

A Woman's Beauty (part 2)

1 Peter 3:1-6

We have a problem. We have a really big problem. That's how I began my sermon last week, and it's how I need to begin again this week as well. Last week the subject was a woman's beauty, and the problem is that in our world, in our culture, we don't know what beauty is anymore. So when you hear reference to a beautiful woman today, it is no doubt a reference to something that you can see with your eyes. And that's all wrong. What the world says about beauty is all wrong. What our culture defines for beauty is all wrong.

My emphasis last week, more importantly Peter's emphasis in our text, is that real beauty is defined by the character of the heart. Peter calls it "the hidden person of the heart." God judges the beauty of a woman by what he sees in your heart. And Peter describes that as an incorruptible beauty. He identifies it as "very precious in the sight of God."

I want you to have all of those thoughts in your mind as we look at this passage a second time this morning, because we have another problem to focus upon today. Our focus today is the the subject of submission, and our problem is that we often don't handle this subject very well. Let me explain.

When I am counseling a young couple about to get married, I go over what the Bible says to husbands and what it says to wives. And it can be difficult to get them to hear the right things, so I often say to the bride-to-be, "Don't listen to what I am saying to him." And I say to the groom-to-be, "Don't listen to what I say to her." The reason for that is that we all want to know what the Bible requires of the other person. And its too easy to miss what the Bible says to us.

So this is the problem when it comes to a study of submission. Submission is something that men like to talk about, because it's something they like to demand from their wives. And in that context, I want you to notice what Peter says to husbands in verse 7. We'll study it more thoroughly next week, but notice that Peter doesn't say, "Husbands, rule over your wives and be sure that they submit to you."

Do any of you see that in Peter's instructions to husbands? Do any of you see a command for a man to enforce his authority to require submission in his wife? I don't. The command to husbands is to be understanding toward your wife.

You can find the same sort of thing in Ephesians 5, where Paul gives instructions to wives to submit. And when he gives parallel instructions to men, he says nothing of enforcing that authority. Instead, we read,

Eph. 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church."

So the command to husbands is to love. To love your bride as Jesus loves his bride. In other words, to lay down your life for her. To die for her. To make her beautiful, to nourish and cherish her. Do you read anything there about ruling over her? I don't.

And that's the problem. We often see this call for a woman's submission to be grounds for a man to rule over her, as if that's the only issue at hand. We often see a woman's submission as the only command that God gives to a married couple. So if there's a problem in the marriage, a problem in the home, why there is an easy solution. The woman needs to submit.

I've known of women terribly, terribly exasperated by counseling offered to them with their husbands, counseling which simply ends with the call for them to be in submission. I've known men who are entirely blind to their own faults, who will nonetheless demand submission from their wives. I have known men who will enforce their authority by being overbearing, authoritarian and even emotionally abusive. I have known men who will enforce their authority by being physically abusive. And all the while, all too often, the proposed solution to any marital conflict is simply for the woman to be submissive.

And that is all wrong, because an overbearing man is a sinful man. A man who abuses his authority is an ungodly man. And the biblical teaching on submission gives no excuse for such sinful behavior.

Go back with me please to Genesis 3, the description of God's judgment upon fallen man. The curse which God pronounces upon Adam and Eve after they sinned. Look what he says to the woman. This is the curse. And it begins with the curse of pain and suffering in the distinctive role God gave to women in the bearing of children. But there is more.

Gen. 3:16 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

It's that last phrase I want to mention, and while I admit there are a variety of different interpretations that have been proposed, I am convinced that those words describe the fundamental sin of fallen men and women. "Your desire shall be for our husband." I believe that refers to a desire to dominate, a desire to control. A desire even to manipulate. A sinful desire, to exercise an inappropriate influence over your husband by ungodly methods.

And then comes the characteristic sin of men, "he shall rule over you." I believe that refers the overbearing, abusive rule of a fallen man. The curse upon mankind is that men will tend to abuse their authority. Husbands will tend to exasperate their wives by their harshness. Men will read about the command for a woman to be submissive, and they will put all their effort into enforcing that duty and obligation.

So, men, don't listen to this first point I am about to make. Don't listen, if it would tempt you to think that this is your duty toward your wife, to enforce your authority with an overbearing harshness. And if you do listen, don't forget how the Lord defines the desire and inclination of the fallen heart of a man, the desire to rule over your wife with overbearing harshness. Instead, as we study the definition of submission, I leave before you the example and testimony of Jesus,

Eph. 5:22 "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

With all of that introduction, then, we come to,

I. THE DEFINITION OF SUBMISSION.

v.1

Likewise...What is the reference? Go back to,

1 Peter 2:18 “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.”

Peter is identifying a structure that is defined by the exercise of authority. Servants are in submission to their masters. And we looked at that some three weeks ago. Likewise, in a comparable way, God does define a structure of authority in a family, in a marriage. And wives are called be submissive.

Similarly, Paul writes,

Col. 3:18 “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

Also, Eph. 5:22 “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

Very literally, the Greek word to submit is a compound of the verb “to place” or “to put” and the preposition, “under.” So the word means to place yourself under. It is a military term, a term referring to rank, to the exercise of authority. It means that you yield to that authority, that you accept the position of rank in which you are subject to that authority.

Nonetheless, it is helpful and even necessary to recognize that this idea of submission as we are studying it does not include any sense of a woman’s essential inferiority, that she is inferior in her very essence. To the contrary, Peter identifies her as her husband’s “joint heir of the grace of life” in verse 7. And recall Adam’s joyful delight when God gave him a wife,

Gen. 2:23 “This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.”

God identified a woman as a help-meet for a man, a helper corresponding to man. Not one of the other creatures qualified. She would not be one of the animals he names, but a helper, equal to him. Bone of his bones! It was an exalted position!

Sometimes we use the words inferiority and superiority to define rank, again especially in a context such as the military. We speak correctly of superior rank, or a superior officer. And we’re not even afraid of that word “superior” in broader context. In most work environments, you might hear reference to your “superiors.” That refers to rank. As would the corresponding word, “inferiors.”

Thus this position of submission is a voluntary act and willing commitment a woman makes, not an oppressive manifestation of any inherent inferiority. Simply put, submission is,

A. A willingness to honor authority, but not an acknowledgement of inferiority.

And it is part and parcel of the design which God prescribes for the relationship between a husband and a wife. A willingness to honor authority, but not an acknowledgement of inferiority.

And a second sub-point here, one which I’ve already introduced. Submission is,

B. A commitment made by a woman, not a duty imposed by a man.

A willing commitment. A free commitment, not one made under compulsion.

Submission is a choice that a godly woman makes. And the call to submission is given to women. It is not given as a weapon to a husband in order to enforce with authoritarian dominance.

We see this same dynamic in every case in which God grants the right of authority, this restraint put upon those in authority against the abuse of authority. Remember the restraint given to fathers in their authority over their children, “Do no exasperate.” Remember the restraint given to elders in their authority over the membership of the visible church,

1 Peter 5:2 “...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

And even the civil magistrates,

Rom. 13:3 “For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good.”

In our text this morning, I will again remind you of just how powerful this testimony of submissiveness can be in a godly woman,

v.1 “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct.”

And remember, this submissiveness is a testimony of “the hidden person of the heart,”

v.5 “the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women

who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands.”

That’s the definition of submission, so let’s go back to the idea of beauty. In this context of submissiveness, look at what Peter teaches us regarding,

II. THE DEFINITION OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.

In other words, submission is not just about authority and obedience. It’s about beauty. And its about holiness, for...

A. A beautiful woman is a holy woman.

v.5

Peter is honoring godly women by speaking so well of them. He speaks of the holy women of the Old Covenant. And holiness is nothing less than godliness. Holiness is nothing other than righteousness. It refers to the purity of your lives.

So Peter is praising them, praising them for their holiness. Praising them for the beauty of their heart, praising them for their gentle and quiet spirit. He calls them holy. For they are set apart from the world, in every good way. They are sacred, identified to receive honor. They are well-pleasing to God, precious in his sight. And they are noticeable among men.

A beautiful woman is a holy woman. And that’s how we ought to go about measuring and defining beauty. There is something else that defines a truly beautiful woman.

B. A beautiful woman is a woman who trust in God.

v.5

So holiness was their adornment, not their hair, jewelry and clothes. Their gentle and quiet spirit was their beauty. That's how they adorned themselves, that was their world. And remember that the word for adornment is the Greek word for world. Their world, their focus in life, their desires in life were all centered upon the incorruptible beauty of their hearts.

And they trusted in God. The NASB and the ESV have hope, "they hoped in God," and the Greek is the word for hope. So remember what "hope" means. It means to wait confidently for something that was promised, to wait with expectation. Even with certainty. So when you have hope, it means that you trust God to keep his promise and to fulfill his word. To hope in God is to wait upon God, to wait expectantly. To hope in God is to trust in God. Surely, they are one and the same thing.

Sometimes that is very hard, isn't it? Because sometimes God allows us to wait. Sometimes, from our perspective, what we hope for is delayed, even apparently denied, at least for a time. Sometimes it seems impossible. So we wait, we hope, we trust.

A beautiful woman is a woman who has such faith. Surely, she can't trust in a man. Surely, a woman cannot be encouraged to submit to their husband because her husband is always faithful and trustworthy. He might well be a scoundrel. And I can guarantee he is a fallen sinner, even at his best.

So a woman's hope can't be in her husband, for that would be a false hope. The hope of a beautiful woman is a hope in God, a trust in God. She accepts her calling, she makes herself submissive, because in the depth of her heart, she trusts God.

Beloved, that's a beautiful woman! She covers herself, she adorns herself with "incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit."

Finally, then, my third point, what does she look like, this beautiful woman? How is her beauty shown? According to Peter, her beauty is clearly demonstrated by her life.

III. THE DEMONSTRATION OF SUBMISSION IN A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.

And such a demonstration involves obedience. Submission refers to the attitude of the heart, an attitude which is shown forth in life as,

A. A willing obedience.

The Greek word means to listen. Sarah listened to Abraham. And that is such an appropriate way to put it. It was not a cold, begrudging external form of obedience. No, it was the willingness to listen. The willingness to listen to one who had authority. And listening means to hearken, to pay attention. By way of illustration, it is the listening of a porter who hears a knocking at the door. To listen to the knock is to answer the door.

To make that more modern, it is the listening of someone whose cell phone rings. Or, for our teenagers and young adults, it is the listening to the buzzing sound of receiving a text or the ping of receiving an email. To hear the sound of a text is to respond. To hear with attentiveness is to respond.

For someone who is submissive, to hear a command is to obey it. Indeed, the genuinely submissive spirit does not even need the form of a command. The truly submissive wife, the truly beautiful woman, doesn't need the form of a command in order to obey. It is a willing choice she makes, the outworking of her

gentle and quiet spirit. It is the evidence of her inner beauty, the hidden person of the heart.

There is nothing here that would allow for heavy-handed male abusiveness. There is nothing here about inappropriate domineering. Nothing about a woman losing her dignity as a joint-heir of life with her husband. Just the demonstration of her beauty, in the form of a willingness to obey. And,

B. A willingness to give honor.

Indeed, the obedience proceeds from this giving of honor. A beauty woman does not submit because she is compelled to do so. She submits, she obeys, because she desires to give honor.
v.6a

Sarah called Abraham lord. That's a small letter "l" in lord. It is not worship. It is not making him a god. Rather, it is recognizing the role of submission, the role of authority and headship. And Sarah offers that sacrifice. She obeyed Abraham. She submitted to him. And Peter says that Christian women ought to aspire to be Sarah's daughters.

Again, the parallel with Paul's instruction is pretty clear,
Eph. 5:22 "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."

Notice then how Paul concludes the whole passage,
Eph. 5:33 "However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

The Greek word there is the word for 'fear.' The word for honor, reverence and respect.

Begrudging, half-hearted submission is not beautiful in God's sight. Obedience is external form only is not precious in his sight, nor is manipulative submission when you are really trying to get your own way in the end. Rather, what Peter describes in the context of a woman's beauty, is that spirit within a godly woman's heart that causes her to give true and sincere honor and respect to her husband.

It's so much more than mere obedience. It's so much more than merely submitting to the exercise of authority. It is the evidence of a beautiful heart, it is the demonstration of a gentle and quiet spirit which is so very precious in the sight of God.

And, with a clear moral judgment by Peter, it is good. It is full of virtue. And according to Peter, it takes great courage to be submissive in that way.

C. The courage to do what is good.

v.6b

Such beauty, a woman willing to do what is morally good. Without fear, because she trusts in God. Without fear, even of her husband to whom she submits, for she trusts in God. Without fear of losing her rights, for she trusts in God. Without fear of being vulnerable, for she trusts in God.

Now let me emphasize, submission does make a woman vulnerable. A commitment to obey, a responsibility to obey, does make her vulnerable. When you promise to submit, even in other circumstances of life, you always make yourself vulnerable. And

men, in love, ought never to take advantage of that vulnerability. That's what a man's love is all about.

What a woman does in offering her submission is to show forth her beauty in a way that nothing else can. She demonstrates her beauty by doing what is good, trusting in God, and honoring her husband. To end at the same place that I did last week, such beauty "is very precious in the sight of God."

To my sisters in Christ, trusting in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you of all your sin, hear these words of God and pray that God would enable you to demonstrate such beauty, knowing that it would be of great value in his sight. Show forth your beauty as you desire to glorify God.

And to my brothers in Christ, trusting in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you of all your sin, hear these words of God and pray that God would enable you to treasure such beauty in women. And you who are married, whose wives have promised to submit to you, respond to them with your love, treasuring this gift of honor they offer to you.