

# Exegesis of I Peter 3:1-7

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## Translation

<sup>1</sup> *In like manner, wives continuing to be subject to their own husbands, in order that if some are disobedient to the Word, through the conduct of their wives they may be gained without talk,* <sup>2</sup> *having viewed carefully your conduct pure in fear.* <sup>3</sup> *Whose let it be, not the outward ornamentation of braiding of hair and putting around gold things and putting on clothing,* <sup>4</sup> *but the hidden man of the heart in connection with the incorruption of a gentle and quiet disposition, which is in the sight of God precious.* <sup>5</sup> *For thus at one time the holy wives, those hoping in God, kept adorning themselves, continuing in subjection to their own husbands—* <sup>6</sup> *as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children you have become, continuing in doing good and fearing no intimidation at all.*

<sup>7</sup> *Husbands in like manner, continuing to live together according to knowledge with a wife as with a weaker vessel, portioning out honor as with fellow-heirs of life's grace so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

Having finished the instruction to slaves both as to what they were to do and why they were to do it, Peter turns to the relationship of husbands and wives and specifically to the position of a Christian wife over against an unbelieving husband. (verse 1) Peter begins with the word *ὁμοίως*, “likewise.” Just as there are instructions for slaves over against their masters, so now wives will receive some. A Christian wife will “continue to be subject to her own husband.” The same word is used here as was used in the case of slaves and men in general in verse 13: *ὑποτασσόμεναι*. The word here means the same thing as it did there—“obedience and subjection in all fear,” only here “subjection” within the framework of God’s established marriage bond. This subjection is mentioned also and further explained in Colossians 3:18, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (NIV), and is also mentioned in Ephesians 5:22-24, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” The church’s submission to Jesus is to be a willing one, not characterized by grumbling and reluctance but rather a happy service motivated by the love of Jesus to us first. The service of a wife to a husband is also to be willing and happy, again motivated by the love of Jesus shown to her first and then manifesting itself in loving obedience and service making compulsion unnecessary. In the case of a wife who has an unbelieving husband, no difference is mentioned as to the subjection, in such a situation the wife will be subject in all things, excepting of course matters where such subjection would counter the will of God. The subjection of a Christian wife has a purpose, Peter says, and that purpose is *ἵνα κερδηθήσονται*, “in order that they may be gained.” The “gain” is for the family of God, that is, to be gained for Christ. How can this be accomplished? The husband is said to be *ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ*, “disobedient to the Word.” He has not committed the sin against the Holy Ghost but rather lives his life without Christ and therefore contrary to the clear Word and will of God in everything that he does. Peter tell us that the conduct of the wife will act as a recommendation for the Christian way and that through the observance of such conduct the husband may, through the Holy Spirit working in him by the Word, be brought to faith in Jesus. The phrase *ἄνευ λόγου* means “without talk”—it refers to the absence of the excessive kind of talk that sometimes characterizes a marriage, the nagging and badgering of one’s spouse in an attempt to get him (or her) into the faith. The principle that no-one is ever argued into the faith stands—the husband may be won by the wife but through her actions recommending the Word of God not through nagging and hounding tactics. The kind of actions that should characterize a Christian wife’s life is found in Paul’s “Psalm of Love,” 1 Corinthians 13. (verse 2) Peter refers to the “conduct” of a wife and says that the husband

should have the opportunity to view carefully that conduct “pure in fear.” The word *ἀγνήν* certainly includes the meaning of “chastity,” that is faithfulness to the marriage vow but also includes all manner of pure living, anything opposite of “uncleanness.” The phrase *ἐν φόβῳ*, “in fear” has the connotation of “reverential fear,” an attitude of respect and honor over against the husband as being one placed over her by God.

(verse 3) What about this conduct then? What does a wife do or avoid doing, specifically, in recommending Her Lord to her husband by her actions? Peter says she avoids the mere outward ornamentation of her body. She carefully avoids placing her total trust and confidence and desire in the outward adorning of the body. That is not to say that she should be careless about her person, either hygienically or esthetically. What she should avoid is the vanity involved in the custom of the day referred to by Peter as “the outward ornamentation of braiding of hair, putting around gold things and putting on clothes.” The impropriety of doing these things involves “outward ornamentation”—it was the matter of drawing attention to one’s person by means of excessive hair styles, excessive use of gold objects to adorn the hair, arms, fingers and even ankles and the excessive use of time and money in the dressing of oneself. “The stress was placed on the outward things as being the only real and lasting valuables of life. Peter says, not so—these things are corruptible, they wear out, go out of style, can be lost, grow old and in the eyes of God and husbands they are not of great price.

(verse 4) What is of great price before God and godly men? (Not the outward ornamentation of the body but rather the hidden inward adornment of the heart. In a wife and women in general the most valuable asset is a gentle (considerate, meek, humble) disposition. A woman who humbly accepts her position as wife and mother and does not fall to the temptation to nag and cry after the corruptible vanities of the world around her in regard to outward “ornamentation” is truly “adorned” in the eyes of God. It means simply that a Christian woman will regard fashion, jewelry, clothing and all outward adornment as special blessings of the Lord to be sure, but not to be coveted after, to be enjoyed if possible but not to be considered absolutely necessary for a long and happy marriage. Peter also does not mean however that a woman should take pride in her humility, that is to disdain everything but “dumpy” clothes and to scorn anything to do with style, brilliant colors or the wearing of jewelry. Examples of this extreme attitude we see in the customs of the Amish and Catholic convents. Inner contentment and gentleness are then precious pluses in the eyes of God and husbands. Proverbs 31:30 says of a wife, “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised” (*NASB*).

(verses 5-6) Peter proceeds with examples of Old Testament believers, what their conduct was in the marriage relationship, wives toward husbands. These wives were saints in the eyes of God because they believed in Jesus as their Savior and had their whole hope and trust placed in God by the Holy Spirit—it was these wives who demonstrated for all time the relationship between husband and wife that God wants. The wives were *ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν*, that is subjecting themselves unto their own husbands and thus, adorning themselves properly in the sight of God and husbands. The Old Testament’s wives were certainly as prone to falling to the temptations not “to be subject” as modern day wives might be, and yet by the grace of God their sanctification was such that it stands to this day as a fine example for the conduct of wives. These women were adorned inwardly with the quality of humility and subjection to their husbands. A specific example of this is found in the case of Sarah and her relationship to Abraham, her husband. Genesis 18 verse 12 records the words of Sarah as she calls Abraham “my lord.” Peter says that there is a spiritual affinity between Sarah and wives of all ages when those wives obey their husbands and conduct themselves in accord with God’s Word over against their husbands—they then are spiritual children of Sarah. The word *πτοήσιν* means “terrifying” or “intimidation.” Peter says, do not ever be afraid of any intimidation in the matter of the relationship between husband and wife. Peter does not say that reason for such intimidation will be absent however. The ungodly husband may certainly revile and ridicule the “meekness” of a Christian wife, he may very well take advantage of the quiet disposition of his wife, he may also abuse the “obedience” of his wife. The world around a Christian wife will also not pass up the opportunity to “poke fun” at the qualities of a wife that God prescribes, especially the world in which we live with its “women’s rights” fanatics and “do your own thing” proponents. Peter forewarns, do not let their roarings and intimidations frighten you into a course of action contrary to the will of God. Rather, your conduct will recommend the Lord and His Word to your

husbands and your “going along” will have the opposite effect. What Peter says of wives as far as outward ornamentation is concerned is applicable to women in general. The priceless qualities in the eyes of God are the inner ones.

(verse 7) The focus now turns to the role of a husband in dealing with his wife. The exhortation is brief but covers the whole of Christian conduct for husbands. Peter says that husbands are to continue to live with their own wives *κατὰ γνώσιν*, “according to knowledge,” in other words to dwell with a wife according to the regulations set down in Holy Scriptures, the “knowledge” referred to is “Scriptural Knowledge” (Ephesians 5:25-33 is a good example of this “knowledge”). What does Peter mean with the phrase *ἀσθενεστέρῳ σκεύει*? The term *σκεύει* is used for both husband and wife which “weaker vessel” implies. (The husband is a “vessel” but the wife is the “weaker one.”) In what respect is the wife weaker? Is she less intelligent, less spiritual, less capable in matters of common sense or less dependable than a husband? None of these areas is meant by the term “weaker vessel.” Peter means simply that a wife is “weaker” physically. She has a body miraculously designed for specific uses, among them the bearing of children. The husband has a body designed for other functions such as bearing the burden of heavy physical labor and defending his family. There are just plain some things which women cannot do easily or at all because of the fact that they are “weaker vessels.” This limitation does not make women intrinsically inferior to men by any means. Peter continues by saying that a husband will afford all manner of honor to his wife because she is a joint-heir with him of the gift of everlasting life. In the eyes of God there is no distinction between husband and wife, male and female as far as faith and grace and eternal life are concerned. In spiritual matters both are sinners and both need a Savior and both are saved in exactly the same way, through faith in the Lord Jesus. Paul writes to the Galatians (3:23), “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NIV). As a fellow heir of the gift of eternal life, treat your wife accordingly. But what happens when you do not do that? Peter says that then there is the danger that your prayers will be hindered, that is interrupted, cut off. When a man treats his wife without honor, without respect as a fellow-heir of eternal life, can he expect his guilty conscience to allow him to speak freely and from the heart with his God who forbade such activity? Indeed not and not only will prayer be interrupted but all manner of worship and finally all communication with Christ and His Church too.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion then, wives are not only to believe in Jesus but are to put that belief into practice with the purpose of sometime winning that husband for the Lord. These wives are to avoid the excessive, outward ornamentation of their bodies in deference for the really valuable qualities of inner adornment—meekness, gentleness, quietness and subjection—in the Lord. Husbands also are to carefully heed God’s will in respect to their relationship with a wife. Respect them, honor them, treat them always as weaker vessels, true, but also as joint-heirs of the grace of God. May God grant that these exhortations be followed by all who claim Christ as their Savior, pastors and their wives not excepted!