

Group Study Guide

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

How to Deal with a Difficult Husband

1 Peter 3:1-6

June 24th, 2018

Main Point

This morning's study will consider what God has to say to believing wives who are married to an unbelieving husband.

Getting Started

In the last several decades, we've all become aware that society has grappled with shifting ideas and values about the marriage relationship. We see that cultural values oftentimes conflict with biblical teaching about marriage. Each new idea or practice brings a challenge to what is often referred to as "traditional marriage": one man plus one woman covenanted to each other for life. Peter's readers also faced questions about marriage as different cultures, backgrounds, and practices collided. It was critical for Peter to address the issue of marriage from a Christian perspective. His teaching still applies to our lives today. This particular passage about the marriage relationship instructs Christian wives on how to deal with unbelieving husbands.

Observation

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says and means.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 3:1-6.

Why does the willing submission of a wife to her husband not mean that she is inferior to him?

Re-read verse 1. Does the Bible teach that women in general are subject to men in general? To whom are wives subject?

For a Christian wife to have a different religion than her husband was quite astonishing for that culture. For example, the Greek historian Plutarch said, "A 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."

Does Peter forbid wives from wearing braided hair or from wearing jewelry? Why or why not? What is his point in verse 3?

What does Peter instruct wives to focus on cultivating in verse 4? What did Peter mean by telling women to cultivate a gentle and quiet spirit?

How did Peter say that godly women adorned themselves? How did they demonstrate their godliness in marriage?

How does the character of the wife impact the spiritual life of the husband according to this passage?

Who did Peter hold up as an example of a godly wife? How did this woman fulfill the ideal of a wife who places her hope in God?

Peter challenged wives to live under the leadership of their husbands, demonstrating their commitment to Christ in both attitude and action. God created the woman to work alongside the man. To do so, the husband must take the lead while the wife follows, just as she follows the lead of her Savior.

It is important to note that women who are in danger through abuse are free to flee and seek help and should do so. This passage does not condone abuse in any way, particularly considering Peter's instructions to the husbands in verse 7.

Application

How would you explain to newlyweds the instructions Peter gives to wives in this passage? How would you counsel a believing woman who is considering marrying a man who is not a believer? How might this passage impact your advice to such a woman?

In what ways should Peter's instruction about not focusing purely on appearance be carried out today? How might this instruction apply to men? What makes the inner beauty of godly character imperishable?

How can believing husbands reduce the pressure their wives feel to make external adorning a priority? In other words, how can believing husbands affirm their wives apart from their physical appearance?

Peter held up Sarah as an example of a godly wife who honored her husband. Wives, who do you know whom you would consider to be a godly wife? What about this wife stands out to you? How would you describe her character and priorities?

If you are married, what area of your marriage needs the most attention? What needs to change?

Prayer

As a group, pray the following prayer: God, thank You for creating us in Your image as men and women and for instituting marriage in Your creation. Help us be good stewards of Your marriage design, holding that design up in our society as your model for men and women in marriage.

Commentary

3:1. Peter's instructions here can be applied to all Christian wives, but with special attention to those women whose husbands are not believers in Jesus Christ. In the same way takes the reader back to something previously introduced. The manner of behavior is described with the words, *be submissive to your husbands*. Submission

appeared first in 2:13 about the believer's response to authority and again in verse 18 in discussing the slave's response to the master.

Opinions vary widely as to how these injunctions should be defined. Submission is best understood as "to voluntarily yield your rights or will to someone else's wishes or advice, as an expression of love for that person."

In all discussions related to submission, if the wishes, desires, or needs of the husband involve a direct violation of the Word of God, then submission does not apply. In such cases, to practice submission would involve violating the higher principle of obedience to God and his Word previously held out as the believer's goal (see 1:14-15,22; 2:11).

Submitting oneself to another is the opposite of self-assertion, the opposite of an independent, autocratic spirit. Wives submit to their own husbands out of reverence for Christ. It involves being satisfied at times with less than what one may deserve or claim as a right. The goal of this type of behavior is to win over to Christ the non-believing husband. This occurs without words. This does not mean that a wife is never to speak, but rather that she is not to resort to constant arguments and nagging discussions. The husband will be more influenced by the behavior of his wife. This links this chapter to chapter 2, where verse 12 indicates that the non-Christian audience can be positively influenced for Christ as they observe the consistent and godly behavior of a believer.

As Christian wives live out the declaration of the praises of God, their husbands will be influenced. For the Christian wife living with a non-Christian husband, Peter's previous discussion of suffering even while doing what is right may have some application even within the context of her marriage and home. What a Christian wife says often will not change her husband; how she lives out her faith before him will make the difference.

3:2. Living a life of purity and reverence can make a difference. Purity signifies more than just moral or sexual purity, although this is included. The term suggests moral and ethical behavior that maintains a high standard. According to recent surveys, forty percent of the women polled by USA Today indicated that they have had extramarital affairs. Obviously, Peter's advice is still relevant today. Purity of life will generally not occur, however, unless "reverence" is also a part of it. The "reverence" is for the Lord and indicates a deep desire to keep his commandments. This desire to obey God should be the driving motive, resulting in a high moral standard.

3:3-4. These verses do not ban grooming or beauty aids, but they do put these adornments in proper perspective. If a woman relies only on these kinds of things to make her beautiful, she will miss the greater value of inner beauty. She must not go overboard patching up the externals while ignoring the internal character. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, referred to women in this time period who wore two or three fortunes in their ears. Peter encourages Christian women not to lose their sense of value. They are to recognize the beauty of character that is far more vital and important than external beauty. This beauty, available to all women, is much deeper and more valued by God. This beautiful character is described as having a gentle and quiet spirit. The word gentle has a caress in it; yet behind gentleness stands the strength of steel. The supreme characteristic of the "gentle" woman is that she lives under perfect control. She is not given to panic but exudes great strength. "Quiet," too, suggests being under control. It also means "to evidence a calming influence."

Together, the two words speak of strength of character, strong self-control, describing a person of quiet elegance and dignity.

3:5-6. Support for this understanding of God's kind of woman comes from the example of holy women in the Old Testament (v. 5), specifically Sarah, Abraham's wife (v. 6).

Submission characterized each woman's relationship with her husband. Sarah is singled out as the primary example of a woman who was submissive to her husband. Sarah obeyed Abraham. The verb used here can mean "to listen to someone."

Translated this way, it fits well with the idea of submission, in that it indicates Sarah took an interest in her husband's conversation and articulated his needs and desires. Apparently, she responded to them in an appropriate manner throughout the course of their married life. Sarah called Abraham her master. This statement is difficult to explain completely. Some suggest the reference is to Genesis 18:12, where Sarah verbalized to herself her disbelief that she was to become pregnant at her advanced age. There the term master was simply a respectful form of address, along the lines of our sir today. Others believe that the term master can be substituted for the word husband. Perhaps it would be better to conclude that Peter did not have one incident in mind, but rather was thinking about Sarah's overall approach to married life.

Sarah's characteristic attitude was one of loving submission. She willingly accepted a nomadic life, following her husband into unknown and uncharted territories. Scripture encourages Christian wives to follow Sarah's example. Thus, they do what is right. This summarizes the first six verses. The end of verse 6 adds a caveat: their behavior toward their husbands should not give way to fear. Submission to husbands should not arise from fear or intimidation. Christian women should not be bullied or forced into this kind of behavior by their husbands. This provides the bridge to verse 7 that speaks to the role and response of the husband. Obviously, Scripture is concerned about marriage as a mutual relationship, not a one-way relationship.