

HONOR CHRIST IN YOUR MARRIAGE (II)

3 ⁷Likewise, may the husbands live with [their wives] in an understanding way: showing respect to the wife as a weaker partner and as a co-heir of the grace of life. [Conduct yourselves in this way] so that your prayers are not hindered. (1 Pet. 3:7)

Introduction

In the Roman world of New Testament times women were demanding and gaining more rights. But at the same time, they were losing something of great value: their honored position of femininity. The great historian of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon, informs us that women were no longer respected and honored; they were increasingly looked upon as objects for the use of men.

The appearance of women's liberation movements do not indicate a progressive society in which the position of women is advancing; on the contrary, throughout history their appearance has indicated a society that no longer assigns to women the honored position of femininity. One of the immoral trends prominent in the Roman world—one trend that assisted in the collapse of that ancient society—was the total debasement of women. (*Pulpit Helps*, 6815 Shallowford Road, Chattanooga TN; www.pulphelps.com) Addressing Christian husbands living in such a society, and influenced by it, the Apostle Peter commands them to fulfill their God-given obligations to their wives, and so honor Christ in their marriage.

Here is a quick quiz for modern-day Christian husbands: Do you view your wife as a gift from God and thank God for her—and do you ever tell your wife as much? Do you encourage your wife and give her compliments of praise? Or do you habitually point out her faults and put her down? Do you show consideration for your wife—such as putting your dirty clothes in the hamper instead of leaving them strewn all over the floor? Do you treat your wife with respect; do you listen to her and try to be sensitive to her feelings? (*POWER*, 7/10/94)

The Holy Spirit commands us to fulfill our God-given obligations as Christian husbands and so honor Christ in our marriages.

I. Honor Christ in Your Marriage, ...By Recognizing Your Accountability to God

Verse 7 begins with the words, "*Likewise, may the husbands live with their wives in an understanding way.*" The same word is found in verse 1, "*Likewise, let the wives be in submission to their own husbands.*" The word, "likewise," serves to tie together a whole series of admonitions that first start in chapter 2:13.

Christian citizens are to be in submission to the governing authorities:
"Submit to every human authority for the Lord's sake; whether to the king as

the supreme [human authority],¹⁴ or to governors as those appointed by him to punish evildoers and to commend those who do what is right. (2:13-14)

Christian servants are to be in submission to their earthly masters: *“Let the servants be in submission to their masters with all respect, not only submitting to the good and kind masters, but also to those who are harsh.” (2:18)*

Christian wives are to be in submission to their husbands: *“Likewise, let the wives be in submission to their own husbands.” (3:1)*

Christian husbands are to be in submission to Christ by heeding His command with regard to their wives: *“Likewise, may the husbands live with their wives in an understanding way.” (3:7)*

By using the word, “likewise,” Peter is connecting his exhortation to Christian husbands with the other exhortations that have preceded it. Each of those previous exhortations focused on the Christian’s submission in the particular relationships of life in which he finds himself—as this exhortation applies to Christian husbands it refers to their submission to Christ.

What Peter is alluding to and what he presents in abbreviated form is more fully presented to us by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3, *“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of a woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.” “The head of every man is Christ”—*Christ is Lord over all mankind, believer and unbeliever alike. Christ has been invested with this absolute authority and lordship by God His Father:

God the Father raised him from the dead ... seating him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in this [present] age but also in the coming age. ²²And “he put all things in subjection under his feet,” and he appointed him to be head over all things for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Eph. 1:20-23)

“The head of a woman is the man.” Christ’s headship over all men is reflected in the husband’s headship over the wife in marriage, as the Apostle Paul notes in Ephesians 5:23, *“the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church.”* There is an equality of men and women before God, as is emphasized in Galatians 3:28, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* But within the marriage relationship God has assigned to each a distinct role. By way of illustration: The quarterback and the tackle are both equal members of the football team, but their assigned roles are different. The quarterback is responsible to lead the team and the tackle is responsible to carry out the play called by the quarterback. If they did not respect each other’s role and carry out their assigned tasks, the team could not function.

“The head of Christ is God.” By means of this last phrase found in 1 Corinthians 11:3, the Apostle Paul is reminding us that Christ is not asking the Christian woman to do anything that He Himself was not willing to do. In His role as the Messiah, the Son of God willingly assumed a subordinate position to His Father:

... existing in the form of God, he did not regard his being on an equality with God as a thing to be exploited; ⁷on the contrary, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found as a man in appearance, ⁸he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. (Phil. 2:6-8)

In a real sense, marriage—especially Christian marriage—is intended by God to serve as a type of “morality play” lived out before the world. The God-given role of the husband and the wife respectively testify, on the one hand, to the lordship of Christ and of God over the world and, on the other hand, to the subordination of mankind to God and to Christ. In this “morality play” God has assigned to the husband the role of portraying Christ’s position and to the wife the role of portraying the subordinate position of mankind.

Christian husband, honor Christ in your marriage, by recognizing your accountability to God. You are assigned the role of headship in your marriage, and you are accountable to God to fulfill that role in a Christ-like manner of benevolent, loving care for your wife and leadership in the marital relationship. Responsibility and accountability to a higher authority is something the Roman centurion understood and something of which the Christian husband must be conscious as he carries out his role of headship in the marriage:

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶Lord, he said, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering. ⁷Jesus said to him, I will go and heal him. ⁸The centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, Go, and he goes; and that one, Come, and he comes. I say to my servant, Do this, and he does it. (Matt. 8:5-9)

II. Honor Christ in Your Marriage, ...By Being Sensitive to Your Wife

Peter commands Christian husbands to dwell with their wives *“in an understanding way.”*

To dwell with his wife *“in an understanding way”* means that the Christian husband must be considerate of his wife. He must seek to understand her, by listening to her and by seeking to understand and respect her point of view. He must be sensitive to her: sensitive to her feelings; sensitive to her likes and dislikes; sensitive to appreciate what is important to her. He must be sensitive to

recognize the fact that his wife, as a woman, is different from himself as a man. He must recognize that his wife is not “a smaller model of the male;” she is altogether different, she is a female. Being a woman, and not a man, she is made differently, she reacts differently, she thinks differently.

To dwell with his wife *“in an understanding way”* means that the Christian husband must nurture and cherish his wife, note Ephesians 5:28-30,

... husbands ought to love their own wives as [they love] their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹No one ever hated his own flesh; rather, he nourishes and cares for it, just as Christ [cares for] the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. (Eph. 5:28-30)

Consider the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to Christian husbands, presented in Ephesians 5:33, *“let each one of you love his own wife just as he loves himself; and let the wife respect her husband.”* Compare that exhortation given to husbands with the second great commandment: *“And the second [great commandment] is ... Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matt. 22:39.) The husband should view his wife as his closest neighbor, and see to it that he loves her accordingly in the manner defined in Matthew 7:12, *“in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”*

To dwell with his wife *“in an understanding way”* means that the Christian husband must seek to satisfy his wife’s sexual needs. The Old Testament command for the newly married man was as follows: *“If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married”* (Deut. 24:5.) The husband was to learn about his wife, so as to enable him to *“bring happiness to the wife.”* The husband is to learn what makes his wife happy, satisfied, fulfilled in the marriage, including her fulfillment in the sexual relationship. The New Testament exhortation to husbands and wives reminds us of our mutual responsibility to each other:

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife [should fulfill her duty] to her husband. ⁴The wife’s body does not belong to her [alone], but also to her husband; and likewise, the husband’s body does not belong to him [alone], but also to his wife. (1 Cor. 7:3-4)

Christian husband, honor Christ in your marriage, by being sensitive to your wife, as the Apostle Paul exhorts the husband:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... ²⁸Likewise, husbands ought to love their own wives as [they love] their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹No one ever hated his own flesh; rather, he nourishes and cares for it, just as Christ [cares for] the church, ³⁰because we are members of his body. (Eph. 5:25,28-30)

III. Honor Christ in Your Marriage, ...By Honoring Your Wife

The Christian husband is further exhorted to honor his wife—to respect her and treat her with dignity. The Christian psychologist, Dr. James Dobson, remarked, “Nothing builds her up more effectively than for you to let her and others know that you respect and value her as a person. And nothing destroys her ... more quickly than your ridicule and rejection” (James Dobson, *Focus on the Family Bulletin*, January, 1989.)

In positive terms, to honor one’s wife involves such things as:

- showing her courtesy (for example, opening the door for her)
- having patience with her
- displaying gentleness towards her (for example, sympathizing with her feelings)
- showing her kindness (for example, letting her choose the activity for an evening out)
- displaying consideration (for example, informing her if you are going to be late for dinner)
- having understanding for her (for example, how do you react if she burns the dinner because she had to tend to the children?)
- complimenting her (complimenting her attractiveness, her cooking, her efforts to maintain the home, etc.)
- remembering special days that are important to her (for example, your wedding anniversary, her birthday, Valentine’s Day, etc.)
- helping her

In negative terms, to honor one’s wife means refraining from such things as:

- displays of harshness, bitterness, irritability, and asking forgiveness when such attitudes are exhibited
- outbursts of anger, ridicule, and resentment
- comparing her unfavorably to other women (for example, “Why don’t you cook like my mother?” or, “Why can’t you look like the latest Miss America?”)

- insulting her, making her the object of cruel and demeaning jokes
- taking her for granted, or simply using her services without showing any gratitude and appreciation for her contributions and for herself

The Christian husband is to view his wife as being *“a weaker partner.”* That is to say, one who is in need of his care, his protection, his strength (both physical and emotional), and his prayers. The Christian husband is to view his wife as being *“a co-heir of the grace of life.”* He is to view her as a fellow believer with equal status before God, a precious soul for whom Christ died. As husbands, let us apply the teaching of our Lord to our relationship with our wives: *“The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”* (Matt. 25:40.)

Christian husbands, honor Christ in your marriage, by honoring your wife. The Christian husband is to honor his wife, and indeed, carry out all the exhortations of this passage, *“so that your prayers are not hindered.”* If you are not fulfilling your God-given role as husband and your responsibility to your wife, you are creating a rupture in your relationship with your God, note Isaiah 59:1-2,

Listen, Jehovah’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is his hearing [so poor] that he cannot hear. ²On the contrary, your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have caused him to hide his face from you, so that he refuses to hear [you]. (Isa. 59:1-2)

It is a serious and dangerous thing to put yourself into a position in which you are hindering your access to the throne of grace—the only place where you can find mercy and help, as the writer to the Hebrews indicates: *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Heb. 4:16.)

Conclusion

One of the immoral trends prominent in the Roman world—one trend that assisted its collapse—was the abasement of women; they lost their honored position of femininity. Addressing Christian husbands, living in such a society, and influenced by it, the Apostle Peter commands them to fulfill their God-given obligations to their wives. The Holy Spirit also commands us to fulfill our God-given obligations as Christian husbands and so honor Christ in our marriages.