

## **What About Marriage?**

**1 Peter 3:1-7** *“<sup>1</sup>In the same way, you wives, be subject to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup>as they observe your pure conduct with fear. <sup>3</sup>Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on garments; <sup>4</sup>but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible quality of a lowly and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. <sup>5</sup>For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being subject to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup>just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children if you do good, not fearing any intimidation. <sup>7</sup>You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, 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.”*

There is a relational conundrum in America today! There has never been a time in the history of our nation when we have had more clinical and anecdotal information about personality types, developing relationships, keys to good marriages, love languages, sexual fulfillment, etcetera, etcetera, and yet, we have more marital problems, marital conflicts, and divorces than ever before. Obviously, this means that the answer to better marriages is NOT more information, more books, and more opinions, whether professional or not

You might think that Christian marriages would be an exception to the norm. Unfortunately, the fact that the husband and wife are both believers does not guarantee a healthy and successful marriage!

Statistically, there is little difference in the success rate between Christian and non-Christian marriages. Therefore, the conclusion is that healthy marriages require something more than a relationship with Jesus and a Christian world view—healthy marriages require sacrificial love, intentional effort and a lot of repentance and forgiveness. Of course, when either of the marital partners is not a Christian, the problem is more challenging. In this portion of his letter, Peter addresses some essential guidelines for a successful marriage.

### **1. WHERE DO WE USUALLY LEARN ABOUT MARRIAGE?**

Usually, our most effective learning in every area of life comes from *role models*, but *not always* good role models. In other words, we tend to model what we have seen. If we intentionally imitate good models, we become better people who have a

greater probability of achieving our goals. However, if we inadvertently imitate bad models, we will struggle with frustration and failure. Role models influence every area of our lives. **Marriage is a good example!**

Typically, we determine our view of marriage from what we observe either in our own family or close friends. Our model may be very positive if we have been blessed by the marriage relationships of our parents or grandparents.

On the other hand, our model may emerge from a negative experience where we determine that our marriage will NOT be like \_\_\_\_\_—*you can fill in the blank!*

In either case, we may try to model the *results* we've seen without fully understanding the ways, the means, and the commitments that produced the model we try to imitate, whether positive or negative. We must not allow our marriages to be a lifelong struggle for who can gain the "upper hand."

**Rule to Follow:** Be VERY SLOW to take advice from someone who is not doing (or has not done) as well as you're doing or want to do!!

2. **THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS** (3:1a, 7a). The phrases, "*in the same way,*" refers to Peter's discussion of Jesus in the previous verses (2:21-25): *just as Jesus was submissive and obedient to the will of God, so Christian husbands and wives should follow His example.*

Using the life and character of Jesus, Peter presented the *model* that applies to both husband and wife. In other words, if both partners will imitate Jesus in His submission, selfless love, obedience, servant's heart, and unselfishness, they can experience the intimacy, joy, and fulfillment that they desire and deserve, both personally and relationally!

Peter then pointed to Sarah as a *model* for wives to follow. Though Sarah was not perfect (*though seemingly more virtuous than Abraham, the father of faith*), she proved to be an excellent helpmate to Abraham—she is one of the two women mentioned in Hebrews 11, the roll call of faith.

Of course, no one can truly follow Jesus' example until we know Him as Savior and submit to Him as Lord. Such fellowship requires intentionality by the couple, such as spending time daily *meditating* on His Word, *praying* individually and as a family, *developing friendships* that encourage faithfulness and *encouraging one another* to walk in faith!

3. **SUBMISSION** (3:1-6). Twice in this passage, Peter reminded Christian wives that they were to be submissive to their husbands (vv. 1, 5). Peter used a military term that is translated, “*be subject*” (*hupotassō*, προσκόπτω), which means “*to place under rank*.”

In the previous chapter, God ordained that the husband be the head, the leader, of the home (cf. Ephesians 5:21ff.). In that responsibility, the husband must submit to Christ and his wife should submit to him. Biblical headship is never dictatorial nor dismissive—it is the loving exercise of divine authority in submission to the lordship of Jesus! It seems that there is a military principle in play here: “*a person cannot be a good leader if he is not a good follower!*”

Peter gave three reasons why a Christian wife should *submit* to her husband—even if the husband is NOT saved:

1) **Submission is an obligation** (v. 1a), which God commanded in His wisdom, because it is His arrangement for a happy, fulfilling, fruitful marriage. Being *subject* does not mean that the wife is *inferior* to her husband (cf. 1 Peter 3:7).

God created both man and woman in His *image*. In the Garden, God gave dominion to both Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28). Submission has to do with order and responsibility, not inferiority! Since Jesus was a servant and submitted to the Father’s will, there is nothing degrading about submitting to authority or accepting God order of creatures in creation (cf. Ephesians 5:21). Positive and willful submission to the Lord and His will is the first step to living a Christ-centered life.

Husbands and wives must serve as partners, not competitors. This is the reason why Christians must marry Christians because a believer cannot enter into a “*oneness*” intimacy with an unbeliever (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

2) **Submission is an opportunity** (vv. 1b-2). Submission is an opportunity to win an unsaved husband to Christ—God uses submission as a powerful spiritual influence in a home. This does not mean that a wife “*gives in*” to her unsaved husband as a subtly manipulation to get him to do what she desires—instead of appreciation and respect, that kind of conduct tends to create resentment.

A nonbelieving husband is seldom, if ever, converted by a wife preaching or by nagging in the home. “*Without a word*” does not mean “without the Word of God,” because salvation comes through God’s Word! Wives who preach *at* their husbands, either directly or by sly comments, tend to drive them further from the Lord.

It is not arguments that will win the lost husband to the LORD—it is the biblical character and conduct of the wife that God can use to influence the lost husband. A

Christian wife who displays the fruit of the Spirit with an attitude of submission, understanding, love, kindness, and patience is who God will use to draw an unsaved husband to Himself! The lost will always be more influenced by what they see in our lives than by the words that they might hear from our lips—particularly, if our words and actions do not match.

Of course, in a Christian home, marital partners must minister to each other.

3) **Submission is an ornament** (vv. 3-6). The Greek word translated, “*adorning*” is *kosmos* (κόσμος) from which we get our English word, *cosmos* (*the ordered universe*) and *cosmetic* (*the ordered appearance*)—it is the opposite of chaos. Peter warned the Christian wife not to focus on external decoration but to focus on internal character.

Similar to our American culture, Roman women were captivated by the fashions of the day and competed with one another in dress, makeup, and hairdo. They wore elaborate and expensive garments—primarily for the purpose of impressing each other.

A Christian wife with an unsaved husband might think that to win and keep her mate, she must imitate the way of the world—so she might follow the influencers on TikTok! Of course, just the opposite is true! Glamour is artificial and external while true beauty is real and internal. A woman can put on and take off glamour, but true beauty is always present!

In addition, glamour is corruptible—it ages, fades, and decays! However, true beauty is a characteristic of the heart and soul which grows more wonderful and glorious as the years pass. A Christian woman who cultivates the inner beauty will not depend on cheap, expensive externals but will focus on true beauty. What do you really value—appearance or character?

Of course, this DOES NOT mean that a wife should neglect her appearance, but she should wear appropriate and pleasing apparel! Every husband is proud of a wife who is attractive both in appearance and personality, but the primary source of beauty is the heart, not Neiman Marcus! **The best rule of appearance: dress to please your husband**—he will always desire his wife to be impressive (and vice versa)!

Peter did not forbid the wearing of jewelry. The word, “wearing” (*perithesis*, περίθεις) means “*the putting around*” and refers to a gaudy display of jewelry. Of course, it is possible to wear jewelry and still honor God in the process—we must careful not judge one another in this matter!

Peter closed this section by pointing to Sarah as an example of a godly, submissive wife (cf. Genesis 18). Of course, wives would probably embarrass their husbands if they called them “*lord*” today, but their attitudes ought to demonstrate that kind of loving respect. A believing wife who submits to Christ, respects her husband, and cultivates a “meek and quiet spirit” will never have to be afraid (cf. Proverbs 31:10ff).

If her husband is not a believer, the objective of her attitude, behavior, and appearance is that he may be “*won without a word!*”

4. **CONSIDERATION** (3:7) Why did Peter devote so much more instruction to the wives than to the husbands? Probably because in the Roman Empire, women were treated like “property” and certainly not equal to men. However, as believers, they experienced new freedom in Christ, and that freedom created new challenges and problems for Christian women to navigate in such a patriarchal culture.

It was also true that women were more responsive to the gospel than men which meant that it was uncommon for many believing wives to have unsaved husbands. In such relationships, the both wives and husbands needed godly instruction and encouragement.

Peter reminded Christian husbands regarding four areas of responsibility:

1) **Physical—“dwell with them.”** A consummate marriage requires a physical relationship: “*The two shall become one flesh*” (Ephesians 5:31). At the same time, Christian couples experience a deeper spiritual relationship, but the two go together (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). A Christian husband must love his wife and fulfill his marital responsibilities. Normally, he should take the responsibility in providing for the physical and material needs of the home (cf. 1 Timothy 5:8; Titus 2:4-5).

One of the great problems in marital relationships today is that couples do not spend enough time together. One survey revealed that the average husband and wife spend about 37 minutes a week in actual communication. When raising children, if not intentional about their relationship, the couple can find themselves living with a familiar stranger.

2) **Intellectual—“according to knowledge.”** It is amazing how two married people can live together and not really know each other. The routines of life can rob couples of both the need and the opportunities to develop the intimacy of heart and mind.

***“Speaking the truth in love”*** is the solution to the communication problem: ***“love without truth is hypocrisy, and truth without love is brutality”*** (cf. Ephesians 4:15). If a husband does not know or understand his wife’s needs and problems, he cannot demonstrate proper consideration and support for her. The phrase, ***“I never knew you felt that way”*** is too often repeated in marriage counseling.

When either mate is afraid to be open and honest about their concerns, likes, and dislikes, walls develop that bring separation in the home.

**3) Emotional—“giving honor unto the wife.”** Since this verse is in the context of “Sarah” and since the name, “Sarah” means “princess,” it is implied that the husband should treat his wife like a “Sarah,” a princess!

In general, the man is stronger than the wife when it comes to physical abilities and accomplishments. In that regard, the husband should treat his wife like an expensive, beautiful, and delicate vase, which contains a precious treasure. The tendency over time is for the husband to start taking his wife for granted, and vice versa.

Big resentments can grow out of small offenses. Of course, “giving honor” does not mean “giving in.” It means to respect one another’s feelings, thinking, and desires. The couple may not agree with each other’s ideas, but they must respect one another enough to listen and consider.

It has been my experience that God often matches couples with *different* temperaments, emotional responses, and likes—“opposites attract!” When the husband and wife treat each other with love, their differences often tend to moderate the extremes of each other—therefore, nurture it!

**4) Spiritual—“that your prayers be not hindered.”** It is assumed that husbands and wives pray together. When they do not, misunderstandings, failures and unhappiness often follow. It is the prayer life of a couple that indicates how things are going in the home. If something is wrong, prayers will be hindered.

A husband and wife are ***“heirs together.”*** If both are submitted to Christ and follow His example, they will experience a rich and rewarding relationship in life. If not, they will personally miss God’s best and will rob each other of blessing, growth, and relational intimacy.

In conclusion, bless God that you and your beloved are heirs of the grace of life!