

Witnessing Without Words

For Better or For Worse, Part 2

1 Peter 3:2

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

The best gospel testimony that a spouse can give is that of their holy behavior and not their eloquent debating skills.

Discussion Points:

Christian wives in Peter's time were often married to unbelieving husbands. Peter knew this was a difficult situation for these ladies so he instructed them how they were supposed to deal with their relationship with this spiritually dead man.

- Why does Peter not simply tell these wives to leave their husbands?
- Why is it important that they continue to submit to the leadership of their unbelieving husbands?
- How does the continued love for their unbelieving husband exemplify the submission of Jesus to the will of God the Father?

In our world today there is a popular saying that "actions speak louder than words."

- What does this short saying mean?
- Does Peter seem to support or reject the sentiment of this adage in this passage?
- With this in mind, what is the responsibility of the wife, if she has any, for convincing her husband to trust Christ?

Peter talks in verse 1 how wives are supposed to submit to their husbands so that they might be won without a word.

- What does Peter point to as the best witness to an unbelieving husband?
- What does this behavior in a Christian wife look practically?

Peter focuses in this passage on specifically instructing wives who have unbelieving husbands.

- Does that mean he is not talking to wives who are married to Christian men?
- How can women in that situation apply Peter's instruction to their own lives?
- Should they behave in the same way or differently than women with unbelieving spouses?
- In what ways?

Discussion Guide cont.

Peter says that the unbelieving husband of a Christian wife will be closely observing the way she lives.

- What are the two attributes that Peter says a Christian wife should exemplify in her life?

If you have access to different Bible translations, compare the terms used to describe their behavior.

- How do these attributes reflect the behavior of Jesus Christ?
- How can they be shown in everyday life?

This kind of holy life must be lived in the public sphere as well as the private one.

- In what specific ways should a wife practice showing grace to her husband in public?
- What should she not do?
- In what specific ways should she exemplify the gospel to her husband at home?
- How could she undermine her witness and taint the gospel picture she is giving if she is not careful?

Gospel Connection:

The Gospel shows us the how what love is through the example of Jesus Christ sacrificing himself for our sake. He was submissive to the Father's will and showed utter selflessness as he thought of others more than himself. Marriage is meant to be a reflection of the relationship between Jesus and the church, which he redeemed. For a marriage to be successful, selfless love needs to be at the center of the behavior as husbands and wives look to Christ's example for guidance in how to show love and respect to their spouse.

Think: Marriage is not easy. Think about how living out the Gospel can transform all relationships. Consider how you are showing Christ-like, selfless love to your spouse and others around you and where you may be falling short of the example Jesus gave.

Pray: Thank God for his great love for you. Confess where you fall short of his instructions on how to be a godly spouse. Ask him to show you where you can more closely follow Him and to humble you so that you will rely on the Holy Spirit in all of your relationships to strengthen you and produce in you the Fruit of the Spirit. Also pray for Christian brothers and sisters who have unbelieving spouses that God would give them strength and encouragement to live by the instruction Peter gives and the example of the Gospel.

Do: Look for opportunities to show love to your spouse by making sacrifices for them. Think of them before yourself and humble yourself to know God is the only one who can produce a holy marriage between two sinful people.

Witnessing Without Words

For Better or For Worse, Part 2

I Peter 3:2

We're continuing to address a rather massive subject in this series – best summarized in what it really means to pursue a living demonstration of your wedding vows in light of scripture.

Much of how we approach scripture on the subject of marriage, unfortunately, is affected by the subtle – and not-so-subtle – influences of our culture.

A major shift has occurred in our culture over the past 60 years. In 1960, 878,000 unmarried people were living together. Today, that number has surpassed 10 million.

One believing author wrote that cohabitation can be traced to several factors such as our culture's open attitude toward sexual activity – once reserved for marriage; in addition, the constant devaluation of marriage as an institution – as something too hard to be worth the effort; add to that the fear of divorce – and finally, abandonment of, or an ignorance of, God's biblical plan.ⁱ

Today, the onslaught of moment by moment media through print, television, mobile devices and movies presents one illustration after another of happy people cohabitating and one more marriage on the rocks.

One woman wrote, "I can't imagine getting hitched to anyone I hadn't taken on a test-spin as a roommate – marriage before sharing a bathroom? Never!"ⁱⁱ

In other words, if I still love him after cooking meals with him and cleaning the apartment with him and paying the bills with him and living with him, then it'll be a successful test-spin and we'll get married.

Listen, you can expect that 10 million figure to be left in the dust over the next few decades as many more couples decide to live together and discover whether marriage will work or not.

The problem of course with that decision making process is so obvious that it gets missed in the discussion. You can't test drive marriage. In other words, you can't know what married life is like unless you're married.

It's more than dishes and bills and cleaning and sharing a bathroom and a bedroom. It's a commitment – and that commitment for life adds a dimension to the relationship that changes everything. If someone slips up during the test drive – well, the test is over and you're out the door.

But a life-commitment to faithfully persevere through the ups and downs, through the thick and thin – for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health and for better or for worse – those vows can't be test driven. Marriage isn't a month-to-month rental agreement.ⁱⁱⁱ

Norman Wright adds this in his commentary on a biblical marriage; people are looking for something magical to happen in marriage. But magic doesn't make a marriage work; work makes a marriage work.

There's a reason why the Apostle Paul exhorted the believer *not to be conformed to the world around you, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you might prove what the will of God is (Romans 12:2)*.

So the ultimate question is not what your culture thinks marriage is – or what your own heart thinks it's supposed to be – or what you want it to be . . . but what is marriage and your role, according to the will of God, revealed in the word of God?

When you get married, God's development in your life takes place on an entirely different level – a unique, life-long sanctifying work as you surrender to His design for marriage –

A design best described by God's word as a woman submitting to her husband like the church submits to Jesus Christ – that's no small task; and the husband is to love his wife just like Jesus Christ loves the church – that's not for the faint of heart either; in fact, Jesus died for her (*Ephesians 5:22-33*).

Those are incredibly challenging Creator-designed objectives for marriage. And the added challenges are – which we ended with in our last study:

- Is that you are attempting to build a marriage in a fallen world;
- and that you happen to be married to a fallen sinner – that got a lot of amens last Sunday – and . . .
- that fallen sinner you're married to happens to be God's assignment for developing and demonstrating patience and character and grace in and through your life.

The vows you delivered are possible to experience with joy and selflessness and perseverance, if and whenever you depend upon the Spirit of God – and pursue the will of God, revealed in the word of God for marriage.

Now while every marriage requires spiritual power and personal commitment and not magic – Peter begins to focus his attention on a marriage that was – and is to this day – perhaps one of the most challenging marital relationships on the planet.

If you turn back to his first letter and to chapter 3, Peter now begins to provide warm encouragement and hope and instruction to a believing wife who happens to be married to a spiritually disinterested man . . . or, perhaps more specifically here, to a spiritually dead man.

1 Peter 3:1. ***In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands*** – that is, from our last study, be willingly ranked under – as an administrative assistant to your husband – now notice, ***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.***

Again, this much into the text provides a volume of information and instruction. All wives are to be submissive – and that's challenge enough to pursue God's created design; but Peter then zeroes in on the wife that is married to husbands – Peter describes as men who are ***disobedient to the word.***

The verb ***disobedient*** can be understood as *unpersuaded*. But it actually pictures someone – in this case, who is deliberately and persistently unpersuaded.^{iv} In other words, he has clenched fists and a clamped jaw whenever you mention the gospel.

Peter's use of the word, here in this original construction, is a technical term for the gospel.^v

So Peter is personally addressing women in the church who were married to men who were openly opposed to Christianity. And the implication is that

these wives were unbelievers when they married, but now have become Christians.

And obviously, they want to know what in the world they are supposed to do in a marriage with husbands who aren't just passively disinterested in the gospel they now love – and a Lord they now follow, their husbands are actually openly opposed to the gospel. So marriage for these women has become a spiritual one-way street.

Which, by the way, can become the testimony of a woman married to a defiant unbeliever, but a disobedient and disinterested believer.

What are these women to do? Well let me tell you first what Peter doesn't tell them to do.

First, he doesn't tell them to leave their husbands at the first opportunity they get and start over.

The Apostle Paul informed these same wives, in his letter to the Corinthians – ***1 Corinthians 7:13 – a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.***

Paul adds in verse 14 that her husband and children benefit from the holy influence of her life in the home – which is another way of saying, she has no idea how impactful her life is for the gospel and will be for generations to come.

However, Paul does go on to say that if the unbelieving husband does not want to stay with his believing wife, she does not need to compel him to remain (verse 15) – Paul writes, if the ***unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or sister*** – that is, the believing spouse – ***is not under bondage in such cases (verse 15).***

In other words, she is freed from the marriage vow her unbelieving husband no longer wants to maintain and she is thus able to remarry.^{vi}

So the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul agree, of course, in their inspired instruction.

So the first thing Peter doesn't tell the wife to do is divorce her husband at the first opportunity.

Secondly, he doesn't tell her to preach to her husband at every opportunity.

Peter actually gives her hope here. He's letting her know that she isn't responsible for convincing her husband that the gospel is true and he's wrong and she's right.

Frankly, we need to appreciate how difficult this marriage is for these wives.

In the first century – and many since – especially in the Roman Empire, the wife was expected to adopt her husband’s religion.

There were a multitude of gods and goddesses and a plethora of temples. And she was expected to adopt her husband’s god – probably a family god for generations.

And now that she’s been redeemed, he’s probably okay with her adding her God to his god and going along with the traditions of both.

But it isn’t long before he realizes that she isn’t going to add his god to her God – in fact, the implication that he is now totally against the gospel implies that she’s already explained to him that her God is the only God there really is and every other god is a myth.

She’s no doubt tried to explain the exclusive claims of the gospel – that *Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life and that no one is going to the Father in heaven except through Him (John 14:6)*.

She let him know that she can’t have dual allegiance . . . and as a result, her conversion has disrupted the family order and her husband’s social order which has no doubt offended him, not to mention the rest of the family.^{vii}

He is now defiantly opposed to the gospel and she will naturally feel like she hasn’t done a good enough job convincing him and so she needs to turn up the heat. Maybe he just hasn’t heard the latest argument.

So what does she do – put gospel tracts in his lunchbox? Set all the radio stations in his car to Christian stations? Hang verses on the wall? Play really loudly in the home the latest sermon from Ravi Zacharias? Write the word “repent” on the bottom of all his beer cans? Make sure the elders of the church are invited to their home for dinner at least once a month.

She’s going to naturally think, I need to do and say more! No, no . . . Peter says here – say less . . . *they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives. They may be won without a word.* Notice Peter doesn’t say, they may be won without the word.^{viii}

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17)

Of course she must be ready to speak about Christ – but Peter makes sure she understands that

taking the initiative isn’t the solution; in fact it may only deepen his defiance even more.

One author wrote nearly 100 years ago on this text, “to persist in talking to someone who does not want to listen only hardens them more . . . but those whose hearts are hardened against preaching, may be softened by behavior.”^{ix}

By the way, this truth applies to us all. No one has ever been argued into the kingdom of God.

So instead of turning up the heat, Peter tells them to turn it down. Let your witness be without words – you could render it – without talking, without arguing.^x

Now granted, the impatience is going to stem, in part, from the belief that if their husband gets saved, she and her husband will begin to experience marital bliss like they’ve never experienced.

I mean, if he comes to faith, not only will he be saved, but he can then save her from never experiencing loneliness or frustration again, right? Surely, a Christian marriage and a Christian husband has a corner on communication skills.

Marriage will be easy if you’re married to a Christian, right? And she will naturally think that. But for married believers in the church then – and now – know the often disappointing truth that Christianity is not marital magic, either. Christian marriages have difficulties too – because Christians are still fallen sinners too.

I read this humorous story not long ago about a Christian couple who’d been married for 60 years; throughout their lives they presented a model of unity and love to those around them and in their church. They had not kept any secrets from one another, for all those years – except for a large box that the wife kept on the top shelf of her closet.

When they got married, she put the box up there and asked her husband never to look inside it and never to ask questions about its contents. For 60 years the man honored his wife’s request. In fact, he forgot about the box until a day when his wife grew seriously ill, and the doctors said she wasn’t going to recover.

So as this husband was putting his wife’s things in order, he remembered that box in her closet, got it down, and brought it to her at the hospital. He asked her if perhaps now they might be able to open it together. She agreed. They opened the box, and inside were two pairs of crocheted mittens along with a stack of 5 dollar bills that totaled \$45,000. The man was astonished.

The woman told her husband that the day before they were married, her grandmother told her that if she and her husband were ever to get into an argument with one another, they should work hard to reconcile, but if her husband was unwilling to apologize about his part, she was to keep her mouth shut and crochet a pair of mittens. The man was touched by this, because there were only two sets of mittens in the box.

Sixty years – and only two times he'd been stubbornly unwilling to yield. He was almost moved to tears. Then he asked her about the stacks of money. His wife said, "Well, every time I crocheted a pair of mittens, I sold 'em for five dollars a pair."^{xii}

If you're doing the math, that would be 9,000 stubborn moments.

Well, Peter has a Spirit-inspired strategy and it doesn't have anything to do with crocheting mittens.

Notice the end of *verse 1* again – ***that they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.***

Earlier in *chapter 2 and verse 12*, Peter used this same word for the kind of life believers should live to silence the charges of unbelievers living around them – he writes, ***Keep your behavior excellent . . . as they observe your good deeds . . .***

And now Peter applies that same idea to wives married to unbelieving men – notice *verse 2* – ***as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.***

So, just as the unbelieving world around you is watching you more than you could ever know (chapter 2:12) – Peter implies that the unbelieving husband is watching you more than you could ever know.

As they observe your behavior. That verb to ***observe*** shows up again here as well. To observe isn't referring to a casual glance or two – this verb refers to making careful observation.^{xiii}

It's a rare word which means to be a spectator . . . carefully serving as an eyewitness.^{xiiii}

In other words, rather than hearing the gospel, your husbands are seeing the gospel lived out, as eyewitness. Your quiet demeanor and godly behavior live out the supernatural power of the gospel.

And Peter offers them the possibility that what may very well happen is that the husband's defiant conscience will be softened over time and forced to admit the presence of a divine power in her life that he has more than likely mocked and ridiculed – but it is her translation of the gospel into life – right

before her husband's eyes – that may prove to be that irresistible witness.^{xiv}

So as they observe your behavior, Peter writes, make sure it is marked by these two attributes.

The first one is ***chaste – verse 2 – as they observe your chaste behavior.***

The word chaste can be translated pure. It has the idea of moral purity and a purity of conduct that is above innuendo or flirtation.

I read recently from one pastor who remarked that at one wedding rehearsal he was commenting on the symbolism of the unity candle that stands in between two candles, representing each family, on either side. He said, "After the middle candle is lit, blowing out the two side candles means the two – from either family – have now become one. One of the wedding party responded in surprise and all honesty as he said, "I always thought it meant that there were no other flames, on the side." That works too!

Secondly, notice – ***as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.***

This respectful behavior toward him is going to be perhaps the most convicting testimony to him more than anything else, simply because he will know in his heart that it his wife who deserves such loyal respect and not him nearly as much.

The wife is ultimately motivated to show whatever respect she can for her husband, not so much because he deserves it, but because she is ultimately showing respect and obedience and submission to God, whose will she is following and whose favor she is desiring above everything else.

And who knows – she may get a new husband after all. Not another one – a new one, out of the same old one.^{xv} Wouldn't that be something? Peter says, it's possible.

Chuck Swindoll writes in his commentary on this text, "This is the lifestyle of a wife, who with selfless cooperation and devotion to her husband, becomes a wife who is impossible to ignore."^{xvi}

By the way, let me encourage you wives – your children or grandchildren may become the powerful allies in this household mission – they just might become powerful evangelists in the life of your husband.

One author was raised by her dad to be a devout atheist—he insisted that all the children in their family agree to be atheists in contract form even while they were still very young. She says, she started backsliding into the gospel at an early age. She just knew her father was wrong.

She illustrated the perception and impact of children by telling the story of another three-year-old girl, raised in an atheistic family with no church contact, no Bible in the home either. One day she asked her father, “Daddy, where did the world come from?” He answered her in naturalistic, evolutionary terms. Then he added, “Some people say that the world comes from a powerful being, and they call him God.” At this, the little girl started dancing around the room with joy as she said, “I knew what you told me wasn’t true—it’s Him . . . it’s Him!”^{xxvii}

That made a lasting, profound effect upon her father.

For the wife, wanting to apply the strategy of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Peter – what does this kind of respectful behavior look like? How does it act out in the marriage?

- Talk about him in a positive light to others;
- Don’t slander him to others, even if what you are saying is true;
- Be warm and gracious to his family and friends – they’re probably unsaved as well.
- Make your commitment to him obvious to those in his world;
- Ask him for his opinion and guidance whenever possible;
- Don’t compliment other husbands to him; make your loyalty to him unconditional;
- Find areas where he is leading the way and express appreciation;
- Make sure you’re a good follower, even if you’re a better decision maker;
- Don’t expect perfection – make room for failure (it happens to non-Christian and Christian husbands alike);
- When asked about your faith, say as little as needed, not as much as possible;

- Expect God to work according to His timetable; knowing that 1,000 years are, to Him, but one day.
- While God works through eternity, you work on just today; demonstrating the gospel to your husband through faithful, respectful love and service.

Probably the most famous example of a godly wife married to an unbeliever was Monica, the mother of Augustine. God would use Monica in the conversion of both her son Augustine and her husband, late in life. Augustine became a significant theologian and church leader in the 4th century, considered by many to be the theological forerunner of the Protestant Reformation.

Augustine wrote his autobiography in which he recounted the testimony of his mother, Monica, and her behavior to her unbelieving husband, who came to faith, by the way, on his deathbed.

Augustine wrote, “My mother served him faithfully; and did her diligence to win him unto Christ – preaching Christ unto him by her behavior; and the Lord made her lovely to her husband; at last, when he was at the end of his earthly life, she won him for Christ.”^{xxviii}

It doesn’t take much for us to imagine the challenges and hard-pressed experiences and the longing and the quiet praying and weeping of Monica – no doubt looking for strength to go on in her quiet service for the glory of God.

I have little doubt that one passage in the New Testament would have been especially precious to her – as it might be to some of you listening to me today – and it would be this text: ***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, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.***

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/4/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from Dennis Rainey, Preparing For Marriage (Bethany House, 2010), p. 102
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- vi Adapted from John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 177
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- ix C.E.B. Cranfield, quoted by Doriani, p. 113
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- xvi Swindoll, p. 187
- xvii *John Ortberg, "God Is Closer than You Think," Dallas Willard Center (accessed 4-28-17)*
- xviii Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, 1 Peter: Be Hopeful (David C Cook, 1982), p. 82