

There was a cartoon some time ago where a pastor had prepared the pulpit area like a fortress. It was like he was peering through the crack of a machine gun nest. The caption read, "Today my text is 1 Peter 3:1, 'Wives submit to your husbands.'" Well, I have the unenviable task today of speaking from 1 Peter 3 in our study of this book. It's not a popular section. Many women can't hear these words without a strong emotional reaction, and in some cases there's good reason for that.

But verse 7 isn't popular with men either because it says, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives." That's not easy to do in an age of selfishness and pride. In spite of its unpopularity, this is an incredibly important section of Scripture.

Preliminary Observations

Before we look at these verses, there are a few things to keep in mind.

God is our designer and He knows what's best for us

When you buy a car, you open the glove compartment and take out the owner's manual. The one who designed the car knows how it best functions. God is our designer. He made man first from the dust of the ground. Then God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*" So God made a woman from the rib of Adam. Then God performed the first marriage ceremony. It says, "*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame*" (Gen. 2:24-25). That's God's design for marriage. Two people—male and female—coming together without shame in a lifelong covenant of oneness. Ultimately, marriage was designed to be a beautiful picture of the love relationship between God and his people.

But somehow things have changed. Way too many marriages end in divorce. Some of you know firsthand the pain of that. Many couples aren't even bothering to get married to avoid the mess. Why is it that something God designed to be a blessing has become so difficult? You see, after this first marriage in the garden something terrible happened. We call it "the fall." Sin infected the human race and that changed everything. It changed marriage as well. This beautiful picture of God's love was torn and marred. Now marriage is hard because it's the union of two fallen people living in a fallen world. But because we have a

Savior, and because he's come to restore us and remake us, we can recover some of the beauty and goodness God designed for marriage. But to have any hope of experiencing that, we need to read the owner's manual.

As followers of Jesus we're under the authority of God and His Word

When you become a Christian, you submit your ego and will to God, saying, "Not my will but yours be done. I acknowledge my way isn't the best way. I'll submit to your word."

I was on a flight to Knoxville on Tuesday and connected through Chicago. I boarded the plane in Chicago and we sat on the runway for 90 minutes. Then the pilot announced, "This flight is canceled due to weather." We were all pretty frustrated, but I'll tell you, no one in their right mind on that plane argued about it. You don't trust your own instincts in a situation like that; you trust the air traffic controllers who see what you don't see. So we all submitted to their decision and got off the plane.

Proverbs 14:12 says, "*There is a way that appears to be right but the end it leads to death.*" When it comes to God's design for marriage, you can come with a spirit of defiance, saying, "I'm going to do it my way." Or you can come with a spirit of submission to the one who designed you, saying, "Lord, teach me what kind of spouse you want me to be. Teach me how this marriage thing is supposed to work." I hope as we open this passage it will be with that spirit.

We must understand Peter's cultural context as it relates to marriage

While what Peter says here may seem demeaning to wives, the fact is it was elevating in his day. Under Jewish law, a woman was a thing, the possession of her husband; she had no legal rights. In Roman society, a man was called the paterfamilias (the lord of the household), and had absolute authority over his wife. Against that backdrop, what Peter says here is radical. He addresses wives equally as responsible individuals in the community. Also, he makes it clear that not only do wives have duties, but so do husbands. He even tells husbands their wives are "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life." An equal? This past week we celebrated International Women's Day. I think Peter would have supported that. This was unheard of in his day! So, what may seem to us as degrading to women was the opposite in Peter's context.

In fact, even though Peter addresses wives first in this passage, I want to start with what he says to husbands down in verse 7 and then we'll look at his instruction to wives.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

What is the Husband's Role in a Marriage?

Notice he starts out, "*Husbands, in the same way...*" If you look up at verse 1 he says the same thing to wives, "Wives, in the same way..." In the same way as what? For both, it's in the same way as Jesus who's described at the end of chapter 3. Just like Jesus entrusted himself to the Father and endured suffering, you husbands do the same. Just as Jesus was humble and obedient to God, you husbands do the same. Husbands are called to submission just as wives are.

For a husband that starts with this: "*be considerate as you live with your wives.*" If we were living in Peter's day we wouldn't have expected him to say that. We'd have expected him to say, "Husbands, make sure you keep your wife in line." In Peter's day it was a husband's duty to enforce obedience. But here he says to put the feelings, interests and needs of your wife ahead of your own. And there's no condition attached to this command. A husband's consideration of his wife isn't dependent on her submission. We say, "Why should I be considerate of my wife if she isn't considerate of me? All she does is criticize me?" Maybe this is precisely **why** you should be considerate of her; because in her brokenness she needs your understanding even more.

What a contrast that is to what many wives experience. I think of a wife who's been home all day with the kids or even worked all day and then picked the kids up on the way home. She's exhausted, trying to time dinner for the unannounced arrival of her husband. She hopes when he gets home she'll be able to recharge her own emotional batteries. She hasn't heard a word of approval or affection all day. Then he walks in, late and tired. He's had a hard day. He's talked out. He reaches for the remote control for some down time on the couch. As they sit down to eat she inwardly winces when he says the Warriors game starts in a half hour. Later that night, he hops into bed, and all of a sudden he pays a lot more attention to her. He can't understand why she's not in the mood. That's not being considerate of your wife; it's being selfish.

Karen Howe tells how she heard a sermon on marriage. The pastor spent 59 minutes talking about the wife's need to submit, and 1 minute on the husband's role. It was his grand finale. He said, "Men, you must love your wives just as Christ also loved the church. What does that mean?" There was a dramatic pause. "That means you must be willing to die for her." Then he sat down. Later, she writes, "Colorful images raced through my

mind of my husband leaping in front of an oncoming bull or offering himself to cannibals in my stead." But then she thought about it. She thought about the reality of everyday life—diapers, dishes, and driving. She concludes, "Most women do not want their men to die for them. They want their men to live for them." Husbands, you probably won't ever have the chance to leap in front of an oncoming bull for your wife, but every day you can die for her by living for her. Usually that has a lot to do with small choices you make throughout the day. A lot of times being considerate is about the little things.

But it's hard to do this because men are so different from women. We're wired differently. So for us to be considerate of our wife we must understand her. In fact, the NASB translates this, "live with your wives in an understanding way" or literally "according to knowledge." That takes some effort. I was a student for a long time. I spent the first ten years of our marriage studying church history, theology and preaching. That took a lot of effort. But there's one course I've been enrolled in for 38 years. I'm still studying Lynn Mitchell. What matters to her? Where do her passions lie? What energizes her? What communicates love to her? What burdens does she bear? This takes time and effort. I have to pay attention. I confess I haven't got her completely figured out. Husbands, study your wife! Be a lifelong learner—about her! Contrary to popular opinion, you actually can understand her. And when you learn something about her, put her interests above your own.

Then Peter says, "*treat them with respect.*" The NASB says, "show her honor." This would have been unheard of in Peter's day! Whenever I do a wedding, I always quote Proverbs 18:22 to the new husband, "*He who finds a wife, finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.*" He should view his wife as a treasure. He should find ways to praise her. Many women struggle with low self-esteem. It doesn't help that our society often devalues what a wife and mother does. All the more reason to honor her.

Have you ever noticed how some men treat their cars? He washes, polishes and pampers it. He services it regularly. He doesn't want others to touch it. He has a special name for his car only he knows. He may even talk to his car, heaping praise on it. He loves to be seen in the car, hoping to attract admiring glances. He can talk about his car for hours. He parks it in the remote part of the parking lot just to prevent it from careless motorists. In essence, he gives his car a place of honor in his life.

You know where I'm going with this: These men give more honor to the machine in the garage than the woman they sleep with! We honor what we value. It's not enough to say, "Well, I'm just not wired that way." Then it is time to get rewired! Ephesians says you're to "nourish and cherish" your wife, not your car. The writer of Proverbs got that. After describing the godly wife and mother, he said, "*Her children arise and call her*

blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all" (Prov. 31:28-29). That's what a woman longs for. God created her with a need to feel cherished; to feel she's the most important person in your life.

Now this may surprise you, but Peter says part of honoring her is understanding she's *"the weaker partner."* It doesn't say the weak partner, but the weaker partner. You're both weak. And he's not talking about spiritual or intellectual weakness. He's talking about physical weakness. I know we could argue about this. There are some women who certainly are stronger than some men. Most men wouldn't last more than 30 seconds in childbirth! But it's also true most men could physically overpower their wives. It's like this: Here's an everyday coffee mug worth probably a couple of dollars. I can bang it and drop it and throw it in the car. But here is a teacup that's worth a lot more. It's the weaker of the two. If I bang it around, it will chip. It's more delicate, but it's also more valuable. So I handle it differently than this mug. In the same way, we should honor our wives by treating them with care and tenderness. By the way, behind Peter's words loom a sharp rebuke, "What kind of sick man, built twice the size of his wife, would even consider lifting a hand to hurt her?"

She is a fellow-heir. But just because she's made differently doesn't mean she's something less. That's why Peter says she's "an heir with you of the gracious gift of life." That's saying the two of you will inherit eternal life together. When it comes to salvation and eternal life, you're on the same level. That's why Paul said, *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28).

Peter ends with a warning: *"so that nothing will hinder your prayers."* Have you ever tried to pray after an argument with your wife? How easy is it to hold your wife's hand in prayer after disrespecting her, ignoring her, or taking her for granted? When a husband doesn't treat his wife with consideration and respect that has an impact on his spiritual life. Of course, the assumption here is as a husband you actually **do** pray, and you pray with your wife. I've never met a Christian wife who didn't want to pray more with her husband. So, men, here's another way for you to be considerate of your wife: before you leave for work in the morning or turn out the light at night initiate a time of prayer with her. You might even find that prayer leads to other things!

Women are Called to Submit to Their Husbands

Now let's look at what Peter says to wives, He starts out in v. 1 and says, *"Wives in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands."* Someone has called "submit" the Christian "S" word. This runs against the grain of our society, which emphasizes our rights. These words are even more difficult to hear in light of how so many women in today's world are mistreated and

demeaned in the name of religion. Not to mention that they've been misunderstood and abused by many Christians, especially Christian men. I want to take a fresh look at what these words mean. Let just make a few things clear.

Submission isn't just for wives

All Christians are commanded to submit. Here in 1 Peter we've all been told to submit to governmental authorities. Slaves have been told to submit to their masters. Later, Peter will command younger men to submit to the elders of the church. In Ephesians 5:21 Paul tells all believers to submit to one another. We're all called to submit, not just to God, but to each other. When wives submit to their husbands, they're doing something we're all called to do in one context our another.

Submission has nothing to do with equality

Our Christian faith tells us Jesus was fully God, equal with the Father. And yet, Jesus chose to submit to his Father. He said, "I came to do the will of him who sent me." You can be equal in value but still submit. When wives submit to their husbands, it's not because they're less than their husbands; it's because they have a different role to play. A woman's role in relation to her husband, according to Genesis 2, is to be a "helper suitable for him." A helper isn't a slave. That's a word in the Bible with great dignity; God is called our "helper." A helper is a companion who gives aid. A suitable helper is one who fits; who's different but equal. A healthy marriage looks like a well functioning team, each person contributing equally but playing different roles. I've never looked at a couple and said, "What a healthy marriage! That wife is so submissive." No, I say, "What a healthy marriage. They respect and complement each other so well."

Submission doesn't mean doing things against the teaching of God's Word

Scripture says we're to obey God rather than man. A wife is still responsible for her actions. She can't disobey God's word because her husband tells her to and blame it on him. Submission isn't bondage or servitude. It's not telling a wife to knuckle under abuse. In fact, submission is never to be demanded from the husband. Husbands, don't tell your wife to submit! This is between her and God. Don't go reading her mail! If you think you have to tell her to submit, you're probably not doing your job. Your job, as we've seen, will make it easy for her. If you're playing your role, if you're loving her and building her up the way you should, submission likely won't be an issue.

So what does submission mean? It literally means "to place yourself under." It's something done voluntarily; it's not forced. One person has said, "Submission is the Christian grace of yielding one's preferences to another...rather than asserting ones rights." Someone else said it's a "modest, cooperative demeanor of putting another first." But here's my favorite, "Submission is knowing how to duck so God can hit your husband." It involves

an attitude of respect and a willingness to follow. In Ephesians Paul says wives are to do this “as to the Lord.” This doesn’t mean you treat your husband as if he were the Lord. It means you submit to your husband, not because he deserves it, but as a way of serving and submitting to the Lord. As a woman submits to her husband, she looks over his shoulder to see the Lord who says, “You’re doing this for me.”

One of the purposes is for the salvation of your husband. He says do this *“so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.”* Some of you have husbands who don’t believe. They don’t come to church with you. Perhaps they do but they don’t share your passion for the Lord. You’ve tried to persuade them. You’ve talked with them about how important Jesus is to you, but they don’t get it. Peter says you won’t win them over by rebelling against them, or by putting them down, or by leaving a little verse of Scripture on their pillow when they come home! The way to influence your husband is by living with such purity and reverence that he says, “God is making a difference in her life. He’s making her a better person who’s more pleasant to live with. I think I’ll investigate.” The quality of your life speaks to him. And, of course, pray for him. I know men in this church who’ve come to the Lord through a praying wife who witnessed through her godly life.

With that, Peter says, *“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.”* He’s not saying don’t ever pay attention to your hair, or wear jewelry or nice clothes! He’s saying, “Don’t let your outward appearance become your focus.” A couple of weeks ago I watched the red carpet deal at the Academy Awards. The whole point of that is outward beauty and adornment—opulence, glamor, outrageous price tags. In some cases, not a lot is left to the imagination! In Peter’s day these adornments were viewed as instruments of seduction, and let’s face it, they can be today as well. It’s exactly what Peter says to avoid. The point here isn’t a legalistic ban on outward beauty and dress but the vastly superior value of inward beauty. Our youthful bodies fade; inward beauty doesn’t. I’d also add, if women are to value their character more than their appearance, men should value their character more than their appearance also.

Peter’s example is holy women of the past and specifically Sarah. He says, “For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed

Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.” Sarah is an interesting example. On several occasions she did submit to Abraham without a word. She followed him to the Promised Land. She let him pass her off as his sister. But Sarah was no pushover. There were also times she exerted her will, like when she demanded Hagar and Ishmael leave their home. Submission is **not** always keeping silent. For your husband to be all God intends him to be there will be times for you to speak up; times for you to point out areas in his life that need work. If your husband is a workaholic it’s not a good thing for you to just say nothing. Submission isn’t about enabling wrong or sick behavior. There are times to draw a line. There are times to say, “I won’t do that. I won’t go along with that. We can’t have that in our home.” Submission isn’t enabling wrong behavior, but empowering right behavior.

It says here Sarah called her husband “lord.” Honestly, I don’t know any man who wants his wife to call him lord. That kind of gags me. But I don’t know of any husband who doesn’t want his wife to respect him. That’s what Peter is getting at here. Somebody said every woman needs to be loved and every man needs to be admired and respected. Having this kind of attitude will help your husband become the man God intends him to be. Your husband needs for you to believe in him. He needs to know you have confidence in him. You have great power in his life. You can build him up by respecting him, or you can destroy him by demeaning him. The greatest fear of a man is failure—that he won’t cut it; that he doesn’t have what it takes. And so, a wife’s respect can cut through that fear and help him to be the man he was meant to be.

Let me tell you something else about men: in their fear of failure, they usually either become tyrants or, more often, they become passive. Men will often abdicate leadership if you as a wife insist on leading, or if you criticize every attempt he makes to lead. So build him up, applaud his efforts, praise the small steps he takes. Minimize the mistakes. I know women who are so frustrated their husbands won’t take the lead, especially spiritually, but so often when he tries to, she’s not applauding him, she’s correcting him.

So the bottom line in all of this is: husbands, understand your wife, be considerate of her needs, honor her as a spiritual equal. And wives, respect the leadership role God has given to your husband, support and encourage him in that.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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