

# 1Peter 3:1-12

## Living as Heirs Together

*...as being heirs together of the grace of life – v. 7*

Christianity and the ethics that spring from it have come to be regarded in our politically correct culture as oppressive to women. That God would see fit to establish a family structure that assigns headship to men and a subordinate role to women is viewed as something crude and demeaning to women, something that in our supposedly modern, enlightened times can only be viewed as barbaric. If you can picture in your mind's eye a cave man, with his club in one hand, and the hair of his wife in the other hand by which he drags her around, that pretty much captures the way orthodox Christianity is viewed today.

In Peter's day the perception would have been the very opposite. From the Global Study Bible notes there comes this remark: *Peter's statement about wives being heirs with their husbands (3:7) was revolutionary. In Roman tradition, the husband usually decided which religion his family would follow.*

We saw in our last study the difficulties that such a cultural norm would have posed to Christian wives married to non-Christian husbands. Peter tells them to submit to their husbands in 3:1, even to their pagan husbands so they might through their actions and demeanor win their husbands to Christ. There were and are, of course, certain limitations to that submission. A Christian wife would not be expected in her submission to her husband to follow him in his paganism. She must as a matter of highest priority submit first to Christ and His Word. So likewise were slaves to submit to their masters and citizens to their rulers, all under the same guideline of being submissive to Christ.

But now in v. 7 there comes this revolutionary statement that is directed to husbands with regard to how they are to treat their wives. They are to dwell with them according to knowledge – that's the first stipulation of v. 7. Then they are to honor them – that's the second stipulation. And the honor they are to bestow on their wives is of a two-fold nature. Wives are to be honored, or treated with the kind of sensitivity that recognizes them as weaker vessels, and the idea of a weaker vessel here is understood by commentators to be a reference to the physical difference between a husband and wife. Generally speaking men are physically stronger than women. And the second way they are to be honored (and this is where the revolutionary idea really comes out that would have stood in contrast to Roman culture), they are to be honored *as being heirs together of the grace of life.*

Listen to the comment of Albert Barnes on this statement by Peter:

This passage contains a very important truth in regard to the female sex. Under every other system of religion but the Christian system, woman has been regarded as in every way inferior to man. Christianity teaches that, in respect to her highest interests, the interests of religion, she is every way his equal. She is entitled to all the hopes and promises which religion imparts. She is redeemed as he is, she is addressed in the same language of tender invitation. She has the same privileges and comforts which religion imparts here, and she will be elevated to the same rank and

privileges in heaven. This single truth would raise the female sex everywhere from degradation, and check at once half the social evils of the race. Make her the equal of man in the hope of heaven, and at once she rises to her appropriate place. Home is made what it should be, a place of intelligence and pure friendship; and a world of suffering and sadness smiles under the benefactions of Christian woman.

Quite a contrast to the way Christianity is viewed today with regard to women. I think Peter's statement could make for a good wall piece to be written in some form of free hand calligraphy on a decorated background to be framed and mounted above the mantle of the fireplace of every married couple whether they be newlyweds or married for many years. I think this statement is what provides the backdrop for the roles that husbands and wives perform. In other words, the husband's headship and the wife's submission to her husband must be viewed in the broader setting of them both being *heirs together of the grace of life*.

So this is the theme I want to focus on this morning, this theme of being heirs together of the grace of life. Simply put:

## Husbands and Wives Must Live Together as Heirs of the Grace of Life

Let's think first of all on:

### I. What This Means

It means that husbands and wives are heirs, that they are given the same spiritual inheritance. Peter has referenced this inheritance in the opening verses of his epistle – back in 1:3,4 where he writes: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.*

Now in 3:7 he notes how husbands and wives are partners in this inheritance – *heirs together of the grace of life*. The particular word for *heirs* in this verse is a compound word in the Greek. It contains a prepositional prefix which according to a Greek lexicon: implies a coherence, the two who are with each other are intimately connected and goes very much further than μετά (another Greek preposition) which means being in the same place with a person.

This compound word *heirs together* occurs just 3 other times than the occurrence here in 1Pet. 3:7. Paul in Rom. 8:16,17 writes *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. And in Eph 3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.*

Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ – and fellow-heirs with the Jews. It's quite remarkable, isn't it, to think that all that Christ inherited by virtue of His life and atoning death He shares with His followers to the point of making them joint-heirs with Him. And

of course this idea of being fellow-heirs with the Jews was the concept that got the Apostle Paul into all the hot water he experienced from the Jews. They might put up with a lot from the Apostle. So before the Jewish council his fellow Pharisees would say *We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God* (Acts 23:9). But earlier in his trip to Jerusalem the mere mention of the word *Gentile* was what triggered their hostility to the point that they would have torn him to pieces had the Roman soldiers not rescued him. The Jews could not stand the idea of their inheritance being shared with the Gentiles and along comes Paul and says that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs with the Jews.

So joint-heirs with Christ, fellow-heirs with the Jews, and now Peter's point is that husbands and wives are *heirs together of the grace of life*. Peter's statement gets to the heart of what this inheritance consists of. He's very specific isn't he when he speaks of inheriting life. There's the greatest benefit to your spiritual inheritance. You inherit life – you inherit eternal life; you inherit spiritual life. Isn't that the most precious thing you could possibly inherit?

There's a tendency in our culture to despise those that inherit large sums of money. Donald Trump is a case in point. He's being criticized for a lot of things these days, understandably so. And among the criticisms being thrown at him is the criticism that he's not really that great of a business man, he's just the fortunate heir of millions of dollars. This was one of Solomon's complaints in the book of Ecclesiastes. Listen to the words of Eccles. 2:17 *Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. 19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.*

But here now is your inheritance as a Christian – something that becomes much more valuable than all the accumulated wealth this world can afford. The devil himself stated the matter correctly when in his dispute with God over Job he said in Job 2:4 *Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life*. Your inheritance consists of life. Your spouse's inheritance consists of life. Your children's inheritance, assuming they follow Christ, will consist of life. I think of that sometimes when I dwell on the fact that from a worldly perspective I'm not going to leave much behind for my children. But here's something I can leave them with – I can leave them with life by teaching them the gospel.

I remember years ago when I came through seminary and John Douglas was over from Northern Ireland lecturing for one of our modular courses. He made the remark that children are the only thing you have in this world that in a sense you are able to take with you to heaven when you leave this world. Their going to heaven is obviously a matter of them being taught and personally appropriating the truths of the gospel but the point I'm now making is that the believer's inheritance is the inheritance of life.

And would you notice that Peter refers to this inheritance as *the grace of life – as being heirs together of the grace of life*. That puts your inheritance in its proper perspective doesn't it? Whether or not a Donald Trump deserves his inherited millions might be a matter of debate and some speculation. There is no doubt about the fact that you and I don't deserve life. Man forfeited life when he fell. You and I have forfeited life by our sin. Indeed, you could argue that we forfeit life every day.

How is it, then, that you and I could inherit life? It's certainly appropriate that Peter refers to it as *the grace of life. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* (Rom. 3:23,24). And in Rom. 8:32 *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

Your forgiveness came freely; your salvation came freely; and life has come to you by way of inheritance freely. So this is your inheritance and it applies to both husband and wife. They are heirs together of the grace of life. I should before leaving this point at least mention that the application can be broadened to include those that are not married and it includes those that are widowed and it includes those whose marriages have unfortunately failed. From the broader perspective of the church we are heirs together of the grace of life.

This is what it means. Let's consider for a moment or two:

## II. How It's Practiced

*Heirs together of the grace of life* – our text says. We generally think of an inheritance as something that applies to the future and that's certainly true I think with regard to our text. It does look ahead to life down the road; indeed it looks ahead to a better life to come in a better world to come. But it also impacts us now. Paul makes reference in Eph. 1 to being sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise *which is the earnest of our inheritance* (Eph. 1:14).

You have gained eternal life now and you have gained spiritual life now and that life is to be lived to the glory of God as God Himself directs. And God has assigned to the followers of His Son the ways in which He would have them function. He would have them live in submission to Himself first and foremost.

And He would have wives submit to their husbands. He would have them cultivate the inner beauty of the hidden man of the heart, even a meek a quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price (3:4). This is, contrary to the way the world thinks, so much more important than her external appearance which is not to be slovenly but is to be simple and modest.

But the thing I want you to note with regard to our text which speaks of *being heirs together of the grace of life* is that this partnership in life is being brought to the attention of the husband. Notice that Peter does not say – *husbands and wives be mindful of the glorious truth that you are heirs together of the grace of life*. No – he directs the husband to be mindful of that truth. He tells the husband to dwell with his wife *according to*

*knowledge*. Could you not draw from that statement the application that says it's the husband's role to minister the gospel to his wife in such a way that he exalts her. He must remind her and constantly keep her focused on the truth that she is an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. He must remind her that her sins are forgiven and that she's clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He must remind her of the high price that was paid for her redemption and how she must love the Lord with all her heart and mind and soul and strength.

And when the truth of this text is lived out it will lead to the mutual ministry of the gospel between husband and wife. They are, after all, heirs together of the grace of life. The husband certainly is expected to take the lead in such a ministry but unfortunately husbands still possess carnal natures and are vulnerable to worldly wanderings and there are times when they need to be encouraged. And that doesn't necessarily mean that the wife takes it upon herself to preach to her husband (though mind you, there may be times when that's needed) but when a wife is seated in place with her Bible open in an air of expectation that her husband will lead their devotions at such a time when the husband is ready to bolt out the door because he's busy and there's other things on his mind, then hopefully the sight of his wife manifesting a meek and quiet spirit will be used by God to shoot an arrow into his heart that he's the one who's messing up and he's the one that is now forgetting that he and his wife are *heirs together of the grace of life*.

The fact, you see, that you are heirs of life and that you are currently possessors of spiritual life means your spiritual life needs to be tended to. There's a vitality to spiritual life that if left neglected leads to weakness and spiritual dearth. In our week of prayer which just took place there was an unusual amount of attention given to the church at Laodicea in Rev. 3 – you will recall that the Laodicean church was the church that was neither hot or cold but was lukewarm which in a sense made Christ sick enough to want to spit it out of His mouth. I was especially struck in those considerations about the Laodicean church with how blind and self-deceived a Christian can become.

Christ reveals, you see, what they thought of themselves. *Because thou sayest*, you get that? This is what they were thinking and saying. This was their perspective. *Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*. I dare say there are many Christians, and many Christian husbands, and many Christian fathers that pretty much think that way.

Christ goes on to say *and knowest not* – you hear that? There's something they think they know. They think they're rich and in need of nothing. What they don't know is they're *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. Could the contrast be any greater? Could self-deception be any stronger? Is such a thing really possible for a Christian? Sadly it is – possible for a Christian, possible for a husband and father, possible indeed for a church.

And in the case of a husband who becomes that way, he definitely needs the ministry of his fellow heir to the grace of life to get him back on track spiritually. I love the phrase

*grace of life* because of the way it indicates that our spiritual lives are governed by grace and the wonderful benefit to grace is that it enables you to start over again and again and again. Have you been negligent in your spiritual habits? Because of grace you can start again. Have you been careless, husbands, in leading your wives, in dwelling with them according to knowledge? Because of grace you're able to start again.

So Peter reminds husbands that they're to dwell with their wives according to knowledge and that they're to honor them as weaker vessels and as heirs together of the grace of life. The grace of life is practiced by assuming our God-given roles as husbands or wives and a part of that practice comes through the continual appropriation of grace so that when we drift or grow cold we're able to begin again.

How, then, do we live as heirs together of the grace of life? We must know what it means by knowing and appreciating just what we've inherited through Christ. And we must know how it's practiced. For the husband it's practiced by assuming his headship with the proper knowledge and sensitivity and appreciation for God's blessings not the least of which is the wife he's given you who is an heir together with you of the grace of life.

Let's think finally for a moment that if husbands and wives would live as heirs together:

### III. They Must Appreciate the Consequence of Their Failures

And here again I call your attention to the fact that husbands are the ones being addressed here. Remember what I said a moment ago – husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life but husbands are the ones singled out by Peter as those which must keep this truth in mind.

Notice how v. 7 ends - *Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

The word for *hindered* here is a word that means literally *to be cut out or cut off*. There's also a metaphorical usage of the term that I think can find ready application to Peter's case. The metaphorical usage means *to cut off occasion*. So you can see the truth of what Peter is saying from two different vantage points.

It's certainly true that from a divine perspective that husband's prayers are cut off when he grieves the Spirit of God by his failure to be sensitive toward his wife and when he treats her as if she's something less than an heir together with him of the grace of life. Chances are that under that kind of circumstance he probably doesn't even know how to pray especially if the focus of his prayers becomes his disappointment in his wife's submission without any reference to his own failure as the head of his wife and family. In such a circumstance he probably prays from the vantage point of seeing a speck in his wife's eye without seeing the beam in his own eye. When that's the case it's well that his prayers be cut off. He's not focused on the right thing.

But the statement of a man's prayers being hindered can be viewed also from a human perspective which draws its application now from the metaphorical usage of the term

which means *to cut off occasion*. And in this case it may not even be God that cuts off such a man's prayers as much as the man himself cuts off from himself occasion to pray. Spurgeon preaches a message on prayer from this text in which the first thing he says is that *this message isn't going to be for everyone today*. And the reason the message wouldn't be for everyone would be because there would be those in Spurgeon's congregation that simply didn't pray at all. In such a case you could say that they cut themselves off from occasion to pray.

Chances are if a husband has lost his spiritual sensitivity toward his wife and he fails to see and appreciate that he and his wife are heirs together of the grace of life, such a husband may have already cut himself off from prayer. Carnal Christians and worldly-minded Christians, you see, just don't devote all that much time to prayer. Prayer is a spiritual exercise that requires discipline. It's very often a battle just to get to prayer and the battle may continue while engaged in prayer and because of the challenges it can pose, prayer becomes a very easy thing to neglect when a husband isn't thinking right or isn't thinking spiritually.

So I leave you this morning with Peter's challenge, a challenge that meets every Christian but especially husbands and wives. You are, husbands and wives, heirs together of the grace of life. You are the recipients of full, free, and sovereign grace, grace that is greater than all your sin. You've received grace to restrain your sins, and grace to forgive you of your sins, and grace to empower you to overcome your sins. And you've received the grace of life which is just another way of saying that you've been born from above. You've gained a spiritual vitality that you never had when you were lost. You've gained communion with God because you've been reconciled to God through Christ.

And by God's grace you've gained life – life that came to you as a gift – the grace of eternal life. This is your glorious inheritance is Jesus Christ. Husbands, this elevates your wives. That lady you've married is a daughter of the King. Don't ever forget that. Treat her accordingly so your prayers aren't hindered and so you both go forward together in your pursuit of God's grace and the advancement of His Kingdom.