

Today continues our reading through 1st Peter. 1st Peter is a letter written to a group of Christians who felt like they were on the outside of their community. Since becoming Christian, they were treated differently by their non-Christian friends and neighbors. So this letter of 1st Peter is written to them to give them instruction concerning what it means for them to be a Christian.

The text I am about to read will make some folks here uncomfortable. Some of you will laugh that I am reading this text today on a Sunday that I knew my wife would be out of town. It is a text which gives guidance concerning the relationship that husbands and wives should have toward one another. It is a text that some avoid reading who believe in marriages of equality. It is a text that others flock to in order to reinforce the roles of wives being subservient to husbands.

I, of course, am in a marriage of submission cause I do everything my wife tells me to do. And this is the type of text which was used in a wedding I attended a few weeks ago where the pastor said that at marriage the woman was no longer able to make major decisions. That her role was to advise her husband but that major decisions were his to make. And so reading this passage brings me back to that place.

Or it takes me back to a conversation I had with my oldest daughter where she reflected on a church she had just attended with her friend in which the pastor said to the teenage boys that they could grow up to be pastors and the girls could grow up to marry pastors. She did not like that.

So there are some folks here that as soon as you hear a passage from Scripture about wives and husbands, you turn off because you assume what it has to say. Or you know portions of what it has to say and so you can't listen to anything else. But this morning I ask you to set aside your own prejudices. Because if you set aside your own prejudices, you may really see some very powerful stuff in this passage.

It was only after I set aside my own prejudice was I open to hearing what God might be saying to me. And so with that in mind, I ask you to set aside some of your own prejudices about what you think the roles of wives and husbands should be and so let's read this passage together.

Read I Peter 3: 1-12

Let's first address the hierarchy that Peter assumes in this passage. Peter assumes that everyone accepts that the hierarchy begins with God and then proceeds down to men, women, children, slaves. That this is a hierarchy that is God's intention. Some folks here will accept that hierarchy. Some folks here will reject it. Some folks here have read Scripture and believe that this is a hierarchy that has been established by God.

Others believe that this is a hierarchy established by the culture and Christians saw no need to challenge it. I think either view has biblical support. I happen to be one who believes the latter. That this hierarchy came from the society and Christians saw no need to challenge it.

But either way, this was the hierarchy that existed and that Peter addressed. So working within this hierarchy, what does Peter say? The first thing that Peter says to wives is that their actions can witness to their husband who may not be a follower. So let us look at this in light of all of our relationships. Let us examine what it looks like in our relationships where you are with someone who has a negative opinion about Christianity.

Let's say your best friend is someone who says that Christianity is just a bunch of hypocrites. Your best friend says that she grew up in a Christian home but that Christianity is too judgmental and that she wants nothing to do with this faith. If you listen to this Scripture, then you have an opportunity to witness to this person a Christianity which may be foreign to them.

A Christianity that shows that Christians can disagree about some issues and still model faithfulness to one another. A Christianity that is not focused on judgment but on grace. A Christianity that is welcoming to others like her who may feel that she is not welcome for whatever reason. A Christianity that says don't cheat on another and you don't cheat on another. That last point I share since we have in the news this week two outspoken Christians, one who coaches college football, and another who ran for president, who have been accused of serious cheating.

Or let's say that you are with a spouse and you are having a disagreement concerning an issue of faith. Maybe it is major or maybe it is minor. Maybe you are struggling with whether you should push your beliefs or not. You can take Peter's advice to you that your actions speak louder than your words.

I remember a woman telling me about living with a roommate in college. The two young women did not get along. They had different values. One went to church on Sunday morning while the other slept in with a hangover. But at the end of the semester when they were parting for more compatible roommates, the one girl who was known to party left a note on the pillow of the other. The note said, "I know we were different, but thanks for showing me that being a Christian did not mean one had to be a hypocrite."

The next portion of this text is advice to women that you do not need to adorn yourselves with jewelry, fine clothing, or nice hair dos. I know there are some Christians who read this text to say that women are not allowed to wear jewelry. But there is another way to read this text. Peter goes on to say that it is not outward appearance that defines the beauty of someone. It is what is inside.

I am reminded of this every time that my son notices that I am thinning up top. "You know, Dad," he tells me, "there is this cream that you can rub on your head and it will make your hair grow back." And ya'll, I don't like the thought of losing my hair. You may not like the thought that there is some part of your body or appearance that you think is ugly or that is falling apart in some way.

But into this self-conscious obsession with our looks, we read Peter's words when he says, beauty is found on the inside, not on the outside. A gentle and quiet spirit is precious to God, according to Peter.

Peter then addresses husbands. He says that they are to pay honor to the weaker sex. What does this mean? Well Peter is recognizing that physically women and men are different. And Peter interprets the physical characteristics of women as being weaker than men. Peter fails on the political correctness scale but it is what it is.

But Peter says that husbands should not hinder women but that both women and men are both heirs to the gracious gift of life. So men and women are to work together to affirm their gifts and abilities.

Finally, Peter says, you are to have unity of spirit, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing.

What marvelous advice for any relationship. Whether it is advice to married couples, dating couples, friendships, or whatever kind of relationships you find yourself in. Relationships are not about dominating the other. It is about finding that common heart and humble mind for one another. It is about finding common purpose.

We don't have to shy away from certain texts. We can approach them with open minds and trust for God's spirit to speak to us through them.

Our relationships with one another are blessings. Let us live well within them.
AMEN.

-Text: 1st Peter 3: 1-12

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