

## Strong Women (part 1)

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1 Peter 3:1-4 is a continuation of ideas set forth in earlier sections of Peter's epistle. Just as Christians are to be subject to civil authorities (2:13), and servants are to be subjects to masters (2:18), wives are to be in subjection to their own husbands. While it may seem, at first, that this scripture contradicts our modern society's "sensibilities" on the subject of women's independence, taken in context, the Bible actually praises and encourages strong women. What makes today's text so interesting, in its cultural context, is that it must have come as quite a surprise to the Gentile readers that Christianity offered religious freedom to women. In that society, women were expected to follow the religion of their husbands. Peter, however, addresses women as independent moral agents, whose decision to turn to Christ is their very own. After all, the souls of women are prized as much as the souls of men in the eyes of our Lord (Galatians 3:28).

***"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives" (1 Peter 3:1).***

The subjection is in like manner to our subjection to secular authorities, or unreasonable employers. What this shows is that women alone are not to be submissive, but all people submit to something. Our culture has failed miserably to understand a very powerful point about Christian female submission: Christian men are under just as much subjection! Paul outlines this arrangement in 1 Corinthians 11:3, which says, *"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ."* Notice a few practical applications about submission:

- Submission does not show that a person is weak, but strong. It takes more character, moral fiber, and fortitude to submit to authority than it does to rebel against it. God does not see the "free spirit", the liberated person, or the "rebel without a cause" as anything more than weak.
- Peter does not give women an excuse by telling them, "Wives, you are off the hook, because we all know that you are too weak to handle the responsibilities of submission." Rather, Peter sees women as having just as much potential in the kingdom as men.
- Morally, women are not in a class all their own. They are not too delicate to deal with sin, nor are they too mousy to stand up for what is right.

*"Be submissive"* – Peter sees the self as involved, voluntarily or volitionally. Similarly, submission to Christ does not demean, debase, or degrade a person, but exalts him or her in God's image (1 Corinthians 11:1). There is a lot more to submission than the "villainous" idea that modern women's liberators attribute to the word. In fact, in a healthy marriage, submission may not mean obedience at all, in the sense we would understand it. Submission carries with it the idea of assisting, agreeing, supplementing,

complimenting, and even advising a husband. A man may request and seek his wife's advice because he understands that she has personal and unique strengths. A husband may defer to his wife's opinion because he values it as a meaningful component of a fully-functioning marriage and family. Through all this, a wife can maintain a sense of submission and respect for her husband's authority, even in the expression of her independence and expertise.

*"To your own husbands"* – This further clarifies the point that the Bible does not demean women into "sub-men" or secondary Christians. A wife is to be submissive to her husband, but it does not mean she is a doormat for men, or that she must defer to the whims and commands of every man that she meets.

*"So that if any of them are disobedient"* – Peter helps women see the influence they can have over their husbands in a religious sense, indicating, again, that women are free moral agents. A wife will be judged by God for her own actions (2 Corinthians 5:10), so she is not bound to follow her husband in his religious indifference or apostasy. But even without a word, a strong wife can have an everlasting effect on her husband's soul by her quiet obedience to God. *"Rather than attempting to argue, verbally contend with, talk down or out-talk one's husband with words regarding his spiritual needs, the apostle would instruct the wives to let their consecrated lives, their humble subjection, their meek and quiet spirit (v. 4) speak out in bold relief against his ungodliness and rebellion. Compare with 2:12"* (Oberst p. 146). What makes this point so worth our attention is that it proves a woman needs to have her own faith before God, and not merely follow her husband. She must be bold and confident about the promises of God and make her relationship with the Savior a priority, *"For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?"* (1 Corinthians 7:16).