

Session 7

LIVING HONORABLY AT HOME

1 Peter 3:1-7

Memory Verse

In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live when they observe your pure, reverent lives. . . Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

— 1 PETER 3:1-2,7, CSB



Living Honorably at Home

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Peter instructed wives to submit to the authority of their husbands, and husbands to honor and live with their wives in an understanding way. In displaying this mutual respect, both parties honor God and point to Jesus with their actions.

CALL TO ACTION: We honor Christ by living in sacrificial love for one another.

Wedding traditions go back almost as far as the practice of marriage itself (see Genesis 2 for the beginning of this God-given institution).

The tradition of giving a ring to the bride-to-be began possibly as early as ancient Egypt, but the first clear evidence of this happening is linked to ancient Rome. This act was less of a romantic gesture and more a symbol of the legal contract being agreed upon (though some of these rings had loving inscriptions inside).¹


In ninth century Europe, the reading of marriage banns (an announcement of intention to marry) was established in the church as a way to create a window of time during which people could object to the marriage if they knew a reason the man and wife to be should not be married and is still required for most marriages held in the Church of England.²

The ancient Celtic tradition of handfasting, dating back to the Middle Ages, marked the beginning of a couple's engagement period. In handfasting, couples would tie a piece of fabric around their hands, literally "tying the knot." In ancient Scotland, this act in front of a witness established a temporary marriage for the couple, who usually formalized their union a year later with a religious ceremony.³

Today we observe many traditions too, such as, “something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue,” wedding dresses (and the joyful fanfare that goes along with picking one out), and throwing rice or blowing bubbles as the newlyweds exit.

But it is after the marriage ceremony that the real work begins. It is relatively easy to have a good wedding; it is more difficult to build a lasting marriage. Peter’s writing in our passage today speaks to the marriage relationship among God’s people.


 When you think of weddings, what comes to mind?

 If you are married, what is your favorite memory from your wedding day?

Session Summary

In today’s reading, Peter continued on the subject of living Christian life in the bounds of a secular society by addressing marriage. His instruction for wives to submit to their husbands is rooted in a desire for a wife’s behavior to act as a testimony pointing people (including non-believing husbands) to the gospel. Similarly, Peter instructs husbands to live in an understanding way with their wives, honoring them and treating them with respect.

1. Pure and Reverent Lives (1 Peter 3:1-2)

 What can we understand about submission in marriage from Peter’s previous teaching in this letter? What are some ways this has been wrongly taught or misunderstood?

 How might husbands be “won over without a word” (v. 1)? How are all Christians called to live in this way among nonbelievers?

Tragically, verses like this have been profoundly misinterpreted and used to justify the sinful abuse and subjugation of women by men.⁴ Peter's intent here wasn't to encourage abuse from a husband. Let's look at this verse more closely and in context to better understand how we should interpret it today.

Jewish wives were protected under Jewish law, but because of human tradition, were largely treated as inferior to men. In the Greco-Roman world, wives generally had more rights and opportunities and greater leverage when seeking a divorce.⁵

Note that this portion of Peter's letter begins with "in the same way" (v. 1), so we should read this as part of the whole of Peter's teaching on Christian submission. He had previously written about how Christians should conduct themselves (submitting yourself to authority, even when it is unfair). Remember, Peter's original audience were believers living as foreigners (at that time in the Roman empire) and enduring persecution from nonbelievers, so he was specifically speaking into their circumstances and cultural moment.

As discussed last week, it would have been the norm in a Roman household to expect worship of household idols from everyone living in the house.⁶ Just like this would have created friction between a believing slave and his or her unbelieving master, it would also create tension between an unbelieving man and his believing wife. Peter wasn't advocating wives they should worship false idols, or otherwise knowingly act outside of God's will (acting according to God's will should be every believer's top priority), but where God's will isn't in conflict, wives were called to submit to the authority of their husbands.


Both Greek and Roman custom established order at home to promote general order in society.⁷ Godly submission followed these customs and allowed wives to help maintain a positive witness for the gospel.⁸ The heart behind this exhortation is to glorify God and point people toward Jesus with our actions. Though Peter spoke directly of nonbelieving husbands, opportunity for influence for the gospel goes much wider.


Peter said, "Even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live" (v. 1). When wives submitted in accordance with God's will, their "pure, reverent lives" (v. 2) acted as a testimony that the Holy Spirit could use to turn hearts for the gospel. This way of living models Christ.

Peter said this could be achieved without using words. Certainly, we should use words to evangelize (we are commanded to in other passages), but, as the saying goes, at times, actions speak louder than words. Actions often open the door for faith conversations to happen.

 Peter spoke to wives directly in these verses, but there is application for all Christians. How can our lives give opportunity to share the gospel with others?

2. A Gentle Spirit (1 Peter 3:3-6)

 Given the context of the first part of chapter 3, why do you think Peter told wives to dress a certain way? What might this achieve and how?

 What connection did Peter make to Sarah and Abraham? Why would this be significant for his original audience?

Last week, we talked about the concept of living differently to stand firm in our faith and glorify God, pointing others toward the gospel. This concept applies here, too. The manner by which wives submitted to their husbands (as instructed in v. 1) may have been countercultural at the time, and Peter's instruction regarding appearance was an extension of this.

“Elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes” was the trend at this time.⁹ These were displays of a person's wealth, and as such highlighted social hierarchies. Women who were wealthy had the help of enslaved persons to braid their hair (weaving in gold thread).¹⁰

The gospel is open to all, regardless of where you stack in the social hierarchy of your community. For wives to prioritize a trend that flaunted wealth reinforced divisions in society and presented the wrong idea about the gospel. Consider this

in modern-day terms. Would someone from a poor socioeconomic household feel comfortable in a church where the parking lot was full of expensive cars and the pews were full of luxury handbags and expensive jewelry?

We shouldn't read Peter's words as broadly prescriptive that women can't style their hair, wear jewelry, or have nice clothes. Rather, we are to consider: Do my appearance and possessions present a roadblock for the gospel? As believers, our lives should look different than those around us.

Instead of focusing on outward appearance, Peter instructed wives to focus on something far more important: "what is inside the heart" (v. 4).

We shouldn't read verse 4 as meaning that women must literally be quiet. Remember the goal is that our actions reflect positively on the gospel and point people to Jesus. Many people have done this with a loud volume. A "gentle and quiet spirit" (v. 4) isn't about volume, but heart posture.

So what does it mean to have a spirit of gentleness? When we have a gentle spirit, we are kind and humble before others (whether done in silence or with words). Jesus lived as the perfect example of this posture toward others (Matthew 11:28-29).

Think of Jesus's reaction to the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8:2-11). She seems to have been maliciously set up, but she was also guilty of the accusation. Jesus could have punished her. It was well within His rights to do so as the Son of God. The law itself would have backed Him up! He could have scolded her in front of the crowd and even called for her to be put to death. But He didn't.

Jesus didn't ignore or endorse her sin, but spoke to her gently. He sent her away in peace. His actions were founded in love. When we have gentle hearts, this is the posture we model. We love others as Jesus commanded us to and this witness is "of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4).



How does living with a gentle and quiet spirit give us opportunity to point others to Christ? Where does this show we place our trust?

3. Sacrificial Leadership (1 Peter 3:7)

 What instruction did Peter give husbands in this verse?


 How might contrary behavior hinder one's prayers?

Why might Peter have written more to the woman than the man? Perhaps he was more concerned about wives (particularly married to nonbelievers) because they were in a more vulnerable position. Also, since it was Roman custom for the household to adopt a husband's faith, it may have been less common for a believing husband to have an unbelieving wife.¹¹

Both Peter (and Paul, who also has similar instruction in his New Testament writings) advocate for mutuality in the marriage relationship. God's design isn't for one partner to be respectful and loving, while the other partner is taken advantage of or steamrolled. Godly marriage is a two-way street of mutual respect.

Peter specifically told husbands to treat their wives with understanding (the NLT says "give honor to your wives"). They are to be considerate and show respect. Peter used the Greek verb *synoikeō* ("living together") here, which was often used to refer to sexual relations (though it certainly is not limited to this context).¹² Peter's point was that husbands shouldn't be demanding or selfish in this (or any) area.

For a husband to live in an understanding way with his wife requires him to first truly understand her. He must listen to her and spend time with her. This requires consideration, sensitivity, and sacrificial service. When a man honors his wife in this way, he also honors God and points people to Jesus, just like a wife does when she accepts her husband's authority.

 How should a husband's posture toward his wife make the wife's call to submission light and not a burden? How does Christ do this for us?

“Weaker partner” here likely refers to the fact that men are typically physically stronger than women. This is, of course, not universally true, but it often is. God has designed men and women in specific ways but also calls them to love and care for one another within these designs.

Finally, Peter identified women as coheirs with men, jointly inheriting salvation and all the goodness that comes along with it.

Conclusion

In our reading today, Peter continued his instructions on submitting to authority by addressing wives, encouraging them to submit to their husbands’ authority. In the Roman world, order in the household was expected and wives would have been expected to worship whatever household idols their husband did. If the wife was a believer (and the husband was either a nonbeliever or a disobedient one), you can see how this creates a problem!

Peter gave instruction to the husbands, too, who also have great responsibility in marriage. Peter and Paul both taught that marriage should contain mutual respect between parties. Peter specifically charged husbands to live in an understanding way with their wives by honoring them in Christlike sacrifice.

Our number one priority should be our relationship with the Lord. When we seek the Lord first, with the Holy Spirit’s help, the rest begins to fall into place! We will consider others and our witness. Our actions will come from a place of love. And the things we do will point people to Jesus.



How can we apply Peter’s advice to operate within marriage in a way that offers gospel witness to those who see it? How does this apply to those not married?



What are some potential modern-day roadblocks to sharing the gospel. Why should we give this consideration, even if these are not “wrong” things?



What would it look like for us to cultivate a gentle heart posture toward others for the sake of sharing Christ?

Memorize

In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live when they observe your pure, reverent lives. . . Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

- 1 Peter 3:1-2,7, CSB

References

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²[britannica.com/topic/banns-of-marriage](https://www.britannica.com/topic/banns-of-marriage); <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/your-church-wedding/planning-your-ceremony/reading-banns>

³theclanbuchanan.com/weddings

⁴Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 1257.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶bibleproject.com/videos/1-peter/

⁷Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 126–127.

⁸Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 1257.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰NLT Every Woman's Bible, *New Living Translation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2021), 1591.

¹¹soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/1peter/1peter.htm

¹²Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 1258.