

Wives Who Win Without a War

by Terry Trivette

TITLE:	Wives Who Win Without a War
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SUBJECT:	Wives; Family; Home; Marriage
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OBJECTIVE:	The Bible teaches that a man who finds a wife finds a good thing. Those of us who are married to a good wife know how true that is. But, how can a wife be successful in today's complicated family circumstances? Dr. Terry Trivette shares a message straight from God's Word on this issue. This is another in the series on the family entitled, Homework.

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Introduction

Years ago, while Mark Twain was speaking in Utah, he got into an argument with a fellow over the issue of polygamy. The fellow said to him, "Can you give me a single passage of Scripture which forbids a man to have more than one wife?" Twain quickly responded, "Yes, 'No man can serve two masters'."

Someone has observed that "when a man and a woman are married, they become one. The trouble starts when they try to decide which one."ⁱ Alan King once said, "Marriage is nature's way of keeping people from fighting with strangers."ⁱⁱ

While many marriages do seem like a constant battle, the Word of God makes it clear that husbands and wives are supposed to enjoy wedlock, not deadlock. Marriage was designed to be a cooperation, not a conflict; a friendship, rather than a fight.

In I Peter, the Apostle Peter opens the third chapter by giving some instructions to Christian wives on how they are to conduct themselves in marriage.

While feminists and modernists would scoff at much of what Peter has to say, when this passage is carefully studied, we find in it some very practical and very helpful instructions on how a wife can win in her marriage without having to go through a war.

Far from restricting and demeaning the wife, as some have contended, in this text we find the Word

of God revealing the dignity, strength, and power of a godly wife.

As we study the words of Peter, there are three truths we draw from this text that reveal how a wife can do her part to build a successful and scriptural marriage. Notice first of all, Peter addresses:

I. The Compliance Of A Godly Wife

Though it is translated differently, what Peter says to Christian wives is essentially the same thing that the Apostle Paul says to them in Ephesians 5:22, and Colossians 3:18. In both of those verses, Paul calls upon the Christian wife to “submit” to her husband.

The same word that Paul uses for “submit” is the same word that Peter uses in the opening verse of chapter 3, where he says, “...ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands...”

Three times in the Word of God, wives are clearly called upon to submit themselves to the leadership of their husbands. While this is an obvious teaching in the Bible, it is nonetheless a hotly contested issue.

In 1998, the Baptist Convention of Texas split into two different groups, and a leading cause of the schism was the fact that the new Baptist Faith and Message was going to include a statement on the submission of wives to their husbands.

Whether a person likes what the Bible says or not, there is no avoiding the fact that the Scriptures clearly call for Christian wives to comply with a certain order in the home, and to submit themselves to the servant-leadership of their husbands.

With that being said, notice with me a couple of important truths regarding this compliant submission on the part of a godly wife. Notice first of all that:

A. It is not a sexist command

Those who disagree with the Biblical notion of a wife’s submission to her husband would say that this command insinuates that women are inferior to men, and that it demeans them as human beings to have to submit to the authority of a man.

This is a complete misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches regarding submission. The word that is translated “subjection” in I Peter, and “submit” in Ephesians, is a compound of two Greek words, and it simply means “under order”, or “under arrangement”.

It is a military term, and it describes how a soldier will submit himself to the authority of the officers who are ranked over him. This submission is not a confession of inferiority; it is simply an agreement to work within a particular order and structure.

Men and women alike practice this type of submission every day. When I take Grace to school on Thursday mornings, we drive through a school zone. There is a little, old lady who stands in front of that school with a whistle, and directs traffic.

Now the truth is, I am bigger than her, I am younger than her, and I am probably more educated than her. Not to mention the fact that she is on foot, and I am in a car, so that I could outrun her if I needed to.

In spite of all these advantages I might have over her, on Thursday mornings, I drive 10 miles an hour as I go through that school zone, because I choose to submit myself to the authority of that woman.

Wives, when the Bible calls on you to submit yourself to your husbands, God is not being a sexist. He knows you may be twice the person your husband is. This command is not a matter of personal ability. It is a matter of Biblical authority.

Notice something else about the compliance of a godly wife. Not only is this call for submission not a sexist command, notice further that:

B. It is not a subjective command

There are some women who read what the Bible says about submission, and they say to themselves, "That is not for me. That doesn't apply to my marriage and my life."

Some women think that this is an outdated principle. They think this is just a first-century, knuckle-dragging, chauvinist writing that has been annulled by women's liberation and the modern society.

For those who feel this way, I remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 5:18, Jesus said, "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law." Isaiah 40:8, says, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

The principle of compliance with the leadership and headship of the husband is not a subjective command that applied only in the ancient world.

There are other wives who believe that this command does not apply to them because of the particular man to whom they are married. One wife says, "I can't submit to my husband, because he is a bum. He doesn't have the sense to lead. I have to drag him, not follow him."

I want to be clear. I know that not all husbands are the leaders God has called them to be. Nevertheless, the Bible calls upon Christian wives to submit to the leadership of their husbands.

Therefore, as long as your husband is not leading you to do something that is contrary to the Word of God, if you are going to obey the Lord, you will submit to your husband.

The late Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say of families, "Anything without a head is dead. Anything with two heads is a freak."ⁱⁱⁱ God has established an order in the home. Within that order, the husband is to lead his wife with a loving leadership, and the wife is to submit to her husband as the head of the home.

Peter calls upon wives to live in subjection to their husbands. That is the compliance of a godly wife. Notice a second truth we draw from this text. Peter points us not only to the compliance of a godly wife, but also to:

II. The Character Of A Godly Wife

Look again at our text, and notice verses 3 and 4. Peter is still talking to Christian wives, and he says, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of 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."

Peter's instructions to Christian wives involve not only the arrangement of the home, but also the attitude of their heart. A godly wife is not just concerned with her biblical compliance. She is also concerned with her personal character.

While the husband is to lead, that does not mean that wife has no spiritual initiative of her own. Notice a couple of facets of the character of a godly wife. Peter tells us that a godly wife has:

A. The sense to pursue what is valuable

In verse 2, Peter discourages Christian wives from falling into the trap of thinking that how they look is more important than who they are.

Notice Peter says, "Don't let your 'adorning' be the outward things such as hair-do's, jewelry, and clothes." Notice that word "adorning" in verse 2. It is translated from the Greek word *kosmos*, and throughout the Bible, this word is translated as "world."

Think about that for a moment. In a sense, what Peter is saying is, "Wives, don't let your whole world

be the external things.” Is that not refreshing advice?

When you look at all the beautiful, skinny, perfect women plastered on the cover of magazines, and in commercials, it is not long before you realize that our world places a priority on external beauty.

The Word of God teaches, however, that what really matters is not the designer of your dress, or the size of it. Your worth and value are not determined by the smoothness of your skin, or the glitter of your jewelry.

Certainly, a godly woman should care about how she looks. However, a godly woman has sense to know that what is truly valuable about a person is not the color of their hair, but the condition of their heart!

Peter says in verse 4, “Let your world be the hidden person of the heart.” In other words, your husband doesn’t need a supermodel for a wife; he needs a saint.

What is most valuable to you and to your marriage is not that you look like Jessica Simpson, but rather that you live like Jesus! The character of a godly wife is such that she has the sense to pursue what is truly valuable!

Notice another facet of a godly wife’s character. It is not only the sense to pursue what it valuable, but it is also:

B. The strength to practice what is virtuous

Contrary to what you might think, a godly, submissive wife is not a weak woman. In fact, a woman of spiritual character is a remarkably strong woman.

Notice what Peter says in verse 4. He says that rather than all the external decorations of superficial beauty, a godly woman should display “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit...”

Mark those two words “meek” and “quiet”. The word that is translated “meek” is an interesting word. Most people equate meekness with weakness. That, however, is not at all the meaning of the word.

Meekness is an inward calm. It is power under control. It is a purposeful gentleness and mildness of nature toward others.

Look at the word “quiet”. The Greek word that is translated as “quiet” doesn’t mean someone who whispers, or says nothing. It is a word that describes the ability to control one’s emotions, and to be peaceful and tranquil, in spite of what is going on around you.

Peter is not describing a weak, shy, timid, scared woman. In fact, it takes a woman of deep strength to be able to control herself and her emotions, and deal peacefully and gently with people.

A comedian once said, “I haven’t spoken to my wife in years. I didn’t want to interrupt her.” Unfortunately, some wives feel that they have to be loud and assertive in order to accomplish what they want. They feel like if they don’t speak their minds, no one will know what they think.

Peter says that a godly wife is strong enough to practice the virtue of restraint and control, and knows that the last word isn’t always the most important one.

In our text, there is a third truth we find relating to a godly wife. Peter writes not only about the compliance of a godly wife, and the character of a godly wife, but also lastly, he deals with:

III. The Capabilities Of A Godly Wife

Look back with me at verse one. Peter makes a fascinating statement in these verses. He says, “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 the wives.”

Notice that phrase, “if any obey not the word”. Here Peter is referring to the husband. He speaks to the wives who may be married to a man who does not obey the Word of God. The idea is of a husband who is defiant and resistant to the Word of God.

This could be a husband who is lost, or it could also refer to a Christian husband who is not living for the Lord. Peter says that this spiritually defiant husband can be won by the holy life of a godly wife.

Someone once said that, “...a groom is one who has underestimated the power of a woman.”iv Peter tells us that we should not underestimate the potential power and influence that can be exerted by a godly wife.

Notice with me a couple of things about the capabilities of a godly wife. Notice first of all, that a godly wife has the capability:

A. To silently witness to her husband

Look again at verse one. Peter says that wives should live in submission to their husbands, so that if a woman is married to a man that does not obey the Word of God, “...they may also without the word be won by the conversation of their wives.”

Essentially what Peter says is that a godly woman is capable, by her godly life alone, to win her husband to the Lord, without saying a single word to him about the Lord. That is a remarkable statement.

How does it work? Look at verse 2. Peter says the lost husband may be won, “While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.” Look at that phrase “chaste conversation.” It literally means a pure life.

Whenever a Christian woman is married to a man who does not live for the Lord, the temptation is to preach at him, and to try to persuade him through persistent nagging or harping on him, reminding him that he needs to do right.

Peter says that godly wives have not been called to preach, just practice. If you will just submit to God, and then to your husband, and walk with the Lord in a quiet, humble, reverent, and pure life, that is all the preaching your husband will need.

Warren Wiersbe tells of a Christian woman he knew who wanted desperately for her husband to be saved. Because she wanted him to hear the truth, whenever her husband was home, she would turn on the Christian radio station, and play it so loud it could be heard all over the house. Wiersbe said that this only made it easier for the husband to leave and hang out with his unsaved friends.v

Peter teaches us that a godly wife wins her husband, not through his ears, but through his eyes. She has the capabilities of silently witnessing to her lost or backslidden husband.

Notice something else Peter tells us about the capabilities of a godly wife. Not only can she silently witness to her husband, but also further, she has the capability:

B. To supernaturally work on her husband

In verses 1 and 2, Peter tells us that as an unsaved and rebellious husband watches the pure life of his godly wife, he can be won without a single word from the wife.

I want you to notice that word “won” in verse 1. This is a truly interesting word. It is translated from an old Greek word that literally means “to wise up”, or to “act cleverly”.

It describes someone who wins a game by using good strategy and wisdom. In other words, Peter says that a godly wife can win her husband over to the Lord if she does so carefully and wisely.

I believe that most Christian wives want a godly husband to lead them. However, in many marriages, the husband seems to lag behind spiritually.

What is needed is for God to do a supernatural work in the heart of husbands that makes them as passionate for the Lord as their wives are.

What makes I Peter 3:1-2 so important to godly wives is that in this text Peter says that if you will obey the Word of God in your own life, you have the capability of helping to bring about the supernatural change that needs to take place in the life of your husband.

Billy Graham and his late wife, Ruth, were married for almost 64 years, prior to her death in 2007. Not long before she died, Billy Graham said "I cannot imagine living a single day without her by my side."

Their marriage was a wonderful testimony of a godly couple. Someone once asked Billy about their long marriage. He answered, "If there is a secret to our marriage, it is Ruth."

While the godly home must be led by a godly husband, the secret behind that godly husband will always be a godly wife who silently, but supernaturally works to influence her husband for Christ.

IV. Conclusion

I read about a group of pastor's and their wives who gathered for a three-day retreat. During one of the sessions, the couples were testifying about how God had blessed their lives and ministries.

One young preacher's wife stood up and nervously testified. She said, "The Bible promises that, 'No good thing does the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly'. Well," she said, "my husband is one of those 'no good things'."

Wives, at times it may seem like you are married to one of those "no good things." However, regardless of the kind of husband you have, the Bible is clear about the kind of wife you should be.

You are called to comply with the God-given order of the headship of your husband. You are to be a woman of depth and character, who does not live her life for the superficial things of this world, but understands the value of godly character.

Most of all, the Word of God reminds you that as a godly wife, you have the power to persuade your husband's heart and soul for Christ without a fight and a struggle. My prayer for you is that God will help you all to be wives who win without a war.

i Pentz, Croft, *The Complete Book of Zingers*, (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1990), p. 193

ii Marriage, sermonillustrations.com, accessed 3/19/09, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/m/marriage.htm>

iii Rogers, Adrian, *Adrianisms*, (Love Worth Finding Ministries, Memphis, TN, 2006), p. 92

iv Pentz, Croft, p. 189

v Wiersbe, Warren, *Be Hopeful*, (Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1989), p. 70