

Marriage in Exile (3:1-7)

Well hey, church family, good to have you tuning in this week. If we haven't had the chance to meet yet, my name is Kent and I'm one of the pastors here at City Church. If you have a bible, turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 3. As most of you know, we've been working through a series on this ancient letter called 1 Peter. And in it, Peter (the author) is trying to help his audience learn how to live within the existing relationships, systems, and social structures of their day. Peter's take is that the way followers of Jesus engage in those things, has the incredible ability to draw people to the way of Jesus. So he's giving them instructions on how to go about that.

Today, in the passage we're going to cover, Peter is going to turn his attention to the topic of marriage. So let's just read through the entire passage, like we did last week, and it'll bring up a few things that we'll then need to unpack and wrap our minds around a little. So take a look with me in chapter 3, verses 1-7:

*[1] Likewise, wives, **be subject to your own husbands** [and just like that, we're off to quite the interesting start], so that even if some do not obey the word, **they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, [2] when they see your respectful and pure conduct. [3] Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— [4] 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. [5] For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, [6] as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and **do not fear** anything that is frightening. [7] Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an **understanding** way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.***

Alrighty. So obviously, we've got just a thing or two we're going to need to unpack today. So here's how I want to go about it: **I want to start by ruling out a few things this passage is not saying.** We approach things this way a good bit around City Church, because often, we come to texts like this with all sorts of assumptions. And **sometimes those assumptions, if they aren't addressed, make it near impossible for us to hear what a text is actually saying.** So sometimes, before we can truly process what a

passage is about, we need to discuss briefly what it's *not* about. So we'll try to do these relatively quickly, but let's lay out four things this passage is *not* about:

This passage is *not* about how marriage is the point of life.

First, by addressing husbands and wives, Peter is not trying to imply that *everyone should* be married. And maybe that seems like a silly thing to clarify, but **sometimes we operate (especially in the Church), as if marriage *is* the point of life.** But it *isn't*—at least not according to the bible. Jesus—the person at the very center of our faith, who we believe all this is ultimately about—remained single his *entire* life and never so much as engaged in a romantic relationship. So **any framework that operates as if all people should be married is, in my view, distinctly un-Christian.**

So practically, for those of you who are single, as you listen to this teaching on marriage, here's how you can think about it. If you *want* to be married one day, this *applies* to you. If you don't want to get married or don't think you're supposed to get married, chances are you still have people in your life who *are* married. So one way to listen to this is to learn how you can love those people, shepherd them, and point them to Jesus as it relates to their marriage. But just for clarity, this passage is not about how marriage is the point of life, because it *isn't*. Next up...

This passage is *not* about how men are better than women.

People have often referenced passages like this one in the bible to insist that the bible promotes sexist and chauvinist behavior. Or to try and say that *all* women should be subject to *all* men: that women shouldn't be CEOs or presidents or professors. But to take that notion away from this passage is to project sexist *inclinations* back into the text. *Peter*, in this very passage, calls wives “heirs with [their husbands] of the grace of life.” That phrase in the Greek is literally is “co-heirs.” Which is significant because wives in *Peter's* day were seen as *inferior to men*, they were seen as *men's property*—they were certainly not seen as “co-heirs” with them. So to operate as if this passage is about men being superior to women is to make it say the exact *opposite* of what it would have communicated to its original audience. So *that's* not what this passage is about either. It's not about how men are better than women. Next...

This passage is not about silencing women.

It is easy to read Peter's statements about a woman's “gentle and quiet spirit” and think that he is pushing for women to just be *silent*. Which is precisely not what we need in today's world, obviously. But that, also, is to miss what Peter is saying. His instruction is to let their *adorning* “...be that of a gentle and quiet spirit.” That's not the same as saying

“don’t have an opinion or a voice.” For instance, if you’re about to go into a job interview, and my advice to you for that job interview is “make it clear to them that you are a *team player*—that you’re *agreeable* and a flexible worker”—that is not the same thing as me saying “don’t ever challenge anything the entire time you work there because you want to be agreeable.” That would be to misunderstand my advice entirely. In a similar way, Peter saying “let your *adorning* be that of a gentle and quiet spirit” is not the same thing as “never say anything.” This passage is not about silencing women. And lastly, and this one is very important to hear...

This passage is not a license for abusive behavior towards women.

You might be inclined to read these instructions to wives and think that it is leaving the door wide open for husbands to be physically and emotionally abusive towards their wives. But in order to do read it that way, you have to completely leave off the instructions to *husbands* in the passage. After everything Peter says to wives, he then says to *husbands* “live with your wives in *an understanding way*, showing *honor* to them.” So if you take away from this passage that men get to do whatever they want and women have to submit to it, you’re ignoring *half* of who the passage is *to*. That’s not what this passage is saying either: it’s not giving license for abusive behavior.

So hopefully, that at least helps rule out some things that this passage *isn’t* about. And obviously, that’s not to say that you don’t hear plenty of people trying to *make* this passage about those things, but the simple fact is that it isn’t. But with all that said, what *is* this passage about? Here’s how I think we could summarize it...

This passage is about how a *Christian* should relate to their *non-Christian spouse*, for the purpose of putting Jesus on display.

That’s what this passage is (at least *primarily*) about. Now with that, a very important clarification should probably be made. And that’s that **the bible actually tells you *not* to put yourself in that type of situation in the first place**: being a Christian married to a non-Christian. In 2 Corinthians, we read these instructions about not being “unequally yoked” with a non-believer.¹ And that would include *several* types of relationships, but certainly would include *marriage*.

¹ 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

So if you're a follower of Jesus and you are *in* a romantic relationship with someone who *isn't* a follower of Jesus, or are considering being in a relationship like that, let me just tell you what's going to happen if you continue in that relationship and marry that person. Either, 1) you will make following Jesus ten times harder than it has to be, because you are joining your life together with somebody who does not want to do that, or 2) you will just eventually decide not to follow Jesus yourself because it's just too difficult to do. One of those two things will happen. And so the bible says, "why do *either* of those two things? Just don't get into that relationship in the first place."

Now that being said, I know the pressure to be *in* a relationship is *overwhelming* in our society. And the fear of perceived lifelong loneliness seems *terrifying*. I get that. But hear me out on this: **the loneliness of being the *only person in a relationship who follows Jesus* is a far worse kind of loneliness.** Being in a marriage where your spouse has no interest in going about life the way you do, caring about the things you care about, that is far *worse* than what you're trying to avoid by being *in* a romantic relationship. So **please, take the Scriptures up on their wisdom here: do not entertain a relationship with someone who doesn't follow Jesus.** I don't want you to think that because this passage brings up that scenario, it's telling you to *pursue* that scenario. What *Peter* is doing is trying to help those *already in* an unideal situation, approach it well. That's not the same thing as telling people to go *put themselves in* an unideal situation. Hopefully that makes sense.

So in the case of Peter's audience, some of them found themselves in that situation *already*. Either because one spouse *converted* to Christianity after they were married, or because they were *unaware* of that instruction when they *got* married. So within *that* context, Peter is trying to offer them some practical instructions on a marriage between a believer and a non-believer.

Now, that does leave those of us who *aren't* in that situation (i.e. if we are a Christian *married* to another *Christian*) going, "well what does this passage have to do with *me*, then?" And the short answer is that there still are general ideas and principles that still very much apply to all of us in this passage, and we'll discover those as we go along.

So with that said, let's work back through our passage and see how all of this fits into that framework. Starting in v. 1, it says this:

[1] Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, **they may be won without a word by the conduct** of their wives [2] when they see your **respectful and pure** conduct.

So there's where I got my statement that this passage is about the relationship between a *Christian* spouse, and a *non-Christian* spouse. That is the primary scenario Peter has in mind, because he says that the *goal* is that the non-Christian husband might be "won without a word by the *conduct* of their wives."

So it's easy for *us* to read this and become hyper-focused on the parts that seem culturally out-of-sync with our society. But again here, don't miss the *provocative* nature of Peter saying what he says. **Peter wants wives to "be subject to" their husbands for the purpose of influencing their husbands.** He wants these women to be a part of shaping and molding how their husbands *think*. This was a radical notion in Peter's day. Usually, a wife was not even *permitted* to worship a different god than her husband. **Here, Peter says not only *should* the wife worship a different god, but that she should also aim to *influence* her husband towards the way of Jesus.**

And so next, he's gonna go into some things that should characterize this *influential* type of behavior. Picking it back up in v. 3:

[3] **Do not let your *adorning* be *external*—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— [4] 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.****

Okay, so let's camp out for a second here. On one level, it probably should be noted that the specific things Peter discourages here are very *cultural*. **Hair-braiding and gold jewelry communicated something very different in Peter's day than they does now.** Back then, those things were meant to show off and flaunt a person's wealth and beauty in really over-the-top types of ways. I don't know that they have exactly the same effect in *our* society today. I don't know that any of us see a woman with her hair braided and go "well *she's* really showing off—who does she think *she* is?" I doubt any of us see friends wearing a small pair of gold earrings and go "wow you're really striving to draw attention to *yourself* today!" Back then, those things drew that sort of reaction. Today they don't, or at least not nearly as much. But at the same time, the *principle* still applies.

So ladies, if I can speak directly to you for just a moment: **the world you live in will try to tell you in a hundred different ways that your value, your worth, your significance, comes from how many people you can get to glance your way.** And it will tell you that in order to accomplish that, you need the latest styles, you need the most *expensive* styles, you need to show just a little more skin, a little more cleavage. And oh, by the way, you need to keep your body looking like a Photoshopped celebrity with a full-time dietician working for them. And society will tell you that *if you do* all of those things successfully, you will get anyone and everyone to glance your way.

And then it will try to tell you that having people gaze at your body is *empowering* to you as a woman. The problem is that it's *not* empowering—it's *objectifying*. It is turning you into a thing to be looked at, rather than a person to be cherished. The notion that your value as a human being comes from your appearance is an outright *lie*, and it is *tearing its way* through women who are beautiful, valuable, image bearers of God. One of the reasons I'm so passionate about this is because about this time last year, I had a daughter. So it got even more personal for me. And even though she's only a year old, I can already feel my blood pressure rising at how early and how often she's going to have this lie communicated to her as a woman. And I know it's going to be an absolute *battle* to tell her throughout her life that *Jesus* gives her value, rather than her looks and appearance.

And I know that *part* of the reason some of you ladies struggle with this is because you *didn't* grow up in an environment that helped you *fight* that lie. You grew up where it was *reinforced* that your value came from your appearance, and I grieve over that for you. So I want you to hear *me* say today, your value has nothing to do with how you look. It has nothing to do with how you dress. It has nothing to do with what store your clothes come from. **Your value, your worth, your importance come directly from the fact that God made you, and set his affections on you before the foundations of the world, and through Jesus has made a way for you to become a daughter of the king.** And *that* type of value will not fade with age or beauty. *That* status far outranks any fleeting, temporary, magazine-cover level beauty the world might put in front of you.

And so what Peter is fighting for is for you to live out of *that* reality. That who you are is so much more important than what you look like. He's encouraging you to **make it your aim, ladies, that when people notice something about you, it isn't primarily "oh she wears cute clothes," but rather "wow, she has the character of Jesus."** And he says that *when we live as if that's true*, we show the watching world a better way

forward. And that when we live that way, God might just use it to draw people around us to himself—including an unbelieving spouse. That’s his point here.

Pause & Reflect

So quickly before we move on, let’s just consider a couple reflection questions on all of this. I’ve got one question for our *women* to consider, and a different question for our *men*.

(For Women): in what ways are you tempted to believe that your value comes from your appearance? Where is it easy for this lie to take hold in your heart? Is it in how much of your money goes towards clothes and hair products and make-up? Is it in what brands you feel like you have to wear in order to feel okay about yourself? Is it in what *size* you feel like you have to be to be? Is it in the types of photos you feel like you have to post of yourself on social media? I don’t know how it specifically reveals itself for you, but in what ways are you tempted to believe that your value comes from your appearance?

That’s the question I’d like for our *women* to consider. Now a question for *men*—because we have a responsibility in all this too...

(For Men): In what ways might you be *reinforcing* that the value of women comes from their appearance? Men: do you compliment your wife or other women on their *appearance* for more than you compliment them on their *character*? Do you mainly only spend time talking to and developing friendships with women who are attractive? Here’s another one, men: does *porn* still have any foothold in your life *at all*? Because just so we’re all clear: porn *disciples* us to value women—and people in general—based on their physical appearance. That’s what it’s *teaching* us to do every time we look at it. So for men, whatever it is, are there any ways that you can think of where you’re reinforcing this lie for women, rather than helping them fight *against* it?

There are our two questions: one for women, one for men. If you’re *watching* this, we’ll leave those up on the video, and I want you to take a second, pause the teaching, and reflect on that question. Do that now...

Okay. So when describing the type of “imperishable beauty” that women should aim for instead, he specifically mentions the “imperishable beauty of a *gentle and quiet spirit*.” Now to help discern what Peter means by this, I think it’s worth noting that the same

language is also used to describe Jesus himself. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus says “take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am *gentle* and humble in heart...” Same language there. It’s the same word Jesus uses, again, in the sermon on the mount, “*blessed* are the *meek*,” or gentle. So **in these instructions, Peter is not necessarily asking wives to embody anything that isn’t true of *men*, anything he doesn’t embody *himself*, or anything he doesn’t actually commend in *all* people.** But he is calling women *specifically* to embody this character trait of Jesus in how they relate to their husbands.

He continues on in v. 5:

*[5] For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, [6] as Sarah obeyed Abraham, **calling him lord**. And you are her children, if you do good and **do not fear** anything that is frightening.*

Okay ladies—again, some of this is cultural. So if you weren’t crazy about calling your husband “lord” after this, that’s probably okay. This is simply a reference to Genesis 18, where in a prayer, Sarah refers to her husband with a title of respect. Abraham wasn’t even *present* when she did it. But it shows us that, **even when he’s not around, Sarah speaks about her husband with honor and respect.** It reveals a heart attitude of hers where she sees him as *valuable* and *valued*—that’s what it means to *respect* someone.

So married women listening to this: I’d love to just invite you to consider for a moment, *is that how you speak about your husband, when he’s not around?* Not with the term “lord” specifically, but the posture of valuing and respecting him. So, the people that hear you talk about your marriage the most—would they take away from those conversations, “wow, she really *values* and *respects* her husband”? Is that what they would come away with? Just an idea worth considering. Now, that’s not saying you don’t ask for help from other followers of Jesus when aspects of your marriage *aren’t* going well. That doesn’t mean you have to talk about him like he’s flawless and never does anything wrong. But there is a way to talk about even issues within your marriage in a way that still *values* and *respects* your husband, rather than tearing him down and makes him look like an idiot.

Wives, if your husband needs to grow in something, you should go and talk to *him* about it like a grown-up talks to another grown up, and you invite him to grow. And *husbands*: when she does that, you respond like a grown-up responds to constructive criticism from

another grown up, and you take it to heart. You don't respond by pointing out something that she does wrong too. You don't respond with defensiveness and shirking it off. You say "thank you for bringing that up—can you tell me more?" and you get to work growing in it. That's the type *posture* that the gospel generates in you towards your wife.

And that leads us to v. 7. Because Peter is now going to pivot and turn his attention towards *husbands*. Take a look with me at v. 7:

[7] Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an *understanding* way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Peter says that *husbands* are to live with their wives in an "understanding" way. Now I don't think it's any coincidence that Peter brings up *understanding* here, considering that *understanding* is sometimes the hardest thing for husbands to do well. I'll just speak for *myself*: when my wife Ana talks to me about something difficult she's dealing with, almost always what she most wants me to is *understand*, and almost always what I most want to do is *fix* it. And my guess is that at least another person or two listening to this can relate to that sort of dynamic.

So men, a word of advice in your interactions with not just women, but all people: if someone is going through something difficult, priority #1 is *always* to understand. Always. There may *also* be times where you can help *fix* or *solve* a problem; that *may* be the case. But the first thing you should always try to do is *understand*. So just to help you with that, understanding could look like asking yourself "how would I feel if I was in this same type of scenario?" And even if the answer is that you would feel very *differently* than *they* are feeling, *then* ask yourself the question, "are there times when I have felt something similar to what they're feeling?" That's going to give you a lot to go on in terms of how to respond most helpfully. And **then, even if you do end up helping fix the problem, you can do it with understanding and empathy, which are going to make your solution ten times more helpful than it would've been otherwise.** Peter says "live with your wife in an understanding way."

Then he goes on to say that men are to show "honor to the woman as the weaker vessel." Now, for clarity, that language is referring to *physical* strength and *physical* weakness. Nothing else. It's not saying that women are weaker *emotionally* or *spiritually* or *organizationally*—it's saying that in general, women are *physically weaker* than men are. It's *also* not saying that *every* woman is weaker than *every* man. That would be a

silly assertion to make—there are women in our church that do Crossfit and could beat me up easily. Peter realizes that not every man is stronger than every woman. What Peter is saying that in general, women are smaller in stature and physically weaker than men are. That is just biology.

This is why *domestic violence* is far more of an issue coming from *men* towards *women*, than for women towards men. This is why the rates of *sexual assault* are far higher from men towards women they they are the other way around. Because there is a physical power differential there, and men far too often exploit it to horrific ends. And specifically as it relates to our passage, what's happening in those instances is that **the man is doing the polar opposite of what they're called to use their strength to do**. They're using their strength to harm rather than to protect. To hurt, rather than to help. To control rather than understand.

And so to men who act in those types of ways, Peter gives a strong warning. He says that their prayers will be *hindered*. In other words, **men: if you do not listen to your wives, God says he may not listen to you**. I want you to *feel* the intensity of that warning for just a moment. So married men listening to this: if you currently feel distant from God, if you feel *dry* spiritually, I think one of the first questions you should be asking is “how am I treating my wife?” “Am I listening to her?” “Am I living with her in an *understanding* way?” And if not, is it possible that my prayers are being hindered because I am not doing those things? That I'm not showing her honor as the weaker vessel? Obviously that's not *always* the reason for the distance between you and God, but it's always a question worth asking.

So that's it for our passage: wives, *respect* your husbands. Husbands, *honor* your wives. That's the recipe for a marriage between a believer and a non-believer, and also between followers of Jesus.

Now maybe to you, all of this just sounds so weird. Maybe to you, it seems like the focus in a marriage should just be on loving one another and staying in love, and not on all this other stuff. But that's where I think we have to remember what marriage *is* in the bible; and how different that is from what marriage *is* in our society at large. For most people in our society, the assumption is that the goal of marriage is to be *happy*. That marriage, at its core, is about two people pursuing their happiness by being together. But **according to the Scriptures, happiness is not the primary goal of marriage. It should be an effect of marriage, to be sure, but not the goal.**

The *goal* of marriage, according to the Scriptures, can be found in Ephesians 5. In this passage, Paul is also laying out some specific instructions for how a husband and wife should relate to each other, and he sort of wraps it up with this statement, found in v. 31-32:

[31] *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* [So that’s just stock biblical language to describe marriage. But then he continues with this, v. 32...] [32] *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it **refers to Christ and the church.***

Paul says that marriage “refers”—in other words, it *represents* or *points to*—the relationship between Jesus and the Church. **The point of marriage, in other words, is to show off the relationship between Jesus and his people.** That’s what marriage was designed to do. **The goal is that when people observe a marriage centered on Jesus, what they would see is a living, breathing representation of the gospel.** That those *observing* that marriage would see a picture of the grace, the patience, the understanding of Jesus. That people would see the ferocious, pursuing, relentless love of God. **Your marriage has the potential to show the world what God is like.**

And Peter’s point in our passage today is that a marriage relationship isn’t just an illustration of that to those *outside* of the marriage, but also to the *other person in the marriage.* And his belief is that God might just use that to draw the spouse who *doesn’t* believe into a relationship with Jesus as a result.

But listen, the principle is still at play if you both *already* follow Jesus. So the question can be asked in a more general way as well. Husbands and wives listening to this, consider a moment: you likely interact with your spouse more than anyone else does. So the question is *are you using those interactions to show them Jesus?* **When your spouse thinks of how Jesus loves them, does their mind easily drift to the ways you love them?** Do they think “oh I bet that is something like this”?

And if *not*, where do you need to sit down with them this week and own up to that? Where do you need to start by having the humility to admit you haven’t regularly *done* that for them and *been* that for them? One of the first steps to fixing any problem is to acknowledge that there is one. So maybe some of us need to do that in our marriages this week.

And single people, please, *don't check out* on all this. If you currently share life closely with a married couple, you may be the most unbiased source of feedback they have on their marriage. Be *willing* to have conversations with married couples, both when you see really beautiful things in their marriage, and when you see areas of needed *growth* in their marriage. Married people: have the humility to *seek* that input out from them, and single people: have the boldness to *offer* it even when they don't ask for it. This is a *community project*. We need each other if we're going to let one of the most powerful relationships there is, point to the most beautiful reality in the universe: the love of Jesus for his people.

So hopefully this all gives us some things to consider and process this week going forward. Let me pray for us as we endeavor in that.