

T 24

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

BY B. G. ECHOLS

There is no greater practical problem in life than the difficulty of living together within four walls and doing so sweetly, graciously, and harmoniously in spite of the peculiarities of disposition and the prickles of temper. If our faith can't make us better at home and is confined only to public life, it is weak and worthless (1 Pet. 3:1-7).

Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands;

While Peter discusses wives married to unbelievers, his instructions are not limited to them only. Christians must be peacemakers, especially those married to unbelievers. Wives are to submit themselves voluntarily. They need not be forced. To be in subjection may sound harsh at first, but thought changes the matter. To submit is not to be inferior. Submission is a matter of love. Love is always submissive, thus harshness is gone. At the heart of sin is the desire to go our way, to do "our thing." The only way we can come to God is to submit to Him. Submissiveness should be a basic attitude. "Your own husbands" is the reason for subjection. No other man occupies his position of headship. He is yours even if he lacks features found in other men. He is yours alone. This is one of the beauties of marriage.

Even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives;

"Obey not" suggests not only an unbeliever, but an opposition to the word of God. He has already heard the gospel and is antagonistic toward it. How can the husband be won to Christ? She can't by argument or ill-temper which only exasperates and embitters, but by gentle and loving behavior. It is taken for granted that the converted will seek to gain their mates to Christ. That is always the natural result of obeying the gospel. Wives, in the condition Peter describes, can only do what is in their power; be good wives. There is no hint there was reason to break up the marriage.

A self-denying holy life will do more to win those with whom we live closely than will debate and controversy. What the wife does will be more

effective than what she can say to one who is antagonistic. Obviously, living as a Christian does not depend upon anyone else.

In what follows, Peter gives the rule of purity, the rule of respect, the rule of modesty, and the rule of the spirit.

Beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear.

"Chaste" is related to "holy." It is also translated "pure." The stress is observable conduct. "Fear" or "reverence" is basically of God, but having that, the wife will "fear" or "reverence" her husband (Eph. 5:33). Thus if she does not rebel against his authority, but lives submissively, he may be won. Her example proves the sincerity of her profession of Christ. She means business. Her conduct should shame the husband in his disobedience and lead him to repentance. When the husband finds what a happy influence the gospel has in making the wife sweet tempered and dutiful, he will hold a good opinion of his wife's faith.

Whose adorning let it not be the outward...

Peter does not totally forbid ornaments, but is teaching they are less important than what is inside. This is an example of numerous "not ... but" passages (See John 6:27). Outlandish attire and too much stress on dress has often been a point of downfall by God's people (Isa. 3:16-24). It is not just the show, but the attitude behind the show. All the outward adorning will perish, but the inner will not.

Let it be the hidden man of the heart,

The hidden man does not manifest itself like conspicuous ornaments. If we are to adorn the inner, hidden man, must it not be obvious that man is more than a body?

In the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit,

One's inner spirit often manifests itself in what it does not do. The meek spirit does not flash in anger, but takes harsh words gently and humbly. It is mildness of temper and patient endurance. The real beauty of women should not be outward tinsel, but inward character of a meek and quiet spirit. This is the lasting quality through life and

eternity. It is that manifestation the husband is to see. The quiet spirit is calm and peaceful in itself and thus spreads to others. The world admires the rich dress and costly jewels; God prizes the meek and quiet spirit (Isa. 30:15). Which should the Christian seek to please? The proper spirit never gets out of style or too expensive. It continues to be appropriate as one ages. Outward ornaments which impress the world are often costly, but the meek and quiet spirit is precious in God's sight.

Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord;

The reference is to Gen. 18:12. Sarah did not say the recorded words to Abraham, but to herself about him. People show their habits of mind more freely in talking to themselves than to others. "Lord" conveys the idea of rulership. Her statement was a recognition of her subjection to her husband according to the will of God.

Not put in fear by any terror.

If husbands are cruel, the wives must not live in terror, but be calm and quiet, trusting in God. They are to live in serene faith. Wives of unbelievers must not be intimidated by their husbands to the point they forsake God's way. It would be unbecoming of daughters of Sarah to panic at things since such would suggest a lack of trust in God. The women of the O.T. had their trust in God. So must women now.

Husbands... dwell with your wives according to knowledge;

The man is still head, but his attitude is to be submissive to his marriage obligations. This is an area where some men fail. Knowledge is required. The gospel made some great changes in the general outlook toward marriage among the pagans who were converted. As Christians, men must be thoughtful and not act carelessly and at random. "Knowledge" makes it clear that marriage is not for children. To know another requires time, honesty, openness, patience, sensibility, and love. The instructions Peter gives would have never been practiced in those societies in which wives were looked upon as something owned rather than a person loved.

Giving honor unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel,

Women are unsuited for rough treatment. The fact that man is usually physically stronger led to the degradation of women among the heathen. Being converted to Christ completely changed the man's outlook. Irresponsible power and selfish-

ness lead to abuse of women. Those who are stronger are always considered to have greater responsibility (Rom. 15:1). To give honor means to recognize the value of and thus to esteem properly. This verse implies man's strength. When men practice gallantry by opening doors for women, they are symbolically showing that their greater strength will be used to aid, not to harm a woman. If men are deprived of such or similar expression by women demanding and proclaiming their equality, men are emasculated. The result will be more dynamic women, but dull, dreary, depressed men.

Being also joint-heirs of the grace of life;

This is a second reason why wives are to be treated with respect. "Joint-heirs" suggests a certain equality. Joint-heirs will lighten the spiritual burdens of the other and help each other on the way. It will be harder to sin against one who prays for you and you for him or her.

That your prayers be not hindered.

If husbands and wives are not at peace with one another, their prayers are hindered because their hearts and minds are not right. The desire even to pray may be lost. Jealousies and bickerings are opposed to the spirit of prayer. The biggest hindrance is being unforgiving (Mt. 6:14,15). One cannot pray properly if he or she sins against the law of love. We must not forget that faults in our lives hinder our prayers. Repeatedly God makes it clear that one cannot be right with Him and wrong with another human.

Through out all this passage Peter has been discussing, not the rights of the partners, but the responsibilities. That should always be our first concern, and it will be when we develop the submissive attitude. No marriage is secure when both partners are obsessed with their "rights." There is entirely too much selfish individualism and seeking "self fulfillment" in our age. If marriage partners will fulfill their obligations, the rights will take care of themselves.

It is impressive to note the careful attention to family life in the apostolic writings. The family not only affects the power of the church, but also the destiny of the state. The gospel puts new meaning into the fundamental institution of human society. In Christ, marriage is a companionship where both bear their proper parts and each helps the other on the road to heaven.

**Church of Christ
412 E. King St.
Shippensburg, PA 17257**