

“Heirs with You of the Grace of Life” (2:21-25)

Introduction: Passage and Applicability

Turn in the Bible to 1 Peter 3:1–7, p. 1015 of the Bibles in the chair rack. Give your attention to God’s word as I read it out loud.

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.

Clearly, this passage is about marriage. It’s about Christian marriage. Peter addresses Christians about marriage even if there is only one Christian in the marriage. Our congregation has a high percentage of people who are not married. There may be a few here ready to start their Sunday afternoon nap early because, you conclude, this does not apply to me.

I remind you what Hebrews 13:4 declares,

Let marriage be held in honor among all.

All Christians need to understand God’s design for marriage. Everyone is either preparing for marriage, married, or encouraging those who are. This passage does not say everything that the Bible teaches about Christian marriage. I encourage you to go to our website and look up Brian Ramirez’s messages about marriage from January of this year. If you click on the Sermon Library and navigate to P. 4 you should see those three entries near the top of the page. He outlines the Bible’s theological foundation for marriage and family.

Peter assumes that foundation as he instructs husbands and wives. Let’s get his teaching into our minds and hearts under three headings: Christian Marriage is Difficult; Christian Marriage Requires Discipline; and The Dynamic for Christian Marriage.

Christian Marriage is Difficult

Last week I noted that suffering would be a dominant theme in the remainder of our study in 1 Peter. You might think that marriage is a diversion from that theme. After all, marriage is about the joy and enjoyment of love between two people who rescue each other from loneliness and live happily ever after together, right?

Not even close. Marriage does offer many delights. But marriage involves suffering too. This is why no one should marry hastily. Christianity is the one religion that teaches that marriage adds nothing to your status before God. Singleness and marriage are equally legitimate callings.

Marriage should never be coerced. And it should never be construed as an escape from suffering. Marriage brings its own set of burdens. Peter points to three reasons why we should expect marriage to be hard.

First, he addresses wives in v. 1 and husbands in v. 7 with the same introduction, “likewise” (in the same way, in a corresponding way). Likewise, compared to what?

The word points back to the previous context and the dominant theme there is the call to follow Christ’s example. Recall v. 21,

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

“Likewise,” means something like, “corresponding to Christ’s experience.” Being a wife or husband provides the unique context to follow Christ’s example. And, though he was without sin, he suffered as he loved his own. His followers can expect to do the same.

Another reason Christians should expect marriage to be difficult also relates to the previous context. In his call to follow Christ, Peter describes the Christian life as dying to sin and living to righteousness (v. 24). It’s going to be a battle. So, note the significance that one of the first battlefields Peter identifies in this war is marriage.

Last week we read from Genesis 3 about the devastating effects on marriage due to Adam and Eve’s sin. A wife will desire to undermine her husband. In response, a husband will control, repress, and demean his wife. Sin exists in our hearts before marriage. But marriage puts it on full display.

Marriage exposes selfish desires. It sets the pursuit of righteousness on a deeply personal and practical level. Gary Thomas opens his book called *Sacred Marriage* with questions that startle me.

“What if God didn’t design marriage to be ‘easier’? What if God has an end in mind that went beyond our happiness, our comfort, and our desire to be infatuated and happy as if the world were a perfect place? What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” (p. 13).

His point is that the “what ifs” are exactly God’s purpose. A few pages later he writes, “Being married forces you to face some character issues you’d never have to face otherwise.”

Marriage is difficult because it’s more about holiness than romance.

A third reason why Christians should expect marriage to be difficult is that the Christian view of marriage is so counter-cultural. You sense this when Peter holds up Sarah as an example of a godly wife. Sarah lived 2000 years before Peter’s time. The Apostle is saying, “Don’t look to contemporary culture to learn about marriage. Look to models who transcend culture.”

Christian marriage has always been counter-cultural. First-century Roman culture insisted that a wife adopt her husband's religion. But Peter insists that a Christian woman can remain faithful to Jesus Christ **and** submit to her own husband even if he is not a Christian.

In our day, a woman has to swim against the cultural current if she submits to her husband and respects his authority. A man will have to reject cultural expectations if he truly honors his wife and treats her as precious.

Marriage involves following Christ, fighting sin, and not just fitting into the culture. It's going to be difficult. It will involve suffering.

Christian Marriage Requires Discipline

Peter gets specific about what's difficult about Christian marriage. It requires discipline. God's design calls for a specific focus, a central concentration from both husbands and wives.

Let me try to explain. Look again at vv. 1-6 and Peter's instruction to Christian wives, especially to those whose husbands are not believers, who do not obey the word as v. 1 describes them. (The "word" is the gospel of Jesus Christ and to obey the gospel is to turn away from the control of sin and trust in Jesus to rescue from sin and give new life.)

A godly wife must discipline herself to focus on just one man, her own husband (v. 1). She must submit to him (v. 1) which Peter defines as exhibiting respectful and pure conduct (end, v. 1). The word respectful is literally, "with fear." We have seen in 1 Peter that fear is reserved for God. (Just to reinforce this, note that v. 6 instructs godly women not to fear anything that is frightening.)

She is not to fear her husband or marriage, only God. Back in v. 1 the word pure refers to that which is holy. So, a wife submits not by doing whatever her husband demands, but by living in the fear of God and pursuing holiness so as to honor her husband.

Peter maintains that a husband may see this God-oriented behavior and trust Christ. He may be "won without a word" (v. 1). "Word" here means argument or debate. It's not that a godly wife remains silent. It is that she does not argue. Peter, instead, encourages wives to illustrate rather than debate.

A wife focuses on the spiritual well-being of one man, her husband, living in a godly way that honors him. So, when she relates to others, she faces the temptation to be "seen" in ways that dishonor marriage. Vv. 3-4 describe a woman's adornment (the way she wants others to see her).

The temptation is to dress and present herself in a way that everyone notices her. It is to spend a lot of money on jewelry and clothing that draw attention to her external, physical beauty. It is to focus on hair and appearance that make other men notice and other women jealous.

She fights that temptation with discipline to cultivate a gentle and peaceful spirit (v. 4). She is not seeking beauty according to cultural fads, but beauty that is imperishable, eternal. She is not trying to make a name for herself but seeks to serve others as Christ did, in a way that honors her husband. But she is not trying to impress him. She is doing what is precious in God's sight (end, v. 4).

Vv. 5-6 reinforce this point by identifying a godly woman as one of Sarah's daughters. She does good without fear. She is courageous not conceited.

She does not call her husband “Lord” as if to mimic Sarah’s vocabulary. Rather, she adapts Sarah’s example and speaks to and about her husband with respect. She lives boldly to support God’s best for her husband.

Wives, what does it look like to love your husbands courageously this week?

A godly husband disciplines himself to focus on one woman (v. 7). He lives with her (implying sexual fidelity). He disciplines himself to study only her (this is the sense of the phrase “in an understanding way”). He is determined to understand her. So, he concentrates on her.

Recently I completed a seminar called Advanced Biblical Theology at Midwestern Seminary. The major assignment for the course was a twenty-five-page paper. I wrote on 1 Peter 1:10-12. For about two months I saturated myself with those verses and what others have written about them.

In a much greater way, a husband makes his wife the subject of his life-long study. He researches specifically how to show honor to her as a unique individual woman. Peter refers to a wife as “the woman” (v. 7) not to demean but to remind a husband that for him there is no other woman.

A godly husband studies his wife to know her intimately and carefully. He knows her unique personality, her interests and ideas, her tastes and talents. He understands her physical and emotional make-up. He knows her needs and her dreams. He knows how to speak her love language and he works at becoming fluent. He becomes the world’s expert in his wife.

And he does all of this not to gain her approval but so that his prayers will not be hindered. His priority is his relationship with God and he will do everything to strengthen that. So, he focuses on one woman, his wife. Such study requires discipline. It’s difficult. But it’s more satisfying than pornography.

Husbands, it’s time for us to go back to school. What new expression of honor to your wife will you learn and practice this week?

The discipline required for Christian marriage boils down to this. A wife as a woman battles the temptation to **be attractive** to many men. A husband as a man battles the temptation to **be attracted by many women**. Christian marriage calls for discipline.

The Dynamic for Christian Marriage

We should expect Christian marriage to be difficult because it requires discipline. Yet, is this even possible? Yes. The passage points to the dynamic for Christian marriage but it does so indirectly.

Yesterday morning when Joe and I left Manhattan for Lindsborg, a massive orange full moon glowed low on the western horizon. Godly science has taught us that the moon is a large rock in synchronous orbit around the earth. It does not produce light of its own. There’s something else at work. The moon glows because it reflects another light source, the sun. Its light is indirect.

The dynamic energy for Christian marriage is the gospel. But someone will say, “This is a passage about marriage not the gospel. Jesus is not even mentioned. Where’s the connection between marriage and the gospel in this text?”

The gospel shines here indirectly. The way Peter writes indicates that these kinds of marriages did exist. Some husbands and wives were working through the difficulties, exercising the discipline. That tells you that there's something supernatural going on. Forgiveness is at work in these relationships.

I say that because the more a woman works at fearing God and submitting to her husband the more difficult it becomes. As she grows in godliness, she realizes more and more that she is married to a sinner. The more she knows what is true and good, the more she will want to argue what's right. When he sins against her, submission gets harder. Frankly (as v. 6 alludes to), it's frightening. She can either demand that he change before she submits, or she will learn to practice forgiveness.

The more a husband studies his wife the more he will see her sin. As he learns more about her, he'll discover reasons why she does not deserve honor. He will either demand that she prove herself honorable or else he will learn to forgive and to honor her simply because she shares her life with him.

The whole project of Christian marriage fails without forgiveness. And how is it possible to forgive? How is it possible to let go rather than get even? You can forgive only when you know you've been forgiven.

You can forgive when you see Jesus Christ as the perfect husband. He found nothing honorable in you but still submitted to your punishment for sin so that he might share eternal life with you. He was reviled in your place yet suffered without an argument.

You were more than physically weak; you were spiritually dead. Still, he honored you with the gift of his life. He has studied you and knows you thoroughly yet still loves you.

His prayers were completely hindered on the cross. The Father turned his face away. He endured that so that you could live in perfect fellowship with him in an eternal covenant marriage.

Only when we realize how much we've been forgiven are we able to forgive a spouse who holds the greatest power on earth to hurt us.

To all who trust Jesus as Lord and Savior, he proves to be the perfect husband. He takes all our sin and honors us with all his righteousness. He sets his name on us. He makes a home with us.

And if you do not have this kind of intimate bond with Jesus Christ, he calls you today to receive his love.

Christ intends marriage to glow like the moon, reflecting his kind of love.