

1 Peter 3:1-12 ~ Wives and Husbands

1. How have the roles of husbands and wives changed in the last 20 years? What do you think is good and bad about these changes in roles? What do you remember most vividly about your parents' relationship?
2. In Verse 3:1, how is the *submission* of wives to their husbands (“...in the same way...”) similar to the *submission* in Verses 2:13 and 2:18? Is this the advice you would expect from Peter?
3. What common slogan could be substituted for the second part of Verse 3:1, which says “won over without words by the behavior of their wives”?
4. Many Christians feel that it is wrong for a Christian to marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). What do you think Peter would say?
5. What nine qualities does Peter list in Verses 3:1-6 for wives to display?
6. What does Sarah's example add to Peter's instructions? (Proverbs 3:25-27)
7. What is the *disadvantage* of a woman's outward beauty?
8. A woman who is married to an unbeliever needs what from other Christians, both men and women?
9. In 3:7, what does Peter mean when he calls the woman the “weaker” partner? How should a man be considerate of her (or honor her)?
10. What does the phrase mean, “heirs with you of the gracious gift of life?” Are you an heir to this gift? (Galatians 3:28, Romans 10:12)
11. What does Peter say will happen to the man who does not respect his wife? (Matthew 5:23-24)
12. Is Peter advocating that spouses stay in cruel or abusive situations? Why or why not?
13. An award-winning Christian book, *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs* by Emerson Eggerichs seems to have it backward from what Peter is saying. What do you think?

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1. How have the roles of husbands and wives changed in the last 20 years? What do you think is good and bad about these changes in roles? What do you remember most vividly about your parents' relationship?

2. How is the submission here (“...in the same way...” Verse 3:1) similar to that in Verses 2:13 and 2:18? Is this the advice you would expect from Peter?

As believers are to submit to government authorities (2:13) or slaves submit to their masters (2:18), so wives are to submit to their husbands. The same Greek verb is used which calls for submission to a recognized authority. It is important to note that Peter does not in any way imply inferiority of wives compared to their husbands. The submission implied is one of a role or function necessary for the orderly operation of the home.

Much of the advice given to wives is outwardly conformist. That wives should accept their husband's authority and not answer back would be commonplace and there are both pagan and Jewish parallels. But the advice becomes counter-cultural in two places. First, the wives' silent submission is to be part of a strategy for winning an unbelieving husband to the faith rather than the total surrender that would entail adopting the husband's faith, as the surrounding culture would expect.

Secondly, wives are not to fear intimidation (“do not give way to fear,” v. 6), which may again mean they are to stand their ground on the issue of their faith.

3. What common slogan could be substituted for the second part of Verse 3:1, which says “won over without words by the behavior of their wives”?

“Actions speak louder than words.” Peter is saying that believing wives are not to rely on argumentation to win their unbelieving husbands, but on the quality of their lives. He specifically mentions purity and reverence in Verse 2 and then goes on to beauty of the inner self, beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, and, perhaps in this day and age, volunteering to sort clothes at a rescue mission, taking the trash out, making chocolate chip cookies, or watching the Giants game on TV.

4. Many Christians feel that it is wrong for a Christian to marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). What do you think Peter would say?

I read of one Korean family who would not even allow their daughter to date a non-Korean because of their interpretation of 2 Corinthians that says “do not be mismatched” or “do not be yoked together with unbelievers.” Now, most translations admonish against being yoked together with unbelievers, but Paul is not talking about marriage here. He's actually saying that Corinthian believers should not cooperate with false teachers, who are in reality servants of Satan.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16 – ¹⁴Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what

do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

In any event, it seems that Peter recognizes that believers and unbelievers will get married and if the believer is the wife, she should try to win over her husband by her actions and not by arguing with him. She should show him the kind of self-giving love that Christ showed the church. There is a second reason for this and that is that the husband would allow his wife to continue practicing her “strange” religion.

5. What qualities does Peter list in Verses 3:1-6 for wives to display?

Purity	Reverence	Inward beauty	Unfading beauty
Gentleness	Quietness	Submissive	Do what is right

To be submissive means to cooperate voluntarily with someone else out of love and respect for God and that person. Ideally, submission is mutual. When submission is one-sided, it can be an effective Christian strategy, although it requires tremendous strength. You really can’t do it alone without the power of the Holy Spirit working in you and without encouragement from other Christians..

The second sentence in Verse 6 starts, “Do what is right,” which is effectively what Peter said in the previous verses—obey elected authorities, slaves obey your masters, but do not compromise your belief in God’s commands. For example, after teaching in the temple courts about Christ’s death and resurrection against the orders of the Sanhedrin, Peter and other apostles were brought to answer before the high priest. Their answer? “we must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29).

6. What does Sarah’s example add to Peter’s instructions? (Proverbs 3:25-27)

First of all, Peter’s readers would have been very familiar with the story of Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament and Sarah calling Abraham “master.” Secondly, Christian women become daughters of Sarah as they become like her in doing good and in not fearing any potential disaster, but trusting in God.

Proverbs 3:25-27 – ²⁵ Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, ²⁶ for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared. ²⁷ Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act.

7. What is the disadvantage of a woman's outward beauty?

In a way, it's hard to imagine there is any disadvantage to a woman having outward beauty. Men notice her in a crowd, gravitate to her, want to speak to her first, and are willing to devote time to her. Not so with the overweight, scowling, gravel-voiced shrew grabbing the last free sample at Macy's. Unfortunately,

1) outward beauty is often only skin deep and will not have any lasting impact.

2) outward adornment ("braided hair, gold jewelry, fine clothes") is, again, often only outward.

3) outward beauty and adornment do not, by themselves, lead to lasting respect. That is not to say that a beautiful woman wearing nice clothes and jewelry should be written off—she may well have admirable inward qualities as well. But Peter says it is submission and inward qualities that set the lasting example and lead to winning over non-believers.

8. A woman who is married to an unbeliever needs what from other Christians, both men and women?

One thing that strikes me is that at our church and in my mixed cell group, we have a number of women believers who come without their husbands. These women really need the support of other believers. It's one thing to work on a job with unbelievers, and then come home at night to your spouse with whom you share the faith. But what about working with unbelievers and then coming home to your spouse who is also an unbeliever? In that case a woman never has anyone to talk to about her beliefs and faith. That's a tough situation and it's up to other Christians to actively walk beside her and give her encouragement and support.

9. In 3:7, what does Peter mean when he calls the woman the "weaker" partner? How should a man be considerate of her (or honor her)?

He does not mean moral stamina, strength of character or intellectual capacity, but by "weaker" he's talking about the literal meaning—physical strength. In Peter's day, women who were not protected by men were vulnerable to attack, abuse, and financial disaster. Does this sound any different today? NO. Despite more job opportunities, women still earn less than men and vast majority of the world's poorest people are single mothers and their children.

A man who honors his wife as a member of the weaker sex will protect, respect, help, and stay with her. He will lighten her load when he can, be sensitive to her needs, and relate to her with courtesy, consideration, insight, and tact.

In Mediterranean society, honor was a value sought by *men*, but here men are urged to give it to their wives. The reason for paying them honor is directly counter-cultural and characteristically Christian, namely that they are the physically weaker sex. Women are certainly not to be regarded as less valuable, but rather as co-heirs, as Peter states in the second part of Verse 3:7.

10. What does the phrase mean, “heirs with you of the gracious gift of life?” Are you an heir to this gift? (3:7, Galatians 3:28, Romans 10:12)

In Verse 3:7, Peter specifically means that women experience the saving grace of God on equal terms with men.

Galatians 3:28 – There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 10:12 – For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

All humans are children of God; all believers are heirs in God’s family with all the attendant rights and privileges. Unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social, and gender distinctions. So if you are a believer and have faith in Christ, you are an heir to the gift of eternal life.

11. What does Peter say will happen to the man who does not respect his wife? (Matthew 5:23-24)

His prayers will be hindered because a living relationship with God depends upon right relationships with others. In this case, the man is disregarding God’s instruction concerning husband-wife relationships. More generally, Jesus said if you have a problem with a fellow believer, you must make it right with that person before coming to worship. Matthew 5:23-24 says, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

This general principle is even more true with respect to family relationships. If men mistreat their wives, their relationship with God will suffer.

12. Is Peter advocating that spouses stay in cruel or abusive situations? Why or why not?

Dr. Jack L. Arnold discusses the submission of wives from these verses at length at www.cleartheology.com emphasizing the duties of a Christian wife and the example she must set and those she must follow (Sarah) . However, he says in his conclusion, “A Christian woman does not have to live with a husband who constantly abuses her, verbally or physically. Nor does she have to submit to a husband who is in an adulterous affair or have sex with him who potentially may be HIV positive. If she is in any situation where she is not sure what to do, she does not need to be frightened but pray and commit the situation to God.”

13. An award-winning Christian book, *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs* by Emerson Eggerichs seems to have it backward from what Peter is saying. What do you think?

From the book jacket: Why does communication between couples remain the number one marriage issue? “Because,” says Dr. Emerson Eggerichs, “most

spouses don't know that they speak two different languages. They are sending each other messages in 'code,' but they won't crack that code until they see that she listens to hear the language of love and he listens to hear the language of respect."

Psychological studies affirm it, and the Bible has been saying it for ages. Cracking the communication code between husband and wife involves understanding one thing: that unconditional respect is as powerful for him as unconditional love is for her. It's the secret to marriage that every couple seeks, and yet few couples ever find.

Contrary to Eggerichs' premise that men need respect and women need love, Peter says just the opposite. Have our relationships changed that much in 2,000 years? Or is it possible that both husbands *and* wives need both love *and* respect?

Although a million-seller, the book is not universally popular and on the Internet it has more 1- and 2-star reviews than 4- and 5-star reviews. The study guide is especially disliked and seems to be mostly an ego trip for Eggerichs. So be discerning before grabbing the latest Christian bestseller.