

Praying Husbands Who Honor Their Wives: 1 Peter 3:1-7
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Stacy and I have been married for almost 16 years now. Our 16th anniversary is coming up on December 18th. For some of you, 16 years may sound like a really long time. For others of you, it's a relatively short amount of time. As I think about it, time has flown by. I can recall some things from our first year of marriage, and it feels like yesterday. But I'm also realizing that we have a lot of memories. We've been through a lot together over these years, and we've grown a lot together in our marriage. We've had ups and downs. There have been times of great harmony, and times of tension.

The amazing thing about seeing the Bible's clear vision for marriage and for the specific roles of the husband and wife is that, when there is tension, we can see where the tension and disharmony is stemming from. When there's conflict, it's pretty easy to put your finger on the source of the conflict. It's sin! We're both sinners, and we're tempted to act in selfish and prideful ways. We're tempted to rebel against God's commands and God's roles for us. If I'm not leading well, or if Stacy is not following and supporting me well, then things are not going to be well in our marriage.

On the other hand, when we're conforming to God's plan, we know that God is pleased and we know that we are most happy in those times. When I'm loving my wife as Christ loved the church, and when Stacy is showing respect toward me and joyfully submitting to my leadership, there is peace and harmony and contentment and great delight in our relationship. If the Lord tarries, we look forward to many more decades of growing in this mysterious and wonderful union that God has ordained—this profound mystery, as Paul calls it, because it points to Christ's relationship with the church.

Last week we looked at the first part of this passage in 1 Peter 3. We focused on verses 1-6 which are addressed to wives. This morning we'll focus on one verse (verse 7) which is addressed to husbands. It's only one verse, but it is packed with divine insights about what it means to be a godly husband.

Let's remember the ways that this is applicable to us. For husbands, of course, it's directly applicable. For wives, you can use this as a prayer guide for how to pray for your husband. For single men who may be married someday, meditate on these characteristics and pray that God will make you this kind of man and this kind of husband. For single women who desire to be married, use this verse as a way to be discerning about a potential

husband. If there's a man who's pursuing a relationship with you, and he's not this kind of man, break off the relationship. Also for anyone who has a son, we should be teaching our sons how to honor the women around them.

Finally, we're reminded again that marriage is about Christ and the church, and therefore the things we see here about how a husband is to act toward his wife points us to Christ, the exemplary and perfect husband, who honors His bride, the church, by laying down His life for her. So even as we're thinking about the specific instructions given to husbands, we can also meditate on the wonderful news of how Christ loves and honors the church.

In verse 7 I want to examine 4 aspects of being a godly husband, a husband who honors his wife.

Knowledge

The first aspect is knowledge. Peter, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writing exactly what God intended to be written, addresses husbands and tells them "live with your wives in an understanding way." "In an understanding way" translates a prepositional phrase in the Greek that could be translated more literally, "according to knowledge." It's the Greek word, *gnosis*, meaning knowledge, understanding, comprehension. And the phrase is describing the way in which husbands should live with their wives. A husband should relate to his wife according to knowledge. Don't relate to your wife according to ignorance, but according to knowledge. It's a pretty simple point, isn't it? A pretty obvious point! Don't be ignorant. Be knowledgeable. Don't be thickheaded and stupid and dense. Be understanding. And yet many of us as husbands remain so clueless when it comes to the area of honoring our wives.

What kind of knowledge do we need, then, in order to live with our wives in an understanding way? First and foremost, we need knowledge from God. We need to understand God's design for marriage and for manhood and womanhood—the very things we've been studying the past several weeks. So many men are ignorant of these simple and clear truths of Scripture concerning God's blueprint for marriage. And that ignorance leads to all kinds of conflict and chaos. God's mandate to men is to lead their families spiritually, provide for their families financially, and love their wives sacrificially. And the man who is ignorant of that calling, or chooses to ignore that calling, will say things like, "My wife is more spiritually minded than me, therefore she can teach the kids about God." Or, "My wife is more in tune with the kids' temperaments, therefore she can take care of disciplining them." Or, "My wife has more earning potential than I do, therefore she

can go out and work.” Or, “I did a lot of really nice things for my wife when we were dating. But now we’re married.”

Those attitudes flow out of a profound ignorance concerning God’s instructions for manhood and for marriage.

Husbands need to understand God’s plan and conform to it and step up to lead and protect and provide and love the way that they should. Wherever we fall short there will be tension and disunity and discontentment, and we’ll be missing out on the joy of God’s good design.

In addition to understanding God’s plan, each husband also needs to understand his wife. A husband needs to live with his wife in a way that accords with knowledge—knowledge of God’s instructions for marriage, and knowledge of the particular woman whom God has given to him as his wife.

Men will often say, “Women are a mystery to me. They just don’t make any sense.” Let me try to encourage you this morning that there’s really only one woman you need to understand, and that’s your wife. You might say, “Well, yeah, she’s the one I’m talking about. She’s the one who’s a mystery!”

Study your wife. Study her. It’s all too easy to say you don’t understand her and attribute that to the assumption that she’s crazy, she’s unpredictable, she’s moody, she’s fickle . . . whatever. But could it be, rather, that you don’t understand her mainly because you’re not trying to understand her? In reality, you don’t pay that much attention to her. Your attitude is, “I’m not a very good listener, and my wife talks way too much anyway. That’s why it’s better for her to talk with her girlfriends.” So you fail to communicate on any kind of meaningful level with your wife. And therefore you don’t understand her.

You need to study your wife. You need to be seeking to deepen your knowledge of who she is, what makes her tick, what are her passions in life, what are her fears, what are her besetting sins and particular weaknesses, what are the temptations she faces, what brings her joy and pleasure, what are her dreams for your marriage, what are her disappointments? What makes her feel loved and cared for, what annoys her, what makes her feel stressed? These won’t all be easy conversations, and it will take patience and humility on your part.¹ But it will be more than worth it. If you haven’t taken your wife on a date lately, take her out somewhere nice, and sit down with her, look her in the eye, and really listen to her. And then do that on an ongoing basis, looking for ways each day to study your wife, thinking of questions you can ask her to find out new things about her and really listening to her.

¹ See the Ricuccis helpful comments on this passage, *Love That Lasts*, pages 37-39.

Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way. I think the best way for us to receive that as husbands is to acknowledge that we are ignorant, to a certain degree, and we need to grow in knowledge—knowledge of God and knowledge of our wives. And we should also realize that this is a most exciting adventure, and it will come with great rewards. To know God better, and to grasp His design for marriage, and to understand the woman who is your wife—growing in these ways will bring much blessing into your life. So work at it, and be consistent in working at it, and have other men in your life who are going to hold you accountable to work at this.

Honor

A second aspect of a godly husband that we see in this verse is honor. Husbands are not only called to live with their wives in an understanding way, but they are also to show honor to the woman as the weaker vessel. Now some women may bristle at that phrase “weaker vessel,” but what we should see is that it’s connected with the call for husbands to honor their wives. I think it’s simplest to understand this as a reference to the fact that women are generally weaker than men physically. If Stacy and I go to the gym and have a bench press competition, I’m going to win. And because that’s true, in our house when it’s time to move a filing cabinet or a dresser or a bed or some heavy boxes, I’m the one who does it. This doesn’t mean that every man is stronger than every woman, but it is generally true. The average man has greater physical strength than the average woman.

Now this strength differential can play itself out in two different ways. On the one hand, the man may use his greater strength in a demanding and selfish way. It is such a sad reality in this fallen world that men take advantage of women in various ways. And how do they take advantage of women? They overpower them. Men use their superior strength to intimidate women, to frighten them, and it’s in order to protect their pride and serve their selfish desires. If he can intimidate her with his strength, then she won’t question his actions or behaviors. And that’s just the way a man who is enslaved to sin wants things to be. He can go out drinking, he can neglect his responsibilities at home, he can gamble their money away, whatever he wants, and she won’t say anything because she’s scared of him.

Colossians 3:19 says, “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.” There’s a sinful tendency in men to be harsh with their wives, to use an angry tone, to threaten violence (whether that be a blatant threat or a very subtle threat). If you’ve ever been physically violent with a woman, or if you’ve even thought about it, you need to acknowledge that there’s something

profoundly wrong with you. And there needs to be serious repentance to God and confession to men in the church and accountability with those men. She is the weaker vessel, and we should never take advantage of that.

The other way that this strength differential can play out in a marriage, and the thing that it should prompt, is honor. A man can either use his strength to intimidate his wife and be demanding and selfish, or he can use his strength to honor his wife and serve her and love her. That's Peter's point. Her physical weakness should *never* be a reason to intimidate her or abuse her in any way, but rather you should see it as an opportunity to honor her, to show your love and care for her.

There's a reason God made men stronger than women, and it's not so the man could get his way all the time. "Submit to me woman, or else." That kind of attitude comes from the pit of hell, and it's an evil twisting of Scripture. Notice, by the way, that Peter doesn't tell husbands to enforce the instructions that were just given to their wives. We saw the same thing in Ephesians 5. There are instructions for wives to submit to their husbands. But it doesn't then say, "And husbands, you make sure your wives submit." No, that's not what we're told to do. What's the command? Love your wife. Honor your wife. Make sacrifices for her. Seek to understand her. Use your strength to serve her.

God didn't make men stronger as a way for men to protect their selfish desires and succeed in their selfish ambitions. Those are realities in a fallen world. *But God's design is that men are stronger so they can work hard to provide for their families and protect their families and thus honor their wives.* Men and women are so different in so many ways, and we see in those differences the blueprint of God's design for our unique roles. A man is designed to work. That's his role. He goes out into the world and he works hard so that he can put food on the table for his family and a roof over their heads.

The wife is so different, showing that she is designed for a very different task, a wonderful task. It's a task that is every bit as difficult, and is also every bit as rewarding. Her role in the marriage is to bear children and nurture those children and care for the home. As Titus 2:4 says, the younger women should be trained "to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled."

That gives a description of the general rule. There are exceptions, of course. We talked a few weeks ago about the gift of singleness. Not all women or men are going to be married, so this blueprint doesn't apply to everyone. We also know that many married couples are not able to have children, and that can be very

painful. There are also situations where a husband may be physically unable to work. It's easy to think of exceptions. Also, the description here of the woman working at home, we shouldn't take that to mean that women can never work outside the home in any capacity. When we were looking at the wisdom in Proverbs about marriage, I noted that the Proverbs 31 woman did some work outside the home while her main focus was caring for her family. So this is not an absolute and rigid rule that we're seeing in Titus 2. There are some exception.

However, I don't want the exceptions to completely obscure this wonderful ideal that is set forth in Titus 2. Generally speaking, this is the ideal that couples should pursue. A husband working hard to provide for his family. A wife giving her main attention to the children and the home.

And what I'm really eager to do in this message, in this point about husbands honoring their wives, is to highlight how important and honorable it is to work as a stay-at-home mom. So, please, if you're not a stay-at-home mom right now, please don't feel like I'm ignoring you. But I do feel strongly that this is a very good calling that God has placed on the lives of many women. And as a preacher and teacher of the Bible, I need to draw our attention to this. Because the world is sending a lot of very different messages. That's also why husbands, if your wife is at home, need to really go out of your way to honor what your wife is doing.

Remember, the husband and the wife are equal but different. And if you think these role distinctions are demeaning to women, I just want you to realize the assumptions you're making. If you think it's demeaning to say that a wife's primary role should be caring for her children and her home, then you have implicitly bought into the world's mindset that significance can only be found outside of your home in the workplace somewhere.

Dorothy Patterson is a woman who has wrestled through these issues and has a lot of godly wisdom to offer to younger wives and mothers. Listen to what she writes about how the world places such value on working outside the home and places such little value on working as a mother and homemaker. She says, "[M]uch of the world would agree that being a housekeeper is acceptable as long as you are not caring for your own home; treating men with attentive devotion would also be right as long as the man is the boss in the office and not your own husband; caring for children would even be deemed heroic service for which presidential awards could be given as long as the children are someone else's and not your own. We must not be overcome by the surrogacy of this age, which offers even a substitute womb for those so

encumbered by lofty pursuits that they cannot accept God-given roles and assignments.”²

You see the irony of the world’s mindset? There’s so much confusion and misery in the culture around us because women are being told that they need to become more like men. And now it’s going the other way as well. Men are being told that they need to become more like women.

We need to rediscover the goodness of what God sets forth in His Word. Husbands, we need to embrace our role as leader, protector, and provider, so that our wives can embrace their role as helper and mother and homemaker. And because of the unbiblical mindset pressing in on us from every side, the Christian husband needs to be especially intentional about honoring his wife’s work. If your wife is a full-time mother and homemaker, then she is involved in a most-important task that will have an eternal impact on your kids and your family as a whole. And you need to bend over backwards to show your appreciation to her.

One time when Stacy and I were in a little antique store, I saw one of those wooden placards that said, “Nobody appreciates what I do, until I don’t do it.” And I said to Stacy, you know I bet a lot of stay-at-home moms feel exactly that way. Then Stacy told me a story she had heard about a husband who came home from work one day to find the house in total disarray. He had to step over toys to get in the front door, there was left over food on the table, dirty dishes stacked in the sink. The kids were a mess. And he found his wife sitting in bed eating chocolates (maybe it was this time of year, after the kids had collected a bunch of candy from neighbors), and he said in disgust, “Honey, what’s going on?” She replied, “You’re always asking me what I did all day. Well, today I didn’t do it.” Nobody appreciates what I do, until I don’t do it.

Don’t let that be necessary in your marriage. Honor your wife by holding in very high esteem the work that she does every day to care for your family. Here are some other ways to honor your wife, and to honor her as the weaker vessel.

Another simple way to demonstrate this kind of honor is to open doors for your wife. Not that she can’t open the door for herself, but it’s a way of expressing to her, “I want to use my strength to serve you and honor you.” As the bad weather comes, scrape the ice off the car for her, shovel the sidewalk for her. Get the house projects done that need to get done.

In your role as father another way that you can honor your wife is by spanking the kids. If you have young children, then when you’re home you should be the one disciplining them. Your

² “The High Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, page 368.

wife has been dealing with them all day while you've been at work, and she's probably exhausted. And not only that, you as the husband are the head of the home and should therefore be the enforcer, the one who sets the expectations and then administers discipline when needed. And, again, because of the strength differential, the kids will probably remember a spanking from dad a little more vividly than they'll remember a spanking from mom.

A final area that I'll mention here is the family schedule. Gary Ricucci, in the book *Love That Lasts*, gives us this example along with some valuable insight. He writes, "suppose you're looking over the weekly calendar together. Yes, the next seven days are pretty tight, but it looks reasonable to you. Suddenly your wife exclaims, 'How can we possibly do all this!' What do you do at that moment? Tell her she's overreacting? Tell her she's not supporting your leadership? . . . I recommend that you not *tell* her anything. Instead, take some time to ask questions and listen. Find out what's generating her concern. Is this plan unrealistic or too ambitious? What will be going on during the days of that week? How packed has the schedule been in recent weeks? What can you cancel or postpone? . . . There's probably a reason for her response, and you'd be wise to learn what it is."³

This is part of understanding your wife and showing honor to her as the weaker vessel and loving her sacrificially.

Equality

The next aspect of being a godly husband that we learn about in this verse is equality. A godly husband will understand that his wife is equal with him in the eyes of God—equal in value and worth, equally an heir of the grace of life. This is what the next phrase in the verse says, and this is given as a basis for why we should show honor to our wives, "since they are heirs with you of the grace of life."

It strikes me when I read this that the Holy Spirit conveys these truths to us in perfect wisdom and with the perfect balance of emphasis. It has been emphasized in the earlier verses that wives are to submit to their husbands. But lest any husband take that as an indication that he is more important than his wife, or more valuable to the kingdom of God, or deserving of greater spiritual rewards, these words repudiate any such notion. It is emphatically not the case that submission implies lesser importance or lesser significance in the kingdom.

We saw in Genesis that God created male and female in his own image (Genesis 1:27). They are both equally made in the image of God. And the woman was created to be a helper fit for the man (Genesis 2:18, 20). Unlike the animals, who are not fit for

³ Page 37-38.

him, she is fit for him. She is his equal. God also demonstrated this by making the woman from a rib that he took from the side of the man. They are made of the same stuff. They are equals. And then the man exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” and then he calls her Woman, because she was taken out of Man. In all these ways we see the leadership role of the husband and the helper role of the wife, but we also see again and again the equality of the two.

And it’s the same thing we’re seeing here in 1 Peter 3. The wife is to submit to her husband, and the husband is to understand that his wife is a co-heir of the grace of life. Their distinct roles do not put them on two different levels of spiritual importance. As Galatians 3:28-29 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” Peter is making the same point. There is no priority of importance or value. We are equal in God’s sight, and we share the same inheritance.

Prayer

The final aspect of living as a godly husband is prayer. 1 Peter 3:7 concludes with a severe (and maybe surprising) warning, that the husband who fails to live with his wife in an understanding way and does not honor her as the weaker vessel, his prayers will be hindered. Falling short of one’s responsibility as a husband is not without consequences. We have to realize the implications of these commands to husbands. It is not a list of things to do if you want to have an extra special marriage, or an extra happy marriage, or if you just feel like going above and beyond the call of duty to please your wife. These things are not the icing on the cake. They are not optional add-ons.

Scripture is commanding you to be a godly husband, and these are some of the essential characteristics of being a godly husband. And this is so important to God’s plan and design for marriage, that if your relationship with your wife isn’t healthy, then your relationship with God will not be healthy. God is saying to me and to every other husband here, “If you don’t treat my daughter the way I’ve instructed you to treat her, then you have no right to come and ask for My blessing on anything that you do.” That little phrase at the end of this verse should bring a whole new weight to the way we think about our marriages, men.

Maybe some of you are experiencing these consequences right now. Maybe you feel distant from God. Maybe you feel like you don’t have any direction or any peace. Maybe you feel like your prayers are not being heard. Maybe you feel like you don’t even have any desire to pray—that’s a really scary place to be. It

has probably never occurred to you that part of the reason for your spiritual struggles and spiritual apathy could be the way you are relating to your wife. Are you harsh with her? Are you insensitive? Do you dishonor her? Do you treat her like you're more important than she is? Do you try to intimidate her?

You need to repent, because until you do God will not listen to you. God will not answer your prayers while you're trampling on His daughter and taking her for granted and dishonoring her. You need to repent, friend, for your sins against your wife, which are also sins against the Almighty God. You need to cry out to Jesus to forgive those sins and ask for His grace to change you.

Let it be clear to us from this verse (and this may be a new concept for some of you), but don't think that your marriage is a compartment of your life that is totally separate from your spiritual walk with the Lord. Maybe you think that you can have a vibrant relationship with the Lord and be passionate about Bible study and missions and theology and evangelism and prayer and service to others and counseling and whatever else, and maybe you think in the midst of all those important things you can neglect your marriage, you can neglect your wife. God's Word is telling us here, That is NOT so! If God has called you to be a married man, then your passion for Bible study and missions and theology and evangelism and prayer and service to others and counseling and everything else about your spiritual walk with the Lord is integrally linked with your marriage. And that's not to say that one must be substituted for the other. It doesn't mean that married men can't be passionate about the Lord. That's certainly not the point. But it is to say that if you're neglecting your wife, then things are not going to be truly fruitful in any of those other areas. You must honor your wife, or God will not listen to you. And He will certainly not honor you or bless you with a vibrant relationship with Him.

So be a man who lives with your wife according to knowledge, who honors her, who understands that she is your equal, and who thus prays effectively. As husbands lead and love in these ways, there will be marriages where there is peace and harmony and joy, and it's those marriages that portray in an amazing way the relationship of Christ and the church.