

1 Peter 3

“¹Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands...”

There is no doubt that in the first century Mediterranean culture, men had more inherent power than women. That situation is no longer the case in the modern world. However, these verses can be understood in a more balanced way than in ancient times.

It should first be noted that even in the patriarchal context of the first century, the submission called for was for wives “to their own husbands.” It is not a call for all women to be subservient to all men. This distinction has often been foolishly lost.

In his writings, Paul also called for husbands to submit to their wives. Yet he also wrote:

“... giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of God...” (Ephesians 5:20-21).

There are many times when husbands must recognize the talents that their wives possess and they do not. In such situations, wisdom calls for husbands to defer to the views of wives. What situations can you think of where this would be the case?

Paul also wrote,

“²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...” (Ephesians 5:25).

Christ’s love for the Church is demonstrated by His sacrifice for “His bride.” He is ever present with her. He is always attentive to her requests. He is always quick to provide for her needs. He always looks out for her best interests.

²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32)

Often Christian wives are not “submissive” because their husbands do not “love” them with the same degree of self-sacrifice that Christ does.

Paul is quoting the words of Christ,

“⁴And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh.” (Matthew 19)

The marital act of coming together is the most intimate act possible between two human beings. It is within a bond of total commitment to one another. When this sacred physical union takes place outside marriage, it is a blasphemy. *“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.”*

There is deep meaning when Paul writes, *“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”* The physical act of “being one flesh” within the bonds of love, commitment and fidelity of marriage has a spiritual counterpart between Christ and His Church. That takes place at Holy Communion. The Body and Blood of Christ is mingled with the body and blood of the faithful communicant. It is the supreme physical and spiritual union of God and man in the context of love, commitment and fidelity.

This is precisely why the Orthodox Church does not offer communion with non-Orthodox. To do so would be to share the greatest form of intimacy with those who lack the necessary bonds of love, commitment and fidelity to Christ’s Church.

This extreme form of spiritual intimacy is also shared between fellow believers. This is why Orthodox Christians should not receive communion if they are in a state of hostility with their fellow Christian. In that situation the bonds of love, commitment and fidelity, the prerequisite for Holy Communion, is damaged. We must repair the damage before we commune. Christ said,

“²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

We do not often perceive it, but harboring deep anger at a brother or sister in Christ is very dangerous to our souls. Here is the medicine:

²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5).

When we worthily partake of Communion, we unfathomably partake in the Trinitarian relationship and in the fellowship of the Church.

“²⁰ I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17).

These are exalted and holy concepts. However, we live in a fallen world where many spouses – including Christian spouses - struggle in their marriages. Peter recognizes this and offers counsel.

“... that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, ² when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.”

Wives usually have significant influence over their husbands.

<https://youtu.be/vNtH2Umgb-c>

Peter encourages wives to recognize the influence they have and use it to inspire their husbands to improve their behavior. Esther is a wonderful book in the Old Testament. It tells the story of a Jewish servant in the palace of Ahasuerus, the King of the Persians.

“¹⁵ And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. ¹⁶ So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.” (Esther 1).

Although she had no political power over the King, she used her virtue to win the love and confidence. She used that influence to alert her husband of a plot to kill her and all the Jews in Persia. The king thwarted the plot and saved all the Jews thanks to the gentle intercessions of Esther. She was the opposite of Herodias, who used her influence over Herod to murder John the Baptist. Peter is encouraging Christian wives to exercise their virtues and be positive influences in their marriages and families.

“³ Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— ⁴ rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

Peter did not forbid exterior adornment for women. Rather, he calls for them to beautify their interior as much as their exterior.

“⁵ For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.”

There is an old saying “Behind every great man is a great woman.” This verse agrees, pointing to Abraham as an example. The Orthodox wedding service lists many Old Testament saints together with their wives, recognizing their spiritual attainment is shared.

“Who did also bless Your servant Abraham, and opened the womb of Sara, and made him the father of many nations; Who bestowed Isaac upon Rebecca, and blessed her offspring; Who joined Jacob and Rachel, and from them made manifest the twelve patriarchs; Who yoked Joseph and Asenath together, and as the fruit of generation did bestow upon them Ephrem and Manasse; Who accepted Zacharias and Elizabeth, and declared their offspring the Forerunner; Who out of the root of Jesse, according to the flesh, produced the

Ever-Virgin Mary, and from her were Incarnate-born for the salvation of the human race...

“Bless them. O Lord our God, as you blessed Abraham and Sara.
Bless them, O Lord our God, as You blessed Isaac and Rebecca.
Bless them, O Lord our God, as you blessed Jacob and all the Prophets.
Bless them, O Lord our God, as You blessed Joseph and Asenath.
Bless them O Lord our God, as You blessed Moses and Zipporah
Bless them, O Lord our God, as You blessed Joakim and Anna.
Bless them, O Lord our God, as You blessed Zacharias and Elizabeth.“

The shared and coequal treasure of marriage continues with Peter’s instructions to husbands:

“⁷ Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Whenever a husband fails to give “understanding” and “honor”, or does not behaving as a “joint heir” with her, his prayers are hindered. God gives diminished respect husbands who give diminished respect to their wives.

“⁸ Finally, all of you be of one mind...”

In the Liturgy, just before we recite the Creed together, the Priest proclaims, “Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess...”

“...having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;

Christ had these qualities: “²⁸ Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the King was owed a vast amount of money, but “was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.” The forgiven servant did not do the same for his fellow servant. The King demanded, “³³ Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?”

“⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.”

Christ taught these very same principles in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Blessed are you when men hate you,
And when they exclude you,
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,*

*For the Son of Man's sake.
Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!
For indeed your reward is great in heaven.” (Luke 6:22-23)*

¹⁰ For

*“He who would love life
And see good days,
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking deceit.
¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.
¹² For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”*

This is a quote of Psalm 34:12-16.

¹³ And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?

Paul gives the same message.

“³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Romans 13:3-4).

This is surprising because Roman government officials were often corrupt and cruel. But the book of Acts frequently describes Roman rulers positively.

“¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.”

Peter is again paraphrasing the Sermon on the Mount, at which he was present:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

“And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”

This is a paraphrase of the words of Christ,

“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Luke 12:4-5).

We live in an age of great anxiety. Christ and Peter are literally inviting us to be totally fearless of anything the world can do to us.

¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶ having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

“... always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

We must know our faith well. Third, we must know the usual criticisms on our beliefs. Finally, we must articulate our responses with “meekness and fear,” not arrogance. This field of theology is called “apologetics,” from the Greek “apologia” terms “apo” (“from”) plus “logia” (“words” or “discourses”). Anyone can learn this valuable skill, which is increasingly valuable in our world which understands our faith less and less.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who formerly were disobedient...”

This refers to Holy Saturday, when Christ descended into Hades. This is mentioned in the New Testament:

¹⁴ And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:14-15)

¹⁸ Therefore He says:

*“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”*

⁹ (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” (Ephesians 4:8-10).

The Orthodox Church commemorates this “despoiling of hell”:

Troparion:

**When You did descend to death, O Life Immortal,
You did slay hell with the splendor of Your Godhead,
And when from the depths You did raise the dead,
All the Powers of Heaven cried out,**

O Giver of Life, Christ our God, glory to You!

Paschal Sermon of St. John Chrysostom:

He that was taken by death has annihilated it! He descended into hades and took hades captive! He embittered it when it tasted his flesh! And anticipating this Isaiah exclaimed, "Hades was embittered when it encountered thee in the lower regions."

It was embittered, for it was abolished!

It was embittered, for it was mocked!

It was embittered, for it was purged!

It was embittered, for it was despoiled!

It was embittered, for it was bound in chains!

It took a body and, face to face, met God! It took earth and encountered heaven! It took what it saw but crumbled before what it had not seen!

“...when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. ²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

In the Creed, we confess “I believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins...” This verse is the most clear connection of baptism to salvation in the Bible.