

Gospel Marriage Culture

1 Peter 3:1-7

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So I couldn't get sick on a Sunday where I had to preach this passage. I could not put this onto Pastor Mayfield or John. Oh well. Let's turn to God's Word this morning, to 1 Peter 3:1-7. And as you turn there, if you have your Bibles, let me just say a brief word that this is a part of a series of different venues where Peter is unpacking what does it mean to live with others with respect and proper submission in the Lord. It is also to be noted that while Peter is not Paul and vice versa, that there is, of course, parallel with what Paul says in Ephesians 5. But it is none the likewise, regardless of whether you are a believer or not—some of the words used in this passage might be offensive.

But let me say particularly if you are not a Christian, much of what is said in this passage will likely make no sense at all, will seem very archaic, perhaps even oppressive. Because unless one understands what it means to be in proper submission to the Lord, to be in relationship with him, what emphasis and implications that has for our various relationships won't make any sense. It requires that, as Dr. Koch read earlier in the service in Ephesians 5, when we at least read Paul in Ephesians 5 as it regards the household of God in particular households, that passage could never be understood except for the preceding passages where it says in verse 11 "submit to one another as unto the Lord," but it also most importantly talks about how we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, what is said here from Peter's lips cannot be understood except for being filled with the Holy Spirit and being in relationship with the Lord, and understanding what it means to submit unto one another as unto the Lord, and what that looks like in various roles.

So we turn in 1 Peter this morning to look at, then, what is a gospel marriage culture. What should be the culture of those who are married? And this applies to married men and women. It does not apply broadly to any woman who's in relationship to any man; it's specifically talking about men and women who are married to one another in that relationship. So let's look at it together, 1 Peter 3.

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, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—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. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

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.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we now ask that you would open our eyes and our hearts to see what a marriage shaped by the gospel looks like. Those of us who are married, Lord, we pray for your grace, that you would increasingly make us the hands and feet of Christ to our spouses, that we would reflect his character, and that he would be the model and example for how we relate to one another, and that those who come into contact with our marriages would note something different—something that is quite a

contrast to the way marriage is portrayed in our culture. But what they might see is the grace and character and mercy of Jesus. So help us, we pray, for we are in need of the work of your Spirit to make us the people of God you desire us to be. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Much as I began this sermon last week, I also want to begin this week. And that is, I want to begin with the ground before I get to the outline. I want to begin with something that needs to be stated at the outset. Though I've already prefaced it, I want to put a stake in the ground again. And I am grateful for the ministry of Doctor Bryan Chapell, former president of Covenant Theological Seminary, who was my professor and who was also the president of my seminary when I was there. He is also still a pastor. As well as Doctor Timothy Keller and his wife Kathy Keller, who in 1993 did a series of talks called "Sex, Singleness, and Marriage," which radically affected my understanding of all of those—sex, singleness, and marriage. He would then preach a series of sermons after that, and he would then, along with Kathy, write a book on marriage. Both Doctor Chapel's book and Doctor Keller's book have both had profound impact on my own ministry as well as my teaching and understanding of these passages, but also as I seek to humbly learn what it means to be a husband to my wife.

But I want to say this at the outset, again, that at the heart of marriage—and I say this to anyone who comes to my office to receive counseling for marriage—at the heart of marriage is itself the gospel pattern of selfless giving and others-centeredness. Because to talk about Biblical marriage is to talk about the salvation that comes alone through Jesus Christ. And not just what Jesus did on the cross, but what Jesus did in his incarnation before, in his incarnation, Jesus emptied himself of his glory, leaving his place at being at the right hand of God the Father, his glorious place, and taking on human flesh—making himself, fashioning himself, into a servant. And that Jesus' whole life and ministry that would lead to the cross is the ultimate expression, is marked by others-centeredness. His thoughts were to obey the will of his Father. His motivation was to glorify the Father. And his motivation was his love for you. And that on the cross where it finds its ultimate expression, Jesus would seek to make the foundation of his church the use of authority in exactly the opposite way we would expect.

For Jesus takes glory, humanly speaking; he takes authority, humanly speaking; he takes power, humanly speaking; and turns them upside down. And he says, "My glory will be most seen by, first, not taking it up, but by taking a place of weakness. My authority and power will be seen not by manipulating others or having them controlled by me, but rather of giving myself to others and allowing myself to be killed for the sake of a sacrifice that you might receive forgiveness." And then, that the greatest power and authority could be expressed through the Son of God being laid in a grave and then on the third day rising again, still bearing the marks of the Lamb who was slain.

So to talk about Biblical marriage is not first and foremost to talk about the roles of husband and wife, but to talk about the Savior who is behind all of marriage. In fact, Paul would say that there is no greater human expression for what Jesus did on the cross than marriage. So to talk about marriage is to talk about the sacrifice of Christ. So it is a place of profound humility, of self-giving and self-sacrifice and others-centeredness. And only from that place can we begin to talk about the culture of what Biblical marriage looks like, or what gospel marriage looks like.

Now, there have been many writers who would say, "Well, the Bible doesn't teach that men and women submit to one another. Women submit to men, but men don't submit to women." I am simply and radically unconvinced. However, I am not a galitarian; I am complimentarian. And that is to say, both men and women in marriage submit unto one another, but what it looks like is distinctive. But they're still called to submit. But they do so both after the pattern of Jesus Christ.

So therefore, as we move forward, I want to say at the outset that the pattern is Christ, and that Jesus chooses to use marriage as one of the chief instruments of how God means to make a man and a woman more like himself. And that is by uniting them as one under one roof for more than a week. Because it doesn't take long to see why what I just said and what Peter says go to the heart of our greatest

problem. Because the pattern of Jesus points to self-sacrifice and others-centeredness, it goes against the very thing that the fall caused. Because if we simply are reminded of what we read in Genesis, as a result of the fall, this is what is said about marriage. Speaking to the woman: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Now, in a lot of English translations, that doesn’t make a lot of sense. But at the street level, this is what it means. So we have the gospel here, and what Jesus did here.

Now let’s talk about what happens at the street level in the street corners of our lives and in our marriages and in our hearts. It’s this. At the end of the day, what our hearts want to do is that women’s desire to be their husband’s head. They want to wrestle for control. Men want to fight for control back and seek to often do so by ruling it over the wife, the woman. And so there we have the age-long, humanity-long wrestling between men and women.

Now, that wrestling has looked like a lot of different things over the ages. And having conducted over forty weddings over the years, having talked with countless couples in various parts of their marriages, I will say that most of the time—most of the time—what I see now is not male aggressiveness, but male passivity. Because most of us as men recognize at the outset that what we want is the path of least resistance—that if we can keep her happy, we’ll be happy. But the problem is this. When we do so without integrity and when we’re doing so simply to stay out of trouble, we don’t want to get ourselves in trouble, we don’t want to say anything, we don’t want to buck the system—when we do that, often what ends up happening is a low-grade form of resentment. And after a while, something snaps. Now, that snapping can look like getting really angry; getting violent; calling names; but it also can look like acting out. That doesn’t look like that at all. It can look like forms of escape—work, pleasures.

The issue is this. Regardless of the age, the wrestling is still the same, and that wrestling is because of sin. It’s not because of gender roles. The problem is not that the Bible has an antiquated understanding of gender roles. The problem is, the Bible finally tells us the truth about ourselves: we don’t want to be in submission to anybody, and we want it the way we want it. And when somebody gets in our way, and if it’s our wife or it’s our husband, we’re going to be upset. But the Bible comes in and tells us the truth about ourselves, that the problem is sin. And it puts at the center of it Jesus Christ. And Jesus says that the picture of my sacrifice is marriage. So it is incredibly important, but it is also incredibly hard, because it meets us at the street level of where we live. And that’s just the preface to the sermon. Not really. Let’s go.

So therefore, with that said, when Peter says to us in these words, “This is what a marriage ought to look like,” what are we to do with it? Well, you’ll see in your outline, it means the role of the wife and the role of the husband. So let’s look at it together. Verse one where he says, “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, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.” One of the words that he uses here is the word *submit*. And the idea of *submit* here, what does it exactly mean? And I have heard many sermons, I have read a lot of books, but rarely do people want to talk about what that means. They just keep repeating the word *submit*.

Well, the word *submit* as it is in Paul is often a military term. And when you see military ranks, what you see is, you see profound respect and honor given. The role of *submit* here is not involuntary servitude on the part of the wife where she just says, “Yes, sir, I’ll obey whatever you say.” That’s not what’s being called for here. Rather, the role of what is being called for here is that the wife seeks to honor and respect her husband as a man—which goes against her own central temptation.

Now, think about the context of which he brings this up. It’s completely understandable when he says, “so that even if some do not obey the word.” That means, if you are a female, a woman who is married to a man who is not a Christian, what is said here is that if you seek to respect and honor your husband even though he doesn’t believe, the Lord will use your respect and conduct in the way you honor him even though he doesn’t believe as a means by which the Lord will draw him to himself. In other words, to respect and honor, to live with others-centeredness in marriage for a wife is to show honor and

respect because he is another human being to whom you are married, to whom you love and share a bed with, to whom you now say, “His body is mine and my body is his.” And when you seek to respect and honor him, regardless of whether he believes, there comes a mighty testimony to who the Lord is and what he is doing in your life.

What is interesting about that is this. Imagine for just a moment, particularly within the context in which Peter was speaking, how would a woman of faith been treated by a man who didn’t believe? Well, we don’t know, and it is not believed that Peter is simply capitulating to the culture. But clearly he is certainly speaking to those who very likely would have been disrespected or certainly not seen as co-heirs with their husband. But here he declares that man and woman, regardless, are co-heirs with Christ, and that the role of the wife is to submit by way of respecting and honoring. It’s not slavish obedience.

Now, it goes on to say—and this gets onto the second part of what it means, the role of the wife—that is, what is true beauty? Now, let me just say at the outset we’re not going to camp out here too long, but he’s not saying you can’t wear jewelry or you can’t wear makeup or you shouldn’t wear nice clothes. That’s not the point. The point is, where is your identity? That is the point. If you’re using makeup, if you’re using jewelry, if you’re using clothes to hide from something or to hide something else, you’re seeking beauty in the wrong place. For what the gospel means to do is that he says to adorn yourself with the hidden person of the heart, that is the character, and with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

Now, some have read that and said, “See, the Bible is telling women just to be quiet and nice again.” Except if you are a student of the Bible and if you are a Christian, you’ll recognize that really what he’s talking about is the fruit of the Spirit. So what he’s calling for here is true of every Christian. So really what he’s saying is that really what is most beautiful and ought to be most beautiful in women and what ought to be the most honorable among men—which we’ll get to in just a moment—is really the fruit of the Spirit.

And so therefore what is seen is that if you recognize that your identity is not in Christ but rather in outward things, then that ought to be an opportunity, a red flag, to say, “Okay, what am I sticking my character in? Who is Christ making me to be? He is making me to be a woman who is gentle rather than harsh.” Quiet not in silence but rather you’re not quarrelsome. You’re not picking a fight. Because it is true, generally speaking—it’s certainly true in my home—my wife is far better with words than I am. Doesn’t mean she talks more than I do. Goodness no. I talk too much. But she’s far better with the words. And what is key is this, that what God means to do with women and men is to have the character of Christ reflected in their character and in your character. And that is to be a person of gentleness and of kindness, not quarrelsome and harsh. And this is what is precious in God’s sight.

So if the role of the wife is to seek to submit by way of respecting and honor the one to whom she is wedded, he gives us Sarah as an example. I’m so glad he gave us Sarah as an example. And he talks about how Sarah—he says, now, this is how women of old used to seek to see themselves adorned, that is not with outward things but with the character of their heavenly Father. He says, “by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.” It’s not saying that Sarah, again, Abram said “jump” and she said, “How high?” Because if you’re familiar with the story at all, you know that’s not the case at all. And then the only time we have that Sarah calls him master or lord is quiet curious.

Just briefly, Genesis 18, this is what happens. This is the Lord now speaking to Abram. Sarah is overhearing the conversation. The Lord then said:

“I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?” Then

the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did.”
[Genesis 18:10-15]

Really, that’s the picture of a couple who’s been married a long time. She doesn’t kowtow to him. Let’s look at the street level situation there. I mean this is in no disrespect, she’s an old woman. Abraham is an old man. And the Lord has just told them, “Guess what? You’re about to be parents.” And she’s listening, and she’s thinking, “Are you serious, have you seen his body? Have you seen mine? That’s not going to happen. Can this really be?” And she’s like, “Abraham, I didn’t laugh.” And he’s like, “Yeah, you did.” She does respect her husband. She recognizes that he followed the Lord, and she followed with him. This is now kowtowing. This is deep and profound respect and understanding.

But notice, there was within her that which is also common: she was anxious and frightened. What could this mean? Now, I will tell you that it is very easy that when you as a female, as a woman, as a wife, you are scared or frightened, how easy it is to want to correct your husband. Particularly when he’s driving. Now, my wife has all the right in the world to correct my driving. I seem to like those traffic cameras, but that’s another point. But when we get scared, what do we do? We want to gain control. Both men and women do. And because the woman’s desire is to be ruling over her husband and the other way around, when the wife gets scared, frightened, or anxious, she wants to take over control, because he surely doesn’t know what he’s doing. That’s what can be common. Doesn’t happen all the time.

And so for the wife to submit, it means that her fear is then turning to the Lord and saying, “Lord, I am anxious. I am scared. And my desire is to tell him what he needs to do. He’s doing it all wrong. Will you help me? Because you are in control.” Because you see, you can’t submit yourself to your husband if you haven’t submitted yourself to the Lord as the one who holds even your husband in his hands, even when he gets it desperately wrong and you see it. But in respect and honor, you submit yourself to the Lord, and you pray for him. And you go to him in respect and honor, and you need to point things out. Can I build on the illustration from a few minutes ago?

So a week and a half ago, I’m speeding down Great Star Road over in Clarksville. It was 9:00 at night. I’m trying to get home. I’m doing 45 in a 30. There’s a new traffic camera. I see the flash. I go inside, tail between my legs. I’m like, “You know there’s a new camera on Great Star?” And Kate knows what’s coming next. So I said, “Well, maybe it’s just there temporarily. They’re just going to send me a warning, you know?” She goes, “No, come on. No they’re not.” And so it came in the mail, sure enough. And she walked in the house this week—God bless you—she walked in the house this week with that envelope in her hand, and she could have handed me my rear end. But she didn’t. She handed—she didn’t even hand it to me. She put it on the counter, she opened it up, and she simply said, “Will you please slow down?” She didn’t berate me. She didn’t belittle me. She probably wanted to, because she writes the checks. But I saw in that moment the grace of Christ, and I am grateful.

Now, husbands, I got to go. Let’s turn to husbands. What does gospel culture look like from the husband’s perspective? Well, Peter says here, “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.” Commentators look at the word “likewise” and they say, “Well, it has a looser meaning. It’s not putting it in parallel with the woman. Again, I’m going to stick my neck out there and say I respectfully disagree. But it does look different, how he seeks to submit unto the Lord and submit unto his wife, what leadership, what being the husband, what being the head of his wife looks like. With this curious phrase in the English, “live with your wives in an understanding way.” NIV uses the word “in a considerate fashion.” So the role of the husband, I have three things.

First, I think what he means here, “in an understanding way,” means in a knowledgeable way. And here I want to say to husbands, the one thing you get to do before your commitment to work, before your commitment to your children, before your commitment to your hobbies, and before your commitment to yourself, is to study your wife. To live with our wives in an understanding way means we study them as a complex human being. We begin to understand and get to know, what are the trigger points for your spouse? What are her trigger points for her fears? What are her trigger points for her joys? What are her trigger words? Do you know what circumstances your wife finds most draining? Do you know what time of day your wife is most likely to be tired or exuberant? Do you know her history? Have you asked her? Have you stopped studying your wife? What is the Lord doing in her? If there is anything that the Lord is doing—and he is certainly working in your wife—one of the things you get to study is not just who she is, but who the Lord is in her. Look at her year over year, not how she is treating you, but look at how the Lord is working in her, and talk about it.

In other words, you must learn—and I say this in the strongest imperative that I can—that when Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church,” he’s calling you to a far more profound way of submitting and of giving yourself than even he does to wives. That means you get to be the Ph.D. of your wife. You get to know her emotionally better than her friends, better than her family. If that is not true of you, I encourage you, let today be the first day that it begins to be true. Wives, if your husbands are poor at doing this, give them the room to mess up and learn. They may start asking you questions that make you uncomfortable, because “he never asked me that before.” Well, maybe it’s because the Lord is at work in him. But to live with our wives in an understanding way, in a knowledgeable way, means we understand them.

Therefore, when we seek to lead, encourage, comfort, follow the Lord and ask our wives to come with us, we understand how they are going to receive it, because we’re learning about them. They belong to you, and you belong to them. If you don’t know your own body, how foolish is that? If you don’t know that your big toe hurts, and you keep stumping it, how foolish would you be? You need to think of your wife as your own body. Care for it. Know it. Do we care more about what we ingest with our sports and what we know about our brackets then we do about the brackets of our wives? Just a question. Encourage you to think about it. May it be March Madness for understanding your wife—not madness because they’re crazy. That’s not what I mean.

Secondly—and this is particularly difficult for us as men—living with our wives in an understanding way isn’t just knowing them. There’s another part. And I’m grateful for the work of Brené Brown and Susan Weissman in their work on empathy. I believe it also means to live with our wives empathetically. Susan Weisman, in looking at the various kinds of professions that require empathy—and oh, is not marriage one of those places that is not a profession but a way of life?—empathy can be the fuel that drives marriages to a deeper place. She points out four things that really describe what empathy is. First, it’s perspective-taking. Taking the perspective of the other. Secondly, staying out of a place of judgment on the other person. Thirdly, recognizing that the other person has various sets of emotions. And then fourthly, communicating that you understand those various emotions, and even communicating if you don’t. But you at least recognize that they’re having those emotions.

This is particularly difficult for us as men, because generally speaking, our first-off response is we want to fix it, and we want to fix whatever ails our marriages or ails our wives, because we want everything to get back to, you know, the path of least resistance. And we want to make it all okay. But that’s not empathy. Empathy is going to the place where our wives are, and not asking how we can fix it, but doing the thing that oftentimes will work against the very thing that is so tempting within us. We want to rule. We want to move. We want to decide it. We want to get it done. But gospel culture in marriage calls us not to do that first but to listen and to hear empathy.

The final thing I would say, when he says here, the weaker vessel thing—he's just talking about women, generally speaking, are the weaker physically than men, generally speaking. Not my wife, she's totally stronger than me, but I'm just saying, that's what he means.

The third thing is this. He says, "Since they are heirs with you in the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." And this is the third thing under the role of the husband, and it is integrity. And I'll close the sermon with this. Husbands, if you are praying to the Lord for various things, if you are asking the Lord's blessing, if you are giving to him prayer requests, if you are giving to him praises on the one hand, and yet on the other you're not living with your wife in an understanding, empathetic way but are doing so dismissively or disregardingly or angrily, that means at the heart of your professed faith is a lack of integrity, which means you ought not to expect your prayers to be answered. I'm not saying that the Lord doesn't; he's the Lord.

But I will say, if on the one hand you're asking the Lord for a blessing yet you're mistreating the very body that is yours, the one who is yours, your wife, then why ought you to expect the Lord to bless you in your praying? The Lord is gracious and compassionate and forgiving and loving, and he does forgive us, and he helps us in our weakness. But you cannot without repentance expect to just keep going on and treating your wife that way, and yet still expecting the Lord just to hear whatever it is you have to say. Because then at the core of your faith is something that isn't true. The Lord calls you to himself as a man, just as he calls you to himself as a woman. In marriage, husband and wife.

Again, I will say, the core of everything that I have said is alone the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant. He came to serve and not to be served. He gave himself that we might have life. When man and women are joined and they leave their families and they become one flesh, each belonging to the other, then the culture that is built there is a culture that is built on the grace and sacrifice and salvation of Jesus. And then what break out of that beautiful thing is the glorious grace of Christ that shows itself in mutual submission of respect and honor, understanding, and empathy.

We celebrate twenty years of marriage this year, and I am grateful for that. Some of you here are celebrating many more, and some fewer. And some are not even married, I recognize. And we are at various places in our sanctification in what God is doing in terms of the gospel culture of our marriages. But we need to know, the Lord means to make you a holy people, holy men and holy women who are joined together in matrimony for his glory, to reflect to the world his grace and mercy. So he means to use your marriage as one of the chief places to do that. May he do that in us. May he begin with forgiving our sin and our shortcomings, but may he give us grace to love one another. Let's pray.

Now, Heavenly Father, we ask that you would make us men and women, husbands and wives, that reflect your glory, made in the image of Christ, made to reflect the character of Christ, made to live out as Christ to one another, giving ourselves in these various roles. Lord, I pray for the marriages of Columbia Presbyterian Church. There are marriages that are growing. There are marriages that are celebrating. There are marriages that are hurting. None of it is beyond your power. May you by your Holy Spirit breathe in new life and renewal to the marriages of this congregation, that they would become a greater and greater expression of the gospel. In Jesus' mighty name we pray. Amen.