WORDS FOR CHRISTIAN WIVES AND HUSBANDS

Before we delve into our passage this morning I want to ask you a question. What qualities in a wife and a husband make for a happy and harmonious marriage? DISCUSS

I am assuming that all of us in this room have been saved. We are believers in Jesus Christ. But imagine for a moment that your spouse was NOT a Christian. Could you have a happy and harmonious marriage with that unsaved marriage partner? Well, this is the very real problem that many 1st Century believers faced. Many people came to faith in Christ after they were married. Most of Peter’s readers came from Jewish backgrounds. Some were Gentiles who had been raised in pagan idolatry. Now they have received Christ as Savior and Lord, but their husband or their wife are still lost. This is a real issue in the early church and Peter is going to address it in the first part of Chapter 3.

READ 1 Peter 3:1-4

“Likewise” links what Peter is about to say with what he just said. Keep in mind there are no chapter divisions in the original manuscripts (these did not come into existence until the early 13th Century). Peter is continuing his same line of thought from the previous verses. “Wives” is who he is addressing. “Be subject to your own husbands…” The Greek word Peter uses for “be subject” or KJV “in subjection” in verse 1 is *hupotasso* (hoop-ot-as’-oh). It’s the same word he used back in 2:13 when he said “be subject to every human institution.” KJV said “submit yourselves to every ordinance of man.” Peter is speaking about us Christians being subject to the ruling government and leaders. *Hupotasso* is also the same word that Peter used in 2:18 “be subject to your masters.” Same word used in 2:13, 2:18 and 3:1. OK, so what does it mean to be subject to, in subjection to or submit to? It literally means “to place yourself under authority.” In a marriage what does it mean for a wife to be subject to her husband? (note: Paul talks about this also in Eph 5:22 and Col 3:18).

With reference to the government and masters (or employers, bosses) Peter is addressing his audience of Christians urging us to place ourselves in submission to some other human authority. And why should we do this? So that our good godly behavior will serve as a positive influence for Jesus Christ. This should be our priority. Evangelism is our mandate given by our Lord. It’s our calling. We are to be witnesses for Jesus with, yes, our words – centered on THE Word of God, but also by our lives.

Peter urges Christian wives to be subject to their husbands, many who had unbelieving husbands. “So that even if some do not obey the word” (husbands are not saved), “they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives.” Again it’s that idea that by your behavior, Christian wife, you will be a positive influence to your unbelieving husband – so that he might be won to Christ (he might be saved). If we are to be witnesses for Christ in a hostile society (that does not believe the same way we do and in many cases opposes our message), then we are called to submit ourselves to the civil, social and family order that God Himself has designed…yes, even if those who are in authority over us are not Christians.

I just want to make a brief comment about verses 3 and 4. This is not at all a prohibition against Christian wives wearing makeup or fixing their hair up or wearing jewelry or nice clothes. Some denominations have interpreted this passage that way. But I believe it misses Peter’s real point. Peter is simply saying that these outward things (that women spend so much time and effort on) should not be our focus. What’s really important to God, what’s precious to Him, is what’s on the inside – what Peter refers to in verse 4 as “the hidden person of the heart.” And specifically Peter mentions the quality of “a gentle and quiet spirit.”

Peter now gives an example to illustrate his point.

READ 1 Peter 3:5-6

“Holy women” in verse 5 is a reference to O.T. saints. Examples that may come to mind when you think about God-fearing wives from back then are Noah’s wife (unnamed), Sarah, Rebekah, Naomi, Ruth, Hannah, Esther and the mother of Jesus, Mary. Some of these wives were not married to followers of Yahweh but were nevertheless submissive to their husbands. Peter focuses on one, Sarah.

Sarah “obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.” Sarah recognized Abraham as the leader and head of the household. She placed herself under his authority. And I looked it up – she actually DID refer to him as “lord” in Genesis 18:12. So Peter tells the Christian wives he is writing to that when they do the same thing they are “her children.” They are of the same spiritual heritage as Sarah.

“Do not fear anything that is frightening.” Certainly there might be fear on the part of Christian women to submit themselves to unsaved husbands. It’s scary to think about what these unregenerate men might be capable of. But Peter tells them not to be afraid. Submit to them as unto the Lord and let God deal with the husband. “You just do the right thing. Do what pleases God.”

Before we go on to address Christian husbands in verse 7 I want to read to you from a parallel passage, 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. READ IT. Christian husbands or wives who are married to unbelievers are to stay in the marriage for the sake of the children and to try to win their spouses to Christ. But, if the unbelieving partner chooses to leave the marriage, then let them go for the sake of peace.

READ 1 Peter 3:7

By context Peter is talking to Christian husbands, many of them are married to an unbelieving wife. His one word to the husbands is to show “honor to the woman.” You’re married to her. She’s the one you promised to love, honor and cherish. You have an obligation before God to treat her right. “In an understanding way” – one commentary I read put it this way: “A Christian husband should be intimately aware of his wife’s needs, her strengths and weaknesses, and her goals and desires.”

I interpret “weaker vessel” to mean that she, the wife, is weaker physically. “Vessel” is a reference to the human body. In the case of a non-Christian wife she would also be weaker than her Christian husband spiritually. In any case, husband, your wife depends on you for your protection and provision and nurturing. “Grace of life” is the gift of life, the physical life that you, husband, and your wife share together. The relationship between a husband and a wife is unique. It is God’s design.

Peter warns the Christian husbands that if they fail to treat their wives with consideration and respect then they cannot expect to have their prayers answered. In other words, it will impact you spiritually. I’ll talk more about that toward the end of the lesson.

In the next few verses Peter shifts gears and he addresses “all of you,” the church, all brothers and sisters in Christ. So whether you are a husband, a wife, single or even a child, Peter is talking to you, to all of us.

READ 1 Peter 3:8-9

“Finally.” Peter is finished talking about a Christian’s responsibility to an unbelieving society – whether it be the government, the work place or the family. He shifts gears and now addresses our character generally, whether out in society or in the church. Peter lists five virtues we should possess as followers of Jesus Christ. So, time for us to take spiritual inventory as we go through each one of these:

[Just a side note: the Greek words and word forms that Peter uses for each of these five virtues is unique and would have grabbed the attention of his readers. Four of the five words are used only once in the N.T. – here in 1 Peter Chapter 3. The other one, the word translated as “a tender heart” is used only one other time, by Paul in Ephesians.]

“unity of mind” the Greek word means “harmony,” “like-minded.” At least half a dozen times we are told how the church was in “one accord.”

“sympathy.” This word means to have the same feelings as or suffering together with another person.

“brotherly love.” Having a love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)

“a tender heart” the Greek word is “compassionate.” Christians should show affection toward all people.

“a humble mind” the Greek word is “humility.” Literally it means to have a mind that does not rise far from the ground.

So, it’s time to take inventory. How well are you doing?

Verse 9 – When things do not go well or we are mistreated we can react one of two ways. We can do one of two things with our mouth: we can bless or we can curse. Our calling as Christians is to bless others, to act like Jesus. There is a natural human tendency to react negatively when we are offended but we are to return good to those who hurt us (Eph 4:25, 29).

In verses 10-12 Peter quotes directly from Psalm 34:12-16a as he exhorts the church.

READ 1 Peter 3:10-12.

First, “let him keep his tongue from evil, his lips from speaking deceit.” Watch what you say. Your words matter. Second, “turn away from evil and do good.” Your actions, your behavior matters. Do that which is good. Third, “seek peace and pursue it.”

Paul put it this way in Romans 12:16-21 “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”