

FIRST PETER

Lesson 14

Duties of Christian Husbands to Their Wives

1 Peter 3:7

What is the key to a Christian marriage? Is it love or communications or spiritual togetherness? Surely these things go into making a solid marriage, but the Bible says the key to a Christian marriage is the husband. As goes the man, so goes the marriage. If the husband is operating according to biblical commands and principles, his marriage will usually be alive, well and growing. Almost everyone has heard the saying, “Behind every great man there stands a great woman.” This is certainly true, but according to the Bible, “Behind every good wife there stands a godly husband.”

The secret to a successful marriage is a Christ-centered husband. In many cultures today, it is difficult for men to show their emotions or to get deeply involved in religious pursuits. Men often think it “sissy” and “childish” to read the Bible, pray or shed a tear over the spiritual condition of their own souls, their wives or their families. Yet, the failure of men to take their proper roles in marriages and families is the single greatest cause for the breakdown of marriages.

In many cultures we are experiencing, on almost every level, the reversal of male and female (wife and husband) roles. This is especially devastating to the marriage and the family, for whenever there is a reversal of husband and wife roles, there is chaos in the family. The wife becomes the leader and often the emotional and physical provider for the marriage. The result of all this for the Christian church is that there are many weak marriages and far too many divorces. Furthermore, when there is a reversal of roles, children soon come to believe that the Christian home, the Christian church and the Christian life are for females and weak men.

The Bible is very clear that the husband is the leader in a marriage and the home. God holds him responsible for the spiritual, physical, economic and emotional activities of the marriage and home. He is to give loving, intelligent leadership and direction to his wife and children.

In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter only addresses the Christian husband’s responsibility to his wife in a Christian marriage, so today we will only speak to the subject of the Christian husband’s duties to his wife.

LIVE WITH HIS WIFE ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL

“You husbands . . .”

Peter is obviously addressing Christian husbands who are married to Christian wives. Some commentators think this is speaking to Christian husbands with unsaved wives which is just the reversal of 1 Peter 3:1-6 where the duties of saved wives to their husbands are presented.

This verse says that the husband is to recognize his wife as “*a fellow-heir of the grace of life.*” This could only be a reference to a saved wife and a saved husband. Probably the reason Peter did not address the issue of the relationship of a saved husband to an unsaved wife was that this would have been a rare phenomenon in the first century culture. Usually if the man became a Christian, the wife and the family soon followed, because it was a male-centered culture.

You might notice that in 3:1-7, six times as much information is given to wives than to husbands. Now some may interpret this to mean wives are six times more in need of shaping up in a marriage than men. However, you could just as easily interpret it to mean that it is six times more difficult for wives to live with their husbands than for husbands to live with their wives.

“likewise”

Literally this is the same translation as “in the same way” in 3:1 which referred to the woman’s submission to her unsaved husband as she sought to follow the example of Christ who suffered innocently and unjustly without uttering a word. The “likewise” or “in the same way” would seem to require some kind of submission on the part of men, not to their wives but to God. If we take the very broadest interpretation of the word “submit,” it means “to take one’s proper place or position under.” Therefore, Christian husbands are to submit to God in their marriages and take their proper roles in marriage. This submission is not a giving in to their wives but a giving up of themselves to their wives. What Peter seems to be saying is when husbands are in submission to God, then they will be serving their wives. They will be taking their proper roles in marriage.

In 1 Peter 3:7 the function or role of a Christian husband seems to be based on other divine revelation about Christian husbands found primarily in the writings of the Apostle Paul. In Ephesians 5:23, Paul says, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.*”

This verse very clearly teaches that the headship in a marriage is the responsibility of the husband. This is a headship of love whereby he is to be a good leader as Christ has headship over the Church and leads it. As Christ is the sovereign and supreme authority over the Church, so the husband is the final court of appeal in the government of the home. As Christ is the Savior of the body (Church), so the man is the savior of the marriage. As the Church looks to Christ for motivation, direction and leadership, so the wife is to look to her husband for motivation, direction and leadership.

Christian husbands, do you understand clearly what tremendous responsibility has been put on your shoulders as head of a marriage? The man is the motivator and sets the pattern for all spiritual activities in the home because he is a prophet, priest and king in that home. The man sets the ethics, standards and value system in a marriage. He is the leader and is responsible to God in all things.

In Ephesians 5:25, Paul goes on to say, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*” This verse clearly balances the authority a man has over a woman. The man is the leader, but he has absolutely no right to govern her in the wrong way. He who has headship must also have heartship. The husband is to lead by love not by force. Christian husbands are not to be harsh or selfish tyrants, but they are to love.

The Bible states five times that a man is to love his wife (Eph.5:25, 28, 33; Col. 3:19). However, the Bible never tells a woman to love her husband with *agape* love, a love of commitment to do that which will benefit the loved one—even at great personal cost and even when there is no response of love. Women are never commanded to love their husbands, but men are commanded to love their wives. The younger women are told that the older women are to teach them how “to love their husbands” (Titus 2:4), but this love is *philia* love which is a love of fondness. The husband is to rule with love and he is never to abuse his authority.

To have authority and to be authoritarian are not the same. The husband is not to be a dictator. He is to love his wife so that she desires to be submissive to him. A loving husband will most likely have a wife who will gladly be submissive. Again, the key is the husband.

While a woman is to love her husband, the husband is commanded to love his wife. It is not an option. By nature it seems so much easier for a woman to love because she is such a tender, sensitive, emotional creature. Men, however, are proud, hard-hearted, and insensitive creatures. Therefore, husbands are commanded to love their wives which is against their basic nature. Often when it comes to expressing love, men are very clumsy.

God has ordained that the man should be both leader and lover. If a husband is a leader without being a lover, he is a tyrannical dictator. If he is a lover without being a leader, he will be a wishy-washy sentimentalist. The husband’s rule is to be that of a loving leader. This is biblical and practical, and it works when put into practice by faith and obedience.

LIVE WITH HIS WIFE ON A PHYSICAL LEVEL

“live with your wives in an understanding way”

Husbands are commanded to “*live (dwell) with your wives.*” In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) this word often spoke of sexual relations between husband and wife, but it seems to include more than just sexual relationships.

The thought is learning to live with one’s wife in every area. Husbands are to live with their wives “in an understanding way” which literally means “according to knowledge.”

What knowledge is Peter referring to here? He is making reference to the knowledge of Scripture. It is living with a wife according to biblical commands and principles. A husband is not to live with his wife according to base lusts as a brute, or according to passion as devils, but as a man who knows the Bible and knows his sexual duties to his wife.

“But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come

together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:2-5).

Furthermore, he knows how to live with his wife in everyday matters in a way which will please Christ.

We should note that the measure of a man’s manhood is not how much alcohol he can put away, how much money he makes, how many affairs he has had with women, how high he has gone up the ladder in his company, but how much he knows and applies the Word of God to life. Most men question their manhood at one time or another, and, believe it or not, it comes often after the age of forty. A teenage boy and man in the mid-life crisis are both struggling with manhood identity. One is trying to enter manhood and the other is trying to keep from losing it. Men over forty often wear “wild” clothes, drive fancy sports cars, cheat on their wives, divorce their wives for younger women, and try new and daring things, these in themselves are never going to prove anything. It will not make a man of any person. The measure of a man is the degree to which he knows and obeys the Word of God (1 Kings 2:2-3)..

“as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman”

A woman, according to the Apostle Peter, is the weaker vessel. This verse probably makes most women’s eyes roll. Yes, the woman is the weaker vessel. In what sense? It is certainly not intellectually, morally or spiritually, but she is obviously weaker in stature and does have limited physical capacities, making it difficult for her to endure fatigue and hard labor, and this is the primary reason she is to be protected by the man. She is more delicate, more frail; therefore the husband ought to recognize this and not make her work like a slave. It should be noted that there are some physical things a woman can do better than a man and one of them is endure pain. This probably comes through her near death experiences in bearing children.

There may also be another sense in which the woman is the weaker vessel. She may be emotionally weaker. I do not mean she is emotionally unstable, but women are more sensitive, fragile and easily broken. God has made them to be warm, loving and feeling creatures; therefore they are to be loved, protected and cared for by their husbands.

When a woman blows up, breaks out in tears and stomps out of the room saying, “I’m only important for what I do for my husband, not for what I am,” the husband knows that the woman’s confidence, respect and security in the man has been shaken. The wise, biblical husband sees this is the woman’s way of wanting the man’s love, and so he shows her tender consideration and understanding which she desperately needs. Men are to have sensitivity to their wives, but—let’s face it men—when it comes to sensitivity, many of us score three points below zero. The Proverbs say, “*Under three things the earth quakes, and under four, it cannot bear up . . . an unloved woman when she gets a husband*” (Prov. 30:21, 23).

LIVE WITH HIS WIFE ON A SPIRITUAL LEVEL

“and grant her honor”

Notice “honor” and respect are to be given to the wife, not lip and badgering. The man is to serve her and give her a place of honor. We need a little more old fashioned chivalry today. She gets into the car first and he holds the door for her. When they enter a room, she goes first. As they walk down the sidewalk, he walks on the outside for protection. (When I forget and let my wife walk on the outside, I tell her that I was walking on the inside just in case a safe might fall on her from the twentieth story of a building.)

Husbands are to show respect, courtesy, politeness and kindness. These sorts of things give security to our wives—things we did almost instinctively when we were courting them, but which we have forgotten because we have taken our wives and our marriages for granted.

A student in one of my seminary classes asked a professor what he felt the secret to his marriage was. We all expected some really superpious answer, but this is what he said, “I never stopped courting my wife.” What Peter is saying is that every husband ought to treat his wife as someone special.

A Christian wife does not want a perfect husband, but she wants a man who will be a loving leader and who will treat her with kindness, courtesy, sensitivity and respect. She wants a husband who will treat her biblically.

“as a fellow-heir of the grace of life”

A Christian husband and a Christian wife are joint-heirs of the grace of eternal life. Both are headed for heaven, their eternal inheritance. They are equal on a spiritual level. On the physical level, there are differences, but on the spiritual level there are no differences. God has made it so the Christian husband and wife come together in their approach to God.

The woman is entitled to all the hopes and promises which Christianity imparts. She has the same privileges and comforts of religion as her husband, and he is never to think of himself in any way superior to her in spiritual privilege.

Christianity is unique in its treatment of women. Under every other system of religion in the world, a woman is regarded in every way inferior to a man. Wherever the gospel has not been received, women are treated as chattels, but wherever the gospel has been received, married women become joint-heirs. Only in Christianity are women given their proper place before God and before their husbands.

Albert Barnes, in his commentaries, *Notes on the Old and New Testaments*, says,

“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 a Christian woman.”

LIVE WITH HIS WIFE ON A PRAYER LEVEL

“so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

The “your” here may refer to the prayers of husbands, but it probably means the prayers of both husbands and wives. If a husband is not living with his wife in understanding, treating her as the weaker vessel and granting her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, their prayers as husband and wife will be hindered (cut in or interrupted).

This verse clearly teaches that a husband and wife’s relationship together affects their relationship to God. The relationship between husband and wife is so fundamental that if it is ignored, it will destroy their relationship to God. Prayer is the lifeline between us and God. If a husband treats his wife unkindly, if he does not show her proper respect and affection, if there are bickerings, jealousies and contentions between them, their prayers will not be answered. A spirit of strife, irritability and unevenness of temper, harsh looks and unkind words and an unwillingness to forgive, can cause the prayers of Christian husbands and wives to get only as high as the ceiling.

Peter is saying that if a Christian husband’s prayer life is not right, he may not need to pray more; he may only need to get his life straight with his wife. A man who is insensitive to his wife is going to be insensitive to his God.

This is such a practical section of Scripture. Christian husbands and wives cannot be down on their knees together if they have their hands wrapped around one another’s throats. Have you ever tried to pray earnestly to God when you were mad at your wife? It just doesn’t work!

Christian husband, do you want to improve your prayer life and assure your wife of an effective prayer life? If you do, then right your life with the second most precious gift God ever gave you—your dear wife. God holds you responsible to treat your wife biblically.

CONCLUSION

Do you have a happy marriage? If you do not, there are undoubtedly many reasons for it, but the basic reason is that sin grips your life. If you are without Christ, you are living for self and without God. You want your marriage to center on you, and you have little or no desire to serve another. This is nothing but sin.

Christ came to die for sinners like you and to bring men and women to God. He came to bring harmony out of chaos. He can change you and your marriage if you will receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

There is a simple and sure way of having a happy marriage. It is to allow Christ and His truth to reign in your heart. With Christ in your life, though there be poverty, and disappointment, and sickness, and losses, and problems, yet there will be peace within, for there will be love for God, love for your husband or wife and a cheerful hope of a brighter world in heaven. With Christ, all things are possible. He can even restore a broken or hurting marriage.