

Our passage this morning in 1 Peter 3 is about marriage. Now this is not going to be a marriage advice sermon. Most of the sermons I have heard on passages like this tend to turn into topical sermons. As if Peter wrote this just to give us some tips and tricks for having better marriages. I have been married for 10 years so I know something about marriage. But I want us to take a close look at the text in God's Word. I am not here to give you advice from my life. I want to try to help us understand what God's Word means.

I also think this passage applies to us whether we are married or not. I don't think we get off the hook here if we are not married currently. Because what Peter says to wives also applies to women in general and men as well. The application is slightly different but the spiritual principles at play still apply to us. For some of us the application will be obvious. But do not think you just get to kick back and relax while others have to wrestle with this passage.

Open your Bibles to 1 Peter 3:1-7

I. [Wives] Adorn yourself in holiness (v. 1-6).

When we hear these verses it can give us a particular image.

We come to the text with our preconceived ideas.

And some of us may have heard countless sermons on marriage already.

But marriage and relationships do not function today like they did 2 thousand years ago.

What submission looked like in Peter's day is different from it looks today.

Our temptation might be to believe this verse calls us to a high patriarchal view.

Where the husband gets to dominate the wife and command her every decision.

Or we may be tempted to ignore it and think it is completely outdated and no longer matters.

But neither of these extremes is true.

What we need to understand in order to properly interpret this verse is understand the context.

The textual context is that all of us are required to submit to the authority figures over us.

All of us are required to have a general attitude of submission.

This is not just for women and now men get to parade around in control.

Husbands and men need to be submissive to those over us.

This is why it starts with **"Likewise."**

Just as all of us are subject to the government authorities.

Likewise, as all of us be subject to our masters with all respect.

This then has to play out in our other relationships.

Verse 1, **"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands,"**

We also need to understand the cultural context.

Because the command Paul is giving here is radical and subversive.

It was unexpected and is never something a patriarchal pagan would have written.

Scholars like to refer to this passage and the one last week towards slaves as the household codes.

This is also what we call the passage in Ephesians 5.

The household codes were a common thing in the ancient world.

Different philosophers would write them with instructions on what a good household looks like.

But they were almost always addressed to men.

Women and slaves would never be addressed or expected to read it.

It was for the man of the house to impose.

There are some significant differences between what those codes in Peter's day said and what he is saying here.

Plutarch, a famous greek philosopher said wives shouldn't make friends on their own and should just enjoy their husbands friends.

This especially applied to the gods who were a husbands greatest friends.

This meant a wife had to follow the religion and gods of her husband.

She was not free to believe what she want.

She was not free to worship as her conscience directed her.

Because at this time faith is not an individual thing, but a familial thing. The husband decided which god was going to be worshipped and which shrines would be placed in the house.

When a woman was married she was to leave her father's gods and begin to worship the new gods of her husband only.

One of the chief duties of a wife was to care for the worship of these household gods.

They had to be the ones to prepare the offerings and care for the idols in the house.

They had to be the ones to go to the temple to make sure sacrifices were made.

A failure to do this would have been seen as unthinkable rebellion.

This would not just a rebellion against your husband but against the broader community.

It would have been scandalous and public knowledge.

An individual's failure to worship the gods was a threat to society.

Because when problems came like crops dying, a famine, fire, it means someone has to be blamed.

The gods are angry with someone.

So the community would look around for someone to blame.

And they are going to blame the person who is not worshipping the gods.

This is why Christians were persecuted in the ancient world.

They were blamed by Nero for the fire that spread.

They were called atheists for not believing in the gods.

Peter knows this charge is going to come, and he is trying to prepare them for it.

Christian women would have had to rebel in this way.

They would have been the scandalous wives who worshipped other gods.

They would have been refusing to do their wifely duty in caring for the household worship.

They would have been seen as scandalous and rebellious in belonging to secret meetings and clubs without their husbands.

Going to church would not have been seen as submissive.

With all of this in mind, Peter asks them to submit.

This attitude towards their husband cannot just be one of contempt and complete rebellion.

They are refusing to obey in the most important area to Rome.

But they need to go above and beyond in other areas.

The hope is that by doing so they may be able to lead to their husbands to Christ.

“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.”

It seems that those who do not obey the word refers to unchristian husbands.

Because they have heard the gospel, but do not obey it.

They are not obeying God’s Word.

Now this verse does not mean we should marry unbelievers.

The Bible is clear in 1 Corinthians not to do that.

But it is not uncommon for a believer who is already married to be saved before their spouse.

If this is the case, your new found faith in Jesus should make you a better spouse not a worse one.

Your behavior should make them want to know what has changed because it is amazing.

It shouldn’t make them want nothing to do with your faith.

This is how Peter is both scandalous and subversive.

He is asking women to rebel against their husbands by following Jesus.

But their rebellion should also make them better wives.

Their lives will be filled ultimately with submission to Jesus.

Their lives will be continually becoming more and more sanctified.
And all of their conduct towards their husbands should be respectful and pure.

Following Jesus should make you a better spouse.

It should make your husband or wife want to know Jesus not assume it has ruined you or made you more combative.

Verse 3, **"Do not let your adornment be external - the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear -"**

Adornment refers to what is being worn externally.

Here, Peter calls wives to modesty.

Now, usually when we think about modesty we think about sexuality.

And it can turn into a discussion over which clothes women should and shouldn't wear because they are or are not modest.

How short are shorts allowed to be.

And our opinions will all be shaped by whatever generation we are from or what culture we are in.

What we consider modest in Oklahoma will look different than Florida, or the Bahamas, or Saudi Arabia.

I think this misses what Peter was getting at.

Now, obviously no one should wear clothing with the specific purpose of getting other people who are not your spouse to lust after you.

But that does not seem to be Peter's idea.

He mentions three things.

Braiding hair, putting on gold jewelry, or the clothing.

The gold jewelry is something that applies to men to.

This is not God's word saying jewelry is evil.

I see plenty of jewelry around the room so we much not believe it means that.

But is it about, and the primary way the earlier church interpreted this passage, was that we are not to flaunt wealth.

That we should not be trying to wear the most expensive things we own. We should not adorn ourselves with wealth so that everyone knows how much money we have.

We should not adorn ourselves with brands that only exist to show other people we have money.

Dress also communicated your status.

Your braid, style, and clothes communicated who you were.

What you wore let everyone else know where you ranked on the social hierarchy.

It told people whether you were a noble woman or someone in high standing.

This would have especially been important in the church.

Where some came into worship as slaves.

Some came to worship as widows in poverty.

They shouldn't come into worship with gold hanging out of their hair while others next to them in worship do not know if they will eat that day.

Not just that but it would be less scandalous.

If Christian women let the house not dolled up because they are coming somewhere shady.

But if they left for worship looking plain and ordinary.

It would have communicated to everyone else they are just going for worship.

The intent here still seems focused on evangelism.

Verse 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."**

The primary adorning should be in holiness.

Our beauty should not be in the external but on the internal.

We should be more concerned about who we are than how we look.

We should be more concerned with what we truly are than what other people think we are.

Verse 5, **“for this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands.”**

Part of this adorning is through submission.

It is a holy act.

It is also an act of hope.

Here it seems this has little to do with husbands.

It has little to do with having an incredibly satisfying marriage.

Instead, it is about God.

It is about hoping in God.

Wives are to submit in hope.

In hope that this action is one that pleases God.

In hope that this attitude is something God sees and will honor.

In hope, that God will bring justice.

Ultimately, just like last week all of our submission is to Christ.

It is not about husbands, male authority, or the government.

It is all about doing what God asks.

I also need to clarify.

Submitting to your husband does not mean you must submit to abuse.

It does not mean that you have to ignore or endure abuse.

If your husband is harming you, physically, sexually, or emotionally.

You are not required to submit to that.

Please do not submit to abuse.

Find a way to escape.

Follow Jesus and go be free.

Verse 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.”**

Usually when I hear this verse, I see people point out how Sarah called Abraham Lord.

Then I hear pastors suggest women should do that.
As if that is the key to a proper marriage.

I think that misses the point of the verse.
Peter is holding up Sarah as an example.
And as Abraham is the father of all those who follow Jesus in faith,
Sarah can be our mother.

But we have to live out our faith.
This really is for all of us, not just wives.
None of us should flaunt our wealth.
We should not be concerned with outward adornments.
What our clothes or hair or things communicate about us.
We should be primarily concerned with being adorned in holiness.

II. [Husbands] Honor the weak (v. 7).

Verse 7, **"Likewise husbands, lives with your wives in an understanding way,"**

You noticed that Peter begins his instructions to husbands in the same way that he did towards wives.
He says likewise.

This is still all in the context of how all of us are required to be submitting to the authority. God has placed over us.
We are living lives of submission to God.

And that fleshes itself out differently in our relationships.
Now husbands are to be understanding with their wives.
Your translation may say that you need to be considerate of your wife.
It means that we are to honor our wives.

We are to be understanding of the place that they have.
It's important to note that Peter doesn't say Wife submit husbands lead.

He does not say husbands take charge and be the head of the house.
I said he says husband you need to understand your wife.

Acknowledging that God's asking them to submit to subject themselves to you now you had better recognize what that is.

I think the way that we often talk about this topic in the church is just so misguided.

We end up talking about it as if it's about who gets to be in charge and who gets to make the decisions and be the boss.

Our faith is about?

Is that what it means to follow Jesus?

Is what it means to follow Jesus as a man and as a husband mean that you get to be in charge?

My understanding of what this means what I think this is trying to get us to see that it's ultimately about responsibility.

This should put more responsibility on you.

I think this means is that to whom much is given much is required.

God is giving us authority. God is giving us responsibility and we will have to answer to God for how we use that.

And God tells us to use what has been given to us in a way that is considerate and understanding.

We are to be like Jesus.

We are not to be domineering.

We are not as strong arm and dominate our families and our wives into doing whatever it is that we say because Jesus says I'm in charge.

That is not the way of Christ.

"Showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel,"

What does it mean to be a weaker vessel?

This does not mean that women are weaker morally.

As if women have less of the Holy Spirit living inside of them.
It does not mean women are generally less sanctified.
It does not mean women are more likely to be deceived and less discerning.

It does not mean that women are made less in the image of God.
As if they are sub human.
Which is what many greek philosophers and Jewish rabbis at this point taught.
This is not what the Bible teaches, this is not what Peter means here.

I think this refers to strength and power.
Women are biologically less strong than men.
There are exceptions, obviously.
I can think of women who are stronger than me or than most men.
But this is generally true.

And women have less social power than men.
We still generally live in a patriarchal world.
Men have more influence, money, and power.
It is hard to be a woman in this world.
This is still true for us today.
It was obviously true in Peter's day.

Think about how much power husbands had over their wives in that day.
It was easy to abuse and beat your wife.
It was normal and expected you could do so.
A woman was a man's physical property.
It was not unusual for women to need to ask permission to leave the house.

And so if this is the world we live in,
How are men to act in this world?

How are men to act towards the weaker vessel that they could easily crush and destroy?

Do we get to dominate the weaker vessels through our power?

Do we get to make sure they do whatever we want?

It is about making sure the weaker serves the stronger?

"Live in an understanding way."

Live as someone who understands the power you have.

Live as someone who recognizes the power you can wield.

It means we are to hold back.

Do not use your power and authority as a club.

Generally, I think if you are having to insist your wife submit to you, then you are already doing everything wrong.

The goal husbands is not that your wife submits.

The goal is that you live in an understanding way.

The goal is that you treat your wife with all respect and honor her as a weaker vessel.

The goal is giving away our power.

The goal is to use our power to serve the weaker not to be served.

And that is true no matter how she treats you.

No matter whether she is a follower of Jesus or not.

Whether she is gentle and submissive or loud and domineering.

You treat her with all respect and live with understanding.

In our world today, it takes bravery and courage to be a gentle man.
to have your power under control.

To choose the way of Jesus and the cross.

To choose to your your power and influence not for your own greatness, but to serve your wife and the weaker vessels around you.

Being selfish is easy.

Everyone uses power for themselves in this world.

But that is not the way of Christ.

There is a move these days in Christian circles.
Men are starting to want to embrace patriarchy.
Not just to upset some people who call the church patriarchal.
But they now believe we should be!
Let's get back to abolishing the 19th amendment and keep women from working outside of the home.
They would love to world be like it was in Rome.
Women can't have their own friends or read or work outside the home.
I am not sure how any of that accomplishes what God's Word calls us to.
It does not sound like how Jesus treated women.

Usually when it comes to passages like this most of the time is spent on discussing what women should of instead of men.
Part of that in 1 Peter I can understand.
After all, most of the verses and space is directed towards women.
But the verses towards men are not any less challenging.
And I think we skip over them to our peril.

Let me just say this as well, if you are a husband.
And your main takeaway from this passage is what your wife needs to do, then you have totally missed the point.

If you read this passage and you want to talk about who gets to make the final decision, you have missed it.
There is not a single major decision in my family we have not made together.
My wife had to agree to move here.
She will have to agree if God ever calls us somewhere else.
Because I love her.
I care for her.
She can tell me it's time to move or quit ministry whenever she wants.
And I am going to listen to her.

Why would I force someone to make a decision like that they don't agree with?

And why would the Holy Spirit only talk to me and not her?

"Since they are heirs with you of the grace of life"

Women are co-heirs with men in grace.

We have both received the gospel.

Because the ground at the cross is level.

We all have fallen short of the glory of God.

All of us are sinners in need of grace.

And Christ offers it to both of us.

But notice the language Peter uses.

We are both heirs.

Women were not usually heirs at this point in history.

This is why widows and women were so vulnerable.

Men were the primary ones who could inherit property and riches.

Things went to the first born male son most of the time.

But Jesus says women are coheirs.

There is nothing in heaven or the new heavens and the new earth men will receive that women will not.

Here on earth whether through God's design or sin that is not true.

But that will be true in the life to come.

Women will inherit the kingdom with men.

And as husbands, and as men we need to act like it.

We need to treat the women and ladies around us as if they are our co-heirs.

As if they will be ruling and reigning alongside us in eternity forever.

Because they will be.

There is a warning here in this passage.

This is a strong warning.

And this is not a warning I usually hear repeated.
I found it surprising how little time most commentaries spent on this verse.

"so that your prayers may not be hindered."

Husbands, if you do not love your wife well.
If you are not treating her with all respect and honor.
God will not hear your prayers.
God does not hear the prayers of domineering husbands.
God does not hear the prayers of non-understanding husbands.

There may be some husbands here wondering why God has not answered your prayers.
maybe there has been something you have been praying about.
Maybe you have even been praying about it for a long time.
You may want to stop and examine your marriage.
Examine the way you treat your spouse.

Because this says God will not hear your prayers.
He will not listen to you if you are getting this wrong.

This should give us pause.
This should stop us in our tracks.
This should make us realize that this is a big deal to God.
He cares about we treat our wives.
He cares how we act towards them.
He cares so much that it is a non-negotiable for your prayer life.

If you are not a husband, or if you are a widower.
I think this passage still applies to us.
It tells us as men how we are to use our power.

This is also true of women.
This is how God says the strong should use their authority and might.
Not for their own good.

We use it for others.
This should be true of all of us.
Whether you are a husband or not.
Whether you are a man or not.

All of us have some measure of power and influence.
And we must be considerate of the weak with our power.
We must not use our power for ourselves.
We must use it in a way that shows love and care for those under us.
Especially those who are weaker than we are.

After all, we have Jesus as an example for us.
He was the most powerful man who ever lived.
He was God wrapped in flesh.
And how did He use all of His power with us the weaker vessels?

The gospels tell us that when He recognized all things had been given into
His hands, He washed our feet.
He served us.
He was gentle with us.

Jesus welcomed children to come to Him.
Jesus spent his time not with the powerful and the put together.
He spent His time with lepers and those on the margins.
He loved women and the widows.
He cared for the sick and the forgotten.

Jesus used all of His power for us.
Jesus gave up His power to become a man.
He put aside His power to submit to a death on the cross for our sins.
Jesus died to forget us even though we did not deserve it.

Because we were weak.
All of us were dead in our sins with no hope.

But Christ showed compassion to us.
He did not ask us to do it on our own.

Without Jesus we are all weak.
We are all broken and don't have the strength we need.
But Jesus provides for us.
Jesus died for us.
Jesus offers us salvation so that in our weakness we can be made strong.
If you are not a believer, come to Jesus.
Accept His compassion and kindness.
turn from your sins and find salvation.

If you are a believer, act like Jesus.
Act in your marriage how Christ acts towards us.
Act towards other people how Christ acts towards you.
Let the gospel be the foundation of your marriage and your entire life.

Where have we been this morning?
We should adorn ourselves in holiness.
We should honor the weak.
Whether we are man or woman.
Married or unmarried.
Because all of us are trying to be like our Savior.