

Message #10

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1 Peter

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LIKEWISE, WISE GUYS

1 PETER 3:7

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Several years ago Charles Colson made these observations about marriage on his Breakpoint broadcast (12/30/2008): **“It’s only natural that the enemy would seek to destroy families--- precisely because the family is God’s ordained instrument for the propagation of the human race, and a symbol of the loving fellowship within the Trinity. And the best way to destroy the family is to destroy marriage. As author Christopher West writes in *Theology of the Body Explained*, the core of the family is the ‘one flesh union of spouses.’ That is, marriage between husband and wife. West goes on to explain that when a marriage is ‘open to God’s inspiration and ordered toward love and life, it builds families and, in turn, a culture of love and life.’ West goes on to warn, however, that the first step in the disintegration of civilization--- toward a ‘culture of utility and death’--- is the devaluing of marriage. He argues, quite rightly, that as the family goes, so goes the culture. I would dare to add ‘so goes the Church.’”**

Even *Time Magazine* (7/3/2009) recognized this problem in a cover story several years ago. The author observed, **“There is no other single force causing as much measurable hardship and human misery in this country as the collapse of marriage.”** The statistics about marriage and the family seem to support this concern. In 1970 80% of all adults were married; today it is only 52%. (Breakpoint, 2/1/2018)

My conviction is that most of the time it is men who are the key to the success or failure of marriages. Scott Haltzman, a psychiatrist and Brown University professor, specializes in the study of marriages. He says, **“Eighty-five per cent of the variance in whether a marriage succeeds or fails is based on the husband’s actions and attitude.”** (*Washington Post*, 1/24/2006)

Carl Wilson wrote a fascinating little book a number of years ago entitled *Our Dance Has Turned to Death*. In it he argues this: **“...the main cause of the nation’s troubles is that many men in America have turned from the worship of God and have selfishly distorted their role in pursuit of wealth and status, giving them an overexaggerated prominence compared to the role of women. In so doing they**

have neglected their wives and children. Some women, following the values of materialism and status set by the men, have revolted against the role of wife and mother for their selfish individual rights, producing dislike, abuse, neglect and rejection of children, who become a hindering responsibility.”

The key relationship in the family unit is the husband-wife relationship. Last week we looked at what the Apostle Peter had to say about the wife’s responsibility in marriage. Today we want to focus on the husband’s responsibility.

At first glance it might seem unfair that Peter spends six verses talking about the duties of a wife--- largely focused on submission to her husband--- but only one verse talking about the responsibilities of a husband. But we need to remember the context. Peter has been talking about how Christians should live in the face of suffering. In #2 v. 13 and following he talks about the duty of Christians to submit to government. In #2 v. 18 and following he describes the responsibility of slaves to their masters. In #3 vv. 1-6 he deals with the responsibility of wives to submit to their unbelieving husbands.

Peter says nothing about the corresponding responsibilities of masters or government or other institutions. The Apostle Paul does talk about those corresponding responsibilities in his description of these relationships in Ephesians and Colossians. Here it does not fit Peter’s purpose. The apostle is focusing on the victims of suffering. The interesting thing is that Peter now interrupts this pattern. He feels that it is important to take a brief moment to mention the corresponding responsibility of Christian husbands toward their wives.

Last week we looked at how women were treated in the Ancient Near East. We saw that, with the exception of the Jews, society generally had a low view of women. Peter’s audience included both Jews and Gentiles who had converted to Christ. For the Gentiles, the notion of having any significant responsibility to one’s wife at all was a new idea.

I.

Our text says that Christian men have two primary responsibilities toward their wives. The first part of v. 7 identifies THE HUSBAND’S FIRST RESPONSIBILITY. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE HUSBAND’S 1ST RESPONSIBILITY) It is to LIVE WITH YOUR WIVES IN AN UNDERSTANDING WAY. Such is what Peter tells us in v. 7: **“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...”** Just as wives have a responsibility toward husbands, Christian husbands likewise are responsible to show their wives consideration.

A.

Let's consider THE COMMAND itself. (I. THE HUSBAND'S... A. THE COMMAND) At the very least, it would seem that this exhortation requires us to spend time with our wives. It would seem that it would require us to be cautious about employers who want us to make the company a higher priority than the family. It would seem that it is difficult to function as the leader of a family if we are seldom home.

Nick Stinnett, dean of the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, participated in something called the National Family Strengths Project. He came to the conclusion as a result of this study that strong families exhibit six characteristics (STRONG FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS): 1) commitment, 2) appreciation, 3) communication, 4) spiritual health, 5) coping skills, and 6) time together. In regard to time together, he says, **"These [strong] families eat, work, play, and talk together. When faced with outside demands on their time and energy, they eliminate obligations and involvements so that time with family is not lost."**

Ray Perkins is a football guy. He has been head coach at the New York Giants, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and the University of Alabama. After becoming head coach in Tampa Bay, he began putting in long work hours. A reporter asked him if his wife objected to his 18-hour workdays. He replied, **"I don't know. I don't see her that much."** (*LA Times*, 12/25/1987) How do you suppose that this worked out in their marriage? This will come as a shocker to you, but a couple of years later, they were divorced. (PROJECTOR OFF)

I was already involved in ministry when I got married. At the end of our first week together after our honeymoon, we realized that we had not spent one evening together. So we had to start scheduling evenings together. Fortunately this church is not overly busy with activities on weekday evenings. But sometimes we husbands and wives need to schedule time together for the benefit of our marriages. We just had a delightful couple of weeks away on vacation. We saw some people from church along the way. But we had lots of time together in our trip to Wyoming and Montana and Idaho. All of us married people need those special times together.

We are to live with our wives, Peter says, **"in an understanding way"**--- literally, in the Greek language that he uses, **"according to knowledge."** Knowledge of what? A few have suggested that Peter is talking about knowledge of God's will. But it seems to me that the context suggests that it is knowledge of our wives that is in play here.

We ought to be students of our wives--- in the sense that we learn their strengths and weaknesses and encourage their personal development. There was an article in the *New York Times Magazine* (11/7/1993) several years ago that described a wealthy businessman by the name of Sandy Weill. He served as the CEO of Primerica and then Citigroup. He also seemingly had a long and successful marriage. The author of the story made reference to the dynamics of Sandy Weill's relationship with wife Joan. He noted, **"Over the years Joan Weill has played a critical role in her husband's business dealings, particularly in her opinions of people he is considering hiring. 'She is his human voice to the world,' says Ann Bialkin, one of Joan's closest friends. 'They complement each other because she takes care of relationships and he takes care of business.'"**

Women are often more sensitive to relationships than we men are. We don't have to be as good at it as they are, but we do need to understand something about what they need and are seeking in their relationship with us. Sociologist James Q. Wilson says in his book *The Marriage Problem* (p. 62), **"Because men are more interested in activities and women more in commitments, the conversations between men and women are shot through with misunderstandings. If a woman has a problem, a man may try to solve it when in fact what the woman wants is a sounding board. When a woman expects her husband or lover to constantly reassure her that she is loved and wanted, the man is puzzled because, having said that once or twice, the matter should now be settled and not need further elaboration."**

My tendency as a man and as a husband is to try to solve a problem when my wife raises an issue. But so often what she is looking for is not necessarily a solution but a listening and sympathetic ear. Eventually she may want to deal with solutions, but not usually right away. I suspect that my wife is not unique in this.

University of Virginia sociologist Brad Wilcox has studied and written in the field of marriage and family relationships. He says, **"The biggest predictor of women's happiness is their husband's emotional engagement. The extent to which he is affectionate, to which he is empathetic, to which he is basically tuned into his wife, this is the most important factor in predicting the wife's happiness. This basically drowns out every other factor in our models."** (*Christianity Today*, Oct. 2006) Wives need our direct attention.

One other important thing that we need to understand about women is that they are often prone to depression. On average women experience depression more often and to a greater extent than do men.

Depression among men on average is less frequent and lasts for a shorter length of time. It also tends to be crisis-oriented.

James Dobson conducted a survey of Christian women between the ages of 27 and 40. In his book *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* he describes the three leading causes of depression that he found among them.

The first one was low self-esteem, a sense of inadequacy, inferiority, or low self-worth. The primary factor in this, he says, is that the traditional role of women is under attack in our society. Women who are primarily occupied at home are undervalued in our culture. How often do we see the role of mother and wife portrayed on TV as a valuable and worthwhile and glamorous profession? How often in her educational background did she see the role of mother and wife presented as an end in itself?

On the human level, the primary source of self-esteem for men is their jobs. The primary source of self-esteem for women who are mostly occupied at home is their husbands. If we are going to live with our wives in an understanding way, we have a big job to do, not only in understanding them, but also in encouraging and appreciating our wives for the job that they do and the role that they fulfill in our homes.

If they do have jobs outside of the home, we need to appreciate the added stresses that they have for doing that. Sometimes these women experience guilt and low self-esteem for falling short as the ideal mother because of their added responsibilities outside of the home. Sometimes they feel that they are falling short at work because of their added responsibilities at home.

The second leading cause of depression among women, according to Dobson, is fatigue and time pressure. This is especially true for women with young children. Men can usually go home from their jobs. Women with children have their jobs at home. Besides the significant time demand that children place upon mom, there are additional demands from husbands, from church, from friends, from the PTA, from relatives, and sometimes from another job. All of these things tire women out, put them under stress, and cause them to operate too often on the basis of guilt.

Psychologists tell us that people can tolerate stress to a considerably greater extent if they know that just one other person is aware that they are enduring it. Husbands, if we will live with our wives in an

understanding way, we will at least listen to them. We can also help them not to be overcommitted. We can help them to say “no.”

The third leading cause of depression among women is loneliness, isolation, and boredom. Again this is especially true of women with younger children. The primary factors involved here, according to Dobson, besides the demands of children themselves, are the competitiveness and sensitivity that often exist among women, the lack of outside interests, feelings of inferiority, and money problems. What we husbands can do here to show understanding is to help them to get out of the house occasionally and to show romantic love toward them.

B.

Consider then THE REASON FOR THE COMMAND. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE HUSBAND’S... A. B. THE REASON FOR...) The reason that Peter cites for this command for husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way is that the wife is “the weaker vessel.” Such a notion is certainly not politically correct today. We also know from science that there are some ways in which women are stronger than men. On average they live longer than men do. They have fewer birth defects. Studies show that females tend to survive very harsh conditions better than males do. (BBC, 1/10/2018)

So in what sense could Peter say that women, or wives, are weaker vessels? Part of the answer probably involves physical realities. About 40% of a man’s body is muscle. Only 23% of a woman’s body on average is muscle. Men tend to be bigger than women. So there are certain vulnerabilities that women will have in relationships with men. Most victims of domestic abuse are women. The “Me Too” movement has reminded us of the vulnerabilities that women have.

Whether the inspired author wants his readers to think that women are weaker in other areas, we do not know for sure. Certainly in the first century women and wives were weaker before the law and in society than were men. Such is still the case in many parts of the world. Emotionally women are more in touch with their feeling usually than we men are. But, as I pointed out a moment ago, they tend to be more susceptible to depression. Experimental psychology also says that women report higher levels of anxiety and fearfulness than men do. The task of bearing and nurturing children also creates a certain vulnerability in wives and mothers.

All of this is not to say that women are inferior to men. It means that women have vulnerabilities that deserve attention from their husbands. The original term for “vessel” in our text was used in that day for

cups and vases. A plastic mug is a durable little instrument. It can be dropped and kicked around, but it won't break. An ancient vase that came from third century China would probably be a lot weaker and certainly more fragile than a plastic mug. But it would also be more valuable. We plastic mug husbands are to treat our wives like fragile but valuable vases.

II.

We come then to THE HUSBAND'S SECOND RESPONSIBILITY. (II. THE HUSBAND'S 2ND RESPONSIBILITY...)

It is to HONOR YOUR WIVES. **"...showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."**

A.

Consider THE COMMAND itself. (II. THE HUSBAND'S... A. THE COMMAND) What does it mean to show honor to our wives? In Greek thought honor was regarded as a personal possession. To honor someone was to give of oneself.

As a start, we can exercise simple courtesy. If our wives are weaker but valuable vessels, we need to keep up with common courtesies like holding the door, opening the door, buying them flowers on appropriate occasions. We need to remember birthdays and anniversaries and Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. If we want to be kings of our castles, we need to treat our wives like queens.

We also do well to honor our wives by treating them well in public. There are few things more detrimental to marriages than criticizing our wives in public, poking fun at them, or treating them poorly in front of other people. We men may think that such behavior is good sport, but it is detrimental to our wives.

We also honor our wives when we show respect for their opinions. We will not always agree, but we can still show respect. My wife is more capable than I am in certain areas. She would be the first to tell you that I am much better in the area of finances and budgeting. The danger is that I can do all of these things without getting input from her. So honoring her means taking the time to ask for her input and opinion on financial issues in our household.

B.

(II. THE HUSBAND'S... A. B. THE FIRST REASON...) Consider then THE FIRST REASON FOR THE COMMAND. The apostle indicates that there are two reasons why husbands should grant their wives honor. The NASV translation is closer to the original text here than our English Standard Version in showing the connection between the command to honor wives and the reasons for it. The second part of v. 7 in the New American Standard Version goes like this (1 PETER 3:7B NASV): **"...and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."**

The first reason for granting wives honor is that they are fellow heirs of the grace of life. In Jewish inheritance law, as well as in Greek and Roman law, women did not usually have any legal right to receive an inheritance from their parents. Peter here says that wives are fellow heirs. They have equal rights to an inheritance.

What is this inheritance? It is called "the grace of life." What that means the text does not say. Some have suggested that the grace of life is a reference to children. Others think that it is marriage itself. I am inclined to think that it is a reference to spiritual life. (GALATIANS 3:27) In Galatians #3 vv. 27 & 28 the Apostle Paul writes, **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (GALATIANS 3:28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."**

Women who have trusted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior have equal spiritual standing before the Lord with Christian men. They have just as much right to a spiritual inheritance, to eternal rewards, and to life in heaven.

The functional role that God has given men in the marriage relationship is to serve as leaders. But in serving as leaders, we need to grant our wives honor and respect and dignity as fellow heirs of the grace of life.

C.

At the end of v. 7 Peter gives THE SECOND REASON FOR THE COMMAND. (I. THE HUSBAND'S... B. C. THE SECOND REASON...) He says that we are to honor our wives so that our prayers may not be hindered. If our relationship with our wives is not right, if we are not granting them honor, our prayers are less likely to be answered.

To not honor our wives is sin. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 66:18 (PSALM 66:18), **“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”** Not honoring our wives adversely affects our relationship with God. It hinders our communication with Him.

Robertson McQuilken (ROBERTSON MCQUILKIN) resigned as President of Columbia Bible College and Seminary in South Carolina in 1990 after 22 years of involvement with the school. Ten years earlier he had begun to notice that his wife Muriel was repeating stories that she had just finished telling. Entertaining in their home became difficult because Muriel had trouble planning menus and then preparing the food. Eventually she was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.

Mrs. McQuilken had her own radio program for women, but she became incapable of carrying on with that. She also had to stop accepting public speaking opportunities, which had previously been frequent. Her husband was occupied more and more with caring for his deteriorating wife. At one point the board of the school arranged to have a companion stay with her. But still she had a hard time being apart from her husband. She would try to walk the half mile trip to his office several times a day.

One night he found his wife’s feet bloody from her frequent walks to the campus. He told the family doctor about it, and the MD choked up. **“Such love,”** he said, **“I have a theory that the characteristics developed across the years come out at times like these.”**

Many friends of Robertson McQuilken urged him to arrange to have her institutionalized. He knew, however, that this option was not best for her--- at least at that time. So he honored his wife by resigning from the school to provide full time care for her himself.

He writes, **“When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, ‘in sickness and in health... till death do us part’? This was no grim duty to which I stoically resigned, however. It was only fair. She had, after all, cared for me for almost four decades with marvelous devotion; now it was my turn... It is all more than keeping promises and being fair, however. As I watch her brave descent into oblivion, Muriel is the joy of my life. Daily I discern new manifestations of the kind of person she is, the wife I always loved. I also see fresh manifestations of God’s love--- the God I long to love more fully.”** He was still able to write journal articles and books and to preach occasionally. Muriel passed away in 2003. Robertson passed away in 2016 at age 88.

Robertson McQuilken is a living example to us (PROJECTOR OFF) of Peter's admonition, **"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."**

The challenge for us men who have wives is to honor them and live with them in an understanding way. If we want them to submit to our leadership, we need to do our part to make it more manageable for them to do that.

Let's close this part of the service by asking several women in the congregation to pray for us husbands to fulfill our Biblical responsibility. So ladies, whether you are single or married or widowed, pray for the Christian husbands represented here. Thank the Lord for them, and ask that He would help us to grow more into the kind of men that the apostle in the text before us calls upon us to be.