

Sarah's Submission: Peter's Analogy in 1 Peter 3:5–6

MICHAL BETH DINKLER

Introduction

In chapter 3 of his first letter, Peter¹ draws an analogy between Christian wives of the first century and the Old Testament matriarch Sarah. This directive (1 Peter 3:5–6) subsequently has been used to support the view that, universally, every woman “should submit to her husband as she submits to the Lord.”² On the other hand, some scholars hold that this passage simply “reinforc[es a] dominant patriarchal system and phallogocentric mindset” and should be rejected altogether as oppressive to women.³ How are we to understand Peter's charge? Is this a universal, divinely inspired mandate for hierarchical marriage relationships? Or is Peter hopelessly patriarchal and irrelevant? In fact, Peter's rhetoric points to an entirely different conclusion: Peter advocates qualified submission to non-Christians in order to be a witness for Christ's self-sacrifice.

The passage states literally:

v. 1: In the same way, wives, submitting to your own husbands, in order that also, if they are unbelievers of the word, by the conduct of the wives, without a word, they will be won over,

v. 2: having seen your reverent and pure conduct.

v. 3: (Let) it not be the outer adornment, the braiding of hair and wearing of gold or putting on of garments,

v. 4: but the hidden person of the heart, in the immortality⁴ of the gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great value in the sight of the Lord.

v. 5: For in this way formerly also the holy women, the ones hoping in God, were adorning themselves (by) submitting to their own husbands,

v. 6: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, of whom you will be made children if you continue doing good and not being made afraid by any fear.⁵

Women in the Greco-Roman world

In 3:1, we read that, in this section, Peter directly addresses the *gunaikes*, or “wives.” However, he is not addressing all wives; he qualifies his address by speaking particularly to wives of “unbelievers/those who disobey the word” (*apeithousin tō logō*).⁶ This point is crucial to understanding Peter's directive to wives in 3:1–7, because his primary purpose is evangelistic: he instructs his readers to endure so that unbelievers might “be gained/won over” (*kerdēthēsontai*).

In order to appreciate Peter's instructions to Christian wives, one must understand that the place of women in first-century Greco-Roman society often made conversion to Christianity a dangerous undertaking. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman women were expected to obey the *paterfamilias*, the “father of the family.”

These highest ranking males legally could “‘throw out’ babies, resort to prostitutes and make life miserable for their wives.”⁷ Still, because of their superior social status, husbands “had more to lose socially from conversion to an unpopular minority religion,” and, accordingly, “Christianity spread faster among wives than husbands.”⁸

Even more germane to our text is the fact that a wife was expected to worship her husband's god(s), or face the charge of atheism.⁹ Thus reads Plutarch's assertion: “It is becoming for a wife to worship and know only the gods that her husband believes in.”¹⁰ Furthermore, for wives to reject “the family religion determined by their husband would be more public, as well as more intimate,” and would be particularly threatening to fathers, because “wives were responsible for raising children for the first period of the children's lives.”¹¹

Mosaic law testifies to the low social status of Jewish women as well.¹² Gilbert Bilezikian observes that “the Old Testament word for husband (*baal*) was also used for ‘master,’ ‘owner,’ and ‘lord,’” and that “the legal status of a married woman was that of a child in relation to the ruler of a house.”¹³ A woman's low social status also made her economically dependent on her husband. In practical terms, this was a necessary, but not ideal, hierarchy. Thus, “Peter's advice is practical, not harsh as it might sound in our culture. Although philosophers' household codes often stressed that the wife should ‘fear’ her husband as well as submit to him, Peter disagrees (v. 6; cf. 3:13–14). . . . Christian wives were limited in their options, but Peter wants them to pursue peace without being intimidated.”¹⁴ Peter's instruction was not only practical; it was also radical. As Campbell asserts, “Undoubtedly, the Christian wives to whom Peter writes have virtually no chance for an egalitarian marital arrangement. Yet for them to remain faithful Christians, maintaining their own religious identity . . . is quite revolutionary.”¹⁵

Here, we turn to Peter's overall purpose: to exhort believers to glorify God in suffering, so others will be encouraged to glorify God. David Balch reminds us that the household codes in 1 Peter perform an “apologetic function,” since “the lack of submission of wives to their husbands would be a source of slander or blasphemy against Christianity.”¹⁶ However, Balch also reaches the untenable conclusion that Peter is advocating total “acculturation to Roman society.”¹⁷ Campbell disagrees with Balch, and yet he also

MICHAL BETH DINKLER is a doctoral student in New Testament/Early Christianity at Harvard Divinity School. She holds the Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and the Master of Arts and Bachelor of Arts degrees in English Literature from Stanford University. She also is a candidate for ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Prior to pursuing doctoral work, she served as the Associate Editor for *Priscilla Papers*.



draws a problematic conclusion; he argues that, in this instance, Peter “agrees with the morality of the larger Greco-Roman culture.”¹⁸ On the contrary, Peter does not admonish wives to reject their Christian faith, nor to merge their husbands’ religion(s) with Christianity, both of which could entail either acculturation or endorsement of those cultural values. Instead, Peter tells the women to remain committed completely to their faith and committed completely to their husbands.

The complications involved in a wife’s conversion, as well as admonitions to avoid being “unequally yoked,”¹⁹ may have led Christian women to contemplate leaving their unbelieving husbands. Yet, Peter does not advise Christian women to reject their pagan husbands because he is concerned about the survival of the women and the salvation of the men. The husbands are to be “won over” (*kerdēthēsontai*) by their wives’ good “conduct” (*anastrophēs*).²⁰

Wider literary context: Sarah and Abraham

Umberto Eco rightly observes that “no text is read independently of the reader’s experience of other texts.”²¹ Intertextual frames inform the way we understand a specific text; a text’s immediate literary context, as well as its general literary context, provide clues to which we refer when we are filling textual gaps and resolving textual ambiguities.

In our text, Peter is drawing an analogy between first-century Christian women and the Old Testament figure of Sarah. Even in the first century, Sarah, first named Sarai,²² carries authority, since, “together with Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, [Sarah] was deemed in Judaism to be one of the four mothers of the chosen people.”²³ The author of Hebrews commends Sarah because she received the power to conceive “in faith” (*pistei*).²⁴

Because Peter makes a specific reference to the Old Testament, determining the text to which he refers is essential to understanding his intention. At a cursory glance, it might seem tenable that 1 Peter 3:6 (“calling him ‘lord’”) refers to the only instance in Scripture in which Sarah literally calls Abraham her “lord.”²⁵ Genesis 18:12: “And Sarah laughed in her inward part, saying, ‘After I am worn out, will delight come about for me, (even) when my lord is old?’”²⁶ However, this verse does not occur in a context of obedience. Genesis 18 tells the story of Sarah overhearing the “three men” (*anashim sheloshah*) proclaim to Abraham that she will give birth to a son. Presumably, Sarah “obeys” Abraham by baking cakes as he tells her to do in 18:6 (though we never hear of them again), but, by 18:12, the scene has changed. She is now hiding at the door of the tent.²⁷ Abraham is not directing her in any way; he is not even aware that she is there.²⁸

As Aída Besançon Spencer notes, “a superficial understanding of 1 Peter . . . does not fit Genesis 18:12 or Sarah’s personality or characteristic behavior.”²⁹ Spencer concludes that Genesis 12:11–20 and 20:6–9 “[fit] Peter’s context better.”³⁰ These narratives are examples of what Robert Alter refers to as “scene-types,” repeating stories that develop common themes in biblical narrative, such as the several times “a patriarch is driven by famine to a southern region where he pretends that his wife is his sister.”³¹

In Genesis 12 and 20, Sarah actually does obey Abraham. However, in these instances, Abraham is no God-fearing, selfless husband. He “disowns the beautiful Sarai as wife, calls her his sister, and allows Pharaoh [and Abimelech] to use her, thereby ensuring his own survival, even his prosperity.”³² In fact, at the time of these stories, Abraham is “an example of a husband disobedient to the word.”³³ Though Abraham initially obeys God and leaves his home in faith,³⁴ he does not trust that God will protect him in accordance with God’s promise; instead, he takes matters into his own hands at the expense of his wife. For this reason, he is held culpable and Sarah is exculpated.³⁵

Peter does not refer to Abraham and Sarah because Abraham is a model husband; quite to the contrary. Abraham is an example of the husband in 1 Peter 3:1 “who does not believe/obey the word.” Nor does Peter cite these Genesis stories because Abraham holds a perpetual superior position over Sarah. Rather, “Sarah’s case was cited in full knowledge of the fact that Abraham pointedly obeyed his wife as often as she obeyed him, once even under God’s specific command (Gen. 16:2, 6; 21:11–12).”³⁶

Sarah and Abraham are a fitting example for Peter’s audience in 1 Peter 3 because, in many ways, Sarah’s situation paralleled that of first-century women. As David Wheaton writes, because “the domestic economy depended on the husband earning a living for the family, it was natural that the wife should look to him to make decisions concerning where they should live etc. Sarah’s readiness to go with Abraham in obedience to God’s call is an example of this kind of relationship.”³⁷ The dangers inherent in a first-century woman’s conversion to Christianity also are analogous to the perils faced by Sarah, misrepresenting herself in a foreign ruler’s palace; nevertheless, Sarah courageously “chose to save her husband’s life.”³⁸

Most importantly, Peter presents Sarah as a “Christ-like example” because she is “willing to suffer vicariously” for her husband.³⁹ Even when Abraham disobeys God, Sarah obeys Abraham, selflessly offering herself in order (potentially) to save the life of her husband. This is the very task to which Peter calls believing Christian wives.

The book of 1 Peter: themes and style

The most prominent theme in 1 Peter is that of living for Christ in the midst of persecution and suffering. To Peter, there are two intimately related reasons for persevering with faith in Christ. Christians’ *motivation* is the gospel of God’s salvation for believers, and their *purpose* is evangelistic: they should exemplify Christ for unbelievers, thereby silencing critics and, ultimately, winning them to Christ through holy conduct.

Secondary themes in 1 Peter are related to the main foci above. As he elaborates about what “holy conduct” entails, Peter speaks of growing in salvation (2:1–5), of appropriate behavior outside (2:11–17) and inside the household (2:18–3:12), and of “shepherding” God’s flock (5:1–4).

The book of 1 Peter is written in a sophisticated Greek style. Peter makes frequent use of Old Testament quotations and allusions,⁴⁰ and he uses the rhetorical techniques of comparison,⁴¹

anaphora (the repetition of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences or clauses),⁴² polysyndeton (the repetition of conjunctions in close succession),⁴³ asyndeton (the omission of conjunctions),⁴⁴ and unique vocabulary.⁴⁵

In addition, 1 Peter is replete with examples of figurative speech, and 3:5–6 is no exception. Here, Peter draws an analogy⁴⁶ between Christian women and Sarah, using the conjunction *ōs* (“like/as”).⁴⁷ The analogy is a form of

authorial commentary and is apt for several reasons. Just as Sarah courageously “obeyed” Abraham even when he did not trust God, so wives of unbelievers can “obey” their husbands, thus honoring the established marital hierarchy (2:13) with courage (*mē phoboumenai mēdemian ptoēsīn*). Just as Sarah entered dangerous situations by being taken as a ruler’s wife, so Christian women entered potentially dangerous situations by converting without their husbands’ consent. Just as Sarah discerned when to obey Abraham and when to speak her mind, so wives of unbelievers should be judicious about when to obey their husbands. Nevertheless, all tropes are limited; one should not indiscriminately extrapolate such comparisons, neither in every sense, nor into all cultures across time.

Peter also uses figurative language to describe women “adorn- ing themselves” (*kosmeō*) with immaterial qualities. This image conveys intentional choice, since we deliberately clothe ourselves. Clothing is the outer layer people see when they look at us. In the same way, Peter advises Christians to exemplify godly qualities, so that these are what people observe when they see them. Here, Peter echoes “dressing/clothing” language that also is used in other New Testament texts, namely by Paul and Jesus.⁴⁸

Immediate literary context: Peter’s three examples

First Peter 3:5–6 is embedded in the larger set of instructions for women to “(let) [your beauty] not be that which is outside, the braiding of hair and wearing of gold or putting on of garments of the world, but the hidden person of the heart, in the immortality of the gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great value in the sight of the Lord.” Here, Peter employs a negative/positive comparison (“not this . . . but that . . .”) to highlight that one’s greatest witness for Christ is not outer adornment, but, rather, one’s inner spirit.

The command governing this section of the letter, to “submit to human authorities for the Lord’s sake,”⁴⁹ should be read in light of that which directly precedes it: “Have your good conduct among the Gentiles, in order that in the slandering (of you) as criminals, *from seeing your good works, they may praise the Lord in the day of visitation.*”⁵⁰ It makes sense that, with this evangelistic purpose in mind, Peter would offer contemporary illustrations of “human authorities” to demonstrate his basic principle.

The example of wives’ submission to husbands is bracketed by two other examples relevant to hierarchical first-century society: the right behavior of slaves (2:18–20) and husbands (3:7). The progression of examples mirrors the hierarchy to which Peter refers: he addresses slaves (considered inferior to both wives and hus-

bands), then wives (considered superior to slaves, but inferior to husbands), then husbands (the position of authority considered superior to both slaves and wives). Some scholars make much of the fact that Peter does not tell husbands to “submit” to their wives, but rather to “be considerate/caring” of them and “treat them with respect” (3:7). However, because *paterfamiliae* represent the top level of authority, it would not make sense for Peter to

tell them literally to “submit” to anyone; there is no one above them in the first-century domestic chain of authority.⁵¹

Essentially, the succession of exam- ples is used as a synecdoche: an example from each major class in society serves to illustrate that all Christians, in every

stratum of society, must submit to and honor one another as wit- nesses for Christ. Peter underscores the inclusivity of the com- mand to submit in 3:8: “all” (*pantes*) “live in harmony with one another. . . .” This fact alone indicates that 3:1–7 is not meant to be a literal, universal injunction for marital hierarchy,⁵² since such a view takes the passage out of its biblical context.

In fact, such societal, authoritarian hierarchies have no place in the church, as Paul reminds the Galatians: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no lon- ger male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28 NRSV). Paul also admonishes husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:21 that they should be “submitting to one another out of rever- ence for Christ” (*Hupotassomenio allēlois en phobō Christou*).

Grammar and semantics

Peter’s grammatical choices also reflect his theological message. First Peter 3:5–6 is integrated into the larger unit of thought found in 3:1–6. Peter uses Sarah as an example to illustrate what has gone before—his admonitions for wives. Though 3:1 is the first verse to address wives directly, the initial *Homoiōs* (“likewise” or “in the same way”) indicates that Peter is linking the direc- tion that follows with an earlier instruction; the reader must refer back to Peter’s last directive, which we find in 2:18: “Slaves, sub- mit yourselves (*hupotassomenoi*) in all reverence to the masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the crooked.” This in- struction, however, should be viewed as a specific example of the general command that went before: “Honor all, love the brother- hood, fear God, honor the king” (2:17).⁵³ First Peter 2:17, in turn, refers back to the command in 2:13 to “be subject (*hupotassō*) to every human authority.” Thus, “submit” (*hupotassō*) is the only finite verb from 2:13–16 until we reach the string of imperatives in 2:17 (*timaō*, “honor,” and *agapaō*, “love”), and these two verbs should not be taken as a new line of thought. Peter employs them as synonyms for *hupotassō*, effectually equating *hupotassō* with intentionally choosing to respect others by loving them and fearing God.

Next, slaves are cited as a particular example, but verses 2:19–25 expound the conditions of everyone’s submission:⁵⁴ the situations in which they should suffer (even in unjust circum- stances),⁵⁵ the reason they should suffer unjustly (because Christ

suffered unjustly, setting an example for believers),⁵⁶ and the way they should suffer (with no deceit or retaliation, trusting in God).⁵⁷

When readers encounter the adverbial *homoios* in 3:1, they know this refers generally to the entire foregoing section, and, specifically, to the main instruction in verse 17. Peter employs *homoios* as a linking adverb twice in this section: 3:1 (linking the guidelines for slaves with the guidelines for wives), and 3:7 (joining the instructions to wives with the instructions to husbands).⁵⁸ Not until 3:8 does Peter indicate closure to this unit of thought: *to telos* (the end/finally). Thus, the verses from 2:18 to 3:8 make up a connected series that is subordinate to 2:17, which is itself an elaboration of 2:13.

In our text, 1 Peter 3:5, we enter into the middle of a sentence that began in 3:1 and continues the thought unit beginning in 2:13: “Be subject to every human authority on account of the Lord.” The dominating verb, *hupotassō*,⁵⁹ has been hotly contested among complementarian and egalitarian interpreters of Scripture.⁶⁰ Most important for our discussion is Peter’s use of the word elsewhere in this letter (see above). Even Peter’s use of *hupotassō* in reference to slaves (2:18) implies choice on the slaves’ part, since only two verses earlier (2:16) Peter orders them to live as *eleutheroi* (“free people”). Thus, in each of his injunctions to “submit” (*hupotassō*),⁶¹ Peter advocates “qualified submission,” because, in reality, “[Christians] are not really part of the structures of the present age.”⁶² Furthermore, Peter emphasizes that submission is a means of following Christ, who voluntarily underwent suffering.

Peter’s use of *hupotassomenai* in 3:5 could be viewed as a result participle or a means participle, but, either way, the intention of the woman is assumed because of the reflexive sense of the prior uses of *hupotassomenai* in 3:1 and 2:13. In fact, *hupotassō* never occurs in the New Testament in the active voice, which would signify imposing submission on another; it always connotes a shared decision, or intentionally submitting oneself to another. For instance, whenever Paul instructs children to obey their parents and slaves to obey their masters, he uses the imperative form of *hupakouō*, or “obey.”⁶³ In Paul’s parallel commands to wives,⁶⁴ he communicates a mutual decision of reciprocal submission by substituting the word *hupotassō*. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word *hupakouō* carries no reflexive connotation⁶⁵ and often is used to indicate obedience to the gospel and/or God.⁶⁶

In light of the foregoing discussion, are we to understand Peter’s use of the word *hupakouō* in verse 6 to mean that Sarah “obeyed” Abraham as a child would her parents, or as a slave would his master? In order to answer this question, the interpreter must return to the Old Testament, which Peter is referencing. In actuality, the Hebrew never directly states that Sarah “obeys” Abraham, and the Septuagint never uses the word *hupakouō* to describe her. In fact, the only time the word *hupakouō* is used in relation to Abraham is in Genesis 16:2 (*hupakousen*), and,

there, Abraham is “obeying” Sarah. Thus, Peter’s use of the word *hupakouō* clearly cannot refer to a universal stipulation for wives to “obey” their husbands as children would their parents or as slaves would their masters.

Suddenly, Peter uses a metaphor that would have been stunning to many in a first-century audience. The word *agathopoiou-sai* in 3:6 is a present active conditional participle. Thus, Peter says that, if wives keep “doing good,” they will become the “children” (*tekna*) of Sarah. Essentially, they will become her heirs, inheriting the promises Sarah received from God, just as men were considered the heirs of Abraham’s faith. In this culminating phrase addressed to wives of unbelievers, “spiritual heredity is traced from foremother to daughter,” a highly unusual image in the first century.⁶⁷

Contemporary application

As we have seen, Peter’s purpose in 1 Peter 3:5–6 is to present an example of effective witness to non-Christians that applies in his culture, not to endorse marital or social hierarchy for all time. Craig Keener avers that the only reason “Peter upholds societal norms” in certain instances, such as slavery and marital hierarchy, is “for the purpose of the church’s witness in society.”⁶⁸

Furthermore, Peter seeks to focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ⁶⁹ rather than on “unnecessarily divisive behaviors.”⁷⁰ Thus, Keener concludes:

[Peter’s] sympathy here is clearly with the woman, as it was with the slaves in 2:18–25. He continues to advocate submission to authority for the sake of witness and silencing charges that Christianity is subversive.⁷¹

Though these particular hierarchical structures may not apply to our twenty-first century culture, Peter’s principle continues to be relevant. Any time Christians must endure opposition from non-Christians, especially from someone in a position of authority over them, Peter’s advice remains apropos.

As Davids writes, “Ironically, interpretations that focus on the unilateral obedience or submission of wives to husbands, regardless of cultural context, achieve the opposite of Peter’s intention. Rather than promoting harmony with culture . . . Christianity is perceived as undermining culture in a retrogressive way. This is precisely what 1 Peter is seeking to minimize.”⁷²

Notes

1. While I recognize that the authorship of 1 Peter is debated in some circles, in order to avoid cumbersome constructions, I use the name Peter to refer to the author of the epistle that bears his name.
2. George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton, Ill.: Good News Publishers, 1991), 174.
3. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1992), 4.

4. In the Greek, there is no noun here. The adjective *aphthartō* (imperishable/immortal) is used substantivally. Because there is no exact English equivalent, English translations employ the words “beauty” (NIV, NIB, ESV, NAB, NRS), “quality” (NAS), “ornament” (KJV), or “jewel” (RSV). I have chosen the word “immortality” to convey the sense of the substantial adjective.
5. My original translation. All biblical citations are my translations unless otherwise noted.
6. Wayne Grudem, who argues that Peter is mandating the universal, unilateral submission of women to the authority of men, nevertheless remarks that in this passage, “Those who ‘do not believe the word’ are husbands who are unbelievers; the present tense verb (*apeithousin*) suggests a pattern of life characterized by unbelief or rejection not only of the gospel but also of God’s standards in other areas of life.” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 202.
7. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993; CD-ROM: Logos Digital Library System, 2003). Keener cites an example from the second century in which “a Christian divorced her husband for his repeated infidelity, so he betrayed her to the authorities as a Christian.”
8. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.
9. “Cults that forbade their participation in Roman religious rites, including prohibiting worship of a family’s household gods, were viewed with disdain, and Jewish or Christian women who refused to worship these gods could be charged with atheism.” Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. Even in early Christianity, we find examples where the male’s conversion to Christianity implies the conversion of the entire household: John 4:53; Acts 16:31–34, 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16; Heb. 11:7.
10. Quoted in Peter H. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage: 1 Peter 3:1–7,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed., ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 226.
11. Quoted in Davids, 234.
12. “The ancient Near East permitted the sale of girls to any male, whether domestic or foreign, and often for sexual purposes.” William J. Webb, “A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: The Slavery Analogy,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed., ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 389. Even in the Bible, we find that women were viewed as the property of men and were subject to the decisions of their fathers and husbands. For example, see Num. 30:1–16, Deut. 22:22, 28–29; 24:1–4. Whereas the virginity of a woman had to be proven (Deut. 22:13–19), that of a man did not; if the woman were found not to be a virgin, she would be stoned (Deut. 22:20–21). Whereas a woman caught in adultery was always stoned, a man caught in adultery was only to be stoned if he had slept with another man’s wife (Deut. 22:22–24).
13. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004), 63.
14. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.
15. Barth L. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter* (SBL Dissertation Series 160: 1998), 151.
16. David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBL Monograph Series 26:1981), 92.
17. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 93.
18. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter*, 125.
19. 2 Cor. 6:14.
20. 1 Pet. 3:1.
21. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations of the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1979), 12.
22. Gen. 11:29. God changes her name in Gen. 17:15.
23. Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 96.
24. Heb. 11:11.
25. The Hebrew word found in Gen. 18:12 is *adonai* (“lord/master”). In 1 Peter and the Septuagint, the word used is *kurios* (“lord/master/sir [of address]”). Most scholars agree that the word “lord” was used in ancient times as a term of respect, like “sir” (per Jacob to Esau in Gen. 33:13–14), and should not be taken as an indication that Sarah viewed Abraham as her literal “master.” For example, see Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 94.
26. As Hillyer writes, “The occasion . . . is when she reveals her incredulity that, despite their advanced years, she was to bear her husband a son (Gen. 18:12 LXX [Septuagint]). . . . Sarah’s response to Abraham on that occasion was an amused ‘My lord is rather old!’” Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, 94. The *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament* also cites Gen. 18:12 as the reference. *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 603.
27. 18:10.
28. See 18:9, where Abraham answers incorrectly when the men ask about Sarah’s location.
29. Aida Besançon Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10:1 (2000), 106.
30. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 106. See especially the chart of similarities between Genesis 12 and 1 Peter 3 (Table 1).
31. Isaac repeats his father’s contemptible behavior in Genesis 26. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1981), 47.
32. Phyllis Trible, “Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah,” *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Alice Bach (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1999), 281.
33. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 108.
34. The author of Hebrews commends Abraham for this act of faith (11:8).
35. See Gen. 12:18; 20:9, 16.
36. Gilbert Bilezikian, “The Subordination Challenge #5,” *Priscilla Papers* 16:4 (Autumn 2002), 7.
37. David Wheaton, “1 Peter,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1378.
38. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 114.
39. Spencer, “Peter’s Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6,” 113–144.
40. For example, see 1:10–12, 24–25; 2:6–8, 28; 3:5–6, 10–12, 20; 5:5, 7.
41. See the metaphors and similes in 1:14, 19, 23–24; 2:2, 4–8, 11, 25; 3:7; 5:2–3, 8.
42. Compare the use of the word *hupotassomenai* to begin clauses in 1 Pet. 3:1 and 3:5.
43. For example, see 1 Pet. 1:4, 7; 2:1; 3:22.
44. For instance, see 1 Pet. 2:9; 4:3.
45. There are sixty-two words in 1 Peter that occur nowhere else in the New Testament.
46. Richard Lanham defines analogy as “reasoning or arguing from parallel cases.” *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991), 10.
47. Though this comparison uses the word “like/as,” it is not a simile, because a simile compares two unlike things.
48. For example, Christians will be clothed with power “from on high” (Luke 24:49), with immortality (1 Cor. 15:54), and with the armor of light (Rom. 13:12). See also Paul’s extended metaphor in Eph. 6.
49. 1 Pet. 2:13.
50. 1 Pet. 2:12 (italics added).
51. We must note that not all men were *paterfamiliae*; those who were not *paterfamiliae* remained answerable to their fathers.
52. Most biblical interpreters would not conclude that Peter is calling for a universal system of slavery, yet some view his next two examples as a call for a universal obedience of women to men.
53. Campbell categorizes all of the participles in 1 Pet. 2:18–3:12 as “circumstantial,” rather than imperatival. He writes, “They describe circumstances attendant to the imperative *pantas timēate* of 2:17.” *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter*, 123.

54. Verse 25 further supports the view that vv. 2:19–25 refer to all Christians, since v. 25 clearly is not directed solely at slaves: “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (NIV).

55. 3:19–20.

56. 3:21.

57. 3:22–25.

58. Peter’s final use of *homoiōs* is in 5:5 (connecting the imperatives for elder church leaders to the imperatives for young men).

59. The word *hupotassō* can mean “to cause to be in a submissive relationship, to subject, to subordinate,” or “to subject oneself,” often with “a sense of voluntary yielding in love.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG), ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1042. For example, see 1 Cor. 16:16, Eph. 5:21.

60. For the complementarian view, see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991). For the egalitarian view, see Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

61. 2:18, 3:1.

62. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage,” 228 (italics added).

63. For example, see Col. 3:20, 22 and Eph. 6:1, 5. The word *hupakouō*

can mean “to follow instructions, obey, follow” as well as “to grant one’s request, hear,” and “to answer a knock at the door.” BDAG, 1029.

64. See Col. 3:18 and Eph. 5:21.

65. Romans 6:12, 16, 17 refer to the reign of sin in one’s life, which has no reflexive connotation. See also Luke 17:6, which implies no choice on the part of the *sukaminos* (“mulberry tree”) to obey.

66. Matt. 8:27, Mark 4:41, and Luke 8:25 refer to the wind and sea obeying Jesus, and Mark 1:27 describes the unclean spirits obeying Jesus. See also Acts 6:7; Rom. 10:16; Phil. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:8, 3:14; Heb. 5:9, 11:8.

67. Aída Besançon Spencer and Catherine Clark Kroeger, “1 Peter,” *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 787.

68. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.

69. Peter refers directly to the “proclamation of the gospel” twice (4:6, 17) and to “salvation” four times (1:5, 9, 10; 2:2). He names “Jesus Christ” nine times (1:1–3, 7, 13; 2:5; 3:21; 4:11), in addition to the “Spirit of Christ” (1:11), the “sufferings of Christ” (1:11; 2:21; 4:1, 13; 5:1), the “blood of Christ” (1:19), the “example” of Christ (2:21), the holiness of Christ (3:15), their “good behavior in Christ” (3:16), the “name of Christ” (4:14), God’s “eternal glory in Christ” (5:10), and to his readers as being “in Christ” (5:14).

70. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage,” 234.

71. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, n.p.

72. Davids, “A Silent Witness in Marriage,” 236.

APPENDIX: LESSON PLAN

This lesson plan is intended for late high school- and college-aged Christian students, but readers are invited to adapt it for the needs of their specific groups. The room should be arranged with circular tables, around which students will discuss in groups. Generally, the lesson is designed to take the students on a “journey”—beginning with their current understanding of the passage (and, concomitantly, the issues it addresses), back in time to Peter’s first-century audience, further back into the Genesis narratives of Sarah, and, finally, returning to “present day” to reexamine their understanding of the issues. The specific goals of the study include the following:

- To teach students the meaning of this passage in particular (especially as it relates to men and women) and thereby to impact their actions in the world as witnesses for Christ.
- To model the responsible use of historical, social, and linguistic backgrounds in the discernment of Scripture.
- To challenge students to think critically about the issues raised, in interaction with each other and the text.

Introduction: preconceptions (15 minutes total)

- At each table, students brainstorm together the messages they have heard about relationships between men and women (from any source—parents, media, church, friends, books, etc.)
- Each table shares with the larger group to compile one large list of preconceptions.
- Read 1 Peter 3:1–7 as a group.

- Around the tables, each group determines what this passage seems to be saying about the marriage relationship.
- Each table shares with the larger group. How similar or different is this list from the one you made previously? Take note of what makes you uncomfortable and/or confused.

Then and now: 1 Peter 3:5–6

Then: Stepping into the shoes of Peter’s readers
(15 minutes total)

The leader gives a short introductory synopsis of key background information (5 minutes).

Discuss the following as a table (10 minutes):

- Who is Peter’s audience in this passage?
- What is the place of each person listed in 1 Peter 2–3 (slave, wife, husband) in the domestic order of Peter’s first-century audience?
- How do you think each of these people would have reacted to Peter’s directions in 1 Peter 2 and 3?
- Imagine you are a Christian wife and your husband worships other gods. How do you feel? What do you want to do? Do you have children? How does that affect your thoughts?
- Imagine you are a non-Christian husband and your wife becomes a Christian. She wants to teach your children that Christianity is right. What do you think and feel? What do you want to do? How do you act?

- Why do you think Peter advises women to obey their non-Christian husbands?

Stepping into the shoes of Sarah (15 minutes total)

The leader gives a short introductory synopsis of key background information (5 minutes).

Together as a table, do the following (10 minutes):

- Read the passages about Sarah in Genesis 12, 18, and 20.
- Determine the passage(s) to which Peter is most likely referring. (Does Sarah “obey” Abraham? Does she “call him ‘lord’”? Does Abraham know Sarah is present in Genesis 18?)
- Imagine you are Sarah, and Abraham has told you to pretend you’re his sister. What do you think and feel?
- In light of how Sarah probably felt, why do you think Peter commends her for obeying Abraham?

Now: Back in your own shoes (35 minutes total)

Students discuss with their tables:

- In what ways has the social order changed since the first century? What are some examples of authority in our day? (Examples: parents, police, professors, supervisors at work, government, administration at school, etc.)
- How are these roles demarcated in our society? (Examples: executives/administrators are given parking spaces closer to the building, managers must sign off on certain activities, people must stand when a judge enters a courtroom, etc.)
- Where are you in the social order today? How is one’s level of authority determined by age, education, economic class, race, and/or situation in life?
- How does our culture view authority? (Examples: We distrust it, so we want a system of checks and balances. Even the highest authority in our land, the President, still has to answer to others. On the other hand, many people desire authority and work to achieve it for themselves; we celebrate promotions at work, etc.)
- In the interest of following biblical principles, should we go back to the social hierarchies of the first century? Why or why not?

Application questions

The leader presents each group with envelopes, in which they find the following different scenarios.

Using what you have learned and discussed tonight, together decide what you think Peter would tell you if you were in any of these situations. For example:

- You go on a mission trip to Romania, where women are not supposed to speak in church. The leader of the trip is an ordained minister who also happens to be a woman. The Romanian pastor asks her not to speak, preach, or pray in public. If she insists on her right to speak, is she hindering the spread of the gospel? If she agrees to remain silent, is she perpetuating a demeaning view of women?
- You have a professor who is hostile toward Christians. He is constantly making snide remarks in class about Christians, and he has even singled you out several times. Should you drop the class? Make a witty comment back in lecture? Confront him during office hours? Ignore him altogether? Report him to the administration?
- You’re getting married to a Christian. In your premarital counseling, the pastor asks you and your fiancé(e) what you believe about submission in marriage. What do you say? What do you do if your fiancé(e) disagrees with you?
- A woman in your church recently confided in you that her non-Christian husband has been abusing her. She believes that 1 Peter 3 says she should stay with her abusive husband as a witness to Christ’s suffering. If she leaves, he might never become a Christian. Is this passage sanctioning abuse? How do you counsel her?
- During the year, you’re in college, living on your own without any rules, but when you go home for Christmas, your parents want you to honor a curfew. Not only that, but the reason you want to stay out late is to go to a Bible study at your friend’s house. Your parents aren’t Christians, and they don’t understand your belief in God. Do you abide by the curfew and leave Bible study early? Do you tell them you’re an adult now and can make your own decisions? Do you invite your friends to hold the Bible study at your house?
- You work part-time as a grocery store clerk. Recently, a coworker was promoted to manager. She has started taking advantage of her higher position to give you jobs you hate. Sometimes she makes you mop the floor when another employee has done so already. What do you do? Do you go above her head and talk to her boss? Do you bite your tongue and view your labor as an example of Christ-like suffering? Do you invite her to church?

Closing

The leader asks how the students’ preconceptions have changed and then wraps up and reviews the general principles to be drawn from 1 Peter 3:5–6 (and its context).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 PETER 3:1-6 1In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. 3Your adornment must not be merely external braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.Â This entire chapter is related to Peter's discussion of "submission" of believers to government (1 Pet. 2:13-17) and believing slaves to their masters (1 Petl 2:18-20). Submission is not a negative term; it describes Jesus Himself. St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church, CA. Spring 2014. "Acts of the Apostles: The Church's Journey, Then and Now." 6-week Adult Education course. St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church, CA. Fall 2013. "The Gospel of Luke for the Season of Lent." 6-week Adult Education course. St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church, CA. Spring 2013. "Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels." 6-week Adult Education course. St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church, CA. Fall 2012. "Sarah's Submission: Peter's Analogy in 1 Peter 3:5-6." Priscilla Papers 21.1 (2006): 9-15. "Cloistered Redemption: E Peter's reference to the weaker vessel in 1 Peter 3 is related to his encouragement to wives to stay in unjust hierarchical marriages for the sake of Christ. A Gentle and Quiet Spirit is not just a Feminine Virtue | Marg Mowczko. In this post I show that the New Testament does not teach that a gentle and quiet spirit is an especially feminine virtue (cf. 1 Peter 3:4). I Believe In Love. Say I Love You I Fall In Love Hold My Hand Hold On 1 Peter 3 Love Is Not Enough Share My Life. Love My Husband. Submission and Respect from Husbands in 1 Peter 3:7-8 | Marg Mowczko. Many Christians believe In 1 Peter 3:5-6 the author of First Peter refers to the holy women of the past who were submissive to their own husbands, and then refers to Sarah who obeyed Abraham and called him master. A socio-historic interpretation of this exhortation to wives in 1 Peter 3:5-6, using Sarah's submissiveness to Abraham as example of submissiveness, is given. This is done in order to approximate the reception of this tradition in First Peter, and the way the letter's first hearers/readers (specifically the women) understood the author's exhortation, and to establish what the implications of this exhortation in chapter 3 of his first letter, Peter1 draws an analogy between Christian wives of the first century and the Old Testament matri-arch Sarah. This directive (1 Peter 3:5-6) subsequently has been used to support the view that, universally, every woman should submit to her husband as she submits to the Lord.2 On the other hand, some scholars hold that this passage simply reinforces a dominant patriarchal system and phallogocentric mindset and should be rejected altogether as oppressive to women.3 How are.4 In fact, Peter's rhetoric points to an entirely different conclusion: Peter advocates qualified submission to non-Christians in order to be a witness for Christ's self-sacrifice.