

Marriage Works...but not without work!

I Peter 3:7

Intro. June is traditionally wedding month. Even though the institution of marriage is being called into question and more than half of all marriages will end in divorce, 2.3 million couples wed every year in the US. That breaks down to nearly 6,200 weddings a day! \$72 billion per year is spent on weddings and the average wedding budget is \$20,000. The tragedy in all this is that while so much is invested in the ceremony and the gala reception, so little is invested to prepare the couple for the partnership God designed to be life-long and filled with blessing. The average training for a new job lasts at least several weeks, but most couples go into marriage ill-prepared for the work they sign on for.

During the past several months I've slowed the pace of our study considerably. In fact, at **Eph. 5**, we dropped anchor. By the way, that's what fishermen do when fish appear on the screen. When a place seems "fishy" we hang around that spot for awhile. And given the statistics inside and outside the church, marriage is definitely a "hot spot" that cries out for attention. As the title of the message suggests, **Marriage Works, but not without work!** Pastor and author Walter Trobisch said, *"Marriage is not an achievement which is ever finished. It is a dynamic process between two people, a relation which is constantly being changed, which grows or dies."*

So marriage works, but not without work! But, we say, of course marriage works! God designed it. Unlike contraptions we invent, God never designed something that didn't work. Bible believers should be convinced of this. Though the world may imagine other schemes, God's plan is best and it's a plan that can work really well. His plan is vital for humanity and when followed, brings Him glory.

So we dropped anchor at **Eph. 5**. For those who were away last Sunday, we dealt with a very important passage. **vs.25-30** address the responsibility of husbands to love their wives. By the way, if you missed it, there is the option is to listen online. Because so many weren't here, I'm tempted to repeat the message. I think I've told you before about the evangelist who preached **"You must be born again"** 3 nights in a row in a city-wide crusade. Members of the organizing committee took him aside after night three and asked, *"Why have you preached the same message 3 times?"* Responding with neither apology or excuse the evangelist replied, *"Because you must be born again!"* I feel like that evangelist. Husbands, we must love our wives! Marriage works when we love her as Christ loves the church and as we love ourselves. And to love her that way requires work!

Here's why I believe these verses are so relevant and necessary...Last Sunday I shared an observation made by a veteran pastor to his own son. From his experience he said that *"85% of all marriage problems stem from a husband's failure to be the loving man God calls him to be."* 85%! I don't like hearing that, but I agree. After the message, no one took issue with that man's observation, but a good many said they agreed. This command is so vitally important because "the buck stops here." With so many Christian marriages on the rocks the command to men is more urgent than the tornado sirens we heard the other night. This whole section dealing with marriage is summed up in **vs. 31-33** - **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

And remember, the foundation for fulfilling these commands is found in **v.18** and the command to **be filled with the Spirit**. God is always more concerned about who we are than what we do. When His Spirit fills our lives we will be singing / thankful / and willing to submit to others. (**vs. 19-21**) For Christian women hoping to find a mate, I suggest you ought to look for a guy who loves people. Probing deeper, you ought to look for a guy who is singing / thankful / and willing to submit to others because he loves Christ and his life is filled with God's Spirit.

Far too many go into marriage hoping a man will become that kind of person someday. The safer route is to find a man who exhibits those qualities right now. History proves that you're probably seeing his best side during dating and courtship. If something is defective, apart from God's grace, it's not likely to improve! After every jubilant 40 minute wedding ceremony comes a lifetime of marriage and the two scenes are often completely unrelated.

So here's what I'm going to do. I won't risk being taken to task by the Official Board because I preached the same message twice. But I want to leave the anchor where we dropped it last Sunday by taking you to a companion passage. Would you please find **I Peter 3**.

I Peter 3:1-6 is instructions for wives. In fairness to the men, the instructions here are disproportional like they are in **Eph. 5**. But unlike **Eph. 5**, if you count the verses, 6 x's more instruction is given to wives than to husbands. Maybe that's because Peter was married and Paul wasn't. I don't know. But speaking through His apostle, the Lord specifies the attitude and behavior He expects. Let's read these verses. **Wives, in the same way be submissive to your 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, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, 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. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.**

Ladies, this is your God-given responsibility! In case you thought Paul was down on women, Peter perfectly echoes the command of **Eph. 5:22**. By the way, the harmony and agreement found between Paul and Peter is what we would expect to find in a Bible whose author is God! But if a married woman obeys God and conforms to His plan, she will be beautiful in His sight and pleasing to her husband. She will set in motion the energizing cycle Dr. Eggerichs describes in the Love and Respect series. Her spiritual life will have maximum impact. Even if her husband isn't a Christian, the way she conducts herself will put her in the best possible position to influence him to consider Christ.

The next verse in Peter's letter is addressed to husbands. Since the 85% statistic seems to be valid this is where we need to drop anchor. To say it again, obedience to God's command is work that is absolutely vital to a healthy marriage. Even though just one verse is aimed at husbands...it's a verse aimed at the heart of the marital relationship. When summed up, the verse implies that marriage is not passive bliss or a stroll in the park, but marriage involves intentional effort and work. Listen to what the Lord says to us...**3:7 - 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 phrase, "**in the same way**" takes us back to **1:15,16** where the Spirit of God says, "**...just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy.**" In every dimension of our lives, the Lord calls us to conduct ourselves in ways that rise above a lifestyle that is common and ordinary. We don't fall into holiness anymore than we fall into a happy marriage. The command to be holy involves some sanctified sweat and intentional living. When Christ is Lord, He will impact every dimension of who we are and what we do! To be holy is to be separate, distinct and a cut above the rest. In **2:11-17**, the Lord calls His people to be exemplary citizens. In **2:18-20**, He calls us to be model employees. Now in **3:1-7**, He calls us to be extraordinary partners in marriage. If anyone has a marriage that stands out, it ought to be God's people! If any couple typifies the ideal relationship, it ought to be those whose lives are built on the solid rock.

We are called to be the trend-setters in our world, but too often it's the other way around. Dr. Howard Hendrix once said, *"If your Christianity doesn't work in the home, don't export it!"* Our marriages and our homes are the proving ground for the Good News we're called to embrace and share with others. So let's explore this 7th verse to hear what God says. I've divided the passage into 5 short instructions. *Know her as your wife / Respect her as a person / Protect her as the weaker partner / Live with her as equals in the sight of God / Regard her as a sacred trust*

1. **Know her as your wife** - *"be considerate..."*

Notice the wording **"be considerate as you live with your wives"**. The KJV says **"husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge."** A shortened version might read, *know your wife*. Be intimately acquainted with her as an individual. Do the work necessary to learn everything about her. Give attention to her needs and tastes. Seek to understand what she feels...her fears and the burdens she bears. Be aware of her wishes and life ambitions. And yes...try to understand her moods. I love the story of the man who found a magic lamp on a California beach...

We often joke about how challenging it is for a man to understand a woman, but God isn't joking when He instructs us to know her. As men, we often forget how different she is from us. In his book, entitled, *If Only He Knew*, Gary Smalley suggests some ways a husband is different from his wife. Let me mention a couple:

1. *Women tend to be more personal than men.* They have a deeper interest in people and feelings than men do.

My parents came to one of Jim's football games his sophomore year. That day Taylor beat Iowa Wesleyan 31-0. Taylor's defense was ranked #1 in the NAIA that year. During the game my dad said, "I love their swarming defense...Taylor completely shut down Iowa's offense!" My mother's sentiments were very different. After Iowa missed a field goal, she said, *"I feel sorry for the other team. They seem like nice boys...I wish they could have gotten a few points."* Note the difference?

Men, do you understand that God wired your wife to be more gentle and compassionate than you are? Typically, she's more interested in you as a person than you are in her. She wants you to communicate with her. She needs you to be her closest friend. She appreciates little things you do that show you love her. We need to understand that about a wife. We're wired for practicality and conquest, but she's wired for intimacy and relationship.

2. *Women become an intimate part of their surroundings.* A woman tends to view her house and family as an extension of herself. That's why colors and curtains and couch pillows matter to her. That's why she wants flowers in the flower beds and Kleenex boxes that match the décor of each room! That's why she tends to defend the kids when you holler at them... they're an intimate part of who she is. If this is true about a wife, what can we do to get close to her? I suppose we could make those things which are important to her, important to us. Go after those items on her "honey-do list". Maybe next Christmas you could try giving her a necklace instead of a weed-whacker.

3. *Women often need more time to adjust to change than men do.* Men tend to look at things logically and analytically. Because a woman's emotional identity is linked to people and places around her, she needs more time to adjust to anything that may affect those relationships. I saw this in Peggy in 1983 when we were making the decision to leave our church in Ohio to come here and in many other decisions we've made as a couple. When change is involved, she gets up to speed much slower than I do. I'm learning to back off and give her time. If God is in it, God will convince her or He will change my mind.

Did you ever ride bikes together as man and wife? Who's normally in the lead?...who's the first to arrive at the next mile marker? A husband may or may not wait for his wife when she stops to look at something. (A female author writing on this subject suggests a wife should let some air out of her husband's tires before the ride begins.) But the point is this...women often need more time to do whatever it is they do, and they appreciate it when we wait for them. Do you wait patiently for her?

In v.7 the word **considerate** means to show kind awareness or regard for another's feelings, circumstances, etc. It means to give careful thought...to keep her in mind...to take her into account. To really know a woman may sound like mission impossible, but it's God's will for husbands.

2. Respect her as a person - "**and treat them with respect**"

In pre-marital counseling, I emphasize 3 things which are foundational to a healthy marriage. The three are: love, trust, and respect. When this letter was written in the first century, men had no respect for women. Women were viewed as possessions to own and to use and often abuse.

To show respect is to esteem or to attribute worth. In the book entitled, Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem, Dennis and Barbara Rainey say a husband should treat his wife as "*a fully participating partner.*" She should feel her husband's acceptance and know her opinion is valued. One reason women struggle with the responsibility to submit is fear....fear that if she gives an inch, he'll become over-bearing and take a mile. But a husband who respects his wife as his partner won't do that. He'll honor her by consistently taking her thoughts and feelings into consideration. She won't be just a share-holder in the firm...she'll be a fully participating partner.

To obey God in this responsibility to love and respect our wives, we need to die to self even as Christ gave Himself for us. Closely related is the need to master the art of putting our wives on a pedestal. She needs to be convinced she's the most important person in the world to us. Talk is cheap and words are never enough. But we can take steps to respect her more by recognizing and celebrating her abilities and accomplishments. Christians sing, "Count Your Blessings." It might be a good thing to take regular inventory of the qualities and blessings she brings to our lives.

Yet while talk is cheap, few things do more damage to a mate's sense of self-worth than the words we say and the way we say them. The husband who puts his wife on a pedestal and considers her better than himself, won't talk down to her and he won't talk negatively about her to others. And few things communicate greater respect than when we listen attentively to what she has to say. Safeco Insurance has an ad that features the stereotype of a guy who isn't listening. Let's watch it just for fun. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_JXVv736aI

As a final suggestion, respect is communicated through common courtesies. When was the last time you opened the door for your wife....when was the last time you complimented her? / wrote her a love note / sent her flowers / dated her / or gave her some extra-special attention? When God said, "**treat them with respect,**" He includes anything we might do to affirm love and unconditional acceptance.

3. Protect her as the weaker partner - "**as the weaker partner**"

The verse goes on to say we're to treat her with respect **as the weaker partner**. Because she's a woman, she has certain limitations. Notice the phrase carefully. It says she is **the weaker partner**. The **er** at the end of **weaker** tells us her weakness is comparative. Men tend to think this means a wife is weak but he is strong. I mean, we're the ones wearing the Superman pajamas! But that isn't what this verse says. It says women are **weak-er**. But weaker than who or what? They are constitutionally **weaker** than their weak husbands!

Now this weakness of hers may not be intellectual or spiritual. In many respects, Peggy is a bunch smarter than I am...in some things. If a wife is weaker than we are in any department, it's physical and emotional. But generally speaking, she's more tuned in to spiritual things than we are.

Studies reveal that 40% of a man's body is muscle while muscle occupies only 23% of a woman's body. I used to sink like a rock in fresh water. I could literally lay on the drain of the pool. Now I float like a boat! And female hormones are of a different type and more numerous than a male's. (That may account for her occasional moodiness.) But things are going on in her body aren't happening in ours. There are times and seasons when she needs a husband who will back off and cut her a little slack. At other times she needs emotional support from him...and oh by the way, she needs it right now! From the beginning, God said, **her desire would be for her husband (Gen.3:16)**. Dr. Dobson says *every aspect of a woman's emotional and physical existence is dependent on the romantic love she receives from her husband*. A man may not be able to figure this out but it's a fact. The best way to protect your wife and contribute to her overall sense of well-being is to fulfill her need for romance. As we said last time, God wired her to be loved by you.

Dr. Kent Hughes tells a story about a lady who was starving for some romance in her marriage....Let me read it... *"Years ago in the Midwest, a farmer and his wife were lying in bed during a storm when the funnel of a tornado suddenly lifted the roof off the house and sucked their bed away with them still in it. As they clung to each other, the wife began to cry. The farmer said to her, "Listen up, this is no time to cry". "I can't help it", she said..."this is the first time we've been out in 20 years!"*

Don't let that happen to your marriage! You don't have to rescue your wife from a band of thugs to be her hero. You don't have to pull her from the claws of a grizzly bear. Just be sensitive to her needs. Come alongside when her emotions are in the dumpster. Be attentive to whatever is troubling her. At times she needs the sense of logic God blessed you with. At other times she needs the spiritual leadership God is trusting you to provide. But at most other times she just needs to be held in your arms. Because she is the **weaker partner**, she needs you to be there for her.

4. Live with her as equals in the sight of God - and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life

Notice that phrase, **the gracious gift of life**. Most of us take life for granted. We come to think of life as an entitlement...a right. But life isn't a right its a gift!...a gracious gift! It's a gift given to us by God. Each breath and each day we have here, is God's gracious gift to us. To spend our days with a beautiful life partner and to enjoy the incredible blessings of home and family / of children and grandchildren...this is all part of God's **gracious gift**. Listen...marriage works, but not without work!

Notice, husbands and wives are **heirs together**. She is **heir with you** (or with her husband) **of the gracious gift of life**. Literally, we are joint heirs. God's gracious gift isn't *"for men only"*...it's for men and women equally. And consider this...when life is viewed as God's gift, her portion is greater than ours! Statistics say wives typically outlive their husbands by 4 to 8 years! This is easily proved by the fact that there are many more widows looking for a man than widowers looking for a woman! I'm sure you heard of the guy who put an ad in the paper that read like this... *"Healthy 70 year old male who loves the outdoor recreation and particularly fishing...looking for a female companion who enjoys the same and owns a boat. Please send picture of boat."*

But there's far more to God's gracious gift than just this momentary phase of life. Through faith in Christ there's a better life beyond this life. In **Jn.10:10** Jesus said, **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** Writing to Christian couples, Peter reminds husbands their salvation is no greater or more complete than the salvation their wife received. Salvation is genderless. **Together** men and women will spend eternity in a place where every earthly distinction is gone.

Gal. 3:26-28 - You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Since male and female are perfect equals in the sight of God, a husband should bear this in mind as he lives with his wife. A husband should encourage her gifts and help her broaden her horizons as a woman made to glorify God. We should help her grow as a Christian. We should do all we can to help her realize the fullness of life that is hers as a gift from Jesus Christ. Then finally, we should...

5. Regard her as a sacred trust - ...so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

This may sound a little awkward but it's an attempt to bind up the verbal strands of **v.7**. The 3 commands are **be considerate / live with her / and treat her with respect**. These responsibilities are committed to us as a sacred trust. The covenant of marriage is made between a man a woman in the presence of God and man...but God first. It isn't optional for a husband to be considerate or live with her in an under-standing way anymore than its optional for him to do life with her. As a man lives with his wife, it isn't optional that he treat her with respect. These are God's commands. Notice how the last phrase reinforces that...**so that nothing will hinder your prayers**.

The word **hinder** means to cut in on or to interrupt. Failure to live with a wife in an understanding way and failure to treat her with respect will interrupt the effectiveness of a husband's fellowship with the Lord...in particular, his privilege of prayer. We know that sin that hinders fellowship with God and effectively neutralizes prayer. So failure to relate to a wife the way God wants us to must be in that category...it must be sin because it has the same effect! So there's nothing optional here! **v.7** states the terms of a sacred trust and that's what marriage is. Like the parable of the talents, we're accountable to God for the stewardship of marriage.

So these are the five instructions contained in **I Peter 3:7**. As the title of the message suggests, Marriage works, but not without work! *We must know her as our wife / Respect her as a person / Protect her as the weaker partner / Live with her as equals in God's sight / and Regard her as a sacred trust*. The companion verse is **Eph.5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**.

In **Matt. 7:24** - Jesus said, "**Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.**" The foundation we must build our marriages on is obedience to the words of Christ. But notice...we must build and building is work.

I wonder if there is a band of brothers here this AM who would dare to step out from where you're seated and come down to the front to pray together...to ask God to help us love our wives more sincerely and deeply? Coming forward doesn't mean you don't love your wife or you've blown it. Let's park that notion right now! Coming forward means God has spoken to you through His Word and you want to invest some more work in loving your mate...you want to obey the Lord more completely. As we found last time, to love a wife selflessly and sacrificially is one of the most difficult challenges set before us. We can't love the way Jesus loves without Jesus! We need to obey His Word and rely on the filling of His Spirit. And as Walter Trobisch said, "*Marriage isn't an achievement which is ever finished.*" Each day brings a fresh challenge to choose to extend love and respect to each other. And who knows, you might gain some hero points with your significant other just by stepping out and asking God to help you love her more.