

Christian Husbands and Wives

1 Peter 3:1-7

1 Peter 3:1-6: “*Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,* ² *when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.* ³ *Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—* ⁴ *rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.* ⁵ *For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,* ⁶ *as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*”

Background Notes

Romans 13:1 says: “*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.*” This verse teaches that **God is the source of all authority**, and He has ordained certain “lines of authority” between Himself and mankind.

The cruel Roman emperor Nero was on the throne when Paul wrote Romans 13. He was an example of how man may corrupt and misuse and abuse the God-ordained lines of authority. Those who misuse their authority will have to answer to God for their abuses. However, despite man’s misuse, God is the source of all authority, and he has ordained the earthly lines of authority.

Romans 13 and other Scriptures indicate that God has set up four areas of authority: the area of the state (government), the area of the church, the area of the family, and the area of labor. All of us are involved in these four lines of authority. We will not only be under authority but in some cases, we will have authority as well.

What is our Christian responsibility and duty in regard to these four areas of authority?

- When we have authority, we are not to abuse it or misuse it.
- When we are under authority, we are to submit.
- The only time we disobey is when the authority above us requires us to do something that is completely contrary to the Word of God. Then we obey the higher authority, God Himself, because all authority finds its source in God. Remember Acts 5:29 - we are to obey God rather than man.

In the second half of 1 Peter 2 the authority of government and the authority of labor were discussed. A third area of authority, the family, is in view in the first half chapter 3.

Doctrinal Points

1. Christian wives should respect and submit to their husbands.

Verses 1-2: “*Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,* ² *when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.*”

Notice that wives are exhorted to submit to *their own* husbands. This is not a command for all women to submit to all men! No. In this passage, Peter was discussing the line of authority in the home, where the husband is the head of the family. This does not mean that the husband should boss everyone around, or behave like a selfish dictator. And this does not mean that husbands shouldn't consult their wives when family decisions are made. This also does not mean that husbands and wives can't function as a team. In fact, according to Genesis 2:18 & 20-23, it is God's plan for wives and husbands to work together as a team!

The Scripture teaches that the husband has the responsibility for leadership in the home - and the husband will answer to God for failure in this area. Husbands, you have the primarily responsibility before God for the spiritual condition of your family - and you will answer to Him for how well you have fulfilled your responsibility. 1 Peter 3 - and other Scriptures - teach that wives should respect this God-ordained position, and lovingly submit to it. In fact, whatever a wife can do to maintain that structure of authority in the home is good. If she can foster and encourage the leadership role of her husband, she will be blessed for it.

Sarah is given here as a biblical role model for wives (v5-6). She respected Abraham and submitted to his decisions. Sarah recognized and honored the authority structure that God had set up for the home. She submitted to Abraham's decision, even when she was called to leave her home in the prosperous city of Ur and live in a tent in Canaan! We know from archaeology that Ur was a very advanced and prosperous city, so it's possible that Sarah and Abraham had a very nice home. Moving to a strange land and living in a tent was not an easy transition, but when Abraham heard the call of God to leave Ur, Sarah submitted to his decision to obey God.

It's interesting that the Bible used **Sarah** as an example here. Nowhere in Scripture was Abraham ever mentioned as a "model husband." In Hebrews 11, Abraham is commended for his great faith - but he is never commended in his role as husband, and he is never commended for his treatment of Sarah. And that's probably one reason why Sarah was used as Exhibit "A" of a model wife here in 1 Peter 3. Sarah certainly didn't have a model husband, and Sarah had a difficult life.

Some marriages are far from ideal. If, for example, the wife becomes a Christian but the husband is not a believer (v1), the situation may even involve uncertainty and fear (v6). However, the Christian wife is called to respect the *position* of her husband, even though she may not be able to respect his behavior. If the situation is dangerous or abusive, a wife may have to go to the other lines of God-ordained authority for help, such as to the church or to the state. Although some Christians hold the position that a wife must stay with an abusive husband even if it means injury or death, I don't think that is what the Bible teaches. However, she is still to respect the God-ordained line of authority.

A Christian wife's godly and reverent conduct may be the means of winning the unbelieving and ungodly husband to Christ: "*that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.*" The word "fear" in verse 2 means "respect" – "*when they observe your respectful and pure conduct*' (ESV).

There are many examples of marriages in which a godly Christian wife's conduct has won her husband to the Lord. I trust that this Scripture passage will be an encouragement to some women who are coping with difficult marital situations.

The teaching about "external adornment" in verses 3-4 does not mean that wives can't have nice clothes, or wear jewelry, or style their hair! That is **not** the point of this passage! The point is that a Christian woman's beauty should come from her **godly conduct** - not from her outward adornment!

A **gentle and quiet spirit** should characterize the godly Christian woman. Fancy clothes won't last. They'll wear out and go out of style. But the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit is "*imperishable*" - it will never fade away! And this quality is very precious in the sight of God (v4). If a gentle and quiet spirit is pleasing to God, and very precious in His sight, then Christian women should surely desire to develop it!

Christian wives should respect and submit to their husbands.

2. Christian husbands should understand and honor their wives.

Verse 7: "*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*"

Husbands - you thought you were getting off the hook, didn't you? Well, you're not off the hook! In fact, we husbands have the greater responsibility before God. Ephesians 5:25 says: "*Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*" Christian husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Jesus Christ loves the Church – and that's a very big responsibility!

As Christian husbands, we are to honor our wives. We are to **understand** our wives. We are to **be sensitive** to their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs.

Husbands are to honor their wives as the “weaker vessel.” What does that mean? “Weaker vessel” does **not** mean that wives are intellectually weaker, or morally weaker. This description speaks of her physical and emotional strength. In general, women are not as physically strong as men, although there are some exceptions. And in general, the wife is more involved with the heart. She’s more compassionate - and that’s a good aspect of the way God has designed women. But as a result of being more emotionally involved in situations, she may more easily be discouraged or hurt. A Christian husband is to be sensitive and understanding of his wife’s feelings and emotions.

Husbands, remember - you and your wife **together** are heirs of the grace of life. Your position as head of the family does not make you any “better” or more privileged! Make sure that your wife gets to enjoy the joys and blessings of life. We’re heirs **together** of the grace of life!

Christian husbands should understand and honor their wives.

Practical Application

Husbands - are your prayers being answered?

You may answer “no” - and you really don’t understand why. Well, is it possible that verse 7 is the answer? “*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*” Is it possible that your prayers are hindered because you’re not honoring and understanding and loving your wife?

God may not answer our prayers in the way we desire for a number of reasons - and this is certainly one of them. Husbands, if our prayers are not being answered, we need to examine our relationship with our wives. Are we being thoughtful and understanding? Are we honoring our wives? Are we recognizing that they are heirs of the grace of life - just as much as we are?

Is it possible that the way you treat your wife is the reason why your prayers don’t seem to make it any further than the ceiling?

Husbands - are your prayers being answered?