

# Christian Wives and Husbands

1 Peter 3:1-7 (text)

18 October 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

## Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Here is something I will remember for a long time...

About a year ago, early one morning when I was listening to a Christian radio station, the radio announcers invited listeners to ring in and tell about the best friendships they have ever had.

It was then that a Christian lady – an elderly widow – rang in and said, “My husband passed away two years ago. And I so miss him! But I still remember how we used to hold hands in bed every night. Yes, before we fell asleep, we would lie face-to-face holding hands. He was my best friend and hero, and I was his best friend and darling princess.”

“And,” said she, “we were so in love – perhaps not more than we were when we first met fifty years ago, but definitely richer in love!”

Well, I found that absolutely sweet – indeed, *precious* – and the sign of a deep & *time-surpassing* friendship – especially seeing that this lady and her husband were both in Christ!

Then I asked myself, “But why can all marriages not be like that one?” Or, “Why should such a deep friendship wait until the autumn of one’s marriage and life on earth?”

Is it perhaps so that a married couple should first “graduate” from their busy working lives – from paying off the mortgage, and from bringing up their children – before they could enter such an absolutely God-blessed and mature stage of married life?

That may be true!

However, may young and mid-life couples never use their busyness as excuse for not investing time & energy into their marriage!

You ask how?

Well, in His gracious loving-kindness, God has given us the words of our text (1 Pt 3:1-7).

Here is its theme (main message): Wives and husbands, do you say you’re Christian?

Well, if so, then serve one another self-sacrificially – in Christ-like manner!

Our text allows for us two main points:

- Wives
- Husbands

## Wives (1-6)

My brother & sister, Peter has already commanded two groups of oppressed Christians to submit to their oppressors:

- First, he told Christians *with no social rights* in the Roman Empire (yes, *non-citizens*) to submit<sup>1</sup> to the Emperor and his governors (v.13-17)
- Secondly, he told Christian *slaves* to submit<sup>2</sup> to their masters (v.18-25)

Why did Peter urge these two groups of Christians to submit to their oppressors?

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<sup>1</sup> For each of the three groups that Peter exhorts to submit, he uses a form of the verb *hypotassō* (ὑποτάσσω), *subject oneself, be subjected or subordinated, obey*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. previous footnote

Well, for the sake of the Gospel! Yes, as Peter says: so that when your oppressors *accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, that's what Peter told 1) the oppressed non-citizens and 2) the oppressed slaves! Now, Peter tells a *third* oppressed group to submit,<sup>4</sup> i.e. Christian wives – especially (but not exclusively) Christian wives of *unbelieving* husbands.

You see, in Peter's time, a wife was expected to profess the same religion as her husband. Here is how it worked: If the *husband* adopted the Christian faith, his wife would have to do so, too. However, if the *wife* became a Christian, her husband would consider her unfaithful to him and his pagan religion. And this would cause tension in the home.<sup>5</sup> So, Peter counsels these wives to submit to their husbands, even if their husbands make life miserable for them.

Why?

Again, *because of the gospel*. After all, *action speaks louder than words!* Yes, as v.1 says, if these Christian wives could, for the sake of the Gospel, be kind and submissive to their husbands so that their husbands could observe the chaste lives their wives live in reverence for Christ *and for their husbands*,<sup>6</sup> then their husbands who did not want to believe the Word might be won over for Christ by their wives' behaviour!<sup>7</sup>

Would it be easy for those wives?

No! But for the Gospel's sake – and to save their husbands – Peter urges them to do that!

Question: Did Peter have only the Christian wives of *unbelieving* husbands in mind when he wrote v. 1?

Well, that cannot be, for the Apostle Paul also gave the same instruction to Christian wives (Eph 5:22-23), and he gave another reason why Christian wives should submit to their husbands, i.e. *for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*<sup>8</sup> And even in our text (v.5-6) Peter reminds Christian wives how believing wives of the past – like e.g. Sarah – submitted to their *believing* husbands.<sup>9</sup>

So, God desires Christian wives to, for the sake of the Gospel, submit their husbands whether the husband is an unbeliever or not – that's a timeless truth for the Christian wife.

Now, whilst it is a timeless truth that Christian wives should submit to their own husbands, it is not a timeless truth that a Christian wife should call her husband

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Pe 2:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Footnote 1 & 2

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Kistemaker, Simon J. 2004. Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude (*In: Kistemaker, S.J. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mi : Baker Books. p.118*).

<sup>6</sup> 1 Pt 3:2 “...*when they see the purity and reverence of your lives*” (NIV84); “...*as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior*” (NASB). I understand the reverence (NIV84) or respectful behaviour (NASB) as referring to the respect the submissive wife shows to her husband (but not excluding her reverence for Christ, her Lord).

<sup>7</sup> 1 Pt 3:1-2a “*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,* <sup>2</sup> *when they see the purity and reverence of your lives*” (NIV84).

<sup>8</sup> Eph 5:22-23, *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*

<sup>9</sup> 1 Pt 3:5-6 *For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands,* <sup>6</sup> *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* (NIV84).

“Lord/Master.” After all, if a woman in our culture would call her husband “Lord/Master,” she would become the laughingstock of the town – and might even cause the spreading of the Gospel to suffer unnecessarily. So, dear sisters of Wainuiomata, I reckon your respect for your husbands will still show if you called them, “Darling” or “Honey.”

Next, (in v.6), Peter tells the wives of his churches a beautiful thing. He says, “...**and you have become her (Sarah’s) children if you do what is right without being frightened by fear.**”

Sarah’s children!

Question: In what way did the wives in Peter’s churches become children/daughters of Sarah?

Well, in the same way as all Christians became (and are called) “Children of Abraham!”<sup>10</sup> Yes, so are all Christian women daughters of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Well, so far, regarding the Christian wife’s *conduct*!

But, now, how about her appearance?

Well, in verses 3 & 4, Peter contrasts *external* beauty with *internal* beauty.

Peter warned against braided hair, gold jewellery and fine clothes. And the Apostle Paul says the same (in 1 Tim 2:9), “**Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair<sup>11</sup> and gold or pearls or costly garments.**”<sup>12</sup>

Were the Apostles Peter & Paul then totally against women dressing beautifully?

No, they simply wanted Christian wives to put the emphasis on *internal* beauty. *External* beauty should be regarded as a secondary matter to personal beauty.

So, our text wants Christian wives to not adorn themselves so as to attract attention.

And it seems that what attracted attention in those days (braided hair etc.) may not be exactly the same as what attracts attention in our day and culture! So, I trust that the Christian women of our time (also our Wainuiomata sisters) will have the discernment to know what attracts undue attention and what not.

The point is that the Christian wife is the one who, in reverence for Christ and her husband, dresses in such a way that she does not attract undue attention, but focuses on inner beauty – yes, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight!

Again, the intention is that the Christian wife will be someone who can bring an unbelieving husband to seeing God’s grace and goodness by the correct emphasis she puts on her appearance.

Quite significantly, the word for “gentle” which Peter uses here, appears only four times in the New Testament – two of which when our Lord Jesus used it to describe Himself.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cg. e.g. Gal 3:7 **Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.** (Also, cf. Gal 3:29).

<sup>11</sup> For “braided hair” Paul uses a different word to the one Peter uses. Paul uses the plural of the word *plegma* (πλέγμα), whereas Peter uses the words *emplotēs trichōn* (ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν), “braiding of hair.”

<sup>12</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Ti 2:9). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mt 11:29 **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls** (NIV84).

Mt 21:5 **“Say to the Daughter of Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,**

So, Peter exhorts wives to display the same gentle spirit which Jesus had during His earthly ministry. And it's not until she has a personal and living relationship with Jesus Christ, that she will have that true gentle/meek, self-sacrificial & submitting spirit.

What about a quiet spirit?

Well, a quiet spirit is a spirit that is not bad-tempered or argumentative.

Now, having said that, we are not saying that a Christian wife should be weak and dull. After all, gentleness or meekness is not weakness. And quietness is not the same as dullness or stupidity.

Well, we have just now looked at six verses – six of the seven verses of our text – by which Peter exhorts Christian wives to submit to their *own* husbands.

Yes, we should note: Peter adds the word “own” – “*wives... be submissive to your own husbands.*” So, Peter confines this discussion to the family unit; he does not say, “Women, submit to all men!”<sup>14</sup>

Submission!

Question: Would it be okay for a husband to *demand* submission from his wife?

No!

I love the answer an evangelical scholar has given: “I believe in a wife submitting to her husband, but I don't believe the husband ever has the right to demand it.”<sup>15</sup>

Husbands, I agree with this, for here is the best scenario: that your wife becomes so moved by your love & kindness for her, that she spontaneously bursts out in submission to (and respect) for you!

And indeed, our text exhorts Christian wives to submit to their husbands (unbelieving or believing husbands). But, boy, *how hard does a husband make it for his wife* if he is not worthy of respect & submission!!

So, here is the crunch of the matter: if a husband is so focused on the fact that his wife should submit to him – yes, up the point that she worries about it – then how will their marriage ever be on God's terms?

But rather, let him love her as Christ loves the church, and she will be moved to willingly submit to him – respect him!

Here is a true word: *When the Christian wife is seeking to love her husband with her whole being and the husband is seeking to love his wife with his whole being, the issue of submission never comes up.*<sup>16</sup>

So far, regarding point 1 “Wives”

Here is point 2 (also the last point)...

## Husbands (7)

To Christian husbands, Peter (in the Holy Spirit) gives two commands: “Live with your wives in an understanding way,” and “Show her honour!”

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*gentle and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

<sup>14</sup> I agree with Kistemaker (ibid:118).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. McKnight, S. (1996). *1 Peter* (pp. 180–198). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>16</sup> My adaptation of the words of McKnight (ibid).

Firstly: *Live with your wives in an understanding way* (NASB). The NIV84 says, “...*be considerate as you live with your wives.*”<sup>17</sup>

That means that, as husband and wife are living together, he will be neither demanding nor selfish in his marital relations. Rather, he will be considerate, sensitive to her needs, and serving.

Question: Husbands, what else does this say but that you & I will do what v.1 has told Christian wives to do – *submit*; yes, that the Christian husband will submit to the needs of his wife!?

Why?

Our text says, because, as woman, she is weaker!

What does this mean?

Well, it means that, in general (ordinarily), women are physically weaker than men. Look, is not the fact that men and women compete separately in sport, proof of this fact!?

You ask, “But what does her weaker physical built have to do with the command that he should live with her in a considerate & understanding way?”

Well, because if he does not behave Christ-like to her – yes, if he does not self-sacrificially love her and live considerately with her – but, instead he is self-serving (thinking only of number one), he could at least *physically* overpower or harm her – not to mention the mental scars he could leave her with!

In this regard, allow me to mention a few horrible statistics from more than twenty years ago when, already then there were in the USA alone...

- more than 60,000 cases of rape a year (only the ones reported)
- between 3 to 6 million women per year who were victims of some form of violence in their home
- In addition, it is women (or the elderly) who are the favourite targets of robbery and assault
- In each of these sinful & horrible acts, the prominent issue was a violent act by a man who took advantage of the fact that he is physically stronger than a woman.<sup>18</sup>

One could list more and more statistics, but I think we get the picture.

And the truth is: angry men at home may hold the greatest threat to our society regardless of how they appear in the public domain.

See why verse 7 says, “...*live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker,*<sup>19</sup> *since she is a woman ...*”?

Question: Are Christian homes free of family violence?

No, sadly not! Not all Christian homes see Christ-like behaviour. And that’s sad, because of two reasons: 1) because of those who suffer in silence; 2) because of the damage it does to the Gospel message when children at home see how actions don’t match professions of faith!

So, allow me, on the strength of v.7, to already now say to the young men and boys in our church – yes, now, even long before you are married: Don’t you ever lift up your hand against a girl, a woman, or (one day) against your wife – not even in times when there’s financial hardship and arguing! And this command also includes verbal bullying – bullying with your words, body language, and attitude!

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<sup>17</sup> The Greek literally translated reads: *live together according to knowledge/understanding* (συνικοῦντες κατὰ γνώσιν).

<sup>18</sup> For these statistics, given in 1996, cf. McKnight (ibid).

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis mine

Instead, if you say you love Jesus Christ and have a personal relationship with Him, then (as v.7) says, "...live with your wife in an understanding way" – in a considerate way, in which you submit your mind, heart and actions to her needs & energy levels!

Well, "***Be considerate as you live with your wives***" – that's the first command v.7 gives. Here's the second: "***Show her honour...***" (NASB); "***Treat her with respect...***" (NIV84). Why?

Because, as v.7 intimates, before God she is your equal! Yes, she is ***fellow heir of the grace of eternal life***. That is, just as *you* (insofar as you really have been born again) will inherit heaven, so too will your Christian wife inherit heaven.

See? Although God has given husband & wife different roles on earth, yet, *before God*, they are equal – the Christian husband and wife are co-heirs of the gracious gift of eternal life!

Yes, as Gal 3:28 says, "***There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***"<sup>20</sup>

Dear men, the husband who is considerate – yes, the one who honours his wife; yes, the one his wife so badly wants – what does he look like in practice?

Well, he is not the one *who struts around thinking that what a woman wants is a strong man, a six-foot hulk of a man – a financially successful man who drives fancy cars and wears flashy suits, yet, when he comes home and the door shuts behind him, all those fancy things disappear into a mist.*<sup>21</sup> That's *not* the considerate husband!

Instead, *here* is the husband to whom a wife responds well: The one who showers all of his attention on her all of the time – not just when he wants something; the one who calls her during the day; the one for whom she is his best friend – his number one!

Then, she also wants him to be respectable and worthy of honour – not powerful at work and weak at home; not famous in the public square but unauthoritative at home. After all, a wife knows what her husband is "really like," because there is no pretence inside the home. She *wants a man who lives a life with personal integrity in such a manner that he is justly "famous in his living room" as well as at work!*<sup>22</sup>

"Live with your wives in an understanding (considerate) manner...; show her honour..." Why?

Well, is it not true that if a husband does not live with his wife considerately and hardly respects her, he will surely find that he is unable to pray with her?

The same when a wife refuses to accept her husband's authority!

My brother & sister, God does not accept prayers which husband & wife offer in an atmosphere of strife and ongoing disputation – yes, and for the same reason as our Lord once said, "***...if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift***" (Mt 5:23-24).<sup>23</sup>

My brother & sister (married and those not yet married), do we want to have such friendship in marriage as that elderly widow had when her husband was still alive?

Well, time is short!

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<sup>20</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ga 3:28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

<sup>21</sup> My adaptation of the words of McKnight (ibid)

<sup>22</sup> McKnight (ibid)

<sup>23</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 5:23–24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

So, why will we not actively invest time & effort in our marriages? – *she* by willingly, for the sake of the Gospel, submitting to him in her conduct and appearance; and *he* by willingly, and for the sake of the Gospel, submitting to her by being considerate/understanding of her needs and by honouring/respecting her!?

AMEN (2,788 words excluding footnotes)