

In the Land of our Sojourn: A Word to Husbands

1 Peter 3:7

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on September 14, 2014

Introduction

- ❖ *What is a man and what does he look like?* Sadly in our culture today the answer is quite muddled. We're often presented with examples that come from the extremes. So on one end of the spectrum, we're told that the Most Interesting Man in the World is the man who travels the world, who always has a beautiful woman (or women) draped at his side, who has a taste for high-risk adventure, and who prefers his hard liquor but will occasionally drink a beer. That's a man, we're told. That's what he looks like.
 - But at the other extreme, we're told that there is no answer to this question. That manhood is a social construct, a product of the culture you live in. *What does a man look like?* It's up to each individual to answer that. You might look like a woman, have the anatomy of a woman, have the genetic makeup of a woman, but if you feel like a man, you're a man. It's an elastic concept of manhood.

- ❖ This is why answering the question, "*What is a man and what does he look like?*" is no easy task, even for Christians. When Christians open God's Word to see what he has to say, to see how he answers, even Christians get tripped up by what we find. **What we see in Scripture is manhood being tied up with one concept in particular – leadership.**
 - Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying a man is not really a man unless he's in some position of formal leadership. I'm not suggesting you're not a man until you become a manager or executive in your workplace or until you become a small group leader at church. **We're not talking about positions of leadership but a posture of leadership in relation to the women in your life.** I'm saying what distinguishes biblical manhood from biblical womanhood is leadership.

- ❖ This distinction is clearest within the biblical view of marriage. **Husbands are designated in Scripture as leaders in the home. The man has been given a unique authority to lead his wife and family.** Husbands are said to possess headship over their wives (1 Cor. 11:3). He is the head of his wife, but as Ephesians 5:23 says, he's the head of her "*even as Christ is the head of the church*" his Bride.
 - In other words, a husband's headship is modeled after Jesus who sacrificially loved and served his Bride even to the point of death (Eph. 5:25). So husbands are not just leaders in marriage, they are *Christ-like servant leaders* in marriage. **They have the authority to lead but also the responsibility to lead in the likeness of Christ.**

- ❖ But I realize no matter how many qualifications I give, it probably won't make it any easier for our culture to accept this concept of manhood. The idea is still going to trip people up. If you've been with us up to this point in the book of 1 Peter, it should be apparent that certain features of the Christian faith will be affirmed and praised by our culture, while the overall stance will still be that of rejection.

- ❖ This is why Peter calls us to embrace the identity of "*sojourners and exiles*" in this world. We try to live in the culture. We try to be the best possible citizens in the kingdom of man. But in the end, we are seen (and we see ourselves) as strangers and aliens in this kingdom.

- Last week we saw this dynamic in play as we considered how God defines feminine beauty. We studied chapter 3:1-6 and saw God describing a wife that willingly submits to her husband's authority to lead as a thing of beauty. Yes, it may seem backwards and odd to the culture, but it's precious in God's sight.
- ❖ Today we're going to sit on v7 and Peter's brief but extremely important instruction to husbands. Let's read it again, "*Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*"
 - Some versions translates that first instruction as a call to "*live considerately with your wives*" (RSV, see also NIV). This is significant. This is an important word that Peter directs at Christian husbands.
- ❖ Up to this point, Peter has only been addressing the parties under authority, whether it be citizens under rulers (2:13), slaves under masters (2:18), or wives under husbands (3:1). But here in v7, Peter finally directs his attention to one party in authority, namely husbands.
 - Peter knows Christian husbands are in the congregation. **So he feels it necessary to call them to exercise authority as husbands in a way that draws out your wife's willing submission.** To lead in such a way as to make it easy and joyful for your wife to follow your leadership.
- ❖ **What we see here in v7 is that the counterpart to a wife's *willing submission* is a husband's *considerate leadership* that is aimed at the good of his wife.** If that's the kind of leadership we're talking about, then a wife's submission is not a surprise. I have two points: The call for considerate leadership and the motive for considerate leadership.

The Call for Considerate Leadership

- ❖ Let's begin by first examining what the Bible means by considerate leadership. Like we did last week, we're going to first look at what we don't mean and then what we do.

What It Doesn't Mean

- ❖ **First, considerate leadership does not mean that wives are somehow inferior to husbands.** We stressed this last week, and it benefits us to stress it again. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that men have greater worth or significance over women simply because they have been designated as leaders in the household.
 - **To argue that would be to suggest that a person's value in the eyes of God is wrapped up in their position, in the amount of authority they hold.** If that were the case, then children would be of less value than their parents. Parents clearly have more authority than their children (Eph. 6:1). Few would deny that.
- ❖ But we'd all agree that God sees parents and children as equally valuable, equally significant in his eyes without flattening out their relationship to each other. In the same way, God sees husbands and wives as equals without flattening out their relationship.

- In fact, Peter is insisting on Christians husbands to exercise considerate leadership in relation to their Christian wives since/because/for the very reason that “*they are heirs with you of the grace of life*”. Husbands are to be cognizant and considerate of this fact, that they might not lead their wives with an attitude of superiority.

- ❖ As co-heirs of God’s grace, the man and woman are spiritual equals. They share the same spiritual privileges and benefits in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). Yet within their equality, God has assigned different roles for each to play. The husband in a leadership role. The wife in a supportive role. They are *complementary* roles suggesting that one is not greater than the other. Both are necessary. Both need each other in order to fulfill the God-designed purpose of marriage.

- ❖ **Second, considerate leadership does not mean authoritarian leadership.** Yes, we are talking about husbands leading their wives with authority. But leading with authority is not the same thing as authoritarian leadership.
 - **Authoritarian leadership is leadership that seeks to dominate, control, and serve your own self-interest.** It is dictatorial and autocratic. It does not seek to understand. It does not care to consider. It only cares to wield power for personal gain.

- ❖ **Paradoxically, authoritarian leadership does not come from a position of strength but one of weakness.** Authoritarian husbands and fathers appear strong, but they’re actually very weak men. They’re insecure in their own identity, in their own worth, and they try to compensate through the pursuit and use of power and control.
 - If you’re the kind of husband who wins every argument, who always gets his way in the end, if you’re always making unilateral decisions for the family, you’re not a very good leader. **A strong husband, a good leader, is the man who doesn’t need to be right every time to be secure in himself.** He’s the man who is willing to apologize when he is wrong, to listen when he doesn’t know, to put in the time and effort to truly understand his wife with the goal of reaching consensus and moving together.

- ❖ Peter says in v7 that a considerate husband will show honor to his wife recognizing that she is “*the weaker vessel*”. I realize it sounds derogatory to call a woman a “*vessel*”. But that’s not the intent. That term is used in the NT as a description of both men and women like when we’re called “*jars (vessels) of clay*”. (2 Cor. 4:7; cf. Act. 9:15; Rom. 9:21; 2 Tim. 2:21)
 - So it’s not an insult to be called a vessel, but in what sense is Peter calling wives “*weaker*”? He doesn’t spell it out, but it’s safe to assume that he’s not implying any kind of intellectual or moral weakness.
 - We pointed out last week how Peter speaks directly to Christian women, even though the cultural expectation is that he go through their husbands. But he speaks directly to wives because he sees them as equally capable of receiving moral instruction just as any man.

- ❖ **That's why the term “weaker vessel” is generally understood as referring to a woman's physical weakness relative to a man's strength.** In fact, many commentators believe this is an implicit censure of domestic abuse. The tragic reality is that when sin is allowed to reign in a man's heart it will tempt him to pervert his leadership by leveraging his strength to crush the will of a woman. That could mean actually laying a hand on her or just issuing verbal threats intended to fill her with fear and to make her compliant.
 - There's been plenty in the news about domestic violence with the fall of an NFL star whose abuse of his wife was caught on tape. He's been widely vilified. Christians and nonChristians agree that a man hitting a woman is a horrendous evil.

- ❖ This is why churches must be vigilant on this front. Domestic violence not only does irreparable harm to women, but **if churches are guilty of turning a blind eye, of harboring abusers to protect their reputation, we can do irreparable harm to the cause of the gospel.** *What will our culture think of our Christ if our leaders, our husbands, are quicker to protect themselves than to protect the weak and vulnerable under their care?*
 - **Any man who uses his strength against a woman is no man, and neither is the man who turns a blind eye.** Brothers, let's be men. Men who sense a responsibility not only for our own actions to honor and protect women but also for the actions of other brothers in the church. We're called to sharpen each other. So let there be a culture among us where we will not tolerate any man hurting any of our sisters.

- ❖ **Third, considerate leadership does not mean mutual submission between husbands and wives.** I stress this point because I know one reaction to our fear and distaste of authoritarian leadership is to downplay male leadership altogether. Maybe we wouldn't outright deny the concept, but we might end up qualifying it to death.
 - So I've heard it argued that the word “*likewise*” that starts off v7 basically implies mutual submission. Wives were called to submit to their own husbands in v1, and now husbands are called to do likewise. The phrase, “*live with your wives in an understanding way*” is just code for submit to your wives. So it's argued that Peter is encouraging shared authority and shared leadership in marriage.

- ❖ *But isn't that making the Bible say what it doesn't actually say?* When instructing Christian citizens, servants, and wives the Bible does explicitly say for them to submit to their respective authority for the Lord's sake. So it's notable that here in v7 we don't read any command for husbands to submit to any authority. Instead Peter's concern is the husband's right use of his authority in a considerate, understanding manner. Husbands are still called to lead their wives and families. This verse is simply telling us how we ought to lead.
 - And again, the whole point is that once a wife understands that God is calling her husband to a particular kind of leadership – *considerate* leadership modeled after Christ himself – then her submission to that leadership will not feel slavish or oppressive. **It'll be her joy because she knows his authority is not being used to please himself but to serve her and her interests.** She'll know that, like Christ, her husband doesn't come home to be served but to serve (Mk. 10:45).

- ❖ **Fourth, considerate leadership does not mean making your wife's happiness the goal of your leadership.** Yes, you've been given authority to lead so you can serve your wife even at great cost to yourself. Of course you want to please her. You want her to be happy. But brothers, making your wife happy is not the goal of your leadership. It'll certainly be the result of good, godly leadership but it can't be the goal.
 - The goal is your wife's holiness. To build her up spiritually, to see her growing as a disciple of Christ, to see your family pursuing God's purposes. That's why he made you the head. **You have to recognize that advancing your wife's holiness is not always the same thing as making her happy.**

- ❖ Abraham failed to see this distinction and it led to marital strife. In Genesis 16, we see Abraham making his wife's happiness the goal. We see Sarah wanting a baby desperately. God had promised them a child years prior but so far nothing. Abraham could see Sarah in agony over her barrenness. He would do anything to make her happy, so when she approached him one evening with a plan – a plan to father a son through Sarah's servant girl Hagar – Abraham complied (Gen. 16:2, 5).
 - But in carrying out *their* plan, they were working against God's. That simply is not the way to advance your wife's holiness. He wasn't encouraging Sarah to trust in God. He wasn't leading her in holy obedience to the Lord.

- ❖ And in the end, by making his wife's happiness ultimate instead of her holiness, Abraham ironically brought greater unhappiness into the marriage. The resulting son, Ishmael, was a thorn in Sarah's side and the cause of marital strife. Let this be a lesson to us.
 - **If her happiness and her holiness are in direct collision, a godly husband will take his leadership seriously.** He won't simply give in just to make his wife happy in the short term. Rather he will patiently, lovingly, considerately point his wife towards the path of holiness, the path of obedience to the Lord, which in the end always leads to greater happiness.
 - Of course this means husbands have to be diligent in filling their minds with Scripture and being on their knees in prayer, in order to discern if his wife's happiness and holiness are in conflict. We can't take our leadership lightly.

What It Does Mean

- ❖ So let's make the effort to understand what considerate leadership does mean for marriage. When Peter instructs husbands to "*live with your wives in an understanding (considerate) way*", he means you put in the effort, you make it a priority, to really know your wife.
 - To understand her. To know what makes her tick or what ticks her off. To know her fears and frustrations. To know her temperament, her personality, her strengths and weaknesses. **Considerate leadership means you're always seeking to know your wife better to be a better leader for her.**

- ❖ Let's say there is a wife who is very organized. She loves to schedule out her day first thing in the morning. She keeps a detailed calendar. So admittedly she's prone to anxiety when plans are made or changed spontaneously without much thought.
 - And let's say she's married to a man who tends to fly by the seat of his pants. Who likes the challenge of taking each day as it comes. Who loves surprises. Think there will be some conflict and challenges? You bet.

- ❖ Biblical leadership, in this case, does not mean he gets to say, *"Look honey, you married me. That was your choice. You knew I was a laid-back guy. You knew I wasn't into making schedules and detailed plans. So why are you trying to change me? That's unfair. If I'm going to lead us, then this is the only way I know how. Besides, a little spontaneity will do you good. It'll help you loosen up."*
 - To be honest, that's how most of us husbands think. When we let sin get the best of us, this is how we rationalize things. Did you detect the underlying attitude? My wife should know *me*. She should be considerate of *me* and *my* limitations.

- ❖ But Peter's instruction is the exact opposite. Know her. Be considerate of her. If you know that haphazard planning drives her up the wall, if you know it causes her so much anxiety and fear, then play the man and serve your wife. Work with her to plan out your weekends. Show interest and initiative in the family schedule.
 - That doesn't mean she couldn't benefit and learn from your spontaneous nature. Maybe you could challenge her to ultimately put her trust in the Sovereign of our schedules and not in her own ability to plan and control all the events of her life.

- ❖ But even so, the husband's primary impulse should be to show consideration and to be the first to adjust to meet her needs, to serve her good. Yes it'll be tough. Yes it'll be a sacrifice. But that is what it means to love your wife as Christ loved the Church his Bride.
 - **Jesus' headship required him to lay down his own life. Your headship is only asking you to lay down your ego, to die to self.** I know it's still not easy but you have a Savior and Lord who set the pattern of selflessness for you to follow in his steps, and he set you free from sin and selfishness through his death and resurrection.

- ❖ **Husbands, become a student of your wife.** Considerate leadership is about studying your wife, about knowing her better to become a better husband and better leader for her. This is how you honor your wife. This is how you show how much she means to you.
 - **You've probably heard a counselor or a pastor tell you before about the importance of dating your wife.** You dated her prior to marriage. Don't stop once she's your wife. But the real point is not just to take her out on a date every so often (which is good) but to reclaim that same attitude, that same curiosity you had during that season of dating where you were so interested in getting to know her inside and out. Brothers, let's date our wives and not take them for granted.

- ❖ **And to my single brothers, you may not possess this specific kind of authority to lead, but even now in your single years, you can begin to take on the posture of a considerate leader.** Be considerate, be understanding, be selfless towards the women in your life. Aim to be the kind of man a woman would willingly submit to and joyfully follow as a leader in marriage. Don't put so much effort in finding the right girl if you're not yet the right man.
 - **And sisters, now you know what to look for in a husband.** Not just a man who makes you smile, who makes you laugh, who makes you happy. Be sure he's the kind of man who, through being in a relationship with him, makes you holy. A man who encourages you and challenges you, who's proving himself to be a considerate leader.

The Motive for Considerate Leadership

- ❖ Men who seek marriage must answer the biblical call for considerate leadership. Now let's conclude by looking at the motive Peter gives. Look back at v7. *“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”*
- ❖ This is huge. Peter is saying to husbands that there is a way to live with your wife, a way of treating her and leading her that will either hinder your prayers or (on the flip side) help your prayers.
 - **His point here is not that a powerful prayer life contributes to a healthy marriage but that a healthy marriage contributes to a powerful prayer life.** That's not what you would've expected Peter to say. You would've expected him to say to men, "You need to be more faithful in praying if you want to improve your marriage." And there certainly is truth to that.
 - But listen to what he's actually saying here. He's saying, "You need to be more faithful in leading your wife if you want to improve your prayers." He actually warns that your prayers will be hindered or blocked.
- ❖ That shows me how much God loves his spiritual daughters and what lengths he'll go to protect them. **God has a bone to pick with any man who misuses the very authority he gave him for the purpose of considerate leadership.** He won't tolerate such a man to mistreat one of his daughters.
- ❖ I think I get it. I'm just imagining if twenty years from now my daughter brings home a young man. If I find out he's been mistreating her, if he's been inconsiderate, if he's only serving his own self-interest instead of my daughter's good, then he would be a fool to think he could just approach me nonchalantly and ask me to do him a favor.
 - That would not be the time for him to be doing any talking. I'd be the one doing all the talking. He'd just need to listen, to fear, and to repent of his ways.
 - **So if I were to fail to lead my wife, if I were to treat her inconsiderately, then I can see why my prayers would be hindered.** I can see why God would put a stop to my talking and how he would want me to start listening and repenting of how I've been treating his daughter.

- ❖ Brothers, being in Christ, being covered in his righteousness, being an adopted son of the Most High God, has its privileges. One being the unfettered access we have into his throne room and the confidence that our prayers ascend to our Father and he listens to his children.
 - 1 John 5:14-15 says, "¹⁴*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*"

- ❖ We have this great promise in Christ, and yet there are times when our prayers are hindered. It's not that our sin blocks our prayers from rising up to catch God's attention.
 - No, we can sure that God always does hear our prayers. **It's just that there are times when he, as our wise and loving Heavenly Father, chooses not to heed or answer them for the sake of protecting his daughters and disciplining his sons.**

- ❖ Husbands, if you're feeling spiritually dry, if your prayer life is weak or non-existent, if you've lost all motivation because your requests never seem to be answered, if God seems silent to you – the first question Peter would ask is "*How is the relationship with the wife going? How is your marriage?*"
 - These two things are intimately related. **If you're feeling pretty distant from God, could it be because you're pretty distant from your wife right now?** *What do you need to do? Is there something you need to confess to her? Something you need to apologize for? Is there an attitude you need to turn from or a bad habit you need to give up? Is something you can do more of or less of to show your wife greater consideration, to show her greater honor?* Brothers, for the sake of your marriage and your discipleship to Christ, do what it takes.