

A Study of First Peter

Learning the Secrets to a Great Marriage (1 Peter 3:1-7)

“God created marriage. No government subcommittee envisioned it. No social organization developed it. Marriage was conceived and born in the mind of God.”

~ Max Lucado

I. An Introduction

Social etiquette often argues that the topics of politics and money should be avoided. However, we could easily add to this list the subject of marriage. The topic is laced with past issues to present struggles. With individuals approaching this subject from various walks of life (e.g., single, divorced), as well as having been influenced by our present culture, opinions are diverse, and often, contradictory concerning this topic. Not surprisingly, marriage was also problematic in the early Church. Both Peter and Paul address the roles of husbands and wives. This particular passage, 1 Peter 3:1-7, is just one example. Our study will be confined primarily to Peter’s exhortations—commandments given to the Church via the Holy Spirit for all ages.

II. Learning the Secrets to a Great Marriage (3:1-7)

A. Instruction to the Wife (3:1-6)

Peter will dedicate the majority of this section addressing wives. A major reason for this lengthy discussion is because in an ancient society, women were expected to follow the religion of their husbands.

v. 1 - Observe that the wife’s submission is voluntary. In other words, it is not the responsibility of the husbands to ensure their wives are submissive.

This call to submit also does not imply inferiority. As noted by one scholar: “Submission to authority is often consistent with equality in importance, dignity, and honour—Jesus was subject both to his parents and to God the Father, and Christians who are highly honored in God’s sight are still commended to be subject to unbelieving government authorities and masters” (Grudem, *1 Peter*, 145).

We should also observe that this submission is not a specific first-century issue that bears no relevance for us today. Rather, this distinction between men and women transcends the culture of the biblical world. As seen in Ephesians 5, the submission of wives to husbands is rooted in theology—in Christ’s relationship with the church and in God’s created order.

The purpose for the submission in this passage is for the purpose of leading one’s husband to Christ.

v. 2 - The reference to “reverence” speaks of fear for God. A wife’s relationship with the Lord dictates her relationship with her husband. One commentator rightly states that wives do not submit to satisfy a husband’s ego, to avoid conflict, or even to show how pious she is; rather, a wife submits out of her trust and love for the Lord (Slaughter, “The Importance of the Literary Argument for Understanding 1 Peter,” *BibSac* 152[1995], 72-73).

Consequently, her reverence to the Lord implies that her submission to her husband is not absolute. Disobeying moral norms to protection of life, a wife is first accountable to the Lord.

vv. 3-4 - Similar to 1 Timothy 2:9-10, and even in the first-century Greco-Roman world, women were to concentrate on inner beauty. Peter's instruction is not to forbid perms, MaryKay, and David Yurman jewelry—otherwise, women would be forbidden to “put on clothing”. The apostle reminds his readers that this world is perishing, and thus, we need to direct our attention to the imperishable.

Why is such behavior precious to God? See 1:8-9 and 1:21.

vv. 5-6 - Putting their hope in God “informs us that these women [of the Old Testament] did not submit to their husbands because they believed their husbands were superior to them intellectually or spiritually. They submitted to their husbands because they were confident that God would reward all those who put their trust in him” (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 155).

The Church should not be filled with women who are rebellious or possess an attitude of superiority, but women who are holy.

If this reference in verse six is to Sarah's off-hand comment to the news that she would become pregnant (Gen 18:12), then even in casual situations, Sarah respected Abraham's leadership and possessed a customary attitude of submission towards her husband (see McCartney, *The Use of the Old Testament in the First Epistle of Peter*, PhD diss., Westminster Seminary, 146-47).

B. Instruction to the Husband (3:7)

“with consideration” - This phrase could also be rendered “according to knowledge” and could imply the following:

- This knowledge is not religious insight, but a personal insight that leads to love and considerate care for one's wife.
- This knowledge is religious insight and entails a husband acting in accordance with God's will and what He demands of the husband in his relationship with his wife.

Neither is exclusive of the other. This knowledge is ultimately beneficial to the husband-wife relationship. Knowledge of God's purposes and principles for marriage certainly includes a husband knowing his wife's desires, goals, strengths, and weaknesses.

How does one obtain knowledge of these areas?

“weaker vessel” - Nowhere in Scripture are women seen as weaker intellectually, spiritually, or emotionally. Rather, this reference speaks to women as being weaker physically. In the Greco-Roman culture, women were vulnerable to physical, sexual, and even social (e.g., the power to divorce) abuse. Peter calls for husbands to honor, rather than exploit, one's wife.

Note that honor is due. This honor entails respect and affirmation of one's wife both privately and publicly and placing her in high priority with choices regarding the use of one's resources (e.g., time, money).

Paul provides two reasons why husbands are to honor their wives:

- Men and women are joint heirs of eternal life. No distinction between male and female is made (see Gal 3:28) as both are equipped with spiritual privileges and eternal importance. Knowing this truth should affect a husband's thoughts, words, and actions.
- Failure to honor one's wife will hinder one's relationship with the Lord (see 1 Cor 11:33-34; James 4:3).

III. Intersect

A. We need to take the time to develop and maintain a good marriage. This means we must spend time "knowing" our wives better. After all, it is God's will.

Ephesians 5:25 -

B. Honoring your wife is not contingent on whether or not your wife respects you. In fact, if we truly honor our wives, the subject of "submission" becomes a far less controversial issue!

Ephesians 5:33 -

C. As in all areas of sin, the Lord forgives. We cannot relive the past, but we can move forward in our service to the Lord.

1 John 1:9 -

"Is it not the great end of religion, and, in particular, the glory of Christianity, to extinguish the malignant passions; to curb the violence, to control the appetites, and to smooth the asperities of man; to make us compassionate and kind, and forgiving one to another; to make us good husbands, good fathers, good friends; and to render us active and useful in the discharge of the relative social and civil duties?"

~ William Wilberforce

For further thought . . .

Based upon our study this morning, you may want to spend some additional time this week reflecting on the following:

In light of our study of 1 Peter 3:1-7, spend some time examining Paul's words to the church at Ephesus (Ephesians 5:22-33). Note specifically three ways in which Christ's actions become the standard for how a husband is to behave.

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Which of these three areas needs attention in your own marriage? Identify a couple of steps you need to take in order to improve in this area. You may even want to ask a friend or accountability partner to assist you.

If you are single, then how can your interaction with other women reflect Christ?