

Dance scene...I think that is a picture of what God had in mind when He invented marriage. A man and woman functioning together harmoniously to the glory of God. I'm no dancer but when I see it done well I am in awe of the grace, the discipline, the strength of a man and a woman flowing across the floor in a way that seems effortless. But unfortunately, marriage is often more like a wrestling match than a dance. Marriage is never effortless. It takes a lot of practice...and a lot of patience because we get our toes stepped on in the process of learning how to do it. Today, as we come to 1 Peter 3, I have two simple words of advice, one for wives and one for husbands, as we learn to dance before an audience of one.

But before we get into the text, let me remind you of the context. If these verses sound foreign to you, the reason is simple – they were written to foreigners. Peter is writing to people IN the world but not OF the world. As followers of Jesus, we are strangers, exiles, citizens of heaven having a brief temporary experience on this fallen planet. We have no choice about being IN the world, we do have a choice about being OF this world. Because the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God are opposed to each other, the Bible will often sound counter cultural because it is. Our mission is not to be conformed to the culture but to offer a viable alternative.

Peter emphasizes our other worldliness by his use of the following phrases, **“for the Lord’s sake,” “For this is the will of God,” “living as servants of God,” “mindful of God,” “in the sight of God,” “to this you have been called.”** We have been called to reflect the nature and purpose of God. Those who lose sight of that, often adjust the scriptures to fit current cultural practices. As a result, the Bible becomes a “living document” that can be changed to fit the times. When God’s will is contrary to my will, I must choose; submit or redefine God’s will by twisting the scriptures. To pick and choose which parts of the Bible have authority over my life is as foolish as a young man enlisting in the military and arriving at basic training with a list for his drill sergeant. “I want to serve but I don’t want to get up before 8 a.m. I want to serve but I don’t want my head shaved. I want to serve but I don’t want to wear those green uniforms. I don’t look good in green.” What kind of army would that be? It might look a little like God’s army! Every Sunday churches are full of people who consider themselves Christians while they pick and choose which scriptures they will obey and ignore the rest like an iTunes play list.

As we come to the passage, the first word we encounter is “likewise” or “in the same way.” Obviously, the word “likewise” requires an antecedent, something said previously that will provide a comparison. Before Peter launches into instructions about marriage, he describes the attitude of Jesus toward the authority of His Father...2:21-23. Jesus submitted to the will of the Father. That’s what faith is. Faith conveys the idea of submission. God, in His grace, has done everything necessary to save us. But grace will never be realized until we accept it by faith. Few concepts are more countercultural today than the concept of submission. The life of God in us will result in a life of submission. 2:13, submit to every governing authority. 2:18, servants are to submit to their masters. 3:1, wives to their husbands. 3:7, husbands to the Lord.

Now to the specific instructions. First, a word to the wives.

WIVES – YOU’LL NEVER GET YOUR HUSBAND ON THE DANCE FLOOR UNTIL YOU DRESS FOR THE DANCE. In vv. 1-6 he tells wives what to put on.

Put on a willingness to cooperate...3:1-2. That's what submission means. Dancing requires cooperation. But in many marriages control outweighs cooperation. Submission is the only cure for the arrogance of insisting the world should work my way. In God's kingdom, the trajectory is away from domination and toward cooperation.

There may be no more counter cultural concepts in the Bible than submission. Often the opposition to submission is based upon false assumptions.

1. Submission does not mean blind obedience. We do not submit to any authority that requires us to disobey the Lord. As Peter himself said in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men!"

2. Submission does not mean giving up independent thought. Peter assumes that the women he is addressing have thought through the implications of his instructions and that many have even departed from their husband's view on the subject. After all, he is instructing them how to win their husbands over to their way of thinking about the Gospel.

3. Submission does not mean being inferior in any way. Peter addresses women who have greater spiritual insight than their husbands. That is often the case.

Submission is an inner quality that seeks cooperation with another in working toward a common objective. "In partnerships such as dance, there is an essential give-and-take, or tension which exists between the leader and the follower. This tension is not born of dominance and helplessness, but rather it develops when two people are mutually dependent in working toward a common goal." (Rene Holt) cf. 3:8

There is no hint of domination in this passage but one of cooperation. Submission is alien behavior. It is not natural to submit. To bend my will to the will of someone else is supernatural. I will never submit unless I am growing in faith because submission requires faith.

Put on a gentle and quiet spirit...3:3-4. The contrast Peter makes here is between external appearance and internal attitude. He is NOT saying, do not wear jewelry or style your hair. If he prohibited those two practices then he would also be prohibiting putting on clothes! He is calling his female readers to pay more attention to what is on the inside than what is on the outside.

The qualities he calls for here are almost identical to the ones Jesus mentions in His self-description in Mt. 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus demonstrated meekness. Meekness is not weakness. Meekness "is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting." (Vine's). Peter brings this home by using a bizarre example from the life of Sara and Abraham. In Genesis 20 Abraham lied about his wife calling her his sister so that a king named Abimelech would not kill him to have her. This may qualify as grounds for divorce. But Sarah trusts God and He reveals in a dream that Abimelech is not to lay a hand on her. In spite of this idiotic decision by Abraham, Sarah still treats him with respect. She understands what Peter is saying, when he uses all those phrases. She did it "for the Lord's sake." She was "living as a servant of God," "in the sight of God." She was "mindful of God."

HUSBANDS – YOU’LL NEVER SWEEP YOUR WIFE OFF HER FEET UNTIL THE LORD HAS SWEPT YOU OFF YOURS. Verse 7 begins with “likewise.” In the same way Jesus submitted to the will of the Father, in the same way the wife submits to the will of the Father, the husband submits to His will. You’ll never be the husband your wife wants you to be until you become the man God wants you to be. When a husband submits to the Lordship of Christ he proves himself worthy of being followed. When a husband is totally submissive to the Lord then it is a pleasure for a wife to submit to him. A godly husband extends two gifts to his wife.

Seek to understand your wife. “According to knowledge.” Women don’t need sympathy but they do need empathy. Empathy is.....what you are feeling for me right now! Empathy is a willingness to try and feel what another feels, a willingness to understand their situation.

Honor your wife. One of the things a man should understand is that his wife is “a weaker vessel.” The emphasis here is less on physical differences than societal differences. I think it is best to read this word “weaker” as “more vulnerable.” Historically, women are often victimized by men. That sad reality is supported by the headlines of the past couple of weeks. If she submits to your leadership then she has chosen to put herself in a more vulnerable position (see v. 6).

Rene Holt sums up the secret of good dance partners: “The leader must lead with strength. He must determine the path and direct the progression of steps, not by force, but with a subtle nudge or arm movement. His is a gentle strength. At the same time, the follower cannot be passive or weak. Her strength comes from the skill and sensitivity with which she follows. The follower is constantly thinking, anticipating, and responding... In partnerships such as dance, there is an essential give-and-take, or tension which exists between the leader and the follower. This tension is not born of dominance and helplessness, but rather it develops when two people are mutually dependent in working toward a common goal.” (Rene Holt) cf. 3:8

When a woman, by faith, submits herself to her husband with a quiet, meek spirit Peter says God takes notice. He says such behavior is “precious in God’s sight.” When a man submits to the Lordship of Christ by loving his wife “as Christ loved the church, so much that He gave Himself up for her,” God notices that too. In fact, Peter indicates that the failure to love your wife in that way leads to a major hindrance in your prayers.

This earth is God’s dance floor and the Lord of the Dance is judging the competition. If you’re married, you have the choice: sit this one out or dance. I hope you dance.

A word to the younger men and women in our midst. When you are young, you are a cultural critic. You have a finely tuned filter that detects hypocrisy and inconsistency and injustice. As a result, young people often want to go against prevailing cultural norms. I want to encourage you in that. When I was young that meant growing your hair long, disobeying your parents, smoking dope, sitting on pillows under a black light poster and singing anti-war protest songs. Today it is so much easier. If you want to be counter cultural, live by this book. Read it, study it, treasure it, do what it says and you will not only be counter cultural but you will be a good ambassador for the Lord Jesus Christ.