

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Precious Things in 1 Peter: The Quiet Spirit - 1 Peter 3:4

Recently, whilst on business in Ireland, I stayed in a hotel. It was very comfortable, as you would expect from a 4 star hotel, but I was disturbed by the noise of piped music on my first morning at breakfast. I prefer quietness early each morning, and I didn't enjoy the constant and repeated music I heard then in the restaurant and in other public areas all day long, each and every day! My wife is rather like me in this respect. She particularly dislikes the piped music, which seems to be a feature of modern shops, especially supermarkets. It distracts her from the task of shopping. That has its compensations for me, but it is the very opposite of the intended effect.

This morning's talk, however, is not about the many and varied external noises in this world, which seem to overwhelm us, but those internal workings of a person's heart that reveal themselves in that person's character. It concludes our series on precious things in 1 Peter and highlights those issues of Christian living that God Himself highly values. We have considered the genuineness of our faith that is more precious than gold; the preciousness, both to God and to us, of Christ, the chief corner stone; and His precious blood, by which we are redeemed. Now Peter tells us, as he writes to wives about being submissive to their own husbands, that God especially notices "the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit". It is very precious in His sight.

Society in the twenty-first century rather encourages a different way of living. In contrast to these attributes of quietness and gentleness, "loud living", featuring self-assertiveness and vanity, seems to be prevalent. Divine ordinances and order, such as the roles of husbands and wives in marriage, and the authority of governments, are being increasingly ignored. As a consequence, Christians are finding it more difficult than ever before to swim against the stream as they seek to follow the practical instructions of God's word, such as we are to study today from 1 Peter chapter 3.

These specific instructions to married women form part of the general theme of submission, which Peter exhorts his readers to practise. Submission is a military term, and is used in the New Testament to describe the authority and orderly arrangements that are established in various spheres of life for the mutual benefit of all. After teaching them that they have been chosen to be the people of God, and that they are loved by Him, Peter opens the practical part of his letter, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," (2:13). He pursues the needs for subjection to different authorities encountered in life and then looks at "difficult situations" such as the servants who have harsh masters (2:18-21). He presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme example for every Christian to follow, before asking wives and husbands to be submissive to each other in the opening verses of chapter 3. Finally, in 5:1-7, he addresses local Christian churches on the subject.

Let's now read 3:1-7, which contain the title of today's talk. "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

Peter extends this exhortation even to those women who are married to husbands who haven't believed the Gospel. He advises them to concentrate on displaying their Christian personality rather than preaching at their partner. In keeping with the fact that Christians are "sojourners and pilgrims" in this world, they are to resist emphasising their outward beauty by extravagant hairstyles, dress or jewellery. Chaste conduct rather than cosmetic appearance is important to God, who looks beyond outward appearances into the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

God takes particular notice of the Christian lady who exhibits "the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" – it is very precious in his sight. Let those listeners today who find themselves in this very situation be greatly encouraged to know that God uses this method. Godly living, accepting the authority of your husband over you, and general Christian demeanour in the home can attract his attention and win him for Christ. Youth and beauty fade with the passing of time, but the beauty of character grows, becoming lovelier and more

attractive. This seems to be especially true of Christian women who live in fear of God. They can become the daughters of Sarah who exemplified these features when she called Abraham "lord" from her heart (Genesis 18:12). By contrast, Scripture also speaks about women who exhibit the opposite features – in the twice-repeated statement in the book of Proverbs the contentions of a wife are likened to the continual dripping on a very rainy day!

The word "likewise" in verse 1 is used again in verse 7, demonstrating that Peter expects husbands also to display this attitude towards their wives. "Dwelling together" suggests mutual submission, an oneness of life, where prayers are not hindered; and it is the secret of order in the home. It enhances the natural relationship of man and wife, bringing stability, peace, security and joy, as well as honouring God. The husband does not dominate but takes an active role in family life. In order to fully provide for her, help and support her, he must understand his wife's material, physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Peter also reminds Christian husbands and wives that they both have received the "grace of life" which gives them a spiritual relationship that will never pass away. This mutual inheritance enhances their natural union, which should be maintained by prayer for one another.

This direct appeal to wives and to husbands to manifest this unchangeable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which comes from the heart, is applicable to all aspects of practical Christian living. The submission section in chapter 2 presents Christ Himself as the model to follow. He totally submitted to the will of God. God wants us to follow in the footsteps of our Master; it's His declared intention in calling us by the Gospel. Whilst Peter amazes us with truths about our being called "out of darkness into His marvellous light" and "to His eternal glory", it is sobering to realise that it is a Holy God who calls us to be like His Son in humility and meekness in an increasingly "loud" world.

When Peter reviews those closing hours of the life of Christ, he sees Him as the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." (53:7). He it was, who, when He was abused, did not return abuse, who, when He suffered, did not threaten; but entrusted Himself to His God, the One who judges righteously. Nowadays we call uncontrolled or totally unacceptable behaviour, "rage". There is car rage, air rage and so on.

We might use that word to describe how everyone treated the Lord Jesus when He was arrested, judged, abused, manhandled, condemned, scourged and then crucified. Whilst we know that no one will ever suffer to the extent that Christ suffered, we are asked to behave in the same manner as He did. We will, however, encounter the same unjust treatment in a world that is no different now to what it was then. He was perfect, "who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth," (2:22), whereas we have a nature that is always ready to retaliate. Therefore we need to have sensitive consciences to remember what God requires, so that we can patiently and quietly endure grief or suffer wrongfully.

Peter also wants us to realise that life in this present world for the Christian is the same as it was for Christ. This means that there are sufferings for us now, and glory to follow. He develops this idea throughout his letter. First of all, he reminds those to whom he wrote that they had various trials to face, which, although grievous, were designed to prove that their faith was real (1:6-7). He then states that Christians suffer when, for conscience toward God, they refrain from what is natural and don't retaliate or protest about mistreatment (2:19). In 3:16-17 he says that it's sometimes the will of God that a Christian will have to suffer for doing what is right. 4:12-16 states that a Christian can glorify God if he suffers for the Name of Christ, and in that way he can partake of Christ's sufferings. At other times God allows the devil to oppose Christians. Severe sufferings often result from these activities of the devil as a roaring lion. Peter explains that this is what was happening to the church at the time of writing (5:6-10). It is a fact that the twentieth century yielded more Christian martyrs than the previous nineteen all put together. Persecutions and sufferings are an everyday reality for believers in other parts of the world. We need to pray that each believer may gain that strength of character, that inner personality, the enduring spirit of gentleness and quietness, which can only come from being Christ like.

A genuine question therefore arises: how can I become like Christ and live as He lived? Peter answers this question in 3:15 when he says that we should honour Jesus Christ by allowing Him to be the Lord of our lives. The verse accurately translated is, "But sanctify (set apart) Christ as Lord in your hearts." Christ enters our hearts when we believe that He was the propitiation for sins and our substitute, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (3:18).

However He can only exercise His control over us, and display Himself from our hearts, when we have submitted ourselves to Him. He then becomes the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (2:25). After that there should be constant feeding on Christ from the word of God, from such passages as those I have already referred to - 1 Peter 2:21-25 and Isaiah 53 - as well as from the Gospel accounts. I find that I constantly refer to a map when I'm out walking, even though I consult it before setting out. Similarly, Christians should regularly refer to their map, the track of the Master through this world, so that they can follow His steps. Quiet meditation on Him is also essential in a busy world – "Be still and know that I am God."

We can appreciate better now that the word “likewise”, or “in the same manner”, of 3:1 more properly refers back to 2:21 “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” This verse occurs at the end of a set of exhortations to servants, especially those with ill-tempered masters. These servants were to follow in the path of the true servant of the Lord. Submission for them would mean that they would receive the commendation of God. The work situation today poses many difficulties for the Christian who desires to remain faithful to his calling. There are not only overbearing bosses to contend with, but also the pressures of workloads, adverse working conditions and workers’ rights issues along with many other “voices”.

Having written to married people in the first seven verses of chapter 3, Peter turns to everyone in verse 8, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted, be courteous.” This instruction can be equated to Paul’s instruction to the Ephesians, “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” (Ephesians 5:21). Again requirements for self-control, gentleness and quietness are emphasised. Peter returns to this need for mutual recognition and submission in the local church when he gives further directions in 5:1-7, when, after describing the responsibilities of elders, he says “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive one to another, and clothed with humility.” (5:5). The potential for “no generation gap” in the local church can be realised when we humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand and have the mind of Christ in us.

We can conclude today’s talk on “a gentle and quiet spirit” by reminding ourselves of some important issues about living as a Christian in the twenty-first century. First of all, the modern way of life, which we can call “the glamour and the noise of the world”, militates against godly living. There is the noise of self-importance and of self-assertiveness, and in our age people have become “lovers of themselves.” Christians can easily be caught up with the spirit of the age; for example the wife with the unbelieving husband may give too much attention to fashion, thinking it to be a means of winning him over.

Secondly, meekness, humility and submission are attributes no more applauded in our society than they were in the Roman and Greek cultures of Peter’s day. However, they are recognised by God, as the text for today (3:4) points out, “the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God,” (3:4). If we want to please God and to do His will, then we will find ourselves to be strangers, but pilgrims, in this world. Let’s remember also that our society is moving further away from God’s standards. As it does so, its noise ever increases before Him. This outcry will soon become so great that He will intervene in judgment, as He did with Sodom in the days of Lot, see Genesis 19:13.

Next, “the hidden person of the heart” is essentially a replication of Christ in the life of the Christian. He is Lord if He is sanctified in the Christian’s heart. He is our great example; He lived for the will of God in the most extreme of circumstances. In these circumstances He succeeded by simply “handing over” the whole matter to God, the righteous Judge. The Christian should follow in Christ’s steps, even through all the difficult areas of life, whether the world rages or the devil roars. A constant quiet and gentle attitude should be displayed in Christian living – it should not vary with the ups and downs of life. Peter insists that witness from consistent Christ like conduct is a powerful addition to speaking about the Lord, especially in situations where the word of the Gospel has not been obeyed. It can also provoke others to question us about the hope that is within us. We should always be ready to explain our faith to people in a courteous and respectful manner (3:15).

Finally, sacrifice and suffering in life now will result in eternal glory. This was true for Christ and is true for His followers. But now Christ is the glorified Lord “who has gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” (3:22). He soon will appear in glory! (5:4). Meanwhile, we are to understand that this is the true grace of God in which we stand (5:12). Peter’s helpful advice in 3:10-12 is: “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”

Let’s close with a hymn as a prayer:

*There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest,
Near to the heart of God.*

*There is a place of comfort sweet,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where we our Saviour meet,
Near to the heart of God.*

*There is a place of full release,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where all is joy and peace,
Near to the heart of God.*

*O Jesus, blest Redeemer,
Sent from the heart of God,
Hold us, who wait before Thee,
Near to the heart of God.*

Amen.

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