

What's a Husband to Do?

1 Peter 3:7

A Sermon by Chris Mueller

A husband shopping center (Husband Mart) has just opened where a woman may go to choose a husband from among many men. The store is comprised of six floors, and the men increase in positive attributes as the shopper ascends the flights. There is, however, a catch. As you open the door to any floor you may choose any man from that floor, but if you go up a floor you cannot go back down except to exit the building.

So a woman goes to the shopping center to find a husband. On the first floor the sign on the door reads "Floor 1--These men have jobs." The woman reads the sign and says to herself, "Well, that's better than my last boyfriend, but I wonder what's further up?" So up she goes.

The second floor sign reads "Floor 2--These men have jobs and love kids." The woman remarks to herself, "That's great, but I wonder what's further up?" and up she goes again.

The third floor sign reads "Floor 3--These men have jobs, love kids and are extremely good looking." "Hmmm, better," she says. "But I wonder what's upstairs?"

The fourth floor sign reads "Floor 4--These men have jobs, love kids, are extremely good looking and help with the housework." "Wow!" exclaims the woman, "very tempting. But there must be more further up!" and again she heads up another flight.

The fifth floor sign reads "Floor 5--These men have jobs, love kids, are extremely good looking, help with the housework and have a strong romantic streak." "Oh, mercy! But just think, what's next?" So up to the sixth floor she goes.

The sixth floor sign reads "Floor 6--You are visitor 1 billion, 12 million, 3 hundred 45 to this floor. There are no men on this floor. This floor exists solely as proof that women are impossible to please. Thank you for shopping at Husband Mart, and have a nice day."

I don't think that's true--the wives of this church have contented themselves with far less than the top floor. So how do husbands and wives get to the place where their marriage becomes the grace of life--the best this world has to offer? The answer is found in 1 Peter 3:7—turn there and take out your outline.

This is a difficult time for the genuine Christians Peter is writing. The government is beginning to turn against Christ-followers. Believers obey God rather than men, so first century Christians were breaking Roman law by proselytizing Roman citizens with the Gospel. As a result Rome began to turn against believers and may have actually kicked these Christians out of Rome and sent them to a frontier region of the Roman Empire in modern day Turkey. So not only are Peter's readers aliens and strangers on planet earth awaiting their true home in heaven, but they are also aliens and strangers on earth now in a totally new location. And now they are marked out by Rome as suspicious radicals.

So Peter writes to encourage them to stand firm in grace. He says at the end of his letter in 1 Peter 5:12, "*I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*" So as Peter begins his letter in chapters 1 and 2, he says to live as one who has been given a salvation you could never earn nor choose for yourselves. You've been

1:3 “*caused to be born again*,” internally transformed and given an amazing inheritance secured in heaven that will never be taken away from you.

So to stand firm in God’s grace every single day, live as one who deserves nothing but has been given everything. Mid-way through chapters 2 and 3 Peter shocks us by stating that submission is also crucial in order to stand firm in grace. So first salvation in Christ, now submission to Christ is the path to standing firm in your faith. In 2:13 he tells Christians to submit to an unfair government that is persecuting them. Then in 2:18 Peter tells slaves to submit to unjust masters, even if they’re harsh. And finally in 3:1 Peter tells wives to submit to their own husbands, even if they’re unsaved.

Then for six verses Peter instructs married women how to be wives who glorify God, please Christ, and honor God’s Word. He invests more time with the wives because they had the most difficult circumstances. The wives were saved, but some their husbands were not--so now these wives worship only Christ, but they live under the authority of a husband who followed Roman gods or even worshipped the emperor. It was a tense situation. So Peter tells these wives from 2:21 to 25 to imitate Christ when it gets tough, 3:1 to fill out their God-designed role of submission, 3:2 to make sure they live the truth not merely talk the truth, 3:3 to 4 to focus on internal character and not external clothing, and 3:5 to 6 model their behavior after Godly biblical examples.

So now Peter does something shocking in verse 7—maybe you didn’t notice, but Peter has not addressed those in authority thus far. He told Christian citizens what to do under an unjust government, but gave no instruction to Rome. He told slaves what to do under unjust masters as the authority, but didn’t instruct Christian masters. But now in verse 7 after instructing wives how to live even under a husband who is unsaved, Peter does instruct Christian husbands how to treat their wives. God is making a point. God is reminding all husbands just how crucial their role is to the marriage relationship. Ephesians 5:23 makes this clear, “*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church.*”

The Greek states that you husbands are the head--not could be, would be, or should be--you are the head. The only question is this, are you a good one like Christ, or a bad one not like Christ. Headship means spiritual leader--it means responsible, it means initiator, it means work at your marriage. Husbands can’t coast, sit back, compartmentalize or float. You’re not the owner of the team sipping iced drinks in your private box when it comes to your marriage--you’re the player coach, in the game pressing for a win through modeling and instruction.

Have you ever done any whitewater rafting? I have actually rafted through and down a collapsed dam which combines the thrill of a roller coaster with the terror of a class 5 rapid. And once I was tied up on the ropes of an overturned raft, trapped under the raft under water, and thought I was going to drown. My last thought before I was mercifully released from this death trap was this--Jean is going to kill me for dying (doesn’t make much sense when you’re dying).

One universal truth about any river is this--anything that is not powered by wind, gasoline or human muscle is going to float downstream with the current. This is also true of all the men in this room. Unless you’ve been saved and are continually filled with the Spirit, you are going to float down the current of the flesh. And nothing demonstrates the need for you to be empowered by Christ and the Holy Spirit more than your marriage. Two saints who sin pressed together in the closest possible environment, layered under the stress of communication, children, finances, home management, education, discipleship, health issues,

ministry in the church, in-laws, witnessing to the lost and more prove the need for Christ and daily dependence upon the Spirit.

The current of this earth is too strong for any marriage to be heavenly. The pull of the flesh is too great for any marriage not to be filled with the Spirit. The flow toward self-reliance is too vast to not depend solely upon the Word of God for direction. You must turn to divine resources if your marriage is to glorify God, honor Christ, be a witness to the world, experience the grace of life and be a joy to you. And that is what 1 Peter 3:7 can give to you believing husbands.

What is a husband to do? Look at verse 7, *“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.”* Peter gives husbands five crucial keys to being a Christ-like mate.

#1 Imitate Christ as your model for marriage faithfully

Peter begins verse 7 with “You husbands in the same way.” In the same way as who or what? Some think in the same way as the wives from verses 1 to 6, or in the same way as wives live with unbelieving husbands, you husbands live with unbelieving wives--but Peter later talks about the wives in verse 7 as co-heirs with Christ. So Peter is not primarily talking to husbands of unbelieving wives.

When Peter says, *“you husbands in the same way,”* he means like the wives, you husbands in the same way imitate Christ. Reaching back to the powerful illustration of Christ at the end of chapter 2:21 to 25, Peter says in the same way Christ behaved, you husbands live. Follow the example of Christ in your marriage.

Listen to Peter describe how Christ responded to the unjust, harsh mistreatment He received at the hands of His own creation at the end of chapter 2. Look at verses 21 to 23, *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”*

No one has more authority than the King of all Kings.

No one has more power than the Creator of the universe.

No one has more moral high ground than the perfect Son of God.

No one has more right to judge than the One who never sinned.

Yet, look at how Christ responded to unfair treatment, cruel people and unjust suffering. Sinless, innocent, perfect Christ yielded to sinful, guilty, imperfect men. And Christ denied Himself without grumbling, without retaliating, without threatening and without doubting.

So husbands, in the same way, deny yourself, do not abuse your authority as head, do not bark orders, do not lose your temper, do not force obedience, but follow the example of Christ who died to self, in your marriage.

This is exactly what Paul calls for in marriage in Ephesians 5:25, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*” Paul says, I command you to continually love your wives, just like Christ loved you and completely gave Himself away. Does your wife know without a doubt that you are completely and totally hers continually? Does she know that you would do anything you could for her? Does she know for a fact that she has your heart and there are no competitors? That is your job--why? The heart of a godly man is to imitate his Savior, following the example of the innocent one who suffered for our guilt, mimicking the perfect one who bore God’s hateful wrath for our sin, doing in a small way what Jesus Christ did for us in a big way.

The only way any man here can hope to fulfill his role as a husband now or someday is to keep his eyes focused on Christ and what Jesus did for us. Men, you must put on glasses, and one of the lenses is Christ and the other lens is the Gospel. That is the only way you’ll know where to paddle, and the only way you’ll resist the steady current of this world headed toward flesh-ville, proud-a-topia and selfish town.

Single men--spiritual leadership is not telling others what to do, it is being like Christ. Single women--spiritual leadership is not a guy who can pray or quote a verse, but a man who is responsible and like Christ. He will do these three things—look for them.

Christ initiated--Christ did not wait for us to respond or want salvation, he initiated and so do spiritual leaders. They initiate and pursue obeying the Word of God--they go for it.

Christ planned--the entire Old Testament proves Christ planned, and godly men are those who plan. If they can’t marry you for three years, they have a plan to pace that relationship. If they can’t afford something they need, they plan their finances. They plan.

Christ sacrificed Himself--the Godly man knows how to be a servant, which involves work, hardship, sacrifice, difficulty, and inconvenience. If a man doesn’t serve without being asked, do not marry Him no matter what he says. He is not like Christ.

Imitate Christ as your model for marriage--remember Christ died for your sins, and you need His grace every single day to live. It is no longer I who live but what? Christ lives in me. Godly husbands are those who pursue Christ daily.

#2 Know your wife intimately

The average American couple spends 37 minutes per week together in actual communication. But God says to husbands in the next phrase of verse 7, “*Live with your wives in an understanding way.*” That phrase literally means dwell together in deep personal knowledge. Do you have an intimate personal knowledge of your wife? That only happens two ways—an intense study into the Word of God as it relates to people, and a deep personal study of your wife. As you look at your wife, do you see her with a biblical lens?

Women are amazing creatures made in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 is clear, “*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*” Even though the fall has marred God’s image in people, it has not disappeared. Therefore I will treat her with a special dignity. And I’ll not forget my wife is stamped with immortality. She will exist as body and spirit entities in heaven or in hell

forever. (There is no hell for dogs--possibly cats--hell is only reserved for distorted image bearers and fallen angels.)

Therefore the Gospel must saturate every Christian marriage. A biblical lens will not forget your wife is fallen in Adam and corrupted by sin. Romans 5:12 says, "Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Because we are all part of the human race, in Adam as our physical and representative father, after he sinned every man and woman born since then has been born with a fallen sinful nature bent against God. That wife or girlfriend may be a ten--really cute, smart, funny, sweet and kind, but they're also at war with God. That sweet hunk of Christian femininity is also Al Capone in a skirt.

Plus a biblical lens will remember that women are redeemable. This is what Peter has been teaching his readers in chapter 1 and 2, that God can save both men and women and transform them. Look back at 1 Peter 1:3, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" God can cause us to be born from above, born again, transformed, forgiven, cleansed, washed, with a new heart. If your wife is saved, then she was purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. She didn't save herself, Christ saved her. He bore the punishment for her sins on the cross and died for her, and now as a saved sinner she must remain continually dependent upon God's Spirit in order to overcome the flesh and grow to be more like Christ.

Do you have a biblical lens to see your wife accurately? Is it clear, or are you still angry when she sins, or hurt when she disappoints you, gives into fear or stops trusting? Or do you graciously overlook her sin (since love covers a multitude of sins)? Or do you gently confront her disobedience? And most importantly, do you husbands provide a model of obedience worth following?

Peter says in verse 7 you need to live with her, which actually means dwell together. The two Greek words are *oikeo* (dwell or house) and *suun* (together), and in this context the participle dwell together is a command. All of your life is to be with her, with her in mind, with her in your heart, with her as your most essential relationship. Now get this, when Peter says dwell together with your wife, the apostle is commanding you husbands to be responsible for the close togetherness of your marriage--that's not her job, it's yours. If there is drift, distance, or dullness, it is most often the husband's fault--and if not it is still your responsibility to fix it.

Providing a good income should never be a substitute for sharing deeply in life together. The godly husband must understand every room in his wife's heart and be sensitive to her needs. And Peter adds you husbands are to be students of your wife--live with your wives in an understanding way. Most guys feel they must know sports, or must know work, or must know about money--but God says you must know your wife intimately.

The root word for understanding way is personal knowing—experiential, relational knowledge, best friend intimacy. Peter is telling you husbands that your position of authority is not a license for insensitivity. Your first task as the head is to understand the wife God has entrusted to your leadership. A great coach knows his players, and a great husband knows his wife. This involves listening, asking questions about money, desires, hopes, raising children, motives, and the bedroom. Our tendency is to be selfish--we try to fix things, provide a solution then move on. But God says dwell with her in deep personal knowledge. Become a student of your wife. Know her, model Christ.

#3 Protect your wife carefully

Peter adds this in verse 7, *“As with someone weaker, since she is a woman.”* Personally, I make a practice of reading the manufacturer labels attached to the products I purchase. You know the little tag stuck on the product that says don’t lick this device while it is plugged in--good advice. It makes sense to listen to those who made the device. And it makes sense to listen to the God who made woman.

If you’re going to enjoy the opposite sex, if you’re going to have marriages that bring God glory and bring us joy, if we are going to date, court, get to know ladies in a manner that will please God and bring you untold blessing, then we had better follow the manufacturer’s label stuck on every woman. And here is that label, verse 7, *“As with someone weaker, since she is a woman,”* meaning this--fragile, handle with care.

The NAS translation leaves out the word vessel or pot, but vessel is in the Greek text, so the English should read, *“as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman.”* Plus the word translated woman in this phrase is actually the word feminine. So it gives the phrase this sweet meaning--as with a weaker vessel, since she is the feminine one. Peter is giving you men three important truths from this phrase.

First Treat your wife (and all women) with tenderness--from weaker

Weaker is also translated sick, without strength and powerless. Husbands treat your wives with tenderness. God loves those who are weaker--would you agree? God is pleased to bless those who are weaker and those less honored in the eyes of the world. Remember what God said of you. First Corinthians 1:26 and 27, *“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.”* That’s me and that’s you--not wise, mighty, noble but foolish, weak.

First Corinthians 12:22, *“On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.”* That’s us--weaker. Now, just as submission doesn’t imply the inferiority of the one who submits, so the word weaker does not imply a wife is weaker in character or intellect to her husband. I know my wife Jean is smarter than I am--I know it. We go to museums and she reads every plate of information and remembers everything she reads--I go to museums and look at the shiny blue objects and don’t remember where the snack shop is.

Weaker doesn’t mean women are spiritually or intellectually inferior, but since Peter is not specific the context determines the meaning of weaker. So we can assume Peter means for husbands to not take advantage of your position of authority over your wife who functions in a submissive role to your headship. Husbands never use your position of strength to control your wife.

Weaker could also be referring to physical strength. Now I know we have some amazingly strong, fast, enduring, workout mamma’s in this congregation. But for the most part if men tried, they can usually overpower their wives physically. Husbands are to be protective and courteous providers to their wives and to all women in general. Don’t use your physical advantage as a justification to mistreat your wife.

A third possible meaning for weakness which would fit the context of verses 1 to 7, since it's a trait a husband should not take advantage of is the weakness of greater emotional sensitivity. Now thank God for our wives' greater emotional sensitivity, since without it most of us men would walk through life as crude cavemen or uncaring robots--true? Will you admit that we men often overlook the obvious and our wives pick up on emotional clues with our kids, relationships and situations all around us? But a wife's emotional sensitivity is also a weakness because of the likelihood of a wife being deeply hurt by conflict within a marriage or by inconsiderate behavior on the part of her husband. You wives are vulnerable in your submissive role--therefore husbands are not to take advantage of you or exploit you because you must follow and obey your husband, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman also teaches us to . . .

Second Treat your wife (all women) as breakable--from a vessel

The Greek word vessel is used in the New Testament as a hollow object used to contain things--a jar, a pot, or a clay container used to store, to cook or keep valuables. But as a hollow container, vessel is also used by New Testament writers to describe our body. Our physical body is the container of our spirit, our immaterial part, who we really are. Like Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.*" And in the mind of the New Testament reader, a vessel is easily broken.

Go by any road that was cut into the landscape in modern day Jerusalem and it is filled with pottery shards, pieces of ancient clay pots now broken. In some places it is literally three-quarters dirt and one-quarter pottery--I used to stop and lift out pieces without digging. The point is vessels are easily broken--they are dropped, tripped over, hit with a rock, grow brittle with age and break. We often forget just how fragile we really are. Husbands, think about it in this manner. Every time you yell, are harsh, or say mean things, it's as if you are throwing a rock and hitting, cracking and even breaking your wife-vessel.

Third Treat your wife (all women) as feminine--from a woman

The phrase since she is a woman actually means the feminine one. It is a rare word that points to the femininity of women. God is saying as you appreciate your wife's femininity it should elicit a gracious intimate understanding causing you to treat her in a special way. The Greek word doesn't mean woman, it means womanly. Peter is saying your wife is not a man, she is not a little girl, she is a woman--she is feminine.

Don't whack her on the back after a good meal, don't give her a noogie because you love her so much. Yes you can tickle her, but protect your wife. Be polite, get doors, lift objects and open jars. And provide what she needs, care for her as your greatest treasure. Peter is saying, do not think of your wife as a common cooking pot, but as a beautiful, valuable, fragile, useful Ming vase. Treat her with TLC--protect your wife carefully.

#4 Treasure your wife diligently

Notice the next phrase in verse 7, "*Show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life,*" literally assign her value as also co-inheritors of the favor of life. Peter says, here is your assignment--the word show means to assign. Assign her honor--it is present tense, so God is saying not

just on her birthday, or Valentine's Day or your anniversary but all the time treat her as if she came with a high price tag.

To honor means to give the amount at which something is valued. For kings, the more expensive the gift was the greater the honor. For husbands, to honor your wife is to treat her as if she was the most valuable gift you've ever received. Proverbs says it this way in 31:10, *"An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels."*

Next to Christ, she is the one you treasure more than life—why? Because she married you! You may be a saint cause of Christ, but you still sin and after a while your wife can even smell your bad motives, your selfishness and your proud heart--and she still loves you? Of course you must honor her. But the reason Peter gives is show her honor as a fellow heir. The wife's position is one of being a co-inheritor--one who will inherit all the blessings that come with Christ and with you.

Two thousand years ago typically only men received inheritance from the family, and often it was only the firstborn. But in Christ, a believing woman receives the same amazing inheritance that a believing man receives from Christ. Your Christian wife is rich--your believing babe is wealthy.

Would you agree with me that at times in our culture the wealthy are treated better than the poor? I flew recently and heard, "First class ambassador club, please at your leisure make your way to the red carpet and board the plane. Your Champagne is chilled and our most attractive stewardess, bubbly Brittney is waiting to greet you. Coach class, get back you cattle! Steward Bubba has a whip, and he's gonna beat you if you complain about our sardine seating. Plus if you pay us your first born male child extra, maybe we will provide you with a raw fish head as a snack." Rich people are treated differently in a lot of different ways. And Peter is reminding you husbands to treat your wife as wealthy--she is a co-heir with Christ. She is going to inherit--she's loaded.

What does she inherit with you? Verse 7 says, *"the grace of life."* Commentators agree that the grace of life here is a reference to marriage, calling marriage the best there is in life--the hot fudge on the sundae of life, the icing on the cake, the ice cream in your root beer, the syrup on your pancakes, the barbecue sauce on your babybacks—hungry for lunch yet? Literally the Greek is "of grace of life." The grace of life is not eternal life, but the best of this life. The grace of life is not heaven, it is heaven on earth in relationship.

A non-Christian couple will never know the joy, oneness, love, intimacy, delight, grace and full life of a Christian couple. One of your most effective witnessing tools is your marriage. And marriage itself, with its oneness, forgiveness, intimacy, joys, companionship, and love is a reminder of God's grace. Grace is not deserved, earned or worked for--it is freely given. Living by grace is admitting each day I am getting better than I deserve. It's believing any day I'm not in hell is a pretty good day. Grace is undeserved favor from God. The grace of life is the expression of grace and abundant life manifested in a marriage relationship of a Christian couple. Only by turning to Christ alone can you experience the grace of life--and any marriage done God's way, by God's power, for God's glory is rich with life and grace.

#5 Work at your marriage fearfully

Peter ends verse 7 with “*so that your prayers will not be hindered.*” Notice the first two words, so that. Here Peter uses those words to describe not purpose, but a contemplative result—meaning, this is what happens if you don’t work at your marriage. This is the consequence, this is what you reap when you sow indifference toward your bride.

Marriage done God’s way, in God’s strength, for God’s glory leads to the grace of life, the best there is in this life. But a neglected marriage, a husband who doesn’t work on his marriage continually leads to the worst there is in this life for a believer. What is that? Your prayers will be hindered. Peter says the same thing just a few verses later--do you see it? First Peter 3:12, “*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.*”

The way we live with our wife can clog our prayers--just like a clogged sink makes our life worse and grieves us. If we treat our wife poorly, or do not work at our marriage, then our prayer life gets smelly and makes our life worse and grieves God. The verb hindered is passive, meaning it is not something that you do but something that God does to you as a part of His loving discipline to those husbands who don’t work at their marriage. And the verb hindered is present tense, meaning being hindered can be ongoing for a season. In a sense, God is saying to all believing husbands, you may be put in the dog house for a season for not treating your wife biblically.

The root word of hindered is very harsh--it means to cut down, to cut off or to strike, but is used metaphorically in the New Testament to impede, hinder or render fruitless. Do you husbands understand what God is saying to husbands? Are you hearing God’s Word here? To take the time to maintain a good marriage is God’s will. To work on your marriage is serving God. To pursue your spouse is a spiritual activity pleasing in God’s sight. Taking time to maintain a good marriage is God’s plan. You are actively serving Christ by working on your relationship.

For believing husbands, your life can’t all be about career, TV, your children, hobbies, sports, cars, food, working out, video games, or hanging out. You actually are honoring Christ by honoring your wife, and you’re displeasing Christ by ignoring your wife. There is so much more to say--I spent sixteen weeks on 1 Peter 3:1 to 7 and just gave you the high points. There is more here, but let me leave you with this challenge. How can I cultivate a renewed relationship with my spouse?

1 Evaluate your affections

Next to Christ, is she your greatest joy, treasure, love, delight? If anything receives more of your affection than your bride, repent today and turn your heart towards her. The grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence, the grass is greener where you water it.

2 Keep working at loving each other

As a believer, you have Christ’s love shed abroad in your hearts, and His love is infinite, bigger than you can imagine. Therefore, keep working at ways to show love to your spouse. This is not self-serving, it is spiritual work that pleases Christ. Keep working at loving each other--if you love Christ, you can love your spouse. Do you?

3 Make regular time together, and fight for it

You can't love Christ without enjoying special time with Him, and you can't enjoy your spouse without regular time with her. A date night, at breakfast, before the kids get up or after they go to bed--but make regular time with your bride.

4 Saturate your marriage in Christ and His work

Start doing ministry together where you study the Word together, and pray together, enjoy the Lord together, celebrate the Lord together. Remind each other of the Gospel and share the Gospel with each other often. Like a pyramid, as you draw closer to Him you will draw closer together.