

1 Peter 3:7

1Pe 3:7 (NKJV) 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.

As I have personally studied carefully over [1 Peter 3:1-7](#), I have come to a very settled conclusion that marriage can be incredibly satisfying beyond our wildest imaginations. However, at the same time it can be incredibly challenging and somewhat unpredictable (especially if we do the wrong things). One of the things that I have always kept in my mind and heart is that my wife is God's gift to me. Next to Christ, she is the greatest gift that I have ever received. When we made our wedding pledges to each other over 47 years ago, it was a pledge to God as much as it was a pledge to each other. We were not signing some kind of legal and impersonal contract, but we were pledging our lives to each other for the rest of our lives. We were entrusting our lives into each other's care and provision. We were pledging our unconditional love to each other no matter what life might bring our way. In every marriage there are high moments and low moments, but our pledge to one another was to be there for each other no matter what would happen to us or even between us.

It does not matter who we are or how long we may have been married, we all know and have learned along the way that marriage is not something that is always easy. We have two different people who are built physically and emotionally different and who probably come from two completely different backgrounds. However, anything that is going to have lasting and eternal value is not something that comes easy. Marriage is something that demands that both the husband and the wife place the needs of their partner above their own needs. Spiritually and biblically, this is a no-brainer. Any godly marriage is one that has a husband and a wife that love each other sacrificially and they are intentionally looking for every way possible to build up their partner. The worst thing that we can do is to selfishly demand that our personal needs and desires be met first. Listen. It should be obvious that we live in a culture that has no understanding of what marriage is or what marriage is intended to be, and unfortunately many in the church have bought into the nonsense.

I was thinking that it is probably a very cruel trick that men play on their wives when they romance their future bride and treat her like she is the most incredible and amazing woman on the planet. Before they were married, the future husband did everything for his wife to be. If they went on a date, he held her hand, put his arm around her, and opened the car door for her. He would call her every day multiple times, write her sweet notes, and maybe even send her some beautiful flowers just to surprise her. However, once they finally get married, it seems that things possibly took a dramatic turn for the worse. Unfortunately, it seems like some men have forgotten all about those days and all of the romantic gestures that they made to their brides to be. In some cases, the wife may even wonder if this is the same man that I dated. One thing that every husband should remember until the day that he dies is that his wife has a deep and abiding need to feel cherished and loved by him. She needs to know that she is still the most special person in his life, and he is the only one that can make her feel that way.

So, no matter how we handle this passage, this is one of the realities that Peter is addressing. As men we have to decide that we are going to share more than just the couch, the table, and the bed with her. We have to deliberately and intentionally determine that we are going to completely and fully share our

lives with our wives. This is a willful choice that we have to make. If for some reason you may be wondering what your marriage will be like if fail to share your life with your wife in a way that is meaningful to her, then just ask some husbands who made that mistake, made the mistake of ignoring and paying no attention to their wife. The bottom line is that they hurt their wives, and it is difficult for them to blame their wives for the disappointments and bitterness that they experience.¹ For many men, it is just an area of pride that they simply are not willing to address. Let me say all of this in a positive way. When you invest your life into your wife, when you raise the bar on what it means to be a godly husband, and when you devote your life to meeting the needs and desires of your wife, you are making the greatest investment in yourself that you can make.

In studying this passage, we have come to the place where we want to take a look at what it means when it says that the wife is the “**weaker vessel**”. Unfortunately, in our culture that is often times viewed as a kind of offensive sexist term, which it clearly is not. Just think for a moment about the word “**vessel**”. Men and women are clearly born into different vessels. Our souls are equal and our intelligence is equal, but our vessels are drastically different. Just think about the difference between a minivan and a fire truck. They are two completely different vehicles. The minivan is made to carry a family and the fire truck is made to put out fires. They are completely different vehicles. In the same way, the woman has been designed by God to both carry and care for children. That should just be physically obvious to anyone paying attention. In the same way, the man has been made stronger so that he can work hard as opposed as being made for raising children. Do you think that someone would be offended if we told them that their family minivan was not as tough as the city firetruck? I hope not. Each vehicle is built for a specific purpose and for a specific role, and so it is with how God made a man and a woman. He clearly made them very different, yet very much the same.

In [1 Peter 3:1-6](#), Peter urged the wives to pursue their true beauty which was the ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. However, now as we come to the husband, God gives to him the same kind of tender approach to his wife that she is to provide for him. He also is to pursue a gracious and godly kind of gentleness in how he treats his wife. He has to treat them with great understanding. He has to give them a remarkable level of honor – more than he does anyone else in the world. This is literally God’s divine design, and we cannot treat it in any less of a way. We mentioned it in the previous study that what God is doing in this passage is creating a marriage culture, a way of life for the husband and wife. In order to do that, the husband must elevate his wife to a place of great, great honor in his life.

The word “**weaker**” is the Greek word “*asthenes*” and specifically means without strength, powerless.² In some ways, it almost sounds like an insult simply because we treat the word weakness as meaning something is not as good, does not have the same ability, or is inferior in some way. However, that is certainly not true regarding this word. In my mind, right or wrong, this word for “**weaker**” is a word that should move me as a husband. It is such an incredibly beautiful picture of the value of my wife that it should provoke something chivalrous inside of me. The role that my wife has in my life personally is so unique and so valuable to my life, and because of that I should be as motivated as much as is possible

¹ Renner, *1 Peter 3:7*, ep.

² Zodhiates, 274.

to love her, to honor her, and to live with her with understanding. Because she is physically weaker, I have the great privilege of protecting her because of that reality.

This word “**weaker**” is similar to our word “vase” or “china” and was often used of something that was priceless, but fragile like fine china. A husband is to treat his wife in the way that he would treat something that was very fragile – with a great deal of care and respect for it. If he was responsible for handling something that was of great value, but fragile, then he would take extreme caution in how he would do that, in how he would handle it. It is its fragility that gives it that certain value and worth. Next to Christ, my wife is the single most important and strategic person in my life. I am to treat her like the most expensive china on the planet. The very reason that Peter calls the wife a “**weaker vessel**” is for the simple fact that he wants the husband to be more understanding in how he treats her. It must be understood that this is not a term of derision or insult. It is not a word that diminishes the woman, but actually exalts her in a very special way. My wife is not inferior to me in any way, except that she is physically weaker, and perhaps emotionally, but that is it.

At this point in the message, I have to recall a true story that I read about in some of my research for the message that just seemed to capture what we are addressing in this passage. It is not about husbands or wives, but the truth of what happened clearly captures the essence of this passage. I quote,

“In July 2012, there was a theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado during a showing of the Batman movie, The Dark Knight. The Huffington Post reported the story of three couples that were in the theater that night: 26-year-old, Jon Blunk, who was watching the movie with his girlfriend, Jansen Young; 27-year-old Matt McQuinn who was with his girlfriend, Samantha Yowler; and 24-year-old Alex Teves, who was watching the movie with his girlfriend Amanda Lindgren. As the gunman entered the movie theater and began firing his weapon, all three couples dove to the floor and hid underneath the chairs. And in each case, one shielded the other. One used their body to cover their date and protect them. Even if you have never heard this story, and even if I never told you who shielded whom, I believe you immediately picture the men protecting the women. Intuitively, we picture Jon shielding Jansen, Matt covering Samantha, and Alex protecting Amanda. And, if I told you it was the other way around, that women pushed the men underneath the seats and used their bodies to defend the men, something within you would think that wasn’t the way it should be. The story of all three couples found the men instinctively saving their girlfriends, using their bodies to keep them from the bullets. All three men were shot and killed, and all three women survived.

This story is tragic and heroic and resonates somewhere deep within us, for we all intuitively know that in that situation, none of us expect the girlfriends to shield their boyfriends. We all, deep down, no matter where you land on feminism or gender roles, we all imagine those men protecting those women before we ever even hear the end of the story. I think it’s this deep place within us that Peter is speaking to here when he calls husbands to protect their wives as the weaker vessel.³

This word was also used of sacred vessels in the temple for the worship of God. So, clearly when Peter uses the phrase “**weaker vessel**” he is not referring to the wife’s moral character or to her intellectual ability or to her spiritual perception. It simply is referring to the difference in physical strength between the husband and the wife. Nearly 50% of the time that this Greek word is used in the New Testament,

³ Williams, *1 Peter 3:7*, ep.

it is speaking of bodily strength, of a physical weakness. The obvious point that Peter is making here is not that the wife is in anyway inferior to the husband, but that because she is physically weaker that she is in need of protection, of provision, and of her husband's physical strength to often times help her.⁴ In some ways, this is clearly a warning to a husband to never use his physical strength against his wife. He is never to try and intimidate her with the simple fact that he is stronger than her. There are a lot of husbands who physically abuse their wives, even abusing them sexually. If I were one of those men, I would hate to stand before God one day and give an account of my life.

It should be clearly obvious that generally the woman is physically weaker than the man. There may be exceptions, but generally this is true. For instance, we do not have women pitted against men in football or basketball. Only 3% of the construction force are women. There simply are things that the man is better suited physically to do. It is very seldom that we see women electricians, plumbers, or automobile mechanics. When was the last time that you saw a woman changing a tire at a tire retailer. In fact, normally if a woman has a flat tire on the highway, some man will stop to help her. Certainly there are many women that are much better athletes than a man may be. For instance some of the women that play tennis could beat me and I would never win a point – not one point. There are women that can easily run faster than most men. I cannot even walk fast, nevertheless run fast. There are downhill women skiers that would put every man in South Carolina to shame. There are women gymnasts that are utterly amazing and can turn backflips and do somersaults as if it is nothing. I struggle to do sit-ups. So, it should be clear that there are exceptions, but in general Peter is only talking about how this attribute is to be treated in the marriage. The husband is to simply realize that his wife is not as strong as he is.

Now, what is not readily apparent in this passage is the historical context in which the women lived that Peter was addressing. In the Roman – Greco world, there was a law called "*pater familias*" in which the family father held complete authority over all things that took place in the family. He held complete and full authority over all decisions that were to be made. In fact, none of his sons could even own property while he was alive. Then to make it worse, he actually held the power of life or death over every member of his family. If thought that it was too expensive to raise a child, he could just leave the infant on the steps of the temple, either to die from exposure or to be taken and raised as slaves. He could actually execute his children if he deemed them to be rebellious or if he found them to be dishonest. He could actually put his wife to death and he could beat her anytime that he chose, and that without any consequences.⁵ You can imagine what it would have been like for a Roman wife to have converted to Christianity without her husband's approval. It would be easy to understand how Peter was somehow responding to the idea that in that society that women were somehow considered to be inferior to men. They were so often oppressed, disregarded, and treated very harshly. That is still a problem in many parts of the world today.

So, in this passage, Peter is clearly calling on Christian husbands to truly honor their wife **BECAUSE** their wife is a "**weaker vessel**", because they are physically weaker. A Christian husband should **NEVER** use his physical strength, or anything else for that matter, in a harsh, cruel, or belittling way. It is exactly because he is the physically stronger of the two that he should exercise his God-ordained role and authority in a very loving and gentle way. We cannot under-emphasize the fact that the very heart

⁴ Precept, *1 Peter 3:7*, ep.

⁵ Wilkin, *Weaker Vessels*, ep.

of this verse is that a godly husband it to both honor and respect his wife. We cannot just casually leave that idea as irrelevant or as disconnected from our marriages. However, based on what we just learned about the Roman-Greco world, this was a completely radical idea in Peter's day. So, a teaching like this that men are to show this amazing honor and respect to their wives as being co-heirs, or what we would call equal heirs of the grace of God, would have been as radical of an idea as Christianity could have introduced into the culture. In my mind, it almost seems radical today to many husbands who seem to love their macho mentality more than they love their wives.

We have not even reached the point yet of the consequence that a husband will suffer if he disrespects and dishonors his wife - that his prayers will be hindered and rendered fruitless. I think it implies that he will find it very, very difficult to even pray at all, nevertheless to pray with any kind of reasonable expectations that God will respond to his prayer. This is not an area of a Christian husband's life that he can just ignore. He will not be able to patronize God with his insincere and unrepentant prayer requests. That simply does not work with God. It just does not work. Let me state it in a bolder way just to make the point here. Any husband who is physically, emotionally, or psychologically abusive or disrespectful to his wife, and someone who mistreats and dishonors his wife in any way is as far outside of the will of God as he can be, and he has no right to even expect that God will hear his prayer. If he truly desires to see God work on his behalf and hear his prayers, then he must repent of how he has been treating his wife, and change his behavior. There are no other biblical options for him. All he can do is just ignore God's clear biblical will for his life. The goal is very, very simple for both the husband and the wife. Just do your part. Just do what you know God wants you to do. Take His clear Word and embrace it and implant it into your heart and you will begin to enjoy the incredible riches of marriage. You can trust that God's ways are much better than your ways and that they work.

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