

The Witness of Holy Marriages

1 Peter 3:1-7

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We are picking up where we left off last Sunday, in 1 Peter 3:1-7. Remember that Peter addresses our conduct in *three key relationships*: with the *government/human institutions, as servants (work relationships)*, and *marriage: husband and wife relationship*. Remember, Peter said that we would experience suffering in these relationships. When we trust Jesus in our suffering, it means entrusting ourselves to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

One of our key take-a-ways is that when we are submissive and endure suffering by trusting in Jesus, it glorifies God and is also a witness to an unbelieving world. Peter said in v. 20, *“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”* Credit is our honorable conduct that is a witness of the truth of the gospel to unbelievers.

Before we jump into our text, I want to go back and clarify something in last week’s message. When Peter says to *honor the emperor and that Jesus did not revile when He was suffering*, I don’t think I was clear enough about what I was not saying. It does not mean we cannot have a healthy and even spirited debate about politics. It does not mean we cannot disagree with the president or congress or the supreme court. It does not mean we cannot be involved in politics. We should debate and think critically about policies, laws, and who our government officials are. This is how we conduct government in America. This is how we hammer out good policies and laws. The application is to put our fear in God, trust God, and yet, honor our president, congress, and judges.

For example, take abortion. Abortion is bad, and the supreme court should have never ruled in favor of it. They should overturn that law. We should speak up and speak out about this wicked ruling. We should work to change people’s hearts and minds on this evil law. Healthy debate and critique of laws and policies are not reviling or dishonoring. However, there is a line we cross when our anger becomes sinful. We must exercise wisdom and even caution as we live in a nation with a participative government.

Transition: As I looked back over the sermon, I felt like I did not explain this well enough. Now let’s move into our 1 Peter 3:1-7 and examine the third relationship Peter said is a gospel witness: *holy marriages*.

In the year 397, one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church completed his autobiography titled: *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Augustine’s autobiography has been a favorite for 1500 years.

In his book, Augustine wrote a moving tribute to his mother, Monica. His mother was one of the reasons he and his father, Patricius, came to faith in Jesus Augustine said:

“She [Monica] served her husband as her master, and did all she could to win him for You, speaking to him of You by her conduct, by which You made her beautiful . . . Finally, when her husband was at the end of his earthly span, she gained him for You.”¹

It is easy to see how Augustine’s mother, who struggled in a difficult marriage for many years, pressed into the hope of the gospel to save her husband. Although she struggled for her whole marriage, the Lord brought her husband to faith in Christ at the very end of his life. Imagine an effort to evangelize that took a lifetime. Perhaps she even memorized and meditated on the hope of 1 Peter 3:1-2:

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, ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

There have been and will be many men entering into heaven who will give glory to Jesus for the faithful witness of their wives and mothers and even grandmothers. I remember when I was in a period of rebellion in my life, it was the faithful witness and prayers of my mother and my aunt Martha that God used in my life. Holy women evangelize their husbands and children and even extended family with faithful prayer, dependence on Jesus, gentle and direct words about life and faith, and pure conduct that flows out of the gospel. *I only have two points, and I will give them as we move through the text.*

I. The Holy Witness of Holy Wives (Holy Women) (vv. 1-6)

¹ Augustine, *Confession*, quoted in David R. Helm’s *1-2 Peter and Jude: Share in the Sufferings of Christ, Preaching the Word* series, ed. R. Kent Hughes, 101.

Before we dive into the text, I want you to keep in mind *to whom was Peter writing?* In vv. 1-6, Peter is specifically addressing Christian women who are married to unbelieving men. He exhorts them in holy conduct in order to be a witness to their husbands.² However, what I want you to do is let the Holy Spirit push the principles taught in this text into other areas of your life. It won't look exactly the same, but let them be applied as much as possible to those with whom you are sharing the gospel.

A. A wife's holy witness of holy conduct (vv. 1-2)

"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, ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct."

Peter begins his exhortation with "*Likewise*." This means he is connecting what he just said to what he is about to say. He is continuing to apply what it looks like to live a holy life that he called for in 1 Peter 1:13-25. This is how it will push out like concentric circles into other relationships in your life. Peter is taking these principles and exhorting us in evangelism. In vv. 1-7, he is making specific application to Christian women who are married to unbelieving men.

Then Peter says, "*wives, be subject to your own husbands*." He not only says it in v. 1, but he repeats it in v. 5. This little passage has a double emphasis on submission. *Be subject* is the same Greek word that Paul uses in Ephesians 5:24, "*Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands*." Some people think, "*Well, Peter, you were doing fine until you said this now you are like that misogynist the Apostle Paul who only wants to put women in their place*."

We must not allow the word *submission* to cause our minds to jam gears. The Apostle Paul does talk about submission, and his example is the glorious relationship between Christ and His Bride, the church.

Also, last Sunday, I said we can take some cues from how Peter and John submitted to the human institution of the Jewish council. The difference between submitting to Christ and human institutions is that Christ is our sinless Savior and King. Humans who lead human institutions are sinners and therefore sin against other sinners. Likewise, husbands and wives are sinners and will sin against one another.

It takes wisdom for us to navigate these relationships. It takes wisdom to navigate the relationship between *authority* and *submission*. Authority in a relationship is not bad, but it can be abused, and sinners very easily abuse it. Submission in a relationship is not bad unless we misunderstand it and become a doormat for those who abuse authority.

Paul and Peter's interaction with human institutions and governments is helpful because they interacted with sinners who had authority. What we notice is that both Peter and Paul's interactions with human institutions were respectful and yet direct. They spoke their minds and made their cases to the Jewish council.

Now, obviously, there is a limit because eventually, both Peter and Paul were arrested by the Roman government, imprisoned, and executed. I would not recommend a wife to stay in an abusive relationship. If a wife is being abused by a husband who is abusing his authority as a husband, then she needs to separate herself from him and do what she can to resolve the problem. The husband's authority in the marriage is to lead like Christ, who laid down His life on the cross for His bride, the church. Human institutions do not lay down their lives. If a husband is not leading in a way that is self-sacrificing for his wife, then his authority is compromised.

Submission in a marriage does not mean the wife is a doormat that takes whatever the husband does. It does not mean that the wife always has to agree with her husband. It does not mean she does not speak up or speak her mind. It does not mean if the husband asks you to sin that you sin. It does not mean that if a husband tells a Christian wife to abandon her faith in Jesus that she does so. Finally, submission does not mean if a husband is physically abusive or verbally abusive that a wife remains quiet and simply take this cruelty at all cost. If abuse is going on, then she should separate and get help to save the marriage (if that is possible).

A godly wife who is submissive to her husband should feel the freedom and safety in the marriage to speak her mind and even respectfully correct her husband if she needs to. For example, contrary to popular belief, I do not always react or respond to situations and circumstances in Christ-honoring ways. My wife is one of the most gentle, quiet persons you will ever meet, but when I cross that line and sin, she has quite often corrected me. She does not do it because she believes she is leading the family or because she thinks she is always right but because she knows my greatest desire is to honor Christ and so she calls me back to obey Jesus.

As I have said many times before about marriage, your sin becomes your spouse's first-hand experience. Because I know this to be true, Stacy and I have an understanding that when we see each other acting in sinful ways, we have permission to speak into one another's life and call each other to repentance. I don't hold my marriage up as perfect, but it is a marriage where we strive

² Daniel M. Doriani, *1 Peter Reformed Expository Commentary*, 109.

to apply the gospel because we are not perfect. I owe a lot of my spiritual growth to the blessing of God, giving me a godly wife who has put up with my sinfulness for thirty years. She has called me to repentance many times, and I suspect she will continue to do so. Men, it will be the same for you, and you will put down deep spiritual roots if you will listen to a godly wife OR if you are single, find a godly wife.

Now, look back at v. 1. Peter had a very specific purpose for calling Christian wives to be subject to their unbelieving husbands. He wanted these wives to be a witness to these men. He knew that when a wife became a Christian that it would create conflict in the marriage. How was she to respond since she no longer participated in the pagan religion of her husband? Because her faith in Jesus would create conflict in the marriage, Peter called these Christian wives to live lives of *holy, pure conduct* so that these men may perhaps be won to Christ.

I remember when I was on staff at First Baptist Church Hamlin in West Texas. We had a lady in our church who was married to an old cotton farmer. Sheila came to faith in Jesus, and her life was radically changed. Her husband, Marion, was not happy about it. He was a rough old farmer, and he did not like it that his wife was getting up every Sunday and going to church. Sheila gently talked to Marion about Jesus and explained the gospel to him. He reluctantly listened but refused. Undeterred, Sheila kept on serving Marion as if she was serving Jesus Himself. This touched Marion. Although he did not believe the Bible, he could not deny she was different. She seemed to be at peace and had an overflowing joy that spilled over on to him. This went on for over a year when he realized that this was no passing fad. He understood that her new faith was real. He did not understand the gospel, but he loved what Christ had done in her life. One day he told her that he had to have what she had. She shared the gospel with him one more time, and he placed his faith in Christ. Marion was a deacon in our church and one of the godliest men I have ever met. This is a man who will enter heaven and praise Jesus and thank Him for giving him a holy wife.

This is what it means *to be won without a word*. It does not mean you never share the gospel. Romans teaches us that *faith comes by hearing*. What Peter means is a wife's words and conduct are the same. She does not have to be sharing the gospel with him constantly. She shares the gospel, the seed is planted, and then God waters that seed through her *pure and holy conduct*.

The pattern set forth in vv. 1-2 is an excellent pattern for evangelism within families and those with whom you have constant contact. If you have shared the gospel with them and you see them every day, you don't have to nag them all the time. Talk about Jesus in subtle ways and let your holy conduct drive the truth of the gospel home. Give the Holy Spirit opportunities to water the gospel seed through your pure conduct.

B. A wife's holy witness of holy gospel beauty (vv. 3-4)

"Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴ 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."

In these two verses, Peter gives very specific instructions for outward appearance. He called these Christian wives not to focus on the externals but on the internal condition of the heart.

The Greco-Roman moralist writers of that day encouraged women to have a quiet, gentle spirit and modest dress, and this was consistent with biblical values. However, many women in that day did not value or practice those morals.

Peter knew these new converts might be tempted to use worldly methods to win their husbands to Christ. The fact is, even in the first-century sex and sex appeal could sell. An unconverted husband might agree to anything to get what he wants. He might even profess faith in Jesus, although it would be a false profession.

Here's the principle in this situation and with evangelism in general: *what you win him with is what you keep him with*. In other words, if a convert is made with temporary, fading beauty, then what will happen when that beauty is no longer there. When men, women, and people, in general, are won to Christ using worldly methods, then it will require those methods to continue to keep them. Peter's exhortation is for these men to be won to Christ through the simple beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ that has transformed a wife's heart. Anything added to the gospel may possibly produce a false conversion.

Therefore, Peter charges these Christian wives to not focus on the externals but to cultivate the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of gospel fruit or what we might call the fruit of the Spirit. Growth in this area is through Scripture reading, prayer, meditation, memorization, study, and by learning from older godly women in your church. The Spirit of God takes the word of God among the people of God and shapes them into the image of their Savior.

By the way, this text does not mean it is sinful for women to wear makeup or dress in nice clothes. It does not mean you cannot fix your hair or wear rings. There is balance to these things. If you spend more time looking in the mirror at your face instead of looking at your life in the mirror of God's word, then you might want to rethink where your priorities are.

Look at the last phrase of v. 4, *“which in God’s sight is very precious.”* This last phrase should make you smile because it makes God smile. Now you know how God values your obedience to His word. He graciously and lavishly pours out His affirmation on a woman with this kind of trust in the Savior. This is what true beauty is, and it is a beauty that only increases with age instead of an external beauty that fades.

C. A wife’s holy witness as a holy daughter of promise (vv. 5-6)

“For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

This last exhortation that Peter gives builds on and illustrates the last one. He finds an example of submission for these Christian women in Sarah.

These women needed to see what submission looked like. Although Sarah had a gentle and quiet spirit, neither did she shy away from getting in Abraham’s face when he needed it. In Genesis 21:8-13, Sarah confronted Abraham about her trouble with Hagar. She told him he needed to do something. Abraham went to God. Listen to what God said in v. 12, *“Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”*

Then in Genesis 18:9-15 is where we find the fun sentence where Sarah called Abraham, *“lord.”* The background for this is found in Genesis 18. We need to observe that the word *lord* is lower case. It is a term of respect and honor, not a title.

So, here is the story, two angels visit Abraham and Sarah. While Abraham is talking to the angels, Sarah is listening in the tent. The angels told Abraham that this time next year, Sarah would have a son.

And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

Sarah’s respect and submission to Abraham are seen in how she referred to him when she thought no one was listening. She called him *lord*. She did not call him an old fool, an old coot, or an old codger. Although she initially laughed in disbelief, she knew Abraham believed God and so she came to believe God too. What we learn is because of her faith in God, a miracle happened—*a son of promise was born to a daughter of promise.*

There are probably a lot of Christian wives who listen to the promise that her unbelieving husband can be born again and, after many years of barrenness, laugh and think, *“Yeah, right! God’s going to save him.”* Perhaps there are some Christian husbands who look at their unbelieving wives, and after many years of no spiritual interest, just laugh and say, *“Yeah, right! God’s going to save her.”* Perhaps there are Christian parents who look at their unbelieving child or children after many years of rejecting Christ and laugh, *“Yeah, right! I give up because I don’t think there will ever be born a child of promise.”* Finally, maybe you are a Christian son or daughter, and you look at your unbelieving parents and laugh because you just have no idea how a child of promise will be born in them. *The question for all of us is: Will we believe God?*

The last part of v. 6 says, *“And you are her children if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”* We can almost hear the voices of the women in our culture today, saying, *“You have got to be kidding me! This kind of life is absolutely absurd. God will keep His promises? God will keep me safe in this relationship?”* To which the Apostle, Peter says, *“Yes. God can be trusted. His word can be trusted. His word remains forever.”*

I realize that it can be frightening for holy women to give themselves to this pattern of life. Faith and a living hope mean you must believe God and that He will meet you in your hour of need. You can trust God and His word. So, whatever situation you find yourself in: an unjust government, an overbearing boss, or a difficult husband, God can be trusted. He will deliver you.³

II. The Holy Witness of Holy Husbands (v. 7)

Let’s wrap up our time with the witness of holy husbands.

“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.”

³ David Helm, *1-2 Peter and Jude: Preaching the Word series*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, 106.

The exhortation to the husbands is not to unbelieving husbands but to believing husbands. Peter's exhortation also gives clarity to the idea of *submission*.

Just as he did in v. 1, he begins with the word, "*Likewise*." Peter connects the application of a gospel witness and the call to holiness to everything he had just written.

Verse 7 says husbands are to live with their wives, "*in an understanding way*." This phrase means, *according to knowledge*, is used throughout the Bible to refer to sexual intercourse. However, it is not referring to sexual intercourse in this text.

Here is what he means. In v. 7 Peter exhorts a husband to have an *educated intimacy of his wife that is gained by paying loving attention to her*. In other words, the holy husband is the husband who studies his wife. He knows how to show *honor* to her.

The Greek word translated *honor* is the idea of monetary value. Peter is telling these men their wives are to be treated like the Proverbs 31 woman who says in v. 10, "*An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels*."

Brothers, Peter is calling us to invest in our wives. The man who does not nurture and build up his wife is a foolish man who, as the Apostle Paul says, hates himself. The husband who does not honor and build up his wife is a bankrupt husband who needs to repent.

Verse 7 goes on to say that she is the *weaker vessel*. This verse does not mean women are inferior or less important or less intelligent. It is referring to the physical makeup of the female body. For the most part, men are built larger and stronger than women.

Peter wants to make clear that just because men are physically stronger than women, that does not mean women are not equal to men before God. He drives his point home to make sure men understand *that women are co-heirs with them because they equally receive the grace of Jesus at salvation*.

The husband who does not understand v. 7 will have his prayers hindered. Brothers, we should not think that if we, as husbands, mistreat our fellow-heirs with the grace of God, believe that God will answer our prayers.

Conclusion

Marriage is a visual gospel tract. Marriage is meant to be a display of the relationship between Christ and His church. Husbands are supposed to learn from Jesus how to lead and lay down their lives for their wives, and wives are supposed to look to the role of the church as she responds to Christ.

Our struggle is that both men and women are still sinners. However, just because we struggle it does not nullify our call to be a display of the glory of God in the gospel. Our call is to display the fullness of the gospel in our repentance for sin and then become obedient to the gospel. Just as the church renews her covenant with Jesus through the Lord's Supper so also marriages are renewed as we seek forgiveness from one another and then bear fruit in keeping with that repentance.

Let's pray that our marriages at Grand become displays of the glory of the gospel and not distortions of the gospel.