

On Submission and Adornment
(1 Peter 2:18-3:6)
Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Background

- a. Peter's first letter focuses a great deal on suffering. He says we should not be surprised that we suffer in various trials. Throughout his letter, he touches on several different types of trials that Christians face.
 - i. We will be refined through trials; they can produce a positive end result.
 - ii. The life of Jesus consisted of suffering in His life, followed by glory.
 - iii. If we are following Him, we should expect to see the same.
- b. The previous two lessons covered up to **1 Peter 2:17**. Peter said:
 - i. "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." (**1 Peter 2:15–17**, NKJV)
 - ii. In the prior lesson, we focused on "Fear God."
 - iii. In the lesson before that, we focused on "Honor the king".
 - iv. Note that Peter referred to us as free men who choose to make ourselves "bondservants of God". We will continue with that imagery and line of thought in the current lesson, where we will continue with Peter's arguments.

II. Servants Be Submissive to Your Masters

- a. Review **1 Peter 2:15-17**; and continue reading **1 Peter 2:18-25**.
- b. The point Peter makes here:
 - i. Christian servants need to be submissive to their masters, *even if their masters are harsh*.
- c. **Question:** Why should they do that? Why not rather protest and insist that they be *treated fairly*? *What reasons* does Peter give to back up a request like this, one that most would consider very *unreasonable*?

- i. If they endure suffering these wrongs *because of conscience toward God* (as opposed to simply fearing even greater punishment), this is commendable before God.
- ii. Doing what is righteous and submitting to unjust punishment is doing exactly what Jesus did when He was being treated unfairly. He suffered not only to pay the price for our sins, but also to provide *an example of how He wants us to live*.
 - 1. Remember, Jesus did *absolutely nothing wrong*.
 - 2. As was prophesied in **Isaiah 53:9**, He “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”.
 - 3. When He was reviled, He did not revile those persecuting Him in return. He did not threaten them.
 - 4. Instead, He committed Himself to His Father, Who would judge righteously.
 - a. Dying on the cross: “And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last.” (**Luke 23:46**, NKJV)
 - 5. We have *died to sin* through the death of Jesus. Now we are to live for righteousness.
 - 6. Therefore, being a Christian is not just about believing and being saved, but also calls us to follow in Jesus’ footsteps.
- d. Peter also describes us as sheep who have gone astray. We have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, Jesus.
 - i. This reference to the Shepherd who gathers the scattered sheep is reminiscent of the One Shepherd whom God would raise up, prophesied in **Ezekiel 34**.
- e. The language and imagery used by Peter here (to discuss our freedom and living for righteousness) are similar to what we find in Paul’s discourse in **Romans 6-7**.
 - i. Peter speaks of *freedom versus slave/servanthood*.
 - 1. “as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.” (**1 Peter 2:16**, NKJV)
 - ii. Peter also speaks of us as *having died to sin* and now living for righteousness.

1. “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, *having died to sins*, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” (1 Peter 2:24, NKJV)
- iii. Read **Romans 6:1-7:6**; and note the parallels with what Peter said. Here, Paul goes into even more detail than Peter.
1. We “died to sin” and were “buried with Christ” when we were baptized.
 2. We had been slaves to the sin and to the law.
 - a. Just as death (alone) frees a married person from the bonds of marriage, a death also is required to free us from slavery to sin and to the Law.
 - b. We have been freed from slavery to sin and now have become slaves to God (and to righteousness).
 - c. While Satan (falsely) presents himself as the great liberator who promises freedom, in reality, he is *the great enslaver*. Sin results in our slavery, not our freedom.
 - i. Read **John 8:31-36**.
 1. The Jews protested to Jesus that they had never been slaves to anyone.
 2. However, Jesus said, “...whoever commits sin is a *slave of sin*” (**John 8:34**).
 3. Jesus spoke of spiritual freedom to people who were slaves to sin, but who did not see themselves as slaves.
- f. The word translated as ‘servant’ here (and elsewhere in the New Testament) can be translated: *bondservant*, *servant* or *slave*. Note that Peter (and Jesus and Paul) did not teach the abolition of (physical) slavery.
- i. To the best of my knowledge, virtually *every society in the world, and every religion*, permitted human slavery up until the movement to abolish slavery in the 1700-s-1800s, initiated by Christians in England.
 - ii. Although officially outlawed, there are still millions of people in slavery in the world, including in Africa and India.
 - iii. People could become slaves in several ways, including:

1. Being captured in war, as spoils of war or a prisoner of war.
 2. Selling oneself (or sold by one's parents) into slavery for money, such as to settle a debt.
 3. Being born into slavery, if one's parents were slaves.
 4. As punishment for a crime that one had committed.
- iv. Jesus and His apostles are concerned about liberating people from spiritual slavery.
1. "Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." (**1 Corinthians 7:21-23**, NKJV)
 2. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (**Galatians 3:27-28**, NKJV)
 3. Points Paul is making:
 - a. If you are a slave, do not worry about it.
 - b. If you are able to obtain your freedom, do so!
 - c. In Christ, it does not matter your state (slave or free), since *we are all the same in the eyes of God*.
- g. Paul taught similar things as Peter regarding servant/master relationships.
- i. "Let as many *bondservants* as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things." (**1 Timothy 6:1-2**, NKJV)
 - ii. "*Bondservants*, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a *slave* or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening,

knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” (**Ephesians 6:5–9**, NKJV)

- h. These teachings are extremely counter-cultural and even disturbing to many. They go against our sense of justice and equality. Yet, this is what Paul and Peter taught. Neither Jesus nor His apostles taught that masters should free their slaves. Instead, they focused on *freeing all men from spiritual slavery* to sin and Satan.
- i. **Question:** What does this teaching have to do with us today, since none of us are either servants or slaves?
 - i. The elimination of slavery in the U.S. (in institution which continued in the southern states through the 1860s) was a wonderful thing. However, *the spiritual slavery to sin* (which continues everywhere) is *much more oppressive*.
 - ii. There has been a movement in the U.S. to destroy the remembrance of anyone who in any way in the past was associated with slavery (including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson). Remember that Peter and Paul were writing to slaveowners in the church. If you lived in the south in the U.S. in the 1850s (where only about 5% of the people owned slaves) and were reading passages like these in your Bible, *would you* have had a clear conviction that slavery was always wrong?
 - 1. It is easy to see the sins and blindness of a society (or a church) in hindsight. If we see things more clearly, we should extend the same restraint in judging those who came before us, as we would wish those in the future to extend toward us (for the things we may be blind to).
 - iii. The same principle of submission regarding servants/masters also applies to employees/employers.
 - 1. For me, putting these principles into practice has been a very hard over the years.
 - 2. One of the things I have enjoyed about being (*semi-*)retired has been: *no more bosses!*
 - 3. I have had some good bosses/supervisors: honest, hard-working, putting the interests of their employees above their own, and having the heart of a good shepherd. Then again, I have had some very painful experiences with other bosses.
 - a. One of the toughest commands for me in my working career was to serve the people who were over me with

an attitude of “*doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men*” (**Ephesians 6**).

- iv. Also, we may see some form of slavery, servants, or serfdom in the future. Or we may see something closer to slavery than the freedom we have lately enjoyed here in the U.S. Who knows?
- v. In any event, we should be spiritually prepared for whatever the future brings.

III. Wives, Submit to Your Husbands

- a. Read **1 Peter 3:1-6**.
- b. What Peter teaches here.
 - i. Wives need to be submissive to their husbands.
 - 1. (We look forward to addressing what Peter *says to the husbands* in our next lesson.)
 - ii. Wives must be submissive *even if their husbands are unbelievers*.
 - 1. Recall that Christians can only marry other Christians.
 - a. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (**2 Corinthians 6:14**, NKJV)
 - b. “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” (**1 Corinthians 7:39**, NKJV)
 - 2. Therefore, this might pertain to a situation where a wife became a Christian after she was married.
 - a. She may be able to win her husband over to the Lord “without a word”, by the godly submission she shows toward her husband and a God-fearing, chaste way of life.
 - iii. This teaching on wives submitting to their husbands is consistent with what Paul taught.
 - 1. Read **Ephesians 5:22-24**.
 - 2. This teaching is definitely “out of season” in modern American culture.

3. I have heard people claim that just as slavery is no longer relevant (Christian understanding has progressed over the centuries), *perhaps the same is true regarding wives submitting to their husbands.*
 - a. Those who follow that line of reasoning often conclude that the teaching on women submitting to men is no longer necessary, either.
 - b. However, let us never forget that Paul says, “the husband is head of the wife *as Christ is head of the church*”.
 - c. **Question:** If the husband is no longer the head of the wife, *is Christ no longer the head of the church?*
 - i. The husband-wife relationship is to model the relationship between Christ and the church.
 - d. This also is one of the reasons given why women need to cover their heads when they pray, according to Paul.
 - i. “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, *the head of woman is man*, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.” (1 Corinthians 11:3–5, NKJV)
 1. The head of Christ (the Son) is God (the Father). That order is timeless; it does not change over time.
 2. The head of every man is Christ. That order is timeless; it does not change over time.
 3. The same is true regarding the statement in this passage about men and women (the head of woman is man). That arrangement is as timeless as the other two are.
 - e. A church where the husband is no longer the head of the wife is a church where Christ is no longer its head. I

wouldn't want to be there, nor would I want my son to find a future wife from among believers who were taught this heretical teaching.

- f. If you destroy the Biblical basis for marriage and the family, you are destroying the foundation blocks of the church. Personally, I see this as '*a hill worth dying on*'.
4. Peter also speaks about outward adornment on women, versus the superior (inward) adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit.
 - a. Peter points to the example of Sarah, who was submissive to Abraham and called him her "lord".
 - i. I assume this refers to **Genesis 18:12**, where Sarah says regarding the promise of bearing a child in her old age, "I have not yet had a child until now, and my lord also is old also?"
 - c. On the subject of outward adornment.
 - i. In the NKJV it says: "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." (**1 Peter 3:3-4**, NKJV)
 1. Here the translators have put the word "merely" in italics, which indicates that it is not in the original (Greek text).
 2. Also, note that the word "merely" *does not appear* in several other English translations, including:
 - a. KJV (1900)
 - b. ESV
 - c. ASV (1901)
 - d. RSV
 - e. NIV
 - f. Young's Literal Translation
 3. "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;" (**1 Peter 3:3**, KJV 1900)

4. “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—” (**1 Peter 3:3**, ESV)
5. Adding the word “merely” (which is *not* in the Greek text of the New Testament) totally changes the meaning and thrust of what Peter is saying here.
6. Consider how simply adding one word “merely” would *totally alter the meaning* of the following statements from Scripture:
 - a. “Do not [+ *merely*] lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” (**Matthew 6:19–20**, NKJV)
 - b. “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not [+ *merely*] sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,” (**Matthew 6:2–3**, NKJV)
 - c. “And I say to you, My friends, do not [+ *merely*] be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (**Luke 12:4–5**, NKJV)
 - i. Jesus is telling us to *not do* one thing; and instead, to *do the other*.
 - ii. He is not telling us to continue doing the first, but make sure we especially do the second thing!
7. **Lesson #1:** You certainly *do not* need to learn ancient Greek to have a solid understand the Scriptures. However, it is wise check out important passages *in multiple translations* (not just one version) when the meaning is in question.
8. **Lesson #2:** Peter is telling the women to do two things:
 - a. Do not adorn themselves *outwardly*.
 - i. Fancy hair, gold jewelry, fine clothing, etc.

- b. *Instead*, adorn themselves *inwardly* with a much more important adornment:
 - i. A quiet and gentle spirit.
- 9. It seems to me that often our sinful desires are not totally depraved, but rather are (at their root) good desires *that have been sinfully corrupted and misdirected*. To illustrate that, here are few examples:
 - a. The desire to battle against a foe with weapons:
 - i. Corrupted, worldly application: misplaced in war and competitive sports.
 - ii. Proper spiritual application: directed toward a *real spiritual war against a real enemy* (Satan), using *spiritual weapons* (**Ephesians 6:10-20**)
 - b. The desire for freedom:
 - i. Corrupted, worldly application: politics and rebellion
 - ii. Proper spiritual application: freedom from *enslaving sin* (**Romans 6**)
 - c. The desire to run a race and defeat others to win a competition:
 - i. Corrupted, worldly applications: Olympics, Boston Marathon, etc.
 - ii. Proper spiritual application: running our *spiritual race* with perseverance, to win the prize of eternal life (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27**)
 - d. The desire of women to be beautifully adorned:
 - i. Corrupted worldly application: arranging the hair, jewelry and fine clothing
 - ii. Proper spiritual application: quiet and gentle spirit (**1 Peter 3:3-6**)
- 10. For many years (while attending a church where this teaching on rejecting outward adornment was not taught), my wife and I had overlooked this teaching. When we started to meet and spend time with Christians from conservative Anabaptist-type backgrounds, it opened our eyes to something we had

previously neglected, and it started a process of re-evaluation. Soon after that, my wife decided to forego the jewelry, make-up, highlighting her hair, etc. that previously had been part of her life. I also reconsidered my practice of wearing a wedding ring (gold band).

- ii. Some of the early Christian writers spoke about this.
 - 1. From Clement of Alexandria, a teacher in the church of Alexandria, Egypt, writing c. 195 AD:
 - a. “And it is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want. How much more glorious is it to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser to spend money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments! ...For women should be adorned within, and show the inner woman beautiful...”
 - i. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 2, chapter 13; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 268).
 - ii. The points made by Clement here include:
 - 1. Rather than spending money on luxurious clothing and jewelry, we should be using our resources to help meet the needs of the poor.
 - 2. We should use our worldly wealth to gain friends for ourselves, no doubt referring to what Jesus had said in **Luke 16:9**.
 - 3. Clearly, Clement did not see any “merely” in the statement by Peter. He saw two directives: first, women should not adorn themselves outwardly, and second, they should instead adorn themselves inwardly for *true spiritual beauty*.
 - b. “Wherefore the wearing of gold and the use of softer clothing is not to be entirely prohibited. But irrational impulses must be curbed, lest, carrying us away through excessive relaxation, they impel us to voluptuousness. For luxury, that has dashed on to surfeit, is prone to kick up its heels and toss its mane, and shake off the charioteer, the Instructor; who, pulling back the reins

from far, leads and drives to salvation the human horse—that is, the irrational part of the soul—which is wildly bent on pleasures, and vicious appetites, and precious stones, and gold, and variety of dress, and other luxuries.”

- i. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 3, chapter 11; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 284)
 - c. “The Word prohibits us from doing violence to nature by boring the lobes of the ears. For why not the nose too?—so that, what was spoken, may be fulfilled: ‘As an ear-ring in a swine’s nose, so is beauty to a woman without discretion.’ (**Proverbs 11:22**) For, in a word, if one thinks himself made beautiful by gold, he is inferior to gold; and he that is inferior to gold is not lord of it. But to confess one’s self less ornamental than the Lydian ore, how monstrous! As, then, the gold is polluted by the dirtiness of the sow, which stirs up the mire with her snout, so those women, that are luxurious to excess in their wantonness, elated by wealth, dishonor by the stains of amatory indulgences what is the true beauty.”
 - i. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 3, chapter 11; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers 2, p. 285)
- 2. From Cyprian, a bishop of the church in Carthage, North Africa, writing c. 250 AD:
 - a. “The characteristics of ornaments, and of garments, and the allurements of beauty, are not fitting for any but prostitutes and immodest women; and the dress of none is more precious than of those whose modesty is lowly.”
 - i. (Source: Cyprian, *On the Dress of Virgins*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 433)
- 3. From Tertullian, a Christian writer from Carthage, North Africa, writing c. 198 AD:
 - a. "So far, however, as regards the dress of women, the variety of observance compels us—men of no consideration whatever—to treat, presumptuously indeed, after the most holy apostle [*presumably*

referring to Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9-10], except in so far as it will not be presumptuously if we treat the subject in accordance with the apostle. Touching modesty of dress and ornamentation, indeed, the prescription of Peter likewise is plain, checking as he does with the same mouth, because with the same Spirit, as Paul, the glory of garments, and the pride of gold, and the meretricious elaboration of the hair (**1 Peter 3:3-6**)."

- i. (Source: Tertullian, *On Prayer*, chapter 20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 687)
4. For additional quotes on early Christian attitudes about the outward adornment of women, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, articles on Clothing, Cosmetics, Grooming, Jewelry and Rings.

IV. Conclusion and Take-Aways

- a. The things we have covered are countercultural. If they are new to you, I encourage you to go back to the Scriptures and study this out on your own, to develop your own convictions about these things based on the Word of God.
- b. The Bible teaches that Christians are to be a submissive people, not rebellious, even when we are being treated badly.
 - i. That includes within marriage and the family, with wives being submissive to their own husbands. This is to reflect our submission to Christ.
- c. Also, women are to reject outward adornment and instead seek to make themselves truly beautiful on the inside; with the spiritual beauty that comes from a quiet and gentle spirit.
- d. Following Peter, we will turn our attention to the men in the next lesson!