

The Marriage Relationship

1 Peter 3:1-7

Tampa Covenant Church

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Proposition: Because Christian marriages serve as a witness to the gospel in a secular world; both (husband & wife) are called to reflect the work of Christ in their marriage to the glory of God.

FCF: The danger of self-interest in marriage.

RHF: Jesus Christ voluntarily submitted to the will of the Father and set an example for husband and wife to follow in marriage.

(#1) Introduction:

Here in Chap 3, Peter continues his exhortation on how the Christian's voluntary submission to authority structures serve as a winsome witness in an unbelieving society. He started broadly by telling these Christians to be subject to every human institution and honor the emperor because doing good in a pagan world, serves to silence the critic. Next, he instructed household slaves to be subject with all respect more so to their unjust masters because it's a gracious thing in the sight of God when one endures unjust suffering for doing good. And the supreme example of Peter's instructions is Christ, who endured unjust suffering in bringing to fulfillment the redemptive plan of God in our world.

In today's text, Peter extends this exhortation to the marriage relationship. And this is important because the 1st century household served as a foundational block in society as husband and wife lived according to culture's ideals. So, Peter is instructing them on how the gospel is to be expressed in the household without provoking unnecessary accusations against the faith. In so doing, Peter doesn't compromise the biblical understanding of the marriage relationship. Rather, he unpacks how Christian marriages highlight the beauty of the gospel in an unbelieving society; as husband and wife reflect the work of Christ in their marriage to the glory of God.

The Institution of Marriage:

When we look at the first page of scripture, we behold God the creator. And after each day of creation activity, the LORD declared everything he made to be good. (#2) *But when we* arrive at 2:18 the LORD declares, *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper¹ fit for him."* One who serves another by supplying what's needed; denotes the strength and power needed in accomplishing a (#3) task. In 2:20, Adam names all the livestock, birds and beasts...then we discover, *"But for Adam, there was not found a helper fit for him."* And we know the rest of the story, the LORD God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, takes a rib and creates a woman. Next, he presents the woman to Adam in all her glory and (#4) *what* does Adam say?... *"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."* (#5) *And it's for this* cause... a man will leave father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. These passages tell us it was God's idea to bring one man together with one woman and make them one through a binding, lifelong covenant relationship called marriage.

Exhortation to Submission: (v.1a)

With this understanding of the (#6) marriage relationship, Peter addresses wives first in saying, *“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands,”* Peter is continuing the thought he began in 2:13 by saying “in the same way.” In the same way Christian citizens and slaves voluntarily submit to those placed in authority over them; Christian wives are to voluntarily submit to the God ordained authority of their husbands. Peter is not saying or implying that all women must submit to all men; he’s saying wives are to submit to their own husbands. Of course, we shriek a little when we read these passages because we live in a society where the idea of a wife submitting to her husband comes off as chauvinistic, even barbaric (*me Tarzan, you Jane*) but that’s not the biblical teaching. To borrow from the Apostle Paul, in marriage the husband’s headship is patterned after Christ’s. (#7) He writes to the Church at Ephesus, *“for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior.”* And this headship is not based on ability. It’s a God ordained role given to the husband and it doesn’t denote that men are superior to women....they’re just roles! And both husband and wife are called to submit to their God ordained role where they see and treat one another as equals. As an equal, the wife voluntarily submits to her husband’s authority, while the husband uses his authority not to advance his own needs but to honor his wife.²

Purpose of Submission: (vv.1b-2)

Peter continues in this same verse by speaking to the (#8) purpose of the wife’s submission, *“so that even if some do not obey the word (Gospel) they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.”* Scholars all agree in this instance, Peter is addressing wives married to unbelieving husbands. According to the ancient household codes, a conventional family was organized around a husband and father who exercised power over the entire household, serving as judge and jury over children, slaves, including his wife.³ If a 1st century wife by God’s grace, became a Christian while her husband was steeped in paganism, it wasn’t something to celebrate. It violated the Greco-Roman ideal of an orderly home, the wife’s new relationship with Jesus could be seen as rebelling against her husband’s authority and going to church alone could open the door for all kinds of accusations.⁴ Notice Peter doesn’t address those specifics. Rather he sticks to his talking points by exhorting wives to live missionally in their marriages; not by preaching to their husbands but through Godly behavior so that the husband may be won to the faith. Peter is saying, in this particular situation, the Christian wife’s Godly behavior is the most effective witness to the unbelieving husband; not her words. What is Peter doing? He’s delicately affirming the cultural practices of a 1st century male dominated society. But he’s also subverting it in helping the wife to see that her motivation to submit to her husband is not based on the social order of the day but on the supreme example of the sacrifice of Christ according to the will of the Father.⁵

Nature of Submission: (vv.3-4)

(#9) In vv.3-4, he cautions wives on the nature of their submission, *“³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.”* Growing up in a legalistic tradition, I recall these particular verses serving as proof texts, calling all women (married or single) to get rid of perms, take off the make-up, lose the jewelry and put on skirts in answering the call to holiness. That’s not what Peter is getting at. He’s

saying, to these wives, *“if you want to win your husband to the gospel, focusing on hair, jewelry and make up won’t do the job.”* Now, there’s nothing inherently wrong with these things but the point is they’re not effective witnessing tools. I don’t believe the unbelieving husbands who came to Christ in that day testified it was because they woke up one morning and realized they had a hot wife. Peter is keeping the main thing the main thing by exhorting these wives to focus on adorning themselves with inner beauty of heart, coupled with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Because these qualities don’t fade over time; they stand the test of time. Even better, these qualities are precious in God’s sight.

Sarah’s Example of Submission: (vv.5-6)

(#10) Now Peter caps off his caution, by citing Sarah as an example of what this adornment looks like in marriage. He writes, *“⁵For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed⁶ Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”* Now when we survey Sarah’s life, she wasn’t perfect but she was a faithful wife to Abraham. They were probably married for 100 years and she followed him from Ur to Haran and continued the journey to Canaan. Along the way she submitted to Abraham’s questionable wisdom in fearful situations as they sojourned in a land not yet their own. Therefore, Peter holds her out as an example of a holy woman who “hoped in God.” The object of Sarah’s hope made all the difference in the world, she didn’t hope in Abraham; she hoped in God! And that hope directed to God enabled her to treat her husband with respect despite his repeated failures in their marriage. Peter is showing these wives that the call is the same for them as foreigners sojourning through an unbelieving society.⁷ And the same is true of Christian wives in this day and age. The call is to remember you have been born again to a living hope through the precious blood of Christ so look to those who’ve gone before you who put their hope in God first and foremost in their marriage.

(#11) Notice what Peter says at the tail end of that verse, *“And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”* What is the wife to do when faced with threats and intimidation by her unbelieving husband? According to Peter, continue doing good and do not fear what is frightening. But this doing good and not being frightened doesn’t mean subjecting one’s self to ongoing physical, mental and emotional abuse. But doing what is necessary to protect one’s self from harm while preserving their Christian witness through their unwavering hope in God. Finally, Peter turns his attention to husbands in v.7.

Exhortation to Husbands: (v.7)

But unlike the previous instructions, he addresses the one in authority. **(#12) He writes,** *“⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”* Although, just one verse for the husband compared to six for the wife, what Peter says to Christian husbands packs a powerful punch and a myriad of **(#13) implications follow.** He begins with “likewise” but he’s not instructing the husband to submit to his own wife as an authority figure. He’s instructing him to show her over the top consideration and respect. Peter tells the husband to dwell with his wife: Do life with her, spend time together, out of the house, in the house, in the same bedroom and in the same bed. That’s how emotional intimacy is built and maintained, which naturally leads to physical intimacy.

Live with your Wife: (v.7a)

And the call is to do it in an “understanding way”, which is literally translated, “according to knowledge.” Brothers, this simply means that we’ll never come to know and understand our wives as fellow image bearers if we’re not putting in the time. And a good way to start is by listening deeply in conversation while suspending judgment and assumption. When we do that, we’re listening to know and understand our covenant partner. So, we listen for what brings joy, what brings sadness, where hope lies, aspirations on the horizon, coupled with uncertainty and even fear. I’ve done my share of premarital counseling over the years. And my favorite exercise by far is when the couples share their wish lists with one another. Where the speaker communicates their wish and how they would feel if their wish were granted. (#14) Something like, *“I wish that we would spend more quality time together and if my wish were granted, I would feel cherished.”* And the response from the speaker can’t be, *“well you know how demanding my job is”* or *“you know we don’t have the money to do stuff.”* None of those excuses hold water because the goal of the exercise is for the listener to repeat verbatim what was communicated regardless of how it made them feel. Brothers, we usually don’t do well on this exercise because of our tendency to operate in fix it mode. So, here’s the challenge, when we’re spending time with our wives; whatever it is we’re doing together. Let’s steer clear from fix it mode and stay in listening mode and listen to understand and know the one we’ve been given to do life with.

Honor Your Wife: (v.7b)

(#15) Next, Peter reminds husbands they are to show honor to the woman as the weaker vessel. Last week, we read of his exhortation to honor everyone, even the emperor. And now he saying to show honor to the woman as the weaker vessel. All scholars agree, Peter is referring to the woman as the weaker vessel in terms of physical strength. It has nothing to do with moral, emotional or spiritual weakness. Because he tells us “why” we are to show honor to our wives. (#16) Because they are co-heirs with us in the grace of life. Gen 1 tells us *God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Both are told to be fruitful and multiply and given dominion over the created order.* And with this understanding, husbands are to honor their wives as they both sojourn together to a new creation. In other words, there’s no reason to wait until that great and glorious day; we honor our wives now. Meaning, communicate their value and worth in the marriage relationship where there is no hint of abuse; physical, mental, emotional nor spiritual. Because that is not the will of God for the Christian marriage or any marriage for that matter. But sadly, because of the tragic consequences of the fall; it’s a reality in our world. So may it be our prayer, that God will grant husbands and men in general renewed vigilance in honoring all women (married or single) and treat them with respect: in the home, the workplace and in all corners of our society and world.

The Husband’s Prayer Life: (v.7c)

(#17) Finally, Peter says when husbands dwell with their wives in an understanding way and show them the honor they’re due as co-heirs in the grace of life; they can expect their prayers to God will not be hindered. The word used here for “hindered” is obstructed; like a road block. It’s what we experienced as we drove around in the aftermath of the storms. Obstructed roadways everywhere due to felled trees and downed power lines. And when we encountered those road blocks, we had to turn around and look for a clearer roadway. Peter, is saying our prayers to God won’t experience roadblocks when we’re obedient to him in our role as husbands. But when we find that our prayers are blocked because of our

disobedience to God's commands as husbands; we turn around. Meaning, we confess our sin to God and repent of wrongdoing. And through the grace of God in Christ Jesus, we receive his forgiveness. But we don't stop there; we do the same in our relationship with our wives in order to receive their forgiveness by the grace of God.

(#18 Blank) Conclusion:

Church, no marriage relationship is perfect. We all have our ups and downs and there's always room for growth no matter how long it's been since you said "I do." And we recognize, the social order of the 1st century world is not the same as it is today. But it's incumbent upon Christian couples to live out their marriage in such a way that it honors the gospel no matter the cultural landscape. When husband and wife embrace their God ordained roles in their marriage, the only thing left to do is to live it out to the glory of God in an unbelieving society. And church this is where I remain silent and let the Spirit deal with those of us who are married. Because apart from the scenario Peter addressed in this passage, he didn't wade into the particulars. Therefore, husband and wife must come together, listen to one another and resolve whatever conflicts are associated with those particulars for the sake of the gospel. Which means trusting in the Lord to fulfill his plan and purpose in and through your marriage.

We read the familiar passages in Pr. 3 where the text exhorted us to trust in the LORD do not lean on our own understanding, we're told to acknowledge him in all our ways and not to be wise in our own eyes but fear the LORD and turn away from evil. When husband and wife trust in the LORD together and forsake their own way of doing things out of reverence for the LORD; it clears the path for them to reflect the sacrificial work of Christ in their marriage. Enabling them to freely live out their relationship as a testimony of God's goodness, faithfulness, mercy and grace working in their lives for his glory alone. And for those in our community desiring marriage, we trust in the LORD with you that he may fulfill your heart's desire according to his plan and purpose for your life. Church, the LORD is indeed faithful and may it be our prayer to trust in him and serve him in all our relationships at all times and in all things.

¹ עֲזָרָה ('ē-zēr): 1. LN 35.1–35.18 helper, assistant, i.e., one who assists and serves another with what is needed (Ge 2:18, 20; Ex 18:4; Dt 33:29; Eze 12:14; Hos 13:9+); help, assistance, i.e., acts of supplying what is needed to another (Dt 33:7, 26; Ps 20:3[EB 2]; 33:20; 70:6[EB 5]; 115:9, 10, 11; 121:1, 2; 124:8; 146:5; Isa 30:5; Da 11:34+); 3. LN 76 strength, formally, help, i.e., power to accomplish a task (Ps 89:20).

² Grant R. Osborne, "1 Peter," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 205.

³ Pilch, John J. *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K., 2012.

⁴ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 179.

⁵ Ibid, 180.

⁶ ὑπακούω (*hypakouō*). vb. **to obey**. *This verb means "to obey," with nuances of hearing and then doing.*

This word is formed from the verb ἀκούω (*akouō*, "to hear") with the prefix ὑπό- (*hypo-*, "under"). In the nt, it almost always means "to obey." Women usually are asked to submit (ὑποτάσσω, *hypotassō*) to husbands instead of to obey (*hypakouō*; e.g., Eph 5:22–24), here Sarah serves as an example of one who obeyed (*hypakouō*) her husband (See Genesis 18:12).

⁷ Jobes, 183.