

Scripture Reading: 1st Peter 3:1-12 (NASB - New American Standard Bible)

<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>And let not your adornment be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and 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>Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

<sup>7</sup>You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

<sup>8</sup>To sum up, let all 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, "LET HIM WHO MEANS TO LOVE LIFE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, REFRAIN HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. <sup>11</sup>AND LET HIM TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; LET HIM SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. <sup>12</sup>FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE UPON THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Last week, we had a look at the second half of 1st Peter chapter 2, where we read several admonitions that the Apostle Peter gave us. In verse 11, he said, "<sup>11</sup>Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." He admonishes us to abstain from indulging in the sinful cravings that our bodies often long for, because these wage war against our soul, and if we indulge in them, we will damage our soul.

A second admonition we saw last week comes in verse 12 – "<sup>12</sup>Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." We must keep our behavior excellent among the nonbelievers with whom we interact in our society. They may criticize us for our strict moral code, but when they do so, they actually glorify God, because they are actually acknowledging our high standards and the God we serve. Let us keep our behavior excellent – or, as the New International Version says – let us keep our conduct honorable, so that in all our behavior, we will bring honor to our God and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Following from those two admonitions, Peter then directs our attention to ways we ought to behave in certain relationships in life. Last week I pointed out to you that we bring honor to our God by being model citizens in our society. It is God's will that social order be maintained, and we Christians would do well to respect those leaders who have authority over us. The remainder of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 describe God's will in three broad areas of human relations: the behavior of citizens to the governing authorities in verses 13 to 17, the behavior of servants to their masters in verses 18 to 25, and the behavior of wives to their husbands in chapter 3, verses 1 to 6, with an admonition to husbands in verse 7.

Let's read 1 Peter 2:13-15 – "<sup>13</sup>Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, <sup>14</sup>or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. <sup>15</sup>For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." It is God's will that we Christians conduct ourselves righteously in this world, in this society, even though society is run by imperfect, fallible human beings. Despite the imperfections of our leaders, they basically know right from wrong and they make laws and punish evildoers and sometimes even praise those persons who have contributed positively to society. We Christians ought to live as model citizens.

The second area of human relations that Peter describes is this: It is also God's will that servants obey masters. 1 Peter 2:18-19 – “<sup>18</sup>Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. <sup>19</sup>For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.” This finds favor with God when servants respect their masters and obey them, even though some masters are quite mean and unreasonable. Follow your Christian conscience and bear even unjust situations – there is a lot of injustice in the world and sometimes we just have to endure it: by bearing undeserved suffering, you are also being a Christian witness in this world.

In chapter 3, Peter moves to the third area of human relations: the relationship of wives to their husbands. Notice the opening words of verse 1 – “In the same way ...” In the same manner as the relationships described in the previous chapter: citizens obeying the governing authorities and servants respecting and being submissive to their masters. In the same way, wives ought to be submissive to their husbands – that is a typical expectation in human society. Unfortunately, it has also been much abused in human history, with many husbands treating their wives like slaves or servants or property. That type of extreme is not part of God's design. I note that the language for wives in chapter 3 here is very different than the language for servants in chapter 2, which I quoted a moment ago. We are talking about a very different relationship here than the relationship of servants and masters in chapter 2.

In fact, I would like to take a look at verse 7, which is addressed to husbands, because it also says “In the same way ...” In the same way that we follow God's will in maintaining social order by respecting authority structures, so husbands have certain responsibilities that they must keep in mind as they relate to their wives. Let me quote two phrases in verse 7 – “<sup>7</sup>You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, ... and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life ...” Grant her honor. This is so different than being a mere servant or slave or property. Grant her honor ... as a fellow-heir of the grace of life. A fellow-heir. There is an equality here – an equality of value, even if there is a difference in roles and in biology. Indeed, there certainly are differences between men and women. Note the first admonition given to husbands which I just quoted a moment ago: “live with your wives in an understanding way ...” It takes effort to understand your wife, because men and women are so different. This is a responsibility of husbands: seek to understand your wife. That's hard to do. The famous psychiatrist Sigmund Freud made a statement that has been much quoted – he wrote: “What do women want?” Even this famous psychiatrist had a hard time understanding women and what they want. But Peter tells husbands first and foremost that we are to live with our wives in an understanding way. We husbands would do well to make the effort to understand our wives.

I'm here in verse 7 talking about husbands, but I haven't covered verses 1 to 6 about wives yet. Yes, I know that. I will return to verses 1-6 in a little while, but I've got a few more comments to make about husbands and their responsibilities.

I would like to introduce you to a book that I read back in my 20s and which I found really helpful and really informative. It's written for Christian husbands with much biblical advice for how to understand and live with your wife. The book is entitled *If Only He Knew: A Valuable Guide to Knowing, Understanding, and Loving Your Wife*, written by Gary Smalley. Although I had heard a lot of sermons about husbands and wives from 1 Peter 3 and Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, this book challenged me and revolutionized my thinking. Perhaps the number one lesson I learned in this book is that the husband, as head of the household, has the ultimate responsibility to maintain harmony in the household. As I read this book, chapter after chapter challenged my thinking as each chapter told me that this or that area of married life is all the husband's responsibility to make sure it is working right. All the man's responsibility? Do you mean that he is at fault if something goes

wrong? Aren't both the man and the woman imperfect human beings and both are sinners? Sometimes, it's the woman who is at fault, isn't she? Well, sometimes she is, but that's kind-of irrelevant. As head of the household, the husband has full responsibility to maintain harmony and everything else in the household. I wish I could say that I have always maintained harmony in my household, but such is not the case. However, very many times I have reminded myself of this responsibility that I have. Men, harmony in the household is totally your responsibility – please remember that.

I want to highlight one more thing in verse 7 before I return to the top of the chapter and talk about wives. Note in verse 7 that husbands are to grant their wives "honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life ..." Grant her honor ... as a fellow-heir of the grace of life. A fellow-heir. This reminds me of Genesis 1 and the creation of mankind. Let's read Genesis 1:27-28 – "<sup>27</sup>God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth".". Notice that when God created mankind in God's own image, He created them male and female. He created two separate sexes, and both of them are made in God's image ... both of them bear God's image. Obviously it's true that we must each honor our wife "as a fellow-heir of the grace of life." I note in Genesis 1 that God gave the man and woman the task to fill the earth with humanity and to subdue the earth, to rule over it – *together*. This is a joint task.

Well, I have said enough about husbands. Let's backtrack and return to the beginning of today's passage. 1 Peter 3:1-2 – "<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." Just as we saw last week when I said that we must keep our behavior excellent among the unbelievers in society and in this way we bear witness that we are children of God, so wives ought to acknowledge the headship of the husband in the household and thus bear witness that she honors her husband and honors our God. This is God's will for a well-ordered society. And notice that Peter here is concerned with behavior and concerned with the best way to win an unbeliever over to the Lord. By being submissive to your unbelieving husband, you may win him over to the truth by your chaste and respectful behavior.

My favorite commentary on 1 Peter notes that women may sometimes be over-eager to try to talk their husbands into becoming a Christian. But, says my commentary, men may find such talk irritating. Peter uses a play on words here when he says that for husbands who are disobedient to the Word, probably the best way for wives to win over their husbands is to not use words. Let the man observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And don't pay so much attention with your physical appearance.

Let's read verses 3 and 4 – "<sup>3</sup>And let not your adornment be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and 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." Throughout human history, women have wanted to look beautiful and men have wanted to look at beautiful women. But such a focus on externals has limitations, and good looks will eventually fade. What really matters is to cultivate the inner self. Verse 4 again – "<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." This is what is precious, this is what is imperishable: a gentle and quiet spirit, a respectful and submissive demeanor. This is what is precious to God and this is what will win over your husband.

Verse 5 – “<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.” The holy women we read about in the Old Testament hoped in God and adorned themselves with a respectful, submissive, and gentle spirit. Their adornments were not jewelry and fine clothes but rather they adorned themselves with a godly spirit. It is that godly spirit which is what attracted me to my wife, first and foremost.

Verse 6 – “<sup>6</sup>Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.” Sarah called him lord in Genesis 18:12, but it is clear by looking at her life that she faithfully followed Abraham everywhere he went. You women can be daughters of Sarah if you follow her example, do what is right in family relations, and not be afraid. The reference here to fear may be because an unbelieving husband might act harshly to his Christian wife, but we Christians ought to always be faithful to Jesus Christ no matter what difficulties or persecutions may arise. We ought to do what is right and not fear what unbelievers may do to us.

Now we have reached verse 7 and I will now quote all of it – “<sup>7</sup>You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Again: *<sup>7</sup>You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

Husbands, too, should follow God’s will in all the relationships of our society, as I pointed out last week. Husbands should seek to understand their wives, realizing that she is the weaker vessel – as we all know, generally speaking, women are smaller than men, less strong, with the potential to be more fragile. We must acknowledge these differences and deal kindly with women, especially the woman you have married. Grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, because she, too, is made in the image of God and both the man and the woman are to rule the earth *together*. Look at the last phrase of this verse: if you do these things, then you will find that “your prayers are not hindered.” Failing to treat your wife God’s way has consequences for your prayer life, and God may not listen to you if you are not acting properly toward your wife.

I would like to take a look at something the Apostle Paul said to husbands. Colossians 3:19 – “<sup>19</sup>Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.” Paul gives two instructions to husbands here. First: love your wife. I guess men sometimes forget to do this. Second: do not be embittered against your wife. In human relationships, we can all irritate one another sometimes. This could happen to husbands and wives, too. But we must not hold any kind of grudge or bitter attitude toward the woman we have pledged our lives to and to whom we have expressed our love. Keep loving her. Don’t let negative feelings last a long time – stop any bitter feelings and keep on loving her.

Well, in last week’s message and today, we have looked at God’s will for relationships in three broad areas of human relationships: the relation of citizens to the government, the relation of servants to masters, and the relation of wives to husbands and vice versa. Next, Peter sums up this section of his letter.

1 Peter 3:8 – “<sup>8</sup>To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.” To sum up his statements on human relationships, Peter gives us these basic admonitions. Let us live in harmony with one another – with our brothers and sisters, parents, husbands and wives, friends, coworkers, employers and employees, citizens and the governing authorities, and here in church as well. Let all be harmonious. Let us have sympathy toward one another, being sensitive to peoples’ needs and helping each other when we can. Let’s be brotherly – Jesus said that

it is when His disciples show love to one another that unbelievers know that we really are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be kind-hearted to one another. And humble in spirit.

Peter continues in verse 9 – “... <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.” Don’t return evil for evil. It is so easy and so natural for us to seek revenge against someone when they have wronged us. But Jesus didn’t do that. He came to earth to redeem us fallen sinners and forgive us of our sins. How can we do anything less than that for our fellow human beings? Don’t seek revenge ... don’t return evil upon the person who did some kind of evil against you. Don’t speak back at him with an insult similar to the insult he directed against you. Instead, bless him. Yes: bless that person who did evil against you and spoke words of insult against you. We were called by God to inherit a blessing. He has blessed us, so now let us bless others.

Yes, let us bless others. And take a look at that word “inherit.” This word suggests our future inheritance ... the promise that we have eternal life. Recall 1 Peter 1:3-4 – “<sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” Our inheritance is imperishable and it is reserved in heaven for us. The blessing Peter talks about in chapter 3 is the promise of eternal life with our Lord.

And this is a message that we are to share with others. Remember: in several places in chapters 2 and 3, Peter is concerned with our testimony as we live our lives among unbelievers. Last week, we saw that we should refrain from the sinful lusts of our past and that we must keep our behavior excellent among the Gentiles, among the unbelievers in our society. Unbelievers may criticize us for our high moral code, but in doing so, they admit that we Christians honor our God. 1 Peter 2:12 – “<sup>12</sup>Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” My commentary says something interesting about this phrase: “*glorify God in the day of visitation.*” In some places in the New Testament, *to glorify God* is a term meaning to come to salvation ... and *the day of visitation* is a way of saying the day of salvation. Peter is very concerned about having us live honorable lives so that we are a witness to the unbelievers around us so that they might be converted to Christ and also inherit eternal life.

In the latter part of chapter 2, Peter tells us that it is God’s will that Christians be model citizens in society and this, too, bears witness to a watching world that we are followers of God. And at the beginning of chapter 3, he exhorts wives to have a chaste and respectful behavior so that they can win their unbelieving husbands to Christ. Peter repeatedly shows this concern that our lifestyles be witnesses for Christ.

Returning to 1 Peter 3:8-9, we learn that when we refuse to take revenge against those who have wronged us and instead we bless those people, we inherit a blessing, something to which we were called. Our righteous living before unbelievers will have an impact and some of them will join us in trusting Christ and so they also will inherit eternal life.

I am reminded of one of my favorite verses, which I have shared with you many times before: 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 – “<sup>18</sup>Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,<sup>19</sup>namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” We Christians

have been given the ministry of reconciliation, meaning we are to share the gospel message to the non-Christians around us so that they, too, may be reconciled to their Creator, reconciled to God.

Let's return to 1 Peter 3. After verses 8 and 9, Peter quotes from the Old Testament. Let me read this part again, beginning with verse 8 and finishing at verse 12 – “<sup>8</sup>To sum up, let all 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, “LET HIM WHO MEANS TO LOVE LIFE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, REFRAIN HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. <sup>11</sup>AND LET HIM TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; LET HIM SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. <sup>12</sup>FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE UPON THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL” [Psalm 34:12-16].”

We do not follow the world's ways. We Christians should not seek revenge when wronged. Instead, as verse 11 says, we seek peace ... we pursue it. The Lord is against people who do evil – that is something contrary to our values. Let us seek peace. Let us live righteously, for the Lord will answer the prayers of the righteousness. As I said to you last week: Keep your behavior excellent ... keep your conduct honorable. For in this way, the watching world will see our testimony and some of the unbelievers will seek the way of reconciliation with God their Creator.

Let me conclude today's message with the main admonitions:

- Keep your behavior excellent.
- Let us display a good testimony to the unbelievers around us by walking uprightly in this society.
- Wives should be submissive and respectful in their behavior.
- Husbands should grant their wives honor as fellow-heirs of the grace of life.
- May our all our relationships be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit.
- When evil is done to you, do not respond with evil, but instead give a blessing.
- We were called by God to inherit the blessing of eternal life. Let us share this message to the unbelievers around us, for we have been given the ministry of reconciliation.