

Treat Her with Respect

I Pet. 3:7

Intro. An article written by Chuck Lawless was forwarded to me last week. The article was written as a guide for pastors who are preparing services and sermons for Mother's Day. He suggests that Mother's Day services present a number of dangerous trip wires for pastors to avoid! In other words, this guide was written to cause pastors a week of sleepless nights as he prepares his message. Here are several precautions and guidelines Lawless recommends. I've modified them a little.

1. Be careful about identifying mothers by having them stand or raise their hand. *Today a growing number of women are carrying concealed weapons they're trained and unafraid to use.* (OK, I added that last comment.)
2. Be careful about recognizing special mothers like the "youngest" and "oldest." *You could find yourself in violation of Hippa Law and could be slapped with a law suit for age discrimination.* (besides that, experience has taught me there are several ways the oldest and youngest thing can go bad.) ...Times have changed.
3. After listing 5 or 6 other precautions, Lawless writes...Recognize mothers, but honor all the ladies in the church. Now that's one I can work with.

So endeavoring to observe these precautions and stay within his recommended guidelines, I will attempt to speak almost fearlessly! But in all seriousness, this morning I want to do what Lawless suggests in that last point - **Recognize mothers, but honor all the ladies in the church.** Let's do that...not because it's the safer route, but because it's biblical. I hope you realize something. In contrast with other world religions and cultures, wherever the Bible is believed and obeyed, women are honored as equals with men and their status is greatly elevated. I wish I could say Christians and the Church have always gotten this right, but the fact is...we haven't. Let's ask God to help us get this right in obedience to His Word. **PRAY**

Even though Mother's Day has been hi-jacked by Hallmark and special offers from Shari's Berries and FTD Flowers, the idea of honoring mothers is rooted in the commands of God. In **Ex. 20:12** the Lord instructed His people this way...**"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."** The NT repeats this command 7x's...only 7! The template God has in mind for a Mother's Day celebration may well be **Prov. 31:28, 31** - **"Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also and he praises her...Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."** If you have a mother, as all of us did at one time, I hope that describes the plans your have for today. That's our desire and goal this morning...to honor the ladies in our midst and to learn how to do this more substantially and with greater consistency. If we listen to God and take His instructions seriously...if we treat the ladies in our lives with greater respect...I'm thinking this is a gift they might appreciate more than anything else we might give them. Flowers are nice but they don't last very long. A box of Godiva Chocolate is always better...but it's terribly fattening. But loving respect...that's a gift that keeps on giving. Ladies, give us a loud 'Amen' if you think I'm on to something. Did you hear that, men?

Our text is **I Pet. 3:7** where the Holy Spirit says, **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.**

Let's take a moment to see this verse in the context of this letter. A major theme in Peter's first letter is holy living. **1:15, 16** - **But 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."** Holy living is out-of- the-ordinary living.

Holy living isn't weird, poker-faced-piety or a person who is "so heavenly minded he's no earthly good." Holy living isn't disconnecting oneself from real life or having tastes that are a century behind the times. A **holy life** is different / distinct / separate / and a cut above the lives of those who are without God and without the guidance of His Word and the enablement of His Spirit. **Holiness** rejects the status quo and lifts the quality of human relationships to a higher plane. From cover to cover, the Bible declares how much God values and is concerned about our relationships.

In **chap. 2**, Peter applies holy living relates to our influence on those who are without Christ (**vs. 11, 12**). He then applies holy living to our relation to those who are over us in positions of authority (**vs.13-17**) and then in relation to our employers. (**vs.18-25**). The **3rd chapter** opens with instructions for the married. Here the Holy Spirit reveals the attitudes and behavior that should characterize the relationship between a Christian man and his wife. The first **6 verses** contain instructions for women or wives and **v. 7** contains instructions for men or husbands. Let me read **v. 7** again, **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 words, **in the same way**, show the connection and similarities between a husband's attitudes and behavior that is appropriate in every relationship.

As we consider this verse addressed to husbands, I have an underlying premise. It goes like this... ***The primary and most basic way we learn to respect and honor women is by observing the way our father treats our mother.*** (repeat) In other words, our homes are the primary school for learning that every person in our lives is owed respect because each person is made in the image and likeness of God. This principle is introduced in **2:17** which says, **Show proper respect to everyone:** Often with wide eyes and dismay, children see their parents treating each other poorly. If dad complains about the food his wife prepares, his children will learn to do the same. If dad does his own thing regardless of mom's feelings, his children will follow his example. If parents argue and pick at each other, our children will think arguing is normal. But when a man treats his wife with consideration and respect as God commands him to, his children will learn to honor the women in their lives as he does. When he speaks highly of her, they will learn to do the same. When he makes a big deal out of her birthday, their anniversary and special occasions like Mother's Day, he makes his love and respect for her visible. Respect for others is contagious...it's a behavior taught mainly by example. The man who honors his wife, creates a ripple effect that touches every level of society. **v. 7** contains **six principles** for the relationship between a Christian husband and his wife. This is the way of holiness...it's out of the ordinary behavior only possible through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

So let me repeat the premise... ***The primary and most basic way we learn to respect and honor women is by observing the way our father's treats our mother.***

1. A Christian man will be considerate of His Wife's needs – Husbands, in the same way be considerate...

Consideration is a quality of behavior that gives careful thought to those around us. **Phil. 2:4** says, **Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.** A considerate person will show awareness or regard for the feelings, needs, opinions, interests, and circumstances of those around him. Can you imagine how different the world would be if everyone practiced consideration? Imagine how different driving would be! Here Peter says, a Christian man will be thoughtful toward his wife. Instead of being absorbed with himself and his things, God commands a husband to think about his wife. He must give thoughtful consideration to things that matter to her. This is a godly characteristic because it's true of God in His relationship with us. **Psa. 139:17,18 - How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.**

A wife should be confident that her husband is thinking about her. Ideally she should know her husband thinks about her all the time. But more than just thinking about his wife, a godly man will think *good thoughts* about his wife. In this he also emulates the Lord. **Jer. 29:11 - For I know the thoughts that I have toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.**

A thought-life is something we're is commanded to control. Critical thoughts and fault-finding attitudes can and must be put aside. In their place a considerate man will focus on his wife's best qualities. He will train himself to ask: "*What will please her? / What does she need? / How can I encourage her? / What help would she most appreciate? / What special thing can I do to affirm my love?*"

Since these thoughts don't occur automatically for any of us, God commands husbands to be considerate. It would be nice if good thoughts just popped into our heads, but they don't. In obedience to God's Word and by the enablement of His Spirit, a Christian man will train himself to be thoughtful.

2. A Christian man will share his life with his wife - "as you live with your wives"

Someone has said, "*The loneliest people in the world are often married!*" Many hard-working husbands are missing out on the one item that is most essential to a happy wife. Providing income isn't the same as sharing a life. In the beginning God created marriage to meet the human need for companionship and intimacy. But in too many marriages, all a couple really shares is the same address, checking account and a couple of kids.

The Greek term translated **live with** means to *be at home* with. It's a comfortable word that implies *settling down* and *permanence*. The same root word is used of **God dwelling in light** and **the indwelling Spirit of God in the believer**. In each case, to **live with** or to **dwell together** suggests a state of inseparable closeness and oneness.

A woman can be lonely for her husband's companionship. He may bring home a nice paycheck, and do the yard work...but what she craves most is his attention and affection. She wants to be noticed, appreciated, and to be given the gift of his time. Often this vital aspect of our marriage starts to slip in the middle years when financial needs are great and children occupy so much of her time. So here we're reminded of the need to practice **sharing life** with our mate. Nice things can never replace the basic need for companionship!

3. A Christian man will live with his wife in a manner that shows her respect - and treat them with respect

The greek word translated **respect** means to recognize value and worth. To show **respect** is to esteem or to acknowledge a sense of excellence in a person. Webster defines *honor* as "*high regard or great respect given; especially glory; fame; distinction.*" Once again, every person is owed respect because every person was made by God in His likeness. There are a number of practical ways a man can show **respect** to a woman.

A man and his children honors their mother when they put her on a pedestal and make her feel she's **special**. This command is echoed in other Scriptures. In **Phil. 2:3** - Paul wrote, **...in humility consider others better than yourselves**. No relationship is a more appropriate place for practicing godly humility than marriage. One way to honor a woman is to notice and appreciate all she does. Some of the finest corporate managers will never be written about in Forbes magazine. They live in homes like ours. They plan / organize / delegate / dispatch / and make on the spot decisions as part of their daily routine. But when was the last time she heard words of appreciation for all she does?

Permanently etched in my memory is a time when I became 'Mr. Mom' for a couple of weeks. I managed to make breakfast / get the kids off to school / and generally keep things picked up...but that was all 'Mr. Mom' had time for. The second law of thermodynamics was again proven as things around the house moved from order to chaos. We ate fast food almost every night / the dust accumulated / the laundry piled up...and the many unnoticed chores Peggy does routinely, went undone. Men, don't wait for her to be absent before you notice and appreciate what she does, tell her. Let her know how much she's needed!

Can you remember a time when you were been ignored or rudely spoken to? How did it make you feel...big or small? Another way for a man to honor a woman is to speak to her with respect. Words are powerful. They minister help or inflict harm...they build up or tear down. Like the rest of us, wives and mothers need to hear words of praise. William James wrote, "*The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.*"

Along with the affirmation that comes through kind words, a woman needs to be heard. When we give her our undivided attention, we're showing her love and respect. It shows that we are sensitive and concerned about her. It helps her feel that her opinion and thoughts have value and worth. The man who focuses on honoring his wife / caring for her needs / and nurturing her as his most valued asset...is obedient to God and will greatly affect how she feels about herself.

4. A Christian man will recognize his wife's weaknesses and will seek to protect and support her - ..."as the weaker partner...

Along with her many strengths, a Christian man will realize his wife has certain weaknesses. She needs her husband's protection and support. Her needs provide him with golden opportunities to come to her rescue. And let's face it...deep inside, every man wants to be a hero and secretly wishes he could wear Superman pajamas. Every woman has the basic need to be protected physically. (That's why so many carry mace and concealed weapons.) She needs to be protected from dangers that exist in late night shopping trips and poorly lighted parking lots. She needs that gentle reminder to use her seatbelt and to lock the car and house doors. When the phone rings and no one else is home, she needs to be reminded how she should answer callers so as to not give the impression she's home alone. Though these reminders may insult her intelligence a bit...the trade off is the message that says you care.

Along with obvious physical dangers, she needs to be protected from over-scheduling and allowing herself to be manipulated by other people...even friends. In some ways her physical and emotional make-up is delicate and more fragile than that of most husbands. She may neglect herself while caring for a member of her family or a parent. A loving husband will see that his wife gets the rest, the exercise and the medical attention she needs. And don't forget the cosmetology...I'm not saying your wife needs a trip to the beauty parlor...I didn't say that...I'm saying it's probably something she values and would enjoy.

Mothers with young children have special needs all their own. They may need to be protected from "*cabin fever*" which is so prevalent during our long Michigan winters. A young wife may need to be rescued for an evening, or better yet...a weekend without the children! (Can you even imagine that?) When the only conversation a young mother has had for a whole month has been conversation with a couple of toddlers, she may desperately need some intellectual protection and relief.

Poor Mrs. Reed lived across the street from us when I was a kid. I mowed the Reed's lawn for 5 or 6 years. Unfortunately, her husband didn't protect her intellectually! Being cooped up for long periods with two small children caused her to become affected by their reading books.

The poor lady's intellectual elevator got stuck at Dick and Jane's floor. She'd say to me, "Look Dean...look at the grass...the grass is tall...the grass needs mowing. See the lawn mower? See the red gas can? Will you mow it for us?" (And you think I'm kidding!)

A woman sometimes needs protection from herself. With so much emphasis on appearance and performance, she may be discouraged by unrealistic ambitions and expectations. Depression can result if she falls into the trap of comparing herself with others. To counteract these pitfalls, she needs regular doses of approval and tender affirmation. She needs to know how good she looks and how much she means to her husband. As I've often said in wedding ceremonies, "The best way a man can compliment his wife...is frequently!"

And what about her children? They're adorable...but I've got news...they are fallen sinners! At times they will exploit her weaknesses...especially when dad is out of range. Like a union, siblings will often organize their resistance and gang up on her. As they get older they can say thoughtless things that hurt and crush her spirit. When this happens, her husband must come to the rescue. With firmness they need to know this is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. The rule must be made clear... "in our home we show respect to this lady who is God's daughter, my wife and your mother!"

Finally, a woman needs *spiritual protection*. The Bible stresses the fact that Adam's sin was open-eyed and deliberate...but Eve was deceived. The vulnerability to spiritual error is stronger for women than it is for men. For this reason, husbands are to be spiritual leaders who make it their business to protect their wife and family by sound teaching and godly example. When a man seeks to protect and support his wife, he affirms her value and worth while protecting his greatest asset.

5. A Christian man will treat his wife as a fully participating partner - "as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life"

Notice the phrase, **heirs with you**. This phrase suggests partnership. The business world has all sorts of partnerships: silent partners / financial partners / equal partners / controlling partners / and minority partners. Although a woman's roles differ from that of a man, God's Word insists she has an equal inheritance as a child of God. In fact, **in Christ**, gender distinctions disappear entirely.

Gal. 3:26, 29 - "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 Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Because of her equal status in God's sight, a husband is to treat his wife graciously as a full and equal partner. But sometimes this isn't the case. Sometimes in marriage the wife is a minority partner. In marriage counseling years ago, I met a husband who bought several cars and a house without his wife's approval. He made the purchases and told his wife about it after the fact. Now that wouldn't work in my marriage! For sure, I'd live in that house alone! In fairness to the men, I also counseled a couple where the wife was taking night classes without her husband knowing. As you might expect, he demanded to know what else she was doing he didn't know about.

According to God's Word, marriage is an equal partnership. What signals are given by a husband who makes decisions independently and unilaterally? It tells his mate, "Your opinion and tastes don't count" / "What I think and decide is all that matters." It says, "You're a silent partner in this marriage and your input is not relevant or valued." Normally conflicts don't arise over big items like houses and automobiles. Most men I know don't have a death wish or desire to sleep in the garage! Typically the dispute is over vacation plans / golf clubs / fishing gear / or to whose home the family is going for Christmas.

King Solomon said, "**its the little foxes that spoil the vine.**" Treating your wife as an equal partner is another way to honor her and demonstrate her worth.

6. Finally, The Christian man understands that his relationship with his wife affects his fellowship with the Lord - "so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

The Spirit of God wants us to know there's nothing optional about these instructions. It is God's will for a man to treat his wife with respect and honor...it's the way of holiness. In his life, she is to be second only to the Lord. To fail in this responsibility will negatively affect his relationship with the Lord and hinder the Lord's ability and willingness to answer his prayers.

CONCLUSION Although not everyone realizes this...Jesus did an incredible thing for women and by extension, for all humanity. His standards oppose male dominance and the abusive treatment of women prevalent in so many pagan cultures. His teachings lift women to a high level...higher than ever existed before. Jesus repeated God's command that says, "**Children honor your father and mother.**" His Word teaches a wife to respect her husband and a husband to love and respect his wife. Yet these commands and the path of holiness can only be walked by those who have received salvation, forgiveness and a new heart. **II Cor. 5:17** says, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** This is what we all need. We need a Savior. We need someone with power to change us on the inside. And who qualifies better to do that than the Creator who made us in the first place. Have you trusted Jesus? Have you invited Him to come into your life and make you new?

On this day set aside to acknowledge the mothers who gave us life...let's ask the Lord to help us to honor her and treat her with respect. And men, God has entrusted to us the responsibility of setting the example of what it means to **Show proper respect to everyone.**