

Christian Marriage

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 16th of June 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled Christian Marriage and is based on 1 Peter 3, verses 1-7. At the beginning, sometime at the beginning of 1992, I received a phone call from my then girlfriend.

It was a nice phone call. We'd been seeing each other earlier that day and she called up to ask whether I was enjoying the calendar that she had given me. She had bought this calendar during the day.

It was a lovely Animalia calendar and it was up on my wall. I said, yes, it was a nice calendar. It was good. She said, have you had a look through it? I said, well, I sort of flipped through it.

It's quite nice. It's a nice calendar. She said, no, have you looked through it? Have you looked in December? Oh, taking her cue, I decided I'd better have a quick look at December.

[1 : 1 1] And turning the page to December, I noticed there was a little picture drawn on the 12th of December. He had a picture of two wedding bells and a little word saying, this would be a good day for our wedding.

On the 12th of December, 1992, I was married to my wife. We've been married nearly 10 years.

When we first got married, we both came with our sets of luggage of the way that we thought that marriage should work. Very definite ideas. She came from her family and saw the way that family should be.

I'd come from my family and had the way that I thought that family should be. And so we met together. Well, like those who have been married know, there's that process of trying to work out what marriage is, how you work out marriage together.

Marriage is one of those things that we form very, very strong opinions about. We have deep-seated ideas, very deep, of the way that things should be done.

[2 : 2 1] They're drawn from our parents, our partners, our ex-partners, our good friends, all these different patterns that we see and we take them on board. So when we come to a passage like this, this passage that is before us, a passage like this is going to cause deep reaction.

It's going to cause different people to react in different ways. It is not an easy passage. Not an easy passage at all.

But as we've been working through this book of 1 Peter, this is the passage that is next. And so this is the passage we'll be preaching from today. Why don't we ask God to help us in this?

For God is the one who has created marriages. He is the one that knows what is best. And he is the one that helps us to live lives that bring him honour and glory.

So let us pray to this God now. Father, we do indeed thank you for marriages. We thank you for the great gift that they are. We pray now that as we sit under your word, help us to understand it.

[3 : 31] Help us to apply it to our lives. That we may live lives that bring honour and glory to you. We pray this in your son's name. Amen.

Well, it's important as we approach a passage like this that we understand the historical context in which it was written. So let me try and paint a picture of what wives and their roles were like back in the 1st century AD, some 60 years after Christ was born.

Women in this culture were powerless. Last week we spoke about slaves and how they were powerless. Well, wives were in a similar predicament.

They were powerless. They were treated as inferior to men. They were thought of as having no capacity of reason.

They were both mentally and physically inferior. As a result, women of the 1st century were seen as evil and a great source of temptation.

[4 : 40] Therefore, they were given no legal rights. They weren't able to vote. Children were the legal guardian of their fathers, not them.

They were dependent on their father or their husband. They could be divorced at the drop of a hat, thrown out into the street. They were made to obey.

It was their place. They were expected to follow the religion of their husband. Whatever religion the husband had, that's what the religion they were to have.

It is said in Jewish tradition, probably dating back to around this time, that a Jewish man would wake up in the morning and would thank God for many things, including the fact that he wasn't a woman.

women were treated very poorly. Very, very poorly. Peter has some advice for those who are Christian women in this society.

[5 : 49] Advice for them. It would be helpful if you had your Bibles open as we worked through this passage. It is not an easy passage and therefore it would be helpful for you to look through it, to work through it as I go through.

It is on page 985. 985, 1 Peter chapter 3, verses 1 through to 7. Let me read the first two verses.

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husband, so that even though some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your life.

If you notice right there at the beginning, Peter says, in the same way. This passage doesn't sit in isolation. It's fit into the book. And as those who have been here for the last three weeks will know that this is a particular section that this passage fits into.

It's a section where Peter is telling people, Christians, how to live in a pagan society. How were they to live in a world that did not honour God?

[7 : 02] They were living in a world of persecution and hardship. And so we see in the beginning of chapter 2, verse 11, Peter gives some beginning words of advice on how they were to live.

It's like a general statement. We see there in verse 12 that their conduct was to be honourable among the Gentiles. The Christian was to have good conduct, conduct that honoured God.

So that although that they maligned them, although they gave them a hard time, their honourable deeds would glorify God when he came to judge or when he came to visit them. The purpose was that they were to have good conduct.

And over the last three weeks we've seen that that good conduct took itself in the shape in verses 13 through to 17 in the way that people were to submit to the civil authority of the day.

They were to submit to it. In verses 18 through to 25 last week we saw that slaves were to submit to their masters. This was good conduct. We saw also last week that they were to do that even though they were harsh, treated harshly because they were to follow Christ's example.

[8 : 17] Christ was the example for them to follow in the way that they lived their lives. He lived a life where he was abused and eventually died on a cross.

He didn't retaliate. He didn't take revenge. He suffered on the cross that those that trust in him may have their sins forgiven.

In the same way wives would have good conduct back then in the first century and their good conduct was to be seen in the way that they submitted to their husband in the first century.

Now this idea of submission is not an idea that people like very much at all in our society. Many see this as a repulsive idea. The thought of submitting to your husband.

The battle's been won, hasn't it? We've been set free from this, this demeaning, chauvinistic, it's the sexist way of life. But before we are too quick to dismiss submission, look what Peter has to say about submission over the last three weeks.

[9 : 32] If you look in chapter 2 verse 15, for it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of foolish people. By submitting to the civil authorities you silence the ignorance of foolish people.

It's the power of submission back then. In verses 19 and 20 of chapter 2 we see there that as slaves submitted to their masters even to harsh treatment they won the favour of God.

It pleased God. It was a credit to them. It is a powerful thing. In chapter 2 verses 21 to 25 we see Christ give an example of the way that he submitted.

He submitted to the Father. He obeyed the Father. Look in verse 23. When he was abused he did not return abuse. When he suffered he did not threaten but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justice.

By him submitting to the Father's will he did a powerful thing. He was able to bring about the forgiveness of sins. He was able to bring us into a relationship with God.

[10 : 47] Society could now be friends with God forever by Christ submitting to the Father's will. Can you see the power in this, in submission back in these days?

Today as we look in verses 1 and 2 we see there the power of submission there. For by the wife submitting to the husband back then the wife could win the husband over to Christianity without saying a single word.

Back then submission was a very powerful thing Peter is saying. Very powerful. It was the way of God achieving things.

The way that God worked things out in the world back then. It was the way of the people back then getting out of the way and letting God get on with what he was doing.

It was people trusting in God and his power. Well, wives were to submit to husbands back then. But Peter doesn't just, like the other weeks, doesn't just put submission as a blanket submission.

[11 : 51] He gives some qualifications for it. So the first qualification we see in verse 1 is that the wives were to submit to their own husbands back then.

This is quite radical for this age, for the first century. For wives were to, women were to submit to men in general. But here Peter is saying, no, submit to your wife, to your husband.

Not to anyone else, not to anyone else's husband, only to your husband. The second thing that Peter qualifies there is we see that they had to live lives of reverence.

It was their lives of reverence that drew the Christian in, drew the non-Christian in. But this life of reverence is a life lived in a recognition that God was who they were serving.

They were to serve God first. This meant they were not a doorstep. They were not a mat to be walked on. A door mat.

[12 : 49] They were not to be that. They were not to do everything that the husband said. For they were serving God first and foremost. That means if the husband asked them to do something that was against what God would have them do, they were not to do it.

Can you imagine the difficulty this would have been when the husband said, right, we're going off to worship my God. Let us go. The wife in this context would have to stand up and say, no, I serve the God of the Bible.

I serve Christ who died for me. This could have brought great suffering upon her, beatings even. Peter is saying you serve God first.

The third qualification is that they were to submit regardless of their husband and the way that they thought of them.

Notice there there is no qualification. Submit if your husband loves you or submit if he looks after you or submit there is none of that. There are none of those qualifications or conditions.

[14 : 01] they were to submit regardless of their husband. They were to render it gladly. Not because of the husband because they were serving God.

Can you imagine living in this first century? These are hard words. These are very hard words. Peter goes on to explain a little bit more about this attitude and he says that this attitude of submission is something that is beautiful.

Something that is truly beautiful back in the first century. Have a look there in verses 3 and 4. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair or by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing.

Rather let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is very precious to God. We live in a society that is very occupied with the outer self.

I went and bought this month's Women's Weekly last night. Not that I normally buy Women's Weekly. But as you flick through it you see what the world is consumed with.

[15 : 14] The world is consumed with outward beauty, clothing, makeup, beauty. It houses beauty that is skin deep.

That's what's important for society. Peter says no, true lasting beauty is not skin deep but in the inner self.

It's inside is where the true beauty is. Peter is not saying that you shouldn't be wearing fine clothes and putting makeup on and jewelry for the first century wife.

They were able to do that. But Peter back then wanted to make sure that they realized that what was truly beautiful was the way they lived their lives. It was the inner self. It was a life of submission.

Look there in verse last. Verse 4. Lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Now this gentle and quiet spirit didn't mean that Peter had in mind that they should just sit there and not say a word.

[16 : 21] It's not silence that they're talking about. as we look at the way that these words in the Greek are used throughout the New Testament we see that it is an attitude. It's an attitude.

An attitude of not wanting to serve yourself. Not insisting on your rights. Not being pushy.

Not asserting yourself. It was an attitude of submission. submission. That is what is truly beautiful for God. That's what the verses say.

This is very precious in God's sight. Submission therefore back in the first century was something that was not only powerful but it was also something back then.

Something that was very beautiful. Beautiful in God's eye. Peter goes on to give an example of the way that women in the past have done this. Let's look at verses 5 and 6.

[17 : 18] It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husband. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him Lord. You have become their daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

Peter here points out that holy women, the holy women that he is speaking about here are the matriarchs of Genesis, that of Sarah, Rachel, Leah and Rebecca.

He has these in mind as he talks about women, holy women, women who adorned themselves in this way, this way of submission. He goes on in verse 6 to say, point out the explicit example of Sarah, the way that Sarah obeyed Abraham, her husband, and called him Lord.

The language here picks up Genesis chapter 18 verse 12 where Sarah is outside the tent and she hears her husband Abraham talking with the visitors, the angels, God, and the way that the angels have just told Abraham that he's going to have a child.

Sarah can't believe this. She's very old, so is the husband. So she says to herself, after I am grown old and my Lord is old, shall I have this pleasure.

[18 : 46] Peter is picking up this example, this explicit example, the way that Sarah called her husband Lord. This was something that the women of old did.

They were women who trusted and hoped in God. Look there in verse 5. Notice how it is they hoped in God, they trusted in God and in light of that they obeyed their husbands, they submitted to their authority.

Well, for those in the first century, I think these would have been both encouraging and also very difficult words. To hear that submission was something that was very powerful, that God worked through this, but also to hear that God saw it as something that was truly beautiful.

Yet how hard would it have been to live such a life, to trust yourself to God. Yet this is the way that Peter is saying to the women in the first century, were to live.

It was the way that God worked. What about the husbands? Peter addresses the husbands in verse 7.

[20 : 07] Husbands in the same way, show consideration for your wives and all your life together, paying honour to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing may hinder them, hinder your prayers.

Note the way that it starts at the beginning there, in the same way. Husbands in the same way, the way that you are to conduct yourselves in the world is good conduct. Good conduct that follows the example of Christ.

That is the way that you are to live your lives back then in the first century. So Peter then goes on to explain what that meant. Note there that he doesn't call the husband to submit in the same way to the wives.

Instead, Peter says, show consideration for your wives in your life together. Now this may not seem much, but this is a radical concept for the first century.

To show consideration for your wives. The Greek here has the idea that they were to know their wives. They were to understand them, to have a deep knowledge of them.

[21 : 18] They were to know what their needs were. Not only to know them, but to help them grow in the gifts that God has given them. That was their role.

They were to consider them, to know them deeply. Not only that, they were to show them honour. They were to respect them, to love, to cherish and value them. These are radical things for this time.

Imagine honouring your wife in a context where women had no honour. In the first century, husbands are told to honour their wives.

Peter gives them two reasons. The first we see there is that is because they are the weaker vessel. I don't think here that Peter has in mind necessarily the fact that they are physically weaker.

I think he has in mind the fact that by being submissive they were open to great abuse. They were making themselves very vulnerable.

[22 : 20] Very, very vulnerable. This is why they were the weaker sex. So much damage could be done to them in the name of submission and headship.

Secondly, the second reason why they were to honour them was because they were joint heirs of the grace of life. In God's eyes they were equal. Many have this idea that submission was inequality or one superior, one inferior.

But Peter makes it clear that the wife back then was equal in God's eye. They were equal. They had different roles but equal.

Note also, so important are these commands to honour and to care for them, to show consideration for them that if they weren't to do this their prayers would be hindered.

So serious their prayers would be hindered. note also just like the wives the way that they were to treat their wives was not dependent on their love back or the way that they submitted to them.

[23 : 32] It was not something that the husband could demand back then. The husband could not demand to have the wife submit to him. He was to honour and show consideration for them regardless.

these are radical words, very difficult words. Yet these are the words that Peter saw in the life of Jesus.

The way that Jesus respected women, the way that he spoke with them as equal, the way that he used them as positive examples.

Even the way that Jesus had women disciples. These are, I guess, for the first century somewhat difficult words, very difficult words.

The question is, what are we to make of them today? What are we to make of them today? How are we to understand this notion of submission and leadership?

[24 : 43] Is it applicable for today? We have a totally set of different circumstances, a totally different culture. Does it apply for us now? Many argue that this is just a cultural submission.

Many see that this is the way that husbands could be won over for Christianity. It was something that was a part of that culture back then, of wives submitting to husbands.

So therefore, if wives did it, then that would attract him and win people for Christ. Yet, as I look through this passage, I find it very difficult to try and support that idea.

I find it very difficult to see it as just a cultural submission. If it was just a cultural submission to a human institution, submission, why does Peter say that submission makes a woman attractive to God?

If it was just a cultural submission to help win non-Christians over to Christianity, why is Sarah and Abraham used as an example?

[25 : 57] Abraham was a believer. Sarah was a believer, and yet she still submitted to Abraham, not to win him over, he was already won for God.

If it was a cultural submission, why does the rest of the New Testament affirm what is written here? In fact, at places, it grounds it theologically in the created order.

If it is only a cultural submission, why is there submission in the Godhead? Why is it that Christ submitted to the Father? Why is there submission in the very Trinity?

These are difficult words. It makes it very difficult to try and dismiss it as just a cultural submission. So how do we apply it for ourselves now?

Let me start with husband. husband. What does this passage mean for husbands? I start with husbands because I think in the name of headship and submission throughout the ages, they have caused terrible abuse.

[27 : 11] Terrible abuse. There has been no negotiation in marriages. There has been shouting, an expectation of obedience, physical violence, Bible quoting at wives, condescending manners, all in the name of headship.

This is not what the Bible calls us to do. Husbands, you are to be considerate of your wives. You are to know them. You are to spend time getting to know them.

What is your wife's favourite colour? What is her favourite music? What's her favourite movie? How does she feel like she's loved?

How does she know that she's loved from you? What are the ways that she feels that? Is it through words of affirmation? Is it through spending quality time with her?

Or is it receiving gifts? A bunch of roses? A block of chocolate? Is it acts of service? Or is it the physical touch?

[28 : 20] How is it that your wife knows that you love her? Do you know this? Do you know her intimately? The way that you should? Do you know what her gifts are that God has given her?

Do you know what needs she has? Do you know what fears she has? The Bible tells us we have to know our wives. Not like a book that I saw on a coffee table once.

The book was entitled Everything Men Know About Women. There's a little paperback and as you opened it up and flicked through it the pages were utterly blank.

This is not to be in husbands and wives. Husbands are to know their wives.

Secondly, they are to honour her. They are to respect and love and cherish, to value them, to be prepared to lay down their life for them, to encourage them in their gifts, to enable them to reach their potential.

[29 : 23] It does not mean forcing them back to live lives of the middle ages. It does not mean that wives have to stay home with the kids, although it may mean that as well.

When my wife and I were going through college and thinking about having kids, I told my wife that if for the sake of our marriage and for the sake of our family it was better for me not to continue on with full-time ministry but to stay home and look after the kids so that she could continue in her field of work than I would do it.

Leadership does not mean that you have to be the breadwinner in the family. Remember, they are in a position of vulnerability.

They are easily abused. easily crushed. Remember, they are equal in God's eyes. You are not to think yourself superior to your wife but equal to her.

And remember, this is so serious that your prayers may be hindered. You are not to demand your wife to submit to you. The Bible doesn't call you to demand it. It is something that she is to offer up willingly.

[30 : 48] family. If she is unwilling to offer it up, you cannot demand it. You are still to continue to love and cherish and honour her. Husbands have been given a responsibility to lead, to maintain a godly peace and harmony in their family, one in which they will have to give an account to God.

What about wives? Wives, you must be willing to accept the leadership of your husband. Not to be as a doormat though, not to do everything that your husband says, because remember, you serve God first.

Remember, true beauty is found on the inside, not on the outside. Remember, submission does not mean inferiority. You are equal in God's eye. For a wife, they are to do good, never to let fears alarm them.

They are to entrust themselves to God. Let me just take a brief moment just to speak about abusive marriages. Those marriages in which people are suffering great physical, verbal and sexual and psychological abuse.

I cannot begin to understand the great pain that people are going through in these areas. I cannot begin to understand the great hurt that you must feel.

[32 : 17] It must be terrible. What does Peter have to say to you? What advice does he give you? Words of encouragement. Well, last week we saw that you are to follow Christ's example.

When he was abused, he did not return abuse. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justice. Don't retaliate or seek revenge, but trust God.

Seek the good. In seeking the good for your family, for yourself, it may mean that you do indeed have to take legal action.

I guess that was one of the great big differences between us and the first century. We do have freedom. We do have legal options. It may mean that we have to turn to these options for the good of that person, for the good of others.

But watch your motivation in these areas. Don't do it out of retaliation or seeking revenge, but do it out of seeking the good, trusting yourself to the God who judges justly.

[33 : 36] Well, I bought the Who magazine last night as well. I don't normally buy this either. On the front it's got Paul and Heather inside the wedding of the year.

So happy. There they are there. They were married I think just last week. I was looking at it. Do you know they spent \$5.6 million on their wedding day?

\$5.6 million. You should see the guest list is quite impressive. The way they actually got there was amazing. They actually had to meet at Heathrow Airport.

I think they were all put on a plane and flown to this secret destination. They didn't quite know where they were going. When they got there they had another trip a car and they arrived there and it was all just fantastic.

Sounds like a great wedding. Sounds like a wedding of the year. I wonder what advice they were given on their wedding day of how they were to live their life as a married couple.

[34 : 44] The Bible gives us advice here. It's advice that our world doesn't want to hear. advice that our world finds difficult yet it's advice that we see that is truly beautiful in God's eyes and something that is powerful.

May God give us the grace and the ability to our lived lives that bring honour and glory to him. Let me pray. Father we do pray for husbands and wives in our church.

Father we do pray that you give them great wisdom in knowing how to live their lives together as partners. Father may they bring honour and glory to you in all that they do.

Father we do pray for those who have been abused, who are hurting deeply. Father we pray that you will be with them and caring for them, helping them in these difficult situations.

May we who are their friends support and care for them in the way that brings you honour and glory. We pray these things in your son's name. Amen.