

Ps 17:4
 Ps 1:1,2
 Ps 62:1,2,3,4
 Ps18:8
 Hy 43:1,2,3
 1 Peter 2:11-3:7
 Genesis 12:10-20
 1 Peter 3:1a,7a

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Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The first verses of 1 Peter 3 contain one of the few places in Scripture where the Word of God speaks directly to husbands and wives in terms of their relation together. Since so many of us want good Biblical guidance for our marriages, the temptation is real to plunder these 7 verses for all they're worth on the subject of how a wife is to live and act in marriage (how she's to dress and how she's to call her husband 'Lord'), and we're inclined to do the same about how a husband is to treat his wife (how he's to treat her with respect). But in the process, congregation, we miss the apostle's point....

Consider: why does Peter address husbands and wives? What place does this section have in his letter? For us to get the most out of what Peter is saying in chap 3 we need to follow his line of thought through the first two chapters of his letter. That will make clear to us why he considered the specific instruction in our text necessary.

Peter, brothers and sisters, is teaching his readers how Christians are to live in this world. He wants God's people to live in such a way that the rest of the community notices their exemplary behaviour so that they in turn are made to take God seriously. How you live in marriage sends powerful signals to the world around you about God.

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

A BIBLICALLY BUILT MARRIAGE CATCHES THE WORLD'S ATTENTION.

1. The reason for Peter's instruction,
2. The content of Peter's instruction,
3. The fruit of Peter's instruction.

1. The reason for Peter's instruction

Both vs 1 & 7 begin with the phrase "in the same way". What, we wonder, is that phrase a reference to? We realize that we have to go back to what Peter wrote earlier to catch what he means with "in the same way". One possibility is then to hook on to Peter's words in 2:18 about slaves: "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect." Then "in the same way" means that wives need to "be submissive to your husbands" with the same respect that slaves have to show to their masters. The problem with that link is that Scripture never presents wives as if they are slaves – and so needing to show husbands the same respect that slaves would show their masters. More importantly, this link to 2:18 leaves you left hanging in relation to husbands in vs 7. To whom are they to be submissive with all respect??

We do better to recognize that the section of Peter's letter beginning at 2:11 through to 3:7 is in fact a unity, with 2:11 & 12 forming the theme of this section. Peter's readers are "aliens and strangers in the world," and for that reason they are to "live such good lives among the pagans that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us." That principle has particular application in all of life. Like how? Vs 13: "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority" – be that the king or governors, etc. Vs 16: "live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil; live as servants of God."

Point? Peter's addressees were part and parcel of particular communities. Behaviours common in those communities included the same sort of habits that characterize communities anywhere in the world, including "debauchery" –that's fornication, immorality– "lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry" (4:3). We see it around us too: loose talk that gravitates to dirty talk (especially under the influence of alcohol) and ends up in wild parties with a big dose of immorality. But Peter's readers had been born anew, had been set free from the narrow view of reality that sees nothing more than the here-and-now, and had been made able to see the redemption and the life that comes from God in Jesus Christ – and so they were now heirs of life eternal (1:3f). As persons born anew they were different from the people of town and maybe even from their families and loved ones, had different values and priorities; they were "holy" (1:15), special to God. The people of town noticed it, and considered them "aliens and strangers" – funny people because they no longer did the sorts of things they used to do, the sorts of things the folks of town still do, things like debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies and so on.

But that difference-in-behaviour raises the pressing question: if you're not going to live as the world does, if you're not going to join in their parties, how in fact are you meant to live in this world?? Is 'different' to be defined only in negative terms: don't do debauchery, don't do drunkenness, don't do the party thing?? That, of course, is Peter's whole point in his letter; he sets out to make clear to Christians how you can be holy and yet in this world. That's 2:11,12: "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us."

We can hear the response of Peter's readers: sure, Peter, sure, but flesh that out, colour it in for us. That's what Peter does in 2:13ff, first in general terms in vss 13-17, and then in more detail in relation to specific persons in vss 18ff. Slaves are to submit to their masters with all respect, whether they be godly or ungodly, good and considerate or harsh. Submitting to a harsh master and showing him respect speaks volumes to the pagans, for it strikes them as odd, funny, different – and makes them sit up and wonder what makes you tick. That's the point of 2:12: then they see your good deeds and glorify God.

But Peter's addressees are not only slaves; they include also wives and husbands, even wives and husbands married to persons who continue in debauchery and drunkenness and carousing and orgies – for they haven't come to faith.... How shall these Christian wives and husbands, now, live christianly in their marriages?? Peter is straight forward: like their brethren the slaves, these godly wives and husbands, "aliens and strangers in the world" as they are, are to "abstain from sinful desires" and to "live such good lives among the pagans that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God..." (2:11f). That's 3:1: wives need to "be submissive to [their] husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word [of God], they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of [their] lives." As the slaves of 2:18 need to apply the principle of 2:12, so too the wives –"in the same way"– need to apply the principle of 2:12 – "live such good lives"

that unbelieving husbands (and of course children and neighbours and the list goes on) “see your good deeds and glorify God.”

The same is true for the husbands. Those husbands too are “aliens and strangers” in town because they are born anew into a living hope (1:3) and so no longer do the things they used to; they’re holy, different, odd to the minds of their neighbours – you no longer see them drunk and giving in to orgies, etc. They too need to “abstain from sinful desires” (2:11) and need to “live such good lives among the pagans that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God.” That means specifically for husbands: “be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect....” Godly husbands doing that to their wives (whether they be Christian or not!) speaks volumes to the community.

What the reason then is for Peter’s instruction to wives and husbands?? What prompts Peter to address wives and husbands is *not* to explain to them what a Christian marriage needs to look like; they should know that already from God’s institution of marriage in Genesis. But Peter tells Christians to stand in the shoes of an unbeliever who looks in on your marriage and the attitudes you have toward your spouse, and then deliberately to give that unbeliever the raw material he needs to ask those hard questions: what makes that wife, that husband tick?! Why is she acting so graciously to her husband though he parties it up?! Even the husband is meant to ask hard questions: why doesn’t she get angry with me or walk out despite my partying and drunkenness and debauchery?! The answer to such questions is meant to draw that unbeliever to glorify God – and even be won over to the faith. That’s Peter’s thinking.

That brings us to our second point:

2. The Content of Peter’s instruction

Peter addresses the wives first. He tells them to “be submissive to your husbands.” In the culture of the day, people of “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” understood that wives were to be submissive to their husbands; in fact, in the culture of the time husbands were masters of their families not unlike what we hear to be the case in the Middle East today. Yet Peter does not urge Christian wives to buck against that position (for, fundamentally, that position is unscriptural), but Peter dares to use for wives the very same word he used earlier for slaves: be submissive (cf 2:18). The point is: how do you win an unbelieving husband for Christ? You don’t make it easier for him to embrace the gospel if you buck the system society has adopted and so embarrass him in front of his peers. Rather, you make it easier for him to glorify God by wearing your wifely role christianly.

How might that be? The culture of the day –just like in our culture– put a lot of stock on outward look. A man has a function to attend in the community and takes his wife along – and she could and did dress herself in such a way as to turn a man’s head. Now Peter says: don’t spend your time and energy on beautifying your externals, but spend your time beautifying what’s inside. That’s vs 4, where the apostle commends “the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” Why is a gentle and quiet spirit of great worth in God’s sight? Simple: you have received new birth into a living hope (1:3,23) so that you are a changed person, alive in the Lord. So your focus isn’t the here and now, but the inheritance God has prepared for you in Jesus Christ (1:4). So cultivate heavenly attitudes, like the gentle and quiet spirit. You don’t need to covet someone else’s hair or jewellery or clothes, because that’s all passing anyway, that’s not what life is about. You’ve been redeemed from the “empty way of life” you learned from your fathers (1:18) so that now your delight is fixed on your Saviour. So you want to draw attention to Him – and so you want to reflect the same attitudes He reflected in the course of His life on earth. He Himself said that He was “gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29), and He Himself said too that the “meek” would inherit the earth – same

word (Matthew 5:5; cf also Galatians 5:23). Well, then cultivate in your marriage, toward an unbelieving husband (and the circle of friends that you associate with on account of him), that very same spirit that the Saviour cultivated. It's a spirit that trusts in God and so is quiet and at peace even when things go wrong (cf Ps 62). It's the spirit, the attitude Christ Jesus reflected even in the abuse hurled at Him on the cross of Calvary. As Peter wrote in the verses directly before his instruction to the wives: "When they hurled their insults at Him" –that's Christ on the cross– "He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly" (2:23). That's the gentle and quiet spirit the Lord would have wives exemplify in their marriages. It's a beauty that far surpasses "outward adornment" of "braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes." This is a beauty that turns heads in a whole different way, for it makes pagans stop to consider how your heart got changed – and how fortunate that husband is to have a wife whose beauty is more than skin-deep.

What, now, does "submission" look like if it's characterized by "a gentle and quiet spirit"? Does such a spirit not leave you vulnerable to abuse? Says Peter: "This is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master." Notice the reference to "putting their hope in God". Does being submissive to one's (unbelieving) husband –with a gentle and quiet spirit to yet!– make you vulnerable? Humanly speaking, the answer is yes, of course, especially if he gives himself to debauchery and drunkenness, etc. But at the heart of the gentle and quiet spirit Peter commends is the notion of trust in God – recall Ps 62. And this, says Peter, is what "the holy women of the past" did; they "put their hope in God". Example? Consider Sarah "who obeyed Abraham and called him her master."

When did she do that? Consider, for example, the passage we read from Genesis 12.¹ Abram was a godly man inasmuch as he heeded God's call to leave his father's house and follow God to a foreign land. So we read in Genesis 12:8 that he built an altar to the LORD and called on God's name. But once a famine came upon the Land of Promise Abram's faith melted as snow in summer. He headed off to Egypt even though he knew that Pharaoh was likely to demand his wife for his harem – and admitted as much to Sarah for he told her to tell a lie to save Abram's skin. What do you think, brothers and sisters: how should Sarah have responded? Should she tell her husband to stuff it on grounds that she doesn't want to run the risk of being made a trophy for Pharaoh? Should she get all disappointed in her husband on grounds that he wasn't taking care of her, was in fact, putting her in danger and doing it knowingly? Those would be reactions we could fully understand! But see: Sarah *submitted*, in her conduct treated him as her lord! How could she do that – knowing that she could end up in Pharaoh's harem and in Pharaoh's bed? Says Peter: *she put her hope in God*. She recognized that God was pleased to look after her through this man Abram, sinner though he was and distinctly imperfect in his care for her. So, in the closing words of 3:6, she did not "gave way to fear" as she approached Egypt. Rather, her spirit was quiet within her as she trusted that God would look after her. Was that confidence foolish?? You know, congregation, how the story ended: "the LORD afflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai," so that Pharaoh sent Abram and his possessions out of the land – out of danger to Sarah (Genesis 12:17ff; how embarrassing for Abram!). The point: her hope in God was not put to shame. God has not changed, and so the Christian wives Peter addresses have every reason also to "put their hope in God" and so submit to their (unbelieving) husbands. These

¹ See Spencer, "Peter's Pedagogical Method in 1 Peter 3:6", *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 10.1, pg 107ff. Spencer convincingly argues that the traditional reference to Genesis 18:12 is inappropriate.

women are to cultivate that inner beauty that trusts in God and so do without fear what their husbands ask – and in the process their deeds serve to win husband (and perhaps his friends) to the Lord’s service. This is the application of 2:11f in relation to the wife in marriage.

The same principle is true in relation to the Christian husband. “In the same way” the husband is to live with his (unbelieving) wife in such a way that others see he’s different, is born anew, is holy – and so others are prompted to glorify God. What is a Christian husband’s manner of living with his wife to look like? Our translation has: “be considerate as you live with your wives.” The Greek has that the husband is to live with his wife “with knowledge”. The term ‘with knowledge’ strikes us as odd, but we can get a handle on what Peter means when we turn to Genesis 4:1. Our translation renders the Hebrew as “Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant...” But the Hebrew has, “Adam knew his wife Eve, and she became pregnant” – as also other major translations render the passage. The point of the Hebrew is not that Adam had sex with his wife, but that he knew her so well, understood her, respected her inner feelings and struggles that she in turn felt safe enough with him to give herself to him – and the result is that she conceived. According to Genesis 2:24, husband and wife are to be one flesh, and again that’s not first of all a reference to sexual relations but a reference to two souls knowing each other so well as to be one in thought and in being – and yes, that sort of intimate knowledge will lead to giving oneself to the other. Sexual relations without that unity of being, without that intimacy of heart, is a far cry from how the Lord has ordained it.

Well now, the command of the apostle is that the Christian husband, born anew as he is, is to ‘know’ his wife. That’s to say: he is to read her heart, know her needs, nurture and care for her according to *her* needs, not his needs. So yes, it does mean that he is to “be considerate” as he lives with his wife (as our translation has it) – as long as we understand that there’s far more in being considerate than simply being polite or kind.

So too: the husband is to “treat them with respect as the weaker partner,” says Peter – and the point is that the husband is to recognize that his wife is vulnerable, is breakable. “Partner”, says our translation, but Peter uses the word ‘vessel’, as in: a clay pot. What would have happened to Sarah if the Lord had not stepped in to protect her from being a trophy to Pharaoh? We well realize: were it not for the Lord, there would have been something very broken in Sarah. The Christian husband is *not* to do as Abram did, but to treat his wife with deep respect, caring for her tenderly, ensuring nothing breaks within her.

And why is the husband to care for his wife so carefully? Think back to 2:11f: the husband is to live in such a way that the neighbour may see his good deeds and glorify God. Is the wife a believer, an heir together with him of the gracious gift of life? The Greek is ambiguous; maybe she is, maybe she is not. If she is, treat her with the same tenderness as the Lord has shown, for He gave His Son for her sins. If not, treat her with such tenderness and care that she be won for the faith too and become an heir with you of the gracious gift of life. Either way, if you fail to know her well and treat her with due respect, your prayers will be futile – simply because your selfish lifestyle gets between you and God.

What we have? Peter insists that his readers “live such good lives among the pagans that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God.” Peter unpacks what such living looks like for wife and husband in marriage – so that the unbelieving spouse may be attracted to the same faith that gives you life eternal.

That leaves us with our third point:

3. The fruit of Peter's instruction

What was in fact to change in the lives of Peter's readers as they listened to Peter's instruction relating to marriage and family life? Let's face it: Peter's readers were normal people, folk struggling with sin and selfishness in the same way we struggle with it. But the lesson for Peter's readers was clear: they were to be very aware of what signal their neighbours were getting about the atmosphere in their homes. Though the community thought these Christians to be odd folk, square and spoil-sports, and for that reason no doubt talked derisively of them, they were to make a point of acting in such a way that they gave to their townsfolk a *different* reason to talk about them, and that is that they lived such good and exemplary lives – even within the four walls of their homes. For what happens inside the home definitely ends up outside, sooner or later!

This, then, becomes the question for us: what signal do your neighbours pick up from your home, your marriage? Do they see the sisters in our midst focusing on outer beauty or on cultivating inner beauty – the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit that trusts in God and so submits to the husband (sinful though he be) that God in wisdom has given? Do they see the brothers in our midst being sensitively considerate of their wives, treating them with respect, speaking of them with respect?? Peter's point is that the neighbours must see that you're living the sort of life Christians are meant to live in God's world – because your manner of living in marriage is meant to draw others to glorify God.

But the neighbours, we're to understand, are not just the folk down the street or perhaps even at work. The neighbours are also your own children. Are they seeing in Mom's and Dad's conduct and attitude toward each other something of what trust in God looks like? Or does your attitude and approach to your spouse in fact undermine your instruction to your children?

Peter wrote his letter to instruct his readers how Christians were to live in pagan world. He's adamant: being chosen of God, being redeemed through Jesus' blood, being born anew to a living hope has consequences for relationships throughout life, not the least in marriage. In our day when the family falls apart and individualism is rampant in our culture, Peter's instruction remains so valuable: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that ... they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives.... Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives...." For the God who saved you is worthy of all glory.