

CHAPTER VII  
1 PETER 3—CO-HEIRS OF GRACE

We next note 1 Peter 2:11-3:7, a passage very similar to Ephesians 5:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. *Submit yourselves* for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. *Show proper respect to everyone*: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

*Slaves, submit yourselves* to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

*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

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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.

*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.*

In the next-to-last paragraph, Peter commands wives of non-Christians to be submissive to their husbands. More precisely, wives of non-Christians are to submit in the same way that slaves are to submit to brutal masters. Does God command masters of slaves to beat them or treat them unjustly? Hardly. A command to submit does not mean that the relationship being submitted to is just or sinless. Thus, the command for a wife to submit to her non-Christian husband “so that they may be won over” does not condone dominance of a marriage by the husband.

Peter’s allusion to Sarah calling Abraham “master” doesn’t change this conclusion (Gen. 18:12). Sarah and Abraham hardly had an “Ozzie and Harriet” marriage. Recall Sarah’s lack of faith in God’s promise evidenced by having Abraham father a son by the handmaiden Hagar (Gen. 16:1-4), Sarah’s abuse of Hagar after the birth of Ishmael (Gen. 16:6), and her laughter at the Lord’s promise of a son and her lie in denying it (Gen. 18:10-15). Sarah hardly suits our stereotype of submission.

Peter uses Sarah as an example of how a wife is to live with a *non-Christian* husband. Peter may well have had Abraham’s sins against Sarah in mind. He twice allowed his wife to be taken into the harem of a local king (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18)—not the sort of conduct that most women would easily forgive. And where the husband is not a Christian, Sarah’s submission to Abraham’s at-times outrageous behavior is an appropriate example indeed. When the husband is not a Christian, Peter cannot command him to become one flesh with his wife. Rather, the wife must make do in an unequal relationship, and Peter’s counsel is wise and consistent with what has been said before.

But Peter takes a very different tone toward Christian husbands. He doesn’t tell them to claim the throne that God gave them in Eden. He says be considerate “in the same way.” “In the same way” clearly refers to the command to slaves to submit to their masters, the example of Christ’s submissive suffering, and the command to wives to submit to their husbands. Peter’s command to husbands is to be submissive. Yield to the needs of your wife, he commands. He then says to recognize that your wife is a co-heir of salvation.

The term “co-heirs” is poorly translated in the NIV as “heirs with you.” The term literally refers to two people who each simultaneously inherit the same property from a

deceased parent.<sup>74</sup> The term is one of equality—equal legal rights to the same shared piece of property. It is also a very precise term. 1 Peter is considered to be written in some of the best Greek in the New Testament. The author is noted for his expertise in language. This choice is no mistake. Moreover, we must remember that under the Law of Moses, daughters generally could not inherit from their parents—only sons.<sup>75</sup> Thus, Peter is declaring a dramatic change—women can be heirs just the same as men!

Peter also describes women as the “weaker partner.” Certainly Peter did not have moral character or intelligence in mind. Clearly, he was referring to the physical distinctions between the sexes. In fact, it has often been the greater size and strength of men that made it possible for men to take such a dominant role in society and in their marriages. Peter says to men: “While your size and strength may allow you to dominate your wife, to do so would be sin. Her weakness compels you to be considerate and to honor her as a fellow, not an inferior.” No other interpretation is fair to the command to treat the wife as a fellow heir of grace.

Peter says that being a co-heir of grace has significance beyond just access to salvation—it affects how we should treat one another. Thus, Peter tells us that mutual submission is a necessary consequence of equal access to salvation.

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<sup>74</sup> “A joint heir, co-inheritor,” W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, page 212.

<sup>75</sup> Num. 27:1-8. Daughters inherited only if there were no sons.