

Studies in First Peter

"You're the Minister of Marriage" First Peter 3:1-7

Introduction

Most Christian counseling is marriage counseling. Many larger churches have on their staffs a full-time minister for marriages.

If you are a Christian and are married, **you're** a minister of marriage! It's not a ministry of counseling others; it's a matter of following Jesus Christ in your own home. If I'm a husband, marriage is my ministry to my wife... If you're a wife, marriage is your ministry to your husband.

Before you agree, I should point out that marriage is your ministry *regardless your spouse's cooperation!* Sure, it would be great if your spouse ministered to you as he or she should; but with or without their cooperation, you are called upon to minister to your spouse.

You see this perspective in Peter's words to wives and husbands:

1. Some of the wives he wrote to were married to unsaved husbands. He saw it as an opportunity for them to have a successful ministry of evangelism.
2. The husbands he wrote to were already saved men. He encouraged them to consider their wives their primary and priority ministry.

These first-century ministers of marriage weren't doing too well:

1. The wives were *negating* their ministry by seeking to win their husbands to Christ with *words* rather than by their *walk*.
2. The husbands were *neglecting* their wives.

Twenty-first century ministers of marriage are still having similar problems. According to the Barna Research Group Christian marriages are in trouble at about the same rate as that of the unsaved:

"...33% of all born again individuals who have been married have gone through a divorce, which is statistically identical to the 34% incidence among non-born again adults" (Website, citing 2001).

Peter's words are just as pertinent today. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Wife - Be Quiet So You Don't Negate Your Ministry In Marriage, and #2 Husband - Be Considerate So You Don't Neglect Your Ministry In Marriage.

#1 Wife - Be Quiet So You Don't Negate Your Ministry In Marriage

(v1-6)

Guys, you're going to hear the words, "wives, be submissive to your husbands," and think that is the key to **all** marriage issues. It is the key... *If you're a woman!* You're not; God is going to have something else to say to you. If I were you, I'd spend the next six verses in prayer, repenting - getting ready for verse seven.

Ladies, now that your husbands are otherwise occupied, we can take a look at Peter's counsel without their interference.

[1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands...](#)

We're in a section of First Peter that describes Christian submission in your earthly relationships. In society, as a spouse, and spiritually (in the Church), God has set-up a proper order involving authority and submission to authority. With regard to marriage, God has set-up the husband as *head* and the wife as the *helper*. "Be submissive to your own husbands" means you acknowledge God's structure for marriage and take the subordinate role as your husbands helper.

Submission is about order, not equality. Jesus Himself was subject to His earthly parents and to His heavenly Father but was not lower than either of them. Before I forget, let me remind you that submission in your marriage follows the principle that you submit to God's appointed authority unless you are directed to sin. In that case, you are to obey God rather than any man - even your husband.

Wives are to accept the subordinate role *regardless your husband's spiritual condition!* Some of the women Peter addressed had unsaved husbands:

1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word...

The words Peter chose indicate an active, ongoing disobedience to God's Word. They describe unbelieving, unsaved men. They might be happy husbands; they might be harsh husbands. But they don't know Jesus and are on-their-way-to-Hell husbands.

Peter's counsel was pretty radical:

1 Peter 3:1 Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,

He told these Christian wives to **be quiet!** He told them to quit *talking* about Jesus and start *walking* with Him. He encouraged them to show their husbands by their "conduct" what difference Jesus made in their lives.

One author put it this way:

"...the husband... may be reached by the wife's silent demonstration of [the] transforming power [of God's Word] in her daily conduct. Instead of trying to coax and argue her husband into becoming a Christian, she will be more effective by quietly living out its saving power before him... It is her translation of the Gospel into life - right before the man's eyes - which proves a telling witness" (Hiebert).

Your marriage is your ministry. If your husband is unsaved, then it's a ministry of evangelism. He can be "won" to Christ.

He is a captive audience:

1 Peter 3:2 when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear.

Your husband "observes" two things: (1) Your "chaste conduct" and, (2) your "fear." Your *chaste conduct* is described in verses three and four; your *fear* is described in verses five and six.

Your chaste conduct:

1 Peter 3:3 Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward - arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel -

"Adornment" is from the Greek word for *cosmos*, where we get our word cosmetics. It means *to put in order*. I'm not going to make any jokes about ladies putting themselves in order; I want to get out of here alive!

This verse has been misused by extreme Christian groups to teach that women cannot ever arrange their hair, or wear jewelry, and must only wear very plain clothing. That was *not* Peter's intent. In the Greek text the word "fine" does not appear; it would simply read, "arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on apparel." *Peter was certainly not suggesting you refrain from wearing all clothing!* Neither was he saying you cannot ever arrange your hair or wear jewelry.

He was encouraging you to be both *moderate* and *modest* in your outward appearance... And you will be if you concentrate most of your attention and energy on improving inwardly:

1 Peter 3:4 rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

Great news! And it's not even an infomercial! God says there is a kind of beauty that is "incorruptible." You can only do so much with cosmetics and cosmetic surgery. Physical beauty is corruptible. Let's make that more personal: You're going to corrupt... But you can get more beautiful with age if you concentrate on your "hidden person."

Your hidden person, the real you, should be growing "gentle" and "quiet." "Gentle" means you live under control. You don't panic because you understand God is overruling your life. "Quiet" means *calming*; you are a calming influence.

What is the point of dressing up in your finest clothes, with your best jewelry, with a new "do," if your attitude is contentious and contrary? Remember, your marriage is not about you. You're the minister of marriage - called upon to minister to your husband, even if he is unsaved. He needs to see the transformation of your "heart." He needs to see the real you, the "hidden person," being affected by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

You may not think this kind of beauty will appeal to your husband. This transformation is "very precious in the sight of God." You live to please your Father in heaven. He doesn't care what you're wearing; He's already robed you in the righteousness of His Son. He's preparing a new body for you. In the mean time He's interested in your heart.

This makes a nice transition into Peter's next subject, *fear*, because you realize that everything you do is for the Lord's sake.

Your fear:

1 Peter 3:5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,
1 Peter 3:6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

Women have a certain idea of what is attractive. It is usually the idea promoted by advertising and by entertainment. If you want to know what is truly attractive, **look to the godly women in the Bible!** What made them attractive, both to God and their husbands, was the adornment of "being submissive to their own husbands."

I got saved just that way... (Describe)

Peter singled-out Sarah. She "obeyed Abraham," her husband. The word "obeyed" is a review of her life with Abraham. There was a pattern of obedience, a growing of her obedience over time. Calling someone "lord" in Old Testament culture was similar to our calling someone "mister" or "sir" out of respect. She may have addressed him as "Lord Abraham," but the idea is that she respected him as the head of her household.

Abraham did not make it easy for Sarah to submit! They were wealthy and successful, living in the Chaldean city of Ur, when Abe got a word from God. *"We're leaving Ur! I don't know where we're going yet, but let's go. God will show us."*

He took extended family with him. In-law problems halted their spiritual progress. It wasn't until after his father died that he moved on. Then they encountered a famine. Abe's bonehead solution was to go down to Egypt. There he put Sarah in jeopardy because he

feared the Egyptians would kill him to take her for themselves. He told them she was his sister; they took her into Pharaoh's harem... But before anything bad happened, God intervened and protected her.

I could go on about Abraham's faults but I think you get the picture. For her part, Sarah was not perfect either. That's why Peter added (in verse six) "if you do good." You are to imitate the "good" conduct of Sarah and the other women of the Bible. You might take encouragement in their failures - God can overcome *your* failures, too. But you take as your example the good conduct they grew into as they walked obediently with God in submission to their husbands.

Submission to your husband, even if he is a believer, is no easy task. It requires *fear* and *no fear*:

1. It requires a fear of God, a reverence and love for Him that motivates you to obey for the sake of pleasing Him.
2. It requires no fear of man. "Not afraid with any terror" means you do not fear the consequences of your husband's bad choices because you know God overrules both your lives for your good and His glory.

Speaking of your husband and his bad choices... **Guys, it's time to get in the game!**

#2 Husband - Be Considerate So You Don't Neglect Your Ministry In Marriage
(v7)

A lot has been said about the fact that there is only one verse for husbands. I rather think it has to do with our spiritual attention spans! You see this stereotyped all the time - the dull husband who neglects his wife. Whether it's Tim "the tool man" Taylor or "everybody loves" Ray Romano, guys just don't get it. They - we - are dull and tend to neglect our wives.

So Peter said something that should send a shiver down your spiritual spine. He said it at the end of verse seven: "that your prayers may not be hindered." If you neglect the ministry of marriage it will hinder your prayer life. That can't be good. Without an effective

prayer life, you cannot hope to accomplish anything of any lasting spiritual impact. You will still pray; you may still seem successful. But God puts your spiritual progress on hold until you become considerate of your wife.

Let me put it bluntly: If you are not fulfilling the obligations of this verse, your spiritual life is a joke.

What are the obligations of your ministry to your wife? Peter started the verse saying, "likewise." Just like in every other relationship, there is a proper submission. In the marriage, the husband is to be submitted to the authority of God. You need to **be** and **become** a man of God.

A man of God "dwells with [his wife]." On a physical level, "dwell" means *live*. You are to spend time with your wife. This means more than just being in the same location. She is to be your companion for life.

Peter described three levels of dwelling companionship. First he said you dwell with your wife "with understanding." The word means *knowledge*. On a **mental level**, you need to get to know your wife. You know how your wife thinks you should know what she means, and what she's thinking, before she ever says anything? *That is what God is saying here!*

Peter next said, "giving honor to the wife as to the weaker vessel." You are both "vessels," but the wife is "weaker." Peter didn't say how the wife was weaker; there are several things we could suggest. One that fits the context is a woman's greater emotional sensitivity. You must dwell with your wife on an **emotional level** that may be unfamiliar to you. Instead of making jokes about it and ridiculing your wife's emotional sensitivity, you are to "give honor" to her for it. You are to honor her emotional sensitivity by spending time figuring it out.

Then you must dwell with your wife "as being heirs together of the grace of life." This is the **spiritual level** of your relationship. "Heirs together" reminds you that your wife is not spiritually inferior. In fact, she may be far ahead of you spiritually. Nevertheless, you are charged with the responsibility for leading your wife spiritually.

Here, too, guys neglect their wives. The appeal of the Promise Keeper's movement was based upon the fact that Christian husbands had neglected the spiritual leadership of their wives and families. You don't need to make promises you can't keep. Just repent and take spiritual leadership.

Guys, you're the ministers of your marriage. Quit neglecting your ministry.

Conclusion

Peter talked to the ladies, then to the men. It can come across a little like a cop separating a married couple, trying to solve a domestic disturbance!

That's not the way to receive these words. The Holy Spirit is giving you God's way of bringing love and stability to the institution He created in the Garden of Eden.

The simplest way I know to put it is this: Make marriage your ministry.