

The Benefits of a Balanced Marriage

1 Peter 3:1-7

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¹ Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 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. ⁵ For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

⁷ Likewise, 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.

Exposition

For the past few weeks, we have been studying how Peter would have Christians live in an evil society. He identified the New Testament church with Old Testament Israel. Just like Old Testament Israel, the New Testament church found itself living in a land that was not their home. They were designated as “sojourners and exiles” that were to live peaceful and godly lives while awaiting the return of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. From here, Peter moved on to deal with the specific relationships that his audience might encounter along the way.

Last week, we considered how Peter commanded household slaves to live in submission to their earthly masters, regardless of whether their masters were good or evil. The ultimate reality that enabled them to live in submission to these masters was the fact that in the end, Jesus Christ was the supreme Lord who sets the pattern of unjust suffering for the Christian. As the example for Christians, those who follow “in His steps” will find favor with God in the midst of their suffering when they endure as Christ did.

This week, we find Peter turning his attention to wives of unbelieving husbands. He begins his exhortation to wives in verse 1 by saying, “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands.”

I. The Role of the Wife in Marriage (Vss. 1-6)

At first, it might appear that he is paralleling the experience of the wife with that of the slave, but this is not the case. Some have attempted to interpret this passage as nothing more than an accommodation a practice of the 1st century that should be abandoned, like slavery. The problem with this interpretation, though, is not only that it reads too much into the phrase “likewise” which essentially function in the same way as the word “and,” but it also fails to see the distinctiveness of marriage compared to slavery.

As one commentator correctly states, “Slavery is an evil institution developed by human beings, while marriage, on the other hand, was instituted by God at creation. It does not follow, therefore, that those who believe in the submission of wives would also endorse slavery.” Slavery is an institution of mankind. Marriage is an institution of God, and as such, He reserves the right to order it how He sees fit for the good of people and His glory.

So, Peter’s point is not to parallel a wife’s relationship to her husband with a slave’s relationship to their master in terms of their essential nature, but rather to show that the spiritual condition of the authority in a relationship does not change God’s call on our life. In other words, even if the government was wicked, the people had a spiritual obligation to God to live as He has called them to live. Even if the master was wicked, the household slave had a spiritual obligation to God to live as He had called them to live. Even if a husband was an unbeliever, the wife had a spiritual obligation to live as He has called them to live. The emphasis for Peter is on how there is a corresponding responsibility to God in all of these different relationships. We do not simply consider our counterpart in our relationships. We consider God and His glory as well.

So, what does it mean to “submit?” We have considered this at length before when we looked at Ephesians 5:21-33, so I won’t labor the point too much here, but simply put, submission is the “voluntary act of the wife to place herself under the authority of her husband in order to honor and affirm his leadership as they work to fulfill the purpose of marriage.” Peter, then, is calling these believing wives to submit to the authority of their unbelieving husbands so far as God allows in the context of marriage. Now, as I have said in the past, submission does not mean that a wife has to:

- Always agree with her husband
- Forsake her own will
- Avoid attempting to change her husband
- Ignore the will of Christ in order to please the will of her husband
- Derive personal or spiritual strength primarily through her husband
- Act out of fear
- Endure abuse

But while submission does not mean these things, it does mean that the wife should seek to honor and even obey her husband to the degree that God is honored in the marriage. What is probably noteworthy at this point as well is that Peter does NOT tell husbands to “submit” their wives, but rather, that wives, should submit to their husbands. This action must be voluntary on the part of the wife, and I believe, ultimately, the work of the Holy Spirit in her life.

So, why should these believing wives live this way with their unbelieving husbands? According to Peter, it was “so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives.” Remember how we talked about the need for the word of the gospel to be accompanied by the deeds of the gospel just a few weeks ago? Well, here we find this expressly mentioned as part of Peter’s plan of evangelism: If they reject your message, let them be compelled by the fruit of the message in your life. Let them behold the impact of the gospel!

According to Peter, there is something compelling about a “pure and reverent life.” Isn’t that interesting? Peter wanted to see these Christian wives live differently from the world. Instead of becoming like the world to reach the world, Peter wanted them to be different from the world for the sake of reaching the world. Now, I know what you are thinking, but doesn’t Paul say, “I have become all things to all people for the sake of the gospel.” And to this, I say, “Yes, and amen!” But Paul’s point was never for Christians to forfeit their “strange-ness” and “peculiarity” for the sake of reaching the lost. Forfeiting obedience to Christ has never been an evangelistic strategy of the followers of the Jesus.

This is the whole point that Peter is making in verses 3-6. The Christian wife’s beauty is not to be measured by the beauty standard of the world, but by the standards of God’s word. In Peter’s days, “elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothes” were all the rage. It was what the women of renown wore in those days. And you know what’s interesting? Not much has changed. Sure, the styles have changed, but the emphasis on the external has not. According to one study, “The average woman in America sees about 3,000 ads each day—many of which send messages about what the “ideal” female body should look like.” Let me ask you, how many of those messages do imagine are telling the “average American woman” to put on the “the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious?”

Think about those words again: “the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.” What does that look like? Well, if you think about the context, it’s not describing a wife that is timid or mousy, unwilling to speak. Instead, it describes a wife that is quietly confident in the Lordship of Christ! She is not fretting. She is not marked by anxiety. She is not aggressively attempting to change her husband. She’s not nagging to get her way. She is at ease in the sovereignty of her Savior. She trusts the Lord and is committed to obey Christ, which means she submits to her husband with the prayerful hopes of compelling him to see the beauty of Christ in her holy life.

The truly beautiful woman is the one who pursues holiness and puts her hope in God! This is what woman, like Sarah – Abraham’s wife, did, while submitting to her husband. This is the type of life that points others to Jesus “without a word.”

T.S. - Peter concludes this section in verse 7 with a passing word to the husbands in his audience...

II. The Role of the Husband in Marriage (Vs. 7)

At first, it might bother some of you that Peter says so little to the husbands compared to the wives, but it shouldn’t. In the 1st century, women were rarely ever addressed in literature. For Peter to spend so much time speaking directly to wives means that women were valued in the Christian community. So, what does Peter have to say to husbands?

Keeping it rather short and to the point, Peter exhorts the husbands to “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.”

What does Peter mean here? Well, while it is generally (though not universally) true that women are a physically weaker and more vulnerable than men, I believe Peter's point has to be understood in its context. In the previous verses, Peter essentially encouraged wives to live counter-culture lives. Instead of being like the woman of their society, they were to live godly lives. And while all people are susceptible to weakness in regard to how they live in a godless society, I believe Peter wanted husbands to see how they were to help their wives live such lives by honoring them and encouraging them in their pursuit of godliness. In the past, I have known husbands who incessantly encouraged their wives to work out and diet. If they ever complimented their wives, they complimented their appearance. And, while physical attraction and health are not bad things, they are not eternal things either. Peter is calling husbands to not only care for their wives, but to promote the values and the principles of holiness that matter to God.

Practically speaking, then, I believe Peter was calling husbands to value "the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" in their wives. He was calling them to be the type of husband that recognizes and helps your wife fight the temptation to value the things of the world like other women. Be the type of husband whose prayers with their wife could actually be hinder, which means you need to be a praying husband. A husband who leads his wife and family spiritually!

Conclusion

Wives, put your best effort into the beauty of growing in the holiness and hope of Christ.

Husbands, honor your wife by valuing her Christlikeness more than her external beauty and providing an environment for her to flourish spiritually.

Singles, Widows and Widowers, pray for the marriages in this church. They matter for the sake of the mystery of which they speak! Every marriage in this church is telling the world something about Christ's relationship to His bride!

What are our marriages proclaiming to this world about Christ?