

## OUR RELATIONSHIPS

1 Peter 3:1-12

In his letter that addressed 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 with examples of how to do this. He discussed our relationships to civil authority (honor the king), to God (reverential obedience), and to fellow Christians (agape love). Peter also addressed 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 Christians (as well as non-Christians) are challenged is in the husband and wife’s relationship. We know from similar teachings of the Apostle Paul, that the respect shown in such a relationship is a two-way street.

### Wives – 3:1-6

<sup>1</sup>In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup> as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. <sup>3</sup> Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; <sup>4</sup> but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. <sup>5</sup> For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; <sup>6</sup> just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. 1 Peter 3:1-6 (NASB95)

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 nonbelievers. 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 wrote about the wife-husband relationship in their letters to the early church members. We can find a reference to this interaction that 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 by some to mean that the woman would desire the position that the man typically has in the relationship. In other word, the woman would want to be in control. There is nothing too surprising here in that everyone wants 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.

Some have made the claim that aggressiveness or assertiveness is also not naturally present with the woman simply because of hormonal makeup. Add to this the cultural history in some societies where the woman is “taught” to be in a 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 usually 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 available to him (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 was 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 much easier if both the husband and wife are faithful Christians. However, Peter points out that even if the husband is a nonbeliever, then the proper action by the wife will give the kind of testimony that will win the husband over to the Lord.

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 was 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.

Sarah and others are characterized 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 functioning 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.

## Husbands – 3:7

<sup>7</sup> You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7 (NASB95)

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 simply to “respect others.” The instructions for husbands address the “how to” of showing honor or respect to his wife which is an expression of his being submissive. In general, when we show respect to anyone, we give consideration to their condition or situation. For example, 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 happens 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 problems worked out because multiple ideas are allowed 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 is working on a problem and the “driving forces” are out of balance. A good example 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 cannot posture and argue in the same 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 are 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 use 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 provided 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

our prayers 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 spouses who are heirs of God's life, then the "answers to our prayers" will be hindered.

### All Believers – 3:8-12

<sup>8</sup>To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; <sup>9</sup>not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup>For, "THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. <sup>11</sup>"HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. <sup>12</sup>"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL." 1 Peter 3:8-12 (NASB95)

From some of the stories we hear or read about relationships that fall apart, we might think that someone needs to write a book on how to get along with each other in all walks of life. Well, someone has already made an excellent start on this. In fact, both Paul and Peter addressed the issue in their writings. Paul had the most discussion on this because he was attempting to correct problems in the dysfunctional church at Corinth. Peter's writing on this is more in the genre of good advice that, if followed, would prevent conflicts in a family or a local body of believers. In fact, these principles will work in most group settings.

In the second part of chapter two of his first letter, Peter described several situations in which we find ourselves and he advised those early Christians how to behave in such a way that God is glorified by what people observe us doing in these various situations. He addressed issues regarding how we should relate to various authorities we encounter in our daily walk. He also had some comments about our general conduct in any situation. In the summary we find here, he proceeded to sum up what he had to say, in general rules; which regarded all sorts of Christians, magistrates and subjects, masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children, old and young, rich and poor, of whatsoever state, age, sex, or condition. Peter's "the sum of all is this" is the same remedy Paul applied to the church at Corinth. "Unity in a family or in a church" can be described as "harmony" or "be ye all of one mind." In this call for unity, he is not calling for us to be clones of each other and have the same jobs, interest, hobbies, dispositions; however, he did want sameness of judgment with respect to the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel. In these things the saints should be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment; for as the church is but one body, of which Christ is the head, there should be but one mind in it; even as there is but one Spirit of God. Since we all belong to the same family, there should be a unity of spirit and mind, and what we say with respect to the Gospel. If we describe the church in terms of being a family of believers, then should not the same principles that work to bring harmony and unity to a church work to bring harmony and unity to a family?

In terms that could be borrowed from the Sermon on the Mount and the Fruit of the Spirit, Peter listed desirable characteristics that should be descriptive of the Church of Jesus Christ (or any organization where Christians are involved). In verses 10-12, Peter backed up his instructions to these Christians with an extensive quote from Psalm 34 (verses 12-16) that addresses the proper relational conduct we should have as God's people.

If we do these things, then we should have little trouble in life. Sometimes there are problems even if we are doing all the right things and we need to be prepared to deal with such situations in the proper way. The early church had many instances where Christians suffered for "righteousness' sake." The proper way to deal with such persecution is found in his quote from Isaiah 8:12 (do not fear their intimidation) but give Christ the proper place in our hearts as Lord of our lives and give witness of why we have hope even in the midst of troubles.

If we will always choose the “high road” in our relationships and interactions with people, then we will not have any regrets in the long run. Consistent, Christlike behavior will be vindicated and even the enemies of the Cross will one day acknowledge the rightness of such behavior.