

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST PETER

LIVING AS CHRISTIAN HUSBANDS AND WIVES!

Read 1 Peter 3:1-7

Introduction.

Marriage is one of the most important human relationships. No wonder Peter spends a few sentences to help his readers with this sometimes-difficult institution.

But Peter's thoughts haven't been confined to marriage. He is very concerned about all kinds of relationships in society – with the government, with masters and slaves, and with marriage. He knows that if Christians are perceived as societal rebels and radicals, their message won't be heard, and the Christian faith won't grow.

Submission to Husbands

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.” (vv1-2)

In some Western cultures, to expect wives to be submissive to their husbands isn't considered politically correct but Peter's words seem pretty straightforward. *“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands...”*

When he says "likewise" he is referring back to his comments about submission to governments and to masters (2:13-20) which we studied last week. "Be submissive," as we saw previously, is the Greek verb *hypotassō* (also in 2:13 and 3:5), which means "to subject oneself, to be subservient, to submit voluntarily," and seems to include the idea of "obey." Peter carefully observed that wives are called to submit to their own husbands and not to all men in a general sense. Male headship is God's commanded principle for the home and the church, not for society in general. The key here is *voluntary* submission. Peter isn't demanding obedience – though obedience is involved with submission. He is asking for an attitude towards one's husband of voluntary submission, whether or not he is a Christian.

How can you submit to a husband who is not a Christian, you ask? You can't submit to him spiritually, of course, unless he is submitted to Christ. Nor can you submit if he requires you to commit some sin, since your submission to Christ takes precedence over your submission to any human being. But submission to your non-Christian husband, Peter makes clear, may be an important element of his conversion to Christianity. When he sees the reality of his wife's faith as it's worked out through her life, it is a powerful testimony to him of the truth of the Christian message.

It's your behaviour, Christian wives, that must convince him, not your words. You can't talk your husband into the kingdom. You must be willing to live out your Christianity before him. He must observe it in action. Then your words may be superfluous. Think of your behaviour as an investment in your husband's salvation. "Won" is the Greek verb *kerdainō*, which originally meant "to acquire by effort or investment, to gain." Here it is used figuratively.

Inner Beauty

“Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” (vv3-4)

“Let your true beauty come from your inner personality, not a focus on the external. For lasting beauty comes from a gentle and peaceful spirit, which is precious in God’s sight and is much more important than the outward adornment of elaborate hair, jewellery, and fine clothes.” (vv3-4 TPT)

Peter did not forbid all adornment. But for the godly woman outward adornment is always in moderation, and her emphasis is always on inward adornment. According to William Barclay, in the world Peter lived women often arranged and dyed their hair. They also wore wigs, especially blonde wigs made with hair imported from Germany. Peter had this in mind speaking of the adornment that is merely outward. Peter did not forbid a woman fixing her hair, or wearing jewellery, any more than he forbade her wearing apparel.

Real beauty comes from the hidden person of the heart. It isn’t something you wear or primp before a mirror to have. It is something you are. The real question is “What do you depend on to make yourself beautiful?” Peter’s point is not that any of these are forbidden, but that they should not be a woman’s adornment, the source of her true beauty.

The inner beauty of a godly woman is incorruptible. This means that it does not decay or get worse with age. Instead, incorruptible beauty only gets better with age, and is therefore of much greater value than the beauty that comes from the hair, jewellery, or clothing. Peter described the character of true beauty — a gentle and quiet spirit. These character traits are not promoted for women by our culture; yet they are very precious in the sight of God.

Peter is not making a Christian law but a vital point. If you rely on outward beauty to keep your man, you’re very short sighted. The outer beauty will eventually fade but inner beauty won’t fade -- don’t neglect it. It may even help you win your husband to Christ. How do you come by this kind of character that characterises inner beauty? The same way as all Christians -- male and female -- gets it i.e., from yielding regularly to the Spirit of God and letting that Spirit reign in your life. From the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit come his fruits -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Not only your husband will notice your character -- but God also notices it too.

Examples of submission

“For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” (vv5-6)

Peter reminds women that he did not call them to a new standard; but to something that was practiced by holy women of former times who trusted God. When women submit to their husbands and when they do not put trust in their outward adornment, they are like the holy women of former times who trusted in God. They powerfully demonstrate their faith.

A woman can trust her own ability to influence and control her husband, or she can trust God and be submissive. A woman can trust her outward beauty and adornment, or she can trust God and cultivate a gentle and quiet spirit. It all comes back to how much trust she has in God and she has examples of holy women who trusted in God in like manner.

Sarah

Two things demonstrated Sarah’s submission to Abraham. First, she obeyed Abraham even when it was difficult and even when he was wrong (as in Genesis 12:10-20). Second, she honoured Abraham by calling him lord. It is possible to obey someone without showing them the honour that is part of submission.

True submission knows the place of both obedience and honour. An attitude of submission to a husband's authority will be reflected in numerous words and actions each day which reflect deference to his leadership and an acknowledgment of his final responsibility.

True submission, full of faith in God has no room for fear or terror. It does good and leaves the result to God and not to man. The words "do good" remind us that true submission is not a sulking surrender to authority. It is an active embrace of God's will, demonstrating trust in Him.

Husbands Be Considerate

We've talked so far about Christian wives. Perhaps Peter spends more time here because of the particular challenges Christian women had in trying to win their husbands to Christ -- surely not because the women had less spiritual maturity than the men. But now he speaks directly to husbands:

"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." (v7)

"The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honour them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground." (v7 MSG)

A godly husband lives with his wife. He doesn't merely share a house, but he truly lives with her. He recognizes the great point of Paul's teaching on marriage in Ephesians 5: that "husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself" (Ephesians 5:28). The godly husband understands the essential unity or oneness God has established between husband and wife.

With Understanding or Wisdom:

A godly husband undertakes the important job of understanding his wife. By knowing her well, he is able to demonstrate his love for her far more effectively. When a husband has this **understanding**, God directs him to use it in that he is to **dwell with** his wife **with understanding**. He is supposed to take his **understanding** and apply it in daily life with his wife. This is where many men have trouble following through. They may *have understanding* about their wives, but they don't use it as they **dwell with them**.

Giving Honour:

A godly husband knows how to make his wife feel honoured. Though she submits to him, he takes care that she does not feel like she is an employee or under a tyrant. In giving honour to the wife, the word in the ancient Greek language for the wife is a rare word, meaning more literally "the feminine one." It suggests that the woman's feminine nature should prompt the husband to honour her.

This was a radical teaching in the world Peter lived in. In that ancient culture a husband had absolute rights over his wife and the wife had virtually no rights in the marriage. In the Roman world, if a man caught his wife in an act of adultery he could kill her on the spot. But if a wife caught her husband, she could do nothing against him. All the duties and obligations in marriage were put on the wife. Peter's radical teaching is that the husband has God-ordained duties and obligations toward his wife.

Weaker Vessel:

In this context weaker speaks of the woman's relative physical weakness in comparison to men. Men aren't necessarily stronger spiritually than women, but they are generally stronger physically. As Peter brought in the idea of the woman's feminine nature with the words the wife, he continues in appreciating the feminine nature and how a husband should respond to it. Therefore, a godly husband recognizes

whatever limitations his wife has physically, and he does not expect more from her than is appropriate and kind.

A godly husband realizes that his spouse is not only his wife, **but also his sister in Jesus**. Part of their inheritance in the Lord is only realized in their oneness as husband and wife.

That Nothing Hinder Your Prayers:

The failure to live as a godly husband has spiritual consequences. It can and it will hinder prayer. Some have thought that Peter has in mind here the prayers that husbands and wives pray together as in praying in agreement. But since he addresses husbands only, and because he says your prayers, he refers to the prayers of husbands in general.

Peter assumed that the fear of hindered prayer would motivate Christian husbands to love and care for their wives as they should. However, many Christian men have such a low regard for prayer that this warning may not adequately motivate them. "Hinder" is the Greek verb *engkoptō*, "to make progress slow or difficult, hinder, thwart."

If Christian men treat their wives wrongly, Peter is saying, their prayers suffer, probably for two reasons. First, men who are selfish and overbearing are unlikely to be the kind of people who spend much time in prayer. But even more, God doesn't listen to the prayers of hypocrites and sinners. Many Christian husbands maintain a respectful appearance at church, but at home sin terribly against their wives and children, in anger, injustice, selfishness, and worse. Peter is saying here: Husbands, you can't hide from God.

