

Living as God's People in the Home

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening. Reading tonight is found on page 1219 in the Church Bible. It's from 1 Peter chapter 3 and it's verses 1 to 7.

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[1 : 5 3] 1 Peter 3 verses 1 to 7. 1 Peter 3 verses 1 to 7. 1 Peter 3. 2 Peter 3. 1 Peter 3. that you made us for relationship with you and with one another.

We pray that as we listen to you speak through your word this evening, you would lead us to a deeper understanding of your will and a growing faith in your character and your purposes for our lives.

Would what we hear lead us to right worship of you? And all this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You may have heard the phrase, those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

And we live in an age and culture where it seems people are desperate to separate themselves from history. And I think sometimes that just leads to slightly strange conclusions. Around this time last year, an online magazine named Vice published an article entitled, What is Radical Monogamy?

There's a new type of relationship in town. So apparently, according to that subtitle, this is a whole new thing, this whole monogamy thing, that is radically different to monogamy that we've had before.

[3 : 0 4] In the article, it is described as a progressive alternative to the old monogamy of our parents and grandparents that doesn't really work today and frequently breeds boredom, disloyalty and stagnation.

Which is, no matter how much of the article you read, it's just fundamentally kind of silly. It's saying, oh, we've got this new version of exactly the same thing. But what it's arguing against is just a bad version of something.

There's a quote coming up on the screen, and something the author says, I've always wanted a gigantic love. I want to be one person's joy and delight. And I wanted them to be mine.

But then I grew up and I was told that that was ridiculous, unrealistic and unhealthy. So I gave up on monogamy. But now I've come around to believing that if approached with intentionality, effort and a willingness to grow, it's possible to have a love that's big and magical.

And yeah, fair enough, that ends in a bit of a kind of Hollywood fuzz. But there is a deep desire in that, to have something that they can't seem to find in the world, that they've been told is wrong and not possible and not even real.

[4 : 10] And it's funny, that in an effort to get rid of a Christian value and a Christian pattern so significantly, people have in the long term sometimes come around to the fact that actually maybe the thing they've rejected, that they still want to reject, maybe that's what they're searching for.

The Christian understanding of marriage is that it's a continual act of loving self-sacrifice and commitment and intimacy between one man and one woman for life. It may be looked down on by many in the world today, but things like this Vice article show us that that is actually what we're made for.

And so as we step into this passage in Peter's letter tonight, he's going to show us what it means to live holy lives in an antagonistic world, as he's already been doing.

In fact, Peter, in chapter 2, verse 12, said, live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

And in verse 13, submit yourselves to the Lord's sake, to every human authority. So we're in a section all about submitting to God and the way that that's worked out in our lives. And Peter's already called Christians to live as godly citizens under an earthly government and even given instructions for slaves to live as godly servants under earthly masters.

[5 : 34] And it's notable that both of those are positions of vulnerability in which Christians can choose to live in a way that glorifies God and makes him known. And the example of how we go about doing this was given in chapter 2, verse 23, about Jesus Christ himself.

And it says, He entrusted himself to him who judges justly. Christ faced unjust suffering and yet trusted the Lord.

And so in our passage today, we're going to see what Peter says about living holy lives in the home. Giving specific examples to wives and husbands on holy living.

For wives, it's living a holy life under a husband's authority and for a husband, on holy use of the authority that he has been given. Both partners in a marriage are called to submit to Christ and to God's pattern of marriage as opposed to an earthly one.

And so as we look at these two roles, we're going to come up with two points. They're on the sheets and they will be up on the screen as well. A holy wife wins her husband for Christ through her character.

[6 : 42] And a holy husband cares for his wife so that nothing will hinder his prayers. Now, going into this, I am very aware that I am a single man about to preach on a passage instructing married women.

I'm aware of the pitfalls. But let me say that when we look at this, Peter has given what he believes to be good news for Christians living in an antagonistic world.

He's expecting that the culture will not like what he says and that it will be a challenge for Christians to live this out. So if we find that what rises in our own hearts is a challenging attitude to this because of the culture that we live in, we maybe shouldn't be that surprised.

But what we will see is what gift God has given in the pattern of marriage that he has laid down. Now, the instructions to both partners of the marriage in verse 1 and verse 7 start off with the words in the same way.

And the question is, well, in the same way as what? Well, it's calling both the wife and the husband to live out a Christ-like example of submission to God as Jesus did.

[7 : 50] So whilst the roles in a marriage and the specific actions will change, the value of each partner and the need to submit to Christ first is the same for both. So let's turn to the holy wife winning her husband for Christ through her character.

In verse 1, Peter says, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over. Now, Peter here is addressing all Christian wives, but he does have a keen eye for the ones who are married to unbelievers.

The aim Peter gives to these women is to win their husband for Christ through their actions that their husbands might love them as Christ does. The reality for a woman married to a non-believer could be very tough.

That woman might experience constant low-level persecution of just sharing different values to her husband, being led in a different way, not having freedom to worship the Lord in the way she otherwise might.

If you want to get some understanding of what that might have been like in Peter's day, the Greek historian Plutarch wrote about marriage in a book called Advice to a Bride and Groom, these words, So imagine the antagonism.

[9 : 25] The wife hears about Jesus, becomes a Christian, and is told by her husband that she cannot have that, she must not worship this, because that is wrong. She must worship the household gods of a Roman household.

So we can safely assume that this would have been a very costly situation for a wife. It would have been very, very hard to hold this line and to live for Christ faithfully in an antagonistic situation with a husband who believes something fundamentally different.

And that will be the same for many women today who are married to non-Christian husbands in a situation where he does not want Jesus. And for her, living out a Christian faith can be very hard and very deeply costly.

So it makes sense that in this situation then, Peter would say to the wife, Well, here's how to win your husband round to Christ. Because of course, for this wife, what a good thing it would be if her husband came to be Christ-like to her.

And so Peter goes on to give a few instructions. First, that a wife would submit to a husband's authority to win him over with her actions rather than her words. Now, that doesn't mean that a wife is never to speak about Jesus to her husband.

[10 : 42] If you were to turn to later in chapter 3, verse 15, Peter is going to say, Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who gives you for a reason for the hope that you have. So we can safely say that there are times and places when a wife absolutely would speak to her husband about Jesus.

But it does acknowledge in a position that she is in that that actually, there may not be an opportunity for her to do so. And so instead, Peter calls the wife in verse 2 to live with a visible purity and reverence for God.

A wife should seek to stay sexually pure relating only to her husband with marital intimacy, something that in Roman society would have actually been unusual. and that her life would live a first priority of honoring the Lord before everything else.

And so how is she going to go about that? Well, verses 3 and 4. Peter says that a wife is to seek the right kind of beauty. Getting dressed up beautifully may attract her husband to herself, which is not wrong on its own, but it's not going to achieve the goal of winning her husband to Christ.

It simply couldn't. Instead, Peter calls these wives to grow in inner beauty, which in verse 4 is described as the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

[12 : 07] Physical beauty fades over time, naturally, but the inner beauty of a godly heart can increase all the way through a person's whole life. Now, quite exactly what Peter means by a gentle and quiet spirit.

It's not explained in this passage directly, but it is worth thinking, if that may be something that doesn't sound brilliant to you, that the word gentle there is only used four times in the New Testament, and all the rest are used specifically of Jesus himself and his attitude.

And so then, in verses 5 and 6, Peter says that this actually isn't something new. This has been a pattern of women throughout biblical history, wives submitting to their husbands and trusting the Lord in doing so.

He cites Abraham and Sarah as an example, not giving a specific episode in Sarah's life as an example, but just the whole story. A call for us in our spare time maybe to go back and reflect on those passages in Genesis.

this. But if you go and read that story, it's not like you get a wonderful picture of Abraham the whole time. He's a bit of a fool. First, Sarah has to follow him across half of the Middle East through complete uncertainty, through some seriously dodgy decisions, and through actual danger.

[13 : 31] Trusting God in that situation actually costs Sarah a lot because there are things which are very easy to fear in following Abraham. And he is certainly not a perfect man.

What she's called to though and what we see in Sarah's story is a trust in the Lord, fearing him first rather than the circumstances that she is in. And living this way as a wife may well seem like a scary prospect.

And Peter fully admits that in verse 6 by saying to those who are reading, you are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. Very clearly saying that there are definitely reasons to fear, but it's a choice.

Living this way takes courage and deep trust in the Lord. But what is also clear in this passage is that God honors this beauty and this trust. This pursuit of a holy life for a married woman of submission to the Lord by following her husband is something that the Lord deems of great worth.

death. And I'm sure on the ground in moments of a marriage it may feel like a huge effort for very little gain. But in God's economy this is greatly valuable.

[14 : 47] Our Lord delights in the holy actions of his people. And he delights in the actions of those he calls his adopted daughters. So the fear is to be of God not of a husband.

To place their trust in the God who is far bigger than their husband. The one who has won their salvation and to trust him. Now to be clear on a couple of things that Peter hasn't said in this instruction.

This is not a general call for submission of all women to all men either inside or outside of the church. This is specifically about marriage. But it isn't either a call to submit only to a godly husband.

This applies even when submission is hard and costly. This isn't a prohibition on jewelry and hairstyles or a general call for women to be quiet at all. It is a specific teaching on how those things are used within a marriage.

And what this also doesn't say, lads, is that only women should strive for inner beauty. That's seriously not the case. Men of course are called to live in a Christ-like way too. The whole letter tells you that.

[15 : 56] And Peter is going to go on to talk to husbands in the next verse where he lays down not just instruction but a warning. But this honoring picture of the holy wife winning her husband for Christ through beautiful inner living might seem maybe far away hard to visualize.

And for that I just want to give us a historical perspective slightly. The historical theologian Augustine, who some of you will have seen in Hey Augustine in Church Family Focus on the mornings wrote in his book Confessions about his own mother and her marriage to his non-Christian father.

He gained much of his Christian faith from her father. And he wrote this about his mother. She was given to a husband whom she served as her lord and she busied herself to gain him to you that is to God preaching you to him by her behavior in which you made her fair and reverently aimable and admirable to her husband.

She waited for your mercy upon him and finally her own husband now towards the end of his earthly existence she won over for you. And it's there's way more written in that entire section.

We find if you go and read it that Augustine's mother father was not faithful to his wife. He went after other women and he was quite angry as well and yet this woman persevered to win him for Jesus and by the end of her life did.

[17 : 27] And this is something that Augustine considers a beautiful picture and something that he trusts. And there is no doubt then that this was a really costly living for this woman.

And for any wife in this situation this is a costly life. Living like this really puts Christ at the center and personal fulfillment at the edge of life but we almost remember that is the structure of Christian life normally to put Christ at the center of everything and our own wants and desires begin to fade away as we follow Christ and his example and his command.

But we've only had one half of the story so far so let's move on to our second point. A holy husband cares for his wife so that nothing will hinder his prayers.

Now in verse 7 Peter calls husbands to submit to Christ in their marriage by living with consideration and respect for their wives. A husband's concern is not to be for himself for his own desires and his own needs but for his wife and her needs with respect to her position.

In the middle of verse 7 Peter says this of the wife the weaker partner and heirs with you in the gracious gift of life. That might again be something which you feel a bit of a kind of knee-jerk reaction to hearing in this passage but it's worth saying Peter again doesn't specifically say what he means by weakness here.

[18 : 57] It could just be the created physical differences between men and women or he could mean something else. We're not really at liberty to just kind of substitute whatever our assumptions might be but it is generally the case in every age that it is the woman who is the most vulnerable partner in a marriage.

Peter's writing in an age where women were often treated more like property. They had less rights and less protection than they do today. Imagine the impact then of telling husbands that a wife's vulnerability is not something to be taken advantage of to serve you but instead to be shown intimate and most deepest care for.

You can't lord it over your wife says Peter that doesn't work. And I imagine that was probably pretty significantly unpopular in his day. The problem that we might find ourselves having with submission in marriage is the assumption that it's just so open to abuse but we are to be clear that all abuse of that submission is sin which is the opposite of holy life.

A husband isn't being given the right to demand submission but to live out responsible love and care worthy of the submission to which the wife is called. And both partners in marriage are called to submit first to Christ even in those different roles.

We see this as Peter immediately in verse 7 reminds his readers that the wife is of equal value to the man as an heir of God's gift of eternal life. And thus he's calling the husband to treat her as if she is the adopted daughter of God that she has been made to be.

[20 : 42] And so finally unlike the wives who are just given instruction and encouragement the husbands are given instruction with a warning at the end of verse 7 where Peter says you do this so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

And actually that if we take that seriously is a very scary prospect. One of the greatest fears that people often say is I just feel like God doesn't hear me when I pray and it's a crippling feeling.

And here Peter says that if a married man does not treat his wife correctly he will actually find his prayer life hindered. So there is a severe warning.

This is to be taken seriously by the husbands who read it lest it impact their prayer life. Christian husbands must not follow the pattern of the men and the culture around them or the marital standards of whatever age and place they live.

It must never abuse the vulnerability of their wives but instead are called to care for them well within it. And there are two ways I think a husband can get this wrong.

[21 : 51] Both are sinful misuses of the authority that a husband is given. The first is as we've already said straightforward abuse to control a wife for the sake of his own pleasure and desire.

There's no space for that in God's design of marriage. It bears no relation to the self-sacrificial picture laid down by Jesus himself. And let me say very seriously if you are in a situation of any form of domestic abuse that is completely wrong.

So let me encourage you to contact someone in church leadership and a service like women's aid so you can get the help that you need. That will be taken seriously. But a second way a husband might misuse its authority is by neglect.

To refuse to use the authority that he has been given to care for his wife and lead his home. Refusing to sacrifice his own desires to care for his wife. Shirking responsibility and seeking to live for himself.

If a husband comes home from work and angrily demands that his wife must cook him dinner, that is obviously an abuse of authority. But if a husband comes in from work and doesn't even speak to his wife and plays two hours of video games, the wife's no better off.

[23 : 05] In both cases, the husband is not honoring the marriage partner he has been given with his actions. And in both cases, that is a sin that needs repenting of in a marriage.

So instead, the husband is to aim to love his wife so effectively that her submission becomes an easier thing to trust as she finds herself wonderfully loved and cared for, listened to consistently, and therefore willing to submit her life.

husband learns to use that authority appropriately to care for his wife and lead her and her family through their lives. And so as we draw to a close, I hope that we see instead of maybe a fearful picture that we expect on hearing the word submission, an oppressive picture of marriage that would suit nobody, Peter is in fact envisaging a loving and committed and healthy pattern of marriage as God intended.

a wife's submission to a husband and a husband's care that create a stable and loving environment where both people can grow and grow together in a love for the Lord Jesus and in a holy life in a confusing and painful world that is antagonistic to God's people.

And in this, the Christian marriage then is bigger than either of the people in it because the marriage testifies to the outside world of God's goodness, of his love for his church.

[24 : 31] Now, it's impossible in wrapping this up to say what this would look like in every single situation. Every single marriage is different. But every married person is called to honor the Lord in their marriage.

So if you're married, then go and work this out. Go talk to the person that you're married to and figure out what this looks like for you. If you've been married for a long time, have conversations that challenge one another to keep growing in godliness because that growth in inner beauty is something that never stops for a Christian.

If you are a woman married to someone who is not a believer and that is hard, let me remind you that this passage says that the Lord sees and that he cares. And that even when that path is hard to follow, your efforts to live for Christ are known and honored by the Lord.

And if you're here and you're single and maybe you're even longing to be married, I hope that you see two things. First is that the marriage is a wonderful gift. It is also hard work. So don't underestimate the commitment that Jesus calls husbands and wives to.

But secondly, whether you're married or remain single, that you would trust that the good life is found in following Christ in pursuit of holiness and living a life that honors him because that is what we're all called to.

[25 : 53] And so let's commit those thoughts and our time together this evening to the Lord in prayer. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the gift of marriage.

But we know that in a fallen world that can be incredibly tough. Teach those in marriages how to commit to Christ in their given roles and teach us together as a church how to love and support people in marriages.

Help us all to live holy lives that honor you. And all this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.