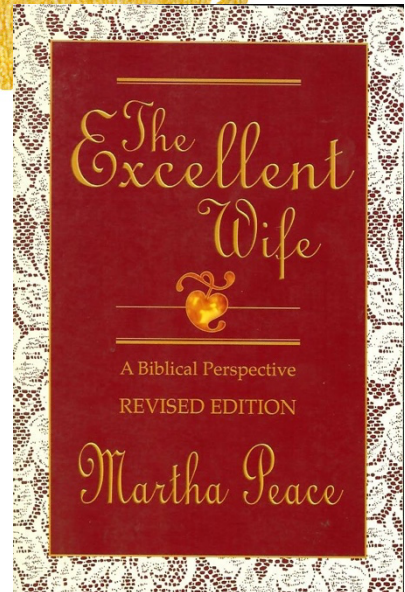




BARE MARRIAGE

HEALTHY, EVIDENCE-BASED, BIBLICAL ADVICE FOR SEX & MARRIAGE

with Sheila Wray Gregoire



The Excellent Wife

(Revised Edition)

Martha Peace

SYNOPSIS

A woman is an excellent wife by offering godly submission to her husband always.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

- Equates obeying a husband with obeying God, making the husband an idol.
- Fails to offer adequate recourse for women in abusive marriages, saying divorce is not an option.
- Dismisses the importance of mental health care as a tool in faithful living, as if prayer, bible study, and pastoral counseling are at odds with therapy and medication.
- Declares important human needs, like wanting to be treated kindly and not yelled at, are “idolatrous desires.”

SETS UP HUSBAND AS AN IDOL

- Positions the husband as a mediator, saying a wife is to obey her husband, not God (56), and that she is to glorify her husband, not God (49, 51), contravening 1 Timothy 2:5.
- Insists a wife “obey” her husband in everything, including the length of her hair, finances, what to have for supper, or how to discipline the kids. No caveat for abuse (especially of children) is given (140).
- Subordinates God to the husband, since the main thesis of the book is that whatever a husband wants a wife to do is now what God wants the wife to do. Her following her husband is how she follows God.
- Asserts that the wife receives sanctification, in part, by placing herself under her husband’s authority (15).

HAS A WARPED VIEW OF A WOMAN’ ROLE

- States that women are “more easily deceived” (17), though the Bible only ever states that Eve was deceived.
- Compares a woman’s place as that of a “slave” who rightly expects no thanks or recognition (31).
- Names “being treated fairly”, “having your needs met” and not wanting feelings hurt as idols for wives (61, 69). Pronounces a woman whose distant husband “uses her for sex” a sinner “with an idolatrous heart” for wanting kindness (65). Having desires for a good marriage is seen as incompatible with truly desiring Jesus.
- Shames women who work outside of the home or have children in daycare (16, 74). Admits it is common for women to have panic attacks that their husbands lose their jobs, but still insists women must not work (215).
- Declares the home the wife’s domain (71), where she must be organized and never lazy. Reading and resting are self-indulgent (74). The home’s “joyful atmosphere” is up to her.
- Says repeatedly that women must have a “gentle” or “soothing” (191) tone of voice, even when a husband has sinned or failed (167), which is encouraging the fawn trauma response when in harm’s way.

ENABLES ABUSE

- Declares it a sin to say “there is no hope for this marriage” (24), to believe “this is more than I can take” (95) or to be self-protective (32), with no caveats for abuse or chronic infidelity. States that women should battle for their abusive husbands no matter how long it takes (157).
- Instead of encouraging women to escape a “cruel” husband, this book tells her that it is a privilege to be “suffering for righteousness sake” (31). Unnecessary and easily avoidable suffering in marriage is glorified.
- Instructs a woman to respond willingly to their husband’s reproof, without defending herself (41) with no caveats for emotional abuse. States that feeling intensely hurt by his words is a sin (45), even if he is angry or unkind.

- Instead of teaching women how to draw boundaries to abuse, insists that women must give gifts, praise him, speak words of kindness, or put kind notes in his lunch when he is “evil” (158).
- Enables marital rape by telling women they cannot refuse sex unless they have both decided to pray instead (121). Says that if a husband wants sex while she is on the phone with a friend, she must not “defraud” him but should phone the friend back later (121). Tells women that even if their husbands touching them is nauseating (which is common in cases of abuse/infidelity), they must joyfully concentrate on pleasing their husbands sexually (96).
- Tells women facing “immorality, physical or verbal abuse, irresponsibility, threats of leaving, use of alcohol/drugs” that they should respond by “suffering personal embarrassment”; “thinking praiseworthy thoughts”; “not reviewing his faults over in her mind”; “speaking in a gentle and respectful way” (144).
- Warns against saying anything negative about your husband to others, even if true, (55) making it more difficult to seek help if she is in danger, as well as erasing any opportunity for the husband to repent or take accountability.
- Insists that a woman whose husband is “unfaithful, irresponsible, deceptive, drunk, or out of control” must still work towards reconciliation (97), and if he rages or hits her, she must still repent of her bitterness and forgive (97). Declares divorce is “not an option” (197) and a wife would be “rebellious” to divorce (98).
- Church discipline, rather than calling the authorities, is the first recourse for an abused wife. Comforts a wife in an abusive marriage with the thought that perhaps God will strike him dead (245).

STIGMATIZES EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND MENTAL HEALTHCARE

- Equates seeking professional mental health care with lapsed faithfulness (2-3).
- Teaches that emotional pain can be removed by remaining hopeful for change when harmed, or by seeing the blessing of suffering for righteousness sake (92).
- States that feeling fear or sadness, even when justified by the circumstance, is a sign of lack of trust in God; feeling overwhelmed with sorrow is sinful (239).

WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

- “The church had me read this book when I went for counseling when my husband became abusive. I stayed in that marriage for seven more years. It wasn’t until he went after me while I was holding my newborn that I finally had the courage to leave. This book started me thinking his treatment of me was my fault.” **Email from reader**
- “This book made me feel like God hates women in general, and made me wrong in particular. My inability to do femininity “right” made my marriage instability my fault, and implied I was just not good enough to be loved. I deserved mistreatment and loneliness. I didn’t want to live.” **A.S., Social media message**
- “I grew up in financial distress because this book convinced my mom not to work.” **Social media message**
- “It didn’t spur me on to be a better wife, it made me feel hopeless and guilty.” **S.M, social media message**
- “This book twisted Scripture for me when I was a new believer, teaching me that enabling narcissistic abuse was godly. It taught me that my husband’s sin and walk with God were my responsibility.” **Social media message**

SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS

With an overwhelming emphasis on “submission” as the most important role for women, *The Excellent Wife* teaches women to sacrifice their own values, callings, and well-being for the sake of their husbands’ whims. The book teaches women not to trust their own feelings of fear, anger, or sadness. While it is stuffed with Bible verses on obedience and giving up rights, it ignores Jesus’ messages of compassion, care and justice. Requiring women to return blessings for hurt and return to the marriage even when a husband is evil and abusive, the book traps women in marriages that endanger them and their children. This book “breaks bruised reeds” rather than bringing healing.



INSTEAD OF THE EXCELLENT WIFE, CHOOSE... Boundaries in Marriage (Cloud and Townsend); The Emotionally Destructive Marriage (Vernick); Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage (Hoffman); The Great Sex Rescue (Gregoire, Lindenbach, and Sawatsky).