

Studies in I Peter (37)

Submission in Marital Relationships: The Wife

Introduction

- A. This passage before us is the third illustration Peter gave in regard to "Test Cases" concerning submission. The first has to do with submission to an ungodly government, the second was an exhortation to slaves to submit to their masters, and now he exhorts wives to be in submission to their husbands.
- B. Peter's exhortation is particularly directed to those Christian wives who were married to non-Christian husbands. Hiebert, in his book on I Peter said, "No specific group of members in the churches was more in need of understanding, warm encouragement, and wise spiritual counsel." He goes on to speak of the problems a believing wife would have, in a pagan society, when married to a non-believer.
- C. The Scripture:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. I Peter 3:1-6 NIV

- I. The Content of Peter's Exhortation: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands."
 - A. The word "submission" is a military term and indicates an acknowledgment of those placed over one for leadership reasons -- so that an objective may be achieved. The basis of such a relationship is found in Genesis 2,3 and I Timotny 2:9-15. See also I Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:22-33.

The words "in the same way" relate back to the obedience the Lord Jesus gave to His Father in submitting to persecution and death -- simply because it was the His Father's will. It is also a reminder that, as the Lord Jesus was sustained in His suffering, a similar resource is made available to the wife in her role of submission to her husband.
 - B. The question we have, as we read such a passage, is what one is to do if the husband demands that his wife do that which would violate the will of God? A pagan husband could easily demand his wife become involved in stealing, lying, or even prostitution. Such a question is also asked about our submission to the government, and the slave to the master. Does Peter's lack of such an answer mean: "Pray, trust and obey your husband"? We know he led the Disciples in refusing to submit to the demand of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:19, 5:29).

II. The Purpose in Peter's Exhortation: "So that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."

- A. The "purpose" is the salvation of the husband. That should always be high on the wife's priority.
- B. They "may" be won "without talk by ... behavior." Emphasis: the power of godliness and presence of the Holy Spirit working through the holy respect in the wife's behavior.

III. The Counsel in Peter's Exhortation: "Beauty not ... adornment ... but inner self ... a gentle and quiet spirit ... of great worth in God's sight."

- A. The warning: not to submit to worldly standards based on sensual and external standards. Because of slave labor, many women of slave masters had the time and money for extravagant dress. Peter reminded the wives that such a life was not the Biblical pattern.
- B. The emphasis: The wife was to develop here "inner self." The thought is on love, holiness, and truthfulness manifested in a "gentle and quiet spirit." Such was an "unfading beauty."
- C. Reminder: The priority of the spiritual. The way wives, as true for all believers, were to "solve" or at least Biblically respond to a critical issue in life -- was by cooperating with God, through His Word, in or by their spirit, the "inner self." The importance of this principle can hardly be overemphasized. This is one reason why Paul prayed for believers that "The Father ...may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being." Ephesians 3:16

IV. The Example in Peter's Exhortation: "Holy women ... who put their hope in God ... like Sarah"

- A. The instruction in Peter's exhortation.
 - 1. They were "holy women." The emphasis and priority of their life was in the spiritual area.
 - 2. They were women who "put their hope in God." They looked upon God as the source of their help in the difficult situations of their life.
 - 3. They were women who "were submissive to their own husbands." Peter describes their obedience to God to be seen, to some degree, in submission to their husband's leadership.
- B. The invitation in Peter's exhortation.
 - 1. It appears that Peter is referring to Sarah in a similar way that Abraham is called "the father of believers." (See Romans 4:11,12; Galatians 3:7, 16, 29). In Isaiah 51:1,2 both Abraham and Sarah are spoken of as the "spiritual parents" of all true believers.
 - 2. Peter invites all Christian wives to follow Sarah's example: "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."