

CHAPTER THREE OF FIRST PETER

I. THERE ARE FIVE BASIC PREMISES IN CHAPTER THREE:

1. First, Some Advice To The Married Christians.

A. Verses 1-7

"Likewise, you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that, if there are any who refuse to believe the word, they may be won for Christ without a word, because they have seen your pure and reverent behaviour. Let not your adornment be an outward thing of braided hair and ornaments of gold and wearing of robes, but let your adornment be an adornment of the inward personality of the heart, wrought by the unfading loveliness of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For it was thus in the days of old the holy women, who placed their hopes in God, adorned themselves in submission to their husbands. It was thus that Sara obeyed Abraham calling him, "Lord." And you have become her children, if you do good, and if you do not become a prey to fluttering fears."

"Likewise, you husbands, live understandingly with your wives, remembering that women are the weaker sex, and assigning honour to them as fellow-heirs of the grace of life, so that there be no barrier to your prayers."

B. In These Verses Peter Is Making Three Points To The Christian Communities:

(1) The Silent Preaching Of A Lovely Life.

"Peter now turns to the domestic and family problems which Christianity inevitably produced. It was inevitable that one member of a family might be won for Christ, while the other remained untouched by the appeal of the gospel; and such a situation inevitably produced problems."

"It may seem strange that Peter's advice to wives is six times as long as his advice to husbands. That was because the wife's problem was far more difficult than that of the husband. If a husband became a Christian, he would automatically bring his wife with him into the Church, and there would be no problem. But if a wife became a Christian, while her husband did not, she had taken a step which in the ancient world was unprecedented, and which produced the acutest problems. In every sphere of ancient civilization, women had no rights at all. Under Jewish law a woman was a thing; she was owned by her husband in exactly the same way as he owned his sheep and his goats; on no account could she leave him, although he could dismiss her at any moment. For a wife to change her religion while her husband did not, was unthinkable. In Greek civilization the duty of the woman was "to remain indoors and to be obedient to her husband." It was the sign of a good woman that she must see as little, hear as little, and ask as little as possible. She had no kind of independent existence and no kind of mind of her own, and her husband could divorce her almost at caprice, so long as he returned her dowry. Under Roman law a woman had no rights. In law she remained for ever a child. When she was under her father she was under the patria potestas, the father's power, which gave the father even the right of life and death over her; and when she married she passed equally into the power of her husband. She was entirely subject to her husband, and completely at his mercy. Cato the Censor, the typical ancient Roman, wrote: "If you were to catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her with impunity without a trial." Roman matrons were prohibited from drinking wine, and Egnatius beat his wife to death when he found her doing so. The whole attitude of ancient civilization was that no woman could dare to take any decision to herself. What, then, must have been the problems of the wife who became a Christian while her husband remained faithful to the ancestral gods? It is almost impossible for us to realize what life must have been for the wife who was brave enough to become a Christian." (Barclay

(a) What Then Is Peter's Advice In Such A Case?

1. He Did Not Advise The Wife To Leave Her Husband.
 - a. In This he took the same attitude as Paul in I Cor. 7:13-16.
2. He did not tell the wife to preach, to argue and to nag.
3. He does not tell the wife to insist that in her faith there is no difference between slave and freeman, Gentile and Jew, male and female, but that all are the same in the presence of the Christ whom she has come to know.

4. He Tells Her Something Very Simple:

a. He Tells Her To Be A Good Wife:

"By the silent preaching of the loveliness of her life she must break down the barriers of prejudice and hostility, and win her husband for her new Master."

b. She must be submissive.

"It is not a cringing and a spineless submission that is meant; it is the submission which, as someone has finely put it, is a 'voluntary selflessness.' It is the submission based on the death of pride, the abasing of self, and the instinctive desire to serve. It is not the submission of fear, but the submission of perfect love."

/c. She must be pure.

"There is to be found in her life a lovely chastity and fidelity which is founded upon love."

d. She must be reverent.

"Her only weapon must be the silent preaching of a lovely life."

(2) Peter's Second Admonition Here Is Concerning True Adornment.

(a) The Ancient Moralists Condemned Undue Luxury As Did Peter.

- / 1. Quintilian, the Roman master of oratory, wrote:

"A tasteful and magnificent dress, as the Greek poet tells us, lends added dignity to the wearer: but the effeminate and luxurious apparel fails to adorn the body, and only reveals the sordidness of the mind."
- / 2. Epictetus, the philosopher, thinking of the narrow life to which women were condemned in the ancient world, said:

"Immediately after they are fourteen, women are called 'ladies' by men. And so, when they see that they have nothing else than to be bedfellows of men, they begin to beautify themselves, and put all their hope on that. It is, therefore, worthwhile for us to take pains, to make them understand that they are honoured for nothing else but only for appearing modest and self-respecting."

(b) One Passage In Isaiah List The Various Items Of Female Adornment.

1. Isaiah 3:18-24 Speaks of the tinkling ornaments of the feet, and the tiaras like the moon, the chains and the bracelets and the spangled ornaments, the bonnets and headbands and the earrings, the rings and the nose jewels, the dresses, the mantles, the wimples, and the crimping pins, the glasses, the fine linens, the hoods, and the veils.

c. A Collection Of Adornments In The Greek and Roman World Is Very Interesting In View Of Peter's Admonition

Quake
(1) "There were as many ways of dressing the hair as there were bees in Hybla. Hair was waved, and dyed, sometimes black, more often auburn. Wigs were worn, especially blonde wigs, which are found even in the Christian catacombs; and hair to manufacture them was imported from Germany, and even from as far away as India. Hairbands, pins and combs were made of ivory, and boxwood, and tortoiseshell; and sometimes of gold, studded with gems.

"Purple was the favourite colour for clothes. Earrings were made of pearls, and Seneca spoke of women with two or three fortunes in their ears. Slippers were encrusted with them; Nero even had a room whose walls were covered with them.

d. In the face of all of this Peter pleads for the graces which adorn the heart, the gentle and quiet spirit, which are precious in the sight of God.

(1) Peter gives the example of Sarah and goes on to say that "if Christian wives are adorned with the same graces of modesty, humility, and chastity, they too will be her daughters, and will be within the family of the faithful people of God.....A Christian wife lived in a heathen society where she would be tempted to luxurious and senseless extravagance; ...Without a word she must win those who are disobedient to the word.

* "There are few passages where the value of the beauty of a lovely Christian life are so vividly stressed."

(3) Peter's Third Admonition Is To The Christian Husband.

a. He Must Be Understanding:

b. He Must Treat His Wife With Courtesy.

"In the ancient world chivalry to women was well-nigh unknown. It was, and still is, no uncommon sight in the East to see the man riding on a heavily-laden donkey while the woman trudges by his side. It was Christianity which introduced chivalry into the relationships between men and women.

c. He Must Remember That The Woman Has Equal Spiritual Rights.

"Women did (not) share in the worship of the Greeks and Romans. Even in the Jewish synagogue women had no share in the service, and in the orthodox synagogue still have no share. When women were admitted to the synagogue at all, they were segregated from the men, who formed the congregation, and hidden behind a lattice or a screen, because there was no part for women in Jewish worship. Here in Christianity there emerged a revolutionary principle. Women have been granted equal spiritual rights; granted that, the whole relationship between the sexes was changed.

d. Unless He Does This There Will Be A Hindrance To His Prayer.

As Briggs puts it: "The sighs of the injured wife come between the husband's prayers and God's hearing." Here is a great truth. Our relationships with our fellow-men ~~can~~ never be right, when our relationships with our fellow-men are wrong. It is when we are one with each other that we are also with God.

2. Secondly, Peter Admonishes Them To Treat The Brethren Kindly.

A. Verses 8-12

"Finally you must all be of one mind; you must have sympathy with each other, and you must live in brotherly love; you must be compassionate and humble; you must not return evil for evil, nor insult for insult; on the contrary, you must return blessing; for it was to give and to inherit blessing that you were called.

He who wishes to love life,
And to see good things,
Let him keep his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking guile;
Let him avoid evil, and let him do good;
Let him seek peace, and pursue it,
Because the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
And His ears are open to their request;
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

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B. In These Verses Peter Sets Forth The Great Qualities Of The Christian Life.

(1) Right In The Forefront Peter Sets Christian Unity.

a. Divisions, whether disagreements between individual members or the existence of factions and parties and - how much more! our present day denominations, constitute a calling in question of the Gospel itself and a sign that those who are involved are carnal. The more seriously we take the New Testament, the more urgent and painful becomes our sense of the sinfulness of the divisions, and the more earnest our prayers and strivings after the peace and unity of the Church on earth.

(2) Next, Peter Sets Forth Sympathy.

(3) Next, Brother Love, Compassion, and humility.

(4) Finally, He Sets Forth Forgiveness.

NOTE: Peter Sums Up What Their Attitude Toward Each Other By Quoting The Picture of the good man in Psalm 37, with its picture of the man whom God receives and of the man whom God rejects.

3. Thirdly: The Christian Is To Do Good Even If He Has To Suffer For It.

A. Verses 13-14

"Who will hurt you, if you are ardent lovers of goodness? Even if you do have to suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. Have no fear of them; do not be troubled; but in your hearts give Christ an unique place." (Barclay...)

B. There Are Three Conceptions Laid Down In This Passage:

(1) Peter Insists Upon A Passionate Love Of Goodness.

(2) He Speaks About The Christian Attitude To Suffering.

(3) He Argues That They Are To Place The Spiritual Above The Physical

a. The Christian is the man to whom God and Jesus Christ are the supremacies in life. To him his relationship to God in Christ is life's greatest value. Now, if a man's heart is set on earthly things, on earthly possessions, on earthly happiness, on earthly pleasures, on earthly ease and comfort, he is of all men most vulnerable. For, in the nature of things, he may lose these things at any moment. There may come at any time a reversal of fortune, and he may find himself stripped of them all. Such a man is desperately easily hurt and wounded. On the other hand, if a man gives to Jesus Christ the unique place in his life, if the most precious thing for him is his relationship to God, that is something which can never be taken from him. Therefore, he is secure.

4. Fourthly, The Christian Life Is An Argument For The Truthfulness Of The Gospel.

A. Verses 15-16

"Always be prepared to make your defence to anyone who calls you to account concerning the hope that is in you; but do so with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame." (Barclay)

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that false accuse your good conversation in Christ." (KJV)

B. In a hostile and suspicious world it was, and still is, inevitable that the Christian will be called upon to defend the faith he holds, and the hope by which he lives. Here Peter has certain things to say about the Christian defence, and the Christian argument for Christ:

(1) The Defence Must Be Reasonable.

(2) It Must Be Given With Gentleness.

(3) It Must Be Given With Reverence.

* (4) Finally, The Most Compelling Argument Is The Argument Of A Faithful Christian Life.

"Let a man so act that his conscience is clear. Let him meet criticism with a life which is beyond reproach. Such conduct will ~~silence~~ silence slander and will disarm criticism. The only unanswerable argument for Christianity is a Christian life. 'A saint; someone has said, 'is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God.'"

5. Fifthly, Peter Lays Down The Fact Of The Vicarious Sufferings Of Christ.

A. Verses 18-22

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, the the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (KJV)

"In the time when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built, in which some few - that is, eight souls - were brought in safely through the water. And water now saves you, who were symbolically represented in Noah and his company, I mean the water of baptism; and baptism is not merely the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge to God of a good conscience."

(Barclay)

"And I cannot help pointed out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted to the safety of the Christian "ark" by baptism, which means, of course, far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience."

(Phillips)

"This water prefigured the water of baptism through which you are now brought to safety. Baptism is not the washing away of bodily pollution, but the appeal made to God by a good conscience; and it brings salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (New English Bible)

"This water was a figure pointing to baptism, which now saves you, not by washing off bodily dirt, but by the promise made to God from a good conscience. Baptism saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (TEV)

B. In the narrow compass of these two verses Peter has the greatest and the deepest things to say about the work of Christ, and about the death of Christ.

1. He Lays Down That The Death Of Christ Was Unique.

a. Whereas the duties of the priests and the sacrifices of the temple had to be repeated over and over - Christ died "once for all" for our sins.

2. He Affirms That Christ's Death Was For Our Sins.

3. His Sacrifice was vicarious.

4. His work was to bring us to God.

C. He Affirms That Was Saved By Water - That We Are Saved By Baptism.

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