



The First Letter of Peter
Bible Study Session 12
1 Peter 3:1-6



Study By
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“Winning a non-Christian Husband”

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Greek NT

3.1 Ὁμοίως γυναῖκες ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, ἵνα καὶ εἴ τινες ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθήσονται 2 ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνήν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν. 3 ὧν ἔστω οὐχ ὁ ἕξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος, 4 ἀλλ’ ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής. 5 οὕτως γὰρ ποτε καὶ αἱ ἅγαι γυναῖκες αἱ ἐλπίζουσαι εἰς θεὸν ἐκόσμου ἐαυτάς, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, 6 ὡς Σάρρα ὑπήκουσεν τῷ Ἀβραάμ, κύριον αὐτὸν καλοῦσα· ἧς ἐγενήθητε τέκνα ἀγαθοποιοῦσαι καὶ μὴ φοβούμεναι μηδεμίαν πτόησιν.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

1 Asimismo vosotras, mujeres, estad sujetas a vuestros maridos, de modo que si algunos de ellos son desobedientes a la palabra, puedan ser ganados sin palabra alguna por la conducta de sus mujeres 2 al observar vuestra conducta casta y respetuosa. 3 Y que vuestro adorno no sea externo: peinados ostentosos, joyas de oro o vestidos lujosos, 4 sino que sea el yo interno, con el adorno incorruptible de un espíritu tierno y sereno, lo cual es precioso delante de Dios. 5 Porque así también se adornaban en otro tiempo las santas mujeres que esperaban en Dios, estando sujetas a sus maridos. 6 Así obedeció Sara a Abraham, llamándolo señor, y vosotras habéis llegado a ser hijas de ella, si hacéis el bien y no estáis amedrentadas por ningún temor.

NRSV

1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; 4 rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight. 5 It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. 6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

NLT

1 In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands, even those who refuse to accept the Good News. Your godly lives will speak to them better than any words. They will be won over 2 by watching your pure, godly behavior. 3 Don’t be concerned about the outward beauty that depends on fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. 4 You should be known for the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. 5 That is the way the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They trusted God and accepted the authority of their husbands. 6 For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, when she called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do.

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Introduction to Study.

This study continues the emphasis on ‘outsiders’ that Peter begun in 2:11. It also continues the Haustafeln emphasis that was begun in 2:18. The focus now is on Christian wives married to non-Christian husbands,¹ which

¹Interestingly, the New Testament contains a reference to a marriage where the wife, Joanna, was a follower of Jesus, but not the husband, Chuza, in all likelihood: **Luke. 8:1-3**, “Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the Bible Study: Page 1

gives it a distinction from the Pauline emphasis on Christian wives married to Christian husbands.² These Pauline passages are important background to Peter's words:³

Ephesians 5:22-24. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.⁴

Colossians 3:18. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

One will detect very quickly the distinct emphasis of Peter over against Paul's. Another important text comes from **Titus 2:4-5**, where Paul instructs Titus on encouraging older women in the church to instill certain values in the younger women who were wives:

1 But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. 2 Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance. 3 Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited. 6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.⁵

Some of these values may seem strange to modern ears, but one has to remember that marriages in the ancient world were uniformly between women in their early to middle teens and men mostly in their thirties at least. A thirteen year old mother with a thirty-five year old husband would not have been unusual at all. These young girls who became wives and mothers very early in life needed wise counsel from the older, more experienced women in the churches.

We live in a world where establishing lasting relationships between men and women is becoming more and more difficult, along with meaningful relationships with other people in general. And this in spite of it being the 'age of communication.' The popularity of marriage swings up and down in western society. Increasingly in many western countries especially, 'cohabitation' is the favored option, even over 'common-law marriage.' Yet numerous scientific studies affirm that such a living relation without a formal marriage commitment almost certainly dooms the future of the relationship. The problem of cohabitation is significantly worse in Europe than elsewhere in the world, apart from a few isolated exceptions such as North America (= Mexico; US; Canada). The rate of divorce in western society is very high, although highest in the US more than Europe and most of the rest of the world where the divorce rate is slowly declining in some countries such as the UK, in contrast to the US.

Given this backdrop of modern struggles with marriage and being a married partner, what message does the Gospel offer? Peter offers important guidelines for a Christian wife who wants to win her non-Christian husband to faith in Christ. Beyond this setting, most of these guidelines have much wider application as well.

I. Context and Background⁶

good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2 as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and **Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza**, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources." Joanna along with several other women, some married and some not, were fellow travelers with Jesus along with the disciples during much of His earthly ministry.

²"Peter's concern at this point is not life within the Christian community, but life at those points where the Christian community interfaces with the world around it." [Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 115.]

³For a quick summary overview of wives (γυνή) in the New Testament, the NRSV uses the English words wife or wives in some 68 passages.

⁴One should also note the final statement (Eph. 5:33) where Paul summarizes both husband's and wife's responsibilities: "Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and **a wife should respect her husband.**" (πλὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς οἱ καθ' ἓνα ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα οὕτως ἀγαπάτω ὡς ἑαυτόν, **ἢ δὲ γυνὴ ἵνα φοβῆται τὸν ἄνδρα.**)

⁵**GNT Titus 2:3-5.** ³Πρεσβυτίδας ὡσαύτως ἐν καταστήματι ἱεροπρεπεῖς, μὴ διαβόλους μηδὲ οἶνω πολλῶ δεδουλωμένας, καλοδιδασκάλους, ⁴ἵνα σωφρονίζωσι *τὰς νέας φιλόανδρους εἶναι, φιλοτέκνους, ἰσώφροννας, ἀγνάς, οἰκουροῦς, ἀγαθὰς, ὑποτασσομένας τοῖς ἄνδράσιν, ἵνα μὴ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ βλασφημῆται.*

⁶Serious study of the Bible requires careful analysis of the background and setting of the scripture passage. Failure to do this



The literary and historical background to this passage are especially important to the interpretive process.

a. Historical

External History. The history of the copying of the text during the first eight centuries reflects a very stable text for verses one through six. The UBS 4th revised edition Greek New Testament text apparatus lists only one variation of reading that was considered important enough for Bible translators to give attention to.

In verse one, the most likely original reading Ὁμοίως γυναῖκες ὑποτασσόμεναι sometimes is written as Ὁμοίως αἱ γυναῖκες ὑποτασσόμεναι in several manuscripts, inserting the definite article αἱ.⁷ But several important early manuscripts do not include it. So we can't be absolutely certain whether it was or wasn't in the original writing. A very small number of late manuscripts will insert καὶ (also) in place of αἱ, but this is redundant with Ὁμοίως and was picked up by looking at ἵνα καὶ εἴ τις on the next line and by mistake inserting it as the second word in the sentence. The impact of the presence or absence of the article for translation is very minimal, and doesn't change the meaning either way.

The Nestle-Aland 27th rev. edition Greek text lists a total of nine variations of wording, of lessor impact than the one above. Most of them pertain either to words or phrases being accidentally left out, or, with a couple of phrases, the sequence of the words in the phrase is altered. None of these variations is supported by early and significant manuscripts, and reflect the typical stylistic mistakes often made when copying of texts was done by volunteers rather than professionals. Thus, nothing in the history of the copying of this passage casts serious doubt on the wording and meaning of the passage.

Internal History. Wives in the ancient world did not enjoy the status, both legally and socially, that they do in today's world. The first century Roman world was a male dominated world. Girls and women were valued but did not enjoy anything close to equal status to the men and boys. But also great differences in the status of women existed in the various cultures of the Mediterranean world of the first century.⁸ Unfortunately, Jewish women were trapped by one of the more repressive cultures of that world.⁹ But in spite of the serious restrictions placed on Jewish women, they did enjoy significant degrees



leads to interpretive garbage and possibly to heresy. Detailed study of the background doesn't always answer all the questions, but it certainly gets us further along toward correct understanding of both the historical and contemporary meanings of a text. This serious examination of both the historical and literary background of every passage will be presented in summary form with each of the studies.

⁷“The weight of external evidence is rather evenly balanced for and against the presence of the article, which perhaps was omitted by scribes in order to indicate more clearly that γυναῖκες is vocative. On the basis of P⁷² κ² C Ψ 33 1739 al, the Committee decided to include the article; in view of its absence, however, from P⁸¹ κ* A B 81 al, the word was enclosed within square brackets.” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 620.]

⁸“Within the patriarchal framework that existed throughout the Roman Empire, there was a surprising degree of variety in the roles and positions women could and did assume from culture to culture. For example, in Rome women could at most be the power behind the throne, whereas in Egypt women could openly rule. Or again, in Athens married citizen-women seem to have been confined to domestic activities, whereas women in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Egypt engaged in their own private businesses, served in public offices, and had prominent roles in various religious cults.” [David Noel Freedman, vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 958.]

⁹“The Palestinian Jewish culture was one of the most patriarchal in the Mediterranean crescent. The home and family were basically the only spheres where women could play significant roles in early Judaism. This was true not only because of the extensive power that a father had over both his wife and daughters in determining their activities and their relationships, but also because various levitical laws were interpreted in such a way that women were prohibited from taking significant roles in the synagogue due to their monthly period of levitical uncleanness.” [David Noel Freedman, vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 957.]

of respect and honor.¹⁰ The economic status of women played differing roles as well. Women in aristocratic families usually wielded much more power and influence both in the home and in public life, than did women coming from low income homes. Slave women were not permitted to enter formal marriage, because they were the property of their owner.



The wife of the ancient world in most every culture was under the authority of her husband as the head of the household. In most of these cultures she had few legal rights, almost no property ownership rights, and very limited freedom of movement outside the home. In very real ways, she 'belonged' to her husband. Spousal abuse laws were virtually unknown in first century law of any culture, and the wife would be protected from abuse by her husband only to the extent that penalties for such had been included in the marriage contract agreed to between her father and the bride's father. In Jewish society only the husband could divorce his wife, but in Roman society the wife had that option as well the husband.

When Jesus and the apostles laid out their teachings on marriage and husband / wife relationships, the emphasis both fits into the surrounding culture and at the same time radically challenges many aspects of it, especially the Jewish side.¹¹ When the married women traveled with Jesus and the apostles (cf. Luke 8:1-3), such was a radical departure from prevailing trends of that day in Palestine. With Paul's emphasis on equal responsibilities between husbands and wives not only in the Haustafeln passages of Ephesians and Colossians, but elsewhere in his letters also,¹² he was challenging attitudes in both Jewish and Roman societies very intensely. What Peter will say both to wives (3:1-6) and to husbands (3:7) follows this same framework, and continues the beginning Christian emphasis upon the dignity and partnership role of the wife in a Christian home.

¹⁰“These facts should not cause us to overlook the positive statements made by early Jews about honoring and respecting women, nor should we ignore the extensive responsibilities placed on a Jewish husband in regard to his wife and daughters, nor forget that much of what we have discussed resulted from the attempt by an occupied people to preserve their culture and religious way of life. Nevertheless, the dominant impression left by our early Jewish sources is of a very patriarchal society that limited women's roles and functions to the home, and severely restricted: (1) their rights of inheritance, (2) their choice of relationships, (3) their ability to pursue a religious education or fully participate in the synagogue, and (4) their freedom of movement.” [David Noel Freedman, vol. 6, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 957-58.]

¹¹“The subordination of wives to husbands reflected in this passage must be seen against the background of the general status of women in the Hellenistic world of that time. Dominant among the elite¹² was the notion that the woman was by nature inferior to the man.¹³ Because she lacked the capacity for reason that the male had,¹⁴ she was ruled rather by her emotions,¹⁵ and was as a result given to poor judgment,¹⁶ immorality,¹⁷ intemperance,¹⁸ wickedness,¹⁹ avarice;²⁰ she was untrustworthy,²¹ contentious,²² and as a result, it was her place to obey.²³ Such a view of women was also sedimented in legal tradition: women could not vote or hold office,²⁴ could not take an oath or plead a case in court, could not be the legal guardian of their own minor children, and were legally dependent on either their father or a guardian.²⁵ To be sure, some of these measures began to be relaxed in the time of Augustus.²⁶ Women could petition for a change in guardian if the present one proved harsh; they could inherit and hold property;²⁷ they could decide whom and when to marry and whether to divorce, and by decree of Augustus if a mother had three to five children, depending on her status, she acquired legal independence and full right to participate in business.²⁸ Despite this emancipation of women in the Augustan period, however, the idea of women remaining subordinate to men remained. The equality of women espoused in theory by the Stoic philosopher Musonius,²⁹ for example, in practice was denied in favor of the traditional notion that the man should rule the woman,³⁰ and the cults of Dionysus and Isis, which gave women a dominant role, were criticized for their excesses by Roman men.³¹ The role of married women at this time was also undergoing change;³² Plutarch, for example, urged that in the proper marriage there ought to be a mutual amalgamation of bodies, property, friends, and relations, with all material possessions held in common.³³ Yet even Plutarch held that the wife must be subordinate to the husband, who must rule her, in a kindly way, to be sure, but he must nevertheless be the superior partner in the marriage,³⁴ even to the point of determining which gods the family is to worship.³⁵” [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 206-07.]

¹²For example, his instructions to husbands and wives in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, he adopted a revolutionary position: “3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

b. Literary

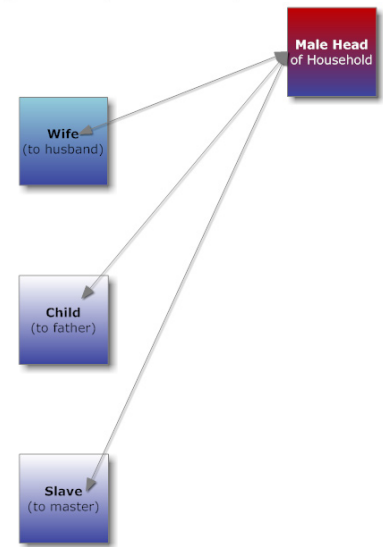
Literary Form (Genre). The larger literary form here is of course the letter body, in which Peter is sharing spiritual insights with his readers as a substitute visit. Whether one can deduce from this that marital problems were present in the Christian communities is questionable. What is clear from studying the broader historical background of marital relationships in general during this era is that Christian couples that came from either a Jewish or Roman background would have needed careful instruction on just how to be truly 'Christian' in their marital relationship since the guidelines for Christians seriously deviated from what they had been taught before coming to Christ. Making the transition from that earlier heritage to the new Christian responsibilities would not have been easy. And yet making this transition took on enormous importance as a witness to their non-Christian friends and family about the difference that Christ would make in one's life and home. This is why several of the passages contain purpose statements defining the goal of such values as being to advance the Gospel of Christ.

The narrow genre of 3:1-6 is that of *Haustafeln*.¹³ From the time of the New Testament forward, family relationships were a significant discussion among Christian leaders.¹⁴ This topic was also discussed extensively in non-Christian circles of that era.¹⁵ The Pauline *Haustafeln* is more tightly arranged into three pairs of family relationships: wife to husband; children to father; slave to master (see chart on the above right). Responsibilities flowed both directions in each of the three sets of relationships. These three sections covered the full range of responsibilities inside the family.

Peter's discussion touches only on slaves (to masters) and wife / husband relationships. The Christian slave is given instructions on relating to non-Christian owners. He doesn't give instructions to Christian slave owners, as did Paul. And the discussion of the wife's responsibilities are focused on her winning over to Christ her non-Christian husband, whereas the husband is assumed to be a believer married to a believing wife. Thus Peter's discussion seems to be targeting some very specific needs present in the churches of Anatolia in the mid-first century. He makes use of the *Haustafeln* tradition but doesn't feel the need for a full discussion of it. This seems to be partially due to this section (2:11-3:7) focusing on the believer's relationships to non-believers. Probably other factors motivated his distinctive emphasis, but we can't determine clearly what they were.¹⁶

Literary Context. As the outline on the right illustrates, 3:1-6 stands as a part of the letter body under the second division entitled "Obligations." After treating various aspects of holy living in 1:13-2:10, Peter turned to discuss the obligations that believers

Ancient Family: *Haustafeln*
Ephesians, Colossians, First Peter



Outline of Contents in First Peter:

Praescriptio: 1:1-2

- **Superscriptio, 1:1a**
- **Adscriptio, 1:1b-2a**
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Proem: 1:3-12

- **Core, 1:3a**
- **Expansion, 1:3b-12**

Body: 1:13-5:11

- **Holy living 1:13-2:10**
 - **Ideals 1:13-25**
 - **Privileges 2:1-10**
- **Obligations 2:11-3:12**
 - **Civic 2:11-17**
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 - **Social 3:8-12**
- **Persecution 3:13-5:11**
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 - **Explanation 4:12-19**
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Conclusio: 5:12-14

- **Sender Verification, 5:12**
- **Greetings, 5:13-14a**
- **Benedictio, 5:14b**

¹³The German term *Haustafeln* comes from the heading that Luther gave the passages in Ephesians, Colossians, and First Peter in the Luther Bibel translation. Literally it means 'rules of the house,' and when translated into English is usually rendered 'Household Code' or 'Domestic Code.'

¹⁴See Matt 5:27-32; 19:3-12/Mark 10:1-12; 22:23-28; 1 Cor 5:1-11; 7:1-40; 14:34-37; Eph 5:22-33; Col 2:18-19; 1 Thess 4:3-8; 1 Tim 2:8-15; 3:11-12; 5:9-16; Titus 2:4-5; Heb 13:4; 1 Clem. 1:3; 21:6-7; Herm. Mand. 4.1; Ign. Pol. 5:1-2; Pol. Phil 4:2.

¹⁵See Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 35-57; Arist., *Pol.* 1-2; Ps.-Arist., *Oec.*; Xen., *Oec.*; Philo, *Decal.* 165-67; *Spec.* 3. 169-71; *Hypoth.* 7. 14; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.189-209; *Hier.* (in *Stobaeus*, books 1-5; esp. 4.22.21-24; 4.502.1-507.5; cf. also 4.24.14; 4.603.8-24; 5.5-22; 5.696.23-697.3). Sometimes this was identified in ancient Greek as the *oikonomia* tradition, 'household management' tradition.

¹⁶This may also be connected to the much larger region covered in First Peter -- Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1) -- than Paul's emphasis in Ephesians, Colossians, and Titus, which covered Ephesus and Colossae in Asia along with Crete.

have, mostly to ‘outsiders,’ that is, non-Christians, in 2:11-3:12. He begins with the foundational admonition of believers living as ‘strangers and foreigners’ in this world, since Heaven is our real home (2:11-12). Then he calls upon believers to acknowledge the legitimate authority of specific humans in leadership roles (2:13-17). With Ὑποτάγητε πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει διὰ τὸν κύριον in 2:13, he sets the tone for 2:14-17 on government leaders. But this admonition is foundational for his admonition to Christian slaves in 2:18-25, Christian wives in 3:1-6, Christian husbands in 3:7, and the believing community in 3:8-12. Christian respect for authority differed from the secular world of that time which called upon individuals to accept the authority of ‘higher ups’ because these people were superior to everyone else and all others were inferior to them. Christians, however, respect individuals in leadership roles because they are humans created in God’s image and also because they stand accountable to God just as believers do, not because they are superior human beings. Peter’s admonitions to wives in 3:1-6 stand as the second unit of Haustafeln instruction that was preceded by instructions to slaves and will be followed by instructions to Christian husbands. The unique use of Greek participles instead of regular verbs for the core admonitions gives a distinctive character to these three units and ties them very closely back to the beginning regular verb Ὑποτάγητε in 2:13.

Literary Structure. As the block diagram below illustrates, the thought structure of the passage is relatively clear.

3.1	Likewise	
26	the wives should be submissive to their own husbands,	
	even if some are not obeying the Word	
	through the lifestyle of their wives	
	without a word	
	so that they...may be won over	
		in reverence
3.2		observing your...pure lifestyle.
27 ^{3.3}	Whose let it not be the outward	
	braiding of hair	
	and	
	putting on of gold ornaments	
	or	
	wearing of fine clothes,	
3.4	instead	
28	(whose let it be) the secret person of the heart	
	in the incorruptible	
	gentle	
	and	
	quiet	
	of a...spirit	
	which is...very valuable	
	before God	
3.5	For	
	likewise	
	formerly	
	also	
29	the holy women...were adorning themselves,	
	who put their hope in God	
	by being submissive to their own husbands,	
3.6	as Sarah was obedient to Abraham	
	calling him lord,	
	whose children you have become	
	by doing good	
	and	
	not fearing any terror.	

In spite of the rather artificial punctuation of both the UBS and N-A Greek texts creating three sentences
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in these verses (vv. 1-2, 3-4, 5-6), in reality only two sentences are present (vv. 1-4, 5-6). The above diagram follows the two dominate Greek texts' punctuation, but in truth statements 27 and 28 are relative clause modifiers of 'the wives' in verse one. Peter essentially gives the admonition to Christian wives in statement 26 and then expands this admonition down through verse four (#s 27 & 28). The second point is to defend (γάρ) the admonition in verse 1 (#26) by appealing to the example of Old Testament wives, and Sarah in particular (#29).

II. Message

In light of the more natural structure of the text as explained above we will organize our study around two points: the admonition to wives (vv. 1-4) and the reason for the admonition (vv. 5-6).

a. Wives, show proper respect to your non-Christian husband, vv. 1-4

1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; 4 rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.

3.1 Ὁμοίως γυναῖκες ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, ἵνα καὶ εἴ τινες ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθῆσονται 2 ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν. 3 ὣν ἔστω οὐχ ὁ ἐξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος, 4 ἀλλ' ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἀνθρώπος ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής.

Notes:

The core admonition in verse 1a is followed by an expression of purpose or intention. This is in turn expanded with instructions on how to achieve this goal of winning over a non-believing husband.

The admonition: Ὁμοίως γυναῖκες ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ("Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands"). The adverb of manner Ὁμοίως links the admonition to the wife that is given to slaves in 2:18 (Οἱ οἰκέται ὑποτασσόμενοι ἐν παντὶ φόβῳ τοῖς δεσπόταις). In the first century world the wife did enjoy a higher status in the household than did the slaves, but she was not considered the equal to her husband. Culturally such would have been difficult, given the typical age difference of at least ten years and more between husband and wife. The concept expressed by Peter is similar to that of Paul:

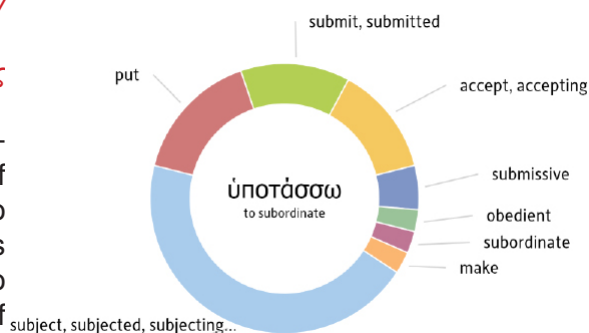
Eph. 5:22. Αἱ γυναῖκες [ὑποτασσόμεναι] τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ

Col. 3:18. Αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτάσσεσθε τοῖς ἀνδράσιν, ὡς ἀνῆκεν ἐν

κυρίῳ.

1 Pet. 3:1. Ὁμοίως γυναῖκες ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν,

The core verbal expression is uniform across all three expressions. The verb ὑποτάσσω can be translated in a variety of ways as the diagram on the above right illustrates. According to the BDAG Greek lexicon, the basic meaning in the 38 NT uses is "to cause to be in a submissive relationship, to subject, to subordinate."¹⁷ The wife is to acknowledge a leadership role of



^{17c}1. to cause to be in a submissive relationship, to subject, to subordinate

a. act., abs. **Ro 8:20b**; 1 Cl 2:1b. τινά bring someone to subjection (Herodian 7, 2, 9) IPol 2:1. τινί τινα or τι someone or someth. to someone (Epict. 4, 12, 12 of God ὑπ. τί τινι; cp. Da 11:39 Theod.; TestJud 21:2; ApcSed 6:2; SibOr Fgm. 3, 12; Ar. [Milne 76, 49]; Menander Eph.: 783 Fgm. 1, 119 Jac. [in Jos., C. Ap. 1, 119]; Just., A I, 49, 7, A II 5, 2.—Cp. ὑπέταξεν ἑαυτοῦ τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τοῦς Πάρθους Hippol., Ref. 9, 16, 4) **1 Cor 15:27c, 28c**; **Phil 3:21**; **Hb 2:5, 8b**; Dg 10:2; Hm 12, 4, 2; AcPl Ha 8, 15. In the same sense ὑπ. τι ὑπὸ τοῦς πόδας τινός **1 Cor 15:27a**; **Eph 1:22**; also ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν τινος **Hb 2:8a** (Ps 8:7). ὑποτάσσειν ἑαυτόν τινι subject oneself to someone (Plut., Mor. 142e to the husband; Simplicius In Epict. p. 33 Düb. to transcendent powers) Hs 9, 22, 3.

b. pass.

a. become subject τινί to a pers. or a state of being (Iren. 5, 5, 2 [Harv. II 332, 11]) **Ro 8:20a**; **1 Cor 15:28a**; **Hb 2:8c**; **1 Pt 3:22**; Dg 7:2; Pol 2:1. Abs. (Diod S 1, 55, 10; Aristobulus in Eus., PE 8, 10, 10 [=p. 140 Holladay] πάνθ' ὑποτέτακται; Just., D. 85, 2 νικᾶται καὶ ὑποτάσσεται [Ath. 18, 2]; Iren. 1, 13, 4 [Harv. I 120, 7]) **1 Cor 15:27b**.

β. subject oneself, be subjected or subordinated, obey abs. (Jos., Bell. 4, 175) **Ro 13:5**; **1 Cor 14:34** (cp. δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις **Gal 5:13**); 1 Cl 2:1a; 57:2. Of submission involving recognition of an ordered structure, w. dat. of the entity to whom/which

the husband in the household, but not in some demeaning way that reduces her humanity and value. This acknowledgement was the cultural norm for the first century Roman world and Christianity adopted it, but with different tones and motivations.¹⁸ In the following expansions, Peter will extend the idea of submissiveness in very distinctly Christian ways that ran counter to much in the surrounding culture. The Christian faith of the wife played the key role in how she responded to her husband.

Of the two distinctive qualities expressed by Peter beyond that in Paul, ὁμοίως and ἰδίοις, the wife could learn from the domestic slaves (ὁμοίως) that respectful attitudes toward the dominating male head of the household could be used to change his attitude toward both the slave and the wife. And she was responsible to her own (ἰδίοις) husband, not to other men. Her first and primary obligation was to the man she married.¹⁹

The intention: ἵνα καὶ εἴ τινας ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθήσονται ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνὴν ἀναστροφήν ὑμῶν (“so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives”). The motivation of the wives to respect their husbands was religious in nature: ἵνα... κερδηθήσονται (“that they may be won over”). This is distinct from but not contradictory to Paul’s advice in Titus 2:5, “so that the word of God may not be discredited,”²⁰ where the religious concern is for the credibility of the gospel. Peter was addressing a situation that easily arose in the ancient world.²¹ The general custom was that whatever the

appropriate respect is shown (Palaeph. 38 p. 56, 15; 57, 2): toward a husband (s. Ps.-Callisth. 1, 22, 4 πρέπον ἐστὶ τὴν γυναῖκα τῷ ἀνδρὶ ὑποτάσσεσθαι, s. 1a above; cp. SEG 26, 1717, 26 [III/IV A.D.] in a love charm) **Eph 5:22 v.l.; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5; 1 Pt 3:1** (on an alleged impv. sense s. Schwyzer II 407), **5**; parents **Lk 2:51**; masters **Tit 2:9; 1 Pt 2:18**; B 19:7; D 4:11; secular authorities (1 Ch 29:24; Theoph. Ant. 1, 11 [p. 82, 14]) **Ro 13:1** (CMorrison, The Powers That Be—**Ro 13:1–13**, diss. Basel ’56; EBarnikol, TU 77, ’61, 65–133 [non-Pauline]); **Tit 3:1; 1 Pt 2:13**; 1 Cl 61:1; church officials 1 Cl 1:3; 57:1; IEph 2:2; IMg 2; 13:2; ITr 2:1f; 13:2; IPol 6:1; Pol 5:3; νεώτεροι ὑποτάγητε πρεσβυτέροις **1 Pt 5:5**. To God (Epict. 3, 24, 65 τ. θεῶ ὑποτεταγμένος; 4, 12, 11; Ps 61:2; 2 Macc 9:12) **1 Cor 15:28b; Hb 12:9; Js 4:7**; 1 Cl 20:1; IEph 5:3; to Christ **Eph 5:24**. To the will of God, the law, etc. **Ro 8:7; 10:3**; 1 Cl 34:5; Hm 12, 5, 1; τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ τῇ ἀγαθῇ 12, 2, 5.—Of submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love **1 Cor 16:16; Eph 5:21; 1 Pt 5:5b v.l.**; 1 Cl 38:1.—The evil spirits must be subject to the disciples whom Jesus sends out **Lk 10:17, 20**. Likew. the prophetic spirits must be subject to the prophets in whom they dwell **1 Cor 14:32**.—HMerklein, Studien zu Jesus und Paulus (WUNT 105) ’98, 405–37.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1042.]

¹⁸“The instruction of wives and husbands that follows echoes sentiments and values concerning spousal roles and relations that prevailed in the Greco-Roman world of the day. These perspectives were enshrined in particular in moral instruction on ‘household management’ (oikonomia), a tradition with which our author was clearly familiar. Xenophon’s treatise *On Household Management* (*Oeconomicus*) has been described as ‘the most fully developed treatise on married life that classical Greece has left us’ (Foucault 1985, 152). With its attention to marriage (ch. 7), domestic order (chs. 8–9), cosmetics (ch. 10), and the husband as gentleman (ch. 11), it illustrates the traditional place of these subjects in the household management (*oikonomia*) tradition of moral instruction. This is in accord with Aristotle’s seminal observation (Pol. 1.5.1) that ‘the science of household management has three divisions, one the relation of master to slave . . . , one the paternal relation, and the third the conjugal, for it is part of the household science to rule over wife and children’; see also Ps.-Arist., *Oec.*, book 1 (1.2.1; 3.1–4.3) and book 3 (regarding the virtuous wife and honorable marital relations).” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 553.]

¹⁹Quite interestingly Xenophon in his *Oeconomicus* uses the classical Greek dialogue format to stress the importance of the husband training his wife to function in the household. In chapters seven through ten, Socrates quizzes Ischomachus about how he prepared his fifteen year old wife to manage the operation of his large country home outside Athens in the third century BCE. In the discussion between these two, Ischomachus explains how he went about educating his young wife to take care of the household and to supervise all the domestic slaves inside the home. At least from Ischomachus’ account, she learned well and managed the household quite efficiently. The key to his educating her was to teach her how to organize everything properly, right down to their clothes and sleeping arrangements for everyone in the house, and even how she could best use makeup and personal grooming. How typical this was to both the earlier Greek culture and then to the later Roman culture is not clear.

²⁰ἵνα μὴ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ βλασφημηται

²¹Paul is the only other author to address the marital situation of one person being a Christian and the other not. He has an interesting take on the situation in 1 Cor. 7:12-16:

12 To the rest I say — I and not the Lord — that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. 16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.

religious orientation of the head of the household, all the family members including slaves would be oriented that same direction.²² But given the polytheistic patterns of that time, if family members wanted to adopt another religion the head of the family would normally be open to such. In the believing communities of the letter evidently a significant number of women had come to faith in Christ but not their husbands. The issue was important enough that Peter felt the need to offer advice to these young wives on the best way to win over their husbands.²³ Whether or not efforts to do so had not been successful is not clear. But given that most of these young wives would have been teenagers trying to win over husbands ten to twenty years older than they were is reason enough for the elderly Peter to provide some wise counsel to them.

Peter qualifies the situation of the husband with *καὶ εἴ τινας ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ*, “even if some of them do not obey the word.” This makes a basic assumption that such a situation is present.²⁴ Overcoming the disobedience of the husband will not be easy, but is possible in Peter’s thinking.

The husbands are defined not as ‘unbelievers’ (ἄπιστοι) who have rejected the claims of the gospel mentally and in commitment, but as *τινες ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ*, i.e., some who are by their actions actively rebelling against God.²⁵ Later on in the letter, Peter makes some strong statements about people who disobey the Word (4:17): “For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”²⁶ Probably some of these husbands fell into this group of disobedient individuals. So these wives were not dealing with indifference to the Gospel by their husbands. Rather they were coping with overt hostility to the Gospel. And yet Peter was confident that the believing wives

²²“This general expectation is illustrated in the observation by Plutarch in his *Advice to Bride and Groom* (*Conj. praec.* 19, Mor. 140D): ‘wife should not acquire her own friends, but should make her husband’s friends her own. The gods are the first and most significant friends. For this reason, it is proper for a wife to recognize only those gods whom her husband worships and to shut the door to superstitious cults and strange superstitions. The performance of clandestine and secret rites by a woman do not ingratiate her to any of the gods.’ The second-century report (Just. Mart., *2 Apol.* 2) of a Christian wife married to a pagan husband and the martyrdom of her instructor, Ptolemaeus, provides a later example of the kind of hatred that Christian wives and their fellow-believers could encounter from reprobate pagan husbands.¹⁶⁷ Thus, the regard that Christian wives demonstrate for domestic order and the authority of their husbands will be an important means for allaying any fears of disruption and insuring domestic tranquillity. In actuality, however, the stated goal of subordination is not simply marital harmony but the very conversion of unbelieving husbands through their wives’ chaste and reverent conduct (vv 1e–2) and gentle and tranquil spirit (v 4).” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 557-58.]

²³The verb *κερδηθήσονται* is clearly with the meaning to ‘win to faith in Christ’: “It is so used in Matt 18:15; 1 Cor 9:22; cf. Lippert, ‘Leben,’ 250; David Daube, ‘Κερδαίνω as a Missionary Term,’ HTR 40 (1947) 109–20.”

²⁴The *καὶ εἴ* construction introduces a concessive protasis, dependent clause here assuming the likelihood of the situation that can be overcome by the action defined in the apodosis, i.e., main clause. “Καὶ εἴ (εἰάν) concessive occurs somewhat rarely in the New Testament. See Matt. 26:35; John 8:16; 1 Cor. 8:5; Gal. 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:1 (but cf. WH.). The force of the *καὶ* is apparently intensive, representing the supposition as actually or from a rhetorical point of view an extreme case, improbable in itself, or specially unfavorable to the fulfilment of the apodosis.” [Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1898), 113.]

This rarity of occurrence in the NT of *καὶ εἴ* is what evidently prompted a few copyists later on to reverse the words to the more common *εἴ καὶ*, which also introduces a concessive protasis. Other copyists just dropped the *καὶ*, thus reverting the protasis to a simple first class conditional clause, “since....”. Still others substituted *οἅτινες* (whoever) for *καὶ εἴ* or else wrote *καὶ οἅτινες*. But these are a small number of copyists who worked many centuries after the original writing of the document and struggled with the unfamiliar grammar structure of *καὶ εἴ*.

²⁵“The phrase ‘disobedient to the word’ (cf. 2:8) points to situations where Christian wives were married to unbelieving husbands (cf. the phrase, ‘disobedient to the gospel of God,’ in 4:17; also perhaps the ‘disobedient spirits’ of 3:19–20). Balch (*Domestic Code*, 99) comments that this ‘disobedience’ entails for Peter ‘more than passive disbelief. Some husbands were almost certainly among those actively ... slandering the Christians’ (e.g., in 2:12, 15; 3:9, 16). He suggests further that Peter’s advice to women married to such husbands ‘should be understood against the social background in which a wife was expected to accept the customs and religious rites of her husband’ (e.g., see Balch, *Origin*, 240–46). In society’s eyes these women were already highly insubordinate just by virtue of their Christian commitment, and Peter is concerned that they not compound the difficulty by abrasive or troublesome behavior (see the graphic description in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 9.14, of a wife, possibly a Christian, who substituted for ‘our sure religion an only god by herself’). Peter’s unqualified advice to Christian wives to ‘defer to your husbands’ must be seen in this light.” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 157.]

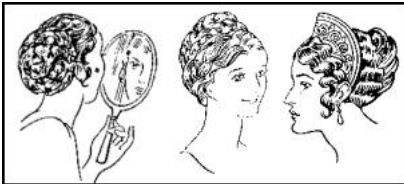
²⁶ὅτι ὁ καιρὸς τοῦ ἄρξασθαι τὸ κρίμα ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ· εἰ δὲ πρῶτον ἀφ’ ἡμῶν, τί τὸ τέλος τῶν ἀπειθοῦντων τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίῳ;

could win over such husbands, but only by following a carefully laid out strategy.

The strategy: διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθήσονται ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνήν ἀναστροφήν ὑμῶν, ὧν ἔστω οὐχ ὁ ἔξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος, ἀλλ' ὁ κρυπτός τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὁ ἔστιν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής (“without a word by their wives’ conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight.”).

Here the apostle lays out a rather detailed strategy for converting the husbands to Christ. **First, the means of such** is διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς, i.e., “through the manner of living by the wives.” How a person lives before someone else plays a vital role in influencing them in the right direction. It is challenging to do so day in and day out, but this is essential, if the proper influence is going to be exerted. **Second, the means of such** is ἄνευ λόγου, i.e., “without a word.” What does Peter mean?²⁷ That the wife not talk to her husband? Hardly! Most likely, it was Peter’s way of stressing the importance of conduct over against repeated verbal pleadings for her husband to become a Christian. **Third, the means of such** influence is ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνήν ἀναστροφήν ὑμῶν, i.e., “having observed your absolutely holy conduct in reverence to God.” He repeats the reference to the wife’s conduct but with two strongly religious modifiers: ἀγνήν and ἐν φόβῳ. The idea of the adjective ἀγνός, ἡ, ὄν is of purity and holiness.²⁸ The prepositional phrase ἐν φόβῳ stresses the wife’s reverence for God.²⁹ In her personal living she is morally pure and upright and possesses a deep devotion to God. These shape the pattern of her day to day living. And this becomes clear to her husband as he carefully watches her daily.³⁰ What he sees is a godly woman who makes a wonderful wife.

Fourth, she does not resort to sensual devices in order to ‘charm’ him into religious commitment: ὧν ἔστω οὐχ ὁ ἔξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος,³¹ i.e., “whose adornment is not to



²⁷“ἄνευ λόγου, ‘without a word,’ represents a verbal play on ‘disobedient to the word’ in the previous clause. Those who are impervious to the proclaimed word of the Christian gospel can and will be changed by the unspoken testimony of their own devoted wives (cf. the ‘humble and quiet spirit’ in v 4). The notion of a testimony borne by conduct is common enough in the NT (not least in 1 Peter), but this is the only instance in which words are specifically excluded. The author’s point is not to forbid verbal testimony by Christian wives but to suggest tactfully that such testimony is not obligatory, and sometimes not helpful (contrast 1 Tim 2:11–12, where silence becomes in certain circumstances an actual obligation for the wife).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 157-58.]

²⁸According to the Louw-Nida Greek lexicon, ἀγνός, ἡ, ὄν belongs to a group of several words stressing holiness and purity; cf. topics 88.24-88.35. The adjective (# 88.28) ἀγνός, ἡ, ὄν pertains “to being without moral defect or blemish and hence pure — ‘pure, without defect.’ ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνήν ἀναστροφήν ὑμῶν ‘for they will see how pure and reverent your conduct is’ 1 Pe 3:2.” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 745.]

²⁹“The prepositional phrase ἐν φόβῳ virtually makes of φόβος an adjective, ‘reverent’ (φόβος has no cognate adjective with this meaning; φόβερος means ‘frightful’ or ‘terrifying’). ‘Reverent’ refers to the wives’ conduct toward God (cf. 1:17; 2:17, 18) and not toward their unbelieving husbands (the watchword in the latter relationship is the opposite: ‘let nothing frighten you,’ v 6; cf. 3:14).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 158.]

³⁰“The manuscript evidence for the participle translated “when they observe” is divided. The aorist participle *epopteusantes*, preferred by NTG27 (κ^c A B C P Ψ and the majority), is punctiliar, whereas the present participle *epopteuontes* (P⁷² κ* and others) implies repeated observance. This variant perhaps has been conformed to the same present tense of the verb in 2:12, also with conduct (‘good deeds’) as its object. Here, as in 2:12, stress is placed on the direct, face-to-face observance by nonbelievers of the proper conduct of believers, by which the latter can positively impress and attract the former.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 559.]

³¹Peter’s use of κόσμος (v. 3) and ἐκόσμου (v. 5) is of standard terminology for people’s outward appearance, especially when

be the external braiding of hair and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothing.” Women’s fashion in ancient Rome sometimes went to the extreme of elaborateness.³² Paul echoes similar views about women’s dress in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, especially for those in leadership roles:

Also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God.³³

To be clear, one must acknowledge that this Christian emphasis away from external appearance³⁴ and stress on inward character traits was not unique in the first century world.³⁵ Greek and Roman philosophers frequently satirized aristocratic women for their excesses and called for modesty in appearance.³⁶



Fifth, the Christian woman values inward qualities that can genuinely influence her husband the right way: ἀλλ’ ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής, i.e., “rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight.” The dramatic contrast between ὁ ἔξωθεν... κόσμος (the outward adornment) and ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος (the secret person of the heart) is placed in strong contrast to one another by ἀλλ’ (but rather). When Peter shifted from the external appearance based on clothes, hair, and jewelry to the inner character, he didn’t use outer/inner terms. Rather he shifted to an emphasis upon the

the issue is clothes, jewelry, grooming etc. The English words ‘adornment’ and ‘to adorn oneself’ are accurate expressions of the Greek terms, although not often used in the English speaking world today.

³²For an interesting and helpful discussion with pictures see “Roman Clothing: Women,” online at <http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/clothing2.html>. Also see “Roman Fashions: Women’s Apparel” as quoted below:

Wealthy women wore clothes of rich colors and fine materials, such as muslin and silks. Some areas also saw women wearing close fitting bonnets and hair nets. Women also wore a palla, a long shawl made of woolen goods for outdoor wear.

As fair as their hair goes, women could do anything! Hair could be dyed golden red or black. The hairdresser could skillfully use a curling iron for ringlets and crude scissors. She could also use oils and tonics to hurry growth and add both softness and luster. In the late 1st century and early 2nd century high-piled hairstyles of curls and plaits became popular. By the mid 2nd century, less elaborate plaits and waves were adapted. Hair was usually styled at home by slaves. Dyes were used, and blond hair was fashionable. Black hair wigs were imported from India and blond ones from Germany.

In terms of makeup, a woman’s face powder was a mixture of powdered chalk and white lead. Rouge for cheeks and lips was acher or the lees of wine. Eyebrows and eyelashes were blackened with ashes or powdered antimony, and teeth glistened with enamel. A lady chose her jewels, a diadem of precious stones for the hair, earrings, at least one necklace, rings for her fingers, bracelets for her wrists, and circlets for her ankles.

A woman was typically accompanied by two slaves, one with a parasol.

³³ὡσαύτως καὶ γυναῖκας ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης κοσμεῖν ἑαυτάς, μὴ ἐν πλέγμασιν καὶ χρυσίῳ ἢ μαργαρίταις ἢ ἱματισμῷ πολυτελεῖ, ἀλλ’ ὁ πρέπει γυναίξιν ἐπαγγελλομέναις θεοσεβείαν, δι’ ἔργων ἀγαθῶν.

³⁴It is possible to translate the Greek in such a way that the women are not prohibited from using outward aids, but are instead urged not to depend on these for their beauty (compare NEB ‘Your beauty should reside, not in outward adornment’; Phps ‘Your beauty should not be dependent on ...’; Brc ‘your beauty must not be the superficial beauty which depends on ...’). However, the TEV rendering is also possible and makes the verse an accurate description of the negative attitude of the early Christians toward superficial beauty aids (compare 1 Tim 2:9).” [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 90.]

³⁵“Censure of the love of finery (*philokosmia*), immoderate display, and extravagance was a commonplace of moral exhortation among Israelites, Greeks, and Romans alike.¹⁷³ (= ¹⁷³ See Isa 3:16–4:1; T. Reu. 5:5; Philo, *Sacr.* 21; *Virt.* 39–40; *Mos.* 2.243; *Plut. Conj. praec.* 48 (Mor. 145A); cf. *Juv.*, *Sat.* 2.6.50.2–3; *Martial*, *Epig.* 9.37; *Strabo*, *Geogr.* 17.7, *Epict.*, *Ench.* 40; *Sen.*, *Ben.* 7.9.)” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 562.]

³⁶“Regarding proper adornment, Plutarch, in his *Advice to Bride and Groom* (*Conj. praec.* 26; Mor. 141E) also recalls: ‘For, as Crates used to say, ‘adornment (*kosmos*) is that which adorns,’ and that adorns (*kosmei*) a woman which makes her more decorous. It is not gold or precious stones or scarlet that makes her such, but whatever invests her with that something which betokens dignity, good behavior and modesty (*hosa semnotētos eutaxias aidous emphasin peritithēsin*)’ (cf. also *Conj. praec.* 48; *Mor.* 144A–146A).” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 563.]

individual woman and what she develops inwardly that then expresses itself outwardly in her actions.³⁷

Very interesting is that Peter does not turn to the household duties of the wife.³⁸ She had many responsibilities that related to keeping the household functioning. Nor does he even allude to the major responsibility in the ancient world for the wife to produce a male heir who could inherit the property of his father. These ‘functional’ duties could easily have been seen as virtues of a good woman, as one finds in Proverbs 31:1-31. Instead, he turned to spiritual qualities.

What is it then that she is to cultivate as an essential part of her true self? In verse four, he mentions two traits, which he then indicates are pleasing to God: ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ **τοῦ πραέως** καὶ **ἡσυχίου πνεύματος**, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής. Basically Peter focuses on the human spirit (πνεύματος)³⁹ with two important qualities: πραέως (gentle) and ἡσυχίου (quiet). The first trait from the adjective πραῦς, πραεῖα, πραῦ defines an attitude of “not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, gentle, humble, considerate, meek in the older favorable sense.”⁴⁰ The second trait comes from the adjective ἡσύχιος, ον and designates a quiet, well-ordered personality.⁴¹ How is the pure and reverent



³⁷“The rendering of *your beauty should consist of your true inner self* will depend in large measure upon the manner in which beauty is spoken of in the first clause of verse 3. For example, one may render *your beauty should consist of your true inner self* as ‘your beauty should depend upon what you yourself really are’ or ‘... what you are in your heart’ or ‘... what you are inside of you.’ On the other hand, it may be necessary to restructure this initial clause of verse 4 as ‘what you are in your heart is what causes you to be beautiful’ or ‘... causes you really to be beautiful.’ The ‘heart’ stands for the whole person, or more specifically, for his character and personality (compare Brc ‘inner character and personality’).” [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 91.]

³⁸“Within the home, the wife bore responsibility for tending the hearth, obtaining the water, preparing the meals, spinning wool, weaving cloth, sewing the clothing, and other tasks needed for the operation of the household as both a social and economic unit. In particular, the rearing of children was her responsibility. Consistent with this identification of the female and the wife with the internal sphere of the home, stress also was laid on the primary importance of the inward character and disposition of the wife herself. In Rome, the sequestered Vestal Virgins, who represented the purity of the Roman people, tended the hearth in the Temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum. Like the Vestal Virgins, the ordinary wife also maintained the heart of the home, the hearth; correlatively, her own heart and internal disposition could be said to be of far greater importance than her external appearance. See the explanation of baptism in 3:20 for a further contrast of external-internal spheres in 1 Peter.

“Marriages, generally arranged by the male heads of the families of bride and groom, created new and mutually advantageous familial alliances. The chief aim of marriage in classical antiquity was to produce a male child who could inherit the family property. It is thus worth noting that the Petrine author says nothing about the wife’s obligation of providing a male heir but focuses exclusively on her personal virtue.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 569-70.]

³⁹“The noun ‘spirit’ (*pneuma*) refers not to the divine Spirit (which would make no sense in connection with v 4c), but to a person’s frame of mind, disposition, temperament, and ‘inward nature and essential character’ (Beare 1970, 155).¹⁷⁹ For the virtual equivalence of ‘heart’ and ‘spirit,’ see Ezek 36:26.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 566.]

⁴⁰πραῦς, πραεῖα, πραῦ (Hom.+; Crinagoras [I B.C. / I A.D.] in Anth. Pal. 10, 24, 4; 16, 273, 6; PGM 4, 1046; LXX; Jos., Ant. 19, 330; SibOr 4, 159 with v.l.) gen. πραέως (**1 Pt 3:4**; cp. W-S. §9, 5 p. 87; Kühner-Bl. I §126, 3 n. 9; B-D-F §46, 3; Maysen I/2 §68, 2, 1e p. 55f) and πραέος; pl. πραεῖς (on πραῦς and πρᾶος Kühner-Bl. I 532f; B-D-F §26 app.; Mlt-H. 160; Thackeray 180f; Crönert 290, 2.—But in our lit. πρᾶος [2 Macc 15:12; Philo; Jos., C. Ap. 1, 267] occurs only **Mt 11:29** v.l.) **pert. to not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, gentle, humble, considerate, meek** in the older favorable sense (cp. OED s.v. 1b; Pind., P. 3, 71 describes the ruler of Syracuse as one who is π. to his citizens, apparently the rank and file [Gildersleeve]), unassuming D 3:7a; **Mt 21:5** (Zech 9:9). W. ταπεινός (Is 26:6) **Mt 11:29** (THaering, Schlatter Festschr. 1922, 3–15; MRist, JR 15, ’35, 63–77). W. ἡσύχιος (and occasionally other characteristics) **1 Pt 3:4**; 1 Cl 13:4 (cp. Is 66:2); B 19:4; Hm 5, 2, 3; 6, 2, 3; 11:8 (Leutzsch, Hermas 452, n. 122). Among the qualities required of church officials D 15:1. πρὸς τὰς ὀργὰς αὐτῶν ὑμεῖς πραεῖς gentle in the face of their wrath IEph 10:2 (cp. PLond 1912, 83f εἶνα Ἀλεξανδρεῖς πραέως καὶ φιλανθρώπως προσφέροντε [=προσφέρονται] Ἰουδαίοις=therefore we affirm that the Alexandrines are to conduct themselves with kindness and goodwill toward the Judeans/Jews [41 A.D.]).—οἱ πραεῖς (Ps 36:11) **Mt 5:5** (WClarke, Theology 47, ’44, 131–33; NLothfink, Die Besänftigung des Messias, Gedanken zu Ps. 37 [Mt]: FKamphous Festschr., ed. JHainz et al. ’97, 75–87; Betz, SM 124–27); D 3:7b.—LMarshall, Challenge of NT Ethics ’47, 80ff; 300ff.—DELG s.v. πρᾶος. M-M. EDNT. Spicq. Sv.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 861.]

⁴¹ἡσύχιος, ον (s. prec. two entries and ἡσύχως; Hom. et al.; ins, pap; Is 66:2; PsSol 12:5; Joseph.) **quiet, well-ordered** D 3:8.

lifestyle (v. 2) to express itself? Peter sees the temperament of the woman as a major avenue of expression for this devotion to God.⁴² The two qualities of gentleness⁴³ and quietness⁴⁴ are important expressions of her love for God. By showing these toward her husband and others as well, he will see the difference that God makes in her life. This kind of disposition Peter characterizes as imperishable adornment: ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ (κόσμῳ).⁴⁵ The external only lasts momentary, but this kind of inward adornment lasts forever. Additionally, this inward adornment pleases God greatly: ὁ ἔστιν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής.⁴⁶ For a Christian woman, to value what God values in her is her first priority.

What applications of this instruction should be made to our world? **First**, we should note that what Peter said to the women in the first century Christian community had relevance to every believer in that day. Many commentators have correctly noticed that the qualities stressed by Peter are closely linked to what he said to the entire communities in 2:13 and 15-17:

12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

15 For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. 17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Beyond this larger text of 2:11-3:7, the qualities advocated here are applied to all believers, male and female

W. πραῦς 1 Cl 13:4; B 19:4 (both Is 66:2); Hm 5, 2, 3; 6, 2, 3; 11:8. Again w. πραῦς: πνεῦμα **1 Pt 3:4** (cp. PsSol 12, 5 ψυχὴ ἡσ.). βίος (Pla., Demosth.; SIG 866, 15; POxy 129, 8 [VI A.D.]) εἰρηνικὸν καὶ ἡσύχιον βίον διάξει *lead a peaceable and quiet life* (thus lightening the task of the heads of state; Jos., Ant. 13, 407 βίος ἡσύχιος, but in a diff. sense; cp. Thu. 1, 120, 3) **1 Ti 2:2**. Here ἡσ. prob.= without turmoil. ἡσύχιον εἶναι Hm 8:10.—B. (ἡσυχος) 840. DELG s.v. ἡσυχος. M-M. Spicq.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 440-41.]

⁴²See 1 Timothy 2:2 where this trait applies to all believers: “so that we may lead a *quiet* and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity” (ἵνα ἡρεμον καὶ ἡσύχιον βίον διάγωμεν ἐν πάσῃ εὐσεβείᾳ καὶ σεμνότητι).

⁴³“The adjective ‘gentle’ (praus) has a range of meanings (‘gentle,’ ‘humble,’ ‘modest,’ ‘unassuming,’ ‘meek’) and refers to a highly prized virtue among the Greeks (Bolkestein 1939, 108–11, 140), as among Israelites. Of Leah, Jacob’s wife, for example, it was said: “For he loved her very much after Rachel, her sister, died, since she was perfect and upright in all her ways, and she honored Jacob. And in all the days which she lived with him, he never heard a harsh word from her mouth because she possessed gentleness, peace, uprightness, and honor” (Jub. 36:23–24). According to the common expectations of the honor and shame code, the wife, in addition to her submission and deference to the authority of her husband and father and her protection of her chastity, was to display modesty and restraint in all things (Malina 1993d, 48–54). Compare again 1 Clem. 21:7, ‘let them (wives) show forth the innocent will of gentleness (tēs prautētos).’

“While the term gentle is used here in regard to females, as in 1 Clem. 21:7, gentleness was valued as a male virtue as well (Ps 36[37]:11; Matt 5:5; Gal 5:23; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; Titus 3:2). Jesus in fact describes himself as ‘gentle and humble’ (Matt 11:29; cf. 21:5; 2 Cor 10:1). Paul likewise speaks of a ‘gentle spirit’ in connection with himself (1 Cor 4:21) and other male believers (Gal 6:1; see Goppelt 1993, 222–23). This quality is urged on all believers in 3:16 so that here again the character and behavior of the wives are paradigmatic of the community as a whole.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 566.]

⁴⁴“The accompanying adjective ‘tranquil’ (hēsychios, only here and in 1 Tim 2:2) denotes a state of inner peacefulness and calm, quiet serenity, and tranquility, unruffled by the vicissitudes and disturbances of the daily round. In 1 Tim (2:11, 13) a wife’s quiet tranquility (hēsychia), as opposed to her teaching, is regarded as a feature of her subordination to her husband. This quality, however, is also urged elsewhere as an appropriate quality of all believers, male as well as female (2 Thess 3:12; 1 Tim 2:2; cf. 1 Thess 4:11). The terms gentle and tranquil are closely related and often combined (cf. 1 Clem. 13:4 [cf. Isa 66:2]; Barn. 19:4; Herm. Mand. 5.2.3; 6.2.3; 11.8).” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 566.]

⁴⁵The adjective ἀφθάρτῳ implies repetition of κόσμος as the opposition adornment from the external.

⁴⁶“**πολυτελής, ἐς** (τέλος; Hdt. et al.; ins, pap, LXX; En; TestSol 5:1 D; TestJob; TestJud 26:3; JosAs) **pert. to being of great value or worth, ordinarily of relatively high degree on a monetary scale, (very) expensive, costly** (so Thu.+; ins, pap, LXX, Philo; Jos., C. Ap. 2, 191) of ointment **Mk 14:3**. Of clothing (X., An. 1, 5, 8; Diod S 4, 53, 3; 17, 35, 2; Polyaeus 6, 1, 4; Philo, Sacr. Abel. 21; Jos., Bell. 1, 605) **1 Ti 2:9**. Of stones (Diod S 1, 33, 3; 2, 16, 4; OGI 90, 34; 132, 8 [s. note 7]; SEG VIII 467, 16 [217 B.C.]; PGM 5, 239. So mostly LXX; En 18:6; EpArist 60 al.) λίθος π. B 6:2 (Is 28:16); pl. MPol 18:2. παρατάξεις π. costly establishments (s. παρατάξεις 2) Hs 1:1.—Metaph., of inward adornment ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής (i.e. God appraises it at high value) **1 Pt 3:4**.—DELG s.v. τέλος. M-M. Spicq.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 850.]

without regard to gender.⁴⁷

Second, the general principle clearly in this passage has vital relevance to our day: what is on the inside of us is far more important than our outward appearance. Much too often modern society focuses solely on outward beauty, especially for women. But Christian principles reverse this with the contention that inward beauty is far more important. This emphasis needs much stress in churches of today.

Third, we should not make the mistake of many of the early church fathers who took Peter's words to mean that Christian women should not wear makeup, braid their hair, or wear expensive clothes at all.⁴⁸ When Peter's words, especially in verse three, are understood properly against the first century backdrop, it becomes clear that he is urging modesty in dress outwardly and speaking against the extremes current in his time. And he is joining with many other non-Christian writers in his time who spoke out against such practices as well. When Paul spoke in 1 Timothy 2:9 of desiring Christian women to “**adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire,**” he did not mean total disregard of one's outward appearance. And Peter did not imply that here either. Paul's ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης (“**in seemly apparel with modesty and sensibly**”) implies legitimate concern for one's physical appearance.

Fourth, how should modesty be defined in our day? One should not overlook the common emphasis between early Christian writers and secular writers in the first century.⁴⁹ We have already noted that Peter's words here echo many of the same themes as ancient Greek and Roman philosophers about women's dress. Good tastes were understood by non-Christians in the first century. The problem arose when many women ignored those standards of propriety with extremes in their dress and appearance. What this underscores is that the existing society will normally have standards of appropriateness that serve as a background to Christian understandings of propriety. Peter and Paul, who alone address these matters in the New Testament, used those secular standards as a base and added to or modified them with distinctive Christian insights. Most importantly the Christian woman should seek to use her outward appearance to glorify her God, not her body. This is an essential guiding principle in how she dresses.

b. Wives, look to OT wives as an example, v. 5-6

5 It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. 6 Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

5 οὕτως γὰρ ποτε καὶ αἱ ἅγιοι γυναῖκες αἱ ἐλπίζουσαι εἰς θεὸν ἐκόσμουν ἑαυτάς, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, 6 ὡς Σάρρα ὑπήκουσεν τῷ Ἀβραάμ, κύριον αὐτὸν καλοῦσα· ἥς ἐγενήθητε τέκνα ἀγαθοποιοῦσαι καὶ μὴ φοβούμεναι μηδεμίαν πτόησιν.

^{47c}While the term gentle is used here in regard to females, as in 1 Clem. 21:7, gentleness was valued as a male virtue as well (Ps 36[37]:11; Matt 5:5; Gal 5:23; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; Titus 3:2). Jesus in fact describes himself as ‘gentle and humble’ (Matt 11:29; cf. 21:5; 2 Cor 10:1). Paul likewise speaks of a ‘gentle spirit’ in connection with himself (1 Cor 4:21) and other male believers (Gal 6:1; see Goppelt 1993, 222–23). This quality is urged on all believers in 3:16 so that here again the character and behavior of the wives are paradigmatic of the community as a whole.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 566.]

^{48c}It is interesting to observe that the Church Fathers show more interest in this text in 1 Peter than in other passages that might be expected to draw attention, such as the letter's Christological statements or other soteriological formulations. Several Fathers regard this text as establishing an authoritative prohibition of external adornment for Christian women.¹⁷⁵ In general, later Christian attitudes toward female attire and modesty remained conservative and conventional in nature.¹⁷⁶ [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 565.]

^{49c}The qualities of a deceased wife inscribed on a second-century CE funerary epitaph by a mourning husband are a moving tribute to her virtuous qualities and her husband's profound sense of loss. Though the words are those of a non-Christian, the virtues extolled are strikingly similar:

Farewell, lady Panthia, from your husband. After your departure, I keep up my lasting grief for your cruel death. Hera, goddess of marriage, never saw such a wife: your beauty, your wisdom, your chastity. You bore me children completely like myself; you cared for your bridegroom and your children; you guided straight the rudder of life in our home and raised high our common fame in healing—though you were a woman, you were not behind me in skill. In recognition of this your bridegroom Glycon built this tomb for you. I also buried here the body of [my father] immortal Philadelphus, and I myself will lie here when I die, since with you alone I shared my bed when I was alive, so may I cover myself in ground that we share, (cited in Lefkowitz and Fant 1982, 104–5)

[John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 567.]

Notes:

In making his appeal to the Christian wives in his letter, Peter bases (οὕτως γάρ) this appeal on the model of godly women in the Old Testament, and in particular uses Sarah as the prime example. All of this is expressed in a single sentence as the causal basis for the previous admonition.

Example of holy women. Peter looks back in time for examples. He begins with the general examples of ‘holy women’ (αἱ ἅγιοι γυναῖκες) who placed their hope / expectancy in God (αἱ ἐλπίζουσαι εἰς θεόν). He doesn’t name individuals other than Sarah. Given the pivotal role of Abraham in Israelite history, the example to women would naturally be Sarah. These women ‘adorned themselves’ (ἐκόσμουσαν ἑαυτάς) by submitting to their husbands (ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν). Peter thus links the piety of these women to how they related to their husbands.⁵⁰ As a part of covenant Israel, they followed the norms established for the Israelites in the marital relationship. Now, one would want to note that these women were not morally spotless, and sometimes even abused the influence they had over their husband in order to gain advantage for a favored son. But Peter is speaking in terms of basic principles and is not assuming perfection by these OT women before using them as models for the women in the churches of Anatolia.

Example of Sarah. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is the only woman identified by name as a worthy example. Her ‘adorning herself’ is identified as having “obeyed Abraham and called him lord” (ὡς Σάρρα ὑπήκουσεν τῷ Ἀβραάμ κύριον αὐτὸν καλοῦσα). In the Greek, the text literally reads “obeyed Abraham by calling him lord.”⁵¹ Sarah’s life was not without fault and failure, but Peter’s point is to underscore that Sarah did respect her husband and essentially did what he asked her to do.

What can we learn from the Old Testament women? Peter’s basic point remains valid: a women’s devotion to God has important connections to how she relates to her husband. If she enjoys spiritual health and vitality, she will have a respectful and positive relationship with her husband.

Also, she doesn’t have to be perfect in order to be a good wife. None of these women in the OT were perfect, and yet most of them related positively to their husband even in the harsh patriarchal system of ancient Israel.

Finally, what Peter does here underscores something Paul stressed in Titus 2:3-5 when older women in the church were to be teachers of the younger women. We need role models to look to when trying to develop good relationships. For some in the churches of ancient Anatolia with no Jewish heritage or background, the example of Sarah probably didn’t mean a lot. But for others with Jewish heritage, it had significant impact. But the image of Sarah held up in discussions of this letter of Peter by women in these churches served to encourage all the married women, and especially those with non-Christian husbands.

Wow! Peter covers lots of territory with these two sentences in 3:1-6! He leaves us with some profound insights that God can use a godly witness to influence even those very close to us in life. Christianity genuinely lived out in the presence of unbelievers can be a vital instrument used by God to bring them to faith in Christ. This we must realize and then implement in our relationships.

⁵⁰While groups of people are identified as ‘holy’ in the NT (e.g., holy apostles and prophets, Eph 3:5; 2 Pet 3:2; Christian believers as a class, Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1), the phrase ‘holy women’ (αἱ ἅγιοι γυναῖκες) is unique here in the Christian canon.¹²⁹ The mention of Sarah in v. 6 makes it likely that the author has in mind in the first instance the matriarchs of Jewish tradition, viz., Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah,¹³⁰ who were holy not because of moral acts but because of their membership in God’s holy people.¹³¹ The ‘holy women’ function therefore not so much as models of moral behavior to be imitated as examples of women who have followed the path here described.¹³² That point is confirmed by the different language used to describe them from the language used to describe Christ in the preceding section, where the household slaves were in fact ‘called’ to emulate aspects of that life. Such ‘calling’ to follow an example is absent here. The activity most characteristic of the women for our author was their continuing hope¹³³ in God; the similar form of αἱ ἅγιοι (‘the holy [women]’) and αἱ ἐλπίζουσαι (‘who hoped’) makes clear that it is that aspect of holiness the author wishes to emphasize.¹³⁴ [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 214-15.]

⁵¹Very likely this is an allusion to Genesis 18:12 in the Septuagint: ἐγέλασεν δὲ Σάρρα ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγουσα Οὐπω μὲν μοι γέγονεν ἕως τοῦ νῦν, ὁ δὲ κύριός μου πρεσβύτερος. (“So Sarah laughed in herself saying, ‘No longer is it possible for me until now, and my lord is old.’”). The ironic aspect is that the occasion in Genesis 18 is where the angel announces to Abraham that a son will be born. And Sarah overhearing this doesn’t believe him nor believes that Abraham at this age can produce a son. Jewish rabbinical tradition held this verse to reflect Sarah’s obedience to Abraham. Perhaps it is that interpretive tradition that Peter is adopting. Interestingly, Genesis 16:2 indicates that Abraham obeyed Sarah, and this verse became an embarrassment to Jewish interpreters in the ancient world like Philo and Josephus.