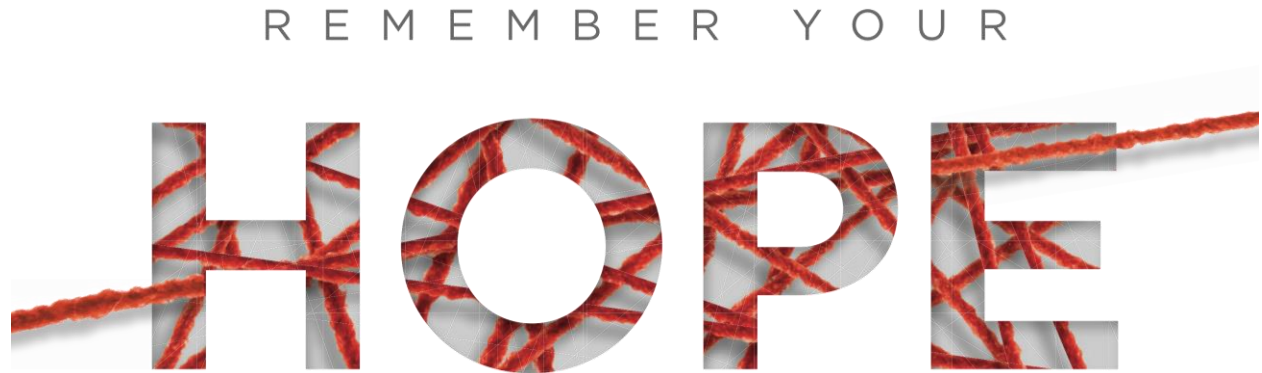


Lesson 5: 1 Peter 3:1–7

Hook



Main Point: When we live holy lives, we are a witness for Christ.

Have you ever been frustrated at putting together a puzzle? Imagine trying to construct a home. The *Sears Modern Homes Catalog* debuted in 1908 and offered recipients the opportunity to purchase plans and materials to build their own home. These mail-order kit homes were sold from 1908 to 1940 and units sold totaled somewhere between 70,000 and 75,000. Homebuyers would purchase everything from the magazine; all materials would be shipped to the property. This was certainly an economical way to realize home ownership—these homes sold between a few hundred and a few thousand dollars. The pieces of the homes were meant to fit together like Legos®; if assembled correctly, these homes were said to last. Some estimate that 70 percent of the Sears kit homes are still standing today.ⁱ

Q: Are you talented at following instructions and assembling things?

Q: Would you be brave enough to purchase a kit home and assemble it yourself?

Q: What challenges would you foresee in attempting to assemble a kit home?

Transition: Today we will discuss the puzzle of marriage—how God has designed it, the roles that the husband and wife play, and even what to do if you are married to an unbeliever.

Book

Main Point: When we live holy lives, we are a witness for Christ.

Text Summary: Peter describes godly submission and authority in a marriage relationship. A woman is to submit to her husband in love and honor, out of meekness to God. If the husband is an unbeliever, her love and kindness will be the best witness to him. A husband is to honor his wife in humility, not lord his authority over her.

1 Peter 3:1–2 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Respect and purity will likely win an unbelieving husband to Christ.

Q: How can our lives be a witness for Christ without our even saying a word?

This passage is introduced with a “likewise,” and when we tie it to the preceding verses, means in the same way slaves are to be subject to their masters (2:18), women are to be subject to their husbands. This does not mean women are to be treated like slaves or that they have no value. It is simply to say the same thing we said last week, that God asks us to honor the authority in “every human institution” (2:13). Pastor and author John MacArthur explains that Peter addresses authority in three institutions—the workplace (2:18–25), the family (3:1–7), and the church (3:8–9), and that “the family is the smallest unit of social structure ordained by God.”ⁱⁱ Submission is critical to the institution of the family just as it is to these other institutions.

In Greek culture at that time (Peter was writing to both Jewish and Gentile Christians), a woman had no rights at all. She was considered property, owned by her husband in the same way he owned his sheep and goats. Under Roman law, a woman was completely at the mercy of her husband. Women were to be quiet and obedient; they were not allowed to have any kind of independent existence or mind of their own. A man could divorce his wife for any reason as long as he returned her dowry. Ancient Roman writer Cato the Censor wrote, “If you were to catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her with impunity without a trial.”ⁱⁱⁱ

That is not the kind of marriage relationship Peter is describing here, because a few verses later, Peter tells husbands to show their wives honor (v. 7). Peter describes a godly marriage as one in which women are spiritually equal to men (Galatians 3:27–28) but have a different and complementary role within the family structure. MacArthur writes, “Submission does not imply any moral, intellectual, or spiritual inferiority in the family, workplace, or society in general. But it is God’s design for roles necessary to mankind’s well-being. Along the same lines, a commanding officer is not necessarily superior in character to the troops under him, but his authority is vital to the proper functioning of the unit . . . That Peter referred specifically to their **own husbands** (appropriate emphasis added) indicates the intimacy of marriage and points out that he was not commanding women to be submissive to all men in every context.”^{iv}

Peter is discussing a very specific situation here—when a wife has become a believer, but her husband has not yet (1 Peter 3:1). In Roman culture, women were not allowed to have their own thoughts, opinions or beliefs. If a man became a Christian, he could just take his wife to church with him; she wouldn't have a choice. But if a woman became a Christian, even trying to share the Gospel with her husband may have been seen as disobedience or rebellion.^v

So, Peter tells a wife with an unbelieving husband to let her life be her witness. Agreeing with Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:13–16, he doesn't tell her to leave her husband because he isn't a believer. He doesn't tell her to correct her husband, to argue, or to preach at him. He says to love, respect, and honor him, *because he may be won over to obedience by her example* (1 Peter 3:1–2). He tells her to continue to submit to him, even if he is not obedient to God, because her godly behavior will be the most valuable witness to the truth of the Gospel.

In today's culture, a woman may feel freer to witness to her husband if he is not a believer. But even today, if your spouse is not walking with the Lord, which is going to be more effective in winning him over? Bothering them or preaching at him about it? Or being a positive witness of the right way to live while treating him with respect and love?

Q: If you are married, how can you apply this principle to situations about which you and your spouse often argue? How can you be a positive example of godly behavior rather than nag or preach at him?

Q: Whether you are married or not, how can respect, grace and love make a difference in the way you relate to unbelievers? How can your life be a witness more than your words?

Q: How does your life need to change in order to reflect "pure conduct" to the world?

1 Peter 3:3–6 [Read]

Talking Point 2: True beauty—meekness toward God—is a matter of the heart.

Q: How have you seen in your life that inner beauty is more important than outer beauty?

Q: How are humility, gentleness and submission precious to God?

Peter continues discussing voluntary, respectful submission by saying it is the "imperishable beauty" of a woman (v. 4). He compares this internal beauty to the external beauty so valued by Roman culture. The Roman consul Lucius Valerius wrote that because women couldn't hold public office or have any public occupation, they were left to devote their time to external beauty—makeup, jewelry and clothes. The Roman world at the time was much as the world is today in its obsession with external adornment. Those women who could afford it wore elaborate, expensive clothing and fine jewelry. They were particularly addicted to elaborate hairstyles, with hundreds of different ways to braid the hair, countless colors to dye it, gold

thread woven into it, and costly wigs, particularly blonde ones. The Roman poet Juvenal wrote that the women took their hair so seriously it was “as if a question of reputation or of life were at stake.” The society Peter was writing to was a world of luxury and decadence in which external beauty was one of the only ways a woman could determine her worth.^{vi}

But he tells us that in God’s eyes, true beauty comes from within. *Imperishable* beauty, the kind which never fades. The kind you cannot buy with all the money in the world and cannot lose, even if you were to suddenly go bankrupt and had to sell all your fancy jewelry and clothes. He agrees with the writer of Proverbs 31, the poem describing characteristics of a godly wife— “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain (or “fleeting” in the NIV), but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). True beauty is fear of the Lord.

Again, Peter defines this holy behavior as “doing good” (1 Peter 3:6), just as he did in our text from last week (2:20). He specifically emphasizes that, for women, beauty is a “gentle and quiet spirit” and submission to her husband in the way Sarah voluntarily and respectfully submitted to Abraham was “how the holy women ... used to adorn themselves” (3:4–6). Sarah wasn’t perfect. The way she treated Hagar wasn’t kind or loving (Genesis 21:8–21). She doubted God’s promises and even laughed at them (18:1–12). Still, Peter describes her as one who submitted to her husband’s authority even when she wasn’t sure he was doing the right thing. Pastor and author Chuck Swindoll writes, “From Sarah’s perspective, Abraham may have appeared unpredictable, devious, foolish, rash and irresponsible. In some cases, her estimation of the man would have been quite accurate!”^{vii} But Peter holds Sarah up as an example because she showed “hope in God” by obeying the husband God gave her (1 Peter 3:6).

This “gentle” and “quiet” spirit is precious to God because it shows trust in Him. These Greek words don’t mean women should be seen and not heard or should never speak their minds. It doesn’t mean women can’t be strong and bold. These words don’t describe women who are demure. They don’t describe weakness; they describe *meekness*, “that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting”^{viii}— the same kind of attitude Jesus describes when He says to not resist an evil person (Matthew 5:39) and “blessed are the meek” (5:5).^{ix}

Even if we don’t agree with everything they do, when we submit to the authority of our husbands or our bosses or other authority figures in our lives, we show that we trust the God who put them in authority over us (Romans 13:1). We make sure our own behavior is pure and godly and trust God to work out justice in the end (12:19). This can be a real exercise in humility for those of us who always feel the need to be right! But if we trust that God has a plan and that He has put us in this situation and this relationship for a reason, we can submit with humility and love. And we may be surprised, as Sarah was, to see things work out even better than if we had demanded our own way.

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Q: In what ways do you struggle to trust those in authority over you?

Q: Why is it hard to obey authority without arguing or getting your own way?

Q: In what ways do you struggle to trust God?

1 Peter 3:7 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way, showing them honor.

Q: Why does God also command husbands to show honor to their wives?

Q: How does this contrast with Roman culture at the time? How does it compare to the way husbands and wives treat each other today?

Again, Peter starts with “likewise,” connecting this passage to the two examples before it. But this “likewise” is shocking, because Peter now addresses the authority figure, the husband. This is the part where Peter really emphasizes the difference between God’s definition of submission in marriage and the Roman culture’s definition. Paul does something similar in Ephesians and Colossians. He starts with what the culture expected—submit to your authority figures (husband/wife, children/parents, slave/master), but adds that godly authority figures should also treat those under their authority with love, respect, and justice (Ephesians 5:21–33; Colossians 3:18–4:1). As MacArthur writes, “‘In the same way’ refers again to the duty of submission (1 Peter 2:13, 18; 3:1). This time it is the believing husband who submits to serve his wife. Husbands obey that duty by adhering to three basic responsibilities in caring for their wives’ needs: consideration, chivalry, and companionship.”^x

Peter is fighting against the Roman culture, which said that a woman was property and had no expectation of respect or justice. This is *not* the biblical version of submission and authority. This was one of the things that made the early Church revolutionary. It considered men and women spiritual equals, co-heirs to the kingdom of God (1 Peter 3:7; Galatians 3:28). Though men and women have different and complementary roles in marriage, they are of equal *value*. A Christian marriage is one in which a wife voluntarily submits to her husband as the leader of the family while the husband loves his wife as Christ loved the Church—sacrificially, putting her needs ahead of his own (Ephesians 5:22–29).^{xi}

Every institution must have a clear leader in order to thrive, but the best leaders are servant leaders. God clearly defines the husband as the leader of a marriage, but a godly husband will use that authority not for his own gain but for the good of his wife and family. Peter and Paul hold husbands to the same standard God used when He rebuked and pronounced judgment on the “bad shepherds of Israel” who used the flock for their own gain (Jeremiah 23; Ezekiel 34). He must be a *servant* leader, as Jesus was (Philippians 2:3–7). Peter gives husbands three obligations:

Live with your wives in an understanding way (v. 7): “Living together” refers to the intimacy of marriage. Marriage is an institution ordained and designed by God. It is a unique and special relationship. Though it does involve authority and submission, it is vastly different from the relationship of a servant and a master or an employee and a boss. A godly wife submits to her husband out of love and respect, not out of obligation. A godly husband loves and cherishes his wife. “In an understanding way” refers to a husband’s being sensitive to his wife and considering her physical and emotional needs. A godly marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and His beloved. Just as Christ put the Church’s needs ahead of His own out of humility and love, so a godly husband leads the family in a way that considers the needs of his wife.^{xii} *The Expositor’s Commentary* says, “In the context of day-to-day marital relations, this imperative is sweeping. Living with a woman ‘according to knowledge’ stands in marked contrast to living with a woman out of ‘sheer thoughtlessness’ ... this exhortation ‘constitutes a call to respect the full personhood of the woman in a marriage relationship.’”^{xiii}

Showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel (v. 7): Regarding the meaning of “weaker vessel,” MacArthur writes, “Just as submission does not imply inherent inferiority for the ones who submit, so the word ‘weaker’ does not mean the wife is intrinsically weaker in character or intellect than her husband ... or that women are spiritually inferior to men (cf. Galatians 3:28). It just means that women generally possess less physical strength than men. With that in mind, Christian husbands are the sacrificial providers and protectors of their wives.”^{xiv} *The Expositor’s Commentary* says Peter is again emphasizing a difference between a godly marriage and the way marriage worked in the Roman world. A godly husband is to honor rather than exploit his wife, the way most men did in the Roman world. “Christian faith has a revolutionary effect not only on the way men treat women but also on how they view them.”^{xv}

Since they are heirs with you of the grace of life (v. 7): This imperative verse also emphasizes the intimacy of marriage and the spiritual equality of men and women. Though the husband is the leader of the marriage, he is not of more *value*—he and his wife are co-heirs. In the Roman world, women were considered inferior, but the Christian faith “elevated the status of women so that in Christ, male and female are coequal.... They are partners in the riches and benefits of the gospel. There exists equality and complementarity within the social scheme of things.”^{xvi} Christianity redefined marriage as a special relationship of intimacy and love. MacArthur wrote, “Intimate companionship in marriage, the richest blessing of this life, was a foreign concept to the Greco-Roman culture of Peter’s day. Husbands were generally uninterested in friendship with their wives, expecting them to merely maintain the household and bear children. In

contrast, the Christian husband is to cultivate all the richness God designed into the grace of marriage."^{xvii}

Peter closes with a warning that a man who does not love his wife in this way may find that his prayers are hindered because he is not living like Christ (1 Peter 3:7). This severe result shows just how critical it is that a husband love his wife as Christ loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25).

Q: Think about all your close relationships, not just marriage, but family, friends, church, etc. How can you put others' needs ahead of your own in a practical way?

Q: If you are in any position of authority over another person, how can you be sure to honor that person, not lord your authority over him or her?

Q: Have you ever seen persons who were good examples of servant leadership? What did they do? How did they treat people? How did people respond to them?

Took

Main Point: When we live holy lives, we are a witness for Christ.

Before You Say "I Do" – This impactful course covers seven areas to help a marriage begin on a godly foundation. The topics are designed to give a biblical perspective and practical principles for marriage to couples who are seriously dating or engaged.

Foundations – *Foundations* is a Bible Fellowship for seriously dating, engaged or newly married couples and builds on the topics taught in *Before You Say, "I Do."* Couples may join this class of revolving lessons at any time.

ONE (Rediscovering God's Plan for Your Marriage) – This one-night marriage enrichment event is designed to challenge and equip you and your spouse with biblical principles to strengthen your marriage.

Mentors4Couples – *Mentors4Couples* combines Christ-centered, biblical marriage principles with applied training, helping to restore and strengthen marriages. Couples desiring help with their marriage are paired with a mentor couple and walk through designated curriculum to strengthen and enrich their marriage. The length of this dynamic mentoring program varies according to the specific needs of the couple.

Revitalize – *Revitalize* is a Bible Fellowship that walks through a one-year curriculum building on the principles taught during our ONE events and *Mentors4Couples*.

Marriage Conference – An annual marriage conference includes guest speakers and breakout sessions to encourage and equip you and your spouse for a stronger marriage.

CHALLENGES

THINK: *How can my life be a witness?* How does my behavior need to change in order to show honor, respect, and love to all people? How would showing them honor be a witness to them for Christ? How can I show unbelievers the Gospel through my actions rather than my words?

PRAY: *For those in authority over me*—that my honor and respect for their authority will be a positive witness to them. ***For those under my authority***— that I can practice servant leadership toward them and put their needs ahead of my own.

ACT: *Choose one relationship to work on this week.* It may be your marriage; it may be your relationship with your boss or an employee; it may be a friendship. Think of specific ways you

can show honor, love and respect to that person this week. Is there some behavior or habit or unhealthy thing you need to stop doing? Is there some way you can serve him or her in humility and love?

ⁱ <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/20/657770791/sears-is-fading-but-memories-of-its-mail-order-homes-endure>

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 176.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).

^{iv} John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 178.

^v William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).

^{vi} Homer A. Kent, Jr and David Dilling, *The First Epistle of Peter: A Translation and Exegetical Study* (Lafayette, IN: Kensington Theological Academy, 2014), 282.

^{vii} Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James, 1 and 2 Peter* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 200–205.

^{viii} *The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon*, Strong's #4239

^{ix} A. T. Bradford, *According to Matthew: A Commentary* (London, UK: Temple House Publishing, 2010), 39.

^x John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 181.

^{xi} Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 720.

^{xii} John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 181.

^{xiii} Daryl Charles, “1 Peter” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews - Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

^{xiv} John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 182.

^{xv} Daryl Charles, “1 Peter” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews - Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

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