

***A PEOPLE IN THE HOME***

**1 Peter 3:1-7**

**December 14, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

I open this morning by reminding us where we have been so far in this letter written to believers scattered throughout Asia Minor, some being displaced because of persecution for their faith. The theme we have seen is how Christians should face the trials of this life. Peter grounded the Christians response in the gospel, both in the promises associated with those who receive Christ savingly as well as the practice such promises warrant. According to practice, Peter's main emphasis or principle associated with Christian suffering in chapter 2 and in our text this morning is that of submission. So far we have seen how the believer is to respond to civil authorities in the world and to masters or employers in the workplace. Even when these authorities are unbelievers, unless one is asked or commanded to do something that is contrary to the will of God, then, even if it might cause one to be uncomfortable or face uncertainty, or even certainty of suffering, the believer is to submit or obey these authorities joyfully for the sake of the gospel.

Peter then gave the supreme example for such submission, that being the person and work of Jesus Christ, who among men was treated and continues to be treated unfairly and with scorn. We see such persecution in this season as we once again hear the outcries of those who suggest that Christ should not be associated with the Christmas season. Of course, Jesus is on the throne regardless of what others do to profane His glorious name. It is we, as promised by Christ, who are persecuted by those who will have nothing to do with the salvation provided by Christ alone, who "bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:21-25). Only those who have truly been healed by His wounds understand what the perfect life of Christ and unjust yet submissive death at the hands of godless men really means. For all others, the person and work of Christ and the glorious gospel of God's grace is nothing more than a fairy tale believed by misguided religious fanatics.

This morning we turn to the third relationship in the world that Peter expounds upon: God's pattern for the husband-wife relationship. Jesus was not married in a temporal way, but He is married to His bride, the Church, in a spiritual way as we saw in our Scripture reading in Ephesians 5 earlier. Whereas Paul set the illustration of the earthly relationship between husband and wife alongside that of the spiritual relationship between Christ and His bride, Peter's flow in the letter shows how Christ and His relationship with His people precedes that of the earthly relationship of marriage. Both men set forth the beauty and order of marriage in the context of Christ's saving work, past, present, and future. It is only as we recognize the love that Christ has for His Church that we can properly live according to the ideal that God in His wisdom has set forth for our marriages.

Now some of you might be thinking, "Pastor Todd, I am not married. Is this message for me?" My answer to you is, "Yes!" While you might not be married, you might be one day and the better you understand these things the better you will be suited for a godly marriage relationship. You will know more of what you should be looking for in a spouse and what God expects of those who enter into a marriage union. So what does God expect from a marriage? How can we be God's people in the home?

## **I. The Pattern for Wives (3:1-6)**

The bulk of this passage is written to the wife and her godly responsibility in marriage. Now lest you men think that this somehow suggests that the wife somehow needs more instruction or bears the bulk of the responsibility in marriage, I would refer you back Ephesians 5 where Paul gives more verses to the husband. There Paul sets the husband as head of the wife in the context of Christ as head of His bride. There, the onus of the relationship is on the husband, and even though Peter only has one verse for the husband, I think we will find him in agreement with Paul. So, I encourage you husbands to understand God's role for your wife and you wives to know God's purpose for your husband. Then, and only then, will our homes reflect the love of Christ and the gospel.

### **1. The pattern in action (v. 1a)**

Peter exhorts the wife, **"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands."** This refers back to Peter's teaching on submission concerning civil authorities and the slave-master relationship, but more particularly to the example of Christ's submission. In those relationships, *submission* was the key. Again, the word means "to yield in surrender, compliance or obedience," "to come under the authority of another." So Peter begins first by restating the principle of submission to show the demeanor or posture that a wife is to have towards her husband. She is to submit to him as God's gracious authority in the household.

You might remember in my introduction to submission a few weeks ago the illustration I gave concerning a woman in one of my seminary classes who had a misunderstanding of what this submission entails. Her argument was that these words were written in a patriarchal society where women were humiliated. While I agree that there were certainly abuses to God's established order in Peter's day, as there are today, this in no way suggests that Peter's words are not applicable to our society. In discussing the wives submissiveness in the home today, two extremes should be avoided.

One extreme is the kind of society similar to that in Peter's day where women had no rights—women and slaves basically held the same place in society. This was a gross abuse, where women were used but not necessarily needed. It went entirely against God's purpose for creating woman in the Garden as a help mate for man. Eve was created out of Adam's side to complete him and provide for him what no other creature in creation could. The idea that woman is to serve man as some sort of slave without filling that void goes against God's creative purposes. Man needs woman and woman needs man in God's created order.

The other extreme, known as egalitarianism, is more common in our society. It is the idea that the sexes are equal, breeding a spirit of competitiveness and independence. This view suggests that in the Garden God created man and woman equal and that any hierarchy of authority is a result of the Fall and is therefore illegitimate. Further, Christ abolished any distinction between male and female according to Galatians 3:27-28, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Therefore equality of male and female, especially as it pertains to rights, is justified. But this view takes Scripture totally out of context and loses any force of logic. Are we to believe that man and woman, male and female, are no longer distinct? Paul only suggests that all types of people, people distinct by culture and by nature, are made one in Christ. So this view also disrupts both God's created order and kingdom order as it fosters the idea that man and woman do not need each other. They can survive on their own.

So what does Peter mean by submissiveness. Does this requirement of subjection imply inferiority in being or an inferior role for the wife in the marriage relationship, as my fellow student thought? The answer is “NO!” Frank Barker rightly asserts that what Peter teaches, along with Paul, is that the woman is to submit, not because she is inferior or has an inferior role, but that she has a different role.<sup>1</sup> That is the understanding of submission that Peter sets forth as the norm to be followed. Barker gives the illustration of the wife of an astronomer. We could plug in any notable occupation here, nuclear scientist or physicist or pastor or President of the United States. Then ask the question, “Who is more important, the wife or the husband who holds such a prestigious position?” The wife of the astronomer offered, “When we were first married, I suffered great loneliness. But I’ve conquered it. I don’t feel lonely any more, I know the research he is doing is important and I’m happy to do what I can to help him by making life easier.” The question we now ask, “Who is more important according to the Christian view? The world famous astronomer probing the universe or the wife at home, tending to the household?” The correct answer is, “Neither.” It is not a case of more or less important, marking an inferiority of person or role. They are doing different jobs, fulfilling different responsibilities. And here is the important point—in so doing they *complement* one another.

This is what is known as *complementarism*, which I hold to be the biblical teaching in marriage relationships. As Barker points out, the restless individualistic ambitious spirit of the age as embraced by egalitarianism tends to forget this and implies that women ought not to be content to take what it is pleased to call a subordinate position. But the God-established pattern is very different. The *complementary* view stresses God’s pattern of *interdependence* with husband and wife needing each other. Neither is complete without the other. Does this not sound much more in accordance to God’s creative act in the Garden? Part of the norm must be for someone to be head—and that was established *before* the Fall. In times of disagreement, there must be one who has a final authority, the final vote, or the two must separate.

So Peter’s teaching here is not of a wife who cowers or can’t think for herself, but one who is self-disciplined and who greatly respects her husband, one who gladly submits when they disagree. Does this describe your household today? In modern day lingo, who would others say wears the pants in your family? Husbands, do you feel as if your God-given authority has been compromised by your wife? Do you act as the head, or do you throw in the towel in hopes of maintaining peace? God’s established order is clear. Who holds the place of authority in your house?

Before leaving the statement of the pattern, Peter states that the woman is to submit even in the case of an unbelieving partner. Suppose the husband is unreasonable, does this principle still hold? According to Peter, yes. Just as some government officials and masters are perverse, so are some husbands. Still, the requirement holds so that they might be won by your actions. This motive is always attached to the principle of submission, so that the unbeliever might be “silenced” (2:15) or “won” (3:1). This, Peter teaches, “finds favor with God” (2:20). The Christian is to be the example of Christ, reflecting Him as the supreme example in all relationships. So again, as long as your husband is not asking you to disobey God, you must joyfully submit, always remembering that to do so reflects God’s established pattern and is therefore pleasing to Him. Remember, your calling as a Christian wife is to glorify and honor Him, not yourself. Is your behavior toward your husband faithful, pure and respectful? How would God see it?

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Frank M. Barker, Jr., *1 Peter: A Series of Sermons*. Outline for this sermon borrowed with some modification.

## 2. The pattern of beauty (vv. 3-4)

The second aspect of the pattern for the woman declares what it is that truly makes a woman beautiful. Peter does not turn to the world for his pattern for beauty, but that which pleases God. He starts in v. 3 by showing what beauty should not be, that being only outward, **“not merely external.”** **“Merely”** here is added for clarity and is not in the original Greek. Peter does not discount the appearance of a woman. He is not suggesting that a woman should not care at all about her appearance. He simply shows that true beauty, the beauty God cherishes, consists of much more than outward appearance alone. Contrary to the world’s approach, which looks often *only* at the outward appearance, Peter suggests that this should not be the starting point, if a point at all. In Peter’s world, this would not come as a shock to his readers. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the woman often spent quite a bit of time and money to adorn herself. Peter was not prohibiting women from wearing their hair all fixed up or from wearing jewelry, so you ladies can take a deep breath. What he was prohibiting was spending an excessive amount of time and money on their outward adornment. Likewise, in prohibiting **“putting on dresses,”** Peter was not suggesting that they wear nothing at all. He was saying that they should not spend an excessive amount on clothing and particularly should pay great attention to what they wear. Immodest dress, perhaps thought to make a woman more appealing, is not beauty at all. So in the nutshell, Peter prohibits both *overdressing* and *underdressing*. Neither of these is **“precious in the sight of God.”** The world might deem them precious marks of beauty, perhaps even your own husband, but not the One who is the ultimate judge.

Then in v. 4 Peter turns to what true beauty should be. It is not *outward*, but *inward*. The words of 1 Samuel 16:7 certainly come to mind, “God *sees* not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” **“The hidden person of the heart”** is a phrase used to describe the whole woman from within. What a person truly is on the inside does not remain hidden but manifests itself in the way wives behave.<sup>2</sup> What is on the inside will come out. And Peter says that what should come out of the godly wife is the **“imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit.”** Peter was fond of the word **“imperishable”** or **“incorruptible.”** Hair, jewelry, clothing, makeup, etc., all of these are perishable, but not the inner beauty of a godly woman. This **“gentle spirit”** is a requirement of all believers. Jesus said in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt. 5:5). Paul addressed the **“quiet spirit”** of the woman in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” Peter is not then asking the wife to be anything other than a Christian in this matter. **“A gentle and quiet spirit”** is the mark of true beauty, a godly behavior that will attract husbands that understand what true beauty is. If their husband is an unbeliever, then this will perhaps be an impetus to leading him to faith.

This does not mean that the wife can never say what she thinks or never object or disagree. But when she does, she does so gently and quietly. I can’t tell you the number of wives I have encountered through the years that patiently endure much from their husbands. My wife certainly is one. But she does do submissively. The foundation for a godly marriage is grounded in Peter’s imperative for the woman to complete her husband with a gentle and quiet spirit. Wives, does that describe you in your marriage. I know we husbands can be difficult at times, but do you realize the moment you answer us out of this cherished **“hidden woman of the heart”** how quickly we are humbled? I am convinced that one of the reasons that God gave Eve to Adam was to confront his pride. How is your spirit? Peter says that a gentle and quiet spirit

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *NAC: 1,2 Peter, Jude*, 154.

**“is precious in the sight of God.”** What about you husbands? Is that precious to you? Do you demonstrate that if you believe it? If not, then repent, and let your wife know how much you adore her inward beauty.

### **3. The pattern illustrated (vv. 5-6)**

Peter sets forth the wives of times past to illustrate what the beautiful woman looks like. This is the way that women used to be **“in former times.”** Notice Peter calls them **“the holy women.”** They were set apart for a specific purpose, the purpose being to adorn themselves inwardly and submit to their husbands. Tom Schreiner suggests, “They submitted to their husbands because they were confident that God would reward all those who put their trust in him.”<sup>3</sup>

In v. 6 Peter gets more specific. He introduces Sarah as the example for the women of his day. By her actions she obeyed and by her words she acknowledged her position, **“calling him lord.”** Do you remember where she did that? In Genesis 18:12 she makes this comment in a rather off-hand way to the idea that she would become pregnant by Abraham. She does not refer to him as “old man” but **“lord.”** We see from this that even in casual situations Sarah respected Abraham’s leadership, revealing that her honor of him was a real part of her heart. Yes, she questioned not only Abraham but God in the matter. But she was humbled in her looking at things from her perspective and not God’s, and she submitted to Abraham from that time forward.

Peter says that wives today have the same hope as Sarah had when they behave in this manner. If you are truly one of her children, a reference to the believing wife in covenant with God, then you will do what is right without fear. The reference seems to be that there will be times when a wife will not behave in a way that pleases her husband because their loyalty to God transcends their duty to submit to their husbands. There may be times, especially when the husband is an unbeliever, when the believing wife must submit to God rather than her husband. They here have the promise that their actions will be vindicated by God.

That is the God-established creation pattern. Wives are to submit to their husbands joyfully, and they demonstrate their joy in their gentle and quiet spirit.

## **II. The Pattern for Husbands (3:7)**

As noted earlier, Peter gives only one verse of exhortation to the husband, but this in no way suggests the husband’s responsibility in the marriage union is less than that of the wife. As a matter of fact, this verse should humble the husband given the context. In this entire passage, Peter addresses those believers who are liable to oppression: Christians under the rule of a secular government; Christian slaves under the authority of a master, whether the master is a believer or not; and now the bulk of the passage on the husband/wife relationship is given to the wife. Peter has already addressed the duty of the wife even in the situation of an unbelieving husband. But even in Christian households the wife might face oppression, though it might be unintentional from a believing husband. Given that context, how should the Christian husband dwell with his wife so that he does not oppress her?

### **1. Dwell with the wife with understanding**

This suggests primarily that the husband is to have an understanding of God’s ways. He

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<sup>3</sup> Schreiner, 155.

should have more than a basic understanding of God's will for his role in marriage. This is where Paul's words to the husband are important. The husband functions as the head of the wife, certainly a position of leadership but much more when seeing the balance of the passage. Paul compares the husband's headship of his wife to that of Jesus Christ with the Church, i.e., the body of those He has saved from their sins. And then he adds, "**He Himself being the Savior of the body.**" Savior is a title of Jesus Christ that reminds us of the human predicament: sin and separation from God. The need for a Savior is precisely because of our need for a right relationship with God. Savior means "deliverer" or one who rescues. In this case, deliverance is through the death of Christ in our place bearing the judgment of God, in order to rescue us from that same righteous judgment. He is the "head" or the "Savior" that alone can be trusted to deliver us from sin. In that analogy, the wife's submission is seen as dependence upon her husband, trusting him in temporal issues even as the believer trusts Jesus Christ in the eternal issues.

So the husband must understand his spiritual responsibility as head, but he must also understand his wife's responsibility. A husband often expects more from his wife that the Scripture demands. We all know of situations where the wife is beaten down, oppressed, led to believe that her only function in life is to keep the kids out of dad's hair, keep the house spotless, and have a hot meal on the table at the end of the workday. And of course, to make herself available whenever the husband wants pleasure. But that is nothing more than slavery and bondage and an abuse of biblical submission. If you have the attitude as a husband that your wife is simply to do what you say, then you are abusing your authority as the head.

## **2. Dwell with the wife as the weaker vessel**

All sorts of interpretations of this phrase have been given that miss the mark. Peter does say that the woman is weaker than the man. But in what way is she weaker? Schreiner and others note<sup>4</sup> that nothing else in the New Testament suggests that women are intellectually inferior, nor is it clear that women are weaker emotionally, for in many ways the vulnerability of women in sharing their emotions demonstrates that they are more courageous and stronger than men emotionally. We as men might not understand women when they share their emotions, but this does not make them weaker emotionally. If anything it shows we have failed to heed the first imperative to understand our wives better. Nor did Peter suggest that women are weaker morally or spiritually than men. This too can be misunderstood by men when they consider their role as head of the wife. He can wrongly believe that he is to be more spiritually mature than his wife. Such a view suggests that men are actually better Christians than women, which is not taught elsewhere in Scriptures, nor is it evident in history. Though that might be the case it need not necessarily be the case. Again, man and woman are to complement one another. The most obvious meaning (and if you are a feminist you won't like this either) is that women are physically weaker than men. This is not only biblical but common sense. The physical weakness of the female compared to the male is one of the things that make her uniquely feminine.

## **3. Dwell with the wife with honor as a joint heir of grace**

The husband should have a high estimate of the value and worth of his wife. Together, the husband and wife are "**fellow heirs of the grace of life.**" Here Peter shows that the man and woman are equal in dignity so no interpretation of submission of the wife being less

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<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, 160.

dignified because she submits is valid. I like what one commentator stated, “It is a grace characterized by the unmerited favor of God toward sinners that freely bestows life upon its recipients—life in the truest and fullest sense. Christians already possess that life, but its full manifestation awaits the return of Christ. As co-sharers of this precious gift, the Christian husband and wife are bound together in the bundle of life.”<sup>5</sup> Husband, is that what you see your marriage to be, a bundle of life?

#### **4. Dwell with the wife with a warning**

The husband’s relationship to his wife profoundly impacts his fellowship with God. Prayer is important for all believers and Peter assumes that the Christian husband will be a man of prayer, leading his family in devotion to Christ. But here Peter seems to have the private prayers of the husband in mind. Those prayers will be “**hindered**” if the husband fails to be considerate and respectful of his wife. God does not bless with his favor those who are in positions of authority and abuse those who are under them by mistreating them. The Lord will not answer the prayers of the disobedient as a means of divine discipline.

Husbands, do you honor and respect your wife? Do your actions and your speech declare your love for her? Do you help her cultivate her “**gentle and quiet spirit**” or are you an obstacle to her obedience? Are you actively engaged in monitoring her outward appearance? Do you help guard her reputation in that regard? That is your responsibility as the husband.

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<sup>5</sup> D. Edmund Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 207.