

Marriage (2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 September 2016

[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So not really through any prior planning of mine, I find myself preaching on marriage this morning for what is now the third time in the past year, and none of those sermons were at weddings.

Amen. In our reading from 1 Peter 3 this morning, as we continue our 1 Peter series, Peter turns his attention to the issue of marriage, how men and women as Christians, as husbands and wives, are supposed to conduct themselves.

Now, as I was preparing for the sermon on marriage, I came across a quote on the topic of marriage from the great British statesman Winston Churchill. Churchill, and he summed up my feelings on the matter pretty much completely.

Churchill said, That rings true.

For some of you guys, I'm sure it does too. I won't name names. Now, how I ever persuaded Elaine to marry me, I will never know.

[1:35] But I'm certain of one thing. It was solely due to the grace of God. I also ran across a fitting quote from the poet Ogden Nash.

And ladies, this one's for you. Marriage is the bond between a person who never remembers anniversaries and another who never forgets them. What do you think?

Ogden Nash, right on that? But in all seriousness, some questions for us. What is marriage? Specifically, how do we live marriage out? And what does it have to do with our lives in Christ? Now, fortunately, the Bible takes up these questions, and we see some of our answers in our reading from 1 Peter 3 this morning.

Before we jump in, I do want to say that marriage is an area where a lot of people, including Christians, have struggled, have had painful experiences.

[2:45] Most of us have had some experience, firsthand or otherwise, of marital strife, or divorce, or broken families. These experiences are really painful.

So marriage is an area that we have to treat, not only with truth, but also with grace. That said, what the Bible teaches on marriage is something that we have to talk about as believers, because the culture around us is confused.

And the church way too often shares in the guilt about that confusion, because we've been silent on matters where we can't afford to be silent. Silence is probably, at least in part, due to the fear that we might be thought of, as old-fashioned, or irrelevant, or weird, if we talk about God's plan for marriage, as it's revealed in Holy Scripture.

Then again, plenty of people thought of Jesus as weird in His day, and still do, for that matter. So it shouldn't strike us as strange when we are following His teaching, and that happens to us.

Now, one thing that jumps out to us as we look at our first Peter passage, is that what Peter has to say here is remarkably similar to what Paul has to say about marriage in Ephesians 5.

[4:14] Really, there's only one major difference. Peter is dealing more with kind of the specifics, while Paul is dealing more with general principles, I think we'd say.

Now, to give us a better foundation for following Peter's points, I want us to take a look at Ephesians 5 really quickly, where St. Paul kind of gives us the blueprint for how marriage is supposed to be lived out.

Starting in verse 22, Paul writes of wives, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Now, if the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Wives, Paul is telling us, are supposed to submit to their husbands.

Now, that is a claim that has been the subject of a lot of controversy and a lot of misunderstanding, something that I'll deal with in more detail when we get to our first Peter text.

[5:20] For now, we'll simply say that Paul's teaching, that wives are to submit to their husbands like the church submits to Christ, is also reflected in what Peter teaches.

Speaking of husbands, Paul writes, started in verse 25, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish, in the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Now men, we have a high standard here, and that is Christ himself.

Christ loved the church, gave himself up for her, and that is the way that husbands are called to love their wives. Husbands are supposed to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and to love their wives as they love themselves.

[6:54] Paul goes on to tell us that marriage between a man and a woman is a sign of the love between Christ and the church. In other words, marriage is a sign of the gospel message itself, that Christ loved us and gave himself for us, and that through faith in him we have been cleansed and sanctified, and are called to follow him as Lord.

So it's a big deal. In Christian marriage, there's more than friendship or romance going on, and there should be friendship and romance.

Those are good things. But the Christian husband and wife also have the supernatural calling to bear witness to the gospel in their life together, and walk as spiritual companions, together as Christian disciples, on the way that leads to eternal life.

And if it's the Lord's will for them to have children, they have the incredible calling of bringing those children up to know the Lord. And with that brief framework in place, let's take a look at what Peter has to show us about marriage.

1 Peter 3, starting with verses 1 and 2. 2. 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 when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

[8:19] Now, Peter, continuing his earlier theme of being subject to authority, echoes Paul here. Wives are instructed to be subject to their own husbands.

He's speaking generally first, and then in the specific case, of wives who were married to men who aren't believers. Now, there are some differences, obviously, between those two situations.

Now, before we go on, as I mentioned earlier, this language of submission has often been controversial and often been misunderstood.

It's important to talk about what the scriptures don't mean by submission. First, we're not talking about giving men permission to abuse or act like dictators within their families.

That is not acceptable, and that is not God's design for marriage. The kind of spiritual partnership that God intends for marriage simply does not consist of the husband ordering his wife around or intimidating her.

[9:27] It also does not mean that women are somehow inferior to men. The Bible is clear that men and women are of equal worth, of equal value, even if they do have different God-given roles.

But those roles should never, ever, ever be an excuse for women to be treated as less valuable or less important than men.

But Peter, like Paul, does teach that wives should submit to the leadership of their husbands. That's God's design for the family. As Paul noted, pointing out that the husband represents Christ, who leads the church as a servant leader.

Submission, here, is not slavery. That's not what they're talking about. It's about wives choosing to respect the leadership, especially the spiritual leadership in the case of Christian marriage, of their husbands within the partnership of the marriage.

It's not about issuing and taking orders. And if that's what is happening, it's a sign that something has gone very wrong. In Christian marriage, it's about the husband taking seriously his responsibility to seek God's will for the family, his responsibility to protect and care for the family, more on those things in a minute when we get to husbands, and the wife respecting and supporting her husband's spiritual leadership.

[11:04] That said, speaking more generally, Peter then takes us into a somewhat different situation, kind of a case study, almost. The situation of a believing wife who was married to an unbelieving husband.

Now, in the New Testament era, that was a particularly tricky situation because in that culture, it was assumed that the patriarch, the father, the husband, determined the religion of the whole household.

While Peter doesn't say it directly, it's very clearly implied that the kind of submission that he's talking about here is not absolute because he's not instructing their wives to obey their husbands in following false religions and displeasing God.

Now, Peter doesn't go into detail about how these women ended up married to unbelievers to begin with, but it was fairly common in the early church for some members of a family to be converted to Christ without the whole family being converted.

Now, on the other hand, maybe some of these women were believers when they married their unbelieving husband. That happens sometimes. The first situation, of course, would have been unforeseeable.

[12:21] The second would have been avoidable. for a believer, as I think we see reflected in what Peter is saying here, being married to an unbelieving spouse, someone who doesn't share your faith and your values and your commitments, someone who isn't committed to bringing your children up to know and love the Lord, that is a hard thing.

If a Christian wants to avoid a difficult situation like that, it is important not to get involved with a partner who is not a believer. It will lead to misery.

No matter how these marriages came to be, though, it's clear that Peter is describing a tough situation. What's his advice? for the believing wife to respect her husband, to support his leadership of the family so long as it doesn't lead to sin, and to demonstrate for him a life of holiness with the hope that he will be converted to Christ through her example.

Now, Peter goes on from here to talk about how wives should adorn themselves with pure and holy conduct, 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, seeing these verses pretty commonly misinterpreted and misapplied, in, when I was growing up in the Bible Belt, I knew of churches where it was basically forbidden for women to style their hair or wear any jewelry or any makeup, you know, a pretty hardline rule against any of those things.

[14:22] That approach is really an example of an exercise in missing the point. Peter is talking about the internal virtues being what matters.

So to take that and to focus on externally what you're wearing in response is to do the exact opposite of what Peter's instructing us to do. So ladies, I know the Holy Trinity ladies will be happy to hear they can still wear their fancy Easter hats.

And we're not going to throw you out if you wear eyeliner. Now Peter's point really is that a truly beautiful woman in the sight of God is not beautiful because of what she wears or her outward appearance.

Beauty in the sight of God is found in the heart in holiness in purity in gentleness in humility in loving service to others especially one's family.

Now it should be said that these verses do a really good job of offending modern sensibilities. I'm pretty sure that they're not included in the revised common lectionary and I suspect I know why.

[15:45] So you see women are what supposed to have a gentle and quiet spirit? spirit? Now I think a lot of the women of my generation would absolutely recoil in horror at that idea.

But I think that's because we really have a misunderstanding, cultural misunderstanding of what being a man is and what being a woman is. It's not actually sexist.

Our cultural thinking on what it means to be a man or to be a woman has been warped by non-biblical ideas. To simplify it, the thought process I think goes something like this if we really scratch beneath the surface and reflect on it.

Well men are allowed to be domineering, calculating, self-assertive, self-promoting, and aggressive with other people. So of course if it's going to be fair, women should be allowed to act that way too. Scratch below the surface of modern thought and what it means to be a man and a woman in our culture and I think that's what you'll find. But that is not what we find in the Bible.

[16:56] The Bible is clear that all of us men and women both are supposed to be kind, humble, and tender-hearted with each other. That's nothing to be ashamed of. That's something which by the grace of God we should be seeking.

Kindness, tender-heartedness, gentleness. That is what our Lord and Savior, the perfect man, modeled for us. Men and women, sure, according to Scriptures, the Scriptures have different roles in the family, but they have the same requirement for kindness, gentleness, humility, and tender-heartedness in how they carry those roles out.

Other than that, the only major difference is that women are often better at the required kindness and gentleness than men are. Wives live out those virtues in supporting and respecting the leadership of their husbands.

Peter cites the example of righteous women of the Old Testament in verses 5 and 6. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord.

So Sarah ultimately respected and supported her husband's spiritual leadership, even as the Lord called Abraham to lead his family through some pretty extraordinary things.

[18:37] Pack up your family and go to a place that I will show you, and by the way, you don't know where it is yet. Peter is instructing the wives he is addressing to follow her example, adorning themselves with the gentleness that she modeled, doing what is good, and not being afraid.

Now, something of an aside, Sarah calling her husband Lord was a culturally determined way of showing respect in that time and place. I haven't convinced Elaine yet that she should call me Lord. I tried last night and it didn't work. Don't expect to be very successful on that front for some reason. Now we get to the husbands.

Men, this one is for us. Verse 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.

Now, Peter is basically telling the husband here to use his role in marriage and in the family as an opportunity for service and love. He didn't use these words, but he's basically saying not to use it as an opportunity to be a domineering jerk.

[20:04] Don't do it, men. The reality that we're faced with is that we have a huge misunderstanding, though, what it means to be a man.

Because of that, we have a huge misunderstanding of what it means to be a husband and a father. John Piper talks about that in his book, *Desire in God*, where he writes pretty accurately, I think. Says, a famous cigarette billboard pictures a curly headed, bronze faced, muscular macho guy with a cigarette hanging out the side of his mouth.

The sign reads, where a man belongs. That is a lie. Where a man belongs is at the bedside of his children, leading in devotion and prayer.

Where a man belongs is leading his family to the house of God. Where a man belongs is up early and alone with God, seeking vision and direction for his family.

[21:06] What Peter is writing makes so much more sense when we think of the husband as the man praying to God for his family, rather than the image of the macho man with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth.

Husbands are to be kind, understanding, loving, servant, leaders because they are called to imitate Jesus. They're called to show honor to their wives as the weaker vessel.

Now that is something that's pretty often misinterpreted. It doesn't mean that women are somehow spiritually or intellectually inferior to men.

It doesn't mean that at all. It's just the general observation that husbands are often physically bigger and stronger than their wives. Peter is instructing us as men never to use that difference to harm or to intimidate our wives, but instead to honor them, to serve them, and we are to protect and care for our families as husbands.

Husbands are called to remember in Christian marriage that their wives are also fellow believers. That should lead the Christian husband to look out not only for his wife's physical welfare, but for her spiritual welfare and also the spiritual and physical welfare of their children.

[22:39] The husband has the task of leading the home spiritually with the Christian family being a family of believers. Husband, the father helping the family to grow in faith and in prayer together.

Men, I will simply say we have to confess at least over the past several generations we have not done a very good job of this. But it's what we're called to do.

Now, if the husband doesn't do that, doesn't respect his wife as a fellow believer, doesn't care for her welfare, he can be certain that his prayers, as Peter puts it, will be hindered.

His own relationship with God will suffer. God's design for marriage is for the believing husband and believing wife to grow in love for one another and to grow together as disciples of Jesus.

Now, between Peter and Paul, we have a blueprint for what marriage should look like in practice.

Now, if you have been married and you've kept that biblical standard perfectly, could you now raise your hand so we can congratulate you?

[24:03] Notice that my hand isn't raised either. Reality is this, brothers and sisters, there are so many ways to fall short of honoring God's plan for marriage.

It could be in failing to love one's spouse as one should or in the breaking of wedding vows. It could be in dishonoring marriage by engaging in sex outside of marriage or in treating arrangements that aren't marriage as though they were marriage.

There are really so many ways to sin by dishonoring marriage. But these sins do have something else in common.

And that's this, forgiveness can be found in Jesus Christ. We see that in 1 John 1.9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us have no hope of forgiveness, no hope of salvation other than being cleansed by the blood of Jesus coming to Him in repentance and faith.

[25:22] Marriage in this life is ultimately a sign of an eternal reality. One that we all need because it is a sign of the gospel message itself wherein we find our forgiveness and we find our hope and we find our freedom.

Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. We need His atoning, sacrificial death in our place for our sins.

We need to come to Him in repentance and in faith, trusting in the cleansing power of His precious blood. No matter who we are, no matter our state of life, married, single, divorced, widow, we all need the sure and certain hope of the gospel, which is the reality that marriage points us to.

It's intended to point us to that. Forgiven freely in Jesus through faith in Him, those who are married have the motivation of joy and gratitude to grow in holiness, to learn to love our spouses as we should, to love our spouses, to honor them, to seek God with them, to pray with them, and I would add to attend the Art of Marriage study with them.

Just throwing that out there. Whether we're married or not, let's remember the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us.

[26:58] Let's love and serve our families, our neighbors, proclaim the truth. so that others might see the glory of Christ and find salvation in the only place where it can be found, in Christ alone, who alone is the perfect bridegroom.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.