

Strong Women (part 2)

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1 Peter 3:1-4 is a frequently misunderstood passage of scripture. In last week's article we considered the first verse and what it means for a woman to submit to her husband. Today we will continue with a consideration of the rest of the text.

“As they observe your chaste and respectful behavior” (3:2).

What we observe from this verse is that a woman is not required to obey her husband's sinful requests. The very fact that a woman of God is required to be “chaste” shows that she maintains purity, even in the midst of the rebellious company of an unbelieving husband. *“The attractiveness of a wife's submissive behavior even to an unbelieving husband suggests that God has inscribed the righteousness and beauty of role distinctions in marriage on the hearts of all mankind. The unbelieving husband sees this behavior and deep within perceives the beauty of it. Within his heart there is a witness that this is right, and this is how God intended men and women to relate as husband and wife. He concludes, therefore, that the gospel which his wife believes must be true as well”* (Grudem p. 139).

“And let not your adornment be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses...” (3:3).

The translators of the New American Standard Version have aptly supplied the word “merely” in the context of this verse, because if Peter is forbidding, in absolute terms, any of the accoutrements described, then it would be wrong for a woman to even wear her wedding band. The sense of the verse is that a woman's quality must consist of more than just the external trappings of elegance and sensibility. There needs to be something more there than just a veneer of beauty. *“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised”* (Proverbs 31:30). *“As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion”* (Proverbs 11:22).

“But let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God” (3:4).

“But let it be” is the language of choice. Every woman can truly reflect the image of God, if she places her priorities where they ought to be. There is so much more to all of us than meets the eye! Unfortunately, the hidden person of the heart sometimes disappoints, as beauty, age, and vanity belie a more sinister or dubious personality. How true it is that you cannot judge a book by its cover, for some of the most beautiful people of our time consist of nothing more than moral trash when the layers are peeled away. Similarly, it was not external beauty which defined some of God's most precious saints. Of Elisha, it was said that he was ugly and bald (2 Kings 2:23). John the Baptist, who Jesus said was the greatest “born of women” (Matthew 11:11), was reviled because he went about in rough raiment (Matthew 3:4). Even Jesus Himself is

described as a pretty uninteresting person in His appearance in Isaiah 53, with no physical characteristics to distinguish Him or make Him seem beautiful. God chides Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, saying, *“For the Lord sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”* What impresses God about women is:

- The imperishable qualities that do not fade with age. Unfortunately, our culture does, indeed, measure many women by their appearance. When celebrities age, they spend millions of dollars to replicate their youth. Unflattering photographs make their way onto the front pages of tabloids, and the images of younger, prettier women eventually take their place.
- Gentleness is considered a premium by God, who has always praised the humble (Matthew 5:5). If we think that gentleness is only a “feminine” trait, then we have failed to consider such worthy examples as the tender Abraham, the solemn and sensitive Job, or the contrite and poetic David.
- A quiet spirit, which is simply an attitude of humility and selflessness. Thayer asserts that the word means, “tranquil” (p. 281), and in practical terms that means that such a woman has a complete, unwavering, calm faith in God.