

Over the past few weeks we have been reading out of First Peter. This letter was written to Christians in various churches who had made a decision to be different than the people around them. These people had made a decision to be followers of Jesus and that made the people around them feel uncomfortable. And so these Christians were being picked on by the people around them.

Today we are going to be reading the first 7 verses of chapter 3. This section addresses the relationships between husbands and wives. When we first read this Scripture we may read it in such a way that it reinforces what we think the Bible says about the roles that husbands and wives are to carry out with one another.

But as we study this text this morning we may find out that this text doesn't actually say what we may initially think this text says. We may become quite surprised by what Peter is saying to husbands and wives of his day which may help those of us who are husbands and wives today.

If you are married I hope that this reading provides some help in being a faithful spouse to your partner. If you are divorced or widowed I hope this text can give you some hope for future relationships. If you are single I hope this text can give you some wisdom if you are seeking a partner.

I am going to do something that I have never done before in a sermon and that is to read the same Scripture in 3 different versions of the Bible. I am going to be reading this version first in the King James Version of the Bible. I will then read the New International Version of the Bible and then I will read The Message translation of the Bible. You were handed a handout of each of these translations so that we can follow along and read these passages and compare some very different interpretations of this same passage of Scripture.

The first translation we are going to read is the King James Version of the Bible. The King James Version of the Bible was assembled by the Church of England in the early 1600s. King James VI commissioned 47 English scholars to use the best available resources of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament to assemble a Bible in the English language. All but 1 of these 47 were clergy and they were all, of course, men.

But what I found really interesting about the direction from King James is that the translators were directed to put together the Bible with a clear mandate to support church hierarchy. In other words, there was a political agenda in putting together the King James Version of the Bible. A clear political agenda to support the social hierarchies of the day. And what were the social hierarchies in the 1600s? Priests were over lay people and men were over women.

So the direction from the Church of England to the King James Version translators was to put together an English biblical translation that supported the current hierarchies. Many people today think that God delivered the King James Version from heaven but it did not come to us that way. All Bible translations have a human agenda behind them. But God can work through human agendas and God can accomplish God's will despite human agendas.

After reading these 3 versions I am going to invite all of us into a discussion. This is not going to be a one way conversation but one where you will be invited in to share what you see. So as I prepare to read these 3 translations I invite you to ask yourself, what do you see that is the same and what do you see in these translations that are different?

Read King James Version

The next version we are going to read is the translation which is found in the pews here, the New International Version of the Bible. The NIV was published in the 1970s and was an attempt to publish the Bible in a more modern English translation. But like all translations, there was an agenda in the people that put it together. Agendas impact how certain words are translated.

Read NIV

The last translation we are going to read is actually not a translation. It is considered a paraphrase. A paraphrase does not attempt to interpret the text word for word but instead attempts to catch the meaning of the text. The paraphrase we are going to read is called The Message.

The Message attempts to convey the text in a style that is similar to the way the original hearers would have heard the texts. The Message was put together by a man named Eugene Petterson who is a retired Presbyterian pastor who now lives in Montana. You will immediately notice the change in style but you will also see a very different interpretation of this text of Scripture.

Read The Message

So what do you notice that is the same in the translations and what do you notice that is different?

This is what I noticed. Peter addresses wives who are in relationships with husbands who are not Christians. The KJV insinuates that an unbelieving husband can be won over by the conversation of the wife while the other two translations suggest that it is the action of the wives that make a bigger impact upon their husbands.

So what do you think? Do words make a bigger impact or do actions make a bigger impact or both?

The second piece of advice from Peter that I notice is that all three translations make clear that it is the inner spirit that makes the woman. It is not her hair. It is not her features. It is not the make up. What makes a woman attractive, according to Peter, is her inner spirit.

The other day I was taking my daughter to high school and she looks over and sees her teacher frantically putting on make up while she sits at the red light. I think Peter would remind any woman that although our society says that your hair style is important and your make up is important, that what is really important is your inner beauty.

Your spirit. Your courage. Your gentleness. Your outlook on life. A good and faithful wife is defined by these characteristics. Peter even says that the inner spirit is what made the women of old like Sarah holy. It was not their exterior beauty but their inner beauty.

The three translations have a very different take on the equality of marriage. When we read the KJV we read about wives are to be subject to their husbands, how Sarah called Abraham Lord, and how women are the weaker sex. But I am sure you noticed how Eugene Petterson dealt with this text in The Message.

Peterson says that wives are to be responsive to the needs of their husband and that Sarah addressed Abraham as “my dear husband.” Petterson also has an interesting translation for women being the weaker sex. In addressing husbands, Petterson says that women lack some your advantages.

Petterson recognizes that in some ways men have some advantages in the world but I think many of us would argue that in some ways women have advantages in this world as well. But notice what all three translations then say. They all say that in the new life of God’s grace, all are equals. As Petterson advises husbands, “treat your wives as equals in Christ so that your prayers don’t run aground.”

I see too many marriages were the husbands and wives try to one up one another. Where husbands and wives keep tallies on one another. Where husbands and wives try to portray to the other that they are stronger than the other in whatever way.

But Peter’s advice is clear to husbands and wives. Cultivate inner beauty, show respect to your spouse, and in God’s eyes you are equal partners.

The world needs to see this model of faithful human marriage. Marriages which seek to cultivate the inner beauty of one another. Where respect of each other is shown. And where equality is lived out in the eyes of God.

The world needs good models of faithful marriage partnerships. I hope that we can all live out and teach that marriage is about inner beauty, marriage is about respect of the other, and marriage is about equality in the eyes of God.

If we strive for these three ideals then we are living in a faithful marriage. AMEN.

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King James Version (KJV)

3 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; ² While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. ³ Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; ⁴ But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. ⁵ For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: ⁶ Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. ⁷ Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

New International Version (NIV)

3 Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. ⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

The Message (MSG)

3 ¹⁻⁷ The same goes for you wives: Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated by your life of holy beauty. What matters is not your outer appearance—the styling of your hair, the jewelry you wear, the cut of your clothes—but your inner disposition. Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in. The holy women of old were beautiful before God that way, and were good, loyal wives to their husbands. Sarah, for instance, taking care of Abraham, would address him as “my dear husband.” You’ll be true daughters of Sarah if you do the same, unanxious and unintimidated. The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God’s grace, you’re equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don’t run aground.