

1 P E T E R

A V E R S E B Y V E R S E S T U D Y T H R O U G H P E T E R ' S E P I S T L E

SESSION OBJECTIVE: 1 PETER 3:1-7

To understand the dynamic of husbands and wives within the covenant of marriage.

Love and Marriage

It's hard to really quantify the impact that pop culture has on our view of marriage in the church today. Movies, sitcoms, talk shows, and a host of other highly visible media sources all do their best to instruct their viewers on what a healthy marriage looks like, and when compared to the Bible, they are almost always quite the *opposite* of healthy. Marriage is God's idea. It was designed by Him. He wrote the manual on it. For us to change the guidelines of what a marriage should look like, then, is to sabotage ourselves. In the same way that you would not decide what kind of maintenance your vehicles requires, but instead would consult the manual for it, marriage should not be based on anyone's opinion but God's.

In our passage this morning, Peter unfolds some of the responsibilities that a wife has towards her husband, and that a husband has for his wife. This is not a comprehensive passage, as Paul includes some details in his writings as well. However, what Peter is doing in this passage is calling for a kind of risky submission for the wife, and a sacrificial leadership for the husband, both of which compliment one another perfectly.

Wives

Verses 1 through 6 form the majority of our passage this morning, and these verses deal directly with the wife's role within the context of marriage. A few things should be said before we dive into this portion. First, the institution of marriage is the oldest institution in creation. It pre-dates not only the church and Israel, but is actually developed before sin entered the world (Gen. 2:24-25). It is a good institution, perfectly made and

without error. There is no such thing as marriage problems; there are only people problems. People are broken and sinful; marriage is perfect. Second, marriage is a visible, tangible picture of Christ and the church. Paul says in Ephesians 5:32, “This mystery (a reference to marriage) is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” Paul’s contention is that the marriage pictures Jesus and the church in either an accurate or inaccurate way, depending on the obedience of both the husband and the wife. As the church is in submission to Christ, so the wife is to the husband. As Christ willingly lays His life down for the church, so a husband should sacrificially lead her, always putting Himself at risk for her sake.

These are important details to keep in mind as you study through these verses. You might find some of what Peter says to be uncomfortable if you come at this passage with the world’s view of marriage in mind, but if you keep the biblical reason for marriage and the perfect design of marriage in mind, his words make a lot more sense. Below is a breakdown of verses 1 through 6.

BE SUBJECT TO YOUR OWN HUSBANDS

The word, “be subject,” or, “submit,” here means, “to be subordinate under.” It’s in the middle voice, a voice we do not carry in the English language. In English we have an active voice where the subject does the action, and a passive voice where the subject is receiving the action. The middle voice is different. It means that the action is being done by the subject (the wife in this instance), but that it is being done with the interest of the wife in mind. In other words, the submission of the wife is purely voluntary, not under compulsion, and for her own benefit. The wife’s submission is freely given. This understanding fits the context of what Peter said moments before this in conjunction with submission: “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (1 Pet. 2:16).

It is also important to note that this submission is done by wives, “to your own husbands.” This is not setting up a hierarchy of male/female relationships in the church. Women are not to submit to men anymore than men are to submit to women (Eph. 5:21). This command is specifically for married women with regard to the man they married, and no one else.

THEY MAY BE WON

Because the wives are to submit voluntarily for their own sake, there is no need for the husband to act a certain way to earn their submission. Peter even remarks that they should submit to husbands who are disobedient to the word of God for the purpose of winning them to the faith. It is not the physical beauty of a woman, nor the skillset, jewelry, wardrobe, or hairstyle that impacts a man, but the, “respectful and pure conduct” of a woman (1 Pet. 3:2).

This is an important detail in Peter’s letter. As we discussed last week, the Bible does not set out to challenge and topple over social issues such as slavery. This week, we could include women’s rights into that category as well. Women had no rights at all in the ancient world, and Peter is not interested in fighting that fight. His interests are the redemption of sinners, and so he sees the wife’s conduct as a means to lead her husband to salvation. This, of course, does not mean that women in abusive relationships should just continue to be the silent object of violence. While women did not have rights in the ancient world, they do today, and they should exercise their rights if they are being abused emotionally and/or physically. Peter had just previously talked about being subject to governing institutions that uphold the law. Exercising your rights is included in that. A woman is to love her husband, even if he is unbelieving, in an effort to see him come to faith, but she must also remember her rights in the event that she is being violated, and the church must offer support to her in that scenario (Js. 1:27).

GODLY ADORNING

Rather than focusing on their outward, external features, Peter admonishes the Godly wife to, “let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Pet. 3:4). God is not focused on the outward appearance of a woman, so why should she? This is not to say that a woman should feel bad for wanting to look and feel beautiful. The Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and a host of other passages speaks highly of the woman who desires to maintain her beauty. However, that kind of beauty does not last forever. On the contrary, the Godly features of a woman are, “imperishable.” They never fade, they are never corrupted, and thus they last forever. It is the inward person that defines the true beauty of a woman.

The Old Testament people of God valued physical appearance as a sign of strong leadership. They valued Saul because he was, “a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people” (1 Sam. 9:2). However, God told Samuel before He anointed David, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). The emphasis for all of God’s people, wives included, is to focus primarily on the inward person.

GODLY WOMEN OF THE PAST

Peter closes verses 5 and 6 with an example of, “holy women who hoped in God” (1 Pet. 3:5). That Sarah is mentioned here also probably includes Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. The most important comment in the verse is that these women, “put their hope in God.” It is a helpful phrase because it informs us that these women did not submit to their husbands because they believed their husbands were superior to them intellectually or spiritually. On the contrary, they submitted to their husbands because they were confident that God would reward them. Their aspirations to submit, then, were wholly tied to their faith in God, and nothing else. Again, this emphasizes the voluntary nature of their submission.

Husbands

Verse 7 is brief, but weighty nonetheless. Peter instructs husbands in a similar manner that he has instructed the wives (“Likewise”). Below is brief outline of what he says.

LIVE IN AN UNDERSTANDING WAY

The literal translation of this verse is, “live with your wives according to knowledge.” The question becomes, “Knowledge of what?” In the context of this passage, Peter likely means knowledge of God’s will for the family. Women are the, “weaker vessel,” which is simply a reference to the dependence she would have on him in this time. Their dependence on the husband is meant to be connected to the dependence of the church in the Christ/church relationship, and so men are to live with their wives accordingly. Christ loves the church, cares for her, provides for her, and even dies for her; men are to carry the same mission into their marriage.

A WEAKER VESSEL

This is notably not a reference to intellectual, emotional, or spiritual weakness. On the contrary, Peter even clarifies: “they are heir with you of the grace of life.” There are no other passages in the New Testament that support the idea that women are inferior to men in any capacity. This is not a discussion of a male/female hierarchy, but roles within specifically the marriage. That cannot be overemphasized.

UNHINDERED PRAYERS

The result of living with a wife in a non-understanding manner is that the husband's prayers become hindered. God takes the treatment of wives very seriously. They submit themselves voluntarily into a position of dependence, and when a man fails to protect, love, and care for her, God does not sit idly by and watch. Husbands are called to a much higher calling; to fail to live out that calling is to incur discipline.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 1 Peter 3:1. Who is Peter speaking to? Who are they to be subject to, specifically? Does the obedience of the husband matter? What effect might the wife's submission have?

2. Read 1 Peter 3:2. Specifically, what kind of conduct are Godly wives to have?

Day Two

1. Read 1 Peter 3:3. What kind of adorning should women avoid? Why?

2. Read 1 Peter 3:4. What does Godly adorning look like, and why is it considered, "imperishable?"

Day Three

1. Read 1 Peter 3:5. Who are the holy women Peter likely has in mind, and why? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read 1 Peter 3:6. What did Sarah do that exemplified her faith in God and submission to her husband?

Day Four

1. Read 1 Peter 3:7. What does Peter command of husbands? What is at stake if they do not?

2. Read Ephesians 5:22-33. What other details does Paul give to wives and husbands? Write them down below.

Week 14 Discussion: Think Biblically

Our passages both this week and last week deal with social structures that are controversial in our day and time. One of these social structures is inherently evil (slavery), but the other is inherently good. Yet, both of them are controversial because of how the world views them. Christians should do their best to not be swayed by worldly teachings, but rather be in submission to the teaching of Scripture, regardless of what kind of scrutiny they will face as a result of it. In other words, Christians are called to *think biblically* about everything we are involved with. Talk as a group about the importance of thinking biblically in today's world, and how to become better at it.

1. Icebreaker: Has your understanding of marriage changed some after this week's lesson? Why or why not?
2. Is the concept of submission looked upon positively or negatively in the world? Why?
3. What are some other social agreements that the world approaches differently from the Scripture?
4. How do you get better at thinking biblically?
5. What if the Bible doesn't explicitly deal with an issue you are dealing with? How do you think biblically if the Scripture is not clear?
6. How important is thinking biblically to our witness to the world? Why?

Takeaways:

1. Wives are to voluntarily submit themselves to their husbands in faith towards God.
2. Husbands are to care for their wives with the knowledge of God's will for marriage, lest their prayer be hindered.

PRAYER REQUESTS: