# Core Seminar—Marriage & Courtship

# Week 5

# Hope, Fear, Knowledge and Weakness – An Exposition of 1 Peter 3:1-7

# Introduction

# When I was a young kid, I would usually get sick once a year and stay home by myself. In my boredom I would flip through day-time television, and usually catch a wide variety of bad television. Soap operas are notorious because they are filled with constant drama – beautiful people in situations filled with struggles, hopes, fears, and weakness. Well, Soap Operas are unrealistic, they are meant to catch your attention and hook you on bad plot lines. On the other hand, the Bible is much more realistic about life in general and particularly about marriage. It speaks honestly about the tensions, hurts, fears, and joys of marriage. And it also gives us real and lasting hope for our marriages, something which a Soap Opera can never give! And we’ll find all of this, plus more, in our passage for today, 1 Peter 3. Peter has some very specific words to both wives and husbands, and we want to address both in turn.

A little bit on context of this passage: 1 Peter 3:1-7 falls within a larger section where Peter is addressing three types of people who are to follow the leadership of another: citizens following the government (2:13-17); slaves following masters (2:18-25); wives following husbands (3:1-7). Part of the point of Peter discussing these roles is to encourage *voluntary* submission in all three roles.

**Wives**

The first six verses is a word to wives. There are three key ideas that Peter addresses to wives.

1. **Evangelism *through* Submission (vs. 1-2)**

Wives are to be submissive to their husbands, *so that* unbelieving husbands can be won over to the faith. Submission is a means of evangelism. A wife’s willingness to follow her husband’s leadership; her willingness to show respect to him; her willingness to show love her husband; all of this will be a witness to the gospel.

In v. 1, “do not believe” in our NIV’s is better rendered “do not *obey*.” The “word” (*logos*) here, as in 1 Peter 2:8, refers to the gospel. “All disobedience stems from unbelief, but the emphasis here is on the rebellion of the husbands who refuse to shape their lives around the gospel” (Schreiner, 1 Peter, NAC, p. 149).

The husbands are to be won over to the faith by the godly behavior of wives. The emphasis here is on the testimony of their life and not their words. We can safely assume that Peter is not condemning verbal evangelism. Rather spoken words have not been effective, so he is encouraging the wives to persist in their evangelism by letting their godly lives be a witness to the gospel. He wants a wife to avoid nagging about spiritual things (reference Proverbs) and to let her pure and reverent life be a witness to her husband.

In v. 2, the term “reverent” is a prepositional phrase “in fear.” So, a more literal translation of v. 2 would be “as they observe the pure conduct in fear.” Who are the wives scared of? Not the husbands. Scripture directs Christians always to be first fearful of God. Thus, **Peter’s point is that the conduct of a wife’s life (and in this case, we are talking about her submission) should stem from her relationship with God.** A wife does not submit because of her husband demands it; or because she wants to impress her neighbors; or for any other reason. A wife submits to her husband because she trusts God and desires to follow God’s Word. Cf. Paul in Eph 5:22, “Wives, submit to your husbands *as to the Lord*.” It is her submission to God’s Word and her willingness to align her life around the gospel that will be a stark contrast to the husband’s rebellion. Hopefully the Lord can use the contrast of their lives to ‘prick’ his conscience and convict him of his rebellion.

*A word of application for wives here today*: Maybe you are married to an unbeliever, or maybe your are married to a husband who claims to be a Christian, but the overall shape of his life shows a consistent disobedience to God’s Word. Let me encourage you to persist in your faith and your testimony to your husband. God has called to you stay in your marriage, even though there will be some very difficult days. Avoid the temptation to consistently nag your husband about spiritual things, which unbelieving husbands can quickly find irritating. Let your life be a witness “without words” (3:1). Does that mean you can never witness to your husband? Not at all! The scenario we are describing here is when a verbal witness has been ineffective, then let a submissive and godly life also be a testimony. Cultivate your relationship with God. And, as you do, you will find that your relationship with God will give you strength and motivation to follow your husband. The only exception to what I’m saying here is if your husband leads you to disobey God. In which case, you should choose God over your husband.

*To single women*: Do not presume by looking at this text that dating a non-Christian guy is commended in Scripture. Though I cannot give you an exact verse that explicitly condemns dating non-Christians, Scripture does make clear that Christians should marry believers (1 Cor 7:39, “She is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord”). And if the goal of courtship is to find a spouse, then it does not make logical sense for a believer to date a non-Christian. If you are single woman is just such a situation, I’d love to talk with you further about this.

1. **Real Beauty (v. 3-4)**

What is real beauty? To wives, Peter says that real beauty is not built around “outward” adornment, but around a life that cultivates godliness. “The adornment that God desires is not external but internal. Wives should not focus on hairstyle, jewelry, and clothing but on who they are in relationship to God” (Schreiner, p. 154).

v. 3, “the inner self” is literally translated “the hidden person of the heart,” and refers to the whole person as it is determined from within. Peter further defines this godly “internal” life as a gentle and quiet spirit. Gentleness is required of all Christians (Matt 5:5; 11:29; 1 Pet 3:16), not just wives. Quietness is asked of wives elsewhere in Scripture (1 Tim 2:11) and is often linked with submission. Peter emphasizes that “internal” adornment (i.e. cultivating godliness) is of “greater worth in God’s sight” (v. 4). The term “greater worth” is a financial term, and what Peter probably had in mind was contrasting the value of a godly life in contrast to outward adornments like braided hair, gold jewelry, and fine clothes.

*To women:* Peter is not absolutely forbidding nice clothes, nice hair styles, or nice jewelry. What I think he is speaking against is a life that put a high priority on these things. And what he wants you to cultivate first and foremost is an inner godliness. What matters to God is not what you look like on the outside, but rather your character. 1 Sam 16:7, “The Lord does not look at the things of man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

*A word of application to husbands:* Do you lead your wives to cultivate godly character? Or does physical beauty matter so much to you that you encourage her to spend a lot of her time and energy on outward adornment, and much less on her inner beauty? Or does your wife (without much prodding from you) naturally spend a lot of her time pursuing physical beauty, and if so, how can you lead her to emphasize spiritual beauty first?

*To single men*: What do you look for when you are looking for a wife? Scripture does say we should be attracted to our wives. Yet, it is all too common for single men to make physical beauty the first thing they look for in a wife, and to make spiritual beauty a second priority. You need to look for both, but more than likely, you need to make spiritual beauty more of a priority than you are currently doing. Assess in your own heart how much you are paying attention to godliness and how important it is to you. Do you act in such that the women around you know that you value their godliness? We’ll talk more about this in later classes.

*To single women*: It is good to have a physical beauty that will be attractive to a potential husband. Peter does not forbid looking nice for men. His concern is a life that over-emphasizes outward adornment. Be very conscious of what you win men to: is it to your physical beauty or to your godliness? What you win a man to will affect the shape of your relationship over the long-term. A potential husband should be attracted to you, but he should be first attracted to your godliness. Do you live a life that demonstrates godliness even “without words?” Can men see your character by way you live it out in this church community?

[PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS]

1. **Hope vs. Fear (vs. 5-6)**

In vs. 5-6, Peter sets out examples of women from the past who lived godly lives focused on internal, not external, adornments. His reference to Sarah in v. 6 makes us think that the women referred to were very likely the wives of the patriarchs—Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. In v. 6, Peter says they were submissive to their husbands. He emphasizes one particular aspect of their submission—their obedience. Submission requires obedience, but it is more than just obedience. It is an entire orientation of your life towards you husband (cf. Gen 2:18). Sarah calls Abraham “master,” which is a reference to Gen 18:12, when Sarah was making an off-hand comment about the idea that she would become pregnant by Abraham. What Peter seems to find remarkable is that even in casual conversations Sarah referred to Abraham with dignity and respect rather than calling him an old man. The point is not that modern day wives need to call their husbands “master,” but that they should adopt a posture of respect for their husband not matter what circumstances are faced in life.

What I want to focus on is the idea that these holy women of the past put their hope in God. What ultimately sustains a woman in marriage? No matter how poorly the husband leads in marriage, a wife needs to rely first and foremost on God. Putting your ultimate hopes in your husband is dangerous because he is a sinner and he is bound to fail you again and again. Think of Sarah’s situation. Abraham is lauded by the Biblical authors as a great example of faith. Yet, like other sinners, he frequently messed up. Take for example, the incident where Abraham was not honest about Sarah being his wife. He put his wife’s life in jeopardy and God ended up rescuing them (Gen 12). And still, even after he put his wife’s life in danger once, Abraham still didn’t learn his lesson and he did it all over again at a later time (Gen 20). What sustains Sarah through such foolish leadership? Her hope in God.

Wives become Sarah’s daughters if they imitate her godly behavior. They are exhorted to “do what is right, “ but they are also warned against giving way to fear. The opposite of hope is giving way to fear in marriage. Our fears can often drive us to do unhelpful, and sometimes even destructive, things in the context of our marital relationships. Peter knows this and he wants to give wives a strong caution against giving in to fear. Giving in to fear means you are not ultimately putting your hope in God.

*Application for wives*: Do you ever struggle with what I would call momentary atheism? While your overall life may be characterized by trust in God, you might find fears about your marital relationship temporarily (and consistently?) invading your marriage. Peter puts Sarah forward as an example of someone who faced difficult circumstances in marriage, and yet put her ultimate hope in God. In this way, I wonder if we can say that *hope in God* also makes a wife beautiful? (It certainly fits with Peters early comment that real beauty comes from cultivating a godly internal life.)

*To husbands*: Think about what ways you might be leading that is actually cultivating fears in your wife. It’s a good question to ask her. And be prepared to humbly hear her response.

*To single men and women*: It is a good reminder to you that you are not to put your ultimate hope in the prospect of a spouse, but in God.

**Husbands**

Peter turns to husbands in v. 7. Only one verse is dedicated to husbands because Peter’s focus in 2:13-3:7 is to encourage those who sit under the authority of another to persevere in their faithful living. NIV uses the word “considerate,” but a literal translation of v. 7 could be “Husbands, live together with them *according to knowledge*.” This is not an analytical knowledge or religious knowledge, but personal insight that leads to loving and considerate care for a wife. Synonyms are: Study your wife and know her well; Be a good student of your wife’s heart.

A husband should show respect to his wife because she is a “weaker vessel.” Weakness should not be seen as intellectual, spiritual, or emotional, but simply physical weakness. Men are created such that they are generally physically stronger than women. A husband should also show respect to his wife because she is a co-heir with him in salvation. Though there is a difference in roles in marriage, fundamentally women are equal with men in terms of their eternal inheritance. A husband’s leadership role in marriage does not make him more valuable to God, nor does it give him a greater status in salvation. Both are God’s children, and thus both are equal spiritually and equally valuable to God. If a husband does not treat his wife with respect, it will hurt his relationship with God. Hence, Peter’s statement about his prayers being hindered.

*A final application to Husbands:* Men tend to have trouble honoring weakness. They are competitive, and want to overcome weakness when they see it in themselves and dominate whey they see it in others (sports). Unfortunately, society admires a competitive spirit, and many women don’t want to be perceived as weak, so they will fight back. Relationships can become adversarial rather than loving if men exploit weakness or sensitivity in their wives, especially when men are in the wrong and plow forward anyway (“I know I did the wrong things, but you’re so…”).

Instead, men must recognize their wife’s weakness as their own, as weakness on their own team and that it is good that it is there. The husband and wife are a team, and the wife brings a nurturing care and a supportive, relational skill-set that is indispensable to the family and the church.

So the husband should respect and honor his wife’s weakness as he leads his family.

Note of credit: Much of the exposition came from Tom Schreiner’s excellent 1 Peter commentary in the NAC series.