

(1 Peter - Part 25): On Wives and Their Place in Family Life

by A.W. Tozer

A Christian woman's true beauty and attractiveness come from within, and she should adorn herself with a meek and quiet spirit, rather than relying on outward appearances.

Duration: 29:58

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:1

Topics: "Family Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of dressing appropriately as a Christian woman. He shares an example of a woman he saw who was dressed inappropriately and expresses his concern about how her appearance reflects on her faith. The preacher argues that Christian women should dress according to their income and the circumstances they are in. He references the Bible, specifically 1 Peter 3:1-7, which instructs wives to be in subjection to their husbands and to adorn themselves with chaste conduct rather than outward adornment. The preacher warns that dressing inappropriately can negatively impact the message of the gospel that a woman is trying to convey.

Transcript

In the third chapter of 1 Peter, 1 Peter, 3rd chapter, the first seven verses. Likewise, ye wives be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may, without the word, be won by the conversation of their wives. Conversation here meaning conduct and not talk.

While they behold your chaste conduct coupled with fear. Who's adorning? Let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting, if you're American, plaiting if you're English, patting the hair, and the wearing of gold, and the putting on of apparel. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

For after this manner, in the old time, the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands. Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. Whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

Likewise, ye husbands dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life. In this view, let your prayers be not

hindered. Now through all history, of course, the biological positions of the two sexes have remained unchanged.

But the psychological attitudes and the social relations have been altered very radically from time to time. And there has occurred in recent years, very much all over the world, having its origin in the United States, a psychological and social revolution with respect to the relation of the sexes. And this has amounted to a positive and radical revolution.

Now, I'm not going to go into that. I'm not prepared to do it. And I would be very unwilling, because the topic would be extremely distasteful.

But I can only say this much. That for the Christian of either sex, there is only one rule to settle the problem. And that is, what does the Bible say? We have been committed to the word of God.

We have been committed to a man and a book. The man being the man, Christ Jesus, and the book being the holy scripture. And when we have discovered on any subject at all, when we have discovered what the Bible says, and what pleases the man in the glory, then there is no place for argument.

He said it. And if he said it, that settles it. There is no place for argument.

And certainly there is no place for numerous remarks. It is my belief that in dealing with the touchy subject of the home and the relation and proper position of the husband and the wife and the child in the home, a great deal of damage, damage that can never be repaired, has been done by public speakers, particularly the preachers, who deal with the subject as though it were humorous. It is anything but funny in the light of the coming judgment and the presence of the Lord at his coming.

Now it says here, ye wives, being subjecting to your own husbands, and here is what the Bible would seem to teach, that the man is the head of the race and the home. Go back to Genesis and you will find that God made Adam out of the dust of the ground, blowing to his nostrils the breath of life. And then because man was not good being alone, God made the woman of the heart of the man.

And the woman must understand this and accept it. But on the other hand, there is never any authority in the Scripture, neither precept nor biblical example anywhere, for the brutal Lord who rules his home with an iron hand. That is completely unknown in the Scriptures.

Read the story of Abraham and Sarah. You will find there the noble leadership of the man Abraham. But he never ruled with an iron hand.

Go on to poor old Jacob with all his domestic difficulties. There was always a graciousness and a kindness in the family. Come on down through all the Old Testament history, even though it was a bit in the shadows compared with the brilliant light of the New Testament.

Still and nevertheless, there never was any brutal domination. The Bible seems to teach that the husband and the wife should supplement each other, being together what neither one would be apart. But on the other hand, the dominant and rebellious wife is unknown in the Scriptures.

Or if she is known in the Scriptures, she is never approved. The idea is never approved. The dominating wife is the product of sin and unbelief and has no place whatsoever in the will of God.

So that there is not to be rivalry, according to the Scripture, there is to be cooperation. There is to be understanding that there are two people, by force and circumstances and their choice, living in the same home, and that the husband, being in the Scripture and according to the will of God, the head of the race, or of the home and the man, the head of the race, and which yet be according to Peter's remarks here, notice it how very gently he says, the husbands dwell with them according to knowledge. It is usually the head.

Give them honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, as being heirs together of the grace of life. That is, they are children of God together, and are equal heirs of the grace of life. And remember that.

I think chivalry was born here, Christian chivalry, as we understand it. The weaker vessel, it says, and there is an awful lot of joking about that in Cartoon's love of this passage, to show the great large bicep woman leading a meek little lamb of a man down the street. They love to play on this weaker vessel business.

But the Scripture says that they are heirs together of the grace of life. The husband and the wife, if they are both Christians, are Christian heirs. Together they are brethren in Jesus Christ the Lord.

Then he says, this doing in order that your prayers be not hindered. I suppose there are many a praying husband whose prayers are not being answered, and he blames it on Malenkov or Cardinal Spelman, when the fact is he is simply a great big overbearing baboon when it comes to his wife. And if he would straighten out and live with her according to knowledge, and put her with the chivalry that belongs as being the weaker vessel, and remembering that she is his sister in Christ, his prayers would get answered in spite of the devil and Malenkov.

The trouble lies not in the Kremlin or the Vatican, but it lies in the heart of the man who just can't resist the temptation to growl and dominate. Well, there is no place for it in any home. There is place for recognition of the proper relationships and positions, but there is no place for domination.

Now, it says that the Christian wife who has an unsaved husband, what about that? And I suppose that if I were to ask what the greatest problem is, even in a congregation as modest as this one, there would be many who would say, well, how to adjust my Christian life so that I am obedient to the scriptures when I am living with a man who hates God and who allows me to go to church only reluctantly and with much grumble. Well, the Bible deals with that, too. And it says, in effect, that the quiet, cooperative Christian wife is a powerful instrument for good in the home.

But she is, without saying much, an evangelist hard to resist. And the man, though he may reject her doctrine and laugh at her faith, in his deep conscience he is badly smitten by the evidence of her meek and quiet spirit and her chaste conversation coupled with fear. And there is many a woman who prays about her husband's conversion who will never live to see her husband convert because she refuses the scriptural position that God has given her and because, bluntly, the husband doesn't see anything there that he wants.

Now, in between, I've mentioned the dominating gorilla of a husband whose prayers aren't answered because he's just too much of a man. Now, I mentioned the woman whose life does not show godliness. But in between those two, thank God, there's a whole world of good, decent Christian people that try to do the best they can.

And if there are any irritations, they try to overlook them and get along the best they can. Thank God for that great mass of believing men and women who get along together and who manage somehow to set a fairly good example to the neighborhood and to their friends. Now we come to a problem that would be very distasteful to me, but I may die tomorrow, and I wouldn't want to die knowing that the day before I had cowardly run out cowardly is an adverb in spite of what you'd say that I had cowardly run out on a text of scripture that I was too timid to deal with.

I'll read it again, Peter help me here. Who's adorning? Let it not be that outward adorning of ladding of the hair, plaiting if you like, and of wearing of gold, and of putting on of apparel. Let it be the hidden man of the heart.

Peter's all mixed up here, talking about a woman and then says it's to be the hidden man of the heart. Because he lifts, he's not mixed up of course, he lifts the whole thing off of the plane where there's division between sexes and puts it up on the spiritual plane where there is no such division. And says it's the hidden being of the heart that matters.

Now, not that outward adorning. What does the Bible teach here? It says that the woman is not to be, seek to be attractive by outward adorning of the plaiting of the hair, of the wearing of gold, and of the putting on of apparel. Now, does this passage forbid these things? Let's say yes, and then go on from there and see where we land.

About the plaiting of the hair, now I used to call that braiding when I was a boy, and every little girl had a pigtail that came to her hips, and the longer the prouder they were of them, with ribbons on the end. And very carefully braided, plaiting is a word that's used in America, plaiting in England, but braiding we always called it. My sister used to wear braided hair, and that's what it means.

Does it say, don't be adorned with braided hair? If we say yes, that's what it says. All right, that rules out the braiding of your hair. Okay, it's out.

Now, whose adorning let it not be the wearing of gold. Does that mean that there's not to be gold ever worn by a Christian woman, if we say, and we're agreeing for the moment, okay, all right, that's out. Nor the putting on of apparel.

Now, wait a minute, we're in it here, because it certainly doesn't mean that the woman is not to put on apparel. So what does it mean if it doesn't mean that she's not to plait her hair ever, nor wear gold, nor put on apparel? If it doesn't mean that, what does it mean? It means your true attractiveness is not outward, but inward. And that therefore, as a Christian woman, you should remember that you cannot buy true attractiveness.

That it is of the heart and not of the body. Now, there's what Peter meant, and anything we read further into that is fanaticism and narrow private interpretation. For that's exactly what he said.

There is not one line here that would lead us, not one common or semicolon that could lead us to believe that Peter had said that it's wrong for a woman to braid her hair. Yeah, do something with it. Nor is there anything in the scriptures that would lead anybody to teach that it would be unscriptural and wrong for a woman to wear gold.

God Almighty made gold and strung it all around us, put it to look at, and it's an element in itself, and it's all that, and if we can afford any of it and have any of it, nothing in the scriptures says don't wear it any more

than it says don't put on apparel. It says don't let your apparel be your true attractiveness, nor your gold. Now, I can see where when Peter smiled a wry smile when he wrote that, because I suppose, I'm quite sure that history would bear me out in this, that they had customs in those days, vogues, and I suppose the vogue was to make the braided hair a ruling somewhat, and the wearing of gold, of course, I suppose, was carried to ridiculous extremes, and no doubt women were lowly, unsaved, pagan women, were being seen on the streets dressed like the reverberant Christmas tree.

So Peter rather dowrily says, you Christian women are another kind of person altogether, and you're invested more in character than you are in your clothing, and therefore you Christian women shouldn't seek to adorn yourself and make yourself attractive by the use of gold and hairdos and apparel, but your true attractiveness is inward, not outward. Now, I may get in trouble here, but not with anybody in this congregation, of course, and it wouldn't be too desperately serious if I did. But while true attractiveness never is outward, yet no Christian woman ever can be a slugger.

You ask me, a woman who is proverbial about and who lives and moves around, carries her big Bible, and yet is a slugger. And I see them sometimes, oh, tell it not in gasp, on buses and streetcars, on their way to church, with the big Bible on their lap and the Sunday school quarter, they're evidently a teacher. And you would shrug, you'd say, did that woman go to the old barrel in the attic and just pull it out and put it on, or how did it get on? Did she sleep in it? I see them like that.

Well, now, they can't impress me with their spirituality. I don't believe in that kind of spirituality. There's no place in the heart of Jesus Christ, There's no place in that artistic, tender, poetic, whole ghost for doubtiness, or dirt, or sluggerness.

I remember the old Quaker brother that went to visit a Quaker sister, making a call of some sort. And after they had stood off to know how they did and boxed, shadowboxed very properly and talked a while in a very dignified manner about the things of God. Why, she said, Bubber, would you care to pray with me before you go? He said, no.

She said, why? He said, your house is dirty. He said, God Almighty never told me to get down on my knees in that dirty house. Clean up and I'll come back and pray.

I believe that he had more of the spirit than she had. She probably was too busy praying to clean up. But I believe that if she had cleaned up, perhaps she could have prayed better.

Now, I say, that this gives no room whatsoever for the female doubt. There are four words. Many of you wouldn't care to take them down.

Not my address, please. Just these four words. But if any of you ladies care to take down here are the words.

Clean, neat, modest, and appropriate. Now, that's the outward adornment. Now, there's got to be some kind of outward adornment.

But you're not to depend upon that, and you're to remember that apart from the hidden man of the heart, there never can be any lasting beauty. First of all, clean, everybody understands that. However poor we may be, we can still be clean.

That's all we water build. Neat. Nobody ever needs to look as if she had been in a cyclone and hadn't got accumulated yet.

And the word modest. I think everybody knows what that word modest means. We can laugh that off if we want to, but those are words we'll face in that great day.

And the fourth word is appropriate. Appropriate to two things. Every Christian woman.

Now, if you want to know, if you don't want to know, it's all right. But if you want to know, every Christian woman should dress appropriate to the circumstances and to her income. A Christian woman giving out cracks, loudly dressed or inappropriately dressed, or badly dressed or unneatly dressed, is a very, very bad ad for the gospel that she is talking, or trying to talk to the public.

Now, what do I mean by appropriate to the circumstances? I can only give you a grotesque illustration of what I mean. A few, some time ago, I saw on a streetcar one day. That's a wonderful place to go.

Some of you people that never get in a streetcar, just ride one. It costs you seventeen cents to observe human nature in the law. And you'll get a lot out of it if you're alert and watchful.

I saw a lady, now here was the way she was dressed. She had on high heels, slacks, a great, heavy, and rather lovely fur coat and babushka. And I looked at this woman and thought to myself, how did they ever let her get out that way at all? Why didn't somebody stop her at the door and say, Hey, mama, please, don't go out like that.

People will think you've escaped. Now, she wasn't dressed appropriately. You say, oh, but boy, we have just a little money and all that.

But we don't have to be grotesque, even if we only have a little bit of money. So there's no excuse for that. And the woman, if that woman, I don't know that she was a Christian at all, but if she was, she'd have had some explaining to do if she tried to talk Jesus Christ to anybody.

Second is, appropriate to the income. Now, I mention this because of two reasons. One is that a great many single women are working so hard they're making themselves old in order to get money enough to buy clothes to make themselves look young.

And the contradiction is grotesque. It doesn't reflect any credit on the common sense of spirituality of any woman who goes out of her financial bracket to decorate herself for the sake of appearances. She lives and comes from a home where those things are taken for granted, all right, but always dress according to the circumstances appropriately, neatly, modestly, and of course, plenty.

Now, I'd rather sound like Mr. Anthony or Albert B. Wiggum here, but Peter said that I didn't, and it's before us. Now, what is the true adorning of the Christian woman? The true adorning is the inward adorning. That lasting beauty which is within.

The hidden being of the heart, which is more conspicuous, though it is hidden, than all the jewels that one can buy. A meek and quiet spirit always makes a woman attractive, be she young or old. In our conclusion, Christian women, take not as your models the wrong people.

Take not as your model Mrs. Roosevelt, Claire Booth Luce, Jane Russell, et al. Take for your model Sarah, the princess. For it says here, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham calling him Lord, as holy women in

olden times, who trusted in God, adorned themselves.

So take Sarah. You don't know how she dressed, of course. You only know that her adorning was inward.

Susanna Wesley is a woman whose name is golden in the annals of the Church of Christ. Yet nobody knows how she dressed. I never heard of her having... I know she dressed, but I don't know how.

I don't know what she wore. I don't know a thing about that. I only know she had seventeen children.

And the two of them were Charles and John Wesley. I'm glad she went on to have seventeen, because John was the last. And if she hadn't had seventeen, we'd never have had John Wesley.

Now, could she have added anything to her glory if she had been known as one of England's ten best dressed women? Never. That would have passed away and been forgotten or put in a footnote at the bottom of the page. But that she brought into the world those princes of song and theology, John Charles Wesley, and taught them herself, has placed her name high in the hall of God Almighty's everlasting fame.

So if you want to take models, don't take the models of the globe-trotting females making gravely voiced speeches about things of which they know nothing. Nor quip artists, but take Sarah, and Susanna, and Florence Nightingale, and Clara Barton, and Mary Fuller. There are plenty of good examples.

Take them. Remember in the last word, this is shoes. And the great day of God will declare all our work, yours and mine.

So we'd better take it seriously. It can neither be shrugged off nor laughed off, for the judgment shall declare every man's work. But we should reverently obey both the woman of verse 1 and the husband of verse 7. And if we do this, and if we remember that there should be no domination, no rebellion, no iron hand, but Christian understanding and fellowship.

And when it comes to adornment, let it not be out of the ladies' room journal, but within circumstances, decently, modestly, practically, but appropriately. Yes. I don't think we can ever have a revival in the Church of Christ until these things that have been laughed off by evangelists are brought back before our gaze and reverently considered, not humorously, but seriously, in the light of judgment.

When that time comes, and we begin to take God seriously, maybe God will begin to take our plaintive prayers for revival a bit more seriously than he's taking them now. But until that time comes, we can go on beating the bench asking for revival. But we'll get revival when we begin to obey reverently in the will of God and not make quips out of texts or subjects for funny stories out of holy writ.

So God help us all, men and women, whatever marital, social, or domestic status, in order that we might do the will of God and thus win our crown.

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