

Submission in the Home

SERMON

By

Everett C. DeVelde

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TEXT: 1 Peter 3:1-7

PROP: Wives to be subject to their own husbands and husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way because the integrity of our families today depends on a right relationship between father and mother, between husband and wife.

1 Peter 3:1-7 (ESV)

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. ³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— 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 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.

Peter continues in his treatment of submission to authority as he addresses himself to the subject of marriage. Again we must remind ourselves that Peter is speaking to the elect exiles of the dispersion; those that God has caused to be born again to a living hope. No doubt what Peter has to say will not be heard by those who do not love Lord. That a Christian woman should submit herself to the authority of her own husband is really an amazing precept when we consider the status of women in the Roman Semitic societies of Peter's day. We will remember the account of the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. His disciples " -- *marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"*" (John 4:27, ESV)

The life and teaching of Jesus brought great change to the status of women in the society in which he lived. As with the Samaritan woman, Jesus often spoke with women and had a close relationship many of them, for example Mary and Martha. At his crucifixion, many women stood weeping near the cross. Women were the first to find the stone rolled away from the tomb and Jesus risen from the dead. Many Women were present in the upper room waiting for the risen Lord to come to them. The four daughters of Phillip the evangelist prophesied in Ceasarea, Priscilla shared in the ministry of Aquilla her husband.

Dorcas, Lydia, and the mother of Timothy played prominent roles in the early church. Paul calls other women, "Fellow workers, servants of the church and laborers in the Lord.

Women were never given such places of prominence in the synagogue and when they were converted to Christianity they were put into a great deal of danger just as slaves who became Christians. Very often a woman would be converted but her husband would remain heathen or Jewish. Such women were exposed to persecution and danger in their own families and they might turn to Christian men in the congregation to which they belonged for guidance with their problems. This of course might lead them to question the maintenance of their relations with their heathen husbands. The church community would treat them with dignity and offer them fellowship that they did not receive at home. No doubt these situations were all too common in the early church such that Peter wrote to encourage them not to leave their husbands. The duty to their husbands still existed and they were to use this contracted obligation for the good of the kingdom of Christ. Therefore Peter instructs Christian wives to, "*-- 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—*" (1 Peter 3:1, ESV)

What possible motive could there be for a Christian woman to continue in submission to a pagan husband? Most women in the pagan societies of Peter's day lived in slavery to their husbands who actually owned them as chattel property. And in most cases they would be forced to share their husband with a number of other wives and concubines. Polygamy and the abuse of women and female children have characterized every heathen culture known to man and these conditions still exist in our modern world. So what could possibly motivate a woman converted to Christ to continue in subjection to her ungodly pagan husband? Peter tells us, "*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—***" (1 Peter 3:1, ESV) Who but godly wives would be in a better position to win the respect of their husbands who disobey the word of God.

Even wealthy Roman women who were caused to be born again to a living hope were to submit to their husbands. These women were free just as the land owning husbands were free. They spent their lives dressing ostentatiously and grooming themselves extravagantly. They were often unfaithful to their husbands just as their husbands were unfaithful to them. Roman upper society was noted for sexual promiscuity and lasciviousness. Just as those women who lived in slavery and polygamous relationships to their husband so these free Roman women were to submit to the authority of their husbands even though they were ungodly. The new birth brings radical change to the way in which we live. Our presuppositions are changed and we begin to realize our chief end which is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We begin to love the law of God, just as Jesus said, "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*" (John 14:15, ESV)

We must remember that the precepts Peter gives to Christian wives in the early church apply just as well to us today. The pagan society in which we live in the United States may not polygamous as it is in most other nations but family life in the homes of our nation is just as promiscuous and immoral if not worse than the societies to which Peter addresses himself. The preacher is right when he says, "*What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11, ESV)

Peter is therefore speaking to all of us when he commands wives to be subject to their own husbands. Indeed, the integrity of our families today depends on a right relationship between father and mother, between husband and wife. The respectful and pure conduct of godly wives is absolutely essential to the integrity of the family. Peter addresses himself to husbands and fathers as well but we will get to that in due course. We will see, however, that godly behavior of husbands with regard to their wives is also absolutely essential to family integrity. When submission to authority in the home does not follow the pattern Peter sets forth, the family unit is inevitably weakened and troubled and the breakdown of the family in our nation is by far the greatest social evil we have to face. The latest statistics on divorce are appalling. In 1997 fifty percent of all first marriages ended in divorce and sixty percent of all remarriages ended in divorce. That does not include families in which the parents were separated or families in which the parents had never been married. In 1997 alone there were 1.3 million children murdered by abortion but 14.5 million single parent children living in metropolitan areas. In that same year 32 percent of births were to unmarried women. These few examples are sufficient to bring us to the inevitable conclusion that families broken apart by divorce or ungodly parental relationships form the greatest social evil of our day.

As the authority of emperors, governors and masters is limited by the authority of the higher law of God so the authority of husbands over their wives is limited. Therefore, in submitting to the authority of ungodly tyrants, unjust masters, and husbands who do not obey the word of God, we may not sin against God by transgressing his law. Accordingly God permits divorce for two reasons, sexual immorality and desertion.

Matthew 19:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

1 Corinthians 7:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

The answer to such great problems does not lie in government social programs or legislation but in lives changed by the grace of God. The answer lies in the respectful and pure conduct of godly wives and mothers and in the godly and faithful love a husband has for his wife. Concerning wives Peter continues, "*Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— 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. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands,*" (1 Peter 3:3-5, ESV)

Long before the days of Peter the daughters of Zion sinned greatly in their outward adornment so much so that the Lord was moved to bring judgment upon them. He said,

Isaiah 3:18-24 (ESV)

¹⁸ In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; ¹⁹ the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; ²⁰ the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; ²¹ the signet rings and nose rings; ²² the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; ²³ the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils. ²⁴ Instead of perfume there will be rottenness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty.

These unfaithful and immoral women were to be dispossessed of their finery and symbols of beauty because they had provoked the Lord to smite them. They had forgotten the simplicity of Sarah who modestly referred to Abraham her husband as her lord. Peter, however, is not teaching us to neglect the body or to be careless with our appearance. The King James Version refers to our body as being vile, "*Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*" (Philippians 3:21, KJV) And some have suggested that attention to the physical appearance of the body is vanity. But the word Paul uses in this text means humble or lowly and the text according reads, "*who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*" (Philippians 3:21, ESV) Peter does not condemn Rebekah's nose ring and bracelets if they are worn with Rebekah's modesty. Sin has robbed the body of its

God given dignity but it is to be restored by the grace of God to be like the glorious body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus dignified the human body when he became flesh in order to dwell among us and we are not remiss to take care of our body and make it comely. The sin involved with outward adornment comes about when by extravagance and ostentation we neglect the inner man. We sin when our attention to the outward person results in that haughtiness which God condemns, "*Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet,*" (Isaiah 3:16, ESV) When it becomes the focus of our lives; when our outward appearance is the pride of our lives, it serves to distance us from God and his people and becomes a real problem to a godly marriage relationship. Surely the wedding ring and other jewels bestowed upon us by our loved ones remind us of the vows we have taken and may be worn therefore in a manner pleasing to God. It is the inward beauty of a godly woman that especially pleases God, indeed that is very precious to him.

Of the inner man Paul writes,

Romans 2:29 (ESV)

²⁹ But a Jew is one **inwardly**, and circumcision is a matter of the **heart**, by the Spirit, not by the letter. **His praise is not from man but from God.**

Romans 7:22 (ESV)

²² For I delight in the law of God, in my **inner being**,

2 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our **inner nature** is being renewed day by day.

This hidden person of the heart is the center of ones being from which the strength of our Christian life flows. If this inner person is rightly clothed in righteousness, the godly person, and in this case the godly wife, will be possessed of the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit that is pleasing to God and winsome to her husband. In his exposition of this passage, professor Lumby writes concerning the hidden person of the heart, " Let this be rightly adorned, and the outward life will need no strict rules; there will be no fear of excess, least of all when the inner life is cared for because it is precious before God. Its pure array passeth gold and gems, be they ever so beautiful. This is a grace which never fades, but will flourish through eternity."

Peter now turns his attention to husbands, "*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.*" (1 Peter 3:7, ESV) In his previous treatment of submission to emperors, governors and masters Peter's concern was focused on the duties of those who were to submit to their authority. We are to, "*Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*" (1 Peter 2:16-17, ESV) And regarding slaves, "*For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*" (1 Peter 2:20-21, ESV)

Perhaps Peter felt that it was much more likely that problems concerning submission to authority would be seen in the relationship of Christian husbands to their wives. This certainly appears to be the case in our modern society in which we have seen a significant increase in marital infidelity, separation and divorce among professing Christian families. The Christian family is brought under tremendous pressure by the frequent need to earn two incomes. Both husband and wife enter the work force necessitating the placement of their children in day care centers. In their book, "Blinded by Might", Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson write,

In a background paper provided by the White House for its 1998 childcare proposals subsidizing day care, one page described with hard numbers the way Americans care for their children. Michael Kelly, a senior writer for the National journal, described it as a "depressing document."

In the Washington Post, Kelly makes some profound points that should be seriously considered by those who believe it doesn't matter where children spend their days so long as they are receiving "quality care." He says, "In 1995, nearly 13 million ---more than half -- of the nation's 21 million preschool children were receiving child care from someone other than their parents. Of children under the age of one, 45 percent were under such care. And these infants and toddlers and preschoolers are, on the average, in child care for a large chunk of their little lives; a 1990 study found that more than half of child-care children were in child care for 35 hours a week or more. Of school-age kids, every week an estimated 5 million come home to empty houses."

In addition our families are being profoundly influenced by immoral materials in textbooks, schools, television, Play Stations and the Internet. All of these things and more wage war against our families and serve to ruin the testimonies of fathers and husbands and wives. How different is the life style of the world around us compared with Christian

wives who subject themselves to their own husbands and Christian husbands who live with their wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as a weaker vessel. Godly fathers and mothers are heirs together with the grace of life here on earth and in the world to come. And all of this so that our prayers are not hindered.

The understanding way with which husbands are to live with their wives is not primarily doctrinal and biblical knowledge although that is certainly a part of what is in view. This understanding way is primarily foresight and thoughtfulness. It expresses itself in godly conduct and chivalry. No burden beyond her capabilities is to be laid upon her and she is to be honored for her God given place in the integrity of the family. As the head of the family the husband is to teach his wife and family the things of the Lord. He is responsible to bring his children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. He is to lead his family in family worship and the study of God's word. And he is to pray with and for his wife and children. Paul gives us a profound insight into the relationship a man has with his wife.

1 Corinthians 11:7-12 (ESV)

⁷ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but **woman is the glory of man.** ⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹² for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

Again Lumby writes, "Together they can bring their requests before God, and where the two join in heart and soul Christ has promised to be present as the Third. And in praying they will know one another's necessities. This is the grandest knowledge the husband can attain to for the honoring of his wife; and using it, he will speed their united supplications to the throne of grace, and the union of hearts will not fail of its blessing." Husbands are to be so related to their wives that their prayers may not be hindered. Henry Ware wrote the words of this hymn.

Happy the home when God is there
And love fills ev'ryone,
When with united work and pray'r
The Master's will is done.

Happy the home where God's strong love
Is starting to appear
Where all the children hear
His fame and parents hold Him dear.

Happy the home where pray'r is heard
And praise is ev'rywhere,
Where parents love the sacred
Word And its true wisdom share.

Lord, let us in our homes
This blessed peace to gain;
Unite our hearts in love to Thee,
And love to all will reign.