

# Studies in I Peter

## Chapter 3:1-7

### *Relationships in Marriage*

### *Part II: Exegesis & Application*

INTRO: Peter has been discussing, and giving exhortation, to a believer's submission to authority. He has written regarding governing authorities, servants and masters, and now husbands and wives. In all of these cases he has related submission to the example set by our Lord, Jesus Christ in His submission even to the cross in order to accomplish the work of redemption. As we come to the role of husbands and wives in this chapter (3:1-7) it is essential that we recognize and apply the rules of interpretation, lest we range far afield in opinion as to what the Scripture teaches; and to that range there is no end!

#### I. Some Preliminary Considerations

- A. Understanding Genesis 3:16: after the fall of Adam God makes some prophetic announcements to the shamed couple. The theological economy of the marriage relationship was marred by the newly acquired sin nature. Adam has already blamed his wife for leading him astray, and she is less than happy with him as well. What was to be a loving valuation of one another has already deteriorated by the presence of sin.
1. God says to the woman (in Adam's presence):  
"Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."
  2. Many expositors interpret this as normative...it is not, nor does it ring true with experience:
  3. In the context of childbearing, the only logical meaning, if normative, is to assume that the woman will burn with sexual passion for the man, resulting in more and more children, however painful childbirth may be. If anything is true, it is the opposite for the human race in general. However, this declaration by God is not normative, it is a sinful perversion of the relationship:
  4. "Your desire will be for your husband:" literally, "Your goal will be to control this man who has made such a grievous error and plunged you into disaster." And
  5. "He will rule over you:" literally, "Try as you might, as the bigger and stronger of the two of you, he will dominate you with a big stick!"
  6. In other words, sin has damaged the harmony, and to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon the nature and temperament of the individuals, these sad tendencies will prevail.
- B. There Is a Theological Economy of Marriage that Transcends Sin and Culture
1. Peter makes clear in his imperatives that he is only speaking to the woman in the context of marriage. In other words, nowhere does the Bible teach that all women are to obey all men, it teaches that wives are to be submissive to their husband; and there are some strong cultural implications surrounding how that looks at a given time and in a given place.
  2. There is a God given economy of the marriage relationship that is necessary for the efficient functioning of the family, and it is paralleled in the Trinity:
    - a. God the Son is co-equal to the Father, but subordinate willingly in the cause of redemption.
    - b. God the Holy Spirit is co-equal to the Father and to the Son, but proceeds from both to execute the will of the Godhead.
    - c. In the Holy Trinity there is an economy of purpose and function in order to achieve the purposes the Triune God has designed. It does not mean that the Members of the Trinity are not co-equal or co-eternal, or that the infinite love shared is in any way less toward one Member or Another or any Member is less than the Others.
  3. Similarly there is a God given economy in marriage that is similar to that of the Trinity, or to any business partnership for that matter: someone has to hold 51% of the shares and someone has to hold 49% or it will not work. In a 50/50 relationship, anytime there is a division of opinion there is an impasse which totally paralyzes and halts all forward momentum.

4. Even though the man and the woman are co-equal in terms of value, however different their gifts and aptitudes may be, God made the man first and the woman from stuff taken from his side, and gave him the responsibility to have the leadership role in marriage as a purely economic division of duty in order to enable the relationship to grow and the family to advance.
  5. Lastly the children are under submission to both parents, and when parents present a united front, the children must obey. If the parents are divided, and they will not make a decisions (even if, ultimately the husband must break the tie) the children will most certainly divide and conquer.
- C. There is a Cultural Component to the Relationship & Understanding of Peter's Admonition
1. Scripture is not merely inspired words on a page, the Bible is an inspired book written within a certain time period and within a particular culture and good interpretation must take into account the meaning of the words, the sentence structure in which they are found, the broader context of the book in which they occur, the culture that prevailed at the time of writing, and the intended audience.
  2. If anything, in our day, the culture card has been played much too often and much too liberally. We must be very cautious not to relegate to ancient culture that which is doctrinally transcendent; but we must not ignore the culture in which a given passage occurs.
  3. Peter is writing to a First Century Christian audience which exists in a Greco-Roman culture that is not happy with Christians or their beliefs. In that context, it is imperative that believers model, even in marriage, godly lives in Christ. They are already being viewed as disrupters of society and atheists in belief (because they worship a God no one sees).

## Part II: Exegesis & Application

- II. In the Same Way, Wives, Be Submissive to Your Own Husbands
- A. Reference to v.2:18, in the same way as servants, in the same way as Christ
1. This does not mean in exactly the same way, but in similar manner
    - a. The relationship of a wife to her husband is much different than that of a servant
    - b. The relationship is also different from that of Christ (the Son) to His Father
  2. It presumes freedom of choice and autonomy for the wife
    - a. Submission from the heart cannot be forced
    - b. A measure of independence has already been demonstrated in the wife becoming a believer and follower of Jesus Christ apart from her husband
- B. The Ultimate Model is Always Jesus Christ
1. Whether human government, employees (servants), wives, or children, the model of submission is Jesus
  2. Jesus did not submit only when it was easy or suited His interests
  3. He was willing to go to the cross for our redemption
- C. Despite Submission to Husbands Who Are Disobedient to the Word, It Does Not Imply Abuse
1. Then, as now, the law prohibits physical abuse of a spouse—Peter is not exhorting wives to submit to physical abuse
  2. In my opinion (!!!) significant emotional abuse may be equivalent to physical abuse in the way it affects the mind, body (extreme stress), and emotions (that line must be individually drawn)
- III. The Purpose of Submission
- A. In the culture, husbands whose wives joined a different religion than his, would be disparaged by the community. He would have suffered insult and rejection.
- B. A schism has already occurred in the marriage because of a wife who is being obedient to Jesus Christ in matters of faith and practice, it is essential that she compensate with behavior that is supportive of him every other way
- C. It has been said, "Witness all the time; occasionally use words."(attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words."). The goal of loving submission and Holy Spirit energized willingness to please and submit in every way possible is to win one's husband to Christ.
- D. To model Christ-like behavior in the home and in the marriage relationship goes a long way toward winning the husband to the Gospel and genuine faith in Christ

- IV. Peter Draws Upon the Mother of Israel (Sarah) to Exhort Godly Qualities
- A. V.3—does not oppose dressing attractively in a suitable and modest manner; Peter is counseling against certain dress and hair styles in the Greco-Roman culture that would be seen as flaunting wealth or one's sexuality in an alluring way. We must determine before God what is appropriate in our culture, as there is no set of rules ever laid out that are transcendent of culture
  - B. V.4—the best adornment is the hidden person (literally “man” i.e.: Jesus) of the heart. This hidden “man” of the heart with a gentle and quiet (peaceful, not silent) demeanor outshines all external beauty and makes any woman attractive in the purest sense
  - C. V.5-6—the example is drawn from Sarah, the mother of Israel
- V. “You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.” (v.7)
- A. Peter does not specifically mention “love” in this verse (as does Paul in Ephesians 5:25), but everything he exhorts demonstrates love
  - B. “In the same way”—curiously this verse implies a humble relationship much like the one who is submissive; in other words, bowing to her needs
    - 1. she is the weaker person, because she is a woman—it is her feminine gender that makes her weaker
    - 2. clearly this refers to her physical strength, not to her mind (intellectual ability), moral character, or capacity of her will
    - 3. As a group (and this applies to the human group of all women and the human group of all men in general—not to specific individuals within the respective groups) men are generally stronger in physical capability than are women—it is important that the husband bear this in mind in whatever way it implies
  - C. Show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life—the wife is the husband's equal in all significant respects, but especially in her relationship to Christ (wherein there is neither male nor female [Gal. 3:28])
  - D. The downside of failing to live with one's wife in an understanding way, and to treat her as a co-equal in your relationship with Jesus Christ, is to have your prayers hindered. God is not pleased when we treat another as less than, especially when that other is one's wife. David writes, “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear [my prayer];” (Psalm 66:18-19)

CONC: The wife is to love and submit to her husband for the purpose of her testimony to the world around her and to him, so that by her behavior she might influence him for Christ. Likewise, the husband is to love his wife and to be sensitive to her as a fellow heir of life that he might be a strong and effective leader of his household. It is a relationship of mutual love and humility in the most ideal sense, where each lives for Christ and both live for each other.