

Holy Engagement in Marriage

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Date: 06 October 2024

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[0 : 0 0] And a passage that deals very clearly with marriage addressing wives primarily, but also husbands. And as Ross was saying as well as we began that reading, it's good to kind of grasp the nettle, that even listening to that, there might be a number of things that make you feel either uncomfortable or maybe uninterested in a passage like this.

Maybe it's the language of wives being subject or the weaker vessel. What's that all about? Maybe you bristle a little bit at that. Maybe it's that you're not married or that marriage feels like a long way away or perhaps is a painful subject for any number of reasons.

Perhaps it's because you're a husband and you're thinking, hang on a minute, I only get one verse out of all this whole passage. Maybe you're quite relieved about that. And so reading this passage, it might raise some questions for us. That's okay.

Or perhaps, and I hope that actually as well as that, we're really keen to hear this, what the Bible says about marriage. But I want to kind of start with this premise that whatever our initial thoughts as we approach these verses, I want our starting point to be that the Bible is good news.

The Bible is good news in every aspect of life, God's wisdom for the whole of life. And hopefully we'll see how that is the case as we work through these verses together.

[1 : 2 2] And also that it's good news not just for us, but it's good news to share as well. So even if this subject of marriage isn't directly relevant to you at the moment, if you're not a wife or a husband, it might be true of you in the future.

But if not, we still have that responsibility within the church to support one another in this as well. It's good kind of practice to get into that habit when we're listening to the Bible, not just to say, well, how does this speak to my situation?

But also to be thinking as part of a church family, well, how can I support, how can I encourage others who are in the situation that this passage is dealing with?

So it's a really good thing for us all to listen to together. And that's why Peter writes it in this letter to the whole of the church. So let's get stuck in. And again, if there are questions that come up as we go through this together, do find me afterwards, it'd be great to talk more about any of these things.

Great. So the very first word then of chapter three, likewise. You see it there. Straight away, we're reminded this morning that we're not just starting from scratch here, but we're right in the middle of a new section of 1 Peter that we began last week.

[2 : 3 5] So we're going to start off with a bit of a recap, because if we miss the big picture of where these verses fit in, we'll struggle to make sense of what we're looking at here.

But we began last week in chapter two, verses 11 and 12, this new section all about how Christians are to live in the world, Christian conduct in the world.

Let me read those verses. Do just have a look across the page. Chapter two, verse 11. And we outlined last week that overall principle that God's people are to live holy lives in the world, that the world might give glory to God.

We spoke about a holy engagement with the world, not retreating and hiding away, but neither just blending in and doing the same as everyone else, but instead living as exiles distinctively while being engaged in our world, in our culture, and in our communities.

And the goal of all of that, we saw, as it says down in verse 12, that people might see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

[4 : 08] That the remarkable power of a life of simple godliness would ultimately move people to find out more about, to come and put their trust in Jesus for themselves.

That they might give him the glory that he deserves as his people upon his return. That this holy engagement is to point people toward our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in our humble actions, every bit as much as in our words.

So that's kind of the big idea of this section. God's people are to live holy lives in the world in order that the world might give glory to God. We then saw that worked out in society, verses 13 to 17.

In the workplace, verses 18 to 25. Here's that same principle being worked out in marriage, chapter 3, verses 1 to 7. And that's helpful to remember, I think, because it means that Peter isn't saying, okay, in these seven verses, here is everything that you're going to need to know about marriage.

You know, I'm going to answer every question you could possibly have, go through every possible scenario. And now, again, remember, we're looking at this bigger picture of living in a way to draw people toward God.

[5 : 26] Here we're looking at that applied to or through the lens of marriage. And so hopefully that helps as well if you're here and you're not married this morning.

Again, these verses are one application of a principle that is supposed to define our whole lives, all of our relationships. And so the more that we see and understand that principle in different areas of life, then the more that principle can work itself into our hearts for us to live it out wisely in every area of life, including that of marriage for whom that's relevant, the holy engagement to point people to Jesus.

Okay, so that's quite a long introduction there, setting the scene, but I think that is important. But let's get stuck into the details of these verses now. We're going to look first at Peter's instruction for wives, and then secondly at Peter's instruction for husbands.

And hopefully throughout all of these, see how ultimately it's the gospel of Jesus Christ that shapes everything that Peter says and everything that we want to live out as God's people.

So first up, instructions to wives. Two major but connected focuses here. And the first from verses 1 and 2 is wives submit to husbands to win them for Christ.

[6 : 52] Wives submit to husbands to win them for Christ. Have a look at verses 1 and 2. Peter writes, So straight away, maybe those words, be subject, start some alarm bells ringing for you.

It's the same word used here as is used to our relationship to the government in verse 13, to masters or employers in verse 18. The overarching idea here, again, this big section, is that the freedom that comes from being God's people, from having eternity with him as our ultimate home, that that freedom isn't lived out or demonstrated in the world by kind of rejecting all other types of social structures or authority, but actually through being willing to be subject to them for the glory of God.

And that's equally true, Peter is saying here, in the marriage relationship as well. And yet notice here as well, and this is really important, and this is true everywhere that this subject is spoken of in the Bible.

The Bible does give this consistent picture in marriage of the husband as the loving head of the household with a God-given authority. The Apostle Paul says that's because marriage is a picture of the gospel of Christ and the church, that those parts aren't just interchangeable.

But wherever in the Bible this idea of wives being subject or submitting to is spoken of, really important to see that it is always spoken of to the wife and not about the wife.

[8 : 47] And so wives are called to submit in the Bible for the sake of the gospel, to best represent that picture of the church coming to Christ and encouraging others to do the same.

But notice it will never say, husbands, subdue your wives. Husbands, make sure your wives are submitting. Husbands will be commanded to live with understanding, as we'll see, to honour, to love, to sacrificially love, modelling Christ to their wives.

And yet they will never be told to subdue. And so even in speaking directly to women in this letter, Peter is being incredibly counter-cultural.

Peter is elevating the status of women as people of agency who can be addressed. Karen Jobes, who's written one of the most helpful commentaries on Juan Peter, it's been really helpful in this series for me, she writes, how ironic it is that the words that first century wives would have read as affirming and empowering are criticised by some today as enslaving and oppressive.

And she goes on to highlight some of the Greek philosophers of the day and their instruction on how women should behave. And again, it's all written about women rather than two women.

[10 : 08] And it's all, to be honest, it's like incredibly sexist stuff. It reads like some of the kind of the grimmest, misogynistic Twitter posts that you might have the misfortune to come across today, thousands of years ago.

But that was the accepted wisdom. That was the respectable behaviour, the assumed respectability of the first and second centuries.

Really, the whole reason that changed is primarily down to the rise of Christianity in the West and the dignity that it gives to women, raising them up as Peter does here.

And so into this kind of women as second-class citizens world, Peter directly addresses wives to say, actually, you have a significant role to play. Even though you are marginalised in society, God has a role for you to play in his mission.

And that is, as you submit to your husbands, not out of fear of them, certainly not out of any kind of inferiority, we'll come to that later, but out of reverence to Christ, reverence to God, to win them for Christ.

[11 : 21] So let's bring this to today. What does this look like for us today? Obviously, our culture is very different from the culture into which this letter was written, but in many ways, the situation that Peter is dealing with remains the same.

This morning, here at church, and in the vast majority of churches across Scotland, there will be wives whose husbands aren't with them at church. There will be women who follow Jesus whose husbands don't.

And so what's the answer in that situation? What are you called to do if that is your situation? And what Peter says, it's not to disrespect a husband.

It's not to be constantly lecturing them in terms of Christian things and kind of badgering them. But nor, and this is really important to say, nor is it to be indifferent to their need to know Jesus.

But rather, Peter says, it is to humbly live with them with this conduct that is both respectful and pure in a way that points to Jesus through your life.

[12 : 27] Again, it's that big picture, isn't it? God's people are to live holy lives in the world in order that the world might come to give glory to God. That picture being played out in the closest, in the most intimate relationship of all, that of husband and wife.

that even there, our purpose in life is directing people toward God for his glory. And it's really important to point out here, particularly within a marriage relationship, that that is hard.

That is a long-term task, maybe a whole lifetime. Peter here is certainly not offering this as a quick fix or solution.

But I think it is here as an encouragement to you this morning. If this is your situation in a way that we can encourage others we know in this situation not to give up, to keep on praying for your husband and to keep on living out your relationship with God in a way that honors your marriage, honors your husband and encourages him to see Jesus in you.

And so we want to respond to that by coming to know Jesus for himself. And it's often said, isn't it, that it's those closest to us that it can be the hardest to speak to about Jesus.

[13 : 52] I think that's probably true. But remember, it's also those closest who we have perhaps the best chance to influence through the remarkable power of a life of simple godliness.

So there's the first instruction for wives to submit to your husbands to win them for Christ. The second instruction Peter gives here really follows on, I think, to outline what that then looks like, what that conduct, what that life of simple godliness that points to Jesus looks like, as Peter here calls wives to seek internal beauty over external adornment.

To seek internal beauty over external adornment. Have a look at verses 3 and 4. Do not let your adorning be external, the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry or the clothing you wear, 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.

Now, I'm sure people have used these verses over the time, over the years, to say, you know, you can't do that with your hair or you can't wear this or that. I don't think that is Peter's point here, you know, that it's only kind of woolly jumpers and trackies that are allowed, although I'd be pretty happy with that myself.

But no, Peter's point really is, you know, where is our emphasis? What is our priority? What about me is it that I think is most important to present to people?

[15 : 32] Is it the external or is it the internal? And why is this part then in this section to wives when actually for all of us, for male and female, we're told in the Bible that man looks at the outside but God looks at the heart.

For all of us, the inner is more significant than the outer. Why does Peter address this to wives? I think it's partly, as we've just said, because this follows straight on from what we've been speaking about.

This is the way, this is the kind of practical outworking of influencing a husband for Christ. But I think it's also because throughout history and still today, it's women who are far more objectified than men in terms of their external appearance.

It's women far more than men who are told via advertising, via TV, via magazines, you know, this is what you need to look like. It's teenage girls far more than boys who are suffering poor mental health because of social media projecting unrealistic and unhealthy standards of feminine beauty, what it is and what it should be aspired to.

And so again, I think as we look at these verses, I want to make the point that the Bible, even in a passage like this, which will be so easy to read as maybe repressive or even just simply kind of old-fashioned or out of date, is actually the very opposite, that it is good news for women that actually the gospel, being God's people, knowing the security that he alone provides, welcoming us into his family through the mercy that he shows us, that brings a freedom from the constant pressure and expectations of the world to conform to a particular physical standard.

[17 : 25] That cuts the knot that our culture is constantly seeking to tie between our appearance and our worth. And yet the gospel offers us freedom from that pressure, freedom from that shallowness that we see all around us.

And it's knowing our acceptance by God, our identity with him, which was that core part of the first section of 1 Peter.

Knowing our identity with him, not based on our works or our appearance or our clothing, but through his mercy in Christ that provides us the strength to be able to live out this command that Peter gives, to follow, as it says in verse 5 and 6, godly examples rather than constantly be chasing after the examples the world holds up for us.

It's knowing our security, our identity in Christ that means we're able to value inner beauty rather than outer. In ourselves and in others as well.

That actually the idea of going out to face the day with a mean spirit or with harshness or not concerned about how our conduct reflects on God.

[18 : 42] That that would be far more unthinkable than going out without our makeup or without our hair being done. Then in our children, and again I think probably little girls especially, also in our wives, it would be godly character and conduct that we would be quick to praise and encourage rather than always being surface level things of appearance or a nice new dress.

And of course we can compliment people on these things. It's nice to be nice but it's great to remember all our families, I think this particularly with our, we've got two girls, are there girls growing up clear that it is inner beauty and the form of godly conduct that matters most?

Is that the message that I'm presenting to them and the things that I praise and encourage them for? because as Peter's been saying, that is what attracts people to Jesus.

And it's that inner beauty which in that brilliant one Peter word is imperishable. We've seen that word time and time before. That inner beauty will last while our external adornments, our looks fade and our hope, our worth fades with it if we fail to grasp as Peter says that it is our heart, it is that internal imperishable beauty which in God's sight is very precious.

That is the thing that matters most and that is the thing that God sees and it is as we find our identity in him that we're able to focus then on what is inside rather than trying to impress the world with external adornments.

[20 : 30] So that's Peter's teaching to wives and I hope we see that's something that we do all need to hear as a church family and again that it's something to hear as good news. Living out that identity as God's people means submitting to husbands in order to win them for Christ and at the heart of that is to seek internal beauty, that godly character over external adornment.

Let's move on then with Peter to instructions for husbands much briefer here as we've said just one verse out of the seven that is absolutely not because guys have less to learn or because guys have less to change it is because throughout this section Peter has primarily been addressing the party with less power rather than more power in the culture that he's writing to giving value as we've said to those that society valued less but he does address husbands and what does he say to the husbands or verse seven likewise husbands live with your wives in an understanding way showing honour 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 again there's a lot packed in there let's start again with one of those kind of flashing red lights maybe women as the weaker vessel what's Peter meaning there I think he's very simply getting there at the biological truth that on the whole women would tend to be physically weaker than men

I don't need anyone to come up and try and prove the opposite to me afterwards I think in general we do understand that don't we we have separate categories for women's sports to women's Olympics and actually that physical disparity is a much bigger deal in an ancient society than in our society today in a pre-industrial society if you can carry fewer sacks of grain or chop wood at a slower rate you know that physical strength makes a bigger difference and so I think Peter is just kind of getting at that biological fact but also he's getting at their weaker position in society that the societal reality of Roman culture we've spoken about that already that women were seen as lower down the pecking order women were more vulnerable women were less secure in society that's not unconnected to that physical strength piece as well and yet what Peter is saying here it is far from follow the culture that says well because of these weaknesses women are therefore worth less therefore treat them however you like do what you want with them actually Peter writes to husbands and says it's quite the opposite he says this is so serious that to be in good standing with God

I think that's what the prayer bit at the end is all about if we want God to hear our prayers if we want to genuinely say that we are in a relationship with God well Christian husbands have to treat their wives well and are to be understanding of that challenge the challenges that their wives face or to show honour to their wives for a husband to lead his wife and family well and again that is a role that the Bible gives to husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church that leadership does not mean being condescending it does not mean being lazy expecting the wife just to do everything and sort out the kids and do all the jobs it certainly does not mean being aggressive or abusive I hope that doesn't even need to be said it means instead living with understanding entering in to see the struggles and challenges knowing and caring about what is going on in a wife's life and drawing alongside to help to love and to serve not with quick fixes something

I think a lot of guys from my own experience talking about myself let me just sort that out for you that's not what Peter is talking about but coming alongside with time and with patience and love in that understanding it means as well showing honour as Peter writes again an incredibly counter-cultural thing to that Roman culture that includes appreciation thanks lifting up rather than squashing down and the motivation here is not because the wife is some kind trophy to make the husband look good or feel good but because verse 7 have a look at this incredible verse because they are heirs with you of the grace of life Peter is again speaking very differently from the Roman empire that downplayed women but also very differently from our own culture which either tends to completely disregard the differences between male and female or alternatively to work against previous imbalances by just turning the tables and yet keeping that hostility and suspicion between the sexes which is

[25 : 51] I think a vicious circle disenfranchises so many young men who in turn denigrate women once more and yet Peter here gives us the Bible's approach to the relationship between male and female to that loving relationship between man and his wife that offers a far better picture that leads to flourishing and joy in that relationship and that's because Peter as we've seen repeatedly in this letter calls us to look ahead calls us to look forward calls us to look at what is to come and in looking ahead we see that male and female are both co-heirs they're heirs side by side of the grace of life that both have that incredible promise and that imperishable inheritance of eternal life with the creator God kept for them made possible through his grace in Jesus

Christ this morning if you are a Christian husband God directs you to look at your wife and to say I sent my son to die for her she is an heir of grace and so how dare you not honour or seek to be understanding or love sacrificially it is as we look at the grace that God has shown to us and also the grace that he has shown to others that we are able to relate in a loving understanding and honouring way to one another and this is how the Bible's world view how the gospel challenges every culture doesn't it whether first century Roman or 21st century Scottish that it doesn't destroy or undermine the distinction between the sexes that God made them male and female there's difference there there's even distinction within the

Bible in the roles man and wife are called to play in the marriage and yet always there is this perfect equality that all of us male female or looking back through chapter 2 servant master rich poor leader follower that all of us are made in God's image and loved and precious to him all need his grace and all receive that grace when we turn to Jesus it's knowing the identity that Jesus through his mercy gives us as his people that we're then able to live that out in every area of life in society in the workplace in the family in the marriage that we would live to win others for Christ that we would love others as Christ does all for his glory and in anticipation of that eternal home that we will share together with all of God's people and with God our creator for all time because of the mercy he has shown us in Jesus let's pray together heavenly father we thank you that you reveal the gospel of

Jesus Christ to us in your word that you show us our need of rescue and also that you show us how you have fulfilled that need in Jesus through the cross and we thank you that you have shown us mercy in Christ that means that we can look forward to an eternity with you we thank you that as well as showing us the gospel that you also show us then how to live as your people in all areas of life in response to that wonderful gospel and we recognize that we need your wisdom not least in that most intimate relationship of husband and wife we need your wisdom in that complex interaction which our culture struggles with as many cultures before us have of male and female we thank you for that promise that we are heirs together of the grace of life that for all of us our hope is not in ourselves nor in each other nor even in marriage as an institution but is in you and you alone and the grace that you show us

Lord please help us this week for those of us who are Christians to be living holy lives in the world among our neighbours friends family that the world might see something of Jesus and give you the glory that you deserve we pray this morning especially for husbands and wives that they would live that out with one another we pray that they would be pointing one another to Christ and reminding each other of the good news and the identity that we have in you we pray particularly for those whose husbands or wives are not Christians that you would use their witness their life of simple godliness to point their spouse to you and we pray that as a church family you would help us to help and encourage one another always remembering that we live in light of that wonderful day when Jesus will return and we will together enjoy our eternal home with you and we pray these things in Jesus precious name Amen