Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The last two 1 Peter sermons, on our duty to government and to employers, generated quite a lot of feedback from you. And there will be a variety of reasons why that is so but no doubt a key part of it is **Peter’s emphasis on submission**. You see, ever since the Fall, which, at its core, was a failure of Adam and Eve to submit to God, the natural inclination of all humanity has been to *not* submit to lawful authority and instead to rebel and disobey. And simple evidence of this reality is how quickly very young children start saying, ‘No,’ to whatever it is that their parents tell them to do.

And so, to adult believers, who just assumed that they were free to be disrespectful and rebellious citizens, Peter said, No. “*Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution*.” And to slaves who just assumed that they were free to abandon their place as slaves, Peter said, No. “*Be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust*.” And the reason Peter needed to address these faulty assumptions is that faulty assumptions like these and the behaviour that ensues gives unbelievers reasons to reject the message of Christ. And that is a key part of Peter’s concern in this section of his letter.

Well, there is one more relationship that Peter addresses in his letter – marriage. And just as Peter needed to correct the faulty assumptions of Christian *citizens* and Christian *slaves*, he also needed to correct the faulty assumptions of Christian wives and Christian husbands. And we will see what these faulty assumptions were shortly. But congregation, instruction in the Bible about marriage is always important. And that is because many of us are married or will marry. And marriage is not easy because of sin. And marriage problems are deeply painful, and they can have enormous consequences. But conversely, God’s ideal for marriage is exquisitely beautiful. And I hope that many of us can testify to that truth. It is why I have called this sermon **magnificent marriage**. And the fact is that there is so much misery and confusion in the world in the area of relationships. People are trying anything and everything to be happy, only to find incredible pain and unhappiness. So, for the sake of our own marriages, and for the sake of our witness to the world, there is much for us all to learn from **Peter’s Christ-Focused instructions for Christian Marriage**. And the two halves of the sermon will simply be Peter’s Christ-focused instruction for **Christian wives** and Peter’s Christ-focused instruction for **Christian husbands**.

1. So, let’s begin with Peter’s Christ-focused instruction for **Christian wives**.
   1. And the first thing we need to consider is the **situation** of many of the wives that Peter originally wrote these words for, which was having **an unbelieving husband**. And we see this in Peter’s reference to some husbands “*not obey[ing] the word*,” and the possibility of them being “*won*” by the conduct of their wives. And this situation of a wife having an unbelieving husband was a very common situation in the early church. So, that means that these words have special relevance to wives today who are in the same situation.
      1. And notice that Peter **does not tell wives in this situation to leave their husbands**. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul also addressed the situation of a believer whose spouse was an unbeliever. And he is explicit there: If the unbelieving spouse wants to remain with the believing spouse, then divorce is not right. So, we can infer from Paul and Peter’s words that a common assumption in those times was that a believer should divorce the unbeliever. But this was a *faulty* assumption; they are to remain married.
   2. And before we get into the instruction proper, and see *another* faulty assumption addressed, the first word of verse 1 is of key importance: “***Likewise***.” In the NIV, it is the phrase, “*in the same way*.” So, even before Peter tells wives what they must do, he focuses their attention on what “*likewise*” refers back to. And what it refers back to is **verses 21-25** and our calling to follow the example of Christ in all our relationships. And we looked at this last week and saw that Christ submitted Himself to injustice, false accusation, and harsh treatment, including crucifixion, despite being entirely sinless. So, any believer who strives to imitate the Lord Jesus, out of love and thankfulness, and knowing that He uses it to bring sinners to faith, does something that pleases the Lord! So, all that Peter will say to wives is anchored in Christ; it will only make sense looking to Christ, it will only be possible trusting in Christ, and it will only be put into practice by the power of Christ, worked within by His Spirit. So, dear sisters, please make the things you hear today a matter of prayer; ask the Lord for wisdom and understanding and conviction and power and hope and perseverance.
   3. Well, that brings us to the instruction proper. And, looking to Christ and His example, wives are called to “***be subject to your own husbands***.”
      1. We saw with the words addressed to Christian *citizens* and Christian *slaves* that their new position of being free in Christ led to faulty assumptions about their duty as citizens and slaves. And these faulty assumptions did not reflect well on the gospel. Well, we have already seen that one faulty assumption of Christian wives with unbelieving husbands in Peter’s time was that they should divorce those husbands. But another faulty assumption was that their position in Christ meant they **no longer needed to submit to their husbands**, especially if they were unbelievers. But Peter says, No. You *are* to “*be subject to your own husbands*.”
      2. And if you have studied all the passages in the New Testament that address wives, you will know that **the basic message is the same in all of them**: Wives, be subject to, or submit to, your husbands. And the other passages do not mention unbelieving husbands. So, why this consistent command to submit to husbands?
         1. Well, way back in the **Garden of Eden**, God told Eve that a consequence of the Fall would be that submitting to her husband would be a constant area of tension for her and all her daughters.He said they would be constantly tempted to resist or push back against his leadership.
         2. So, already, there is this sinful and natural inclination to not submit. But now, on top of that, Satan was supplying wives with a ‘theological’ reason not to submit – you are free in Christ and equal in God’s sight. Who does he think he is? Tell him he can make his own dinner!
         3. So, this is why the consistent message for wives is submit to your own husbands.
      3. Now, I hasten to add, that **husbands receive a common message** in all the Bible passages that speak to husbands, because they also share a common problem, as we shall see when we come to verse 7.
      4. But regarding wives, just as there can be difficult emperors and governors that Christian citizens must still to be subject to, and just as there can be unjust masters that Christian slaves must still be subject to, there can also be unbelieving and/or difficult husbands that Christian wives must still be subject to.
         1. And in all seriousness, what I can freely admit on behalf of all husbands is that we are difficult to live with. To a greater or lesser degree, we do not make it easy for our wives to do what the Holy Spirit commands here, through Peter.
   4. So, what does being subject to your own husband look like?
      1. Well, in terms of what the text makes explicit, the first thing identified is “***respectful and pure conduct***” in **verse 2**. But the lead up to those words is important: Peter says of husbands, “*So that even if some do not obey the word, they may be* *won over without a word by the conduct of their wives*, *when they see your respectful and pure conduct*.” So, Peter is commending “*respectful and pure conduct*” and prohibiting what we could call ‘**gospel nagging**.’
         1. The Book of Proverbs says several times that a nagging or contentious or quarrelsome wife is “*like a constant dripping on a rainy day*,” and that it is “*better to live in the corner of the roof*” than with a wife like that.
         2. But the ‘gospel nagging’ in view here is when a wife tries to talk her unbelieving husband into faith through constant sharing of the gospel or telling him, again and again, that God does not approve of what he just said or did, etc, and that he should instead be doing this or that. But that is not what Christian wives with unbelieving husbands are to do.
         3. Instead, he calls them to what we could call a **silent evangelism**. He says, you can win your unbelieving husbands, or show them Christ, not by what you say but through your “*respectful and pure conduct*.”
      2. And as we continue to **verse 3**, we see more about what “*respectful and pure conduct*” looks like, as Peter speaks a few words about what a Christian wife should *not* look like! He says, “*Do not let your adorning be external- the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing- 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*.”
         1. And the problem Peter addresses here we could call ‘**gospel seducing**.’ Believing wives of Peter’s day had the idea that looking over-the-top sexy might be a good method of evangelizing their unbelieving husbands. But that is not what Christian wives with unbelieving husbands are to do.
         2. And indeed, because this is a common biblical teaching, it is not what *any* Christian woman should do.
         3. Now, just to be clear, **God is not anti-beauty**. This is not a blanket ban on jewelry or hair-spray or nice clothing. In Ezekiel 16, for example, God describes Israel has His chosen bride. And He celebrates and describes her beauty, and how He dressed her in fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth, and gave her a ring and earrings and even a crown.
         4. What is being criticized here is an **obsession** with outward beauty at the expense of pursuing and cultivating inward beauty.
         5. I typed some of these words into Google and what came up in the search results was this saying: “Beauty attracts the eye but personality captures the heart.” But notice how Peter puts it: He says in verse 4 that “*the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit [is very precious] in God’s sight*.” So, we could tweak that saying to be; Outward beauty attracts a man’s eyes, but inward beauty is very precious to God’s eyes.
         6. So, if we were to paraphrase what we read here, God is saying, wives, if you make inward beauty your propriety and focus, I will work on your husband’s heart.
         7. And these are **much needed words for today**. The message for young women from Hollywood and social media is all about looks. Have one item of clothing or one body part that doesn’t ‘fit’ with the world says is beautiful, and you will be trolled and bullied and piled on, with the whole world getting tagged so that they can all join in with the mockery. So, sisters, and especially you younger women and girls, the sooner you learn to value what in God’s sight is very precious, “*the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit*,” the better it will be for you.
      3. And if we put all of this together, the message here is that **submission to your husband will make you more beautiful to him than a nice dress or necklace**.
         1. And there could be a whole series of lectures about this point, but this is one of the chief sadnesses of feminism’s hatred of the idea of a wife submitting to her husband. Is it a guarantee of relationship bliss? No. Are there wicked husbands who abuse their wives’ submission? Yes. And I want to be clear here that that is utterly wicked. But God tells us here that in His sight it is “very precious,” and that it is far more attractive than outward beauty. So, in devaluing submission feminism has done a disservice to women.
   5. Well, to further elevate submission, Peter points wives, in **verse 5**, to “*how* *the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands*.” And then he cites the example of **Sarah**, saying that she “*obeyed Abraham, calling him lord*.” And have no fear sisters, I am not about to tell you that the Bible requires you to call your husband ‘lord,’ even though it does have a nice ring to it. Jokes! But I had read this verse many times, without giving it a lot of thought, until it occurred to me to wonder, When did Sarah call Abraham ‘lord’?
      1. Was it when Abraham came to her and said, Sarah, we are going to leave the whole family and go and live in a far-off country that I don’t even know where it is yet but the Lord will lead us there. I mean that was a pretty extreme thing to ask of his wife! Was that when she called him Lord? No.
      2. Was it the two times when Abraham told her to pretend to be his sister because he was scared he would be killed so someone could have Sarah. And both times led to Sarah ending up in a king’s Harem! Talk about extreme obedience. Was that when Sarah called him Lord? No.
      3. Was it when he took Isaac, her only son, to sacrifice him, confident that Isaac would be raised from the dead? Now, we are not told that Abraham told Sarah what he planned to do. But even if he didn’t, he would have had to explain what had happened when they got back. So before or after, it would have been an interesting husband and wife conversation! Was that when Sarah called him Lord? No.
      4. The only time that Sarah calls Abraham lord is in **Genesis 18**. That is where the Lord told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son the next year. And we are told that Sarah was listening at the tent door behind Him – kind of eavesdropping on the conversation. And we read, “*Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I am worn out and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?’*” So, she wasn’t even talking to Abraham. It was a private thought of hers. And Abraham was far from perfect as a husband. So, if ever there was a moment when she could have described him as a complete idiot or a nit-wit or a loser, it was then. No one would have known. But even when no-one else was listening, Sarah thought of her husband as her lord!
         1. And there you have the essence of submission. In Sarah’s heart, Abraham was ‘the lord’ that THE LORD had given her; he was who she was to be subject to, for the Lord’s sake.
      5. And for the Lord’s sake, looking to the example of Christ, knowing that it is precious in God’s sight, this is the attitude that each Christian wife needs to cultivate, and especially those with unbelieving husbands. He is my head because God has made him my head. I will respect him. I will appreciate what he does for our family. I will thank him for it. I will pray for him, regularly. I will strive to please him. I will not speak badly about him, even jokingly, with others. I will value his opinion and seek his permission and agreement on the things he wants to be asked about. And I will do this even when it is hard.

* 1. And I want to finish this point with a **word of encouragement** to wives. Have you noticed that in all the New Testament passages that address relationships, the one spoken to first is always the submitter? The order of address is always wife then husband, slave then master, child then parent. So, the Lord is saying, I know you are in a vulnerable position. I know you cannot do this in your own strength. I know that this is a hard pathway to tread. But it is the pathway that I trod for you. And it is the pathway that I love to honour and bless. Think of it as being entrusted with **the power of gospel submission**.
     1. And it is what the Lord has used, many times, to bring unbelieving husbands to Christ, believing husbands to a deeper godliness, and husbands and wives to a better marriage.
     2. But even if He does not do this, your meaning and purpose and joy is secure in Christ. And that is the message of the last part of **verse 6**: “*And you are [Sarah’s] children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening*.” If you fear the Lord, as a wife, by obeying your calling to be subject to your husband, He will protect your hope, He will safeguard your faith, and He will reward you in the life to come!

1. But now we need to turn our attention to verse 7 and Peter’s Christ-focused instruction for **Christian husbands**.
   1. I said earlier that husbands receive a common message in all the Bible passages that speak to husbands, because they have a common problem. Here in verse 7, it is “*live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life*.” In **Ephesians 5:25** it is “*love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*.” In **Colossians 3:19** it is “*love your wives, and do not be harsh with them*.” So, because of their position as head of the house, and because of the many rights that society afforded men, and because of their own sinful hearts, and because they are typically physically stronger than their wives, a struggle for Adam and all his sons after him has been to love their wives, to not be harsh with them, and instead to be considerate and gentle and to honour them as the weaker vessel. And I hope that all you husbands are honest enough to put your hand up and acknowledge this truth.
   2. But before we go any further with the husband’s calling, notice that Peter’s instructions begin with the same word as his instructions to wives: “**Likewise**.” So again, all that Peter will say to husbands is anchored in Christ; it will only make sense looking to Christ, it will only be possible trusting in Christ, and it will only be put into practice by the power of Christ, worked within by His Spirit. So, husbands, please make the things you hear today a matter of prayer; ask the Lord for wisdom and understanding and conviction and power to do what you are called to do.
   3. So, looking to Christ, who lay down His life for His bride, you must “*live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life*.”
      1. And let’s be clear about one thing right at the outset, this term “***weaker vessel***” is in no way some sort of sexist put-down. Both men and women are referred to as “vessels” in the Bible. It simply means that God works in and through us. And I think we all know that in general men are **physically** **stronger** than women. It is why so many people object to the idea that ‘transgender women’ can compete with biological women in sport. And I think we all also know that the emotions of women are typically more fragile than the emotions of men.
      2. But this is not a value thing, as though men are better than women because of their strength. In fact, in **1 Corinthians 1:27** we read that “*God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong*.” God values weakness and He uses it wonderfully!
      3. So, what Peter is saying here is Husbands, don’t take advantage of or trample over your wife’s physical or emotional weakness. Don’t hit her. Don’t stand over her and angrily shout at her. Don’t humiliate her. Don’t ignore her. Use your strength, instead, in her service – to help her and to protect her and to give her a sense of safety and security. Work as hard as you do at your job or your hobby to cultivate and deepen every aspect of your relationship. And don’t tell me that you would gladly die to protect her if you aren’t even willing to undo the buttons on the shirts you put in the laundry, even though she has asked you to do that many times. And never stop wanting to know her better and to talk about her hopes and dreams and her hurts and frustrations.
   4. At the end of verse 7, Peter says that Christian husbands should live with their wives in this way “***since they are heirs with you in the grace of life***.”
      1. And congregation, these are remarkable words! You see, in Peter’s day, marriage was a relationship that existed to make children legitimate or to provide security or advancement. Many men were unfaithful with prostitutes, or had a mistress, or eventually divorced their wives for a new one. They certainly did not cultivate an exclusive and intimate friendship with their wives.
      2. And sadly, the same is still true today, although it is also true that women have become more equal partners in trashing and abandoning marriage. But hoping in and out of this bed and then that bed is not a recipe for true and lasting joy; it just creates emptiness and misery, which the exploding mental health system and suicide statistics are ample evidence of.
      3. So, Peter here confronts the faulty assumption of husbands about marriage. By talking about a husband and wife as “*heirs*” in “*the grace of life*,” he calls husbands to understand that marriage is a precious gift of God. There is no other relationship like it. So, Peter says to husbands, turn your eyes to your wife! Pour yourself into knowing *her* as your best friend and lover and confidante and co-worker in life. Value *her* opinion before anyone else’s. Want to be *with her*. Maximize physical intimacy *with her*. Treasure her feelings and her instincts and her hopes, for what they are, but also because they will compliment and adjust your feelings and instincts and hopes, because that is God’s design for marriage!
   5. And to further reinforce what is at stake here, verse 7 ends with this striking warning: “*So that your prayers may not be hindered*.”
      1. Now, a good number of us men have daughters. And we have probably all said something to our daughters like, the moment boys start sniffing around, I am going to sit on the porch with a shotgun and scare them off. And of course, we were just joking, or half joking 😊 And in my case, the two young men who were not put off by this threat, and persevered, eventually had to sit down with me and ask if they could marry my daughters. And in both cases I was very happy to agree. But I did make it very clear that I expected them, as husbands, to be 1 Peter 3:7 husbands. And these things are examples of a father’s desire to have his daughters treated with love and gentleness.
      2. Well, what 1 Peter 3:7 wants husbands to understand is that **God has given us one of His daughters**. And He is so concerned that we love them that he says, If you do not, I will close My ears to your prayers. If you fail to honour her and protect her and be gentle and to cultivate this intimate friendship, I will interrupt your fellowship with Me. That is what is at stake, brothers.

Congregation, God’s ideal is magnificent marriages. Husbands and wives are sinners, and they will fail, and need to turn to the Lord for forgiveness and renewal. But if the wives among us are committed to submitting to their own husbands and the husbands among us are committed to loving their wives, and together they work to cultivate an intimate friendship, what a powerful witness that will be to the world with its messy and unhappy relationships! May God make each marriage among us and each future marriage a 1 Peter 3 marriage. Amen.

Shall we pray (marriage prayer – don’t know the author):

O God of love, you have established marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Yours was the plan, and only with you can we work it out with joy. You have said, “it is not good for a man to live alone. . . . I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now our joys are doubled, since the happiness of one is the happiness of the other; our burdens are halved, since, when we share them, we divide the load.

Bless us as husbands. Bless us as providers for the needs of those we love. Sustain us in all our struggles in the contest of life. Make us those who love our wives as Christ loved the church. May our strength be her protection, our service her delight. May we be the companion she yearns for and may our tenderness and devotion cause her to grow in her love for Christ.

Bless the wives present here today. Work in them the gift of godly submission that makes them great. Give them a deep sense of understanding and trust in You. Give them that inner beauty of soul that never fades, eternal youth that is found in holding fast to the things that never age. May she so live that we husbands may be pleased always to honour and adore her and to grow in our love for Christ.

But may we as husbands and wives never make the mistake of merely living for each other. Help us to know the blessing that belongs to those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways.

Teach us that marriage is not living for each other; it is two uniting and joining hands to serve You, the living God. Give us a great spiritual purpose in life. May we seek first the kingdom that is yours, and its righteousness, so that all other things may be added unto us. For it is in loving you best that we shall love each other all the more. And faithful unto You, faithful unto each other we will remain.

May we not expect that perfection of each other that belongs alone to You. May we minimize each other’s weaknesses, be swift to praise and magnify each other’s strengths and beauty, and see each other through a lover’s kind and patient eyes. May we be quick to forgive and may we grow in the grace of patience and love. And may we be patient with each other’s omissions and commissions just as You are with ours.

Make such assignments to us according to Your will as will bless us and develop our character as we walk together. May we never take each other’s love for granted, but always experience that breathless wonder that exclaims: “Out of all this world, you have chosen me!”

Then when life is done, and the sun is setting, may we be found, then as now, still hand in hand, still so proud, thanking you so very much for each other.

May we serve You happily, faithfully, together, until at last one shall lay the other in Your arms. This we ask through Jesus Christ, great lover of souls. Amen.