

## Godly Behavior Changes Others • 1 Peter 3:1-7

Fairy tales can be a wonderful part of childhood. Perhaps the most famous line of any fairy tale is often the last line: “. . . and they lived happily ever after.” It is a wonderful view of the prince and the princess who have romantic love that lasts for eternity, a relationship that all the rest of the world admires.

When St. Peter wrote the New Testament book that bears his name he wrote it as a married man. He understood from first hand experience the importance of a good Christian marriage and he knew from his own marriage the inevitable challenges of a lifelong relationship between a man and a woman.

Peter also watched the marriages around him and observed a growing problem and opportunity occurring within his country and culture. More and more Christian women were married to pagan men. It wasn't so much that they married unbelievers as that after they were married the women came to Christian faith.

In those days men decided pretty much everything. They were the undisputed bosses around town and at home. If a man changed his religion his entire family usually converted as well. That was just the way it was. At the same time, it was virtually unthinkable that a woman would independently change her religion without the prior consent of her husband. In fact, if she did it would probably cause serious trouble in their relationship. Yet, many women were hearing the good news of Jesus Christ, believing in him and becoming devoted followers of Jesus. This often was a threat to their husbands and jeopardized their marriages.

When men became Christians they faced an equal challenge because this was contrary to the culture. From childhood men in the Roman Empire were trained to treat women poorly. It was pretty much understood that women existed solely for the benefit and pleasure of men. It was normal for a husband to be abusive at home and promiscuous away from home. It probably never even occurred to most Roman men to treat their wives with respect much less equality.

When men became Christians they discovered a whole new approach. Galatians 3:28 says that as

Christians, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” These Roman men were overwhelmed with new ways of thinking. They lived in a world of racial, social and gender distinctions. Now they were being told that there is equality between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women. All are one in Christ Jesus! Chances are they had no idea what to do. They had never before seen a Christian marriage and had few if any Christian husbands to study as examples.

With all of this as a background, Peter wrote the words of I Peter 3:1-7:

*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is why the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.*

*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as*

*the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

Peter starts out by saying, “*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands.*” He is simply continuing from what he wrote in the previous paragraphs. Peter's purpose in all he writes is to teach Christians how to live in difficult times. In I Peter 2 he argues that Christians are to be the best citizens and the best workers because he's convinced that this is a powerful tool for Christians to impact and transform the lives and the behavior of others.

***...behavior is more powerful than any spoken words.***

What he's talking about is not a passive submission but an active submission that does good. The whole idea is something of a cousin to the non-violence approach taught by Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King, Jr., in America. Therefore, Peter starts out by telling Christian wives to bring the same type of behavior that transforms governments and workplaces into their homes and marriages.

The goal of all this is to see their husbands become Christians: “. . . *if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives.*” There is something of a play on words here. It is saying that if any husband does not believe the word of God, the best way to persuade him to believe is for his Christian wife not to talk a lot. It is saying that behavior is more powerful than any spoken words.

This shows an enormous faith in the power of Christian behavior. It assumes that simply by acting Christianly we can persuade unbelievers to become Christians. We can actually keep our mouths shut and by what we do we can show other people what it means to be a Christian.

There is an underlying assumption here that every Christian is fundamentally evangelistic. That is, every Christian is on a mission to identify unbelievers and do everything possible to persuade them to follow Jesus. To be a Christian is to be a witness. To be a Christian is to be a missionary. To be a Christian is to be an evangelist. What is true for Christian wives married to unbelievers is true for every Christian everywhere.

When advising Christian wives married to unbelieving husbands it is interesting to see what Peter does not tell wives to do. He realizes that many of these women are in extremely difficult circumstances. They have become Christians. Their husbands have little respect for Christianity and don't want to go along. In fact, they don't want to give consent or permission for the conversion that has taken place. Yet she is not told to divorce her husband.

There are multiple reasons for this. Practically, Roman wives had little legal chance of divorcing their husbands. Husbands could easily divorce wives but it was virtually impossible for wives to divorce their husbands. Spiritually, the only way a wife could live a godly life to evangelize and change her husband was to stay in the marriage.

She is also not told to insist on her rights. Although the Bible is clear that women had (and have) rights that was not to be her primary emphasis be-

cause it probably wouldn't work.

And, she is not told to talk him into believing. In fact, to the contrary, it seems to be assumed that the less she says the better that is. Actions speak louder than words.

So, what is a Christian wife supposed to do? Very simply, she is supposed to be a good wife. The Christian wife is challenged here to be unselfish, pure, reverent, beautiful . . . and to pick a godly example.

Unselfish: That is what submissiveness is all about. It is putting the other person first. It is a willingness to take the number two position.

Pure: She is to be sexually moral and faithful. This may seem like an unfair expectation when so many pagan husbands were so sexually promiscuous. But the whole point is that she lives by a different standard. She is morally pure for Jesus' sake. This shows her unbelieving husband the contrast between Christianity and paganism.

Reverent: She lives all of life in awe of God. She has confidence and trust in God. She is absolutely convinced that God is good and he is engaged in everything that happens in her life and marriage. That confidence and trust in God is an impressive teacher to her husband.

Beautiful:

*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*

Hair and clothing styles change from culture to culture and generation to generation. We know from the art of the first century Roman Empire that the fashion for women of that day was to wear their hair ornately braided and decorated with expensive gold and silver combs and with jewels. If they could afford it they wore elaborately expensive dresses. One modern analyst estimates that upper class dresses cost as much as a million dollars.

To be sure, the Bible is not saying that you shouldn't braid your hair or wear jewelry or nice clothes. But it is saying that a Christian woman does not major on outward appearance. That's not what she wants to be known for. She is more concerned about her inner beauty. While she should look good on the outside, she should spend equal or greater time on the inner beauty and how she looks on the inside.

We all know examples of people who are stunning to look at but you don't want to spend much

time with them because they are obnoxious. There are others who may at first seem to be very plain but the more you get to know them the more attractive they become.

The fifth suggestion is to pick a godly example. Peter suggested Sarah from the Old Testament. Her husband was Abraham. She was stunningly beautiful but she was best known in history for being a godly woman.

Here's a way to think of what Peter is teaching. If you are a woman, what other woman would you most like to be like? If your first choice is a Hollywood celebrity you probably have the wrong answer. If your first choice is a godly Christian you probably have the right answer. The Bible's advice is to pick your examples well!

The advice to Christian husbands is only one-sixth the length of the advice given to Christian wives. So wives get six verses (I Peter 3:1-6) and husbands get one verse (I Peter 1:7). There could be a lot of different explanations for that. One possible explanation is that wives had a bigger challenge in a male-dominated culture. While that certainly was true, there is perhaps another reason. It is that Peter assumes that everything that applies to wives equally applies to husbands. It is sort of "ditto" plus some extra respect when Peter says:

*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

So, Christian wives are to influence their husbands for good—and Christian husbands are to do the same things "in the same way." That's really pretty cool when you think about it. If a husband wants to know how to treat his wife, just look at the way she treats him and do the same thing. If a wife wants to know how to treat her husband, just look at the way he treats her and do the same thing. Christian marriage is about one person teaching the other person how to be more Christian in our behavior to one another.

However, there is a special emphasis for Christian husbands. It is to "be considerate". Husbands are to work hard at becoming experts on their wives' needs, emotions, fears, dreams and expectations.

One pastor had an interesting premarital counseling routine. He would give pads and pencils to the prospective bride and groom and ask them each to write down the three things their future spouse liked best to do. The pastor said that most of the women finished in a minute or two while the men sat there trying to think of something to put down. When the lists were finally finished the women were usually right and the men were usually wrong.

That's not good enough for a Christian husband. He is to be an expert on his wife. He is to know her better than anyone else. He is to be constantly and clearly considerate of what she wants and what she needs. She is to know every day that he lives to serve her and her needs.

The Christian husband is to respect his wife. That means he listens to her and honors her opinions. He treats her with dignity and deference. He shuts up when she wants to talk. She is the most important person in his life. Although she may be poorly treated by friends, co-workers and other relatives, her husband will always treat her well.

He is to treat her well as the "weaker partner". This does not refer to being spiritually, morally or intellectually unequal. It is the recognition that most men are physically stronger than their wives. So the husband is to use his physical strength to provide for her and to protect her—but never, never to hurt her!

The Christian husband is to relate to his wife as a partner. She is his "partner" and heir "of the gracious gift of life." Husbands and wives have been given God's gift of life to share together and they are to share it as partners. Partners have strengths and weaknesses. They work together to succeed together. Partners are not perfect. They suffer losses together and celebrate successes together. Partners receive the gifts of God together like heirs splitting an inheritance.

There is one last bit of advice added by Peter that is both strange and wonderful. These are words that no Christian husband should ever miss. So, husbands, listen up:

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***Christian marriage is about one person teaching the other person how to be more Christian in our behavior to one another.***

*that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

This may reflect an expectation that husbands and wives will pray together. Prayer together as a couple is a wonderful and important experience. It brings God into the relationship and welcomes him—making their marriage strong. It binds a man and woman to a new level of intimacy even to the point of strengthening their sexual relationship with one another. Most often the success of marital prayer comes from the husband's initiative and support. If he is for it then it will work; if he won't pray with his wife it fails.

We may get a hint of Peter's own marriage and prayers from I Peter 3:7. I can't help but wonder why he wrote this. Did he know from experience that prayers to God are hindered by shabby treatment of a man's wife?

Could it be that Peter came home one day full of himself and his needs? He didn't ask how his wife was doing and didn't listen to what she had to say. His mood was lousy and his wife was hurt, but he never noticed. After all, he was exhausted from his work as an apostle. He was a saint. He was busy writing some of the New Testament. That's an important job! Surely it was more important than anything his wife did that day.

The great St. Peter left the dinner table without a smile or word of thanks. It was time for him to pray, so with great piety and self-righteousness he went out into his garden. He spoke eloquent words and asked God for divine help. But it seemed as if he was talking to himself. He knelt down but that didn't help. Becoming desperate, he laid facedown on the ground but it was just uncomfortable. Praying was more-or-less a waste of time. Peter was one of Jesus' best friends but it seemed like he was talking over a bad cell phone connection. He tried everything he could think of: theology; volume; silence; demanding; crying; shouting. Nothing helped.

What was going on? Was something the matter? He *wanted* to talk to God. And then something occurred to him. He got up off the ground and walked back into the house to talk to his wife. He apologized for the way he had treated her. He said he had been insensitive and self-absorbed. He asked for her forgiveness. Then he asked her what happened that day and how things were going with her. He gave her the most important and precious thing any of us has to give—ourselves and our time. And he listened. In fact, he decided to change his schedule, give her more time. He would make her priorities his priori-

ties. And an obvious change took place in their relationship together.

Later, perhaps before he went to sleep that night, he went back into the garden and started to pray one more time and had one of the best prayer experiences he had ever had. It was like he directly connected to God. Not only did God listen, God also answered him.

Perhaps it was the next day that Peter the husband, more than Peter the saint, sat down at his desk and wrote:

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So, what is the point of all this? Certainly it is how to be a Christian wife and how to be a Christian husband. But there is something more! The principles here are bigger and even more important than wives and husbands and marriages. These are words for all of us in all the relationships of life—in the best of times and in the worst of times. How we live can and will transform the lives of other people. Godly behavior changes others.

May you live in a way that wins other people to Jesus Christ!

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