

VIII. Wives and Husbands

December 7/9/10, 2020

1 Peter 3:1-7

Aim: To strengthen marriages by applying God's standard of living beautiful lives within the relationship of husband and wife.

Gardner: Peter now gives another specific example of how 'exiles' should live and what showing proper respect to everyone (2:17) may look like. He has written about slaves submitting to their masters (2:18) and now he turns to wives and husbands.

McKnight: His emphasis on the wives (3:1-6), like his emphasis both on governmental authority (2:13-17) and slaves (2:18-25), probably emerges from the presence of a large number of women whose husbands were not yet Christians. Because Peter spent most of his time addressing women does not mean today that men need to be addressed only briefly.

Helm: In all three cases (2:13-3:7), Christians are to present themselves before a watching world as people who emulate Jesus. We are to pattern our lives on His example. For in doing so we present the world fresh and vibrant pictures of living hope. Clearly, that is the logic of our opening verses. Equally clear are Peter's desires that his words apply to all Christian wives, not just those who are married to unbelieving husbands, for the text says, 'even if *some* do not obey the word.' So the force behind the words we are looking at in 3:1-6 are intended for all Christian wives.

A. Instructions to Wives (1 Peter 3:1-6)

1. Conduct (3:1-2)

¹Likewise, 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, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

a) Wives (3:1a)

...wives...

MacArthur: In first-century Greco-Roman culture, women received little or no respect. As long as they lived in their father's house, they were subject to the Roman law of *patria potestas* ('the father's power'), which granted fathers ultimate life-and-death authority over their children. Husbands had a similar kind of legal authority over their wives. Society regarded women as mere servants who were to stay at home and obey their husbands. If a woman decided to obey the gospel, that decision to change religions on her own could result in severe abuse from her unsaved husband. When such conversion did occur, a wife needed to know how to respond to her husband so that she might win him to the gospel. Her essential duty was to be submissive, as in the case of civil and workplace relations.

McKnight: Asia Minor permitted freedoms to women, including some kind of religious freedom; however, most scholars are agreed that when a woman struck out on her own and joined a religion different from her husband's, that could be seen as an act of insubordination. Far from making what was probably a difficult situation worse, Peter exhorts these women to be especially circumspect.

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Doriani: First, *historically*, while Peter’s message applies to all, he addresses Christian women who are married to unbelieving men. He teaches these women how to conduct themselves, that they might win their husbands to the faith (3:1). Secondly, *culturally*, Peter draws on norms admired by Greco-Roman moralists as he counsels wives in winsome behavior. Ethicists often urged women to be chaste and respectful, to shun gaudy clothes and hair, and to show a meek and quiet spirit. Wherever biblical and Greco-Roman norms agree, Peter urges Christian women to behave in ways that both God and their pagan husbands would approve. Furthermore, that age assumed that wives would adopt the religion(s) of their husbands. A Christian woman, upon conversion to the faith, could no longer participate in pagan worship rituals. Since the Greco-Roman wife was expected to share her husband’s faith, that refusal would seem subversive. Thus, Peter tells godly wives to conduct themselves in ways that demonstrate respect for their husbands and so to mitigate the potential tension caused by their faith.... It might seem that Peter’s instructions burden women and excuse men. But it is more accurate to say that Peter aimed to guide Christian women who were married to pagan men. Further, simply by addressing them, Peter honored the women of his churches. The literature of the day normally ignored the subordinate partner in a relationship. Authors addressed governors, masters, husbands, and fathers and overlooked ordinary men, plus slaves, wives, and children, who were judged unworthy or incapable of receiving instruction. By guiding wives, children, and slaves, Peter (like Paul in Ephesians 5:21-6:9) has already elevated them.

b) *Submit (3:1a)*

¹*Likewise...be subject to your own husbands...*

Gardner: *In the same way* is not suggesting that wives are to submit to their husbands as slaves or servants are to their masters. The marriage relationship is altogether different. Rather, as servants fulfil their calling to be submissive to their master ‘for the Lord’s sake’ (2:13), in the same way wives should fulfil their marriage calling to be *submissive* to their husbands ‘for the Lord’s sake.’ In the same way as Christian servants may have to endure hardship and antagonism, so may Christian wives.... Undoubtedly, this discussion of a wife’s role in marriage provides a good example of how *living a good life among pagans* may result in unbelievers coming to faith (2:12).

MacArthur: The expression *in the same way* refers back to the two previously mentioned examples of submission: citizens to civil authorities (2:13) and servants to masters (2:18). The same verb (*hupotassō*), rendered *be submissive* and considered in connection with those two references, appears also here and is a present middle form, emphasizing reflexive action (‘submitting yourself’). The New Testament usage of this word, meaning ‘to submit,’ ‘be subject to,’ or ‘rank under,’ is common.... Submission does not imply any moral, intellectual, or spiritual inferiority in the family, workplace, or society in general. But it is God’s design for roles necessary to mankind’s well-being.... That Peter referred specifically to their *own husbands* indicates the intimacy of marriage and points out that he was not commanding women to be servile to all men in every context.

McKnight: As with the other units in this section, the exhortation to submit in 3:1a is part of a larger pattern: living a holy life before unbelievers with the hope that such conduct will have a positive impact on them. (Peter begins with *in the same way* so he can connect the exhortation of submission to the exhortations to slaves (2:18) and to those under governmental authority (2:12). Thus, all three exhortations are drawn into the same imperative at 2:13, revealing that Peter sees each of these injunction as part of the kind of orderliness that ought to be

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characteristic of the Christian community as it lives a holy life (2:12) in society. In this way, the Christian community can have an enduring impact upon society.). The exhortation to *be submissive* draws its energy from 2:13. Christian women, like Christian slaves, when they find themselves with a non-Christian husband, are to partake of the same ethic that Christians ought always to have: live under all the orders of the day (2:13).

Dorani: While the command has a purpose—the winning of unbelieving husbands—it has no restriction. Peter commands all wives to *be subject to your own husbands*, not men in general. Thus, *all* wives submit, and *some* have a distinct circumstance and goal—to win an unbelieving husband.... Submission does entail the concept that authorities give orders that subordinates follow, but *submit* is milder than *obey* for two reasons. First, a wife who submits to her husband’s guidance may still decide *how* to follow his direction. Second, a believer’s submission to human authorities is always qualified, never blind. If a husband commands his wife to do evil, she is to heed the Lord, not the man.... Again, Peter commands wives to submit to *their own* husbands, not to all men. Submissiveness manifests itself in several ways: in reverent and pure conduct (3:2), in modest clothing and inner beauty (3:3-5), and in respectful speech (3:6).

Sproul: Peter addresses women who are married, in some cases to pagan husbands: *Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands*. Paul writes the same way: ‘Wives, submit to your own husbands’ (Eph. 5:22). Wives are not called on to submit to someone else’s husband but to their own.

Helm: I want to say a few things about what Peter’s call to submission does *not* mean for Christian wives. It does not mean that if your husband asks you to abandon your faith in Christ, you should do so. It does not mean that if your husband asks you to sin, you should do so. It does not mean that you must always agree with him and never present a differing view. It does not mean that if he is unfaithful to you, you are left without Biblical recourse. It does not mean that if he abuses you physically or abandons you through incessant verbal humiliation, you must remain quietly in the home and accept the daily cruelty of that relationship at all costs.... What Peter *does do* in this text is to lay down a single principle. It is the same principle of submission that we looked at [previously, 2:13].... We find the Biblical principle of submission throughout Peter’s letter. It extends to how we treat elected officials and unjust employers and, in the text before us, how wives relate to their husbands.... The principle of submission relates to the example and the person of Christ in 2:21-25. The *submission* of which Peter speaks is not adherence to a principle but recognition of the person who compels us to submit in order to live lives of godly obedience.

c) *Husbands (3:1b)*

...so that even if some do not obey the word...

Gardner: Most of those whom Peter addresses will have Christian husbands, though some husbands will be unbelievers who do *not believe the word*. If Peter is prepared to give wives this command even though their husbands are not believers, how much more is this an exhortation to those whose husbands are indeed believers!

MacArthur: *Disobedient to the word* describes the unbelieving husband’s condition as a rejector of the gospel (cp. 2 Th. 1:8-9; Heb. 4:2).

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Doriani: Peter addresses all wives, but especially Christian women whose husbands *do not obey the word* (in this case, to *obey the word* means to believe the gospel). As we have seen, since wives were expected to adopt their husband's religion, Christian women could seem rebellious if they abandoned familiar gods.... It was vital, therefore, that believing wives submit whenever possible, since they seemed rebellious in religious affairs. (If a man converted, he had a greater chance of carrying his pagan wife with him, and if not, he at least did not disrupt the social order when he practiced his chosen religion.)

d) *Witness (3:1c-2)*

...they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

Gardner: Peter speaks of husbands observing the *purity and reverence* of their wives' lives. The word 'reverence' refers to their relationship with the Lord. Their quiet trust and reverence for their Lord Himself in the midst of their day to day lives, combined with their purity of life, will be what speaks deeply to the unbelievers. It is clear that Peter sees the behavior of the wives here as another example of this deeply countercultural call to submit to authorities for the sake of the Lord.

MacArthur: Amazingly, in spite of the profound enmity of his soul toward the Lord, if his Christian wife will continue to submit to him, she might be the instrument God uses to win him to Christ *without a word*. That expression does not refer to *the Word* of God but to the wife's spoken words.... Peter's point here is that the wife's godly behavior is the most valuable testimony to open the husband's heart to the gospel. He will need to hear the words of salvation, perhaps from her. But it will be as he is able to *observe* her submission as a faithful wife that she truly commends the gospel to him.... A lovely, gracious, and submissive attitude is the most effective evangelistic tool believing wives have.... Closely related to that is their responsibility to be *chaste and respectful*, demonstrating their sanctification through Christ by a life composed of irreproachable and pure conduct toward God and her husband. The word *respectful* is *phobos* ('fear'), used in 2:17 to define the required attitude of those who give honor to God Himself.... This means she shows honor and respect to her husband as to the Lord.

McKnight: Peter is urging the women of the Asia Minor churches to live a life that is respectable in society so that they will be able to maintain a good reputation for the gospel.

Doriani: Unbelieving husbands will be won by observing their Christian wives' respectful, pure conduct. (The word translated *see* in most translations is *ekopteuō*, a rare verb that typically means 'to be a spectator.') Wives should conform to social conventions and fulfill expected duties in order to win their pagan husbands *without words*. One can be relatively silent yet not mute; there are clear cases of this in Scripture. So, Peter doesn't mean that the wife never speaks. Nor does he mean that speech is pointless. She does not speak because Peter did not expect *her* words to be helpful in that context. He knew that others might be more persuasive. Even today, a believing wife often finds it best to be (relatively) quiet and let others engage a skeptical husband.

Sproul: Fear ('respectful') here means reverence. The practical reason that Peter gives for submission to husbands, particularly if the husband is an unbeliever, is that a submissive spirit might bear witness to the truth of the gospel. Paul gives a slightly different reason for submission: 'Wives, submit to your own husbands *as to the Lord*.'

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2. Carriage (3:3-4)

a) External Adornment (3:3)

³*Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—*

Gardner: Perhaps it is worth trying to put this verse in a rather more modern idiom. The wife who wants her husband to see her *purity and reverence* so that he sees her faith in Jesus will not dress for *other* men. She will not set out to flirt with others or flaunt her beauty publicly so that her husband might see her as ‘impure.’ Or course, Peter is not denying that a wife should make herself sexually attractive to her husband! Any such teaching would fly in the face of what we read, for example, in the Song of Songs 4. But she will be a woman of whom her husband will be proud as he sees *her gentle and quiet spirit*. In a world which reveres physical beauty and has created a multi-billion dollar business of providing women with everything from beauty treatments, to the most expensive jewelry, to the most flattering or sexually provocative clothing, this Christian woman’s *gentle* spirit will provide a stark and genuinely beautiful contrast. This verse seems so amazingly up to date!

MacArthur: This text does not prohibit wives from styling their hair, wearing jewelry or lovely clothing, which is why the translators added *merely*. The bride in Song of Solomon was beautifully adorned, e.g. Song 1:10; 4:11; 7:1. The point is that this was not to be the preoccupation or main concern in the matter of drawing an unsaved husband to Christ. In the Greco-Roman culture, women were devoted to superficial *adornment*, often wearing the best cosmetics, dying their hair outlandish colors, *braiding* it elaborately, and wearing—especially on their heads—costly jewelry to crown their elegant clothing. But *braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses* made no contribution to spiritual transformation. Such surface concerns still consume women in the present media dominated culture. Christian women, however, especially those whose husbands are not saved, are still under this mandate.

McKnight: Every culture has its own ideas of external beauty for women. Today, for example, the ‘ideal woman’ is tall and thin, shapely, dressed in the latest fashion (which change by seasons), and full of zest and confidence. For Peter’s day, the image was that of the woman with *braided hair*, who wore *gold jewelry and fine clothes*—comments that might indicate some of Peter’s churches contained women of wealth and standing. Peter’s critique here joins a long list of ancient writers who chastised women for their concern with appearance, including Paul (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Dorani: Paul gives similar counsel in 1 Timothy 2:9-10.... For both Greeks and Jews, extravagant dress could signify promiscuity or disregard of a husband’s authority.... Modesty is the principle. The problem does not lie with braided hair or gold per se. A gold wedding band is a simple symbol of commitment. But elaborate hair took hours to prepare and so became a conspicuous display of wealth and rank.... Peter singles out hair, gold, jewelry, and fine clothes because people displayed wealth in them. Today, people display their wealth through houses, cars, and vacations more than clothing.

Sproul: This biblical text is not commanding ugliness so that a women’s outward appearance cannot possibly disguise evil in her soul. Rather, Peter is telling women not to be caught up in an ostentatious display of beauty, because the most beautiful thing about them is their soul. What will win a man to the things of God is the hidden person of the heart.

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Helm: Peter’s culture, like our own, had an obsession with external adornment. Women were under enormous pressure to look beautiful. They were fixated on their hair, the wearing of jewelry, and clothing.

b) *Internal Beauty (3:4)*

c) *The Hidden Person (3:4a)*

4but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit...

Gardner: Peter says that a wife’s beauty should emanate from her *inner self*, but he is *not* saying that a wife’s beauty should only be *inward* beauty. His contrast is with the manner in which a wife draws attention to what makes her outwardly attractive. Many will seek to do this with expensive clothing or great jewelry. These external things are designed to draw attention to her as a beautiful person. Peter is saying that *inward* things are what she should consider as she seeks to appear beautiful before her husband.

MacArthur: Instead of being consumed with their external appearance, Christian wives must be devoted to beautifying *the hidden person of the heart*. (*Person* is the translation of *anthrōpos*, ‘man,’ demonstrating the biblical use of the masculine gender to describe even a woman.) They should manifest the inner beauty of spiritual value (cp. 1 Tim. 2:9-10)... In particular, a believing wife should be characterized not by passing earthly fashions, here today and gone tomorrow, but by literally *the imperishable* (*quality* is implied), translated ‘incorruptible’ in 1:4 KJV, where it describes the believer’s eternal inheritance in heaven. Christian wives should be devoted, not to temporal beauty but the lovely adornments of godliness. *Gentle* comes from a word referring to a humble and meek attitude, expressed in patience submissiveness; *quiet* is ‘still’ or ‘tranquil.’

McKnight: External appearance is relatively unimportant, but internal virtue is the prime pursuit of life. Yet this interpretation ought not to lead to the view that Christian women can dress as they like; rather, Peter urges them to regard their external appearance as a secondary matter to personal beauty and to dissociate themselves from the cultural trend of that day to adorn themselves so as to attract attention. The virtues Peter praises are *the unfading* (no doubt a contrast to the effects of aging on a woman’s external appearance) *beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight*. The *quiet spirit* Peter enjoins here is that Christian wives avoid a cantankerous grumbling that would prevent a non-Christian husband from seeing God’s grace and goodness in her behavior. This expression, however, is not a virtue assigned in the early churches exclusively to women; in fact, this ‘non-violent’ disposition was characteristic of the early church in general and is but one example of ‘living under the order’ of the day. Such a beauty emerges from *your inner self*, the hidden person, a person who has been transformed from the inside out by God’s Spirit.

Dorani: Inner beauty is what counts. Virtue is the one garment any woman can wear with pride. Peter singles out a gentle and quiet spirit. He blesses amiable friendliness, calm peace, a refusal to quarrel or show bad temper.... If spiritual virtue is imperishable and all bodily strengths perish, let us therefore spend less time on our bodies and more time caring for mind and spirit, pursuing love, justice, and truth.

Sproul: Peter speaks of an incorruptible beauty, an adjective we have seen already in this epistle (1:4, 23). Peter continually focuses our attention on that which is incorruptible—here, a beauty

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that does not fade. Such beauty consists, Peter says, of *a gentle and quiet spirit*.... Incorruptible beauty is displayed in a gentle and quiet spirit, but this does not mean that a wife is prohibited from giving her opinion. Peter's point is that a quiet spirit is not a tempestuous spirit. Jesus was the strongest man who ever lived, yet He was adorned with a gentle and quiet spirit.

Helm: Peter calls upon Christian wives to adorn themselves with *the imperishable beauty* located in *the hidden person of the heart*. Literally, he asks wives to be concerned to dress 'the inner man.' Peter tells Christian women to pay attention to the adornment with which they are dressing the interior of their souls.... Further, he desires women should consider how much time it takes to prepare getting ready in the morning, then see that Peter is urging them to take time to adorn the inner person as well. Christian women ought to be known for putting on the clothing of Christ. After all, He was gentle and meek.

(1) God's Sight (3:4b)

...which in God's sight is very precious.

Gardner: In reflecting this Christian, God-honoring heart to her husband, the wife reveals something that normally only the Lord Himself sees. Peter wants this inner self to be one that is content and peaceable and longs for her husband to encounter the Lord Jesus or to grow more deeply into His relationship with the Lord. Without doubt this spirit will be noticed by the unbelieving husband but, even if it is not, it is *of great worth in God's sight* since it reveals something of the wife's reliance upon and commitment to the Lord Himself who enables her to live in this way.

MacArthur: Such character in the *spirit* of a believing wife is the true inner beauty that *is precious in the sight of God* and effective in making her not only valuable and attractive to her husband, but demonstrating the beauty and value of regeneration.

McKnight: Such virtues are pleasing to God and have a powerful impact on unbelieving husbands.

Dorani: A believer is especially pleased to learn that a beautiful spirit is *of great worth in God's sight*. We should long to please God more than to gain applause or admiring glances. We should pursue God's favor more than human favor, since His appraisal is more accurate, generous, and gracious.

Sproul: Peter says that such a spirit is very precious in the sight of God. It is not just the sort of spirit that can lead a man to the truth of Christ, but something that is precious to God. God is the only one who can see that gentle and quiet spirit in a woman's inner person with perfect vision. He sees the beauty in her soul that no man can see, and it is exceedingly precious to Him.

Helm: The motivation for women taking the time to adorn their souls is not put forward by Peter. The latter half of verse 4 says that I doing so they became '*precious*' *in the sight of God*. In other words, when God looks upon them, He is glad to have them for His bride. Men and fathers, is this the kind of woman we are teaching our sons to look for in a wife?

3. Case Studies (3:5-6)

McKnight: Peter now legitimates his instructions to Christian wives about their good behavior by appealing to the *holy women of the past*. What is noticeable here is that Peter extends the

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instruction to include women who had believing husbands, showing that his instructions to submit are not just some pragmatic expedient.

Dorani: As Peter exhorts women to cultivate inner beauty, he assures them that this is the proven path for godly women.

a) *Holy Women (3:5)*

⁵*For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands...*

Gardner: Finally, as he addresses wives, Peter turns to scriptural support and urges Christian wives to recall the *holy women* of the past, specifically *Sarah*. His appeal to these women is that they modeled a submission *to their own husbands*. That submission, he says, was in itself something beautiful for her husband. Many a loving wife will spend much time making herself beautiful for her husband, whether it be the time taken with the hair, the make-up, or the clothing. Peter is not here condemning the loving actions of a wife for her husband, but he is encouraging wives with the thought that there is a very deep beauty to be found in following the calling of God to submission. Especially in the context of marriage to an unbeliever, this will be something that will mark her out as a Christian and point to the great beauty of a life lived *first* or God.

MacArthur: *In former times* (Old Testament days) many believing women (*holy women*) exemplified these principles of submissive and modest godliness (cp. Ruth 3:11; Pr. 31:10-31). Peter says they *used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands*. Thus his call for such behavior is not unprecedented.

Sproul: Peter instructs his readers to consider the examples that God has given from history, those holy women in the past who were adorned with these qualities. There was Ruth, Esther, and Mary the mother of Jesus. These holy women trusted in God. They adorned themselves in the manner in which Peter has just spoken.

b) *Holy Woman (3:6)*

c) *Sarah's Obedience (3:6a)*

⁶*...as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.*

Gardner: As Peter refers to Sara he notes that she called her husband ‘master.’ In fact the word is better translated here as ‘lord.’ In modern English, ‘master’ may connote someone who is very dominating. The Greek word used is *kurios* (lord), which is often used as a term of respect indicating a degree of authority in the person addressed but not in a negative sense. It is likely that Peter has in mind the one place in the (Greek) biblical account where Sarah refers to Abraham as ‘lord.’ It is in Genesis 18:12 where Sarah overhears God speaking to Abraham about the child that Sarah will bear.... Though Peter does not develop this here, Sarah probably came to mind for a variety of reasons. Her respect and obedience to her husband were seen on many occasions, even though her husband often treated her very badly, for example, as he lied about her to Pharaoh and later to Abimelech (Gen. 12 and 20). Of course, her husband was a believer and God was active in their lives together, but her respect for her husband, often in very trying and harsh circumstances, would remind wives with unbelieving husbands of a faithful and submissive wife who had also experienced severe trials through much of her married life.

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MacArthur: He specifically cites *Sarah* as an illustration, noting that she *obeyed Abraham*, going so far as *calling him lord* (‘master’). *Calling him (kalousa)* is a present participle, which indicates Sarah’s continual attitude of respect toward her husband Abraham—she treated him as her *lord* or master.

Doriani: If wives balk at submission, how will they react to Sarah’s authoritative example? Calling a husband ‘lord’ seems heavy-handed. But *lord* is not *Lord*. In that culture, viewing her husband as ‘lord’ meant that a wife must acknowledge him with due deference, as her husband and master. That is how Sarah used the term in Genesis 18:12. (If we review Genesis 18, we see that Sarah’s demeanor was hardly submissive, but she did call Abraham ‘lord’ or ‘master’ [Hebrew *adon*], which is Peter’s sole point.) More importantly, this recognition of Abraham’s leadership did not keep Sarah from speaking her mind to Abraham. And with God’s approval, he complied (Gen. 21:8-13). Obviously, Sarah was submissive to a believing husband, so that her duty was lighter. But Peter was arguing by analogy: if Sarah, a forceful woman (Gen. 18:12), obeyed Abraham and called him ‘lord,’ all women should respect their husbands.

Helm: When Peter went looking for a woman whose life modeled good works, he chose Sarah, the wife of Abraham. When he wanted to put forward someone with a ‘gentle and quiet spirit,’ he selected Sarah. And we can all thank Peter for doing so. After all, Sarah wasn’t a wallflower woman. Sarah wasn’t weak. She was real. And the Scriptures portray her faith and life as precious and beautiful. Sarah is the perfect choice.... Sarah was a woman who got into her husband’s face a time or two—and he needed it a time or three more.... Why does Peter draw our attention to Sarah? It is because she lived out God’s principle of submission by calling Abraham, ‘lord.’ I looked back in the Old Testament narrative to see the precise time when Sarah called Abraham that and found that it was at the time of her laughter. This ‘lord and laughter’ day in her life is recorded in Genesis 18:9-14.

Helm: Sarah reminds me of the Proverbs 31 woman. There verse 10 reads, ‘An excellent wife, who can find? She is far more precious than jewels’ (a connection to 1 Peter 3:3-4). ‘The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good [there is our word from 1 Peter 3:6] and does not harm, all the days of her life’ (vv. 11-12). Proverbs 31:25 will go on to assert, ‘Strength and dignity are her clothing.’ Isn’t that great? When Christian wives adorn themselves with gentleness and quietness, what do they get? They get strength and dignity!

(1) Sarah’s Offspring (3:6b)

And you are her children...

Finally, Peter reminds these wives that they are (literally, ‘have become’) Sarah’s *daughters*. He recalls their conversion when they became part of God’s family of believing people. Though the application is for women, in fact Sarah’s role is the same for men as well. Right back in Isaiah 51:2 Sarah is named, along with Abraham, as the parent of God’s people: ‘look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.’ Paul makes this point for men and women in Gal. 4:31: ‘Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.’ These Christian women have joined the same family of those who believe in the Lord and who inherit all the wonderful covenant promises made to Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants.

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MacArthur: When Paul wrote that by faith all saints are children of Abraham, he was saying that all who believe have followed the same path Abraham took. He is the Old Testament model for believing God's Word, and all after him who do the same belong to the same family of faith (Rom. 4:1-16; Gal. 3:7-29). Similarly, all believing wives who follow Sarah's example of submission and modesty have in that sense *become her children*.

Dorani: Peter *repeats* that godly women should pursue spiritual beauty and submit to their husbands. But he *adds* that while they might still be exiled from their culture of origin, they now belong to a new family. They hope in God, like holy women past. They are Sarah's daughters, beautiful women all, for they, like Sarah, adorn themselves with righteousness and good deeds.

(2) Sarah's Outcome (3:6c)

...if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Wives are to follow the way of the woman of the past and *put their hope in God* (3:5). In 'doing good' they will follow God's ways and be of a *gentle and quiet spirit* (3:4) and *submissive to their husbands* (3:1). Later Peter will speak of suffering for doing what is right (v. 14), and he hints at this here. For the Christian wife with a non-Christian husband there is no guarantee that he will be converted or that he will even be kind to her. So he exhorts them not to be overcome with fear or to let that determine their actions.

MacArthur: Wives who follow Sarah's pattern have made the commitment to *do what is right* or good, even though they might nevertheless have some serious fears as to where such submission under an unsaved husband could lead. The Greek word for *fear* is *ptoēsis*, a strong word meaning 'frightening' or 'terrifying.' Instead of succumbing to such terrors, those who are faithful to submit because it is good and *right* can be used by the Lord in the salvation of their husbands.

B. Instructions to Husbands (1 Peter 3:7)

McKnight: Having addressed the wives of unbelieving husbands, Peter now addressed Christian husbands. He assumes that their wives are Christians too, so his exhortation to them moves in a different direction.

Sproul: Peter then gives an exhortation to husbands, which we will again compare to the words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her' (Eph. 5:25). Women chafe under the mandate to be submissive to their husband, but I would exchange that responsibility for the man's responsibility any day of the week. I believe it is a lot easier for a woman to submit to her husband than it is for a man to love his wife the way Christ loves the church. There is no selfishness in the love that Jesus has for His church. Jesus has never abused, tyrannized, exploited, or belittled His bride. When I ask my wife to submit, I am asking her to submit to me as I am prepared to give my life for her.

1. Consideration (3:7a)

⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...

Gardner: Just as wives have roles to fulfill in their marriage relationship, so do husbands. They are to *be considerate* in living with their wives. Peter uses a word here that really has to do with 'knowing' how to live well with a wife. In part this will be about knowing what God wants of

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him and so being ‘considerate’ of the Lord’s demands in this relationship. But Peter surely is also saying that the husband should truly ‘know’ his wife so that he can *treat* her and *respect* her (or ‘honor her’) in appropriate ways and thus fulfil part of his calling to ‘show proper respect to everyone’ (2:17).

MacArthur: *In the same way* refers again to the duty of submission (2:13, 18; 3:1). This time it is the believing husband who submits to serve his wife. Husbands obey that duty by adhering to three basic responsibilities in caring for their wives’ needs: consideration, chivalry, and companionship. First, husbands are to *live with their wives in an understanding way*, which means they must be considerate. *Understanding* speaks of being sensitive and considering the wife’s deepest physical and emotional needs. The word translated *live* (*sunoiountes*) means ‘dwelling together’ and refers to living with someone in intimacy and cherishing them. Believing husbands must constantly nourish and cherish their wives in the bond of intimacy.

McKnight: (The grammar of 2:13-3:12 is such that the imperative of 2:13, *submit*, governs the participial imperatives of 2:18, 3:1, and 3:7. Thus, each of these latter three are specific applications of the general command for Christians ‘to be orderly.’) Inasmuch as his exhortation to them to *be considerate* borrows its force from the verb of 2:13, it is best to see here a specific kind of ‘living under the order’ for husbands, a kind of submission, yet distinct from it. The order for Christian husbands is one of being considerate—literally of ‘living with one’s wife knowledgeably.’ The verb *synoikeo* (‘living together’) was especially used for sexual relations between husband and wife (Dt. 22:13; 24:1, 25:5), and that is no doubt the intended meaning here, though obviously not limited to that. The Christian man, Peter says, is neither demanding nor selfish in his sexual and marital relations; he is instead considerate, sensitive, and serving.

Dorani: First, husbands *live with* their wives. Peter expect husband and wife to live in the same house. It also means that they should sleep in the same bed, since the verb ‘live with’ (*sunoikeō*) was used for sexual relations in the Septuagint (Dt. 22:13; 24:1). Peter assumes that physical intimacy is an element of married life.... Second, husbands *live*, literally, ‘according to knowledge.’ Peter expects husbands to *know* their wives. Men occasionally excuse careless leadership by pleading ignorance: ‘I don’t understand women.’ But a man doesn’t need to understand *women*; he needs to understand his *wife*. Husbands are scientists with a narrow field of inquiry. A man should know the preferences, moods, needs of his beloved, so that he can love and care for her.

Helm: The husband is called upon to live with his wife *according to knowledge*. The word used here for ‘knowledge’ is used throughout the Bible in reference to sexual intercourse. A man knows a woman. Peter wants husbands to live out this aspect of the one-flesh relationship with intimate concern and care.

2. Care (3:7b)

...showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel...

Gardner: Men are all too good at centering life round themselves and Peter reminds the husband that a wife is a *partner* and a co-heir (*with you*) of the *gracious gift of life*. Even if she is *weaker*, she is no less a *partner* in the marriage and no less an heir than her husband of God’s eternal blessings. This verse very carefully balances what Peter has been saying to wives. They are to submit to their husbands as they live lives of purity and reverence to the Lord. But Peter will not allow husbands to insist on such submission by the exercise of power or force which they often

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may have by virtue of being male. Peter speaks in generalities about the comparative strength or weakness of husbands and wives, but he knows well enough that husbands will all too often force their will upon their wives, whether it is in the area of sexual activity in the marriage or through emotional blackmail or force of personality.

MacArthur: A believing husband should also be chivalrous to his wife, realizing she is *someone weaker, since she is a woman*. Just as submission does not imply inherent inferiority for the ones who submit, so the word *weaker* does not mean the wife is intrinsically weaker in character or intellect than her husband. The word (rendered ‘weaker vessel’ by the KJV and NKJV translators), also does not mean that women are spiritually inferior to men (cp. Gal. 3:28). It just means that women generally possess less physical strength than men. With that in mind, Christian husbands are the sacrificial providers and protectors of their wives, whether or not the wives are believers.

McKnight: The reason that the Christian husband must be especially considerate in these relations is because his wife is *the weaker partner*. This expression has given rise to two major interpretations: physical weakness and spiritual weakness. Inasmuch as the preponderance of evidence in the ancient world uses identical or similar language when describing a woman’s physical condition, it is almost certain that Peter has in mind a wife’s physical capacities.

Dorani: Third, *the woman is the weaker vessel*. The Greek word translated ‘vessel’ (*skeuos*) is used for sundry material objects, especially jars and vessels, but sometimes for the human body. Peter simply means that women are, generally, physically weaker than men. There are many exceptions, but taken as a whole, men are larger and stronger than women. (Peter does not here use the most common word for an adult female, *gunē*, which normally means ‘wife.’ He uses *gunaikeos*, which is an adjective that means ‘feminine’ or ‘the feminine [one]’)... A Christian husband must honor women, and especially his wife. Physically, she is probably weaker, but spiritually she is a joint heir of grace. At a minimum, husbands must never bully, threaten, or strike their wives, nor should they demean their wives for being weak or slow-footed. Marriage is a union of two weak and sinful people, even if we are weak and sinful in different ways.

Sproul: *Weaker vessel* does not mean ‘weak-minded.’ Peter is clearly referring to physical strength. I have met women who are physically stronger than their husband, but that is extremely rare. In most cases, men are physically stronger than their wife. Men are called not only to love their wife but to respect her, to give her honor.

Helm: [Peter gives] the reason for his concern: in regard to her physical frame she is *the weaker vessel*. Husbands know this: your wife deserves nothing less than your most elevated and intimate care, concern, love, and honor.

3. Co-Heirs (3:7c)

...since they are heirs with you of the grace of life...

Gardner: It is interesting that even as Peter writes about differences between husbands and wives in terms of their roles in marriage, he insists most strongly that they should not be seen as denying their partnership in Christ, and their equal status before the Lord as His children. It is good to remember that, while in the modern world any suggestion that a wife might have a slightly different role in marriage to her husband is seen as arguing for a wife’s inferiority to the man, both Peter and Paul meet the criticism head on by insisting that we should not at all confuse roles and callings with status in the kingdom of God. Status as God’s saved people, and as

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spiritual children of Abraham and Sarah, is not in any way challenging the teaching that husbands and wives are called to different roles in marriage.

MacArthur: Third, the husband is to be a companion for his wife *as a fellow heir*, sharing in the *grace of life*, which refers not to eternal life, but to the true and intimate friendship that belongs only to those who are possessors of God's most blessed gift in this life—marriage.... Marriage is a divine providence given to man regardless of his attitude toward the Giver. Intimate companionship in marriage, the richest blessing of this life, was a foreign concept to the Greco-Roman culture of Peter's day. Husbands were generally uninterested in friendship with their wives, expecting them to merely maintain the household and bear children. In contrast, the Christian husband is to cultivate all the richness God designed into the grace of marriage by showing *honor* to his wife in loving consideration, chivalry, and companionship.

McKnight: Here again Peter participates in the early Christian tendency to elevate the position of women in society; they are seen as *fellow heirs*. ('Heirs with you' [NIV] translates a special word for Peter, *synkleronomos*, or 'fellow heir'.) Twice in this verse he forms a compound verb in his incorporation of women into the lives of their husbands: 'living together' and 'fellow heirs.'

Doriani: Fourth, married believers are joint heirs of the life-giving grace of Jesus. *Grace* is the first and last word of 1 Peter (1:2; 5:12).... How sweet it is for both husband and wife to know that their comfort in life and hope in death is the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sproul: Peter calls on husbands to give honor to the wife because they are heirs together of the grace of life. Husbands and wives are in it together, and if both are Christians, they share an inheritance. They are joint heirs with Christ of the kingdom of God.

Helm: Sadly, Peter needed to remind husbands that their wives are *fellow heirs* with them of the grace of life. They are equal partners and partakers of the glory that is to be revealed on the last day. As such, they should be treated with respect and dignity. After all, they are, like you, the very bride of Christ. They too have been bought with His blood. They are also the majestic ones in whom is His delight. Therefore, men take care. your charge is of eternal value and is priceless in the sight of God.

4. Concern (3:7d)

...so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Gardner: Peter's concern that *your prayers* might be hindered most likely refers to the prayers of husband and wife praying together and not simply to the prayers of husbands. Peter has emphasized that they are co-heirs *of the gracious gift of life* and, if the husband denies this in disrespectful and inconsiderate treatment of his wife, then their times of prayer will be hindered. The impediment to prayer may be part of God's discipline upon them (see v. 12 below), or it may be that they no longer pray together because of the disrespectful relationship. Either way, it is a salutary reminder to those of us who are husbands that the way we treat our wives will directly reflect upon our relationship with the Lord.

MacArthur: *So that his prayers will not be hindered* is the reward God promises to the loving, caring husband.... The warning is clearly given that if a husband in Christ is not fulfilling his responsibilities toward his wife, God may not answer his prayers. No more serious divine threat could be given to a believer than that—the interruption of all the promises of prayers heard and

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answered (cp. Jn.14:13-14). That is severe, cutting off the divine blessing, which shows how critical is Christian husbands' loving care of their partners in this *grace of life*.

McKnight: In respecting their wives, these men and their wives will gain a hearing with God, and their prayers will be answered (cp. Mt. 5:21-26; 6:12, 14-15; 18:19-35; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; James 4:3).

Doriani: Respect makes prayer easier, but how can a harsh husband pray well, except in repentance? When husband and wife both know Jesus, prayers flow freely. Each is humble over his or her sin, each gives thanks for God's grace. Both present requests confidently.

Sproul: Husbands are to give honor so that their prayers may not be hindered. Again we find an ellipsis. The implication of this text is that if husbands fail to love, honor, and respect their wives, that behavior will hinder their prayers. Likewise, wives, if you resist submitting to your husband, that will hinder your prayers. In a sense, it means that God does not want to hear our prayers until we come to Him as humbly submissive people.

Helm: A second motivation for careful stewardship of your marriage is found at the end of verse 7: *so that your prayers may not be hindered*. Interestingly, the word translated 'your' is plural. This implies that married couples will be praying together. The act of praying together is one of the most difficult things for a husband to cultivate. For some reason most of us have trouble going before the throne of grace in the presence of our wife.... If a man does not honor his wife and live according to knowledge with her, his prayers will be hindered.

In the text of 1 Peter 3:1-7 we have seen *one* overriding principle—namely, submission. We have seen Peter's *twofold* plan: women, do not let your adorning be external, but let your adorning be the adorning of the hidden person of the heart. We have seen the woman's *threefold* reward: the possible salvation of her spouse, her preciousness in the sight of God, and her reward for entrusting herself to God. In addition, we have heard the call for husband to live godly lives in the home.

For next time: Read 1 Peter 3:8-17.

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Lesson Summary

VIII. Wives and Husbands (1 Peter 3:1-7)

Aim: To strengthen marriages by applying God's standard of living beautiful lives within the relationship of husband and wife.

A. Instructions to Wives (3:1-6)

This text is a continuation of the theme, established in 2:11-12, of living *a beautiful life* in front of pagans. The relationship described here is of the wife to her (unbelieving) husband; The command to submit applies to all wives to their own husbands; Peter's corresponding instruction to husbands is in verse 7.

1. Conduct (3:1-2)

- Wives *submit* (*hupotassō*) to their *own* husbands, not men in general; submission is not blind obedience, but a loving response, following the example of Christ, 'for the Lord's sake'
- Their conduct is to be *respectful* (reverent) as to the Lord and *pure* (chaste)
- Some husbands may be unbelievers; the requirement to submit remains; their Christian conduct may be instrumental in winning them to the Lord
- A lovely, gracious, and submissive attitude is the most effective evangelistic tool believing wives have

2. Carriage (3:3-4)

- Her emphasis should not be on adorning her external appearance (hair, gold, jewelry, clothing); these things are external and temporary; not a command to be 'ugly,' but a prioritization of what's really important
- Her focus should instead be on *the hidden person of the heart*; 'person' is *anthrōpos* ('man'); the command is to 'dress the inner man'
- Internal beauty is *imperishable* or 'unfading' (cp. 1:4, 23); true beauty is a person who has been transformed from the inside out by God's Spirit
- it consists *of a gentle and quiet spirit*; 'gentle' is humble, meek, submissive; 'quiet spirit' is still, tranquil
- True, Christlike character is beautiful and *is very precious* in God's sight (and should be so as well for the husband)

3. Case Studies (3:5-6)

- Holy women in the past (e.g., Ruth, Esther, Mary) adorned themselves in the same way, submitting to their husbands
- Sarah is singled out as an example; she called Abraham 'lord' in Gen. 18:12
- Sarah honored Abraham, but she was not a doormat; she was a real, strong woman full of internal beauty and grace, an example of the Proverbs 31 woman
- Believing women are the *children* of Sarah – they share in her spiritual destiny, just as all believers are children of Abraham because of their faith

B. Instructions to Husbands (3:7)

Peter does not leave husbands off the hook. Paul says husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Eph. 5:25). Indeed, the responsibilities of husbands towards wives is even greater and more difficult than the command for wives to submit!

1. Consideration (3:7a)

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- Husbands are to be consider of their wives, *live with your wives in an understanding way*
 - *Synoikountes* ('live together') – physical intimacy, care, cherish them
 - Understanding way—a man doesn't need to understand *women*; he needs to understand his *wife*
2. Care (3:7b)
 - Since she is the *weaker vessel* (i.e., has less physical strength), husbands are to honor, care for, and protect their wives
 - 'Weaker' does not mean morally, spiritually, or intellectually inferior (cp. Gal. 3:28)
 3. Co-Heirs (3:7c)
 - Christian husbands and wives are co-heirs (*synkleronomos*) of the *grace of life*
 - Remember she is precious in God's sight and should be the same in yours
 4. Concern (3:7d)
 - If a husband is not considerate of and does not care for his wife as a co-heir of the gospel, then Peter warns that *your* (plural) *prayers* may be *hindered*
 - The implication of this text is that if husbands fail to love, honor, and respect their wives, that behavior will hinder their prayers. Likewise, wives, if you resist submitting to your husband, that will hinder your prayers.
 - Therefore, both husbands and wives follow Peter's instructions and live beautiful lives with respect to each other and before God

1 Peter 3:1-7 continues his household code of Christian conduct, following the command in 2:11-12 to live 'a beautiful life.' Peter addresses wives in verses 1-6 and husbands in verse 7. As with residents to civil authorities and servants to masters, in the same manner Peter calls for wives to submit to their own husbands (not to all men). The respectful and pure conduct of Christian wives may be instrumental in winning unsaved husbands to the Lord. But regardless of the spiritual condition of their husband, the internal beauty of the Christian wife is not only pleasing to the husband, but also especially precious in God's sight. Rather than focus on external displays of adornment that fade with time and age, she should dress her inner person with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Peter calls upon the past examples of holy women, and especially Sarah, to support his exhortation to wives to live beautiful lives of submission to their husbands.

Husbands are not left off the hook. In a similar manner, they are also to demonstrate their love and submission to their wives, principle by showing them consideration and care. Paul says Christian men are to love their wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. If all husbands loved their wives in that way, they would have no problems submitting! Husbands are to be considerate of their wives, living together with them and knowing them intimately – understanding their desires, needs, preferences, and so on. Husbands are to honor and care for their wives; while they may be physically weaker, they are not in any way inferior. Indeed, they are co-heirs of the grace of life. Christian wives are precious in God's sight and Jesus died for their sins as he did for the Christian husband (cp. Gal. 3:28). Therefore, both husband and wife should follow Peter's instructions to live beautiful lives with respect to each other and before God; otherwise, their prayers might be hindered.