

WOMEN OF INNER BEAUTY CHANGE HOMES AND THE WORLD

1 Peter 3:1-7

Key Verse: 3:4

“Rather, 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.”

Today's passage is not a general instruction for marriage and family life as we find in Ephesians 5. There is no mention of the word "love" and nothing is said about parents' relationship with children. Mainly Peter speaks to wives—allotting six verses to them and just one verse to husbands. He specifically addresses believing wives who were living with unbelieving husbands, and takes an evangelical tone. To understand his teaching well, we need to know the context of the times. At first glance, it may seem difficult to apply his teachings to our times. But when we study this passage carefully, we find that it is very relevant to us. Peter's instructions are timeless. We can learn the importance of marriage, a woman's role in the family, and God's vision through Christian homes. We Christians want to have beautiful families. But practically it is not easy. There are so many dysfunctional families, whose pain and anguish is more than one can say. It has robbed them of vision and hope and left them despairing. They cry out for healing and restoration. They need motivation to struggle and a real hope and vision. In that sense, Peter's instruction gives us practical help for a breakthrough. Let's listen to Peter's timeless teaching. Then we can have God's vision for our households to be beautiful Christian homes to serve the world with God's love.

First, wives adorned with unfading inner beauty (1-6). The gospel message contains the truth that all people are sinners and we are saved only by grace, regardless of our human distinctives. Furthermore, all people are equal in the sight of God because we are created in the image of God. This message had a tremendous impact in the ancient world, on societies which had long been stratified and hierarchical. Those born in inferior social positions had seemed unalterably consigned to the bottom class of mankind, without any hope for a better life. When people in this situation heard the gospel message, they welcomed it joyfully, especially slaves and women. The number of slaves and women who entered the church was considerable. So Peter writes particularly to these two groups of people. In those times, the status of women was similar to that of slaves. The influential philosopher Aristotle theorized that women were naturally inferior to men, but a little better than slaves.¹ His view of women had a huge impact in the

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle%27s_views_on_women

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ancient world. The Bible commentator William Barclay writes: “Under Roman law, a woman had no rights...she was under patria Potestas, the father’s power, which gave the father the right even of life and death over her; and when she married, she passed equally into the power of her husband. She was entirely subject to her husband and completely at his mercy.”² In this social environment, Jesus valued women and treated them with respect and dignity. So there were many women among his followers. They received his grace and supported his ministry sacrificially and wholeheartedly with their own means (Lk 8:2-3). Wherever the gospel spread, many women responded well. The book of Acts tells us that quite a few prominent Greek women believed (Ac 17:4,12). In many cases, the women believed, but their husbands did not. “For a Christian wife to have a different religion than her husband was quite astonishing for that culture. For example, the Greek historian Plutarch (C.A.C. 46-127) 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 (*Advice to Bride and Groom* 19, *Moralia* 140D).’”³ So naturally, conflicts arose between believing wives and unbelieving husbands. These believing wives needed practical instruction about how they should live out their gospel faith.

Verse 1 says, “**Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands, so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives....**” To be sure, submitting to an unbelieving husband was not easy. Nevertheless, Peter exhorted such wives to submit to their husbands as he had exhorted all believers to submit to their governments, and slaves to submit to their masters following the example of Jesus. This submission was the opportunity to learn of Jesus. This submission was to be willing, not blind, and to result in the orderly operation of the home. In brief, he was telling them to be good wives who brought peace to their families for the Lord’s sake. Believing wives want to win their husbands over to Jesus. They love them and want what is best for them. They want their husbands to share the wonderful grace of Jesus which they have received. The question is how to go about it. Usually they want to use their words, saying, “If you listen to me you will come to know Jesus and be saved and happy.” It does not always work. It may wound their husband’s pride, and strain their relationship. In frustration, she may be tempted to nag her husband, but this usually makes things worse. Peter did not exhort believing wives to preach the gospel by winning an argument. Instead he

² Barclay, William (2010-11-05). *The Letters of James and Peter* (New Daily Study Bible) (Kindly locations 4064-4066). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

³ ESV Study Bible, 2008, study note on 1 Peter 3:1. Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL, pg 2409.

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said, “...they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives.” There is a saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” Jesus, though he is God, did not argue with sinners and try to force us to believe. Rather, he humbled himself and demonstrated God’s love through his actions. He offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Jn 2:2). We follow Jesus when we live out God’s love by actions.

Verse 2 says, “...when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.” The lives of believing wives are to be marked by moral purity that springs from reverence toward God. This comes when they accept their role as wives as God’s mission for them and devote themselves to caring for their husbands and children. Out of such purity springs compassion, diligence, wisdom, and a hardworking spirit by which they provide wonderfully for their families. They resemble the woman in Proverbs 31. They make a great contrast with worldly women whose interests are in gossiping about society and indulging in various kinds of entertainment. When believing wives live purely and reverently, the fragrance of their beauty fills their home. When husbands sense it, they are moved and realize that God is present. They confess, **“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised”** (Pr 31:30). Monica, the mother of St. Augustine, was given in marriage to a pagan official named Patritius, who had a short temper and lived an immoral life. At first Monica’s mother-in-law did not like her, but Monica won her over with her gentle spirit. Unlike many women of that time, Monica was never beaten by her husband. She said it was because she always held her tongue, setting a guard over her mouth in his presence. But her actions spoke loudly. She was constantly in prayer and shedding tears for their son Augustine. After watching this for 16 years, Patritius was baptized, and died one year later. Shortly after that Augustine was also converted to Christ.⁴ This is the power of a woman’s pure and reverent life.

Peter knew that God made women to be beautiful and to desire beauty. So he exhorted them to pursue true beauty. In order to do that, there was something they should watch out for. Verse 3 says, **“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.”** Historically, women have done their best to adorn themselves outwardly to make themselves beautiful. So the hairstyle, jewelry and fine clothing industries have developed a lot. According to one researcher, the average woman, in her lifetime, will spend \$50,000 and seven full months caring

⁴ <http://www.antiochian.org/node/18343>

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for her hair.⁵ Women love to wear all kinds of jewelry: gold, diamonds, pearls, and precious gems, and they wear them all over their bodies. Women also like to wear fine clothes made of the best fabrics, with stylish patterns that are in season. For this they invest a lot of time in shopping and a lot of money, sometimes even going into debt. Peter urges Christian women not to follow worldly trends and obsess over their outward adornment.

From where, then, does a woman's true beauty originate? Peter said in verse 4, "**Rather, 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.**" Peter urged that women focus on inner beauty. This does not mean that they neglect their appearance and look unkempt. They can dress in a tasteful and stylish manner. But they should do so with modesty. The main point is to recognize where true beauty comes from; it is from within. It is invisible, but it is expressed through words, deeds and attitudes. Peter refers to "**a gentle and quiet spirit.**" Here the word "gentle" means "not insisting on one's own way, not demanding." Such a spirit is beautiful to other people, especially husbands. More importantly, it is of great worth in God's sight. Such gentleness reflects trust in God, who fully contents us by providing for all of our needs. God delights in being trusted. What matters to God is not outer appearance but the inner beauty of faith and godly character. God does not look at the outer appearance, but at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Believing wives should be more concerned about inner beauty than outer beauty. Inner beauty is unfading, while outer beauty is fleeting. What is the beauty secret for the inner life? It is submission to one's husband for the Lord's sake.

In order to encourage believing wives, Peter reminded them of holy women of the past. How did these women adorn themselves with inner beauty? Verse 5 says, "**They put their hope in God,**" and they submitted to their own husbands. It is common for wives to put their hope in their husbands, thinking their future largely depends on him. When he does well, they feel happy and secure. But when he does not do well, they become nervous and worry. So they demand him to improve by any means. However, their future does not depend on their husbands, but on God. God is Almighty and loving and absolutely trustworthy. God is the Sovereign Ruler who cares for those who trust him; he provides for them and protects them. He is the true source of security and the only worthy object of hope. When a believing wife puts her hope in God she can have peace, assurance and confidence. Then she is free to submit to her husband and grow spiritually.

⁵ <http://main.stylelist.com/2010/03/29/the-price-of-pretty-women-spend-50-000-on-hair-over-lifetime/>

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Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is a good example. Peter said in verse 6a, “**...like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord.**” Sarah called Abraham “my lord” in Genesis 18:12. When she overheard God’s promise that she would have a son at the age of 90, she laughed to herself and said, “**After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?**” Calling her husband, “my lord,” reflected Sarah’s spiritual growth. When we review Sarah’s life, we find that she began well. She followed Abraham without complaint when he suddenly left everything to obey God’s calling. When he made a foolish decision out of fear to go to Egypt, she went along with it even though she ended up as a harem candidate in Pharaoh’s palace. She waited patiently for ten years for God to grant their family a son. Then, her patience ran out. She made her own plan and nagged Abraham to have a child by her maidservant. That brought a lot of trouble on their family, and they suffered for 13 years. Then, God established a covenant with Abraham to make him a father of many nations, and included Sarah in this covenant. He changed her name from Sarai to Sarah signifying that she was now the mother of many nations. God promised that kings of peoples would come from her (Gen 17:16). After accepting God’s promise deeply she was able to put her hope in God all the more and grew spiritually. When angelic visitors appeared, she served them wholeheartedly, and at that time, called Abraham “my lord.” Her example shows us how a believing wife can grow by putting her hope in God and submitting to her husband until she matures. Believing women can be Sarah’s daughters when they do what is right without fear, and trust God (6b). When we put our hope in God and live by faith all kinds of fear try to creep into our hearts: fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of an uncertain future, fear of her husband’s mistakes, and fear of death. This fear does not come from God, but from the devil. God did not give us a spirit of fear but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Ti 1:7). When we trust God with all our hearts, fear disappears.

Second, husbands who are understanding and respectful (7). In verse 7 Peter advised believing husbands. In those times husbands regarded their wives as their possessions. They were free to mistreat them or even divorce over matters such as going out in public without a veil. But Peter admonished believing husbands to regard their wives differently than worldly husbands did. Verse 7 says, “**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.**” The words “in the same way” refer back to the phrases: “**for the Lord’s sake**” (2:13a), “**in reverent fear of God**” (2:18a), and “**follow in Jesus’ steps**” (2:21b). Especially, following Jesus’ footsteps is significant. As Jesus valued women and treated them with respect and dignity, so should believing husbands. **First of all, they should**

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be considerate as they live with their wives. What does it mean to be considerate? A more literal translation of the Greek would be “according to knowledge” (KJV, YLT). The ESV says, “in an understanding way.” This means that Christian husbands should know their wives as they live together. The first thing husbands must know is that wives are different So husbands should not see their wives from their own point of view. Women are different from men in many ways: physically, emotionally, in their way of thinking, lifestyle, and desires. So husbands must try to understand them than they. This takes time—ten years, 30 years, or even a lifetime. Usually, wives simply want to be understood by their husbands. If they are really understood they feel a sense of unity and are willing to go through hardships together without complaint. But if they are not understood they become extremely frustrated. An understanding mind is essential for a Christian husband.

Understanding is not enough. Christian husbands must treat their wives with respect as the weaker partner and heirs together of the gracious gift of life. Here “weaker” refers to physical strength and legal standing in the context of the times. Husbands should not misuse their physical strength or legal authority for selfish ends, but use it to respect and honor their wives. The word “partner” indicates a relationship of mutual respect and love. It is not hierarchical or simply dividing responsibilities and assets fifty-fifty. It means the two are one and they travel together side by side through their pilgrimage of life. They share joy and sorrow, agony and success, and everything. They have the same faith, hope, vision, goal, and direction. They walk together as friends and are heirs together of eternal life. Sometimes we argue due to different perspectives and opinions. At that time, it is good for us to affirm that we are essentially one in Christ. Husbands should know that their relationship with their wives affects their relationship with God. If they treat their wives disrespectfully, the Lord will pay no heed to their prayers. So it is good to repent quickly. Then God hears our prayers.

Peter’s instructions to wives and husbands may seem to be given for the purpose of solving their immanent problems. But actually the impact would be much more far reaching. Peter’s exhortation gave wives clear motivation to struggle, overcoming deep despair, and it gave them hope to change their homes. It also enabled husbands to correct their hierarchical attitude toward their wives in order to form a beautiful family in Christ. In this way they could have hope and vision to serve the world with God’s love. And history attests that such Christian families did indeed impact future generations. Church historian Philip Schaff wrote: “Christianity, with its doctrine of the sanctity of marriage, with its injunction of chastity, and with its elevation of woman from her half-slavish

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condition to moral dignity and equality with man, began the work of a silent transformation, which secured incalculable blessings to generations yet unborn. It laid the foundation for a well-ordered family life.”⁶ There are many ways in which Christianity influenced the Roman Empire. But one of the most significant was the transformation of family life inspired by the gospel, mainly carried out through changed women.

Through this passage we can have vision and hope for America. Sometimes we are frustrated as we witness the decay of the nuclear family in our times. Broken families produce broken children who in turn damage others in a vicious cycle. The situation seems to be getting worse and worse, and it is hard to find hope. But through women of inner beauty who know and follow Jesus, we have hope for the future, a hope of changed homes, a changed society, and a changed world. The future of America depends on Christian wives and husbands. Let's pray that God may give us his vision and hope for America, and raise 10,000 beautiful Christian families for his glorious purpose.

⁶ Schaff, Philip, 1910. *History of the Christian Church, Volume II: Ante-Nicene Christianity, A.D. 100-325*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, p 361.