

Part 8: Gospel Culture in Marriage

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We are going through the book of 1 Peter and we are finding that the Apostle Peter is after the identity and the conduct of Christians.

Fundamentally, salvation by faith in Jesus Christ changes you, you are born again. Because of this conversion, we are new, distinct, and unique in terms of how we should act. As we've seen in this book, nothing you do earns salvation, but salvation changes everything you do. That includes how we act towards each other in the church, and we saw last week it includes how we act towards our government officials and towards those who mistreat us.

And today we are going to see how it changes the way we act when we are married.

More specifically, Peter is going to speak to husbands and wives and give them guidance for how to act when the marriage isn't all roses. Just as Peter has been doing since the middle of chapter two, he's after the conduct of Christians when life is hard and make no mistake, marriage is sometimes hard.

If you were to go search Amazon or Google for what to do when marriage seems difficult you might see all sorts of negotiation tactics, self-care tips, calls to cut and run, or subtle ways in which you might manipulate the relationship back towards your favor.

But here Peter is going to set two principles for Christian conduct in marriage. He wants us to obey God and love the other person. As simple as that sounds, he shares some nuts and bolts of what that looks like which might challenge us.

Peter's message, specifically for wives today, is counter cultural and perhaps even offensive to some people. But just like everything else Peter has talked about, it should shock us if we don't understand the gospel.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. The gospel says that my greatest problem was dealt with on the cross. The gospel says I don't need to fight for my own good because my own good couldn't even save me. The gospel says that my identity is in Jesus Christ, my hope is tied up in his never ending love, and my eternal reward is as secure as it could ever be because of my faith in Jesus.

If we don't understand the gospel we will always and only fight primarily for ourselves, but the gospel frees us to fight for God's glory and the good of others because Jesus has already met all of our needs.

In fact Peter uses a wonderful word to describe our posture as we walk with Jesus even when life seems hard: **1 Peter 1:8**.

This text is for people who want that joy. This text is for people whose hearts have been captivated by that joy.

Now there are two groups of people in here today, those who are married, and those who are not. To those who are not married my prayer is that you might understand this text clearly for two reasons. The first is that in understanding this text you might find your own thoughts on dating and marriage changed. The best medicine for a good marriage is the preventative medicine of the gospel which helps us reorient the way we view ourselves and our potential future relationships.

It's also helpful to understand this text because this text equips you to help disciple your married friends. The gospel gives us "all-access" passes when it comes to helping other people follow Jesus, where your life experience ends, the Bible still provides helpful truths relevant to those around us.

But for the second group of people in here, those who are married, my hope is that we not only understand this text, but that we might be able to joyfully and immediately apply this text to our own lives.

The big picture of what we are going to see today is that even when marriage is hard, the gospel equips us to act in a way that is good. We are going to see this in two parts, first we are going to see that **Godly wives adorn themselves with the beauty of the gospel** and secondly **Godly husbands live with the grace of the gospel**.

Before we look at these points I want to address the potential imbalance in this text. Wives are given six verses here and husbands one. That might seem unfair.

But I want us to note two things that help us understand this tension: the first is the context, the second is the tone.

In the cultural context of the day, women were considered to be inferior by nature to men. Because of that they were considered to be of poor judgment and ought to simply obey their husbands because of this. An implication of this ideology was that people such as wives or children were rarely written to or publically addressed. But Peter sets a counter-cultural notion by specifically and at length speaking to wives. Nowhere in scripture do we see that women are inferior to men. In fact in verse seven Peter makes the point of equality between husbands and wives when it comes to salvation.

Contrary to what secular culture tries to tell you, Christianity was always more progressive than secular culture when it came to gender roles. The Bible does hold distinctions inside of gender which hold up over time, but those distinctions aren't based off of capacity or competence, instead they are based off God's desire for his glory.

But because of the cultural tone of the day, wives were often those who were most vulnerable. This fits with the literary context of 1 Peter too. Peter is spending the majority of his time talking to the persons who are on the lesser side of the power imbalance: he spoke to citizens, not senators, slaves not masters, and here he speaks to wives more than husbands.

But there's also a unique distinction when it comes to Peter's tone in this text. What I want to do is read our text to the wives today and I want you to see if you can feel or hear Peter's tone in the text. **1 Peter 3:1-6.**

Contrary to what we will read in the passage to husbands, Peter's primary tone is that of encouragement to wives. Peter is urging wives on, empowering them in the gospel, reminding them of their hope, and to the husbands he takes more of a serious tone of admonishment.

How does Peter encourage the wives? He reminds them of this: **Godly wives are to be adorned with the beauty of the gospel.**

In 2:13, Peter calls all Christians to be subject to the government, in 2:18 he calls all servants to be subject to their masters, and here he calls all wives to be subject to their own husbands.

That's an important detail to notice. Peter isn't calling all women to submit to all men. He's not calling girlfriends to submit to boyfriends. Nor do we ever see a command to men to ensure that women submit to them. Instead we see the voluntary imperative that accompanies marriage: wives are to willingly submit to their own husbands.

Peter's not after forced subjugation. Instead he's after willing submission stemming from a gospel hope.

That's really what we see for both the husbands and the wives. We see in each an appeal to gospel conduct rooted in a gospel hope.

The nature of this gospel conduct for the wives is important to understand because we could walk away thinking that a Christian wife should just look like one of the Stepford Wives. The plot of the Stepford Wives is that some men genetically program their wives to be robots meeting their every need. Not only does Peter's command to husband prohibit that, but Peter's message to wives also prohibits that.

Now we do see in verse six that part of this submission includes a call to obey their husbands as Sarah obeyed Abraham. But we also see that Peter makes room for women to not obey their husbands, or at least to not follow in their ways.

Peter calls all wives to be subject to their husbands in this text. And I think we can assume that most the wives in Peter's churches were married to Christian men. But Peter's tone here is shaped by his specific address to live this way, "even when some husbands do not obey."

Wives will have unbelieving husbands who do not obey, and wives will have believing husbands who disobey but in those moments wives are not to cave to the weight of their husband's sin, but instead continue to obey God.

At this time, for a Christian wife to be married to an unbelieving husband was to actually dissent to the husband's authority.

The Greek Philosopher Plutarch said of wives: **"A wife should not acquire her own friends, but should make her husband's friends her own. The gods are the first and most significant friends. For this reason, it is proper for a wife to recognize only those gods whom her husband worships and to shut the door to superstitious cults and strange superstitions."**

Peter is writing to a culture where women who became converted faced pressure to either hide their Christianity or throw it aside. And here Peter empowers them to be independent of their husbands in worship, but reverent in all the other ways.

In fact Peter encourages a sort of fearlessness in these women which in any other context would be applauded by culture. Look at what he says in **1 Peter 2:6**.

Peter doesn't see women as passive and mild, he sees them as formidable and fearless in their faith.

Whether it be in submission to governments or to husbands, the Bible never paints submission as a form of concession or subjugation. It is a posture of firm resolve and gospel strength. Just as we saw last week it stems not from a predisposition to weakness, but from a posture of gospel liberty.

Wives can continue to obey God and love their husbands by godly living because they themselves have been freed by Jesus' own submission to the cross for their sake: **1 Peter 1:23-25**.

It's only when you realize the hope that you have in Jesus that you wives can do what Peter is calling you to do in this text. And we see two wonderful gospel hopes that lay behind Peter's gospel conduct. When Peter speaks of the adornment wives are to wear, he's simply stating that these hopes make themselves visible in your lives.

The first hope is that the godly conduct of the wife might help convert the husband, "that they might be won without a word by the godly conduct of their wives."

I've known wives who have come to faith in homes where the husband hasn't. And I also know that the wives at times joyfully and urgently pleaded with their husbands with the gospel only to still have the husbands continue to disbelieve.

I can only imagine how heartbreaking that might be. But if that's you, or if that's someone you know, here Peter holds out hope. Your actions towards your unbelieving husband might be the voiceless words which win him to Jesus.

It is not a female problem, but a human one, that when we are at our wits end and exhausted we can become either passive or nagging in our conduct. But here Peter holds out the winsome nature of a beautiful and respectful response.

Instead of nagging, or berating, or in exacerbation speaking out in anger, wives are to show the gospel by modeling Christ's service to us while we were yet sinners.

The expectation is that godly wives might be able to do this because they experienced Jesus doing this for them! Thoughtless subjugation has no place in the Christian wife, instead their action is robed in active and steadfast gospel reflection. Instead of attempting to please their husband with the beauty of jewelry and clothes, they are to witness to their husband with the beauty of grace.

Look at the connection Peter builds from chapter one to chapter three: **1 Peter 1:3-4, 3:4**.

Because the hope of the Christian wife is not in the perishable things of this world, she also wants to present to her husband the fruit of this imperishable gospel in her own attitude.

I know men who sit here in this building today who are saved by Jesus Christ because of the wordless witness of wives who refused to relent. I pray that many more stories like this might be added to the witness of these women.

But I also want to say, on account of all believing husbands, salvation saves us but it doesn't fix us. We are still knuckle heads, we are still going to be imperfect, and we are still going to need grace in the face of our own disobedience.

The first hope is that your actions might show the gospel to your husband, the second hope is that your actions might remind you of the God who never fails you.

Look again at what Peter says in **1 Peter 3:5-6**. Now this is such an odd allusion here because if you know anything about Sarah and Abraham in the Old Testament, you know that they are far from the picture perfect marriage.

But I think that's exactly why Peter chose to point to Sarah. In fact the only place where Sarah calls Abraham "lord" is when the Angel of the Lord told Abraham that Sarah was going to get pregnant, and this is what Sarah said while listening to this conversation: **Genesis 18:12**.

She laughed at the frailty of Abraham, for them to have children at that age was beyond imagination, and yet, she called him 'lord' even when pointing out his old age.

But faith, as it does with all of us, rewrites our history. Where Sarah initially laughed at the idea that God would give her a son, she ultimately believed and conceived. And it was this "hope in God" Peter says, which adorned Sarah and the women of old.

Ultimately God isn't asking any of you wives to submit to your husbands. He's asking you to submit your hope to himself, for this is precious in the sight of God. My wife knows I'm sinful, she knows I'm going to make mistakes, and if her submission to me is based in my own ability to lead our family to the Promised Land, she places her hope in a foolish place.

But wives are to submit to their husbands because they submit to God. The gospel hope of submission is not only that it might save a sinning husband, but that it is an active trust in God's own good for you personally.

To live with gospel beauty in all areas of your life is to free yourself from trying to trust in things which fail, and instead it chooses to boldly entrust yourself to the God who never will.

What does it look like to hope in a God who never fails, it looks like submitting yourselves to husbands who certainly will.

One quick aside here for the wives. Peter is writing to shape individual conduct here, but he is not assuming that you do this on your own. He even alludes to this when you says you are part of Sarah's children, other daughters of God who are here to help. The church also works alongside you. We are to bear one another's burdens, to help the weak and admonish the idle, perhaps even discipline believing husbands who refuse to repent. So don't take this passage and think you have what it needs to do this well. Be part of the church, share your burdens in this area with ladies from your community group or one of the elders or church staff.

Peter is simply focusing on the posture your conduct should have in moments of tension.

To help limit such moments, Peter turns to admonish the husbands. It's God's ideal design that it is a wife's joy to submit to her husband because her husband seeks to care for her as God designed.

This is the second point this morning: **Husbands are to live with the grace of the gospel.**
Read with me **1 Peter 3:7**.

Just as wives are called to hope in God and out of that hope submit themselves to their husbands, so husbands are called to submit themselves to God's commands for them.

Now Peter does call wives the weaker vessel here. Peter isn't saying that women are less valuable or less Christian. He simply acknowledging two things. The first is that generally speaking, the husband is physically stronger than the wife.

This is a paradox that I don't understand. My wife has grown four children inside of her. She's a massage therapist which is a physically demanding job. Yet when she's home she helps keep the house, caring for four kids, chasing three of them around, and keeping our nursing daughter alive from her very body. She also loves me and disciples other women in the church. Yet she can't reach the top shelf of our pantry and I can.

Generally speaking men are to use their physical strength not for their own benefit, but for the care of the women in their lives. That's the first thing Peter means when he says weaker vessel. And it's certainly a generalization.

But the second reality is not. The wife is the weaker vessel simply because the nature of her submission makes her more vulnerable. Paul calls husbands the heads of their wives (1 Cor. 11:3). This means that by nature of leadership and follower, wives are in a unique position to be cared for or harmed by their husband's leadership.

So how does Peter call husbands to live in light of that? In an understanding way, showing honor to her. What am I to understand? I think Peter wants you husbands to understand two things when it comes to how you live with your spouses.

First, understand that God has put you in a position of authority over one of his own daughters and a co-heir of grace with you.

C.S. Lewis has a famous line that you never encounter a mere moral, for we all live eternally. How much so husbands do you need to realize that your believing wife is just that?

Because we understand how God views her, we should seek to understand her.

It's so cliché for husbands to say, "I can never understand women." But men, God is calling you to understand yours. How many of us actually understand our wives like this?

I think if we are not careful we husbands can love having a wife more than we love our wife. But God is calling us to know our specific wife in such a way where we can honor her.

Husbands, we should all pass the Dairy Queen test. I did this the other day and I about had a panic attack in the drive through. I wanted to surprise my wife with ice cream because who doesn't like ice cream?

But when I got there I realized that I had to know what kind of ice cream she liked. Everyone loves being understood and honored, but we should know how our specific wives feel understood and honored.

Here's the thing, husbands, we have the ability to turn the narrative of its head when it comes to submission from our wives. We should want our wives to submit to us, to be subject to us. This means that they should know that when they extend themselves in submission that their weaknesses, their concerns, their vulnerabilities will be cared for, understood and honored by our leadership.

And why do we want this? Not because we want to be pampered but because at the end of all things we want our wives to obey Jesus. We want our wives to experience the joy of Christ as they obey him in the safety of our home.

We want our wives to submit to us because we want them to experience the wonderful joy of salvation, not because we want to feel good about ourselves.

Look at how Paul puts this in **Philippians 2:3-4**. Do we consider our wives as more important than ourselves? Are we willing to lay aside our own preferences for the sake of her? If she is a co-heir of grace then shouldn't you want to lead your family and your home in such a way where she joyfully lives out that grace by following Jesus in a way that is easier and easier?

Remember what Paul says is the mystery of marriage: **Ephesians 5:25-28**.

Just as Christ loved the church so that she might grow in holiness, so too are you husbands to live with your wives in such a way where she grows in holiness.

All marriage is, is long form discipleship. It's wives helping their husbands follow Jesus by winning them with their actions. And it's husbands helping wives follow Jesus by helping them follow Jesus in all things.

If you are one who is wondering if you're ready for marriage, this is a great litmus test and application: are you discipling people? Do you show a desire to be discipled? You single guys might be able to do a few more crunches at the gym, but when it comes down to it your future wife will benefit more from your spiritual might than your physical might.

Maybe you're a new Christian and this seems daunting to you. But do you have a desire to be discipled? Do you want others in your life helping you follow Jesus? Because this is what marriage is ultimately about.

Husbands, God wants you to know your wife and love her in this way because this is the way in which Jesus loved you. Don't neglect weight behind Peter's words that all aspects of living with your wife should be shaped with this self-sacrificial leadership.

For the husband everything he does shows the value of the gospel.

How serious is this for husbands to understand? Look at **1 Peter 3:7**.

Tim and Kathy Keller wrote a book called the "Meaning of Marriage." And in the book Kathy describes a season of hardship in their marriage where Tim wasn't understanding his wife.

He came home from work one day, and she was standing in the kitchen and started throwing plates onto the ground. Tim responded and asked her what was going on and she simply responded, "Are you ready to listen now?"

After many attempts of trying to get his attention, it took the shattering of a handful of plates to get him.

Husbands, don't miss the weight God places here. When you forget to treat your wife as Peter calls you to, when you see your wife primarily as a tool for your own pleasure and not someone to be cared for, understood and honored, then God himself will stop listening to you.

The heavens will clash to a close. That's how significant your role is.

Husbands, do you want a better relationship with God? Consider how you care for your wife. It's that important to God.

Marriage is not easy, and in God's eyes it's an incredibly important thing for both the individuals in the marriage and the watching world who sees the marriage. But the hope is that the gospel itself gives us enough grace and enough joy that we can bear this heavy burden because Jesus has married himself to us by faith.