

1 Peter 3:1-7

Kingdom Living as Servants: Wives and Husbands

Moving from citizenship to the workplace (2:13-25), Peter now addresses submission in the household.

Exhortation to Wives (3:1-6)

Note: So much misunderstanding and erroneous information has been hurled across Christian culture in the last several decades that it would be impossible to address everything necessary to correct even a small portion. However, the comments below will help us think more critically about the social structures of Peter's context and their implications for us today.

- Peter exhorts wives to be submissive (3:1a), not because the man is the head of the household, but for the Gospel's sake (3:1b-2). That man is the head (whether "authority" or "source" or something else altogether) of the household, Scripture makes clear elsewhere. But that is not the basis of Peter's appeal to the wife for her submission in this text.
- The kind of submission Peter has in mind is the same as slaves and citizens (Note: "In the same way"). Submission in this context (2:13-3:7) entails respectful deference. There is no hint of forcing the wife against her will!
- As the Christian community "lives such good lives among the pagans" (2:12), order in society will find its way into every aspect of our lives. Therefore, just as Christian citizens/slaves should positively impact their social environment for God's glory (see 2:12), so too should Christian wives live their lives in such a way that it draws their unbelieving husbands toward Jesus Christ (see Tit. 2:5).
- Women must not hear in this text any notion of abuse nor subservience. The women Peter addresses (Asia Minor) were quite able to engage in private business, pursue education, serve in public offices, held prominent roles in religious sects, vote, and have property rights (see B. Witherington, II, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitude to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (SSNTMS 51; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 1-10 and "Women (New Testament), Anchor Bible Dictionary," p. 958).
- "Won over" (3:1b) is used frequently to describe successful activity regarding repentance/salvation (see Matt. 18:15; 1 Cor. 9:19-22). Peter's sole focus here is the advancement of the Gospel.
- Notice the *modus operandi* involved in proclaiming the Gospel: "without words," "behavior/conduct" (3:2-4). The silent communication of "purity and reverence" takes on the form of character and outward appearance:
 - "Braided hair," "gold jewelry," and "fine clothes" suggests that the majority of women were wealthy.
 - The contrasts between inner and outer beauty is intended to highlight the priority of godly character in women rather than deny them any fashionable wear whatsoever (see also, 1 Tim. 2:9-10).
 - Peter is speaking to the preoccupation of outward appearance at the expense of "inner beauty" that emerges from a "gentle and quiet spirit."

To Consider: In our society today where civil and personal rights are idolized, how could these principles apply to you? What tacit measures are you taking to proclaim the Gospel in your home? While Peter addresses women, these principles transcend gender lines (see 1 Cor. 9:22).

- Peter demonstrates submission by using "holy women of the past" (3:5-6).
 - That Peter uses Sarah, who obviously did not have an "unbelieving" husband, illustrates that the willing deference applies to all Christian couples.
 - The analogy of Sarah's "obedience" comes more out of the immediate context of submission (slaves to masters) than from some notion of subservient behavior. Sarah's willing deference to her husband is the point of identity in the analogy, not unwilling compliance, which the idea of "obedience" often intimates. In essence, the Bible nowhere commands women to obey their husbands! Note that Abraham obeyed Sarah as well (Gen. 16:2; 21:10-12) and addressing Abraham as "lord" or "master" was an expression of respect (cf., Mt. 7:22; 13:27). Most likely Sarah's address was verbalized outside of Abraham's earshot (Gen. 18:12)!

Exhortation to Husbands (3:7)

- An understanding husband, literally "according to knowledge," facilitates submission by the wife. Being "considerate" (NIV) is only the beginning of what Peter intended. Husbands are to study their wives and work tirelessly to promote her spiritual, emotional, and physical well being (cf., Deut. 21:10 for minimal responsibilities). Since their needs change with time, we must be lifelong learners of our wives as they mature.
- The term for "dwelling" (lit., "living together") was used especially for sexual relations between the husband and wife (cf., LXX, Deut. 22:13; 24:1). The Christian man should be neither demanding nor selfish in sexual relations-or any relations for that matter!
- Peter gives two reasons why husbands are to understand their wives:
 1. Because she is the "weaker vessel." This cannot mean spiritual weakness since she is to be respected as a "fellow heir of the grace of life" (NASB). Most likely Peter intended physical weakness. Another's vulnerabilities should never be used as "leverage" to get what you want!
 2. Because she is a "joint heir" of salvation. In every respect, women are spiritually equal, having the same destiny and inheritance as men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Pt. 2:5; Rev. 1:6).
- The motivation Peter gives to husbands is an effective prayer life (since Peter is directly addressing husbands, "your prayers" intimates the husband's prayers specifically). An indicator of how well our marriage relationship is getting along is directly correlated with the effectiveness of our prayer life, and vice-versa (on how sin impinges upon your prayer life see Ps. 66:18; Is. 59:2 Jn. 9:31). "So concerned is God that Christian husbands live in an understanding and loving way with their wives, that he 'interrupts' his relationship with them when they are not doing so. No Christian husband should presume to think that any spiritual good will be accomplished by his life without an effective ministry of prayer. And no husband may expect an effective prayer life unless he lives with his wife 'in an understanding way, bestowing honor' on her. To take the time to develop and maintain a good marriage is God's will; it is serving God; it is a spiritual activity pleasing in his sight" (Wayne Grudem, *The Epistle of First Peter*, p. 146. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

Biblical Guidelines for Husbands

1. The Bible nowhere suggests that the husband is to use his role or status for abuse or selfishness.

2. The issue of submission would rarely emerge if genuine sacrificial love empowered by Christ were "the order of the day" for Christian husbands. In other words, how we understand and apply submission is largely defined by how we understand and apply love for our wives. The primary focus of a biblical marriage begins and ends with sacrificial love, not specific roles and responsibilities of the sexes!
3. The Bible nowhere indicates that husbands must compel or force their wives to submit- however we define that term. In marriage, submission is always willing compliance/ deference to another out of reverence to the Lord (Eph. 5:21-22).
4. Your wife wants a husband who will call her during the day, listen to her, take her advice, and see her as your very best friend. She wants to be "number one" in your life. Imagine eliminating your anniversary, Valentine's Day, Christmas, wife's birthday, and ask yourself how you show her that she's number one! If you have no other tangible means of showing your wife how much you love her, then you have much to learn from Peter.
5. God insists that a husband's leadership is not to be patterned after a patriarchal society, or after any physical distinctions between the sexes, but after the loving example of Christ's sacrificial death for the Church (Eph. 5:25, 28). Any other pattern for the husband's role in marriage is biblically uninformed, culturally insensitive, historically naïve, and, dare I say, morally reprehensible!