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## *Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter*

### *A Common and Dangerous Error in Applying God's Word*

*December 11, 2016*

**Sermon Text:** 1 Peter 3:1-12

**Scripture Reading:** Joshua 7

1Pe 3:1-12 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.

(8) Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

(9) Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. (10) For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; (11) let him turn away from evil and do good; let him

seek peace and pursue it. (12) For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

This morning we are going to do a kind of general overview of these verses here in chapter 3 and then plan to come back to them again next time and go through them in more detail.

As Peter has been instructing Christians how they, as elect exiles, are to live in a fallen world ruled by Caesar. As citizens, as slaves, and now as husbands and wives. How is the Christian to live? How would Christ live?

And we have been learning things like this:

1Pe 2:16-17 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (17) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

This is how we are to live. We are not to be rebels and trouble-makers but are to, as far as it depends upon us (as Paul wrote), be at peace with all men. There is no need for a Christian to bring unnecessary persecution by doing evil, by trying to overthrow the government or to lead some slave revolt. *In that day, this was the instruction given.*

*This was wisdom.* Because if Christianity, through the actions of people who claim Christ's name, came to have a reputation of rebellion and revolt against the Empire, life would become much, much harder for believers. Persecution would increase.

NOTE: Take care then in applying these instructions to our day. They do apply, but probably not "straight across the board." Today for instance it is lawful for employees to change jobs or to participate in a labor union. Citizens have perhaps more legal rights today than they did in the Roman Empire?

And now Peter turns to instruction for wives and husbands. How is a Christian wife to live in relation to her husband, particularly if he is not a Christian? What does the Lord command of a Christian husband? Is Christianity to become associated with a radical social movement, perhaps a women's rights movement that seeks to radically alter the fundamental social institution of marriage, you see? And I think the answer is, no.

Those are things we will consider next time, but this morning I wanted to talk to you about how Scriptures like this one are SO OFTEN twisted and distorted and then used by evil ones to oppress others. And the best way I think to introduce this subject is by

way of a question we were recently asked.

[NOTE: The material that follows was published this morning, at least in part, on the ACFJ blog AND Barbara Roberts contributed to it as well, so I want to be certain to give her proper credit].

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself,  
and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:33)

Recently we received the following excellent email and question from a reader. This is what she wrote:

*"I'm emailing you because I've been wondering a lot lately about what the opinion of the team at ACFJ is about what Ephesians 5:33 means when it says that wives are to respect their husbands. Because on every single post and sermon about this verse [which she has heard or read elsewhere] people say that wives are to unconditionally respect their husbands — even when their husbands don't deserve it. At all. Even if their husband was literally Hitler, they need to respect them — they'll say that it doesn't mean respecting their actions/decisions, necessarily, but rather respecting them as a person. And they top it off by making some remark about how husbands are*

*supposed to unconditionally love their wives, and how the verse doesn't attach any conditions to the command and that's how we know that the love and respect is meant to be unconditional.*

*But while I can't particularly fault their exegesis — it's true, there are no conditions attached to those commands... it always strikes me as absurd, dangerous, and unbiblical, although I can never entirely articulate why.*

*I mean, sure, let's accept the premise that Ephesians 5:33 means that wives must unconditionally respect their husbands as people, even if they don't always respect their actions or choices. Here's what is never discussed: doesn't the bible also say that we will know them by their fruit? In other words, is there really a difference between a man's actions/decisions and who they are as a person? [As we will see, there is not a difference. Rotten fruit means rotten root].*

*If there is, what is it? How do we draw that line? After all, a Christian's identity is in Christ, but we still sometimes choose to do sinful things, which presents a contradiction. If there's not, then what does that imply about the way we ought to be interpreting and living out Ephesians 5:33?*

*I'm not married, so it isn't personally relevant to me, yet, but I think it needs to be discussed on ACFJ, especially given how often that verse is used to club women over the head and keep them in abusive relationships. If you haven't already posted on this subject (I looked, but I suppose could have missed it), I hope you will, because I think your readers, and Christianity at large, could benefit greatly from a more discerning look at this incredibly common idea."*

First, let's deal with the issue of the identity of a true Christian, then we will address the meat of her question about this "respect" thing.

### **The identity of the true Christian**

Christians in this present life still sin. Anyone claiming to have arrived at perfect sanctification just blew it by making that claim! However, a Christian is not a sinner in the essence of his or her new identity in Jesus Christ. If you will look over Romans 8 for instance, or peruse through 1 John, or consider Galatians 5:16ff, you will see this. A Christian is a new creation who loves God, loves His Word, and loves Christ's people. A Christian is indwelt by the Spirit of God who constantly leads him or her into God's will, and who immediately brings the believer under conviction leading to repentance when we sin. NONE of

these dynamics are present in the unconverted heart. That heart hates God, is hostile to God's Law, and is unable to obey that Law.

So, a regenerate person IS a child of God, not a sinner. (Take the challenge by the way of trying to find anywhere in Scripture where a Christian is clearly called a "sinner"). The fruit of the Christian's life is good. The course he travels is righteousness and his life evidences that. So while the Christian sometimes sins, his/her *identity* is not defined by the flesh, but by the Spirit of God who has birthed them, who gives them new life, and who leads them step by step in righteousness. Thus the repeated message of the New Testament is, "Christian, BE WHO YOU ARE!"

**"There are no conditions attached to the command" -- is that good exegesis?**

The teachers who say "*Ephesians 5:33 doesn't attach any conditions to the command, so the command to respect and love must be unconditional,*" are making a significant error in their exegesis. **They are arguing from silence.** It is true that Ephesians 5:33 does not give conditions; but the Bible overall is not silent about conditions pertaining to respect and obedience. In fact, there are lots of places in the Bible which point to conditions

in which it is *wrong* to respect or obey someone.

We will address several examples below. But for now, let's just recall that when the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain, when the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us," God holds them in derision.

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. (Ps 2:4)

The Hebrew word there means mock, deride, ridicule. God laughs derisively at those who proudly defy him. A far cry from showing them respect!

Whenever you hear an argument from silence, weigh it carefully. Many arguments from silence are very flimsy, and quite often they are downright distortions. Over-reaches of the text. Or a bee-in-the-bonnet of some axe-grinder.

### **Unconditional Respect?**

Scripture, including this passage of Ephesians 5:33, does not teach "unconditional respect." It does not teach that we are to respect people (usually those with some kind of

authority such as the king or a father or mother, etc) *no matter what*.

The claim that the Bible does teach unconditional respect is repeatedly used by ignorant people or by wicked people seeking to control us for evil purposes. Why do wicked people make this claim? Because what they really mean by "respect" is *you must do what they say* — you must obey the one you ought to respect. It is true that respect and obedience really cannot be separated. Children are to honor (respect) their parents - ie, obey them. Citizens are to honor the king - ie, obey them. But unconditionally? NO! This false "unconditional respect and obey" teaching brings people who want to please God into horrible, horrible bondage to evil people.

Consider Jesus' example and the example of other saints in Scripture like Paul or Peter. NOTICE HOW OFTEN THEY ARE SPEAKING OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, THE CLERGY, THE PASTORS OF THEIR DAY:

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (Matthew 15:12-14)

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. (Matthew 23:13)

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:27-29)

The very same Spirit of God who inspired Hebrews 13:17—

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

... also inspired Hebrews 13:7 which points out that true leaders are those who *speak to us the word of God*—

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Why are we to consider the outcome of the leaders' way of life? Because we

are to assess their godliness by their fruit. We are to be discerning. Is their teaching lining up with the whole counsel of scripture. Is the fruit of their lives rotten? If the leaders are prideful, if they manipulate the the flock for their own selfish gain, then we are right NOT to imitate them; we are wise to neither follow nor obey them.

And that very same God who inspired Hebrews 13 also spoke in this manner of some people who held leadership positions:

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. (Gal 6:12-13)

These principles apply directly to any scenario in life where normally, all else being equal, we are to show respect for someone. Rulers, pastors, husbands, parents, etc. That respect is NOT unconditional. And here is a vital point then when it comes to how we interpret the Bible:

**We must not make a particular verse into a universal, "always true no matter what principle" when**

**that Scripture was never given to function in such a manner.**

Here is a very, very wise observation that Barbara Roberts found when she was reading about the current “Eternal Sonship/Submission” debate:

*The short path to heresy is not in denying biblical teaching. The short path to heresy is just in affirming part of biblical teaching. Honing in on a verse, honing in on an idea, and trying to let that be the be all and end all of your theology. But the orthodox fathers said no no no, we can't do that! Scripture can't function as our supreme authority unless it's the total message of scripture that's our authority.*

— Dr Scott Swain, ~21 minutes into his talk God from God, Light from Light: Retrieving the Doctrine of Eternal Generation.

This error happens constantly. It is the result of failing to consider the Genesis to Revelation context of a given passage [This is why I so much appreciate works on Biblical Theology such as those by G.K. Beale]. The overall context of Scripture, the consideration of other passages that cast light upon the passage we are

studying, is VITAL. So when Peter for instance says:

*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, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. (1Peter 3:1-2)*

...we must ALSO be disciplined in our study methods to stop for a moment and think. "Let's see, hmmm, Peter. Wait a minute. Peter, aren't you the same Peter who announced to Sapphira that she was also guilty and would die just as her husband Ananias did because she went along with her husband's scheme?" So if that is true, then Peter must NOT mean that a wife is to obey and respect her husband NO MATTER WHAT.

And isn't Peter, who said —

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

...ALSO the same Apostle who said, "we must obey God rather than men"? Yes! Same guy!

Do you see? When preachers and authors and individual Christians hook onto some Scripture like Ephesians 5:33 or like the one before us here in 1 Peter 3 and jerk it out of the Bible to carry around and use like some universal "fits every lock" skeleton key, they are perverting and twisting the Word of God. And that twisting of Scripture ALWAYS leads to spiritual harm and bondage. ALWAYS.

The fact is, as we write and teach so often here at ACFJ, our counsel to abuse victims is "that man is Nabal, a fool. He is an evil man who has never kept his marriage covenant with you and never intended to. You have every right to divorce him and walk into freedom. Respect him? Nope. An abuser is anything but a respectable person."

### **It isn't Just About Domestic Abuse**

If you will keep an eye on the ACFJ blog, quite soon you will see a followup article which flows from these things we have just considered. The topic is this:

*"The false teaching of unconditional respect/love/obedience/forgiveness has produced a CODE OF SILENCE ABOUT EVIL in the church. It is a plague, a ubiquitous infection."*

We have just seen still another example of it recently in respect to a "well known, big-name" Reformed Baptist pastor who has been arrested and charged with multiple counts of child molestation and serious injury assault.

This has been kept quite "hush-hush" for a considerable time but has now hit the newspapers. *If the church is to be the pillar and support of the truth, if Christ's people are to be His Light in this sin-darkened world, then I ask, why is it that these kinds of reports generally are broken by the secular news media and law enforcement RATHER than being exposed by the church?*

Well, one major answer to that "why" is that Christians have been brought into bondage by evil through this wicked teaching of "unconditional respect/love/obedience/forgiveness." Evil loves the darkness you see, and this false teaching so many have been taught and believe promotes that darkness.

Now, even a superficial and brief consideration of the Scriptures will surely reveal that this Code of Silence about evil among us is absolutely contrary to God's command. Think it through.



***Does the Bible speak openly and repeatedly about wickedness creeping into the church? Does the Bible name the names of the wicked who are hiding in sheep's clothing? Does the Bible use harsh, fearful language in exposing these evildoers? You know the answer. YES! YES! YES!***

2Pe 2:1-3 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2) And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (3) And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Remember now, this is the very same Apostle Peter who we have just heard instructing us this way –

1Pe 2:13-20 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. (15) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (16) Live as people who are free, not using

your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (17) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (18) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. (19) For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. (20) For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.