

LIVING LIFE IN THE FAMILY

In the discourse on “Living a Christian Life” in various situations, Peter has given us a principle to follow in 1 Peter 2:16 and this is to do what seems to be a paradoxical statement:

“Live as free men and as servants (bond slaves) of God.”

He went on to tell us that a practical way to carry out this way of life is to

“Honor All” or “Respect Others”

Several venues were given as examples of how to do this. He discussed our relationship to civil authority (honor the king), to God (reverential obedience), and to fellow Christians (agape love). We examined in some detail the difficult situation of a servant and a master or in a more contemporary vein, the employee and employer.

The next life setting where many Christian (as well as non-Christians) are challenged is in the husband and wife relationship. We know from similar teachings of the Apostle Paul, that the respect shown in such a relationship is a two-way street.

¶ Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

As Christians, we should be able to bring Christian values to the family situation and have more success in family life than anyone else in the world. No where else is “self-sacrificing love” more needed than in the home environment. If we can’t make our Christianity work in the home and in the family, then we probably can’t make it work anywhere. Yet, surveys show that dysfunctional families are just as common among church members as among non-believers. The society in which we live has a constant call that is contrary to Christian values. Individuality and independence are more highly valued than cooperative relationships and interdependence. The very thing that allows cooperation and interdependence to work is dying to self which is contrary to the call of the culture.

Both Paul and Peter made pleas for the wife to be submissive to the husband. The situation of non-submissiveness goes all the way back to the consequences of the fall in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:16 we see

16 ¶ To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

The second part of this verse has been interpreted to mean that the woman would desire the position of power of the man in the relationship. In other word, the woman would want to be in control. Physical power is not typically present with the woman to bring about such a situation of being in control. Relying on physical power to gain control can manifest itself as abuse in such relationships. Aggressiveness or assertiveness is also not naturally present with the woman simply because of hormonal make up. Add to this, the cultural history in some societies where the woman is “taught” to be in lesser position in the culture and what you wind up with is a lot of frustration on the part of women in their relationships with men. At the same time, there is still that desire to have the position that she sees that the male has. Since she is not being able to achieve power or control by a direct approach, then subtle manipulative actions are attempted. This action is seen in young girls and in grown women. It is a compensating way of “surviving” in a male dominated society or culture.

The natural reaction of the male when either an overt challenge or a subtle action is brought to bear is resistance and he will typically exercise whatever control (physical strength, economic power, aggressiveness) to stay in the dominate position.

All this results in open hostility. Both are trying to survive and preserve SELF. Peter saying to both parties “Don’t do that!” Why? Remember what you are doing, remember that your very lives are on display as “walking billboards” for the Kingdom of God and His salvation. The idea of “mutual submission” is lot easier of both the husband and wife are faithful Christian. However, Peter points out that even if the husband is a non-believer, then the proper action by the wife will give the kind of testimony that will win the husband over to the Lord.

3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.

Peter backs up his logic for this by reminding us that we are spiritual beings and not just physical beings. It is a mistake to conclude that Peter is advocating that women (or men) should neglect their physical appearance. However, one should not be obsessed with that issue. It was quite common, not only in the time Peter wrote this letter, but also has ever been and will ever be that most women spend considerable time, money, and effort on their outward appearance. In the culture in which we live, people put a high premium on outward appearance. Many working women will arise early (more than an hour early) to “do their hair and put on their makeup.” Few will rise early to have a quiet time of devotion and meditation with the Lord. (The same is true of men: While men do not get up early to “do their hair,” neither do they rise early for a time of devotion and meditation.)

The beauty that lasts is the inward beauty. Just as one must work at achieving outward beauty (with hairdos and makeup and exercise) inward beauty also requires considerable effort to achieve a gentle and quiet spirit which comes from knowing who we are in the Lord.

Some practical advice for women and men regarding “outward adornment” is that the clothes or jewelry we wear, the way we “do our hair” and whatever else we do that affects our outward appearance should not draw attention to itself but should work together for the presentation of our person in such a way that we are not hindered in our role of being representatives and “walking advertisements” of the Kingdom of God.

5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, 6 like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Sarah and others are characterized by people as those “who put their hope in God.” Our hope in God was the theme of the first part of this epistle from Peter to the Christians who were living in difficult situations. That hope is a basis for our trust in being able to live successfully (holy living) and fulfill our calling as “kings and priests unto God (living stones) in the culture or society (fallen world) in which we find ourselves. Because our hope and, therefore, our trust is in God, then we are able to position ourselves under His authority (and the resulting framework of other positions that are needed for an orderly society) and recognize the need for some sort of orderliness in relationships in whatever venue we are operating.

What might prevent a wife from function in such a manner? One thing that Peter mentioned was “fear.” The logical question is “Fear of what?” It is not terror of the husband but is a terror of uncertainty that comes from putting our complete trust in God to bring us through the situations in which we find ourselves. We are afraid to step out in trust because of the unknown. We don’t want to let go and just trust ourselves to God’s grace. We do not want to give up control of what happens and this desire for control applies to men as well as to women.

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Recall that the general, practical way in which we are to live as free men and as bond slaves to God is to “honor all” or simple to “respect others.” The instructions for husbands addresses the “how to” of showing honor or respect to his wife which is an expression of being submissive. In general, when we show respect to anyone, we give consideration to their condition or situation. If a person has a headache, then we would show respect by being considerate and not make loud noises or whatever would worsen the situation. If a person is celebrating a happy occasion, then we might show respect by given consideration to them and not “burden them” with a recitation of all the problems and heartaches you or someone you know is undergoing.

Therefore, in consideration of the wife as the “weaker partner” but as an “equal heir” in the kingdom of God, the husband would interact with his wife in a different manner than he would with someone else. For example, men will typically interact with other men (whether in a social setting or in a business relationship) with a certain amount of “posturing” and perhaps even “bravado” so as to gain an advantage and achieve a certain element of control. The discussion may be about alternative ways of doing a job or achieving a certain results and egos and pride come into play as we attempt to “sell our ideas” as being superior so that we are influencing what happen in our sphere of life (that is, we are exercising control). Since the driving forces (physical strength, economic power and assertiveness due to hormonal makeup) will tend to be comparable in a setting of men, then there is little risk of intimidation of each other as strong arguments for and criticisms against various positions are expressed. If there is good balance of the “driving forces” in a group, then opinions can be shared and better solutions to problem worked out because multiple idea are allow to thrive. This situation is expressed in the vernacular as “two heads are better than one.”

Consider the situation in which a group of men are working on a problem and the “driving forces” are out of balance. A good examples would be the company president and the building custodian trying to solve a problem. Unless the president gives consideration to the relative economic power positions, he or she is not likely to get any meaningful interaction and input from the custodian. The president can not posture and argue the way he (or she) might do with other presidents in trying to solve a problem.

How does such an example apply to the husband-wife relationship? Consider the “driving forces” that are in play in such a relationship. Physical strength is typically in favor of the husband. In times past (less so, today), economic power was typically in favor of the husband. Assertiveness and aggressiveness that comes from hormones is typically in favor of the husband. If the husband’s conversation with his wife is conducted at the same level of forcefulness as he might used in interacting with other men, then his wife will undergo severe intimidation and the possibility of there being any meaningful communication and sharing or utilizing her input and ideas in decisions is nil.

Considering that God gave the husband and wife to each other as joint heirs of God’s life in the marriage relationship, then the husband must submit himself to his wife by altering the approach he might normally take in order to accomplish the result of benefitting from his partner’s input that God has provide for him. If husbands fail to do this, then they are not using all the resources that God has given them.

As Christians, we should be asking God for help in every situation in life. The answer to the pray just may be found in the uninhibited interaction and communication we have with our spouses. If we are failing to have effective interaction and communication with our spouse who is an heir of God’s life, then the “answers to our prayers” will be hindered.