

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

Wives Be Subject To Your Husbands

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1 Peter 3:1-7

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 3:1-7; that's on page 1015 in your pew Bibles. This is now the second particular application of a general word of counsel that Peter gave back in chapter 2 verse 12. Peter wrote to these folks and commanded them saying:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

And then in verse 13 he went on to say that a big part of conducting yourself appropriately in a fallen world has to do with how you relate to potentially hostile forms of authority. He says in verse 13:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.... (1 Peter 2:13 ESV)

Our calling is not to burn the house down. Our calling is to represent and resemble Christ wherever we find ourselves in this broken and sinful world.

That's the general principle that Peter gave back in chapter 2 – but then right away he realized that, given his audience he needed to unpack that a little bit for two groups in particular. He

needed to unpack that for slaves who might find themselves submitting to cruel and crooked masters – we looked at that last week. And then here in this passage he addresses Christian women who very often found themselves married to unconverted and generally unsympathetic pagan men.

I mentioned last week that Christianity was actually mockingly referred to in the first century as a religion of women and slaves. Slaves FLOCKED to Christianity because of what the Gospel said about them. The Gospel said that they had great value to God – he loved them, he chose them, he called them, he died for them and he had plans for them. That message RESONATED with Roman slaves.

And the Gospel also resonated with Roman women.

Historian Rodney Stark says:

“Women were especially drawn to Christianity because it offered them a life that was so greatly superior to the life they otherwise would have led.”¹

Roman women generally had no say in who they would marry, they were often forced to marry much older men in what were basically real estate transactions, they could be divorced on a whim, they were often forced to abort or expose babies that their husband didn't want – particularly if they were female, they had very limited property rights and they had to endure systematic infidelity on the part of their husbands.

Christianity offered something entirely different and they flocked to it in droves.

Which is why Peter had to address this issue. Just as he knew that there would have been many Christian slaves hearing his letter read on a Lord's Day morning – so too he knew that there would have been many Christian women. Women who would have heard the letter – heard it explained and then would have had to go home to an unfaithful, uncaring, potentially abusive pagan husband.

¹ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 122.

Surely this idea of being subject to every human institution FOR THE LORD'S SAKE – did not apply here?

And yet – actually – this is exactly the sort of situation that Peter has in mind. Peter is particularly interested in IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS. The Gospel THRIVES in impossible situations! I love how Edmund Clowney puts it; he says:

“Peter sees the ‘impossible’ position of the Christian as a remarkable opportunity to bear witness to Christ.”²

That’s what this is about! This isn’t submission for submission’s sake – this is submission for the Gospel’s sake! These sorts of impossible situations become the stage upon which we display our faith and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is where we thrive! This is our opportunity!

That’s what Peter’s saying.

Now, it’s a big ask – in our day just as much as in Peter’s day - so we’ll read the whole passage and then we will look carefully at what Peter is saying and then we will consider what possible application it may have to those of us listening here today. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

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. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, 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. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

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. (1 Peter 3:1–7 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Let’s begin by looking carefully at what Peter has to say to Christian wives.

²Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, ed. John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 129.

A Word To The Wives:

First of all in verse 1 he says:

1. **Be subject to your own husbands**

Peter uses the same word here that he used back in 2:13:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution. (1 Peter 2:13 ESV)

So again, this is a particular application of that general principle and I think that it is very important for us to see that because we mentioned two weeks ago that submission to the state in the Bible is never absolute. When Peter and John were arrested for preaching in the name of Jesus they indicated that they would obey their earthly authorities only up to a certain point.

They said:

“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19–20 ESV)

So Peter says: “You will have to decide whether you want to keep arresting or not – that’s your call – but we are going to keep doing what Jesus told us to do.” Clearly, Peter’s submission to his earthly authority was not absolute. His submission to Jesus was absolute but his submission to the Sanhedrin was qualified and so ought it to be here.

Wives must render a similar, qualified submission to their husbands. Wayne Grudem says for example:

“the submission Peter commands must never go so far as to include obedience to demands to do something that is morally wrong.”³

So Peter is telling wives that they ought not to do anything immoral but they should in general submit to the leadership and authority of their husbands. In support of that command he offers the example of Sarah from the Old Testament; he says they are to do this:

³Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 147.

as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. (1 Peter 3:6 ESV)

That's an interesting citation because in that story, which is from Genesis 18, Sarah was expressing doubts about the wisdom of her husband's plan.

Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" (Genesis 18:12 ESV)

Shall I have the pleasure of children – Sarah is doubting her husband's understanding of God's will for the family – but she followed him anyway. That's what Peter is saying. Even when you don't understand how this is going to work out – you follow anyway. Because God knows how it is going to work out! Sarah obeyed her husband and wonder of wonders – it was because of her obedience, humanly speaking, that the Messiah came into the world.

God's ways are higher than our ways and he often does miraculous things through simple, human, hard and costly acts of obedience.

The second thing Peter says to wives is found in verse 3. He tells them:

2. Be understated in your appearance

Specifically he says:

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear (1 Peter 3:3 ESV)

Now clearly Peter is not forbidding these things outright – he is not forbidding them to wear clothes; that would hardly be helpful – rather he is saying that the emphasis should not be on external appearances. In this sense, Peter is speaking in line with much of Roman culture. Roman culture generally did not look favourably upon women who drew attention to their physical attributes. One Roman writer named Juvenal actually said:

“There is nothing that a woman will not permit herself to do, nothing that she deems shameful, when she has encircled her neck with green emeralds and fastens pearls to her elongated ears.”⁴

Seductive clothing leads to seductive behaviour – that’s what they believed in the Roman world; you might get arrested if you ever said that today. Now regardless of what you think about that what Peter is saying here is that Christian women ought to dress modestly. Christian women ought to adorn themselves – that is commend themselves – not by drawing attention to their bodies but by drawing attention to their character.

Specifically, he says in verse 4:

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. (1 Peter 3:4 ESV)

Don’t just care about what men want – care about what God wants!

The word translated here as “gentleness” is the Greek word *praus* – often translated in the Bible as “meekness”. And it is not just something that women are called to – it is something that everyone is called to. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

“Blessed are **the meek**, for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5 ESV)

So all people are called to be meek – but here Peter says that it is a particularly attractive and commending quality in a woman. Meekness in the Bible is that quality of trusting God with final outcomes. It is not scheming, not cheating, not forcing. It is playing fair and doing right and trusting God to sort out injustice and inequality at the end.

Remember – the call of the Christian is not to burn the house down. It is to live as Christ in every situation.

The second word that Peter uses here in verse 4 is the Greek word *hesuchios*. It is translated in the ESV as “having a quiet spirit”. It’s the same word that Paul uses in 1 Timothy 2:11 when he says that women:

⁴ As cited in Thomas Schreiner, *1 Peter* Thomas Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 152.

should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. 11 Let a woman learn **quietly** with all submissiveness. (1 Timothy 2:9–11 ESV)

That sounds a lot like what we are seeing here. The word “quietly” does not mean that women can never participate vocally in a worship service. In Corinthians 11 Paul says that women can both pray and prophesy in the church service so whatever he means in 1 Timothy 2 it does not mean absolute silence. It means actually “to stand down”. It means to allow the men to step forward and to assume their role as the authoritative teachers in the church. It is the liturgical application of meekness. Paul seems to be saying that when it is time for the men to play their part in the service, the women should stand down. They should step back and make space for the men to fulfil their role.

So taking that back into 1 Peter 3 – it seems that Peter is saying that a woman should step back and make space for her husband to be a man. Women will often go first. Women will generally speak first. Women usually know what to do first. But the wise woman will step back a bit and leave some space for her husband to be a man. That quality – that character is very attractive Peter says – to men – and more importantly to God.

These are the ways that a Christian woman should seek to commend herself. Not by weaponizing her body but by displaying the quality of her character. In every generation – and regardless of your politics - I think that is very good counsel indeed.

Now uniquely here, Peter has a word for the husbands. He doesn't say anything to political leaders and he hasn't said anything to the masters of slaves – up until this point he has been speaking solely to those who find themselves in powerless positions in a hostile and unbelieving culture. But here he breaks the pattern and says a word or two to husbands. The most reasonable explanation for that is that there were already some converted husbands in the church – so he has a word for them.

Likewise To The Husbands:

In verse 7 he says:

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. (1 Peter 3:7 ESV)

This sentence is hard to translate into English. For clarity's sake then let me rephrase what Peter is saying. He is telling husbands first of all to:

1. Be considerate

Literally, he says live with your wives, them being the weaker vessel, according to knowledge. Basically, he is saying, living with a wife requires some thought and study. You've got to know God and you've got to know women. Wayne Grudem understands Peter here as commanding:

knowledge of God's purposes and principles for marriage; knowledge of the wife's desires, goals, and frustrations; knowledge of her strengths and weaknesses in the physical, emotional and spiritual realms; etc.⁵

To be a good husband you've got to study the Word of God and you've got to study the daughter of God that has been entrusted to your care.

Now we probably must take a minute and explain what Peter means by "weaker vessel". He does not mean that they are weaker intellectually or spiritually – in fact Peter grounds his command in the fact that they are co-equal heirs when it comes to spiritual blessings. The plain sense meaning of what Peter is saying is that women are smaller – they are physically weaker generally speaking – and therefore they are vulnerable to bullying, abuse and mistreatment which was very common in the Roman world. Such things should not characterize a Christian marriage, rather the husband should be very considerate.

This was common teaching across the board in Christianity. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 3:3 that a man could not be an elder in the church if he was a striker – that is if he hit his wife. Christianity required men to be gentle and considerate towards their wives – again this is one of the reasons why pagan women FLOCKED to the church – and hoped to bring their husbands with them.

⁵Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 151.

The second thing that Peter says to husbands is that they need to treat their wives with honour.

2. Treat her with honour

The word used here means to highly esteem, to treat as valuable and precious and to accord as worthy of great respect. The word almost means “to worship”. In some contexts it actually does mean that. So again, let’s not pass by this without appreciating how remarkable this would have sounded in the Roman world. Historians tell us that this command was **UNIQUE** in the Roman world, meaning no other author at the time is known to have said anything like this to Roman people. Women were not generally treated with honour in the Roman world – so Peter is being revolutionary here.

The Bible says some absolutely scandalous things about women. Paul for example says:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:27–29 ESV)

Paul says if you are a Christian – if you are in Christ through faith - then you are co-equal heirs to all the promises of God in the Old Testament. Jews and Gentiles have an equal share. Men and women have **AN EQUAL SHARE** – that was **REVOLUTIONARY!**

Nobody was saying that kind of stuff – but here Peter is saying that kind of stuff. He is telling men – you better treat your wives **ALMOST** like an object of worship. Don’t make an idol of her – but just shy of that – treat her as a daughter and heir of God Almighty. Your wife is a princess – literally – she is the daughter of the King and you will stand before her Father one day and give an account for how you’ve treated her. And if you don’t treat her well then the king of the universe will turn his back on you. That’s the threat that Peter provides at the end of the section; he says that they must treat their wives with honour:

so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7 ESV)

If you don’t treat you wife like a princess then you will be denied an audience with the King. That’s serious business and Peter means for them to hear it as such.

Why Should I Obey This Seemingly Impossible Teaching:

Now, you can't tell people to do crazy, impossible things without explaining to them why it matters, and Peter does that in this passage so I want to make sure you see it.

You ought to do this, Peter says, first of all:

1. Because it is the best way to reach an unbelieving spouse

He says that in verse 1.

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 (1 Peter 3:1 ESV)

Now, listen in case you are sitting here thinking, "I don't need to pay attention to this because I am not a Christian wife married to an unbelieving husband – this is not my situation." Well it is your situation – remember this is a specific application of a general principle. One commentator puts it this way:

"This emphasis on conduct rather than words is also applicable to other situations in which Christians find themselves in regular daily contact with unbelievers (at work, within a family or college residence, etc.)... the means God will use to 'win' such persons will generally not be the Christian's words but his or her *behaviour*." ⁶

Are you hearing that?

Peter is saying that if you live in a context where people will not hear the Word of God – preach the Word of God by how you live. Show them what it looks like to follow Jesus -

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23 ESV)

⁶Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 146.

Remember that? That's the Jesus way! If your husband – or your friends – or your family members or the culture in general – won't listen to you talk about Jesus then you **SHOW THEM JESUS** until they start asking you for the reason for the hope that you have in Christ.

That's how we do it – and more importantly here – that's **WHY WE DO IT**.

We do it because sometimes you have to do something **CRAZY** to get through to a hostile and unbelieving culture.

Secondly, Peter says, you ought to do this:

2. Because it demonstrates our continuity with the Old Testament saints

Look at verse 6. Peter tells the wives to follow the example of Sarah:

And **you are her children**, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. (1 Peter 3:6 ESV)

Now Peter was writing these things to largely Gentile women. The early church believed that whether they were Jew or Gentile – if they had faith in Christ then they were truly part of the family of Abraham. Well, Peter is saying, if that's true then you ought to act like you are part of the family of Abraham. You better prove that by your behaviour. Show that you are heirs of Abraham – show that you are the daughters of Sarah. She believed God even when he asked her to do impossible things.

That's what faith is – that's what faith has always been. Believing in God even when everyone around you thinks you're crazy – even when you think you might be going crazy. That's what faith was for Sarah and that's what faith is for us today. It is holding on to the Word of God when everything around is telling you to find another way.

I want you to hear what Peter is saying here. He is saying that faith should look basically the same in every generation. Some things will change. The clothes will change, the language will change, the music will change, the architecture will change – but the nature of faith will always be the same. Apart from the externals – which are largely irrelevant – faith will always look the

same to a hostile and unbelieving world. We will look like crazy people. We will look hostile to social norms. We will look disruptive to the cultural consensus. We will look like we are marching to a different beat.

Do we?

Or have we capitulated entirely on this issue as on many others – that’s part of the challenge of this text. Are we doing gender and sexuality and marriage JUST LIKE THE WORLD – or just like sister Sarah? Which family do we look like we belong to?

Because our family is old – and it hasn’t changed. Same God. Same faith. Same story. So being out of step – appearing contrary – crazy even – that is par for the course. It is to be expected – and more than that – it is to be UTILIZED for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Can I make a prediction here? I think this aspect of our faith is going to become USEFUL in the days ahead. Our culture is in the midst of a massive and unprecedented transformation. We are experimenting with NEW and NOVEL approaches to gender and sexuality and identity – no one has ever done this before! No culture on planet earth has ever encouraged its citizens to choose their own gender and to have sex with whomever they choose – this has never been tried. And I suspect that it will not go well. So, if we hold our ground – if we do it the old family way – I suspect that we will find ourselves shining very brightly and answering lots of honest questions in the days and years ahead.

God make it so.

Lastly, in terms of the why, Peter says to the wives in his congregation, you ought to do this:

3. Because God is glorified by our obedience in difficult situations

Look at verse 4 again. He says:

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.** (1 Peter 3:4 ESV)

When you embrace what God has ordained – even though you have questions – even though it's hard – when you embrace that and you shine your light within that – God finds that very precious. Even if your husband never appreciates that – GOD APPRECIATES THAT – and in the end, isn't that whose approval you ought to be seeking?

Do you see?

Peter NEVER guarantees that if you do this your friends and loved ones will come to Christ – they might – but they might not. Peter can't promise that, because Peter doesn't know that. But here is what he does know: when you obey God in difficult situations – GOD LOVES THAT. God DELIGHTS IN THAT. Your obedience – your faith – your submission – is BEAUTIFUL and PRECIOUS to your heavenly Father. He sees it. He treasures it. And he will reward it.

DO IT FOR THAT.

You might get the world added on to that – or you might not.

But do it for that – and God will be glorified on the day of visitation.

That's your ultimate goal, that's your chief ambition – and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.