

The Blessings and Challenges of Marriage

1 Peter 3:1-7

Introduction. Marriage is one of God's great gifts to the human race. In fact, in Gen. 2, God himself performed the first marriage between a man and a woman, between Adam and Eve. There God tells us, "It is not good for a man to be alone. I will make him a helper corresponding to him" (Gen. 2:18). God would then make a woman, and he would unite the man and woman in a covenant relationship as the two "become one flesh" (2:24). Yes, marriage between a man and a woman is a wonderful gift from our great God. It has only one problem. It involves two sinners living in close proximity with one another. In our fallen world, that is a formula for sparks to fly! Further, imagine one is a Christian and one is not. One is devoted to Jesus and one is not. Obviously, this only compounds the challenges and potential for problems. In such situations what are we to do? Peter, under God's Holy Spirit, provides words of guidance and wisdom to help us navigate these potentially turbulent waters. He has words of counsel both for the wife and the husband.

I. Wives should submit to their husbands 3:1-6

Peter began addressing the subject of submission in 2:13. First, he addresses the subject of our responsibilities to the government (2:13-17). Second, he addresses the relationship of slaves to their masters (2:18-25). Now, he

addresses the relationship of wives and husbands (3:1-7). In each relationship he speaks to those in a subordinate position, to those who have less power and are more vulnerable. In the particular situation Peter addresses here, the power dynamics may be even more acute. It is a saved wife married to a lost husband. What should she do? What should she say? How should you act? Interestingly, Peter's counsel falls in line and is consistent with what he wrote in 2:13-25. Follow the example of Jesus (2:21) and be submissive (3:1). Wives, yield in your will to the direction and leadership of your husband even if he is not a follower of Jesus. Note, "voluntary submission is in view here" (Schreiner, 148). This is something she willingly chooses to do. The reasons why a wife should submit is detailed in verses 1-6. There is a fountain of good counsel.

1) Live with evangelistic wisdom 3:1-2

"In the same way" is probably not the best translation because it could give the idea that a wife is to submit to her husband the same way a slave submits to his master. The Greek word functions as a connective to what Peter has just written, and the *ESV* "Likewise" serves us better. A wife submits but certainly not like a slave. Further, the exhortation is specific. It is "wives to your own husbands," not all women to all men. The Bible knows nothing of that kind of idea.

The wife in view has a unique challenge. Her husband “disobeys the word.” He is lost. He is not a Christian. How should she respond? Leave him? Preach to him? No, she submit that her husband “may be won over without a word by the way his wife lives, observing her pure, reverent life” (3:1-2). Her husband will not be won to Christ by nagging or a verbal barrage of Bible verses. No, he will be won by a transformed life! Now to be sure, he must hear and know the gospel in order to be saved. But that gospel comes wrapped in the package of a beautiful life that is pure, reverent, inwardly attractive, adorned with a gentle and quiet spirit that is of “great worth in God’s sight” (v. 4) and evangelistically persuasive in the eyes of her husband. This woman, because she honors Jesus and loves her husband, becomes a master of knowing how to say the right thing in the right way at the right time and for the right reason. Warren Wiersbe says it well: “An unsaved husband will not be converted by preaching or nagging in the home. The phrase “without the word” does not mean “without the Word of God,” because salvation comes through the Word (John 5:24). It means “without talk, without a lot of speaking.” Christian wives who preach at their husbands only drive them further from the Lord...It is the character and conduct of the wife that will win the lost husband—not arguments, but such attitudes as submission, understanding, love, kindness, and patience. These

qualities are not manufactured; they are the fruit of the Spirit [Gal 5:22-23]”
(Be Hopeful, 82).

2) Live with beauty that is internal more than external 3:3-4

I can think of few verses that are more out of step in our 21 century American context than verses 3-4. An article entitled “Fueled by Social Media, Gen Zer’s and Millennials Admit to Overspending on Beauty Products” (Lendingtree, 8-28-33), the authors note “beauty is pain” and “vanity comes at a price.” They point out consumers spend an average of \$1,754 a year on beauty products, with younger generations spending between \$2,408 and \$2,670. Add to this that, “In the US, women and girls spend an average of \$545 per year on clothing” (“Money Spent On Clothes Statistics [Fresh Research], Gitnux Marketdata Report 2024, 12-24-2023) and we see how strange Peter’s words sound. “Don’t let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, but rather what is inside the heart (“rather, the hidden person of the heart”) — the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (vv. 3-4). Now, let’s unwrap this scripturally daunting text and see what Peter is saying and what he is not saying.

1) His primary, but not exclusive, audience is saved wives who have lost

- husbands that they want to win to Christ (3:1-2).
- 2) Peter is not opposed to women wanting to be attractive, especially to their husbands. Take a look at the Song of Songs for biblical support here.
 - 3) Peter is concerned that a woman gives more attention to her appearance than her heart, what she looks like on the outside more than who she is on the inside (3:3-4).
 - 4) Ostentatious and showy hairstyles, jewelry and fancy clothes are evidences of a prideful and idolatrous heart (3:3-4; cf 1 Tim. 2:9-10). Vaughn and Lea are correct, “Peter’s words are to be taken as a caution against a distorted sense of values” (p. 74), something men are also susceptible to.
 - 5) God is always primarily interested in our heart (3:4). First Samuel 16:7 reminds us, “Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.”
 - 6) God finds beautiful “the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit (v. 5)”. John Piper says “serene” or “tranquil” captures well what Peter is saying (“The Beauty and Behavior of a Godly Woman,” 5-29-2015). Perhaps Prov. 31:30 says it best, “Charm is deceptive and beauty is

fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord will be praised” (Ill. my mother).

3) Live with worthy role models as your example 3:5-6

We all have heroes, people we look up to and even emulate. Peter has told us in 2:21 that our ultimate example for life, and particularly unjust suffering, is Jesus. Now, for wives (really all women) he points to the matriarch Sarah (and by implication Rebecca, Rachel and Leah). Verse 5 makes a general observation about the women of faith in the past (“For in the past”). Of these women he says they were “holy women who put their hope [a major theme in 1 Peter] in God.” Their hope was not in this world, after all they were “exiles” (1:1), “strangers and exiles” (2:11). Nor did they put their hope in their husband, though each of the key matriarchs were blessed with believing husbands. No, their hope was in the Lord and thus they “adorned themselves” by “submitting to their own husbands” (v. 5). Peter specifically cites Sarah (see also Heb 11:11), but her example is surprising. The text he references is Gen. 18:12 which in context, is the Lord’s promise that Abraham and Sarah will have a child in their extremely old age. There we read, “so she [Sarah] laughed to herself: “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I have delight?” Schreiner is helpful when he says the verse “reflects an off-hand comment by Sarah to the idea that she will become

pregnant by Abraham. What Peter found remarkable was that she still referred to him with respect and dignity instead of merely calling him an old man (though she did note his age!). We see from this that even in casual situations Sarah respected Abraham's leadership, revealing thereby that her honor of him was part of the warp and woof of her life" (p. 156). Peter concludes his instruction to wives by blessing them with these words, "You have become her children when you do what is good and do not fear any intimidation" (*ESV*, "frightening"). John Piper is right, "Hope in God drives away fear of man." The daughters of Sarah do not fear anything but displeasing God...They wage war on fear, and they defeat it, with the promises of God" ("Holy Women Who Hope in God: Mother's Day," 5-11-88).

Now before we move to husbands, a final word about submission in marriage, for the wives:

A) Because your Lord and King is Christ, you are not under obligation to obey and submit to your husband if he asks you to do something:

- 1) unbiblical
- 2) unethical
- 3) illegal

4) immoral

The will of Christ for a wife always trumps the will of a husband.

B) Submission for a wife does not mean:

- 1) A wife is inferior to her husband (see 3:7).
- 2) She is less spiritual than her husband.
- 3) She is to be treated like a servant or doormat.
- 4) You must always agree with your husband (You do not check your brain at the marriage altar (Piper)).
- 5) You do not provide counsel and perspective to your husband.
- 6) You subject yourself to physical, psychological and emotional abuse (same is true for your children).
- 7) You may not separate for a season for the hope and health of your marriage (see 1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Now, we turn our attention to Peter's advice to husbands.

II. Husbands should understand their wives 3:7

“Likewise,” like in verse one, has the meaning of “next.” Peter is moving to address a new group (Schreiner, 159; Vaughn and Lea, 76-77). The new group

is husbands. No doubt saved husbands are in view here. That they receive only one verse should not cause us to erroneously draw the conclusion they need less instruction! Interestingly, but not surprisingly, given the biblical importance of marriage and family, they are the only group in a position of authority that receive any directions in 2:18-3:7. The instruction husbands receive is comprehensive, direct and pointed! The primary point is our knowledge and understanding of our mate.

1) Grow in your knowledge of them personally

Peter calls on husbands to “live with their wives in an understanding way.”

The *KJV* says, “dwell with them according to knowledge.” I like combining them. Husbands should work at knowing and understanding their wives.

Hendriksen says, “Peter wants the husbands to love their wives in a Christian manner. That is, husbands ought to live with their spouses in accordance with Christian knowledge (compare Eph. 5:25-33; Col. 3:19). In their marriage, they should demonstrate the love of Jesus that is revealed in the Scriptures and thus be considerate and understanding. Husbands must love and respect their wives in harmony with God’s Word.” (*Peter and Jude*, NTC, 124).

I often say a husband needs to develop a “marital radar system.” He needs to send out and receive signals from his wife. This radar system will hopefully develop and grow over time. Watch her. Listen to her (both words and tone!) Study her. Become a student of your wife and work hard to make an “A” in this class. It will honor God and bless you both.

2) Grow in your knowledge of them physically

Peter says we grow in our understanding of our wives “as with a weaker partner.” Weaker here simply means physically, not intellectually, morally or any other category. Karen Jobes is spot on when she writes, “In the context of 1 Peter, “weaker vessel” is primarily understood as indicating physical weakness relative to men’s strength. Therefore, Peter’s exhortation indirectly addresses the issue of physical abuse.... Peter teaches that men whose authority runs roughshod over their women, even with society’s full approval, will not be heard by God [when they pray]” (*1 Peter*, BECNT, 210). Jobes’s observation is still relevant in our day. Many cultures, because men are bigger and stronger, subject women to all sorts of abuse. Beatings, whippings, sexual abuse are far too prevalent around the globe. Men who follow Christ have a different perspective and a different ethic. Our size and strength is to provide, protect and serve. It is not to exploit, harm and abuse. Our physical strength is a gift of service from God. Use it well!

3) Grow in your knowledge of them spiritually

Some believe “understanding” in the first part of v. 7 is talking about our understanding of God, His Word, and his teachings on marriage. That is certainly possible, but here in the last part of verse 7 there is no doubt. As we live in an understanding way, caring for our wives as a unique and precious vessel, we will “show them honor” because we recognize their equal value and worth to our Savior as “coheirs of the grace of life.” I love Piper’s thoughts here: “Men, let this sink in and dwell on it long and hard. Fellow heir, so heir comes from the inheritance back in 1 Peter 1. We are born again to a living hope, to an inheritance, undefiled, unfading, imperishable kept in heaven for you, and she’s got the same one.

She’s going to be a queen of the universe someday. You sleep with a queen. You sleep with an heiress of the world. That’s not an exaggeration. You sleep with an heiress of the world, the earth. That should have an effect on you in terms of kindness, respect, tenderness, listening, marveling at what you have in this house. We are not amazed enough at the marvel of who we are. Representing Christ, representing the church, fellow heir the grace of life. We don’t marvel enough at the wonder of our wives or our husbands.” (“Men, Love and Lead Your Wives,” 5-2-2015).

Peter closes with a very important spiritual observation. If we don't work at understanding our wives, treat them well because of our superior physical strength, and honor them as coheirs of all we have in Jesus, then God will not hear your prayers. They will be "hindered." The idea is if we are not right with our wives we cannot be right with God. Pray all you want. They will be impeded, thwarted. They will hit the ceiling and fall back to the floor. Further, husbands living in sin have a hard time praying. No need to go to God. Best to go to your wife first and make things right.

Conclusion: Two Christians in marriage are still two sinners in marriage. This is a challenge, and one make more difficult when one mate is lost. Below are some concluding thoughts that are biblical, practical, and hopefully helpful. Marriage is hard work. Hope in Christ and get after it!

How to Bless Rather Than Curse Your Marriage

- 1) Make a choice (commitment) to love and humbly serve your mate (Phil. 2:3-5) recognizing that they were made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27) and that Christ died for them (John 3:16). Accepting them does not mean you always agree with them or affirm their actions (Acts 5:29).

- 2) Receive your mate as someone valuable in your life. They are God's gift to you as "divine heavenly sandpaper!" God will use them to conform you more to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-30).
- 3) Seek to live wisely and accept personal responsibility for your relationship (Prov. 14:16; 15:12, 32; 28:13; Eph. 4:29-31). Do not play the blame game. Remember, you are a sinner too and you will also do sinful things.
- 4) Rejoice and value the differences, looking for the positive. God made you different that you might complement one another (Gen. 2:18).
- 5) Determine to communicate in a godly and positive manner (Prov. 4:24; 10:11, 19-21, 31-32; 26:20-28) by:
 - a) Sharing (Prov. 11:13-14; 25:11-12; Eph. 4:15). Use "I" messages.
 - b) Listening to both the words and the heart (Prov. 12:15; 15:22; 19:27; 21:23; 29:11, 20; James 1:19). Quick to listen!
 - c) Talking (Prov. 15:1, 23, 28; 16:24; Eph. 4:25-27; James 1:19). Slow to speak!
- 6) Never assume anything. Grow in your understanding of your mate (Prov. 3:3-4, 7; 17:27-28; 18:1-2, 13, 15; 19:2; 1 Peter 3:7).
- 7) Be an encourager. (Prov. 3:27; 12:25; 15:15; 17:22, 1 Cor. 8:1; 13:7). Look for the positive whenever possible. You catch bees with honey not vinegar!

- 8) Be real: be honest and willing to admit your own failures. Learn to say, “I am sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?” (Eph. 4:32; Jam. 5:16).
- 9) Accept yourself in Christ (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:3-14). It will free you to love and accept your mate without either a superiority or inferiority complex (1 Cor. 13:4).
- 10) Learn to be a *Lover*: Learn to speak in a language that they will understand (1 Cor. 13:4-8). (Gary Chapman’s “Five Love Languages”)

1) Words – Jesus spoke words
of love and healing.

4) Gifts – Jesus gives us the gift of
eternal life and so much more.

2) Touch – Jesus touched the
sick and dead and brought
healing and life.

5) Time – Jesus is always with us,
promising to never leave or
forsake us.

3) Service – Jesus was the Suffering
Servant of the Lord who
washed feet and died on
the cross for our sins.