God gets to determine what true beauty is.** He designed woman, so he gets to say what's beautiful about her.

- ❖ Sisters, don't look to your mirror, or the fashion magazines, or the latest celebrities. They are not the authoritative source on what is beautiful. God is.
 - ▶ And in his Word, he says your beauty lies not in your outward adornment, in your hairstyle, your jewelry, your clothes. **True beauty lies in the inner self, the hidden person of the heart.** It's described by Peter as a gentle and quiet spirit (vv3-4).

- ❖ Peter is writing this in the context of a larger section of his letter where he's describing what godly, honorable conduct looks like for Christians, especially in relation to proper authorities. Peter calls us "*sojourners and exiles*" (2:11), and out of that identity, we are called to live distinctly different lives in contrast to our culture. Yet something about our lives should be compellingly attractive.
 - ▶ He says in chapter 2:12 to keep your conduct honorable among the watching world, so that they might see your good deeds and end up glorifying God. That though your example, they might be won over to Christ.
- ❖ He goes on in vv13-17 to mention unbelieving governors/rulers, and then in vv18-25 he talks about unbelieving masters/bosses. These are the proper authorities that God has placed over us, and Peter is exhorting us to submit and show proper respect to their authority, even if they treat us harshly or unfairly.
 - ▶ **But he stresses that our submission should not be motivated by custom or cultural norms but by an allegiance to Christ and the personal example he set in his life and death.** That's what Peter means in v13 when he tells us to willingly submit "*for the Lord's sake*". We do it for Him and because of Him.
- ❖ Today we enter chapter 3 where Peter directly addresses Christian women, especially those with unbelieving husbands. Husbands are another example of proper authority, and we're told that honorable conduct for wives – *beautiful* conduct – also involves a willing submission.

Feminine Beauty in the Eyes of God

- ❖ I know that raises a whole host of questions, but before we explore this concept of wives submitting to their husbands, I want to continue our discussion on the Creator's prerogative to define beauty for us. **This is important because any discussion on biblical submission will be misconstrued if not placed in the context of God's good order for marriage and his definition of feminine beauty.**
- ❖ Peter actually starts by telling us what it doesn't look like. Look at v3, "*Do not let your adorning be external – the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear.*" So feminine beauty does not lie in one's external adornment.
 - ▶ Peter's culture, like our own, was obsessed with outward beauty. Roman women of the wealthy class were known for their gaudiness, their extravagance. They loved fine clothing, expensive jewelry, and elaborate hairstyles.
- ❖ It's this kind of flamboyance that Peter is calling out among Christian women. He's not against braiding one's hair or the wearing of jewelry. It's not a sin to do so. If you take v3 that literally then you'd have to prohibit the wearing of clothing too! That's obviously not Peter's point. **His point is that Christian women should not be preoccupied with their personal appearance, with these kinds of external adornments.**

- ❖ Some people have a perception of Christianity being very restrictive when it comes to dress. As if devout Christian women are only permitted to wear long skirts down to the ankles or long-sleeved blouses with absolutely no plunge in the neckline. **The Bible seems to repress a women's freedom and ability to express herself through dress.**
 - ▶ But such a stereotype couldn't be more wrong. When you consider the constant bombardment women face, the incessant messaging and marketing to look and feel a certain way – it's nothing short of oppressive. They can't walk through a store, read a magazine, or drive down the freeway without being told they're not pretty enough, thin enough, or young enough. It's seriously oppressive!

- ❖ How ironic that the Bible is actually a source of liberation for women when it comes to beauty and dress. The Bible offers greater dignity to women than our culture. **Because the Bible points women away from an inordinate preoccupation with external beauty and elevates the beauty of the inner self when adorned with godly character and virtue.**
 - ▶ Keep reading into v4, *“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.”*

- ❖ Peter is simply building on a solid OT moral tradition that elevated the inner qualities of virtue over a person's looks. We're told in **1 Samuel 16:7** that *“the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”* The **Proverbs 31** woman understands that *“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”* (31:30).
 - ▶ And **Proverbs 11:22** states in no uncertain terms, *“Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.”* **In other words, you can put lipstick and pearls on a pig, but it's still a pig.** You have yet to address the inner self. That's where true beauty lies. That's where God put it.

- ❖ This explains how Peter can point to Sarah as an example of true beauty. She's the wife of Abraham whom we're introduced to in Genesis as a ninety-year-old, elderly woman (Gen. 17:17). **She's a senior citizen. Her hair has thinned out and grayed. Her skin is saggy and blotchy. And yet, in God's sight, she's a picture of beauty.**
 - ▶ Everyone knows that external beauty fades. It never lasts. But Peter says in v4 that *“a gentle and quiet spirit”* has an imperishable, never-fading beauty to it that is precious in God's sight.

- ❖ **Sisters**, what more do you need in motivation to adorn your inner self than the promise of becoming precious in the sight of God? **Mothers**, are you protecting your daughters from the messaging of this world and pointing them to true beauty – helping to adorn them with gentleness and the fear of the Lord? **Fathers**, are you teaching your sons what to look for in a wife – what makes a woman truly beautiful? **Brothers**, are you looking deeper than the surface, looking past the charm and appearances, to detect the true beauty of a woman? It's lies in a woman's character, in the inner person of the heart.

The Beauty of Biblical Submission

- ❖ Okay now we're ready to discuss biblical submission. Peter goes on in v5 to say that the holy women of the OT, women like Sarah, used to adorn their inner selves – they used to beautify their own character – “*by submitting to their own husbands*”. **So there’s something beautiful, something precious, about a wife who willingly submits to her husband.**
 - ▶ This is not just the opinion of ancient societies or just the opinion of husbands. This is God’s opinion. This is what he says in his Word. Biblical submission is a means by which a woman can adorn herself with true beauty.

- ❖ Let's read vv1-2 again. "*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, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct.*" I want to begin by means of qualifying what we mean by submission. I have five things that biblical submission is not.¹

What Submission Does Not Mean

- ❖ **1) Biblical submission does not teach that all women are subjugated under all men.** Be careful not to make this passage say more than it says. Peter is telling *wives* to be subject to their *own* husbands. Not to just any man they meet on the street or in the congregation. Peter is focused on biblical submission *in the context of marriage*.
 - ▶ Wives, it’s important you understand that this kind of submission we’re talking about is uniquely given to your husband alone. No other man in your life – be it your father, your pastor, your boss, your president – has the unique authority over you and your household like your husband. And unmarried sisters, it’s important you understand that the man you’re dating does not possess this unique authority. You are not called to submit to your boyfriend as you would to a husband. I can’t stress that enough.

- ❖ **2) Biblical submission does not mean having to always agree with your husband.** Clearly Peter doesn't expect this since he’s assuming that some of these Christian wives will have nonChristian husbands. Submit to your own husbands “*even if some do not obey the word.*” That’s a euphemism for not believing the word of the gospel (cf. 1:22).
 - ▶ So she’s a Christian; her husband is not. They disagree on matters pertaining to ultimate reality. They disagree on the most important thing in all the universe – God himself – and yet Peter assumes she can still be submissive to her husband. Biblical submission doesn't mean you have to check your brain at the wedding altar and become a mindless follower of your husband. You don’t have to agree with all that he says and does, and yet you can disagree with the posture of a gentle and quiet spirit that still affirms your husband’s God-given responsibility to lead.

- ❖ **3) Biblical submission does not mean giving up any effort to influence (or even change) your husband.** Peter is not saying wives have to accept their husbands as is. He’s not saying, “*You have to tolerate all his flaws. Be a submissive wife and don’t try to change him.*”

¹ The following structure has been adapted from Wayne Grudem’s article “Wives like Sarah and Husbands Who Honor Them: 1 Peter 3:1-7” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Crossway, Wheaton, 1991, pp. 194-208.

- ▶ No, the whole context of this passage is a Christian wife's desire to "win" her husband to Christ. To influence him. To change him for the better as he finds his hope and identity in Jesus. **Paradoxically, the Bible's strategy to change your husband is by submitting to him.** He might be won over to Christ *without a word* by the conduct of his wife when he see her respectful and pure conduct.

- ❖ "*Without a word*" implies that the primary gospel influence of wives on their unbelieving husbands will not be their speech but their godly behavior. I think it's safe to assume these husband in view have already heard the gospel. That's why Peter describes them as those who disobey the word. They're not ignorant of the gospel. They heard it already along with their wives. But they rejected it as their wives received it with saving faith.
 - ▶ Peter's advice to these wives is that it'll do little good for you to constantly bring up his need to convert. By now he knows that you think he needs submit his life to Christ. He knows the gospel and what it demands. What's going to really win him over is now seeing the gospel and its demands being faithfully lived out in his own wife's transformed character and demeanor, through her respectful and pure conduct.

- ❖ **4) Biblical submission does not mean following your husband into sin.** A Christian wife's submission to her husband is not only a willing submission but a conditional one. It's not absolute. The only absolute submission we offer is to Christ, our true and better Husband.
 - ▶ When Peter starts off his instruction in v1 with the word "*likewise*", he's referring back to the previous two exhortations he gave about submitting to rulers and masters. In chapter 2:18 he calls for submission "*with all respect*" and in 2:13 he says to submit "*for the Lord's sake*".
 - This means a wife's submission is not based on whether her husband is a believer or a good husband. It's motivated rather by her reverence to the Lord. And that means her submission to Christ and his demands will always take priority over any ungodly demand from her husband.

- ❖ If he tries to lead you and your family onto the path of sin, you must not follow for the Lord's sake (and your husband's sake), but you can still do this with all respect. This is the same instruction Peter gives to citizens and slaves who have to choose to respectfully disobey any time the authority over you demands you to compromise your faith in Christ. Unjust treatment may be what you get in return, but to endure such sorrows while mindful of God is a gracious thing in his sight (2:19-20).
 - ▶ **But having said that, there's nothing here to suggest that submission requires a wife to submit to physical abuse.** If you are a victim of spousal abuse, you must speak up and seek protection from the proper authorities for the Lord's sake and the sake of any children under your care. The beautiful concept of biblical submission should never be used to justify such ugly, cowardly, sinful behavior.

- ❖ **5) Biblical submission does not mean men and women are inherently unequal.** This is probably the biggest misconception. This kind of teaching is often perceived as chauvinistic. It seems to suggest that men are superior to women. That's sexist.
 - ▶ But that is a misconstrued depiction of biblical submission. The Bible couldn't be more clear on the equality of men and women. **Genesis 1:27** speaks of male and female both sharing in the image and likeness of God. **Galatians 3:28** stresses that when it comes to salvation in Christ there is no distinction between male and female. Peter goes on to write in **3:7** that Christian couples are co-heirs of the grace of life.
 - As he did with slaves, Peter speaks directly to wives even though it was customary to speak to the master of the household (the husband) if you wished to address his slave or his wife. **Peter treats these wives as equally capable of instruction and equally responsible for their own discipleship to Christ.**

- ❖ So there's no question that the Bible teaches the equality of men and women. **The real question is whether this equality is compatible with the call for wives to submit.** Those who argue that it's not typically argue that Peter is just accommodating to the cultural norms of his day. He wanted to maintain the gospel's credibility within a highly patriarchal society. That's our typical explanation for why Peter didn't outright call for the abolition of slaves.
 - ▶ So it's argued that the submission of wives is a temporary injunction that's only applicable if it supports the gospel's mission and strengthens the church's credibility. And of course it's argued that, in our culture today, advising women to submit to their husbands would actually hinder our gospel mission and hurt the church's credibility. It would be like trying to bring back slavery in the name of Jesus.

- ❖ But that's not a fair comparison. Yes, the Bible regulates slavery, but never gives it any theological grounding or calls it part of God's good design. Yet that's exactly what the Bible does for marriage when it calls for biblical submission (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Cor. 11:3; 7-9).
 - ▶ That's why Peter has no problem speaking of women being co-equals with men and at the same time calling wives to submit to their husbands. **Because submission does not negate equality.** Just as God the Son could submit to God the Father without negating their equality. The relationship between Father and Son proves that a difference in role and function does not imply a difference in worth and dignity.

- ❖ **Those who insist so are betraying a secular worldview that relates one's value to one's position of authority.** But Scripture says to wives, *"You're valuable. You have dignity and worth, not because of the role you hold or the amount of authority you have, but because you're made in God's image."* You're called equal and called to submit without contradiction.
 - ▶ Yes, there is going to be push back from our culture. Such a wife, such a marriage, will be distinctly different in society today and probably seen as strange. **But there is something about an intelligent, capable, spiritually-mature woman who joyfully submits to her husband's leadership that is compellingly attractive.** There's something beautiful there. And no matter how hard the world tries to deny it, the world can't help but notice. Because it's part of God's good design.

What Submission Does Mean

- ❖ So I've been telling you what it's not, now let me describe what biblical submission is in positive terms. I'll put it like this: **Biblical submission is a wife's gentle demeanor and willing disposition to follow her husband's authority to lead their household.**
 - ▶ Peter points to Sarah as a model of this. Look at v5 again, *"For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord."*

- ❖ Notice how Peter connects Sarah's *submission* to Abraham with her *obedience* to Abraham. **That means biblical submission is not just an attitude.** It's not just a gentle demeanor you carry around at home. **That's why we say it also includes a disposition – an inclination, a willingness – to follow a husband's authority to lead.** That's how Sarah obeyed Abraham. The mention of calling him "lord" is a possible allusion to Genesis 18:12. That's the only place recorded when she refers to him that way, but it was an offhand remark not even spoken to Abraham. It's hard to say if Peter was only referring to that instance.
 - ▶ More likely he was referring to their overall story, and how this matriarch of God's people set a great example of what it looks like to follow your husband's leadership.

- ❖ Think about it. Sarah willingly followed Abraham's leadership, but I'm sure it wasn't easy. Abram comes home one day and says God told me we need to leave the only home we've ever known to go on a dangerous journey for thousands of miles to some Promised Land we've never seen. And Sarah obeyed. She followed. Without having heard from God herself. Without know where they're going. *Can you imagine how difficult that must have been?*
 - ▶ What made it possible? Is it because she had so much confidence in Abraham and his impeccable, infallible, courageous leadership? Clearly not. We remember those instances in Genesis where Abraham wimped out, balked in his leadership, and put Sarah in a compromising and dangerous position, twice! (Gen. 12:11-13; 20:2)

- ❖ **No, she was willing and able to submit to her husband – not because she hoped in him and his leadership – but because she "hoped in God" and God's ability to ultimately lead their family to glory (v5).** That's how she could affirm her husband's authority and follow his leadership even if he was prone to falter.
 - ▶ The world imagines a submissive wife to be weak and mousy, very timid and afraid. But in v6, we're told that Sarah was fearless. She was strong and unafraid. This is only possible when your hope is not bundled up in your husband but in your God – the one who calls you to humble submission, who says he designed marriage this way for your joy, who says this is beautiful and precious in his sight.

What Beautiful Submission Looks Like Today

- ❖ Sisters, Peter says in v6 that you are Sarah's daughter if you imitate her godly conduct. This is how the godly women of the past adorned themselves. **They made themselves beautiful by paying attention to the heart – not the mirror.** They adorned their character with virtue, including a gentle demeanor and a submissive disposition towards their husbands.

- ❖ The way I want to conclude is by considering what this kind of beautiful submission can look like today in modern-day marriages.² **First, let me speak to women who are married to believers or who plan to marry a believer one day.** I know you wish Peter had just laid out a step-by-step explanation of what submission looks like in family decision-making, in conflict resolution, and in daily chores. Just tell me what to do.
 - ▶ But I think there is much wisdom in Scripture to *not* spell out the specifics because – though the principle transcends any one cultural moment – Peter was writing into a specific culture that was definitely more patriarchal and not influenced by the feminist movements of our day.

- ❖ So how submission works out in daily practice will look different today. I doubt many of you plan on calling your husband "m'lord" anytime soon. And it's going to look different for each Christian wife depending on your personality, your husband's personality, your age and life-stage, your particular life circumstances. **The outworking of biblical submission may be different for different couples, but the inner attitude and disposition will be the same.**
 - ▶ It's a heart that delights for your husband to take initiative. That resists any sinful impulse to control, subvert, or replace his leadership in the home. It involves lots of encouragement and support for your husband. He's often burden with self-doubt and fear. He's prone to passivity and too quick to turn the reins over to you. Reassure him and make sure he knows it's your joy to see him take responsibility and lead in love.

- ❖ If you want your husband to see you as beautiful, Peter says to forget the face creams and hair dye; don't focus on the clothes and jewelry. Real beauty is found in this kind of heart. And best thing is that this is a beauty that actually improves with age. The most beautiful women in the world are not in Cosmo. You'll likely find them in a church's seniors ministry.

- ❖ **Let me also speak a word to women who are married to nonbelievers.** Peter's words here are most applicable to you. God understands that your heart's desire is for your husband's salvation. Your dream is for him to one day be the spiritual leader of your family.
 - ▶ Every Christian feels like a stranger and alien in this world, but oftentimes you feel this way even at home. Perhaps you've had to deal with our husband's ridicule of your faith. He's been resistant to every effort to share your faith. Perhaps the time for talking is done and the only avenue you have left to share the gospel is by showing how it's changed your life, how it's led you to joyfully submit to your husband's lead.

- ❖ **God has a simple message for you: *Put your hope in me.*** Trust that he is sovereign over all things, including all the unique challenges that come with being married to an unbeliever. Fear God and you'll have nothing to fear in marriage. Hope in God and take comfort in knowing that he sees and appreciates your inner beauty even if your husband is blind to it. Your faithfulness has not gone unnoticed. Keep your hope in God.

² For further study I recommend Claire Smith's *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says About Men and Women*, Matthaïs Media, Australia, 2012.