



Catalog No. 771

1 Peter 3:1-6

Eleventh Message

Brian Morgan

April 29, 1990

GLORY IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL HOME

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

In 1 Peter 2, the apostle used the person of Jesus Christ to illustrate his model of Christian submission, and demonstrated the wonderful influence of salvation which our Lord's submission brought to the world. In 3:1-6, Peter reveals how choosing the role of a servant will determine the quality of a marriage and the environment in the home.

Oswald Chambers said, "Marriage is one of the mountain peaks on which God's thunder blasts souls to hell, or on which His light transfigures human lives in the eternal heavens." Similarly, I would liken marriage to two great mountains of the Bible, Mount Sinai and Mount Hermon. On Mount Sinai, there are only holy demands, for which you have no adequacy in yourself, and it seems as if you are constantly under the holy wrath of God. On Mount Hermon, however, you are transfigured as you see the light and glory of Jesus Christ. Between those two mountain peaks is a vast wilderness, a valley of humiliation, which I call "mutual submission." In order to move from Mount Sinai to Mount Hermon there is no other alternative but to walk that path.

Mike Mason writes in *The Mystery of Marriage*, "Who wins the battle of wills and whims is not the point; the point is that each tries to surrender as much as possible for the sake of the other so that the love between them may be honored and built up in every way!"

Since this is Ray Stedman's last Sunday at Peninsula Bible Church, after 40 years of faithful service, I thought it would be appropriate to quote his wife Elaine regarding their journey from Mount Sinai to Mount Hermon. Elaine writes:

When we married I was a biblically illiterate, Bible-reading, church-going activist. I was squeaky-clean in my moral self-righteousness, knew all the answers but none of the questions. I could have used some help. My new husband had been enculturated with a view of women as emotionally unstable and somewhat lacking in sound judgment. His perception of men was quite different. They were generally stable, good fellows, equipped for taking charge. He was sure I needed help.

Ray had been vaguely indoctrinated with a view of headship-submission which placed the husband in command-responsibility to the wife...and tried to instruct me. Problems developed when his father-to-child stance encountered my notable lack of humility and patience. Our communication was so unfruitful that we each took silent vows to study separately, which spilled over into our prayers as well.

Providentially, I believe, we knew so little about various and sundry views of biblical teaching on marriage that we could attribute neither our successes nor our failures to them. We were dealing the "the flesh," pure and simple, and the Scriptures to which we were both committed had plenty to say about that.

The good news is that as we individually committed ourselves to the integrity of the Scriptures we became thoroughly convinced of their harmony and viability for life. As we allowed the truth of the Word of God to indict our carnal and selfish attitudes and behavior,

the barriers they created began to diminish. Now we could begin to share our insights and appreciate the nuances and dimensions which come from hearing it through one another. As we began to apply gracious principles learned from our encounters with Biblical truth we learned to appreciate the privilege of praying together.

Learning to hear and appreciate one another opens us up to others, and we gradually are becoming more willing to be transparent and vulnerable toward truth expressed through God's other people. This continues to be a process, one to which the Apostle Peter refers as growing up to salvation.

A husband and wife who are willing to humble themselves and submit to mutual vulnerability of praying together, will find that the mutual confession of failure and weakness which is part of all true prayer is perhaps the best of all ways to truly know one another. Two people on their knees together in shared humility and dependence upon the grace of God for forgiveness and power to love and obey, can experience beautiful vulnerability unique to united prayer.

Just as Peter exhorted husbands to mutual submission in last week's passage, today we will see how a wife's submission to her husband will affect the marriage relationship. 1 Peter 3:1-6:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. (NASB)

I. The Model of Submission: Jesus Christ (3:1a)

Peter begins by telling us that our model of submission is Jesus Christ. This is found in the words, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands." (3:1a).

By submitting to his Father with a gentle and quiet spirit, Jesus Christ brought salvation to the hostile nation of Israel. "In the same way" as Christ submitted to his Father's will, wives also are to submit to husbands. "The same way" includes the same *motive*, "for the Lord's sake" (2:13); the same *breadth*, whether your husband is a "good husband or the unreasonable" (2:18); the same *manner*, being silent rather than reviling (2:23); and the same *trust* in the one who judges righteously (2:23). That phrase confirms that the role of submission is not a position of weakness, but one of unqualified strength. It is the very role Christ took to establish the kingdom of God.

II. The Goal of Submission: Winning Hearts (3:1b-2)

The apostle now tells us the goal of submission in 3:1b-2:

...so that even if any of them are disobedient [unbelieving] to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

In Peter's day, as in ours, there were many marriages where wives had come to Christ, but their husbands were unbelievers. I would translate the word "disobedient" in verse 1 as "without faith," or "unbelieving." What does a wife do in that situation?

A. Holiness in the Old Testament

To answer that question, we must first understand the teaching of scripture about the importance of holiness and purity. The Jews were to be a holy people, achieving purity by separation from anything unclean. In the Old Testament, if something unclean came into contact with something holy, the holy thing did not sanctify the unclean. Rather, the unclean thing defiled what was holy. Haggai tells us in chapter 2 of his prophecy,

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling: If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?'" and the priests answered and said, "No." Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?" And the priests answered and said, "It will become unclean." Then Haggai answered and said, "'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.'" (Hag 2:11-14)

Thus, there had to be walls of separation to maintain holiness. When a woman had an issue of blood during her menstrual period, she was separated from the temple and could not worship. Since a leper was considered unclean, he could not go into the temple. Touching a dead body defiled a person, and therefore kept him from worship.

B. Holiness in the New Testament

In the New Testament, an amazing thing happens regarding holiness and purity. When Jesus Christ comes from heaven to earth, he is the heavenly reality of all of Israel's worship. He is the heavenly temple come to earth, the priest and the sacrifice. Holiness and purity is intensified, for we see Jesus Christ in situations that would normally have defiled an Old Testament saint. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. A woman who has a flow of blood touches his robe, while he himself touches lepers. He interacts with the dead when he resurrects Lazarus. Yet miraculously, Jesus is not defiled. The greater wonder, however, is that his holiness is so great that he sanctifies everything with which he comes in contact! He heals the leper, forgives sin, and cleanses people's lives. He makes holy what he touches.

Applying this principle to marriage, the apostle Paul says, "If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. A woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy" (1 Cor 7:13-14).

After the cross, the resurrection, and the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, holiness has been intensified. Unfortunately, I think many Christians are living as if Pentecost has not happened. They view holiness and purity as if we were living in the days of the Old Testament. They are fearful of living in the world, and want to

separate from it. The New Testament, however, says that when a Christian and a non-Christian interact, the Christian brings holiness to the relationship. Thus, Peter tells the Christian wife that her holiness is more powerful than her husband's idolatry, and her good influence on their children is greater than his evil. Even in a submissive role, a wife can win her husband without a word by her righteous behavior, just as Christ achieved great influence upon an unbelieving world.

This text has often been misapplied to say that wives do not have the freedom to disagree or argue with their husbands regarding righteousness. But that is not what the text teaches. In Acts 5, for example, Sapphira is judged as an equal heir to the grace of life when she goes along with her husband's hypocrisy. Rather, "without a word," means that a wife is not to preach to an unconverted husband. She should not leave books by his bed-stand, drag him to church, or coerce him to Christian fellowship. She is to live her life and say nothing, for the husband will not be converted by what he *hears* with the ear. He will be converted by what he *sees* with the eye—the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

A beautiful example of this is Bob Roe, one of our former pastors. Although Bob rejected his faith as a young man and married an unbeliever, God fooled him by bringing his unbelieving wife to Jesus Christ. Believing the truth in the text, she said nothing to Bob for two years, but lived a quiet life before him. When the pressure of her goodness was too great, he came back to Christ. He became, in my mind, one of the greatest pastors PBC has ever had. His marriage is a wonderful model of how a man and woman are to submit to each other in love.

Therefore, wives, the reason to submit and the model for submission is Jesus Christ. Secondly, understand the great power submission brings, even to an unbelieving heart.

III. The Value of Submission: It Beautifies (3:3-4)

Peter now tells us the value of submission in verses 3-4. It beautifies the soul, says the apostle.

And let not your adornment be external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

A. Do not invest in external beauty

In the Greek and Roman world of Peter's day, women gave much attention to the art of externals. They plaited their hair, wore expensive gold ornaments and nets in the hair, and gold bands on the fingers, arms or ankles. The Old Testament prophets often denounced wealthy women in Israel who attained wealth through injustice to the poor, and then flaunted their wealth in their worship. Isaiah said to the wealthy women of his day,

**Because the daughters of Zion are proud,
And walk with heads held high and seductive eyes,
And go along with mincing steps,
And tinkle the bangles on their feet,
Therefore the Lord will afflict the scalp of the daughters of Zion
with scabs,
And the LORD will make their foreheads bare.**

**In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets,
headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils,
headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger
rings, nose rings, festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks, money purses,
hand mirrors, undergarments, turbans, and veils.**

**Now it will come about that instead of sweet perfume there will be putrefaction;
 Instead of a belt, a rope;
 Instead of well-set hair, a plucked-out scalp;
 Instead of fine clothes, a donning of sackcloth;
 And branding instead of beauty. (Isa 3:16-24)**

The wealth of these women resulted from oppression of the poor. In recent years, two wives of world leaders have been judged in a similar way. Imelda Marcos brings to mind 3,000 pair of shoes bought at the expense of the poor. Elena Ceaucescu of Romania robbed an entire nation to maintain her opulent life style.

Since many first century women who gathered for worship were very poor, a woman flaunting her external wealth at worship was intimidating to the poor women, as it is today.

Secondly, primping takes excessive time in front of the mirror that ought to be invested in good deeds. For a woman's beauty is not what she puts on, it is what she gives out. So Peter says, "Wives, don't get caught up with externals, but invest in the secret beauty of the heart, with a gentle and quiet spirit."

Again, the analogy alludes to Jesus Christ. As Jesus brought salvation to an unbelieving nation, so the wife is to bring salvation to a hostile husband. Jesus did it with a gentle spirit. He came to Jerusalem in humility, the King of Kings riding on a donkey the size of a Great Dane. He was quiet, not boisterous, and did not coerce his power. He did good deeds and gave no justification. At his trial, he said nothing in his defense.

Men and women alike should learn to be quiet, at rest, and open to God's word, so that they will walk humbly before him. This is contrasted to the undisciplined life of busybodies, who create a stir by meddling in others' business. We must learn to be silent so we can hear God's word. Then when we speak, our words are few but they are full.

Thomas Merton observes, "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am the more affection I have for them...Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say."

Many of us are like the busy Martha, eager to serve the Lord but distracted by so many things that we create a stir. Mary, in contrast, sat at the Lord's feet, gazing into the beauty of his face. Her self-worth came from what he said about her. Since Martha's self-worth depended on her ability to serve, she laid her expectations on Mary and rebuked the Lord. Jesus responded, "Martha, you are distracted about too much. Very few things are necessary. Look at my face and get your worth and beauty and dignity from me. Then you will serve out of a quiet sense of worth."

Peter says this spirit is "precious" (translated "expensive" in Greek) in the sight of God. Thus, the most expensive garment you can wear is a gentle and quiet spirit because it took the blood of Christ to purchase it.

This spirit can be seen in the example of Sarah Edwards, the wife of Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher of the 1700's. It was through his ministry that the Great Awakening came about in North Hampton, Massachusetts. Sarah was noted as a beautiful woman who raised 12 children. Samuel Hopkins, a young seminary graduate who came to intern with Mr. Edwards, testified to her beautiful character. Her spiritual speech and demeanor so uplifted his state of dejection and gloom that he doubted "the cordiality and ready conversation of Mrs. Edwards was capable of being matched by her husband."

Her beauty resulted from the time she spent undistracted in the scriptures. Even when she was in bed, she would meditate on the scripture in her heart, and would dwell in the presence of God all night long. She writes about one occasion in her journal:

I felt more perfectly subdued and weaned from the world and more fully resigned to God than I have ever been conscious of before. I felt an entire indifference to the opinions, and representations, and conduct of mankind respecting me; and a perfect willingness that God should employ some other instrument than Mr Edwards in advancing the word of grace in Northampton. I was entirely swallowed up in God, as my only portion, and his honor and glory was the object of my supreme desire and delight. At the same time, I felt a far greater love to the children of God than ever before...

Thursday night, Jan. 28, was the sweetest night I ever had in my life. I never before, for so long a time together, enjoyed so much of the light, and rest, and sweetness of heaven in my soul...The great part of the night I lay awake, sometimes asleep, and sometimes between sleeping and waking. But all night I continued in a constant, clear, and lively sense of the heavenly sweetness of Christ's excellent and transcendent love, of his nearness to me, and of my dearness to him; with an inexpressibly sweet calmness of soul in an entire rest in him...So far as I am capable of making a comparison, I think that what I felt each minute, during the continuance of the whole time, was worth more than all the outward comfort and pleasure which I had enjoyed in my whole life put together. It was a pure delight, which fed and satisfied the soul. It was pleasure, without the least sting, or any interruption. It was sweetness, which my soul was lost in. It seemed to be all that my feeble frame could sustain, of that fullness of joy which is felt by those who behold the face of Christ, and share his love in the heavenly world...

I had a deep sense of the awful greatness of God, and felt with what humility and reverence we ought to behave ourselves before him.¹

Although George Whitefield had taken a vow of celibacy, his testimony of Sarah reveals how her example changed his mind:

Northampton, Sunday, October 19, [1740]. Felt great satisfaction in being at the house of Mr. Edwards. A sweeter couple I have not yet seen...Mrs. Edwards is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which for some months, I have put up to God, that He would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.²

Thus, the value of submission is that it beautifies the soul. To help you wives, I am giving you a "beauty" kit that will help create a beautiful spirit. First, take a pillow to the altar to kneel before God in humility. While kneeling at the altar, focus on your face, because your face is the most beautiful thing about you. However, instead of seeing your face in the mirror, I will give you the scriptures so you will see the face of Jesus. That is not enough, however, because they are merely words on a page. You need a lamp, a symbol of the light of the Holy Spirit to reflect the glory of Christ's life in the pages so that you see beyond the page to his beauty, which reflects into your face. When you behold that image you become beautiful, like Sarah Edwards.

The one impediment to this beauty kit, however, is the telephone. If you pick it up to tell somebody about your concerns instead of getting down on your knees at the altar, you will cause a stir. You will give up your priesthood. You should be taking your concerns directly to the throne and meditating on Christ, rather than spreading them around. I suggest that you unplug the phone and talk to the Lord first. If you spend uninterrupted time pursuing the Lord, I promise you

will become beautiful, having a gentle and quiet spirit. So take these beauty tips!

I thought it would be appropriate to have a husband who is in the process of learning these principles of submission, share his thoughts with us this morning:

Brad: After Brian married my wife and I five years ago he challenged us to take a weekend a month as a sabbatical during our first year of marriage. Like newlyweds in the Old Testament, it would give us time to get to know each other and establish our marriage on the right foundation. We did this religiously for 12 months, getting away to do something special. The first time, we stared at each other across a table and said, "We really have to work at communication." It was a stretching time, and we grew from the experience. We found that marriage is a partnership. I believe it is important for us as husbands to express our life-long dreams in a number of areas, to share them, and confer with our wives to work out the plan. Wives need communication with their husbands, and submission on the husband's part is allowing a wife to delight in his dreams.

One evidence of submission on Janice's part occurred two years ago after I got back from a missionary trip in Romania. Janice could see that I had been changed by the experience, and she expected that the next year I would ask her to go with me. She dreaded it because our daughter was young, and she did not want to leave her. Yet when I expressed my desire she join me the next summer, she submitted to me and said she would go if I really wanted her. What a freeing experience!

It always hasn't been easy for me in this regard. Fifteen years ago I had a failed marriage, and was in despair. Six years later I married Janice. God has shown me such beauty in her that I really appreciate what I have now. I would like to encourage you husbands to do preventive maintenance by spending time with your wives. Our submission is manifested in caring and gentleness towards them by sharing our lives. It is based on the fact that we must know where God wants us to be and know what his desires are.

Another important part of the marriage is the headship of man. While I am an easy-going person, Janice is pretty independent, decisive, and often intense. Yet she is submissive because she knows God's desire for our marriage. If you husbands try to understand your wives, share with them, and provide headship, I think that a good marriage will result. I know there are many marriages in this congregation that are not doing well, and I would encourage you to seek out for advice people who models what the scriptures teach about submission.

IV. The Example of Submission: Sarah (3:5-6)

Peter concludes by saying that the result of giving yourself to Christ is the birth of new life. In verses 5-6 he gives us the example of Sarah:

For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

The apostle uses three themes in Sarah's life as an example: the desire for a son, calling Abraham "lord," and her fear. I expected this text to refer to when Sarah accompanied Abraham to Egypt, but it is

actually the text where the angel comes to the elderly couple and announces the birth of a son in Genesis 18:

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh." (Gen 18:9-15)

A. The expression of submission: Calling Abraham "lord"

The expression of Sarah's submission is that she calls Abraham "lord." Although her words are very ordinary speech, they demonstrate the high esteem in which she holds Abraham. Even though she found it difficult to believe that his dead body could be the source of new life, she did not disparage him.

B. The impediment to submission: "Being confronted with fear"

Fear is the impediment to submission. In Sarah's case, she is confronted by the angel with her unbelief in God's promise and denies it because of her fear.

C. The result of submission: New life

We see the result of her submission, miraculous new life, for she does indeed give birth to a son although she was beyond her child-bearing years. Therefore, you wives with unbelieving husbands, see yourselves like Sarah. In this case, you are barren of spiritual seed, which happens to be your husband. He is spiritually dead. You may be tempted to laugh like Sarah, saying, "Can spiritual life come from this man's dead body?" The truth is, if your husband is to be won to Christ, it will happen in the exact manner that Isaac was born. God can speak the gospel of promise to the husband without a word from his wife, but through her submissive spirit. That word once spoken by God brings life to his soul, and it is life from the dead.

Wives, rather than viewing submission as stifling, it is an honorable role. It is the same role that Christ took to bring about man's salvation. It is the only role that spreads the kingdom of God. You can have tremendous influence with it, even with unbelieving husbands, because a "gentle and quiet" spirit is a rare and powerful force that exhibits a woman's true beauty.

Finally, my prayer for you wives is that in submitting to your husbands, your marriages will go from Mount Sinai, where you have holy demands and no resources, into the wilderness of mutual submission. Then you can ascend to the Mount of Transfiguration to see the glory and light of Jesus Christ.

1. Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 195-196.

2. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, 178.

© 1989 Peninsula Bible Church