
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 3.1-7. This passage begins with the Greek word *ὁμοίως* [ha-MOY-ose], which means “likewise” or “in the same way.” Just as slaves were to be motivated by their reverence/fear for God, the same is true for wives, another class of people who often were underprivileged in society; because they have hope in, and respect for, God, they will submit to their husbands [v.5]. But also like with slaves, Peter addressed the wives directly in this passage, not through their husbands as would have been normal, a departure from custom that would indicate he was investing wives with dignity and equality with men before God [v.7], and implying that women were not to be forced to worship or obey by their husbands, but had the moral choice as a free person in Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that women are equal to men in their value to God, in their dignity as being made in God’s image, and thus in their rights to be treated with respect and love. However, for his own reasons, God has given men and women different roles just as the Father, Son, and Spirit have different roles even though they are equal within the godhead. In the household, the husband is the leader [see also Ephesians 5.22-24]. This does not entitle him to be a tyrant, as we will discuss later in the week. Greco-Roman society did not sanction spousal abuse, and a wife who endured it would not be seen as virtuous. Thus, what Peter writes about submission is not a command to endure abuse; physical separation might be necessary until the church can help the husband walk with God at least to the point of safety for his wife. Wives are to submit to their own husbands, not to all men. The forms of submission are not specified, leaving it open to each couple as to how this will work.

Some women who had come to faith before their husbands might find their husbands antagonistic, especially in those days when a wife typically worshipped her husband’s gods as part of the cultural household code. Peter calls on wives to continue submitting to unrighteous husbands in the hope of winning them to Christ [v.1], yet Peter also clearly expects them to subvert the cultural household code by continuing to worship the true God even if this brings them some suffering within the household. Thus, as with slaves and citizens, we see that submission is not blind obedience, but recognition of authority and obedience to the point of when it conflicts with Christian ethics.

Reflect: Based on this teaching, do you need to adjust your attitudes about submission or about married relationships? Peter emphasizes honoring the gospel within our social orders; some of his teaching is universal [e.g., there is never a basis for abuse, infidelity, or neglect], but some contains contextual considerations. What would submission in marriage look like today, in a way that reflects our culture but still honors the spirit of God’s differentiation between the two genders?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 3.1-6. Peter is not against aesthetic beauty, but he downplays it. Rather than working so hard to be pretty as we do in our culture – and as they apparently did in this one [v.3] – Peter stresses working for a beautiful soul, one that is characterized by humility and a quiet demeanor [v.4]. It is not physical beauty that will reflect the character of Christ or win people to him, but our inner beauty of actually being like Christ in character. Outer beauty is what society values, but we should care about more important things [see 1 Samuel 16.7].

Peter recognized the need in his day to offer biblical role models to replace cultural ones, and this is just as necessary today. If we pattern our attitudes and behaviors on television characters, advertising, and cultural expectations, how can we expect to follow Christ well? Peter stresses the Old Testament women who trusted in God and so submitted to their husbands in the way he has laid out. He stresses doing what is right and not being intimidated [v.6]. Since the wife would not anticipate anything to fear from outside the household because she was submitting, most likely this is a reference again to the situation of a believing wife and a non-believing husband: she submits, but continues to worship the true God and to act righteously. Sarah is an interesting example then: she did rightly submit to Abraham, following him around from land to land, trusting in his visions from God; but there were times when she wrongly asserted her will with disastrous effect [Genesis 16.2-6] and when she followed Abraham into sin, also with ill effects [Genesis 12.12-20; 20.5].

Reflect: Peter does not say we may not try to look nice, but we have to ask whether we are being good stewards of our resources and focusing on the right priorities if we spend a great deal of money and time on fixing our hair and buying clothes and jewelry. Consider the expense of all your clothes, jewelry, and hair styling services; should some of this money be better spent on helping people? Does your effort to beautify the outer person detract from your efforts to beautify the inner person? Does it reflect a disproportionate attentiveness to worldly beauty over attempting to reflect Christ? The woman in Proverbs 31 is highly accomplished, but what does it say about her beauty?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 3.7. Again we have the Greek word ὁμοίως [ha-MOY-ose], which means “likewise” or “in the same way,” implying husbands also are to be motivated by their reverence/fear for God. To live with understanding or knowledge is to understand God’s will, in this case including God’s high view of women and the fact that Jesus always treated women with dignity and respect. Women are fellow heirs in God’s grace, equal with men before God, not inferior in stature or importance, made in God’s image [Genesis 1.26-27] and saved just as men are [Galatians 3.28]. Even if a man has an unbelieving wife, he still should treat her as a fellow heir, hoping she will be in time. At the same time, husbands should seek to care for their wives, recognizing their own protective role as head of the household and their wives’ vulnerability to the harsher realities. In the Greco-Roman culture, gender-differentiated aptitudes gave husband and wife specific roles in the family function; women were not seen as lesser, but weaker, with a stress on man’s need to protect and nurture her, and protect her in a society in which she had less empowerment. Even in this non-Christian culture, the expectation was that the husband would not abuse his authority, but instead be responsible for the welfare of his wife. This is all the more true in Christianity, for the husband who fails in this regard can not expect God’s favor, and might find his prayers go unanswered. From what Peter wrote here and what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5.21-33, we see that marriage is a lifetime union similar to Christ’s relationship with the church, so the husband must proactively care for his wife and she must submit to him, and they must focus on blessing each other.

Reflect: Based on this teaching, do you need to adjust your ideas about marriage or gender equality?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 3.8-12. Peter’s readers were suffering persecution in their community. Peter calls on them to create a better community, in the church, one that is created on God’s principles. Thus, they are to be harmonious toward each other, in unity of faith together, sharing a brotherly love that goes well beyond affection, to be sacrificial and always doing right by each other, compassionate, and humble toward each other [v.8]. Then, as now, this is counter cultural: God puts a high value on stability of the community, not on selfish aims or individualism. Peter also instructs them to love their antagonists. Christian love is not a feeling, but acting rightly toward someone. They are to bless even those outside the church who are persecuting them, and are not to antagonize back [v.9; see also Luke 6.27-28], a startling reaction then and today. This calls for empowerment by the Holy Spirit, which those within the church can expect [see, e.g., Galatians 5.22-23], as they emulate the way Jesus reacted to his persecution [1 Peter 2.21-25; recall from this passage that we all are called to suffering!]. Not all translations make it clear, but Peter’s Greek suggests God called us to this purpose [as in ESV; NLT], that we would bless our antagonists and so receive a blessing from God in the end. Our purpose in this time period between Christ’s first coming and his second at the time of judgment is to share and live out the gospel before others. Thus we do not retaliate when others antagonize us [regardless of whether the antagonism is secular persecution or strife within the church], but rather we bless them.

Reflect: Who are the antagonists in your life? How do you react to them? Are your reactions consistent with the teaching of Jesus and Peter? If not, how can you change? Are your attitudes toward others in the church the type Peter describes in v.8? Pray about these things.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 3.8-12. Peter takes vv.10-12 from Psalm 34.12-16. He earlier had alluded to this psalm [2.3], which is about putting one’s hope in God and receiving God’s deliverance. God delivered David from his time living among the Philistines, and God would deliver these Christians from their time living among hostile Romans, and Christians today from their struggles [though perhaps not until death]. Peter gives us action steps to pursue even when we are suffering: turn away from evil [including a hostile tongue], and do good; seek and pursue peace. It is unclear if Peter is talking about seeking a temporal blessing [now] or one in the eternal kingdom. Certainly, if we want to be blessed with a life of intimacy with God, we need to pursue God’s values and not the world’s; and beyond intimacy, this leads God to consider our prayers. We cannot expect blessing if we disregard our relationship with God and the way of life he has for us. This is not a promise that God will smooth away our troubles; obviously, Peter’s people were suffering, and Peter did from time to time as well. Rather, the idea is that we suffer now, but we return love for hate and blessing for curse, because we are connected with God, and by doing so we remain in intimacy with him and experience true life with him. Some think this is saying that those who want eternal life in the kingdom need to do these things; if that is the case, then it is not that Peter says we earn our salvation [which would be inconsistent with his teachings on grace], but that if we are saved then we will experience transformation in our characters so that we do seek to live this way.

Reflect: In what ways could you better live the way described in these verses?