

## Counseling a Believing Wife With a Hostile Unbelieving Husband<sup>1</sup>

This paper contains research done on the above-named topic. The purpose of this research paper is to give the pastoral counselor a resource for counseling this type of client. The paper begins with the Apostle Peter's exhortation to a woman in this situation (1 Peter 3:1-6). The paper then goes on to identify five of the main problems that a woman in this situation may have to deal with. Following this is a study on love that is meant to show the wife that her unsaved husband is exhibiting normal behavior. Communication is discussed. The counselor needs to be aware that now that the husband and wife's focal points of life are probably opposing, communication could be the first thing to go in their marriage. That is why the wife needs to be educated in ways to keep the communication lines open. Another problem that could occur for the wife is that of isolation. If the wife is no longer participating in social events that she and her husband used to participate in together, she may become very lonely which could result in anxiety or resentment. The counselor would need to help her deal with this. Lastly we have listed different resources and have added an appendix from our earlier studies that we thought would be helpful for you to use.

Contributors

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Peter On Wives With Unbelieving Husbands

1 Peter 3:1-6

A wife married to an unbelieving husband is in a difficult position, but not an impossible one. Three things emerge as we look at this passage:

1. The wife is to be submissive.
2. The wife is to exhibit true beauty.
3. The wife is to be doing what is right.

Parts 2 and 3 emerge from a biblical perspective of submission. Peter's main burden here is to explain to these believing women the proper means to win their husbands to Christ. Let's look at our passage on submission, true beauty and doing right.

1. True submission to husband is to be patterned after Christ's submission. Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should "follow in his footprints." When insulted He did not retaliate; when He suffered He made no threats. Rather He entrusted Himself to the Father who judges justly (1 Peter 2:18-25). The wife must maintain a submissive attitude to her husband. If and when her husband is abusive, she must not retaliate. When she is suffering physically or emotionally, she must not threaten. "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep her tongue from evil and her lips from deceitful speech. She must turn from evil and do good; she must seek peace and pursue it .... (1 Peter 3:12). The wife must be careful not to harbor bitterness, resentment or malice in her heart (Eph 4:31,32). Instead she who suffers according to God's will should commit herself to her faithful Creator and continue to do good (1 Peter 4:19).

2. True beauty is what she must display. As submission is an attitude of the heart, so is true beauty. It is found in the inner self. This unfading beauty is that of a gentle and quiet spirit. This is of great value in God's sight. As with submission, Jesus Christ is our example of a truly beautiful attitude (re-read 1 Peter 2:19-25). For us the reality of such an attitude results from a maturing, intensifying relationship with our Creator and Redeemer. This type of relationship can come about only through time in God's word and fervent prayer. There is no other substitute. As a means of obtaining wisdom, the believing wife might wish to study through her Bible and examine the data given on various wives about whom are written. Peter sets forth Sarah as an example of a submissive wife (1 Peter 3:6).

3. A truly submissive wife never compromises God's truth. She does what is right and doesn't give into fear (1 Peter 3:6). Submission must never be construed to mean doing anything the husband commands or demands. As a Christian is to obey the government until it calls him to disobey God (Rom 13; Acts 5:27-29; 40-42), the same also is true of the Christian wife in her marriage. How can she be expected to win him to Christ if she compromises God's truth? Remember, "even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." (1 Peter 3:13). "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." (1 Peter 4:16).

### CONFLICTS WOMEN HAVE WITH UNBELIEVING HUSBANDS

In order to find out what problems in particular saved women have with unsaved husbands, I researched two main areas:

1) the wives themselves, and 2) local pastors by telephone interview. The following are the conclusions of my research:

Tithe: (Guilt)

Along with sex, the problem of tithing was foremost in these marriages. The wife continually had friction as she tried to give to the church. The husbands for the most part could not and would not understand this practice. To them it was like throwing

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<sup>1</sup> C:\My Documents\bible\SchoolOfLocalChurch\Lessons\7FamilyMatters\Articles\WifeWithUnbelievingHusband.doc

money away. The wives felt it was OK to tithe their own income in the cases where they worked, but the wives who didn't work were under much conviction over this.

#### Sex: (Guilt)

The sexual relationship posed a real problem in these marriages. In many instances the wife was called upon to continue to perform sexual acts which previously were performed but now seemed to be against her conscience. Most women had a real problem with this area. They experienced poor feelings about themselves for these questionable practices, and in many instances they had their faith destroyed.

#### Social Aspects: (Guilt)

This I found to be the most damaging toward a woman's faith. Other areas affected by these relationships are more or less private, but social areas are for all to see. How can a woman maintain her witness when she is seen going to bars or sex movies, etc.? Most women have a very hard time dealing with this area. They feel very guilty before God for participating. To demonstrate how tough this is, in one instance a husband agreed to stop going to bars, but in the place of that he wanted the wife to watch sex movies with him on cable TV. These situations create incredible moral dilemmas for the wife. The results can be devastating.

#### Child Raising: (Resentment)

In some cases husbands were hostile. One went so far as to give the children drugs and alcohol because he knew it would wreck their faith.

#### Time: (Anxiety)

The husbands could not understand why the wife should do so much at church while seemingly neglecting things at home. In some cases, this was a justifiable question on the husband's part for the wife was neglecting her duties at home.

An excellent study on this subject is to be found in **John MacArthur's book, The Family**. In it, he deals with the biblical teaching through word studies in chapter two.

## WIFE'S LOVE

### I. Those that can't love (I John 4:7-21):

We as Christians are able to love (agape) because we are born of God. A non-Christian cannot love because he is not born of God. When a non-Christian husband mocks or makes fun of Christianity, the Christian wife can expect those types of attitudes because that man is not a Christian. Many times we, as believers, forget that we are dealing with people who do not have the love of God working in them as Christians do.

### II. Love can work through Christian wife (Matt. 22:37-39):

To the Christian, communicating love is more than what we say or do. In the above case, the wife must be careful that everything that she says or does towards her husband comes from the Spirit of God's love. Anything that the wife says or does outside of God's love will be immediately noticed by the husband. That which is said or done outside of God's love will not last. In other words, the wife will get tired of (so called) loving her husband.

### III. God's love is perfect (I Cor. 13:1-8):

But when the wife loves in the Spirit of God, that love is perfect, pure, suffers long, and does not harbor wrongdoings of the husband from the past. If God does not harbor our wrongs, neither should we harbor someone else's wrongs. God's love is unconditional towards us. Therefore, our love towards our spouse, family, etc., should be unconditional with no demands or attached strings.

## COMMUNICATION

Five basic rules on communication:

- 1) Establishment and maintenance of a permissive atmosphere (freedom to share themselves with each other, even on an emotional depth).
- 2) Grant mutual respect for each other's ideas, even in disagreement.
- 3) Acceptance:
  - a) change arguments or fights into constructive work (weeding, housecleaning)
  - b) seek an outlet
  - c) apologies aren't necessary, but out of courtesy and love, verbalize it
  - d) don't induce pain in an emotional battle
- 4) Validity - Grant your spouse identity and accept what they say.
- 5) Listen.

Three weapons used to kill communication:

- 1) Explosion - anger and hostility to protect self
- 2) Tears - sign of breaking point
- 3) Silence - takes a heavy toll physically and spiritually

How to communicate:

- 1) Pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5-7; 3:13-18; Phil. 4:6,7)
- 2) Plan a time to talk

- 3) Speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15; Prov. 15:1,2,4)
  - 4) Don't lose your temper (Prov. 2:5,11; 11:22)
  - 5) Allow for reaction time (Prov. 13:3)
  - 6) Commit your problem to God (1 Peter 5:7; 2 Thess 3:16)
- (Taken from The Essence of Marriage by Julius A. Fritze.)  
 Cycles of Marriage  
 Ephesians 5:22-33

(husband)

Leads

(husband)

Love

Submits

(wife)

Respect

(wife) If the wife does her part,  
 she is pleasing God.

Ten Commandments for Wives:

1. Learn the real meaning of love.
2. Give up your dreams of a "perfect marriage" and work towards a "good marriage."
3. Discover your husband's personal, unique needs and try to meet them.
4. Abandon all dependency upon your parents and all criticism of his relatives.
5. Give praise and appreciation instead of seeking it.
6. Surrender possessiveness and jealousy.
7. Greet your husband with affection instead of complaints or demands.
8. Abandon all hope of changing your husband through criticism or attack.
9. Outgrow the "princess syndrome."
10. Pray for patience.

Ten Commandments for Husbands:

1. Treat your wife with strength and gentleness.
2. Give ample praise and reassurance.
3. Define the areas of responsibility.
4. Avoid criticism.
5. Remember the importance of "little things."
6. Recognize her need for togetherness.
7. Give her a sense of security.
8. Recognize the validity of her moods.
9. Cooperate with her in every effort to improve your marriage.
10. Discover her particular, individual needs and try to meet them.

(Taken from The Art of Understanding Your Mate by Cecil Osborne.)

#### COMPLICATION OF ISOLATION - SUPPORT

Another complication the wife may experience is loneliness within her marriage. The isolation that exists in varying proportions involves change in the content and frequency of their communication and possibly their involvement in activities and groups that had previously been common for that couple. The degree of difference between the former lifestyle and the new one desired by the wife is proportional to the amount of isolation felt by the wife.

A wide range of social contacts and settings is a minimizing asset, especially if the wife functions in some of these apart from her husband. The more contacts she has personally, the more she can pick and choose (modify) her support group. Little social contact outside the home or away from her husband magnifies the problem. If she had considered him as her "all in all," if she has poor social skills, or if she is not readily accepted by others, the trauma of isolation is multiplied.

The attempt to satisfy a legitimate need for personal interaction has been frustrated in her relation with her husband. She may develop an anxiety of losing her husband to someone who has less inhibitions of relating in settings and ways which her husband expects. She may feel guilt for a seeming inadequacy to meet her husband's needs, that all the troubles in their marriage are her fault, or that she should be able to handle these troubles as a Christian and is not. She may feel resentment toward her husband for alienating her for her beliefs. She may resent the church for not supporting her as she thinks it should. She may even resent God's handling of the whole situation.

The assertion of her self-worth in a Biblical perspective is assumed. The concurrent steps are to try to increase wholesome interaction with and in response to her husband, aid in vitalizing her relationship to God and to actively, deliberately network a

support group for her within the church. She must have readily available, stable Christian women who would listen, talk and be involved with her.

## REFERENCES

### Books:

1) Beloved Unbeliever

Loving Your Husband into the Faith

Jo Berry

Zondervan's, Grand Rapids, Mich. (1981)

Best recommended source to purchase and use. After each chapter there are questions and Bible references are given to look up the answers. For personal and group study - in Moody bookstore

2) The - Push - Pull - Marriage

Learning and Living the Art of Give and Take

Les Carter - counselor with Minirth, Meier Clinic

Baker Book Store, Grand Rapids, Mich. 49506 (1983)

Contains: Trials with the Push-Pull Marriage Joy of Give-Take Marriage

Highly recommended book to have in your library.

3) A Women's World

Clyde M. Narramore

Zondervan's (1964)

Chap. 6 - Married to an unbeliever

Helps in understanding the problems and gives helpful advice to one who is married to an unbeliever.

4) Prime Rib & Apple

Jill Briscoe

Daybreak Book

Zondervan's (1976)

Chap. 6 - How to deal with a difficult man

Abigail - Nabal

Enjoyable book to read about real situations of different women in the Bible.

5) Coping with Abuse in the Family

Wesley R. Manfulcone

The Westminster Press, Phil. (1980)

Helpful reference book to refer to in dealing with difficult family situations where there is wife and child abuse.

6) The Measure of a Family

Gene A. Getz

G/L Pub. (1971)

Glendale, Cal.

Chap. 3 - Christian Wife and Submission

Chap. 9 - Unequally Yoked - Some Biblical Guidelines

Also: Biblical Study of 1 Peter 3 Christian Wife's Checklist

7) The Family

John MacArthur, Jr.

Moody Press, Inc. (1983)

An excellent Biblical view of submission from Eph 5

8) Me?/Obey Him?

The Obedient Wife and God's Way of Happiness and Blessing in the Home

Elizabeth Rice Hardford

Sword of the Lord Pub.

Murfreesboro, Tenn. 37130 (1972)

Strong message on submission and obedience of the wife in the home.

9) The Art of Understanding Your Mate

Cecil G. Osborne

Zondervan's (1970)

10) The Essence of Marriage

Julius A. Fritze

Zondervan's (1969)

(NOTE: Listed in order of recommendation for reading)

Pamphlet:

Formula for a Happy Marriage

Articles - Paul Meier, Jan Harris, John Drescher, Mildred Tengbom, Larry Christenson

Clinics:

1) Frank Minirth and Paul Meier

2071 N. Collins

Richardson, Texas 75080

(214) 669-1733

1-800-232-9462

Program on AM 1110 from 12:00 to 12:50

Cassette lists are available

2) Dr. Dennis Gibson

Wheaton Counseling Assoc.

1616 E. Roosevelt

Wheaton, Ill. 60187

(312) 668-3331

3) Center for Life Skills

858 N. Clark

Chicago, Ill.

(312) 642-0061

APPENDIX

Proverbs 1-30

5:18-21The wife is to do her part (be desirable, loving)

God is watching your husband. (+)6:34Jealousy enrages a husband (envy)(-)Do not be a woman of folly or like a harlot, they

are:7:11boisterous and rebellious (loud, to be in great commotion,

an uproar / to turn away, stubborn, withdrawn)(-)9:13boisterous, naive and knows nothing (clamorous, simple, silliness)(-)11:16A

gracious woman attains honor (pleasant, favor)(+)11:22Women must have discretion (reason, understanding)(+)12:4Woman of

noble and upright character is a crown to her husband (virtuous, a force)(+)12:46Don't shame him (to disappoint or delay)(-)14:1A

wise woman builds her house (obtain children, make, repair)(+)15:1Gentle answers turn away wrath.15:3The eyes of the Lord are in

every place.19:14A prudent wife is from the Lord (intelligent, skill, understanding)(+)21:9Better to suffer such and such than to:(-

)21:19have a contentious, vexing wife25:24(brawling, provoking, spite, discord, strife)NOTE: (+) means positive aspect; (-) means

negative aspect

Proverbs 31

Fears God

Great desire to please husband

Does him good - continually

As a result her husband will:

Trust in her Praise her

Good mother of children

As a result children praise her

Not lazy But works hard at home Doesn't sleep in the morning

Not self-centered Concern for household That they have proper clothes Uses her skills to make and provide clothes and food for

her household Concern for others - poor and needy

Not foolish and critical in speech But wise in what she says Also kindness in how she says it

Not said to be physically beautiful But wears nice appropriate clothing

Not a weak person inside, Strong character inside

Scriptures On Anxiety, Resentment, and Guilt

## ANXIETY

Philemon 4:5-9

Determine, commit with trust. Renew the mind, obey God to reduce anxiety.

1 Tim 6:6

Be content in/while obedient/obeying

2 Cor. 9:8

God cares so we don't have to worry.

1 Peter Pet. 5:7

God cares so we don't have to worry.

Phil 4:11

Be content in any status (biblically).

Luke 12:11-12

Calmness in explaining our faith via Holy Spirit.

Luke 12:22-34

Don't worry about provision of life.

Matt. 6:25-34

God provides. Handle matters at hand; Don't borrow trouble. Don't hoard; use belongings for ministry.

## RESENTMENT

Prov 12:4

Shaming one's husband is sin. Don't vent bitterness.

Eph 6:4

Parents should not provoke resentment.

Col 3:19

Husbands: Don't be bitter toward your wife.

Eph 4:31-32

Rid of bitterness, wrath, anger, slander, noise and malice. Be kind, tender, and forgiving - just as Christ.

Phil 2:3-4ff

Don't act on selfishness or conceit, but give of yourselves in preference toward each other.

Phil 4:8-9

Meditate and act on good things.

1 Pet 3:8-10

Live harmoniously, hold your tongue.

## GUILT

Ps 1

Righteous life comes from God's precepts.

Matt 13:23,38

Good life comes from God's word.

Rom 16:19

Study good, not evil.

Ps 32:2

2 Cor 5:17,21

Pure before God; the Christian is blameless.

Rom 1:1ff

Position of righteousness doesn't allow for license.

Ps 89:16

God's people receive His righteousness.

John 5:25

Christians will not be condemned by God.

Rom 5:1

Justification = peace with God.

1 Cor 6:11

Holy Spirit works in us to sanctify and justify.

Phil 2:13

God actively works in us to bring pleasure (change).

Titus 3:7

Bring justified by grace ... hope of eternal life.

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