

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 PETER 3:1-4 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

Families are currently experiencing disharmony and difficult social challenges. This state of affairs has resulted into sudden family separation, ill-feelings and divorce. This pathetic dilemma occurs very often in our Nigerian society. Some families who are victims of such ill-fated circumstances have been deprived of their legitimate home and marital right. This merciless and impatient state of affairs has left families and some individuals to become single parenthood. The researchers are inspired to conduct this research paper in order to recommend ways of improving the condition of families in Nigerian society. The study adopts library research qualitative method to obtain data. In addition, Synchronic exegesis and content analysis approaches are employed to discover the meaning of 1 Peter 3:1 in the context of its original audience. Other intellectual works have also been examined to determine the current situation of families in Nigerian society. This study reveals that some of the issues evaluated in 1 Peter 3:1 concerning family matter are issues found in Nigeria society. For the sustainability of the family, the study recommends that appropriating Peter's message in contemporary homes is one of the ways through which harmony can be experienced.

Keywords: “in the same way,” ὑποτασσόμενοι, “the world,” πολυτελής

Introduction

The fundamental interest of this article is to appropriate Peter's pronouncement in his first epistle (1 Peter 1:1-7) to the family challenges in Nigerian society. Peter says more about the wives than the husbands. There is one main instruction on both sides: ‘Be in submission to your husbands... dwell with your wives according

to knowledge' (3:1,7). If any couple will obey these two commands, their family will improve... if even one of them will obey these commands the family will come right (Eaton 63). As believers are to submit to government authorities in 1 Peter 2:13) or slaves submit to their masters (2:18), so wives are to submit to their husbands. The same Greek verb is used which calls for submission to a recognized authority. It is important to note that Peter does not in any way imply inferiority of wives to their husbands. The submission implied is one of a role or function necessary for the orderly operation of the home. There are three major sections in the New Testament which address the unique, God given, relationship between husbands and wives, these include: 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; 25-40, Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. There are other passages guiding husbands and wives as well as men's and women's role relationships (1 Corinthians 11, 1 Timothy 2). But these are the three major treatises about marriage. Paul wrote the first two sections and Peter wrote the third. They all have remarkable similarities (Patterson 147). Any extensive study of what God says to husbands and wives should include these passages.

The message of Peter as contained in the biblical passage is centered on submission. What is involved in submission according to Peter? Submission does not mean treating the husband as if he is in the place of Christ. It does not mean that the wife does not think for herself neither does it mean that she must not seek to influence her husband – although this should not be excuse for nagging and stubborn argumentativeness. Submission does not mean that the wife must obey her husband if he asks her to do something sinful or something contrary to the word of God. It has nothing to do with lesser intelligence or ability. In any given marriage the wife may have more ability than the husband. Eaton (199) states, "Submission does not contradict equality of salvation. Spiritual status in Christ is not affected by whether one is male or female. Submission is a matter of order rather than superiority or inferiority." It is recognition of God-given authority of the husband, a matter of having gentle spirit, a respectful attitude and disposition. Apostle Peter turns to domestic problems which Christianity inevitably produced. Barclay maintains, "It is inevitable that one marriage partner might be won for Christ, while the other remained untouched by the appeal of the gospel; and such a situation inevitably had difficulties" (218). It is the focus of this paper to examine and discover the theological convictions present in Peter's message of submission and draw certain implications for families in Nigeria society.

Historical Background of 1 Peter 3:1-7

In Jewish traditions, a woman was the mistress of the home but was not qualified to appear as a witness in the court and was exempt from fulfilling her religious duties. In Roman culture, it is ideal for women to pass from the subjection of their father to their husband (Ferguson 78). In Greco-Roman culture it was believed that the wife should have no friends of her own and should worship the gods of her

husband. If this expectation is applied to a Christian wife, it might result in her trouble for several reasons:

1. The very fact that a woman would adopt any religion other than her husband's violated the Greco-Roman ideal of an orderly home. Because prosperity and well-being were seen as dependent on religious forces, disorder in the home was a threat not only to the family but to society (Jobes 3164). The society also experiences the ills and disorder that originate from homes. Jayman avows, "Christians were frequently blamed as the cause of public calamity because they introduced a new god, upsetting the religious status quo of the empire" (201).
2. The husband and society would perceive the wife's worship of Jesus Christ as rebellion, especially if she worshiped Christ exclusively. If the wife persisted in her new religion to the extent that others outside the household learned of it, the husband would also feel embarrassment and suffer criticism for not properly managing his household (201). This could seriously damage his social standing, even to the point of disqualifying him for certain honours and offices.
3. The wife's involvement at Christian worship would grant her the opportunity to have fellowship with other Christians who possibly were not her husband's friends. Depending on the specifics of social expectations, a wife's conversion to Christ could potentially have far-reaching implications for her husband and family. Those wives who reject the family religion determined by their husbands would be threat to fathers, because they were responsible for raising children for the first period of their lives (Davids 226).

Consequently, Peter does not advice Christian wives to deny their Christian faith, nor does he admonish them to combine their husbands' religion with Christianity (Dinkle 10) in the midst of these challenges. Instead however, he calls them to remain loyal to their faith and be committed completely to their husbands. Even though wives were under the check of their husbands in Greco-Roman society, that common perception is totally invalidated but not nullifies the fact of wives' submission to their husbands.

Exegetical Analysis of 1 Peter 3:1-7

Translation of 1 Peter 3:1-7 from Greek to English

Passage in Greek Text	Passage in English Translation
1 Ὅμοίως, αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, ἵνα καὶ εἴ τινες ἀπειθοῦσι τῷ λόγῳ, διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθήσονται, ¹	1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,
2 ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνῆν ἀναστροφήν ὑμῶν.	2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.
3 Ὡν ἔστω οὐχ ὁ ἐξώθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος,	3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.
4 ἀλλ' ὁ κρυπτός τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ	4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self,

ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ Ἰπραέος καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἔστιν ἑνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ πολυτελέες.	the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.
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The heart of a godly wife (3:1-2)

Ὁμοίως, αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, ἵνα καὶ εἴ τινας ἀπειθοῦσι τῷ λόγῳ, διὰ τῆς τῶν γυναικῶν ἀναστροφῆς ἄνευ λόγου κερδηθήσονται, ἐποπτεύσαντες τὴν ἐν φόβῳ ἀγνὴν ἀναστροφήν ὑμῶν.

Peter furthers his conversation on submission as he opens this section with ‘in the same way,’ which is likely referring back to the submission of slaves to their masters from the previous section. He admonishes the readers to be submissive to authorities and telling the slaves to obey their masters. He exhorts the wives to be subject to their husbands. He includes the phrase *in the same way* (ὁμοίως) to enumerate categories of people and not saying that wives should compare themselves to slaves (Kistemaker and Hendriksen 116). Peter itemizes four categories of people in his first epistle: (1). Citizens to civil authorities (2:13); (2). Then, the slaves (2:18); (3). next, the wives (3:1); (4) afterward, the husbands (3:7); and (5). “All of you” (3:8). Peter does not encourage wives to be submissive to all husbands in general. He encourages each wife to submit to her own husband (Allen and Mark 186). Therefore, in the same way that slaves have God-given responsibilities with respect to their masters, wives too have their own responsibilities to their husbands (Dubis 83). Ὁμοίως, αἱ γυναῖκες, ὑποτασσόμεναι τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν, (Wives, in the same way, be submissive to your own husbands). The godly wife will be subservient to her husband. This submission is not a reward for the husband’s good behavior; as the polite order of the home, it is a command from God which must be followed by every woman.

Submission - The meaning of ὑποτάσσω is ‘subject oneself, be subordinated, or to obey.’ The word translated submission in ancient Greek was used outside the New Testament to describe the submission and obedience of soldiers in an army to those of superior rank (Huther 248). It literally means, “to order under.” The meaning of γυναῖκες could technically be either “women” or “wives,” just as ἀνδράσιν could mean either “men” or “husbands.” Considering the general context of the whole table of duties, we have already seen in connection with Peter’s use of the term οἰκέτης that in this letter interpersonal relationships are decidedly viewed in the setting of *family* (Wallace 206). That consideration would seem to be adequate reason for translating the terms γυναῖκες and ἀνδράσιν as “wives” and “husbands.”

Male headship is God’s commanded principle for the home and the church, not for society in general. Submission has nothing to do with the wife’s intelligence or capacity. Her intelligence may be higher than her husband’s. Her personality may be more lively and attractive than her husband’s. She may be far more spiritual than he will ever be. The concern is not ability, the issue is role! In any

organization, there must be authority. This principle is employed in government, school, business, and the military. Life is made up of principles of authority (Richison 16). So it is in family as well. The person who submits is not weak but strong because he or she honours God's ordained authority. A wife is to accept her place in the family under the leadership of her husband whom God has placed as head in the home (Walvoord & Zuck 848). Wives are to be subservient even though the husbands are not in the faith, so that they might be saved by the behaviour of their wives. The prevailing purity of a godly woman can soften even the stoniest male heart without a word (Titus 2:5). Likewise, winning their husbands and overcoming hostility can be accomplished through their silent testimony of Christian life and character (Chia 202).

The true beauty of a godly woman (2-4)

Ἵν ἔστω οὐχ ὁ ἔξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος, ἀλλ' ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφάρτῳ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ πολυτελής. Ἐξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος,

This would yield the sense 'let not external adornment ... be yours, but let the unseen person of the heart ... be yours.' Guzik translate this as "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" (Guzik 274). The beauty of a godly wife must not centered on outward appearance but that which is honorable and morally upright Dubis has it that the Greek text of verses 3–4, would thus be Ἵν ἔστω (κόσμος) οὐχ ὁ ἔξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος ἀλλ' (Ἵν ἔστω κόσμος) ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφάρτῳ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος. Which when translated would be: Let not the external adornment that consists in hairstyles, jewellery, and clothes be that which beautifies you, but let the unseen person of the heart be that which beautifies you (201).

The word κόσμος, is derived from cosmetics, and is used in its original sense of an orderly arrangement, referring to adornment or decoration. It points to the world as orderly system (1 John 2:15-17). Peter did not prohibit all adornment for godly women. But for them outward adornment is always in moderation, and her emphasis should always be on inward adornment. In antiquity women often arranged and dyed their hair. They also wore wigs, especially blonde wigs made with hair imported from Germany. Peter had this in mind when he addressed the women on adornment that is merely outward (Guzik 274). He did not prevent a woman fixing her hair, or wearing jewelry, any more than he forbade her wearing apparel rather, to let it be the hidden person of τῆς καρδίας (the heart). "Though desire to be beautiful and attractive is manifestly a commendable one, outward beauty, however much desirable, is secondary to beauty of character" (Marshall

622) Real beauty comes from the hidden person of the heart. It is not something you wear or primp before a mirror to possess. It is something you are.

The word ἔστω (*let it not be*) in this verse is a command in keeping with the present aspect, which portrays an internal perspective (Chia 2021). The application this thought connotes the fact that Peter encourages the wives not to concentrate on outward beauty. The inner beauty of a godly woman is incorruptible and does not decay or get worse with age. Instead, incorruptible beauty only gets better with age, and is therefore of much greater value than the beauty that comes from the hair, jewelry, or clothing. When women submit to their husbands and do not put trust in their outward adornment, they are like the holy women of former times who trusted in God. Through that they will be able to impressively demonstrate their faith in God.

ἀλλ' ὁ κρυπτός τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ Ἰπραέος καὶ ἡσυχίου καὶ πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ πολυτελής. πολυτελής.

The word πολυτελής is relevant to being a great value or worth. It occurs three times in the NT and two of them pointed to outward adornments, such as ointment and garments (Mk 14:3; 1 Tm 2:9). Nevertheless, Peter described the character of true beauty as a gentle and quiet spirit. These character traits are not promoted for women by our culture; yet they are very precious in the sight of God (Guzik 274.). He employs the word 'πολυτελής' to completely explain the inward life of a godly wife. Consequently, Peter persuades them to know that God himself considers their inward beautification at high value and as an irresistible beauty.

Theological Implications of 1 Peter 3:1-4

Implication for Family Relationship

This paper demonstrates that there is disharmony and instability in the relationship of husband and wife without submission and love. Nevertheless, this has not jeopardized God's objective for family relationship. Wives were instructed to submit to their own husbands (1 Pet. 3:1) just as all Christians should submit to their rulers, and all workers to their employers (Hale 913). With sincere submission of the wife to her husband, there will be harmonious co-existence in the family. The wives' reverence for God is their motivation for submission to their husbands, regardless of whether the husbands are harsh or kind (Jayman, 2011). Wives are expected to obey their husbands and this obedience included allegiance to their husbands' religion. Meanwhile, the concept of submission has nothing to do with lesser intelligence or ability. In a given family the wife may have more ability than the husband. Therefore the submission has not in any way reduced the value and worth of women. The harmonious relationship of husband and wife would be affected without genuine love and submission. Marshall asserts, Man becomes the sole head of the family and he is to rule over the woman based on the stories of the Creation and Fall where the woman, originally created to be a

helper for the man (Gen 2:20), is cursed by the pain of childbirth and submission to the rule of her husband (202; see Gen 3:16)

Wives should unconditionally embrace submission as biblical principle for making successful and stable family. Christian wives must have a “quiet” spirit. A woman with a meek and quiet spirit ought never to be underestimated, for meekness is not the same as weakness, and quietness is not synonymous with dullness. The most effective women are those who possess the inner qualities of gentleness and quietness. Because of these qualities, Christian women receive favour in God’s sight. This virtue should be emulated by all women in the society. This study has demonstrated that the submission in 1 Peter 3:1 does not mean subjugation or tyrannical oppression in the part of the husband but it implies women’s subordinate to their own husband even if their husbands are unbelievers.

Implication for the Society

This study reveals that in Nigerian society, there is a struggle for social equality between men and women. In view of this, there is quest for *egalitarianism* or *equalitarianism* between men and women (Umahi 68) Women in the society crave for equality between men and women because the society seems to view women with the same submission as in the family. Nevertheless, the Scripture specifically stated that their subjection is to their own husband. Consequently, women should be given privilege to exercise certain right in the society because they are also created in the image of God.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the message of Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-4 which focuses on the relationship of husband and wife can help reduce occurrences of disharmony among the couples and promote peaceful co-existence in Christian homes in Nigeria society. *Apostle Peter explains what harmonious Christian homes look like, with husbands and wives regularly serving one another to mutual benefit. Wives most efficiently assist their husbands by having good character, a beautiful spiritual life, and speaking reverentially, all of which definitely persuade their husbands. Husbands generally wish to love their wives when they seek to understand them and treat them with honour as an equal partner in life. Peter advises that their beauty should not come from outward adornment.* The significant means to having a positive witness to an unsaved spouse is living an exemplary Christian life as a faithful, submissive spouse. That obedience satisfies God and gives the authentication that honours the Lord Jesus Christ before the unsaved husband/wife.

Recommendations

1. Christian wives ought to be proactive in submitting to their husbands by taking into consideration his needs and fulfilling them. They should not

overthrow the order of society but to value it by showing deference and honour to their husbands.

2. Christian women should make themselves beautiful by pursuing a “gentle and quiet spirit” and not through elaborate hairstyles and gold jewelry. Though these might indicate status in society, but the fact remains, true beauty doesn’t come from expensive bags or classy shoes. Neither does it come from the latest make-ups, a modern half-naked dress or braided and costly hairstyle. Beautiful character comes from relationship with the Lord.
3. Christian wives should make it a point of duty to win their unbelieving husband to Christ through their submission to their husbands’ authority. They should also make every effort not to make their adornment as the source of her true beauty.

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