

Marriage is not easy. **Video: Tim Hawkins Marriage.** Marriage is not easy. It unites together a man and a woman as two become one and yet they still remain individuals with their own very different personalities, attitudes and ideas.

And yet, as God's elect, living as exiles in this world, Peter knew that living out God's plan for our marriage was essential. And so in this next section of his letter he called us to be committed to following Christ in marriage.

1 Peter 3:1-7: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. <sup>3</sup> Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. <sup>4</sup> Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. <sup>5</sup> For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup> like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. <sup>7</sup> Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

### 1. Wives Submit to Your Husband

I want us to be clear about what this passage is talking about. Although there might be some general principles that we can apply to all of our relationships, this passage applies first and foremost to the relationship between a husband and his wife.

So when Peter wrote, "Wives... be submissive to your husbands." 1 Peter 3:1, he was not speaking about women being submissive to every man, or about whether or not women should be in positions of leadership in work, in politics or society. So those who use this passage to teach about the superiority of men are misusing the Bible.

Instead Peter was teaching how a wife should be submissive to, or to be under the authority of, her own husband. Peter doesn't spell out in detail what this looks like, but the principle is that God wants wives to display a gentle and quiet spirit by accepting and submitting to the leadership of their own husbands.

#### a) Because It Is Powerful

But as we've seen before, this submission is only to be so far as a husband's leadership does not go against God's ultimate leadership. This is clear in this passage because when talking to Christian wives with unsaved husbands, Peter encouraged the wives to behave in such a way so that their husbands "may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives." 1 Peter 3:1

When it comes to matters of faith and living for God, Peter's hope was not that Christian wives would follow their unbelieving husbands, but that the husbands would follow their wives.

And Peter believed that the quiet and gentle attitude of Christian women could have this powerful impact. That this doesn't mean that every unsaved husband will come to Christ if Christian women just live as they should. But it does help wives to know what to do in that difficult situation.

Instead of trying to badger, nag or manipulate their husbands into God's kingdom, Peter tells them to focus on living out their Christian life. Yes, they can take the opportunities to speak about Jesus that come up – we can see that in v15 of this chapter – but before that, they need to focus on expressing the love, humility and gentleness of Christ in their everyday lives. In our witness to our family, who we are and how we live is much more important than what we say!

#### b) Because It is Christian

But even saying all of that, I think many women struggle with this command to submit. It sounds a bit like male chauvinism, just another example of men dominating and oppressing women. At the very least it seems unnecessary, unhelpful or unfair.

And yet Peter introduced this teaching with the words, "In the same way." 1 Peter 3:1 This teaching is not given in isolation. Instead it is given in the context of teaching Christians to accept and submit to authority in many different aspect of our lives.

So Peter has taught us to "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men." 1 Peter 2:13, meaning our government and our legal system.

Last time we read about those who were trapped in captivity that, “[Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.](#)” 1 Peter 2:18, even when it includes suffering.

And later in this letter, Peter wrote, “[Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.](#)” 1 Peter 5:5

And similar teaching is found elsewhere in the New Testament. Hebrews 13:17 tells churches to “[Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.](#)”

And the apostle Paul even wrote that as brothers and sisters in Christ we should “[Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.](#)” Ephesians 5:21, as a call to serve one another and consider other people’s needs before our own.

So although we can understand why this command to wives is controversial and challenging, as Christians we need to see that submission is a common principle for us as Christians. In many aspects of their lives, as well as in marriage, wives are called to accept and submit to the authority of others.

### c) Because It is God’s Design

But why? Why should wives submit to their husbands? Well this is not because men are superior to women or are more natural leaders. Rather it is because this is God’s design for marriage

Paul taught that “[The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.](#)” 1 Corinthians 11:3 This verse shows that headship is not about superiority but about accepting different roles. God the Son and God the Father are equal in person and power and value. And yet, they function differently.

It was God the Father who took the leadership role by sending his Son into this world. And it was God the Son who willingly submitted to his Father’s leadership. So in his ministry Jesus said things like: “[My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.](#)” John 4:34

And he said, “[I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.](#)” John 12:49

And probably the most powerful example of Jesus’ submission to his Father was in Gethsemane when he prayed, “[Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.](#)” Luke 22:42

And so God has designed husbands to reflect his leadership by being the leader of his home. We’ll see in the next section what this looks like. And God has designed wives to reflect Christ by willingly accepting and submitting to the leadership of her husband.

So this is how marriage works best, because this is God’s design for marriage.

### d) Because It is Godly

And so this is also part of how a wife will “[Live as servants of God.](#)” 1 Peter 2:16.

Peter illustrated this by looking to the godly women of the past, especially to “[Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master.](#)” 1 Peter 3:6 This doesn’t mean that Abraham ruled Sarah. This word master is different from the slave masters of last week. It is the word *kyrios* or lord, and was used as a term of polite address, like sir.

And Sarah was certainly no slave to Abraham. She was not silent. She spoke up. She asked. And Abraham agreed to some of her suggestions (for good or for bad). But Sarah’s respected and accepted her husband’s leadership role in their marriage – even although Abraham was not a perfect husband at all.

### e) Because It is Beautiful

And this is what made these holy women of the past beautiful. And so “[Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes.](#)” 1 Peter 3:3. This doesn’t mean that it’s sinful for a woman to style their hair, wear jewellery or nice clothes. God is not against outward beauty.

Remember we saw this principle in the Garden of Eden when God planted “[trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.](#)” Genesis 2:9 God is the designer of beauty and attractiveness.

But God is not impressed by a new hairstyle or a new set of clothes. His priority is not how we look in the mirror. Instead

he looks deeper within to see the kind of person we really are. As he told the prophet Samuel, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

And so in a world that is obsessed by outward beauty, that spends a fortune on clothing, jewellery, beauty products, cosmetic surgery, God wants his people to be counter-culture by focussing instead on inner beauty, one that “...should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” 1 Peter 3:4

This is what God values. This is what God sees as beautiful. It is someone who is gentle and quiet; who doesn’t demand what they want; who doesn’t argue and fight for what they like; who considers others rather than themselves. It is someone who is willing to set aside even their rights and their interests for the benefit of others.

#### f) Because It is Christ-like

But let’s be clear about this. This attitude is beautiful in a wife, not because it is the lady-like thing to do. But rather it is because it is the Christ-like thing to do!

Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3-8: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

And so Peter called Christian wives to submit to their husbands, not because they were inferior to their husbands, but because he wanted them to follow Jesus in their marriage.

## 2. Husbands Care For Your Wives

But Peter also wanted the husbands to follow Jesus in their marriage.

#### a) Be considerate

He wrote: “Husbands... be considerate as you live with your wives.” 1 Peter 3:7. This literally means “according to knowledge.” They are to understand their wives, consider her needs, be aware of her feelings and emotions and to act accordingly.

As someone who has only been married for 21 years, I’m very willing to admit that this is not easy for us guys. It is not always easy to understand our wives, recognise what upsets them or what blesses them. And it is not always easy to act on what we do know we should do.

But this is our calling as the head of our household, as the leader in our marriage.

We are called to seek to get to know our wives more and more each day so that we can more effectively serve them, nurture the and love them. As Paul said, “Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself.” Ephesians 5:28

#### b) Be Respectful

But Peter also wrote: “And treat them with respect.” 1 Peter 3:7 This word means to honour, to value, to treat as something of great worth. Husbands are to treat their wives as someone who is extremely precious to them.

This is such an important balance to what Peter wrote to the wives. Yes, they are called to submit to their husbands, but that does not mean that the husbands can act like they are higher and better than their wives. Instead, these husbands are to speak and act in such a way as to daily demonstrate just how treasured their wives are.

#### c) Use Strength Properly

And Peter believed that this teaching was so important because he said that wives are “the weaker partner.” 1 Peter 3:7. Again we need to be careful what this means.

This does not mean that women are intellectually, emotionally or spiritually weaker than men, that they are less able to handle pain or work hard. Having been with Lorna through her two labours, I’m not ever going to claim that I’m better at handling pain than her.

But I think Peter is just stating a physical fact. In general men are physically bigger and stronger than women. Of course that doesn’t mean that every man is stronger and bigger than every woman. Ladies, don’t please come up to me and challenge me to an arm wrestle!

There are of course many incredibly strong women. But it is a general rule. So if you look at sporting world records, those for men will be faster, longer or heavier than those for women.

But there's other evidence for this, and it is much more sobering. That's the statistics of domestic abuse. Yes, some men are attacked and abused by women. But in general, women in this world are in much more danger of being abused by men! This week, Women's Aid reported that last year they received a shocking 19,000 disclosures of domestic abuse against women and children.

And it is this abuse of power that Peter called husbands to reject. Instead of using their role as leaders and their strength as men to control, to dominate, attack or abuse, husbands are supposed to use their role and strength to care, to honour, to serve and to protect.

#### d) Because We Are Equal

That's because their wives are "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life." 1 Peter 3:7 It's not completely clear what Peter meant by this.

If he was talking to Christian husbands whose wives were unbelievers, then this means that they should care for their wives because they both have received the same gift of life as human beings made in the image of God.

As we saw in Genesis,  
"God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27

But if Peter was talking to Christian husbands whose wives were believers, then this could mean that they should care for their wives because they've both received the gift of salvation and so are both equally children of God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

But whichever situation Peter was thinking of, it is clear that he believed that the fact of the equality of men and women should impact how men treat their wives.

#### e) Because It is Christ-like

But more than that, husbands should care for their wives because they are following Christ. Peter introduced what he said to the husbands by the same phrase he used earlier to the wives: "In the same way." 1 Peter 3:7

In the same way as wives are called to live out their commitment to Jesus in their marriage by submitting to their husbands, so husbands are called to live out their commitment to Jesus by caring for their wives.

That's why Peter said that husbands need to care for their wives, "so that nothing will hinder your prayers." 1 Peter 3:7. How could they expect to experience the intimacy and power of praying to God if they were living in rebellion against God's plan and design for their marriage?

And that is why as husbands we are called to put this teaching into practice even when it costs us everything. Paul wrote "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Ephesians 5:25 Our example to follow as husbands is nothing less than the cross of Jesus.

#### Conclusion

So marriage can be tough, but if we are married, or would like to be married one day, then this is what it means to follow Jesus in it:

- It means that wives willingly accept and submit to the leadership role of their husbands, as Christ submitted to his Father, even when it meant the cross.
- And it means that husbands love and care for their wives, as Christ loved the church, even when it meant the cross.

Following Jesus in our marriage means we walk in his attitude of submission and love that he powerfully demonstrated on the cross.