

## **Submit and do good, Part 2 - 1 Peter 3:1-7**

*Peter continues to explore how as Christians we are to live among those who have rejected Christ. In this passage he focuses on wives with non-Christian husbands. Once again the model is Christ. Drunk, Hunk or Monk?*

### **Is this just for wives and husbands?**

Although, I am recording this sermon early, it will first be available on 2nd August, which is my wife and mine wedding anniversary. We will have been married for 23 wonderful years.

Now, you might think that I have chosen this passage for us! After all the heading in some Bibles of 3:1-7 is 'Wives and Husbands'.

But, actually it is not really specifically for us, because as becomes clear in verse 1 and the context it is more specifically for wives of non-Christian husbands!

But, before you switch off, because you are not the wife of a non-Christian husband - hang on!

There is much for all of us to learn from this passage.

The principles are important and seeing the principles worked out in different contexts helps us apply them in ours!

We can see that Peter is working through principles to different groups with his comment at the start... 'In the same way...'

In fact he is trying to apply the model of Christ to different situations.

### **The Model of Christ**

So, let's consider this passage in the light of the principles. Principles that are modelled on Christ.

First of all let's remind ourselves what issue Peter is addressing in these passages:

How do we live as Christians in a society that has rejected God and Jesus?

And in 2:13-3:6, more specifically, how do we relate to those who are over us in the social order:

If as Christians our king is ultimately God, how are we to relate to the king?

If as Christians our boss or master is God, how are we to relate to our bosses or masters?

If as the church we are the bride of Christ, and so Christ is our husband, how are we to relate to our husbands or wives?

This is the overarching issue that Peter is addressing in 1 Peter 2:13-3:6 and at the heart of the passage is the model of Christ, who knowing that he was God, himself and the rightful ruler of the universe allowed himself to be crucified at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities of his day.

Last week we saw that there were three elements to the model of Jesus that are relevant for us as Christians and I am going to use them to look at the principles, issues and details raised by this passage.

#### **1. He submitted -**

Firstly, Jesus submitted.

That is Jesus did not retaliate to the abuse he received at the hands of the authorities. He did not even hurl abuse.

It is the call to submit to authority, even to unjust and unkind authority that is repeated throughout this passage:

2:13 - submit to every human authority

2:18 - slaves submit to your masters

3:1 - wives submit to your husbands

To many today, it is this idea of slaves and wives being told to submit that feels so counter-cultural. Indeed, this is where our culture perhaps differs most starkly with the Greco-Roman culture that Peter was writing in.

Our culture stresses individual freedom and rights, whereas the Greek philosopher stressed the need for order within households and people carrying out their roles in a proper way. They saw women and slaves as in different ways inferior to the household owner.

At first glance it seems that in telling slaves to submit to their masters and wives to submit to their husbands, he is simply re-enforcing the extreme sexist and classist attitude of his day.

However, there are three ways that Peter subverts the outlook of the day.

- a. Firstly, he addresses slaves and wives directly as people in their own right as people who have a choice about how they should live or behave. This is a radical and striking difference to the way the Greek philosophers behaved. They only wrote for the master or the man of the house. It was his job to instruct his wife or his slaves. But, Peter is going over the head of the master and speaking directly to the slaves and the wives.
- b. Secondly, he is urging a different allegiance. The Greek philosophers expected slaves and wives to have the same gods as their master.

One well-known writer of about that time said:

""A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but enjoy her husband's friends in common with him. The gods are the first and foremost friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions." (Plutarch)

But, Peter tells these wives and slaves, that their ultimate allegiance is to the God and Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. They are fundamentally slaves of God and ultimately free from the control of any human master.

- c. Thirdly, when Peter addresses husbands in verse 7, he calls on them to have a totally different attitude towards their wives. They are firstly to treat them with respect or honour them. This is the same word used in 2:17 for the attitude they should have towards the king!

What is more they are to recognise that as Christians they share the same destiny, the same gracious gift of living hope that comes from God. Jesus did not die just for men, he died for men and women. He did not give eternal life just to men, but to men and women.

In Christ there is a unity of status and value, that completely subverted the sexist, racist and classist attitudes of the society of Peter's day. Indeed, it is the influence of Christianity that has made our society value this equality of status and value so much. It is the values of Christianity that led to the banning of slavery on three different occasions through history.

Peter teaches the husbands that their wives are as valuable as them and should be treated with respect. This is despite their wives were physical weaker and in that society much lower status. That is what I think he means by the 'weaker sex'.

Peter then says: "...so that nothing will hinder your prayers." The implication is that not to honour their wives, to treat them in anyway abusively, whether physically, verbally or emotionally would be condemned by God himself.

And we need to say that this is just as true today. Any form of abuse is unacceptable and if as a Christian husband you find yourself treating your wife in that way, then can I say urgently seek help to stop that.

And we need to say, that submission to a husband does not mean accepting abuse, especially when it is possible to escape it - as it is in today's society much more than then. When Peter was abused by the Jerusalem authorities, he left Jerusalem. If as a wife you are facing abuse today, then getting yourself out of that situation is not going against Peter, it is following his example!

To submit, does not mean to allow or accept abuse that you can escape.

So what is the submission Peter is calling wives to?

I think it is ultimately, like Jesus to be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of your relationship and to serve your husband. That will mean willingly going along with decisions that your husband makes for the household, although a good husband will want to talk things through to reach a joint decision where possible and will also be looking out for your needs as much as his. But, then no husband is perfect and there will be times when you need to accept their decision even when you don't agree! That is the kind of submission Peter is talking about, because it is best for the relationship and best for your husband.

Why submit? Because although as slaves and wives are in no way inferior to their masters and husbands, as Christians we are called to live fearing God and for the good of the world.

These are the two other aspects of the model Jesus gives us.

### **He feared God**

Not only did Jesus submit, but he feared God, more than man.

It says he entrusted himself to God, who is judge. As Christians we know that God is the ultimate judge, so we live in fear of him, wanting to do what pleases him.

And it is this fear of God as judge, that is a constant refrain throughout the passage:

2:17 Fear God

2:18 slaves are told to submit in fear to God.

Think again about what Plutarch said about women not having  
But also, can you see how hard it would have been for the kind of women Peter was talking to.

Imagine you were a woman living in that society and you became a Christian, but your husband did not. You would be forced against all of Plutarch's directions - refusing to worship the gods of your husband and taking on what would have seemed like 'outlandish superstitions' to those who weren't Christians - especially in an area and at a time when Christianity seemed very new.

More than that you would want to go to meet with other Christians and treat them as friends, even though they wouldn't be the friends of your husband.

And in a society that valued order and esteemed men who kept order in their household such behaviour of their wife would have looked bad for the husband and may have lowered his status in society.

Of course having different beliefs to your husband and going to church meetings with people your husband does not really know are the kind of issues that still make it difficult for Christian women married to non-Christian men today. But in Peter's time and with the attitude of Peter's society these issues would have been more acute!

So, it would have been tough for wives and slaves to hold a different faith to their husbands and masters. Perhaps this explains what Peter means in verse 6:

"... do not give way to fear."

They need to remember who the ultimate judge is and who it is they should ultimately fear. Like Jesus on the cross, we will not be afraid of what people might do to us.

For wives under pressure from unbelieving husbands it must be very easy to give way to fear of what they might do, because of your Christian faith. Many may feel pressured into giving up their faith altogether. Yet, true fear of God will help them to hold firm under the pressure, that they might show the ultimate value of knowing Christ and the value of our hope in him.

It will be difficult to work out in practice how both to submit to your husband and yet still hold firm to your faith. That is still a big tension for many women today. But these are the two issues you need to work out how to hold together as you work through living out your faith in the context of your marriage.

### **3. He did Good**

The third thing we see from the model of Jesus, is that in his unjust suffering he does good.

Verse 24, says he bore our sins, and by our wounds we are healed. Jesus submitted in order to do good to a world that had rejected him.

And that is God's vision for the church in our world. We are to do good:

"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (1 Peter 2:12)

This is the vision that is echoed strongly in 3:1:

"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 behaviour of their wives,"

Peter's hope is that unbelieving husbands, although they might be upset with their wife's Christian faith, may become so impressed by how it makes her a better wife, that they too come to believe in Christ for themselves.

Again Peter is encouraging a transformed way of living rooted in the Christian gospel. He wants these wives to live different lives so as to make a difference to their husbands.

### **A different beauty**

He calls on them to have a different kind of beauty. Women in our world, just as in the ancient world spend vast amounts of money on clothes, make-up and jewellery to make themselves look beautiful.

Peter, however, urges them to work on a different beauty. An inner-beauty. One of purity and reverence, gentleness and humility. In the Bible these are not feminine values, these are qualities urged on all Christians! But Peter hopes that such attitudes and behaviours are not only pleasing to God, but will show to their husbands that being a Christian makes their wives into better and more beautiful people!

He hopes their inner beauty rooted in Christ will not only please God, which it will, but also their husbands.

### **A different role model**

Secondly, Peter gives the women a different role model. He talks about Abraham's wife, Sarah. She is an example as someone who obeyed her husband Abraham. In so doing she gives an example of submission that helped Abraham become the father of all who believe!

In doing this Peter is calling the women to root their outlook on life on the Bible and not Greek philosophy. To discover a different way of living in the world, a Biblical way.

One, however, not rooted in rebellion, but doing good in the hope, that their husbands would be won for Christ.

### **Conclusion:**

You may or may not be a wife of a non-Christian husband, but you may well be in contexts that involve someone in authority over you who is not a Christian. The way you work that out will involve the same principles:

submission, fear of God and doing good.

We need to be constantly working at how we apply this model of Christ to our relationships today.