

Lesson 7

1 Peter 3:1-12

One of the mistakes people often make when approaching this passage is treating it as though Peter is only talking about marriage. While Peter certainly addresses husbands and wives, he is doing so within a much larger section of the letter. Beginning back in chapter 2, Peter has repeatedly been showing believers what it looks like to submit themselves to God's design for the sake of the gospel. Citizens submit themselves to governing authorities. Servants submit themselves to masters. Wives submit themselves to husbands. Husbands submit themselves to the responsibility of loving and caring for their wives. Finally, Peter broadens the discussion to all believers and calls them to live with humility, sympathy, love, and unity.

The common thread running through all of these examples is not merely authority. The common thread is willingly laying down our own preferences, rights, and desires in order to honor God and serve others. Peter is showing us what it looks like when the gospel shapes our relationships. From a worldly perspective, this often appears restrictive. The world tells us to pursue our own interests, demand our own rights, and place ourselves first. Peter repeatedly calls believers to do the opposite. The Christian life is one of voluntary self-sacrifice because we trust God's wisdom more than our own desires.

Peter begins by addressing wives. His instruction to wives is not built on the idea that women are less valuable, less intelligent, or less capable than men. Rather, it is rooted in God's design for marriage. Peter calls wives to willingly place themselves under the leadership of their husbands. This does not mean that a wife becomes passive or unconcerned with her husband's spiritual condition. In fact, the opposite is true. Peter assumes that believing wives deeply desire the spiritual well-being of their husbands.

One of the most misunderstood aspects of this passage is the idea that submission means never attempting to influence a husband. Peter is actually describing an ideal wife as a wife who is actively seeking to influence her husband toward God. Wives should not stop caring and influencing and allow for their husbands to drift because they want to allow for him to have full leadership. His point is that she should trust God's methods. Peter says that unbelieving husbands may be won by observing the conduct of their wives. He is highlighting the incredible power of a godly life. A wife who faithfully loves God, walks in holiness, and trusts Him in difficult circumstances often provides a powerful testimony to an unbelieving husband.

Peter also shifts the focus from outward appearance to inward character. His concern is not that women never care about how they look. His concern is that the world places enormous emphasis on external beauty while neglecting the heart, jump on your favorite social media platform if you don't believe me. God values something much deeper. Peter points to the

beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, not because it is passive or weak, but because it demonstrates a deep trust in God. A woman who trusts God does not need to place her identity in outward appearance because her identity is already secure in Christ.

I think there is also an important application for young women here at WBC. The habits of godliness that are developed before marriage are the habits that are brought into marriage. If a woman learns to trust God, pursue holiness, and make decisions based upon pleasing Christ now, those same qualities will serve her well whether she is single, dating, engaged, or married.

Peter then turns his attention to husbands. He tells husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way. The word translated "understanding" carries the idea of knowledge. Husbands are called to know their wives. They are not to be passive. They should know their wives' strengths, fears, struggles, joys, burdens, and needs. A husband who refuses to listen, learn, and understand cannot properly care for the wife God has entrusted to him.

This is where many men misunderstand leadership. Biblical leadership is primarily about responsibility. Peter is not calling husbands to dominate their wives. He is calling them to honor them. The husband is not his wife's lord; Christ alone occupies that position. The wife ultimately belongs to God, and the husband has been entrusted with the responsibility of caring for one of God's adopted daughters.

Peter reinforces this by reminding husbands that their wives are fellow heirs of the grace of life. Before God, husbands and wives stand on equal footing. Both have received grace. Both belong to Christ. Both are heirs of the promises of God. This makes Peter's warning especially sobering. He says that husbands who fail to honor their wives should not be surprised when their prayers are hindered. It must be commutated to clearly to the guys that doing a poor job as a husband has a real spiritual consequence.

Sometimes people struggle with Peter's description of wives as the weaker vessel. Peter is not suggesting that women are spiritually, intellectually, morally, or emotionally inferior. In fact, he immediately reminds husbands that their wives are fellow heirs of the grace of life. It is important to notice that Peter is not contrasting a strong husband with a weak wife. Throughout Scripture, both men and women are presented as weak and dependent upon God. Peter has repeatedly emphasized the weakness of humanity and our dependence upon God's grace. The contrast is not between strength and weakness but between weakness and greater weakness.

Most likely Peter is acknowledging the reality that women are often physically more vulnerable than men. In a world where there were few machines to ease manual labor, and few nonmanual labor jobs being larger and stronger (generally) was very impactful in day to day life. His point is not that women deserve less honor because they are weaker. His point is exactly the opposite. Therefore, husband should recognize that God has entrusted someone precious into his care

and therefore should treat her with greater honor, gentleness, patience, and care. She should not be looked down on because she may not be able to make the same economic impact for the family as he can.

As Peter often does, he then broadens his focus from a specific group to all believers. He calls Christians to be united in mind, sympathetic, brotherly, tenderhearted, and humble. This is where we see that the principle of self-sacrifice applies to everyone. Wives are not the only ones called to submit themselves. Husbands are not the only ones called to give themselves away in service. Every believer is called to place the needs of others ahead of selfish ambition and personal pride.

Peter then gives one of the clearest pictures of gospel-shaped living when he tells believers not to repay evil for evil or insult for insult. The natural response of the flesh is retaliation. We want to get even, we want to defend ourselves. We want people to feel the pain they have caused us. Peter calls believers to something radically different. He calls them to bless those who mistreat them. This is not natural behavior. It is the kind of behavior that only grows out of a heart transformed by the gospel.

Underneath all of these commands is the example of Christ Himself. Christ laid down His rights in order to serve others. Christ humbled Himself. Christ suffered for sinners. Christ entrusted Himself to the Father. Peter's point is that believers should follow the same pattern. Because Christ willingly sacrificed Himself for us, we should willingly sacrifice ourselves for the good of others.

Peter concludes by quoting Psalm 34, reminding believers that God's eyes are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers. This serves as a final encouragement. Christians do not submit themselves to others because people always deserve it. They do not serve others because service is always easy. They do these things because they trust God. They believe that He sees, He knows, He cares, and He rewards faithfulness.

Application Questions

1. What messages does our culture send about marriage that conflict with what Peter teaches?
2. What are some ways Christians can pursue inner beauty rather than simply outward appearance?
3. How can we become more intentional about understanding the people closest to us?
4. What are some practical ways a husband could grow in knowing and caring for his wife?

5. What does honoring others look like in everyday life?
6. What relationships in your life would benefit from more humility and gentleness?
7. Is it easier for you to focus on changing yourself or changing other people?
8. Are you more concerned with outward appearance or inward character?
9. How well do you listen to the people God has placed closest to you?
10. Why do you think Peter connects godly behavior with evangelism?
11. How can our conduct either strengthen or weaken our witness for Christ?
12. Have you ever seen someone's actions make the gospel more real to you?
13. Why might respectful and loving behavior be more persuasive than arguments alone?
14. When someone wrongs you, what is your natural response?
15. Do you want to be understood more than you want to understand others?
16. What relationship in your life most exposes your selfishness?
17. Is there someone you are struggling to bless because of how they have treated you?
18. If God answered your prayers in the same way, you treat others, what would concern you most?
19. What area of your character most needs to reflect Christ?