

“Equal Servants”

1 Peter 3: 1-12 NIV 1 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 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.

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. 11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

NLT 1 In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over 2 by observing your pure and reverent lives.

3 Don’t be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. 4 You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. 5 This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands. 6 For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husband might do.

7 In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered.

8 Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. 9 Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and He will grant you His blessing. 10 For the Scriptures say, “If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. 11 Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. 12 The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and His ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns His face against those who do evil.

In the prologue to the book “Leadership Jazz” Max DePree writes: Esther, my wife and I have a granddaughter named Zoe, the Greek word for life. She was born prematurely and weighed one pound, seven ounces, so small that my wedding ring could slide up her arm to her shoulder. The neonatologist who first examined her told us

that she had a 5-10% chance of living three days. When Esther and I scrubbed up for our first visit and saw Zoe in her isolette in the neonatal intensive care unit, she had two IV's in her navel, one in her foot, a monitor on each side of her chest, and a respirator tube and a feeding tube in her mouth.

To complicate matters, Zoe's biological father had jumped ship the month before Zoe was born. Realizing this, a wise and caring nurse named Ruth gave me my instructions. "For the next several months, at least, you're the surrogate father. I want you to come to the hospital every day to visit Zoe, and when you come, I want you to rub her body and her legs and arms with the tip of your finger. While you're caressing her, you should tell her over and over how much you love her, because she has to be able to connect your voice to your touch."

God knew that we also needed both His voice and His touch. So He gave us not only the Word but also His Son and the Holy Spirit. He gave us not only Jesus Christ but also His body, the church. God's voice and touch say, "I love you." And as we go through this passage of Scripture I want you to remember that at the core of our relationships with one another and with our spouses that love is at the core. It comes down to loving God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself.

This is another of those passages of Scripture that the Lectionary passes over. As I looked through my files and my computer, I realized that I have never preached on this passage before in 30 years. I have referenced it, but I have never preached on this passage. After some research I had 10 pages of notes. So it was a huge task to narrow it down to a 25 minute sermon. **[NOTE 1]**

So we start with 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 1 and 2: The New Living Translation reads, "1 In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over 2 by observing your pure and reverent lives" The word "obedience" is translated to "accept authority" in the New Revised Standard Version as well. Commentator William Barclay calls this the silent preaching of a lovely life. Now this passage, I think it safe to say, is not in the top 10 or even top 50 Bible passages for most women. But let's take some time and look at what Peter is teaching us through these first 12 verses. To understand this we have to realize that God didn't cause people to go into a trance and have them convulse holding a writing instrument to produce the words of the Bible. He inspired them but the writer's had to understand what they were writing in the context, the culture, and the circumstances in which they were living. It had to make sense to the writer or he would not have written it. So before I dive in I want all of us to understand that the cultural assumptions about relationships between husband and wife in these ancient texts are foreign to the individualistic definitions of marriage in today's society. In every sphere of ancient civilization (we are talking about when the NT was written) women had no rights. Under Jewish law a woman was a thing, she was owned by her husband exactly the

same way he owned a sheep or a goat. For a wife to change her religion while her husband did not was unthinkable, simply unfathomable to the culture of the time. In Greek civilization the duty of a woman was to remain indoors and be obedient to her husband. He had no kind of independent existence. The Taliban and Sharia Law are much like that today. Under Roman Law a woman had no rights. She was totally subject to her father first and then to her husband. If a man caught his wife with another man he could kill her with no fear of repercussions, no fear of discipline whatsoever. The whole attitude of Jewish, Greek and Roman society was that no woman could dare make a decision of any consequence for herself. It is almost impossible for us to wrap our minds around what life would have been like for the wife who was brave enough to become a Christian. That is the context, the culture that Peter grew up in. But Jesus didn't treat women that way. Jesus was radical to even let women assist in his ministry in any way. That's why Peter's advice to women is six times longer than his advice to husbands. It's because the wife's position was far more difficult. **[NOTE 2]**

Into this context Peter writes that women should not leave their unbelieving husbands but submit to their authority and win them over by their Godly, pure and reverent lives. I think it is slightly easier to swallow the New Living Translation's "accept the authority of your husbands" than it is the NIV's "submit yourselves to your husbands". That is because (in our culture) when we hear the word submission it strikes at the core of our sinful nature where there is a deep desire to go our own way and do our own thing. Part of the context is what the rest of the Bible teaches. That points us to what Paul writes. In chapter 5 of Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus he declares in verse 21, that we should "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." The only way we can come to God is to submit to Him. So, submission is to God first and out of respect and love for Him we submit to one another. That's what makes Christianity different from other religions, we are called to humility. Jesus submitted to the Father because of a deep love for Him. Jesus submitted to the cross because of His deep love for us. Jesus was equal with God, but He emptied Himself in submission by becoming a servant and He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of terrible suffering and death. Jesus is our example! (be quiet and let that sink in) **[NOTE 3]**

So in these first two verses Peter is calling wives to submit to, or accept the authority of, their husbands even if they do not believe so that they may be won to Christ, pointed to Jesus by their beautiful life. The Communicator's Commentary on 1 Peter was written by Dr. Paul Cedar and he tells this story: "An attractive young wife came to my office after she had come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ through the church's ministry. Prior to her conversion she and her husband had been involved in a very immoral lifestyle. She asked Pastor Cedar how she could best influence her husband so that he might come to new life in Christ. He shared 1 Peter chapter 3 with her and then said, "At a proper time, tell your husband what has happened to you. Tell him about the love and forgiveness of Christ, and what a difference following Jesus is making in your life. Then, never mention another word about God or Christ or the Gospel again until he asks you or the Holy Spirit prompts you to speak. In the

meantime, live for Christ in all that you do. Allow Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit and to pray for Him to give you the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. They prayed together and she went home to live for Christ & to love her husband as only Christ could enable her.

Three months later the woman's husband came to Pastor Cedar's office to ask how he could also become a Jesus follower. "What influenced you most for Christ that you decided to show up today," asked the Pastor. Without a second of hesitance he responded, "It's been my wife. Several weeks ago she told me of how she had come to know Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. She said she hoped that I would also come to Christ personally, but that she would not bug me. Whenever I had a question or would say I wanted to know more she would share with me. She was a changed woman. She did not nag me or preach to me, she just loved me. I know that whatever she has, I want and need that too. And I believe that it is Jesus Christ!

Very rarely, if ever, will we argue someone into heaven. We will get so much farther if we love, pray, and influence people by living our lives more and more set apart for Christ. Peter mentions purity and reverence. Reverence simply means respect and awe for God. And don't forget purity which refers to doing things Jesus' way.

I also want to mention that in no way does Peter suggest that a woman should be subject to harassment or abuse by their husbands. In the case of slaves, physical abuse was a possibility, but Peter treats the two situations as totally separate. Now we get to verses 3 and 4. I want to be clear that Peter does not say it is a sin to wear a pretty dress or to wear jewelry or style your hair. But Peter desires to point out that there is a beauty that is much deeper and of a much higher priority – the unfading beauty of a gentle spirit. There is an old hymn that reads, "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, all of His wondrous passion and purity, O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine, till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. Christian wives should be adorned by the graces of modesty, humility, and chastity and most importantly faithfulness to God. These are precious to God.

To get very practical, as with most of what Jesus taught, it is not about the rules. Too often we get caught up in asking the wrong question. Don't ask, so what am I allowed to wear or why don't my parents allow me to wear this? Instead ask yourself, "how will my choice of clothing affect my friends, my parents, my teachers? Will it tempt them to lust? For instance, if a young girl wants to wear tight leggings without a skirt or dress. It is not an issue of rules, is it allowed, but rather how do I best show love and care for my God and my "neighbor" (those I come in contact with)? If a girl knows that a vast majority of men are tempted to lust by the sight of females wearing things that reveal every curve and leave little to the imagination, why would you want to be the cause of them stumbling or cause them to be tempted to think sexual things. Now in Christianity God never puts all the responsibility on one side or the other. Should males always work at not staring, not letting their thoughts go crazy, and focus on God's Word? Absolutely! As Paul implies when talking about eating food sacrificed to idols, the question isn't about me, it is about how do I best love God with all my heart, mind,

soul, and strength and how do I love my neighbor as myself? Ask yourself, am I choosing clothes to help my own esteem or is my esteem based on an inner relationship to God as a fully adopted child of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

God's way of doing things works great when we are both living God's way. Trustworthy, honest, respectful people can easily submit mutually in a marriage when both are focused on the good of the other. But it breaks down quickly when one gives in to selfishness or lust or acts in an untrustworthy or deceitful way. Because that causes fear.

How does a Christian wife act like Sarah? Peter gives two practical examples. First do right or what is good and then refuse to give in to fear. What is right or good, but to keep the commandments of the Lord which are summed up in the Great Commandments, love God and love your neighbor. How to love yourself without selfishness is a whole separate sermon. But seek first to follow Jesus. Then the second part is to not give in to fear. How does a woman not give in to the fear that her husband will not love her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her? How does a wife refuse to fear that her husband will act selfishly and not submit to Jesus as his Lord and Savior and respect and honor her? The Biblical answer is clear, "There is no fear in love' but perfect love casts out all fear," (1 John chapter 4). So only out of reverence, respect and awe of God, can we keep from giving in to fear. **[NOTE 4]**

Peter tells husbands to live with their wives with understanding. The Greek word is *gnosis*, from which we get the word knowledge. If we are to be understanding and considerate of our wives we must know her. It is a great challenge and in our culture we are tempted to fill our lives so full that we don't have time to sit down and talk with our spouse. In order to love deeply we must know one another profoundly. How can we lovingly respond to the needs of our spouse if we don't know what their needs are? In marriage counseling class at Pine Rest I learned a technique to help. It is simply to periodically, like at least a couple times a year, ask one another to write down three things that you wish your mate would do more often or less often? Some of you think you know what their answers would be, but you will be surprised if you are honest with one another and there are only pleasant and positive consequences. To know another requires time, honesty, mutual openness, patience, sensitivity and above all LOVE! Peter tells husbands to honor their wives. The original Greek language word is "timay", translated as precious. It denotes value and esteem. We should be treating our wives as very precious, of great value, and highly esteemed. I am feeling like we need to have another time of silent confession about now. Then Peter goes on to say if a husband does not do this, his prayers are hindered. **[NOTE 5]**

A Christian marriage is predicated on the principle that a woman is not inferior or superior to a man in marriage. In Christ "there is neither male nor female; for you are all on in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). The submission of a wife to her husband is not a matter of inferiority in any way; it is simply a matter of love. She does it because she loves Jesus, because she loves her husband and because she is obeying the Word of the Lord. Husbands must give their wives honor and treat them with understanding. She is

your equal partner in God's gift of new life. It is not difficult to submit to a God we love and then to serve Him. It is not difficult to submit to a husband we love and then to serve him. It is not difficult to give ourselves for a wife whom we love as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it. To serve is to love, to love is to serve, and Jesus is our model. There is a writing that appeared in a newspaper column that says it well. "Woman was created from the rib of man. She was not made from his head to top him. Nor out of his feet to be trampled upon, But out of his side to be equal to him. Under his arm to be protected and near to his heart to be loved. [NOTE 6]

Together a man and his wife are children of God, fellow Christ-followers. We are called to love one another, serve each other, submit to one another and live together as heirs of the grace of life.

Finally, we come to verses 8 through 12. Verse 8 says we are to be of one mind. This can not happen without Jesus at the center of everything. Live in harmony. Listen to these final verses again: Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. 9 Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and He will grant you His blessing. When it comes to the essential things we need to be on the same page and put Jesus Christ first. I love to listen to Barbershop quartets sing. When the group is good all four singers work together and complement one another, support one another and the sound is wonderful. It is the same with any group of instruments or voices. When they work together in unity the sound is special. [Note 7] It is the same way with the church. God provides what we need to thrive. But nowhere in the New Testament will you find the concept of Christian unity as an unnecessary but highly desirable spiritual luxury, but rather as something essential to the true being of the Church. When Paul or Peter say that we should be of one mind, they are not speaking longingly like it is a wish or hope. It is something we are to take very seriously. We must seek the will of the Lord together and do it. I believe that is one of the reasons God is blessing us, because in large part, we have been seeking to do that. We must seek to work together, in Christ, in harmony to make a beautiful sound, family, church together. Then Peter calls us to have sympathy for one another. It is interesting that you cannot have sympathy and be selfish at the same time. If we really care about one another and love each other then selfishness will not show its ugly head. Peter is calling us to be compassionate and loving, tenderhearted and courteous, ...like Jesus. We should be displaying love, compassion and humility. Peter calls us to repay insults with blessing. Pray about that. Think about how you can be a blessing, even to the person who insults you. If we are a blessing then God will bless us. [NOTE 8] The last couple verses are mainly a direct quote of Psalm 34 verses 12-16. "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. 11 Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. 12 The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and His ears are open to

their prayers. But the Lord turns His face against those who do evil. So now, what are you going to do about it. Please write down one thing that you can do today and this week to apply 1 Peter 3: 1-12 to your life. Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for the bulletin September 10, 2023 at Doster Community Church

"Equal Servants" based on 1 Peter 3: 1-12

- I. Peter's advice to women is six times longer than his advice to husbands because the wife's position was far more difficult. In every sphere of ancient civilization (Bible times) women had no rights. Not in Jewish society, Greek society or in Roman society.
- II. When we talk about submission we must realize that at the very center of our sinful nature is the deep desire to go our own way, to do our own thing. Yet in Ephesians 5:21 Paul declares that we should submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- III. We should never determine how we should live based on one isolated verse or passage of Scripture. It is very important to consider all that Scripture has to say about something before we make a decision on how to apply it. To properly and best interpret a passage, we must put it in its context and read what the rest of Scripture says about that topic.
- IV. To help one another KNOW each other we should periodically ask the question, "What are three things that you wish your partner would do more often?" But you must practice expressing these three things in a loving, non-condemning, and mutually submissive way.
- V. It is not difficult to submit to a God we love and then to serve Him. It is not difficult to submit to a husband we love and then to serve him. It is not difficult to give ourselves for a wife whom we love as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. To serve is to love and Jesus Christ is our model.
- VI. Woman was created from the rib of a man, she
was not made from his head to top him, Nor from
his feet to be trampled upon, But out of
his side to be equal to him, under his arm to be protected and near his heart
to be loved.
- VII. The New Testament never treats unity (agreeing) in Christ as an unnecessary but highly desirable spiritual luxury, but rather as something essential to the true being of the Church. Sympathy and selfishness cannot coexist.
- VIII. What are you going to do about it? Please write down at least one thing that you will do today and this week to apply this message to your life.