

Before reading:

1 Peter 3:1 'In the same way' i.e. this continues the theme of 2:11,12 'As aliens and strangers in the world, I urge you to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.'

Also continues the sub-theme of 2:13 which gives one element involved in living in such a way that non-believers 'see the good we do and glorify God': submit yourselves for the lord's sake to every authority instituted among men.

1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives,

2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes.

4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands,

6 like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Many people play or watch the Beautiful game (football). Not here just now. But how many play 'The Beauty Game'?

That word 'beauty' comes in v3. We see it all around us.

What is beauty? Usually we think first of something visual. Television and Magazines are full of products that claim to make a woman beautiful.

Clothes from Yves Saint Laurent ...

skin care from Jo Malone, Eve Lom, Garnier - and I guess the cucumber (on the eyes) is probably Tesco!...

perfume, of course, from Chanel,

accessories from the most expensive shops.

But lipstick, shampoo, conditioner are all superficial!

I'm not saying these products are intrinsically wrong. The last chapter of Proverbs praises the ideal wife, one of whose jobs was 'fashion designer'.

But behind the adverts is a lie: they try to make you think that if you spend money on these products, they will turn you into something else. Someone else. Younger, prettier, more alluring, maybe even more able to hook an unsuspecting mate!

Well, we don't need a scientist to tell us: beauty is actually more than skin deep.

So what is beauty?

A woman asked: 'Do we put as much effort into becoming more beautiful on the inside as we do on looking attractive on the outside?'

Do you remember that Hyde Park concert where it poured with rain? Some concert goers objected that they could not see the stage because a woman in front of them put up her brolly. The woman heard them and took it down. And was later pictured,

Diana, with Pavarotti, soaked through. Normally famous for her looks, that day the princess was famed for her consideration, her ability to think of others, whatever the cost to her comfort and visual image.

So beauty can lie in actions, attitudes

Peter contrasts the outward trappings of beauty

V3 Outward adornment: such as braided hair...

I remember from my youth in Ghana seeing some African women and girls having their hair wrapped around with thread to straighten it; it took many hours; I wonder if Peter had something like that in mind? ... wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9 adds pearls. The point is, if you are *relying* on these to make you beautiful, the beauty is superficial and doesn't last.

What Peter commends instead:

He contrasts them with: v2 purity, reverence

V4 Gentle and quiet spirit in your inner self

Unfading beauty

Of great worth in God's sight

Mother Theresa said, 'It is not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love that is put into them that matters.'

Thus far, most women would agree.

But Peter also uses a word which is to some women like a red rag to a bull. Submission. What is involved in submission? How does it contribute to beauty? Well, take it in context.

Peter is saying, to *all* the Christians, 'Submit yourselves *for the Lord's sake* to every authority instituted among men...

e.g. 2:13 the king, or v14 governors..

v 18 Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.

So the verb is used of both slaves, and subjects of the king. Now citizens are not slaves. So it has more than one meaning.

In 2:23, Peter moves to the rationale behind submission: that was what our Master Jesus did. His response to insults and suffering was: 'he did not retaliate or threaten...; he entrusted himself to him who judges justly' = God.

When we are told to submit 'in the same way', it means we who follow Christ *all* have to absorb this attitude from him, let him live it through us. Not just women.

We notice the identical phrase 'in the same way' is used for 'wives' 3:1, husbands, 3:7; and after a word to the elders to submit to Christ, it appears again at 5:3 Young men, in the same way, be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility.'

So submission clearly applies to everyone in the Christian family. All of us. And all of us can find it hard, not just women. Not just the wives of non-Christian husbands. So what does it mean for wives?

Clearly, a wife's relationship with her husband is in no way the same as that of a slave to a master. So it never was appropriate for a husband to use this verse or others like it to treat a wife as if she were a slave. Boorish husbands may bully their wives till they are cowed and obedient, but that is not the submission described here. This word is addressed to the woman, not the man. It is about duties, not rights. This does not give men right to demand submission; but women may *choose to give it*.

First, let's deal with another issue: how come in v1, a Christian wife is married to a non-Christian husband? In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul tells Christians not to be yoked together with unbelievers. 'Yoked together' can refer to business partnerships, but it also means marriage.

Also, in 1 Corinthians 7:39 'A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord' i.e. be a Christian.

So the clear message of Scripture to young people considering marriage is that a Christian should only marry another Christian; and while we are likely to mix with all sorts of people and be friends with many, we should not go to the lengths of 'going out' or 'dating' (or whatever the current jargon)

someone who is not yet a Christian. It is asking for trouble later.

On the other hand, it is perfectly possible that a married couple who are not Christians hear the Gospel; and one believes while the other does not. So here, Peter is addressing a wife who has become a Christian *since their marriage*.

I have quite often heard a married person who wanted to become a Christian, *hesitate* to take the step of faith in Christ because they were afraid that loving God would get in the way of their promised commitment to love their spouse. It is my testimony -and theirs - that a relationship with the God of love, who after all invented monogamous, lifelong marriage, does not deplete but enhances one's love for one's spouse.

That's the thing about love, the more you express it, the more you have to express. The more in touch we are with the king of love, the more we act in loving ways.

Now, the most loving thing a married person can do for a non-believing spouse is pray for them to come to faith in Christ. The thing is, *arguing* them into it usually doesn't work.

Peter's remedy is for wives to love their unbelieving husbands with the right kind of submission so that, v 1, they may be won over without words by the wife's behaviour.

Just imagine the opposite for a moment. Will a non-Christian husband be impressed with the faith and message of a wife who is argumentative, manipulative, always trying to get her own way? Won't he distrust and dislike *her*, and her *God*.

What is it about a Christian wife that is winsome, in this sense of bringing someone to faith in Christ without direct preaching?

We've already mentioned v4 the inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit ... of great worth in God's sight.

More, Peter cites the OT, which does indeed portray a great many women in subjection to their husbands. He refers to Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master (though I can't find an exact quotation!)

You are her 'daughters' if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. (more on fear in v 14, and 5:17 Cast all your anxiety on him (God) for he cares for you.)

Ah, is this a clue? Are women prone to fear? Fear of an attack against her family? Surely a husband should defend them. Or fear of what a husband might do to her? Is fear the source of a distrust that makes the woman reluctant to go along with her husband's decisions?

In my first charge, a woman who was reluctant to move from her village decided to go accede to her husband's need to move house (for work purposes) to England. In due course, since she had come with him, he decided to come with her to church. And became a Christian.

I would have preferred it you could have heard testimony about Peter's words from a woman that has tried and tested them. All I can say is: Scripture is clear, men and women are of equal worth in God's sight. But we have different roles to fill. In a team - which is what a family has to be - there is a need for clear, decisive leadership. From one, undisputed leader.

Not because he is cleverer, or knows all the relevant facts, or is always right, any more than a king is, but because disagreement, disunity, dissension, is destructive of the team.

Peter deals with **husbands** in a single verse, but what loaded words;

First, there is no suggestion that the wife might not be a Christian. His calling is to be considerate of her, to respect her, whatever her spiritual state. That is what 'submission' means for a husband.

So when they have a choice to make that affects the whole family, they discuss it, and he listens with respect to her insights.

The adjective 'weaker' partner needs qualification. You know how in athletics, male and female athletes perform in separate events. There have been a few women tennis players with ferocious serves that could hold their own against many men, but it is deemed fairer to match like with like.

Dame Kelly Holmes, whose day job in the army was to bring a bunch of new recruits up to fitness, would send them off on a one mile morning run, and give them a massive head start. She would warn

them that anyone who came in behind her would have to get up at 6 every morning of the three-week course to run it again. Off they would go, these hard young men, full of confidence that no mere slip of a girl could beat them. Then she would catch them up and sail past them, because they were far less fit than they thought, and she was in peak condition.

But put her in the Olympics against other female athletes also at their peak, and she won only by a whisker.

So 'weaker' is relative. Think of other kinds of strength: Some women are enormously patient, and can use that patience with problem-solving, in industry/education/ bringing up children. No way are they less than men. Some women, indeed, some of you here, are vibrantly artistic, others write exhilaratingly, organize brilliantly like the Sale for Malawi yesterday. In a host of skills, in strength of character, in determination, some women are stronger than many men

By 'weaker', Peter refers to physical strength; in that sense, a husband has a duty to protect his wife, to provide for her needs and those of their children.

Weaker does not imply 'inferior'. To confirm that, look at v7: women are 'heirs with men of the gracious gift of life'.

You see? In the eyes of God, men and women, equally, are sinners, in need of a Saviour, who cannot save themselves. If they accept God's free gift of Christ as their Saviour, they are equally heirs of God's gracious gift of life. (faith is God's gift, so no-one can boast - Ephesians 2:8)

So Christian husbands and wives will pray together, and look for God's will together, and not allow disputation to spoil their relationship.

And here we have to note that the verb 'as you *live with* your wives' is a Greek term used in the Septuagint (usually written LXX = 70 in Roman numerals, which was (close to) the number of translators), (when the Jews were so scattered they had to translate their Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, when it was the common language). Where the original Hebrew often used the verb 'to know' when it meant sexual intercourse, e.g. 'Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived' (Gen 4:1, AV) the LXX used this Greek word, 'lived with'.

So husbands are particularly called on to treat their wives with consideration in *that* most intimate part of their relationship.

Is anyone playing the Beauty game? Using outward beauty aids to persuade a man to give them what they want? Is any man flattering a woman so she will give him what he wants?

The Word of God shows another way; submit, for the Lord's sake.