

## PILGRIMS PROMOTING GODLY UNITY

We turn today to that passage from God's Word found in I Peter 3:1-12. Peter is still addressing elect strangers. These elect strangers must often suffer for Jesus' sake. They can expect that on this earth. At the same time, these elect strangers have a very specific calling of God while they are here on this earth. In chapter 2 we have seen that they are called to obedience to those in authority. Christians are not rebels in this earth--though they are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Christians are to be good members of the earthly kingdoms in that they obey kings, rulers, and all in authority. Such obedience was seen further in their relationship to the "master" or employer. Again, the child of God does not see how he can gain the upper hand, nor does he seek to use force to attain unto his own desires, but he is in proper and Scriptural submission to the "master" also. That sort of relationship is simply not understood by those of this world. Yet the child of God must practice his "Christianity" in that he walks in all godliness in every relationship.

Now the apostle progresses beyond this question of obedience, to speak of the other relationships we have on this earth. In every relationship, godliness must become evident. And perhaps that one relationship where our "Christianity" shows more than any other, is in the marriage relationship. The world has departed very far from the requirements of Scripture on marriage. Those within the church also have been affected by the standards and practices of this world. Therefore the reminder of this passage is very necessary. And if it runs contrary to the movements and endeavors of our day, then understand that this is God's Word which speaks--not simply myself.

Peter speaks first to wives--in fact, he does so in the first six verses. Did they need the instruction worse than husbands--to whom only one verse is devoted? Likely not. Yet some important instruction must first be given to wives.

The key word to wives is: subjection. Not only that, this subjection is required of Christian wives who, evidently, had unChristian husbands. These wives faced two evils. First there was that temptation not to dwell in subjection to their husbands at all. After all, if they belonged to Christ, were they not of greater importance than their unbelieving husbands? Were they not made free through the blood of the Lamb? Could they not then throw off the yoke of submission unto their husbands? Besides, their husbands did not believe. Were they not justified in rebelling against the authority of such husbands?

But the Word of God demands subjection--without any apologies. Subjection means exactly that wives place themselves under their own husbands. Verse 6 clearly explains this subjection when Peter points to Sarah who obeyed Abraham and called him "Lord".

And such subjection was not simply the requirement of a different age and different land. Some claim so. These insist that this requirement of Scripture does not apply to us today. I strongly disagree. There is no indication at all in the passage and all of Scripture that this is a time-conditioned command. Wives must be submissive to their husbands in all lawful things.

Why make a point of this? Simply because, as a result of sin in this world, none would be in subjection. Everyone would be masters. And the same is true of wives--even Christian wives. These would persuade themselves that they are just as wise or clever as their husbands. They have more common-sense. They have every gift and more than the husbands have. Why submit? Yet Scripture teaches that God first created Adam as ruler over the earthly creation. Then God created Eve to be a help meet for Adam. Read Genesis 2 on that. Eve was not inferior--but she was made to be a help to Adam. A person may be more intelligent and cleverer than the president of the United States, but this does not make him to be equal in authority. So with wives. It was part of the creation ordinance. No women's lib movement, no constitutional amendment can change this teaching of Scripture.

And Christian wives can use this godly submission as a means whereby ungodly husbands might be brought to conversion. Their husbands do not obey the word--not the word spoken by their wives either concerning Christ crucified. But these same husbands, without the word, see the fruit of godliness in the circumspect walk of their wives. And God uses that walk as the means to bring some of these unbelieving husbands to repentance before Christ.

How must the Christian wife walk in this world? Before her husband as well as before the whole world, she is to show a pure (chaste) conduct. She is to do this "with fear"--not fear of her husband, nor fear of what others might say. She conducts herself "with fear" of God--that spiritual virtue according to which she dreads the very thought of offending God and walking contrary to His Word.

Much of that godly conduct can be discerned in the "adorning" of such wives. We live today in a fashion-conscious age. Some of this has been true through all ages of this earth. Men, but especially women, are conscious of their appearance. So this Word of God gives

direction concerning woman's fashion. Nor is that inappropriate. Some things need saying badly--and we need these today too. Nor ought we to dismiss this instruction with the idea that it was for another age and nation. We are warned in all of this also.

First, Paul warns concerning adorning or fashion which involved the "plaiting of the hair, wearing of gold and putting on of apparel." Now obviously, the Word of God does not condemn dress or fashion as such. But there was the excess which was condemned. The "plaiting of the hair" was more than just proper grooming. It was the custom to fashion one's hair elaborately in large piles. Women were even afraid to sleep at night lest they disturb their hair. So today one often sees women who are more concerned with their hair and general appearance than anything else. These live for fashion. They will sacrifice anything, family or even church, to maintain their life's style. So also with the wearing of gold ornaments. Here too there was often the showy display of jewelry. Many did this in Paul's day by decoration of their hair with valuable trinkets. So today, often jewelry to enhance one's appearance is used. Many simply live for gold or silver, diamonds or pearls.

So also Paul comments on the dress of women. Some insist on that which is most fashionable. Understand: Paul is not condemning careful dress. He is not saying anything against neatness and attractive clothing. Rather, he condemns again display. Then as now, many will use dress to display themselves. Dress is used to arouse sexual appetites. Dress is used to gain attention and admiration. Fashionable dress is used to show that one is better than another. Even within the church, often the dress especially of women may reflect attitudes of Paris, New York, or Hollywood rather than the teachings of Scripture. This is what is wrong and what must be condemned. And any Christian wife, who would show before her husband that Christianity has its fruit also in our personal lives, would fail in this were she to imitate the standards and practices of this world in her dress.

Positively, the Christian wife must have a spiritual adornment. This is a matter of the heart--the "hidden man of the heart". The apostle refers to that new life of Christ, which Scripture calls the "new man", which is worked within the spiritual center of a person. So also a wife must reflect this different, this new, life in all that she does.

That is seen in her in that she displays a "meek and quiet spirit". Surely the idea is

not that she allows herself to be trampled underfoot. Rather, her meekness represents that kind and gentle disposition which ought to be seen in every child of God. She seeks not first her own welfare, but the welfare of another. And she is of a "quiet spirit"--that is, she seeks not the rule nor authority in her home. She does not put herself forward. But she rather recognizes the proper position of her husband as head of the home.

All of this is the submission which this Scripture speaks of. The wife is not a slave. She does, however, recognize the creation ordinance, recorded in Genesis 2, in which the wife is made to be an help to her husband.

So, says Paul, godly wives did in the past. They were adorned with these godly attributes. The prime example is Sarah herself. Sarah was married to Abraham. And Sarah had definitely a mind of her own. She had her own ideas and sometimes set them forth in an unreasonable way--as for instance, when she persuaded her husband to marry the maid, Hagar, in order to have children by her. Yet Sarah, generally, was obedient and submissive. She would obey her husband Abraham. One can read of all of this in Gen. 12 and following chapters. It's very instructive for Christian wives.

Sarah indicated her obedience in the very way she addressed her husband: "Lord". She recognized and acknowledged her relationship as God had established this. Nor ought we quickly to suggest that there was something wrong with Sarah or with the age in which she lived. On the contrary, she rightly understood that Scriptural calling to obey her husband for God's sake. Such women are not "afraid with any amazement", that is, they are not frightened by any threat or intimidation. These, rather, carry out their calling with the confidence that God will keep and bless them.

All of this ought to have something to say to husbands and wives, of course, but also to potential husbands and wives. The Christian young maiden ought not to seek a husband by trying to attract him to her because of her physical beauty. Nor ought a young man be attracted first of all by physical display. For both, the central and important factor must be: does this one serve the Lord? Is there the evidence of the "hidden man of the heart"? Two young people who look for this in each other, can be assured also of a blessed and spiritually enriching marriage.

But there is a word also to the Christian husband in verse 7. He is directed to give

honor to the wife. For just as the wife, by nature, is not inclined to be subject to her husband, even so it is not the nature of man to give proper honor to his wife. It is true, because of the fact of sin, that man is inclined to use his greater force to compel his wife to serve him. He is by nature a tyrant. Therefore the Christian husband must hear the word of the Lord to him: he is to show that proper honor toward his wife.

Such is done when the husband dwells with his wife "according to knowledge." Such can not mean that he must know the nature of woman in order to dwell with her properly. Nor is he to be a "well-versed" fellow, knowing many things. But he is to reveal a spiritual knowledge of marriage and the proper relationship of husband and wife. He must know and remember that God instituted marriage in which two are made one--and remain one as long as both of them shall live. He must know that marriage has as its purpose the bringing forth of the children of God's church. He must understand that his marriage must reflect that perfect marriage between Christ and His church as described in Eph. 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it...." Thus he is to remember that "honor" includes a proper love towards his wife.

The husband, then, is warned not to make of his marriage some sort of selfish, lustful tie, or that sort of arrangement whereby he obtains for himself some kind of legal slave, or that he might think that it is a union which can quickly be broken if things don't go right. There must be reflected a permanence in this union, a spiritual unity between two who love the Lord, a desire to serve God together in establishing a home and raising a family.

Thus will he show dignity and esteem toward his wife. He will not take advantage of her submission. He recognizes her as the weaker vessel, that is, one who is physically not as strong as he. Then, these live as co-heirs of the grace of life. They together seek the kingdom of God in heaven.

So too, prayers will not be "hindered." When two do not live together as God's Word requires, they can not properly and spiritually pray either. When the home is divided, prayer becomes difficult or impossible. But those who respect God's Word and obey His command, find that they can approach God in prayer, knowing that He hears and answers.

Now follow some more general admonitions in verses 8 and 9. Not only must there be

that spiritual relationship between husband and wife, but a loving relationship must exist between brethren. The heart of this instruction is that one is to love as brethren. This love is that strong emotional tie which those who are closely related to each other have. This love is not of natural origin, but is rooted in that love of God shown to His people through Jesus Christ. It is not a self-seeking love, but one which is spiritually inspired.

It is from such love that proceeds a oneness of mind. Christians do not, of course, all have the exact, same opinions. There are diversities of thought and idea. Yet among brethren, united in Christ, there is agreement concerning the basic doctrines of Scripture. These agree concerning the Trinity, the atonement of Christ for His people, in the resurrection from the dead, in the assurance of Christ's return. On the basis of such oneness, children of God can worship and praise the living God.

In brotherly love, there is compassion shown. Literally, this is to be "sympathetic". This compassion is often shown by children of God towards those who experience great sorrow or pain or grief. Such know how to reassure and comfort from the Word of God. These also know how to rejoice in the joys of fellow saints. Each can thank God for the benefits He has bestowed upon members of the church.

These are also "pitiful", or literally, "tender-hearted". Scripture speaks also of "bowels of compassion". We seek to help children of God especially in their times of trial and great need. Never would we neglect them in their necessities--we "feel" for them.

And finally, there must be "courteousness", or, lowliness of mind; humility. Christians think not more of themselves than they ought. But these seek always to elevate the brother above themselves. They would not lord it over others, but rather seek to serve to the glory of God's Name.

All this is impossible for one who is not born-again and converted. Man's nature is to render "evil for evil"; he will give "railing for railing". We might say, he returns "tit for tat". Someone hurts us, we are inclined then to hurt him back. One is inclined to speak evilly of others; to seek to destroy the good character of another. All such is prompted by the devil.

Children of God are called to walk in all holiness overagainst his neighbor. He understands that such is the calling God gives to born-again saints. And thus also he enjoys

or inherits the blessings. Consciously he enjoys what God has provided for His people in Christ: fellowship with God; an abundance of wisdom and understanding; assurance of eternal life.

So we must also continue to walk who are called in Christ our Lord. We are led by the Spirit of Christ to serve God and love brethren. Nor may we ever neglect this high calling.

Finally, in verses 10 through 12 we have a prescription for the "good life". Many have been concerned with that "good life". It has been equated with free enterprise; others have equated it with communism or socialism. Many have insisted that it consists of eating, drinking, and marriage. But such is contrary to this instruction of Scripture. Paul quotes from Psalm 34:12-16 to remind us what is the teaching of all of Scripture. There we read of those who love life and would see good days. The reference is first to those of Israel who enjoyed the blessings of God in Canaan in the way of obedience. These enjoyed life there and had good and long days. Such pictures the spiritual position of the child of God. The "good life" then represents the wonderful fellowship and communion with God through Jesus Christ. That, after all, is the essence of true life. This one then also has good days. For he enjoys eternally this blessed relationship with God.

He who desires such a glorious relationship must understand that first what he is not to do. This is the negative side of what was taught earlier: love the brother. He must beware the evil use of the tongue. We read also of the misuse of the tongue in James 3 where it is called a "world of iniquity". One may not speak evilly of another; he is to refrain from that all-too-common practice of gossip. He must guard his lips so that nothing passes through these which in any way hurts or destroys another.

Positively, he must follow peace and pursue after it. Peace is that wonderful spiritual relationship between God and His people in Christ whereby all that had caused separation is removed. We must chase peace, that peace of a right relationship with God. We are to pursue it as that which is glorious and desirable. That peace never can exist where there are wagging tongues and evil talk. But it is evident where there is the care and concern for God's Word and His people.

Each one does all this in the consciousness that God sees and knows all that he does. God is not a God Who is unaware of what happens in this earth. He has "eyes" which see every

action of each individual. He has "ears" which hear every word spoken. None can escape the observation of this almighty, sovereign God.

And the testimony of Scripture is that this God has His face against those who do evil. They get away with nothing. They can not fool God. When His face is against them, it means that they must endure His anger. To turn away one's face from another indicates strong disapproval. In the case of God, the turning of His face suggests punishment upon the evil doer now and finally after death in hell. That is the certain and terrible end of all those who hate God and deny His Word.

But this same God sees the righteous. He rejoices in that righteousness--and He does so because these have received righteousness from Jesus Christ. And God hears their prayers. When His people cry to Him, God answers and strengthens. What an incentive, then, to the child of God to continue in a godly walk! One may face great trials while on earth. He is indeed a pilgrim and stranger. But he has a God Who is almighty. He can speak to that God and know that He hears. The lot of spiritual strangers is then blessed indeed.