

1 Peter

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish
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1 Peter 3:1-12

Vss. 1-6

- Peter's approach to the persecution that is beginning to hit the church was for the people of God to live exemplary lives. They are to be good civic minded citizens. They are to be good neighbors. Here at the beginning of Chapter 3, they are to be ideal family members: ideal wives, ideal husbands.
- One of the criticisms against the church was that it was disrupting family life across the empire. This was not entirely an unjust criticism. As family members became Christian, the transition did in fact disrupt many family traditions, marriages, and legacies. A son may no longer want to follow in his father's business if the boy believes God may not approve of the business or has something different for him. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-37.
- If you noticed, Peter has way more to say to wives than husbands, but there are very practical reasons for this. The situation where a wife becomes a believer puts her in a very delicate, if not dangerous, situation.
- First, there is the matter of a wife's legal status. Throughout the empire, whether Roman, Greek, or Jew, the wife would be only a half-step above a slave and may not be as valued. Regardless of the sub-culture, a wife had no rights and for a wife to adopt a religion other than her husband's, was unprecedented. In Jewish culture a wife was owned by her husband as he would own his livestock. There was no way for her to divorce him, but he could divorce her for any reason with a simple letter from the rabbi. For her to adopt a new religion without her husband was unthinkable. In Greek culture it wasn't just that the wife was to be seen and not heard, she wasn't even to be seen. She lived in her own apartment away from her husband

and was never to go out and was to live in strict obedience to her husband and bear him sons. Like the Jews, a Greek husband could divorce his wife on a whim. Life for a Roman wife was no better. She was legally a child all of her life, passing from the power of her father to her husband. Her father or husband had even power of life or death over her. Her husband could literally kill her without impunity if he just suspected her of infidelity. He could divorce her for whatever reason he chose. The whole of the ancient world saw no place for a wife to ever make any decision on her own. It would be impossible for us to appreciate the situation of a wife in the Roman empire who rejected her husband's gods and become a Christian by her own choosing.

- So Peter has some good advice, but what he doesn't say is just as important. 1) He doesn't advise that the Christian wife leave her pagan husband. Despite what he says about not being unequally yoked (which is more toward those looking to be married), Paul gives the same advice in 1 Cor. 7:13-16. The wife is to remain with her husband as a witness and as his best chance at salvation. 2) She is not to preach to her husband, nor make an argument of Christian apologetics. Rather she is to let her "chaste and respectful (and submissive) behavior" as well as her inner beauty which flows out of her "gentle and quiet spirit", be her testimony and witness. Her submission to her husband does not come out of fear but love. She is to be chaste, that is pure, in all ways. She is to be respectful even to her pagan husband. In short, God makes a Christian wife to be the very best kind of wife, so that not even a pagan husband has reason to complain.
- It was common in the ancient world for women of even moderate means to adorn themselves as much as possible. Isaiah 3:18-23 gives an example of what Hebrew women wore in his day. Here in vs.3, Peter gives us a slight example too. In Roman times adornment was considered the one interest allowed to be a woman's own.

- Our daughter was always pretty. Her mother, long before me, could see the beauty she would become, so early on she would gently instill into her daughter that inner beauty was *always* more important than outer beauty. Kathy always looked for examples to point to and never missed an opportunity to speak into the question. By the time Rebecca was a senior in high school it was clear that her mother's message had taken root. Mothers of younger girls were asking Rebecca help to coach their girls on how to dress, etc. and today she is the epitome of vss. 4-6.

Vs. 7

- Peter has a single verse addressed to husbands. Whether their wives were Christian or not was something of a moot point. Like the Philippian jailer, if the husband confesses Christ and is baptized, then the whole household would do the same.
- One of the earliest foundations of the Christian life is the concept of the "reciprocal ethic". If scripture speaks to slaves, it also speaks to masters. If scripture speaks to children, it also speaks to parents. Here, having spoken to the wives, Peter turns to the husbands. It's all about being in right relationship with one another through Christ. This was a totally new concept in Roman/Greek culture. Slaves, children, and wives had no rights, nor reason to have expectations...until Christ and His church.
- A Christian husband is to be understanding. He is to treat her with consideration and respect. He must be willing to listen, for who is speaking is a sister, a co-laborer in Christ.
- He is to be chivalrous toward his wife "*as with*" someone weaker. Peter is not saying that the wife IS someone weaker. He's a married man. He knows better. But treat your wife with grace and mercy and kindness. This is something we instilled in our son. He said recently that he held the door for a lady or something like that, and she remarked with surprise that "chivalry was not dead!" Chris told her that had he not done so, generations of his ancestors would have risen up against him and he was absolutely right. He

was taught the same way I was taught in how a Christian gentleman is to act towards women.

- Going back to the idea of understanding, husbands are to show their wives honor as “a fellow heir of the grace of life”. Recall Galatians 3:28 - we are all one in Christ. Your wife is your sister in Christ, on equal ground with you before Christ. A scandalous thought in Peter’s day!
- As such, to avoid having your prayer life hindered, a husband must be a good brother in Christ to his wife, as he would to any brother or sister in Christ. Recall Matt. 5:23-24.

Vss. 8-9

- Peter here shifts his gaze back to the whole church. First, they are to live in harmony. The idea of the need and value of Christian unity is pervasive throughout the New Testament. It is the center-point of Jesus High Priestly Prayer (John 17:21-23). Paul tell the Romans and the Corinthians they are always one body (Rom. 12:4, 16; I Cor. 12:12-31). Living in harmony may be the singular Christian essential that we fail most frequently.
- Second, we are to be sympathetic. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). It is that Good Samaritan perspective we are to have always.
- We are to be “brotherly”, that is readily showing love as one brother in Christ to another. 1 John 3-4 powerfully and plainly drives home the point that without openly showing love to your brothers and sisters in Christ you cannot dare to call yourself a Christian.
- We are to be kindhearted, readily showing compassion. Jesus, in Matt. 9:13, is rebuking the Pharisees, and challenges them to “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire compassion and not sacrifice’”, quoting Hosea 6:6. The gospels tell us that when Jesus looked at the crowds he felt compassion, because “they were like sheep without a shepherd”, (Matt. 9:36).
- Humble in spirit: we must remember that whatever we are, we are because of Christ. We are no better than anyone else in and of ourselves. Nor can we do anything on our own, but with Christ we can do all things.

- We must be quick to forgive, quick to turn the other cheek and return good, a blessing, for any evil done to us. We are to forgive as we are forgiven and we will be forgiven only to the extent that we forgive.

Vss. 10-12

- Peter concludes with a quote from the Old Testament as he often did. Here he is quoting Psalm 34. It is a picture of those whom God accepts or rejects. Following God was never meant to be complicated.