

Sermon – 1 PETER 3:1-7, Leroy Coote 28th February 2021

Context is always vital, and today it is extremely important. We must remember that Peter is writing to Christians who are living in the middle of a very large Roman empire that is often hostile to Christians. So, Peter's words here are written to encourage Christians not to disengage from society but, in fact, to live in the midst of a pagan world and influence it where it can be influenced. Same applies now. We are continuing with Peter's teaching of being subject to an authority for the sake of Christ. He's already told us that we are to be subject to governing authorities, to our masters/employers and today he addresses Christian wives and Christian husbands.

1 Peter 2:13–14 (ESV): *¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*

1 Peter 2:18 (ESV): *¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.*

1 Peter 3:1: *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands.*

These commands come to us in a fallen world and encompass situations that are less than perfect. In the ancient world when Christianity was beginning to take hold in and around the Roman Empire, there developed an interesting phenomenon that faced many new believers. How were the new converts supposed to relate to their spouses who may or may not be Christians? So, the context here is that both husband and wife are not saved and then one gets saved. How are they to relate to one another and to the society at large? Peter describes this in our second reading today:

1. Words for Christian Wives. The Christian Wife's Respectful and Pure Conduct.

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

Initially, we might wonder why Peter has 6 verses for Christian wives and only one verse for Christian husbands. Well, it's not because husbands have it all together and don't necessarily need 6 verses, but the reason is because in Roman society there was a greater potential for family and society disruption when a wife became a Christian than when the husband became a Christian. The potential was there for the new Christian wife to try and dominate her lost husband. Because God had saved her, she was not to take her new freedom in Christ and lord it over her lost husband.

Here's a description of what could happen: *A woman becomes a Christian and all of a sudden she feels superior to her husband, she feels like now that she knows what the Bible teaches and belongs to God, she knows so much more than he does, how can he be the leader in the family? Not only that, she keeps meeting these wonderful men at church who are fine, outstanding Christians and she becomes envious of them and she becomes indifferent to her own husband and much more attracted to other men who love Christ because she sees in that the potential for such a wonderful life. This can lead to great, serious problems.*

So, for a Christian wife, in the first century especially, her strategy was to continue in submission to her husband, whether or not he is a believer. In the context of submission, Peter addresses the Christian citizen, the Christian slave, and the Christian wife, all of whom had little power to effect authoritative change. They could, however, live out their faith in such a way as to make the authority glad they were Christians. The Christian citizen in the pagan Roman Empire was to live not in rebellion or in protest but to be active in doing good. The slave was to go over and above what was required. The Christian wife was to continue to respect her husband rather than lording her faith over him. She was to do good to her husband so that he would see her faith in action and potentially come to faith in Christ himself. Therefore, wives, you are called to submit to your own husbands (Husbands, stop smiling!) in respect and purity.

2. The Christian Wife's Internal Beauty

³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear— ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

Peter is not telling women to look bad externally. He's not saying it's sinful to braid your hair or to wear jewellery. He's not saying to avoid designer labels or expensive clothing. None of that is wrong or sinful. However, what he is saying is to not focus too much on externals but be mostly concerned with who you are on the inside. Who are you in the secret places that only God can see? Who are you really? God is more concerned about who you are internally. Internal beauty is far more valuable than external.

David talks about this concept in 1 Samuel 16:7 when he says The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

In Isaiah 3 there is the verdict to the Israelite women who were not pure and quiet in spirit but haughty and conceded. Listen to what it says:

Isaiah 3:16–24 (ESV)

¹⁶ The Lord said: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet, ¹⁷ therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. ¹⁸ In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; ¹⁹ the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; ²⁰ the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; ²¹ the signet rings and nose rings; ²² the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; ²³ the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. ²⁴ Instead of perfume there will be rottenness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty'.

Can we see how much more valuable inner beauty is than external adorning? Again, there is nothing wrong with looking nice, but God sees modesty and inner beauty as very attractive for Christian women. A quiet and gentle spirit is better than a dominating and argumentative spirit.

These traits are good for all Christians, even Christian men.

3. The Christian Wife's Biblical Model

⁵ *For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.*

Peter explains and then give women an example to follow. Sarah had proper adornment. She followed her husband and he led her into godliness. She wasn't perfect, and there were times when she didn't submit. But overall the portrait of Sarah was a godly woman whose adorning was internal. We don't know what Sarah looked like, but we do know she was very beautiful to God.

4. Words for Christian Husbands

⁷ *Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

Christian Husbands be Considerate to Your Wives

Peter begins this verse with the word likewise. So, what does likewise mean here? He used it at the beginning of our text for the Christian wife to submit to the authority of her husband in the same way we are to submit to governing authorities and to masters. Here, he writes likewise in regard to the wife's submission to her husband. So, in a very real but slightly different way the husband is to submit to his wife. Husbands are not called to submit to their authority but to submit themselves to their wife's needs. In other words, husbands are to stop thinking about themselves permanently, and consider and literally submit to their wives' needs.

Consider that your wife is the weaker vessel

Christian husbands, consider that your wife is the weaker vessel in many ways. She's not inferior to you in any way but she's different in many ways. So, how are wives and/or women in general the weaker vessel? Women are weaker physically. Because of this Husbands must consider ways to help them in this area. Husbands must not ever use this fact to intimidate their wives or be violent with them.

Husbands, be the protector of your wife. You're her protector. There is a great word that we don't use much anymore—chivalry. You are her protector. When there is a bump in the night, you go check the house. When she is threatened, you step in. Do the opposite of what Adam did in the garden.

Consider that your wife is an heir with you. Husbands, rather than using your strength, etc. as intimidation, remember your wife is an heir of grace with you: *since they are heirs with you of the grace of life*

Application

Likewise is a very important word in these verses and we need to remember the context of this passage as this is an application of submission to the Lord.

Wives, make him glad at least that you are a Christian by the benefits he receives from your commitment to Christ. You are doing good to him because you are committed to Jesus Christ and obeying what He commands, and these commands you must obey will bring good to your husbands.

Husbands, use your strength to keep them safe not to dominate. Understand that you also must submit your desires to her needs and care for her as the weaker vessel and as an equal heir with you of God's grace.