



MINIMIZING MARITAL HASSLES

Part 2 - 1 Peter 3:7-12

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Many of you know that I preached last week's sermon on submission by the wife to a difficult husband (1 Peter 3:1-6) in a bullet-proof vest. Well, one of our ushers, Aaron Lundberg, asked me today why I wasn't wearing one today when preaching to the men. He asked if I was more afraid of women. There's only one answer to that question, "Yes."

Today, we'll be looking at a key verse on how the husband should factor into his relationship with his wife. There's something unique here. When Peter spoke of the government's authority, he said nothing to the government, only to the citizen. When Peter spoke of the boss's authority, he said nothing to the boss, only to the employee. But when Peter talks about the husband's authority in the marriage, he addresses not only the wife, but the husband. It's only one verse. But it's loaded. READ 1 Peter 3:7.

I've been well acquainted with this verse for most of my married life. I've tried to live by this verse as a husband. I hope Marie would give me fairly high marks. There've been times I've struggled. And I still do. But if a husband can master this verse, he'll have an amazing relationship with his wife and with God.

The overarching teaching by Peter in verse 7 is, "Husband, treat your wife well. Use your God-given authority for her benefit." So I want to talk about three powerful ways a husband needs to relate to his wife.

I. Husbands should be obedient to the Word (vs. 1).

We have to jump back to verse 1 for this point. In that verse, Peter was addressing the situation of a wife who has a husband who's disobedient to the Bible. If a husband refuses to obey the commands of God in the Word, he's much more likely to mistreat his wife. Husbands, we must never find ourselves in that place.

You see, whether we're married or single, the desire to be a man of God should be our number one pursuit in life—to love God, to walk with Him, to follow hard after Him, to obey Him. That's what the purpose driven life is all about. But if we're married, the desire to become a man of God is the best thing we can do for our wives. A husband who's submitted to God, who has a daily walk with Him, who reads and obeys the Scriptures is much more likely to esteem his wife and treat her well. She'll become the beneficiary of her husband's obedience to God.

Over the years of my ministry, I've seen the results of disobedient husbands and obedient husbands on their wives. I've seen many wives struggle with husbands who don't show them honor and respect, who neglect them, who are harsh to them, who treat them badly in private and in public, who's drinking damages them. But in all my years of ministry, I've never seen a truly obedient husband to the Word knowingly hurt his wife.

I've been teaching the principle of the legitimate marital tri-angle for years. We all know what an illegitimate triangle is. It's when a husband or wife ends up having an affair. That's always bad news. But every married couple needs a legitimate third party in the marriage. That third party is God.

There's a very interesting dynamic that happens in this triangle when the husband and the wife are in love with God. As the husband and wife move closer in love with God, they move closer in love with each other. That's why it's so important for the husband to be obedient to the Word. He's moving closer to God and therefore he'll be much more likely to treat his wife well.

Husband, if you're not in the Word every day, if you're not hearing from God and doing what He says, you're being disobedient. It's going to have an adverse effect on how you relate to your wife.

One of the ministries that God has laid on my heart the last three years or so is a greater ministry to men. I've seen enough lukewarm men and disobedient men. I want the men of our church to be on fire for God. I want them to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

One of my professors at seminary said something to us that I largely ignored for many years of my ministry. I really didn't get it back then. But I think I'm getting it now. He said, "When you become a pastor, minister to the men of your church and they'll minister to their wives." He was right. If we're willing to pour our lives into men and they become men of God, they're going to treat their wives well and that will be the best gift they could ever give their wives.

The professor said something else, "The greatest gift a husband can give his children is to love his wife dearly." The positive effects are huge for both the wife and children.

Husbands, see this book? Get into it on a regular basis and live it. Many of your marital problems will clear up!

Before we move on to the second way a husband needs to relate to his wife, there's an important word in verse 7. It's the word "likewise". It's the word that connects verse 7 to the preceding verses. In each case before this verse, there was a difficult challenge going on in a relationship. Someone was suffering for doing the right thing.

The same thing is true here. The husband might be living with a wife who's really causing him a hard time. She may be making life miserable for him. The door swings both ways. Peter is saying to the husband, "Just like the citizen or the employee or the wife who's suffering for doing right, likewise husbands, if that's what's happening to you, then by all means, do the right thing. Two wrongs don't make a right. Lead well even in difficult circumstances. Verse 7 is all about that kind of leadership.

So here's the second way a husband needs to relate to his wife:

II. Husbands should live with their wives in an understanding way (vs. 7a).

This guy came up to me one time and said, "My wife is smarter than Einstein. Only a few people in the world understood Einstein. But I don't think there's anybody that can understand my wife." I have to admit, most men are simpler to understand than most women. And I think Peter is acknowledging this when he tells husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way.

You see, Peter doesn't tell wives to live with their husbands in an understanding way. I think wives pretty much have their husbands figured out. That's not so true with many husbands. So Peter tells husbands to be students of their wives and learn what makes them tick. They need to gain as much knowledge as they can about them to tailor-make their approach with them.

Some of you have met Mr. Wonderful. He's a doll that when you squeeze his hand, he says understanding things to his wife. He's the consummate example of a husband understanding his wife. Just listen to some of the things he says:

- *Can't your mother stay another week?
- *Hello darling, have I told you I love you lately?
- *Did you have a hard day? Why don't you sit down and let me rub your feet?
- *You're going shopping by yourself? How about if I tag along and carry your bags?
- *Actually, I'm not sure which way to go. I'll turn in here and ask for directions.
- *You've been on my mind all day. That's why I bought you these flowers.
- *Why don't you just relax and let me make dinner tonight?
- *The ball game really isn't that important. I'd rather spend time with you.
- *Here, you take the remote. As long as I'm with you, I don't care what we watch.
- *Let's just cuddle tonight.

I learned something about twenty years ago that has really helped me to understand my wife. In a seminar for husbands, I learned the key to understanding wives. It's not profound and it's nothing new. It's simply the recognition of the truth that Peter is teaching here—wives are women and therefore they're different from men. That's the divine design. God created monumental differences in men and women and husbands are called upon to understand them.

What are some of these differences? Well, you can read some books that are out there. They'll do a better job talking about the differences than I can. Two good ones are "Men are From Mars, Women are from Venus" by John Gray and "Men are Clams, Women are Crowbars" by David Clarke.

But let me give you just four examples of differences. One is **conversation**. Most men talk less than women. Someone has said that most women speak over 30,000 words a day and most men speak about 13,000. The problem is that at the end of the day, the husband has used up most of his words and his wife is just starting.

Here's another one—**details**. I'm content to tell Marie the bottom line—so and so is in the hospital and I visited and prayed with them today. That's like opening up a whole new window on the computer. She might ask me at least ten clarification questions.

Last fall we were in our small group going over the four outreach project options Pastor Mike said we could choose from. I told the group what they were. The men were content to choose one right away. Not the women. They all started to ply me with a hundred questions. I finally said, "Time out! Do you see what's going on here? We're seeing a classic difference between men and women." We all laughed and then they said, "Well, how are we going to choose without knowing all the details?"

Here's another difference—**shopping**. Most men are content to go to the mall, get what they want, and get out. Not women. The mall energizes them. When I go to the mall with Marie, she's good for hours. I come home exhausted!

One more. Men and women view **sex** differently. When listing the most important things in life, women listed sex as number 14 on their list of priorities, right behind gardening. You'd never see a man with a list like that.

One of the problems in marriage is that couples think their differences are the reason they're having trouble. They'll say, "We're so different!" They think that's a bad thing. The truth is—God created the differences in men and women so we would complement each other and be a great team. You can let the differences drive you apart or you can realize that these differences are what make you a one-flesh couple who really need each other.

Peter doesn't say that husbands have to understand women. He says they need to understand their own wives. So the husband must try to tune to his own wife's frequency. How does he do that? He's got to listen to her, observe her, pay close attention to her words and actions.

I want to point out four huge things husbands need to understand about their wives so they can tune in with more precision and live with them in fulfilling ways:

1. Husbands need to get into their wives' world.

Their world is very different from ours. And it's not natural for many husbands to enter that world. We must make an effort. When they ask for our opinions, we need to take time to honestly respond with interest. The other day Marie was in a store looking at wallpaper. She called me on my cell and asked me to come to the store so I could help her decide. I didn't want to. But I remembered this point and soon found myself at the store showing interest in her world.

And talk about women's movies. Take *Pride and Prejudice* for instance. She wanted me to go with her to the movies to see it. I wasn't particularly interested but I went. When the DVD came out, she got a copy. She wanted me to see it again with her. I'd rather be upstairs watching a basketball game. But this movie is important to her and I need to enter her world.

And the HGTV channel? That's all about a woman's world. I watch it sometimes with Marie to get into her world. It's actually not that bad! The point is—guys need to take time to enter his wife's world.

2. Husbands can't force the submission thing.

Submission was written to the wives not the husbands. They must understand that wives don't respond well to commands and orders. Yes, a husband is the head of the home before God. But that headship is to be used to minister to his wife, not to order her around according to his own dictates and desires.

I'd love to have a new puppy in our home. I could appeal to I Peter 3:1 and say, "Marie, you need to submit to me about this." But we're not going to get a puppy and here's why. I've come to understand my wife in this matter. The burden of caring for the dog would be on her. She already has enough on her plate. Husbands are not to give their wives orders to obey. Husbands are to temper their desires by how things affect their wives.

3. Husbands need to learn their wives' needs and meet them.

Where do husbands get that kind of know-ledge? I'll give you three good sources. First, the Bible. It's a manual on marriage. Second, books. Many have been written about this. A good one I read recently is "**Oops! I Forgot My Wife**" by Doyle Roth. And third, ask your wife. She may fall down, but she'll get up again. She'll tell you. Guys, it's not a secret what wives need. Each wife has social, spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical needs. Husbands need to step up.

I'm convinced that every husband already has what it takes to meet his wife's special needs. The Bible says that we're in sin if we withhold from someone what they need when we have it in our possession (Jas. 2:15-16; I Jn. 3:17). Guys, let's not withhold what our wives need. I happen to believe that if a husband would discover and meet his wife's top two needs and consistently meet those needs for thirty days, the marriage would be revolutionized!

I want to clarify something. Couples can't meet all of each other's needs. It's wrong to either expect that or try to do that. Some of our needs are met by others through other relationships. But there are certain needs that only a husband and wife can meet and nobody else better try.

4. Husbands need to give their wives plenty of time and attention.

Wives need plenty of undivided attention. It's not a matter of quality time over quantity time. She needs both quality and quantity time. A husband needs to set regular time aside for his wife so that he can put himself in a climate to understand her and care for her needs. I'm talking about alone time that doesn't include children, relatives, or friends.

What does this kind of time look like? A lot like what you did while you were dating. You spent lots of time together. You didn't ignore her while together. You didn't include a whole lot of other people. You looked at her when you talked. You were interested in what she thought and had to say. That's what husbands need to do after they get married! The amount of time husbands spend with their wives in undivided attention reflects the quality of their marriage.

5. Husbands need to understand that a woman is a weaker vessel.

That's an interesting statement by Peter. What's he talking about? Peter is not saying that a woman is inferior in any sense, physically, morally, emotion-ally, intellectually, spiritually, or otherwise. He's saying that physically, she can more easily be overpowered by the man. She's unable to withstand his strength. A husband must deal with his wife in a gentle way because in most cases, she can't compete with his ability to overpower her.

Let's turn to the world of sports for a second. The "weaker vessel" factor shows up there really quick. You aren't going to find many women that can be put on the line of an NFL football team. You aren't going to find many women who can compete on an NBA basketball team with Shaq O'Neal. Women tend to be smaller and weaker in stature than men and much more easily overpowered. Husbands are to understand that difference. They're not to use their physical size and strength to muscle their wives around.

On the other hand, I've found that women are stronger than many men in other ways. For instance, pain tolerance. If men were to have babies, I don't think there'd be many children.

Husbands, the secret to a happy marriage is not so much self-understanding but wife-understanding. Peter tells husbands to work at understanding their wives and live with them accordingly. It'll make all the difference in the world.

That leads to the third way husbands are to relate to their wives:

III. Husbands should grant their wives honor as fellow heirs of life (vs. 7b).

It's amazing how husband/wife relationships can be like big game hunting. At first the mighty hunter glides silently through the woods, ever careful not to break a twig or make the slightest sound. That's called courtship. Before long, the trophy is in sight, the trigger is pulled, and the hunt is over. That's called the wedding. Suddenly, the hunter could care less about making noise and breaking branches. He charges through the woods screaming for his friends. That's called marriage.

That's not the way Peter sees marriage at all. He tells husbands to grant their wives honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life. What does "honor" mean here? The word means to recognize something of great value or price and to treat it that way. I see guys spend bundles on golf clubs. They take real good care of them. I see guys soak lots of money into collector cars. They really baby them.

Well, husbands, in this life we'll never have anything more valuable in our lives than our wives—not our jobs, not our houses, not our bank accounts, not our possessions. She's the pearl of great price. We need to treat our wives with to-tal honor and respect so they're not damaged in any way.

Husbands, we grant our wives honor when we listen to them, help them, protect them, lighten their load, include them in our spiritual journey and pray with them, speak kind and affirming words to them in private and in public, and show courtesy, consideration, and tact. When a husband does that, his wife comes to believe that she's lovely and beautiful and that she has no earthly rivals. She feels honored and valued. That's what we're shooting for!

Sometimes men parade around churches like they're the more spiritually significant and valuable of the sexes. That's simply not true. The husband doesn't have an edge with God spiritually. Verse 7 says a husband and wife are equal before God. He's to grant her that status as a fellow-heir of the grace of life and salvation. A husband must do everything in his power to demonstrate that he understands their equality.

More than that, he must do everything in his power to provide for her spiritual nurturing. That's another way of granting her honor. Now I know that husbands and wives are equal before the Lord. Yet there's something in me that wants to say a husband should consider his wife as more valuable than himself.

A few weeks ago, Marie and I were driving across town. She said something that made me cry: "Of all the men in the world, you're the perfect one for me. I've loved you from the beginning and I love you even more now. There's no other person for me. My biggest fear is that someday you'll go first and I'll have to face life without you. I can hardly bear that thought." I could hardly see the road before me.

In all honesty, that's the kind of message our wives need to hear from their husbands—how priceless they are to us. It's so easy for husbands to take their wives for granted. Life is busy and we fall into ruts and routines. We need to let our wives know how special and priceless they are. We need to tell them and demonstrate that often.

In verse 7, Peter doesn't just call a wife a "woman". It actually means "the feminine one". He's calling attention to the marvel of her feminine nature. That feature should be attractive to a husband and he should recognize, as Adam did in Genesis 2, that his wife's femininity and female nature are a great gift from God to him. It should inspire incredible honor towards her. Husbands, we need to lift our wives up before the world as our greatest and most valuable asset. We're the ring and the prongs. She's the diamond on display. We can't forget that.

Conclusion

I want you to see how Peter ends his little talk to husbands. He says that if they're obedient to the Word, if they live with their wives in an understanding way, and if they grant her honor, they'll have an effective prayer life. If they fall down in these areas, their prayers will be hindered. They're not going to get the results they want when they pray.

There are two very obvious things here. First, Peter is expecting that husbands will be men of prayer. That's a major part of a husband's job description. He's going to recognize that leading a family can't be done in his own strength. He's going to cry out to God. Husbands, you need to be men of prayer.

The second obvious thing is—the effectiveness of a husband's prayers depends on how he treats his wife. If a husband treats his wife well, his prayers will be effective. If he treats her with neglect, inattentiveness, insensitivity, feelings of resentment, and for selfish ends, his prayers are basically just hot air.

When I was growing up, I used to hear this phrase about some of the men in the church—"home devil, street angel". Some of them appeared so spiritual at church but they mistreated their wives at home. Husbands, we need to know that we have no real power with God if we're not taking good care of our most priceless possession we have on earth—our wives.

Significant marital difficulties occur as a result of ignoring or disobeying the direct commands of Scripture. Peter advises the wife to submit to her husband. And he asks the husband to treat his wife well. Obedience to these principles will not only reap great marital, but great spiritual benefits as well. Couples can enjoy a great marriage when the husband and wife do marriage God's way.