

FULFILLED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN A PAGAN WORLD
"Part VII: Excelling In Living With An Ungodly Spouse"
(1 Peter 3:1-6, 7)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

In the Dear Abby Column of the October 11, 1988 issue of the Torrington Register-Citizen, this letter verified to be genuine by Abigail Van Buren, detailed an amazing trial for a young woman:

"Dear Abby: . . . Lee and I have been married for 10 years. Last year, he became completely burned out at his job and also suffered a severe back injury. I was expecting our fourth baby, and we had another family sharing our home. All this created a very explosive atmosphere, and Lee flipped out.

Our baby was born and developed mononucleosis at 3 weeks. Lee announced that he didn't love me anymore, and he left me. The other family moved out suddenly, and I was alone with a sick newborn and three other small children.

I couldn't eat or sleep. I lost 47 pounds, got hooked on tranquilizers and had a nervous breakdown. Lee came back, put me in a mental hospital, then proceeded to have an affair with my best friend of 10 years. . . While I was in the hospital, my best friend's husband broke into our house and caught his wife and Lee in bed together. He told Lee that he could have her; then Lee and my girlfriend became engaged. They told me later that they had planned to drive me to commit suicide so I would be out of the way.

After I was released from the hospital, Lee tricked me into a false reconciliation. Two hours after making love to me, he stood me up at the airport and took his girlfriend to Florida. Meanwhile, my kids were aware of everything that was going on, and my 7-year-old kept begging me to shoot him in the head because he didn't want to live anymore. It was terrible.

We lost our home, so the children and I moved into my parent's attic with no heat -- during a Pennsylvania winter . . . "

Though God doesn't condone divorce, though believers are supposed to suffer patiently while wronged in such difficult, permanent, undissolvable unions, what was Donna Stewart supposed to do to survive in practical terms while wed to a flipped out Lee Stewart?!

What can we do in such marital unions in practical terms?!

Need: "I may know from 1 Peter 2:18-25 that I must put up with a hard but biblically required relationship! I may also know that Matthew 19:6 orders me not to divorce! Yet, in my case, I have an ungodly spouse -- and life's unbelievably strenuous! Any ideas?!"

- I. **Practical excellence in living with an ungodly spouse begins with following Christ's example of submission to God's will.**
 - A. Peter welded his remarks **both** to wives **and** to husbands onto his address to slaves with hard masters (v. 18-25) by starting those remarks with the adverb, *homoios*, "In the same way," 1 P. 3:1,7. Thus, Peter's words to wives **and** husbands in 1 Peter 3:1-6, 7 arise out of the spiritual basics of his input to slaves in 1 Peter 2:18-25.
 - B. Since 1 Peter 2:18-25 commands slaves in "must" relationships to endure harsh masters like Christ endured suffering en route to the cross, the following **basics** on living with carnal spouses apply:
 1. Wives and husbands living with difficult spouses must rely on God to (a) know what to do and (b) to gain the strength emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually (*psuchay*) to perform well when crises arise, 1 Peter 2:23b, 25. (former sermon)
 2. Thus, they must **not** consider divorce as an out to suffering hardship, but follow Christ's example until **life's** end, 2:21.
- II. **With this foundation in place, Peter gives special directives to wives and then to husbands who suffer with ungodly spouses as follows:**
 - A. Special Guidelines To Wives With Ungodly Husbands, 1 Pet. 3:1-6.
 1. A Christian wife must obey her ungodly husband except when doing so counters her obeying God, 1 P. 3:1,6a; A. 5:29. This rule covers all issues, and calls a wife to learn Scripture to tell **which** leader to obey, and **when** -- her husband or God!
 2. While relating to the ungodly spouse, a wife must let her gentle lifestyle do the witnessing instead of her words, 3:1-2. (Otherwise, the husband may be turned off to God's truths not by **what** she says, but by **how** she speaks by her lecturing him!)
 3. Included in this effort is her trying to be attractive to him not so much by looks as by disposition, 1 Pet. 3:3-4. (Otherwise, the ungodly husband may feed on his lusts in relating to his wife, staying lost instead of being drawn to Christ through her lifestyle!)
 4. Peter then alludes to the godly example of Old Testament Sarah, and that gives us Sarah's exemplary actions, 1 Peter 3:6:
 - a. Sarah esteemed Abraham, calling him "lord," Gn. 18:12.
 - b. When her husband was faithlessly afraid of being slain by powerful kings who might want beautiful Sarah in their harems, Abraham told Sarah to say a half truth -- that she was his sister even if she was taken into other harems, Gn. 20:10-13.

- c. God had promised to bless Abraham's seed through Sarah -- not use Sarah by other partners, Gen. 12:1-3; 17:15-16.
 - d. Sarah trusted God with these promises, 1 Pet. 3:5b.
 - e. Thus, she obeyed Abraham, letting God do whatever was needed to counter her being polluted in other harems, 1 P. 3:6!
 - f. It was God then Who reversed Sarah's entanglement in these harems, overriding Abraham's errors and protecting her from pollution, cf. Gn. 12:17-19 and Gen. 20:3-7 respectively.
- B. Special Guidelines To Husbands With Ungodly Wives, 1 Pet. 3:7.
- 1. While relating to an ungodly wife, the husband must recall that her feminine attributes magnify her spiritual state's expressions, making a carnal wife irrepressibly toilsome to her husband, v. 7 and Prov. 27:15-16. (Conversely, godliness with femininity makes her spontaneously delightful to him, cf. 1 Pet. 3:4b)!
 - 2. He must also recall that in spite of her being difficult for him in her carnal state, **if** she is saved, she is equal with himself before God when it comes to eternity, v. 7b. This keeps him humble enough to respect her even if she is carnal and toilsome!
 - 3. He must remember that God wants him to treat his ungodly wife honorably if he expects his prayers to continue being heard, 7!
 - 4. Having opened the door by using Sarah as a godly example, we have **Abraham's** proper role with carnal **Sarah** in Gen. 16:1-6!
 - a. Instead of trusting God, Sarah tried to produce a child for Abraham by customary surrogacy: She gave Hagar to Abraham to elevate from slavery to be his concubine. Hagar would then bear a child by Abraham for Sarah to adopt, R. S. B., KJV, ftn.
 - b. After the boy's birth to Hagar, pecking-order conflict erupted between concubine, Hagar and wife, Sarah. Sarah then chided **Abraham**, blaming **him** for creating this conflict, Gn. 16:5!
 - c. Abraham rightly showed respect for carnal Sarah, giving her space to demote "the other woman" back into slavery, 16:6.

Lesson Application: *To excel in living with an ungodly spouse, (1) believe on Christ for salvation for spiritual enabling, Jn. 3:16; Ro. 8:9. (2) Then rely upon the indwelling Holy Spirit for behavior control (Gal. 5:16-23) and heed 1 Peter 3:1-6, 7!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message lesson . . .)

The letter I started to read at the introduction of this message, a letter by a very troubled young woman to Abigail Van Buren of the Dear Abby Column, continues as follows:

" . . . Suddenly, Lee came to his senses and broke up with his girlfriend. Her husband forgave her, and she went back to him and their three children. And guess what? **I forgave Lee and took him back.** I got counseling, **went to church and kept reading my Bible.** I'm off the pills, eating normally, and our family is intact. We got our house back, Lee is totally repentant, and we have restructured our lives to avoid anything that could be destructive to our family.

Two weeks ago I went to my girlfriend and told her I forgave her. We cried together and talked for six hours. Forgiveness, when it is least deserved, has true healing powers . . . **now God is able to work in my life** . . .

I still feel a little insecure at times, but I'm much better today that I was six months ago. A life filled with thoughts of revenge and bitterness is no life at all. Abby, if you think this letter will help others to forgive; you have my permission to print it with my name.

Signed,

Donna Stewart, Hilltown, PA."

Abby wrote back this interesting response:

"Dear Donna: Your letter rivals the Book of Job. As you know, I telephoned you to verify the authenticity of your incredible trials. After our long conversation, I was convinced of your sincerity.

I am profoundly grateful to you and your husband for allowing me to use your names. **Your testimony should be an inspiration to others. If you could forgive, anyone can. May God continue to bless you and yours.**"

The point is simple. With Christ in our lives, no matter how hopeless, how painful or how destitute a marital arrangement may seem due to the carnality of another marital partner, if we are right with God and follow Peter's input in 1 Peter 3:1-6,7, God can give us a platform in that union whereby we can live and glorify Himself!