

## Hope PCA Sermon: February 18, 2024

### *1 Peter 3:1–7 “Respect and Honor in Marriage”*

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Continuing in 1st Peter, this morning we arrive at chapter 3. If you would, in honor of the reading of God's Word, if you're able, please stand. We're continuing in that section of 1st Peter where he's talking about relationships and submission and what that means in different relationships. So verses 1 through 7 of chapter 3 before us this morning. This is God's Word. This is God's Word to us, His people.

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> when they see your respectful and pure conduct. <sup>3</sup> Do not let your adorning be external — the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear — <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup> as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

This is the infallible, inerrant, inspired word of God. May he write it upon our hearts. May it bear fruit in our lives. Please be seated. Let me pray for us. Oh, Lord God, this is your word. It is your word to us. Help us to hear it, understand it, accept it, and put it into practice. You give us this word because it is good for us, and we thank you for it. Again, we ask that it might bear fruit in our lives, that we might bring honor and glory to your name. We thank you in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, again, here from chapter two, verse 13, up through chapter three, verse 12, is a long section in Peter's letter to the church about submission in various relationships. We saw earlier about submission to authorities. We talked about submission last week to masters. Today, wives submitting to husbands. And Lord willing, next week, submission to one another. And along with this idea of submission, Peter acknowledges that there could be, and I think actually he indicates that there will be, hardships and sufferings of various kinds as we do what we're called to do. So again, here we come to this section, verses 1 to 7, about wives and husbands That clearly teaches submission. The suffering may not be quite as obvious, though I do believe it's there.

So this morning I just want to quite simply look at Peter's words to wives. then his words to husbands. That's the order he takes it in, so will we, and then some concluding lessons.

But before that, just a few preliminary general thoughts about this passage. The reason why there are some various interpretations that I want to address, how these verses are applicable to us today, and a little bit as well on the relationship of this passage to what we looked at about a year ago. In Ephesians chapter 5, verses 22 to... Oh, I have a typo in here. Well, several verses. Nine verses. 22 to 34, I think it is. In any case, to 33. 22 to 33. Pretty sure that's right. So anyway, some introductory stuff about this passage because there's some speculation and maybe skepticism in some of the commentaries that may have leaked out in some way into even your awareness.

Big question that scholars ask about this passage: who is Peter writing to? Who is he addressing when he talks to wives in particular? And it might seem obvious to us, he's talking to married couples, husbands and wives. By the way, verses 1 and 2 read gives some people pause. Because Peter notes, as you I'm sure heard, there's a situation that exists where the husband may not be a believer. And so the question is, is that the real audience that Peter's addressing here? Particular couples where the wife is a believer and the husband is not. And some commentators say that's exactly what's going on. And they base their whole analysis on that. That makes it very specific in how you apply it to a group as diverse as the one we have here this morning.

Now not everybody agrees on that, and I don't either. I think the first phrase, the very first opening phrase in verse 1 is clear. Wives be subject to your own husbands. That doesn't put a limitation on it of any kind. And then the next idea: even if some don't obey the word. So even if some, those are speaking of a particular situation that might arise. If I can put it this way, a subcategory among married couples. It's certainly true that a Christian wife married to a non-Christian husband would have been a problem in Greco-Roman culture. Wives were expected to adopt their husband's religion, their husband's gods, and worship and practice with him. So what happens when the husband doesn't believe but the wife does? And that's what Peter seems to be addressing as a special case. But I don't think our understanding of the whole passage should be restricted to that one particular issue in the context of Greco-Roman society.

And then in a similar vein, there are scholars who I think overplay that Greco-Roman culture factor. There was, in the culture of that time, there were moral philosophers who gave advice on marriage, and that advice sure sounds a lot like much of what Peter is saying in these short verses. And so what happens though is these commentators will try to read into Peter's instruction Greek philosophy. He just got it from them. And it's true, there are similarities, there's overlap. But in my view, if anything, what Peter is doing here is taking similar teaching and transforming it through the lens of biblical truth and the Christian faith. I think very similar to what Paul does with the philosophers in Athens. And it's certainly true that general revelation can give valid insight into various issues in life and give even wise advice for us to consider.

But when we hear Christ and when we hear God's special revelation in God's Word, that is authoritative instruction that we must follow. So it puts it in a different category. So just, if you've heard of that kind of thing, Yeah, it's worth considering, but we can, I think, put it to the side, more or less.

Another issue to speak about before we dig into the text, this is clearly a passage, seven verses, about marriage. How is it relevant for single people? And my answer is: very. So, if you're not married, you can't tune this out. This isn't a Sunday you can take off. First of all, I know that some of you hope to be married, and so this is worth listening to so that you can begin preparing yourself, your thoughts, your attitude, your preparation, even now. Secondly, some of you who are now single have been married, and you have wisdom and life experience to pass on to those who are younger, whether single or married. Examples from your own life of how what Peter is saying has been true for you. And so it's worth listening to, to think: Oh, I experienced that, I have an example of that in my own life. But thirdly, in its broadest sense, this passage, especially the first six verses, I believe, apply to all of us in a broad, general sense.

So guys, when I'm talking about verses one to six, you can't tune out either. Listen, pay attention. And so for single people who may never marry or have never married, this is applicable to you as well. We know this from what Paul says in Ephesians 5, that marriage is a living picture of the relationship between Christ and his church, the bridegroom and his bride. It's a mystery, says Paul, so we can't plumb the depths of it fully, but we can understand some important things as well. We're all members of Christ's Bride, the Church. And so we all submit to Him as a wife submits, is called upon to submit to her husband. And so the husbands, I'll say again what I said last year, we also, in a very real sense, a real spiritual sense, are brides, because we are part of the bride of Christ. And so this instruction about submission has application for us. When we read about having our adornment being the inner person, that's true in many ways for us as well, about submission, about remembering the example of others who submitted. We can learn things from that as well. how we submit to Christ as our bridegroom, I think is a very important example that we live out in our marriages to our wives.

All right, with that done, let's start looking at verses 1 to 6, Peter's instruction to wives. Now back in Ephesians, Paul said much, much more to men than he did to the women. Nine verses to husbands and three verses to wives. Here it's six verses to wives and only one verse to husbands. Why the difference? Well, for one thing, Peter and Paul are different people, different authors, and the Holy Spirit uses them in different ways. But I think there's more to it than that. We've already seen in Peter's letter that there's this recurring theme of suffering, and that theme has been addressed in the context of submitting both to authorities and to masters.

It's not quite obvious here in this text, but I think Peter refers to it or infers it in a couple different ways. First is, I think, quite obvious. If the husband is not a believer, that is certainly a potential situation for suffering for the woman who is a believer. And then more broadly, when he speaks to husbands in verse 7 and notes that the woman is a weaker vessel, her position as a weaker vessel. A wife who has a non-believing husband is going to suffer potential mistreatment and suffering because she doesn't adhere to her husband's religion or serving his gods, and that suffering and that persecution may be quite severe.

But in the second case, and we've seen this, we know this to be true, men who take advantage of the weaker position of women in ways that are cruel and harmful to the woman, We just had a whole study report, 220 some odd pages done by our denomination about the subject of abuse. It seems to be spreading in our culture. And so we want to be informed biblically, how do we respond to these things and deal with them wisely? We'll talk more about the latter case when we get to verse seven itself.

So Peter begins his instruction with this general command for wives to likewise submit to their husbands. That, likewise, or in the same way, continues a theme that connects us all the way back to chapter 2 verse 18, and then to chapter 2 verse 13. This idea of submission as a command from God. We are to submit. It's not optional in all these different circumstances. That also continues the important idea that we've already talked about, that when submission is called for, that would cause the one submitting to sin. That's where the line is drawn. Authorities can't cause us who follow them to sin. Masters can't call upon slaves to sin. Husbands cannot cause their wife to sin. We draw the line. We must obey God rather than men. And this allows Peter, I think, to give instruction that the Greco-Roman moral philosophers would never give.

First of all, wives, you can be Christians and serve God even though your husband is not a believer. That would have been anathema in the surrounding culture. And so there's a way in which Peter, just as he did with slaves, is in a subtle way elevating women. You have the God-given right to follow God. In fact, it's a God-given command. And then he goes on to say that in some way, your behavior, your respectful and pure conduct, in verse 2, might be used by God to draw her unbelieving husband to faith in Christ. Peter uses a word here that they might be won without a word by the conduct of their wives. Sometimes we in the Reformed faith don't like words like winning people to Christ, and we shouldn't be afraid of that. Paul uses similar language in 1 Corinthians 9.22 where he says he becomes all things to all people so that he might win some. Neither Peter or Paul are boasting about how good they are at converting people to Christ. Look what I did. From the broader context of their teaching and of course of Scripture as a whole, it's clear that God is sovereign, and God superintends all these things. What they're doing is simply acknowledging, wow, God used me for this purpose. And so God may use a believing wife to bring an unbelieving husband to faith. And for that person in that situation, that could be a very encouraging and comforting thought, even in the midst of a terribly difficult situation.

Another thing to note here is that submission is to her own husband. Another thing that would have differentiated from the broader society, not to other wives' husbands, she submits to her own husband. Again, there's that parallel between Christ and the Church. We're called to submit as the bride to our bridegroom. That doesn't mean we submit to other so-called grooms out there who might claim our allegiance. We owe our allegiance to one. And so does the unbelieving wife to her husband.

There's more general instruction then in verses 3 through 6, and again, here's why I think this is to not just unbelieving husbands with believing wives, but to all husbands and wives. Two prominent ideas, internal versus external adornment or beauty, and then Sarah and other Old Testament women as examples.

So first he says: don't let your adorning be external. your hairdo. People were known back then for elaborate braids. I just read something about a statue recovered of some Roman emperor, and they were astonished. He's an unusual example in that his bust shows him without hair. He was bald, because Romans were obsessed with hair, and even bald emperors were shown with nice, curly, full heads of hair. Don't let your adorning be external. your hair, your hairdo, jewelry, the clothing that you wear. Rather let your adornment be internal, the hidden person inside of a beautifully gentle and quiet spirit."

And then he goes on to say, this internal beauty is precious in God's sight. Now, what Peter is not saying here is women can't wear jewelry or do things with their hair or wear nice clothes. That's not the point of what he's saying. He is saying don't let that be your primary expression of yourself, your image, your beauty, because those things are external. They don't really reflect who you are as a person. And moreover, it's not what God sees in you as precious.

And I think suddenly he's referring here to Christ. Think of things he's already said in this letter. Chapter 1 verse 19: You were bought with the precious blood of Christ. Chapter 2 verses 4 and verse 6, he talks about Jesus as the chosen cornerstone, precious in God's sight. What's precious to God? His own Son. His own blood shed for our salvation. So Jesus is an example to us for our own submission, just as He was with masters, what we looked at last week. So the same ideas apply. Jesus suffered, so we also can endure suffering. But what's added here by Peter is that Jesus, remember, he says, Jesus is precious to the Father. And so when we emulate Him, our desire to be like Christ is precious to the Father as well.

And there's something else that Peter calls precious in this letter: our faith. Back in chapter one verse 7 he says it's more precious than gold itself. And our faith is not an external thing that we wear like clothes or jewelry or worry about like our hair. It's an internal thing that bears external fruit. That faith is precious because it looks to Jesus who is precious, gratefully receives the gift of his life and his sacrifice for us and for our salvation. It's a faith that rests upon that work. It's done. It's complete. That's our hope. Our hope is in this precious Son. That's true for a Christian wife, it's true for anyone who is single, and then it is true for you and I as well. Our faith is precious in God's sight.

And then as further encouragement, Peter points to examples. Broadly, in verses 5 and 6, the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, and then specifically in verse 6, Sarah herself. He says, what I've just talked about is how they adorned themselves as they hoped in God. There implicit, again, is that idea of faith, that which is precious to God. Those holy women of old in the Old Testament, they only had God's promises, but they held on to them in faith.

He talks about Sarah who called Abraham lord. This is in Genesis 18 verse 12. This is part of the story of the divine messengers coming and announcing that in a year, about this time next year, Sarah will give birth. And Abraham instructs her to prepare food for these divine visitors. Sarah laughed at the promise at the time. Of course, later laughed in joy when Isaac was born. But we get the idea that Sarah didn't just wait until the son was actually born to believe in God. Hebrews 11, that hall of fame, that hall of faith in the Bible, in verse 11 tells

us that Sarah in faith received the power to conceive since she considered him faithful who had promised. This is what Peter's pointing to. Sarah was a woman of faith. She looked to the promises of God. Holy women who hoped in God adorned themselves with this kind of faith, the kind of faith that produces the fruit of a gentle and quiet spirit.

Again, men, this is for us too. Those who are single, it's for you as well. Peter goes on to say then that children of Sarah are those who persist in doing good and living without fear. If you're fearful, it's hard to persist in doing good. I might be persecuted, I might suffer. And he's been dealing with suffering and he's going to deal with it again in this letter. Persist in doing good, persist in doing right, persist in doing what God calls us to do. Fear becomes passive, where love remains active and hopeful and persistent. The character of a Christian wife.

And then to husbands, it's only one verse, but guys, he's got four things to say in one verse. You get this from Daryl Charles and his commentary. First: live with your wives in an understanding way. Second: show honor to them as the weaker vessel. Third: remember your wives are co-heirs with you of the grace of life. And then fourth: do this so that there will be no barrier between you and God, specifically that your prayers will not be hindered. Look at each in turn.

First he tells us to live in an understanding way, and that word translated "live with" is a word used elsewhere in scripture, Deuteronomy 22 and Deuteronomy 24, for the sexual relations between husband and wife. In other words, these are people who are together. They are together in a marriage. They are together in the same dwelling. Live with her. Treat her as your wife, your exclusive wife, your only wife. Same house, same marriage bed. Treat your wife in an understanding way. Again, it's just literally treat your wife according to knowledge. In other words, what's wise, what's good, what's proper versus what is thoughtless. Pay attention to your wife. Listen to what she says. Take her needs into consideration. Live with her in an understanding way. Is this not how our bridegroom Jesus treats us? Again, that's our example as men, as married men.

Second, showing honor to her as the weaker vessel. Now, weaker here doesn't mean inferior, and that's been a tragic way of interpreting this over time. It's a simple acknowledgement of a creaturely reality that we all know to be true. Generally speaking, as God has created men and women, women aren't as strong as men. Yes, there are exceptions, but exceptions don't disprove a general truth. Sadly, pointing out exceptions is an increasing tactic out there in public discourse. Peter's context, and the context of most of human history, is also that women had fewer rights and fewer privileges. So they're in a weaker position in society as well. So rather than act in a way that dishonors them, husbands are to show them honor, act honorably toward them, protect them, watch over them, be faithful to her, publicly treat her with respect and honor, speak well of her, show your admiration and love of her. Show honor to her as the weaker vessel.

Why? Since they are heirs with you of the grace of life. Peter assumes here what would probably be the norm, that the wife of a believer is also a believer. And so when this is true, remember who she is. She is precious in God's sight because of her faith in Christ Jesus. She

has the same inheritance that you do. The same inheritance that Peter earlier in chapter 1 verse 5 said is being kept, it's being guarded by God for the salvation to be revealed at the end. She is a co-heir with you. She's not inferior. She gets just as much as you do, which is to say a lot. Everything that is ours by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. All the promises of God that we hope for as Christians. So part of understanding and honoring her is to nurture that faith, that precious deposit. Exercise spiritual leadership to nurture her in that faith.

Why? So that your prayers may not be hindered. Peter's telling us about the consequences of failing to love our wives as we ought to. Our prayers might be hindered. That's quite a consequence. Husbands, what do you desire from God? What are you asking Him for? Failing to honor your wife, as scripture tells us to here in Ephesians, could jeopardize those requests. Not getting what you're praying for? How are you treating your wife? Now, this isn't necessarily a quid pro quo, get this for that, but self-professed Christian men who don't love their wives, that's evidence to me of a lack of true faith. And prayer without faith is fruitless.

All right, some concluding thoughts. What do we take from this? Well, I think we can take some things that we might take from Ephesians and other places as well.

But first is the remembrance, the recognition that marriage is a gift from God. It was given by Him to our first parents and through them to all their descendants. Marriage is from God. It's instituted by Him. It's defined by Him. And it's quite clear what that definition is. One man, one woman. A man shall leave his father and a woman leave her home and the two will become one flesh. Any other imagined or attempted combination is unbiblical. From a biblical standpoint, it is invalid. Society may bless or legalize other forms of marriage, but for the Christian, these other forms are invalid. Our recognizing them would be inconsistent with, in violation of God's revealed truth to us. Can't go there. Now what will happen as we discuss this with folks is they'll always bring up the same objection. Well, the Old Testament patriarchs had tons of wives. Again, that's an argument from an exception. It's a pathetic way of engaging in rhetoric or debate. But second, we also have to be very careful when we go to scripture and read stories and narratives and assume that what goes on in them is acceptable to God just because he told us the story. Stories tell us what happened, but that doesn't mean that God approves of what's happening in those stories. Marriage is defined by God, and we have to accept that.

A second truth, I think, that I know you know this, but it helps to remember it, helps to be reminded of it. Men and women are different. That's just the way we're created. And that means men can't be women and women can't be men. And trying to do so is rebellious. It's a self-indulgent farce. It's an obvious contradiction of God's created order. Two sexes, each different from the other. Again, as with marriage, society may accept and even legalize such deceptions, but we can't go along with that. It's against God's revealed truth. And quite honestly, men pretending to be women is not honoring women as the Lord commands. I mean, take the example of men competing as female athletes. It's a joke. It's a humiliation to part of God's beautiful creation. We can't do these things.

Third, hearing Peter's instruction, acting as God here calls us to act, it's going to likely result in some kind of suffering. Wives will be ridiculed by other wives who don't respect their

husbands. My mom used to complain about this. She hated going to certain events. All they do is sit around and complain about their husbands. Don't do it. Don't join in it. You're not showing honor. You're not showing the fruit of a quiet and gentle spirit. And husbands, when we get together, It's not appropriate to start ogling women who pass by or pass around photos or pictures or videos that we shouldn't be looking at. We shouldn't be denigrating our wives with other men. But if you do that, if you don't do that, you're going to be looked at as kind of weird, kind of strange. You might be excluded, you might be ridiculed. And that's going to happen. Christians who refuse to go along with society's perversions regarding things like marriage and sexual identity, we're putting ourselves in trying circumstances and they might result even in real harm. Right now it seems like the most likely result is losing a job. But people have been sued. People have been fined by legal authorities. This is already going on.

But this takes us to that "likewise" in verse 1 and in verse 7. The likewise that ties us back to the B subject of verse 18 and the B subject of verse 13. Being subject brings suffering and as Peter made it very clear in chapter 2 verse 21 and following this is to what we have been called to suffer as Christ suffered for us, his work for us to save us That's a key governing principle in the life of a Christian. It talks to us about how we relate to authority, how we relate to masters, how we relate to our spouse, and as we'll talk about next week, God willing, how we relate to one another. We have the Son who humbled himself and became a man, who himself was obedient, submitted even to death on a cross. who took our sin as his own. Colossians tells us the record of our offenses was nailed to the cross with Christ. The debt was paid, the penalty paid for. But the slate's just not wiped clean. His perfect obedience is credited as if it were ours. that righteousness that we are clothed with that we heard about earlier in the service today. God gives us that clothing, the perfect obedience of Christ, given by grace, received through faith.

Just like the holy women of old, our faith continues to look to the promises of God, promises of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. The promise that Jesus is coming again, that disobedient sinners will be judged. We began getting a picture of that in Revelation this week, and more, Lord willing, as we get into chapters 15 and 16 and things to come. We saw a little bit of an example of it in the thinking about the flood and the devastation that that brought upon the world, the expression of God's wrath that that flood was. We're spared from that because believers entered into eternity with Christ, joy and peace and love.

But in the meantime, Peter's already told us we're aliens and strangers. It's not a pleasant status as history demonstrates. But we have a God who loves us. We have in the Son a faithful husband who gave himself up for us. We are blessed beyond measure. And with the Spirit's help, we can be faithful, loving husbands and wives, servants of God. And indeed, may God help us to be so.

Let me pray for us.

Lord God, we thank you as always for your word. We do ask that you would help us serve you as you've called us to serve. And we do hope, Lord, that rather than experiencing the hardships of obedience in a society that rejects you, that our faith would have such an impact and so many embrace Christ that we would outnumber and outweigh those who would reject



you and so be a sweet savor to those around us. But the times do seem to be changing, and Lord, prepare us, equip us with hearts and minds that are ready and willing, strong in faith, putting hope and trust in you, that we might serve you even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances. For those of us who are married, help us to be faithful and good wives and husbands. We cannot do it in our own strength, so we do pray again that you would grant your Holy Spirit that we might live as you've called us to live, and as we'll discuss tonight, to help us to will and to do all things according to your good pleasure. All this we ask in Jesus' name, amen.

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