

A Man's Strength

1 Peter 3:7

This morning I want you to notice that there is only one verse of instructions from Peter for men. There were six verses for the wives, but only one for husbands. There might be several possible explanations for that. Perhaps women just learn more slowly. Perhaps a woman is more easily confused and more prone to going astray, so six full verses are needed to keep her straight. Whereas, the argument might be made, that since a man is so quick to learn, only one verse is needed.

Or, on the other hand, I could point out that men are basically dense, and one verse is about all that a man can handle. Any more than that, and he will just get confused and forgetful since everyone knows that a man can only remember one thing at a time anyway. So for the man, Peter keeps it very simple.

I'll let you decide which of those you think is more accurate, though I think the second option is likely more accurate. But either way, Peter is clearly giving instructions to men and women about the most prominent characteristic of what we might call masculinity and femininity. The chief characteristic of biblical femininity we studied the last two weeks, Peter identifies as beauty, what he describes as "the hidden person of the heart, ... the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

For a man, we might label that primary characteristic strength. And there is something to be said for simplicity! Peter would say one thing to men about their strength, their masculinity. But it is something very different from what the world would say. The focus is not upon physical strength, so often combined with pride in the wisdom of the world. The world would teach that strength

means to dominate and control. Strength means to wield authority with power and domineering influence authoritarian control. Sadly, the only alternative seems to be a passiveness and inactivity that seems to exasperate many women as much or more than domineering.

Peter says something quite different. His simple instruction to a husband is for him to know his wife. To understand her. And certainly, many wives would have as their chief complaint, "He just doesn't understand me!"

Peter's emphasis is clear. It is,

I. THE PRIORITY OF UNDERSTANDING YOUR WIFE.

v.7

Yet many a man would say about his wife, why can't she be easy to understand? Why can't she be straightforward and consistent, simple and predictable? Thus, many a man, pretending to be strong, simply ignores all the personal intricacies of his own wife's personality, and leads her as if she were just like him. That's strength, the world says. "I wear the pants in this family, and you do what I say." That's strength. My ability to control you is the measure of my strength, according to the foolish wisdom of the world.

Peter says something quite dramatic and even revolutionary. His one exhortation to men is the know their wives, to "dwell with them with understanding." Literally, to live with them according to knowledge.

It is a reference, first of all, to,

A. The intimacy of daily life.

Daily life. Living together. Spending time together. You can't do this with a measured amount of quality time. It takes lots of time. Normal time. Ordinary time. Daily time. Life-time. Breakfast, lunch and dinner time. Morning time. Evening time. Weekend time. Chore time. Free time. Activity time. Leisure time. That's intimacy.

So the duty of a man is to dwell with his his wife. To live with her, day after day.

There is nothing sadder in my experiences of counseling married couples than to confront a situation in which a married couple says, "We grew apart." No adultery. No great financial troubles. No deep conflict. Just a neglect of daily life together.

So men, as leaders in your home, as the head of your wife, the one to whom she is obligated to submit, there is no substitute for living out the regular, ordinary routines of daily life, together. Dwell with your wives. Live with your wives. And don't get so busy that you neglect that most basic duty. The intimacy of daily life.

And then, to do so with knowledge.

B. The intimacy of deep understanding.

Rather than ignoring the differences between a man and a woman, Scripture requires a man to be committed to understanding them. Instead of belittling or mocking in your wife what is different from you, it is your task as a husband to know her fully and completely. To understand every detail of her personality, and to live with her day by day accordingly.

And that's what intimacy is all about. Knowledge. Not physical intimacy, that's not what is in view here. Intimacy isn't

based on any physical sexual activity, but it begins with this Greek word translated very simply translated "knowledge." The NIV chooses the translation "considerate," for while being considerate with your wives is a good thing, it is not the basic, central focus of this particular word.

According to this simple instruction, though you may not have any idea why something is so important to your wife, you must understand that it is! You may get frustrated with any number of things, but whatever the frustration, the biblical call is for understanding and knowledge. You might not know why she is stressed or even depressed, but you must find out! Maybe even before she knows herself. You must learn to know what your wife wants from you, what she needs from you, and why that so often involves lots and lots of time and attention. You need to understand her insecurities, and be sure never to mock them so that she can be rid of them. You must know her fears, her dreams, and her hopes. You need to know what she likes and what she dislikes, what sets her at ease and what makes her uncomfortable. And if, at any point, you simply don't know, then you need to ask. You need to find out everything necessary to understand everything possible about your wife.

That's biblical masculinity. That's masculine strength. The ability to understand. Not the ability to command obedience. Not the demand for her to submit. Strength in a man has nothing to do with being domineering or controlling. Certainly not with abuse. An abusive man is not a strong man at all, for just as a woman's outward attractiveness can cover up a very ugly heart, so can a man's brute strength. A man who is a bully, a man who is abusive or controlling is not a strong man at all, but very, very weak.

So men, learn to pursue the intimacy of deep understanding.

Learn to measure your strength by this very ability to understand. In that way, learn the full meaning of what it means to love. As we read in,

Eph. 5:28 “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.”

Those are words of understanding. Those are words of great strength. Nourish and cherish. A man’s strength is shown by his ability to nourish his own wife, to gently and graciously provide for her all that she needs. His strength is shown by his ability to cherish her, to consider her to be as valuable as precious china, to be considerate of her delicacies and always respectful of her honor! That requires a man to be gentle, to be thoughtful, and always honorable. And to make her feel special. That’s the priority.

And so we come to the main focus of the text, the main focus of godly masculinity. And it is a virtue.

II. THE VIRTUE OF HONORING YOUR WIFE.

If you read what the says to women, you might conclude that it is dishonoring to them, demeaning. The women’s liberation movement certainly stress that point. A woman called to submit is a woman belittled. A woman belittled, diminished. Dishonored. But no. No it isn’t. Yes, a woman is called upon to submit, to live out that inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. But a man is called upon to honor her.

v.7 “...giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel...”

Specifically, that means...

A. The honor of using your masculine strength for her benefit.

Giving honor to the wife as to the weaker vessel. Now, if you immediately think that statement is demeaning to women, then you will really miss this whole point. The point is that a man is to use his strength for a woman’s benefit.

Surely, in most general terms, men are created by God with greater physical strength. There are isolated exceptions, to be sure, but the principle is valid. Men are created with strength. The issue is, what will you do with that strength. And the pointed question is simply this, men, “Will you use your strength for your own benefit or for your wife’s benefit?” “Will you use your strength to exalt yourself or to honor a woman?”

And you young men, you boys, please think about that question. Never, never use your physical strength to cause harm to a girl, even in playing around. Never use your ability to be physically strong to threaten or endanger a girl, not even when you are playing. And you boys who have sisters, this is as crucial a lesson as you will ever learn in your children. Never use your strength to intimidate or bully your sister. Always use your strength for her benefit. That’s how you will prepare yourself to be a good husband.

A good friend of mine once told me about a situation between his son and daughter, very early in their childhood. The boy was younger, and once he hit his sister. It wasn’t overly violent and she wasn’t physically harmed, but my friend told me with a certain resolution, “He never did that again.” I suspect the discipline inflicted that day was as severe as that boy ever received.

That young man is now grown up and married. He and his sister have as good a relationship as I have ever seen between a

brother and sister, and I expect that he is happily married, because he learned a valuable lesson from his father very early in his life. A man never, never causes harm to a woman. A godly man never uses his strength to intimidate, dominate or injure a woman.

Rather, to be positive, he uses his strength to honor her. For her benefit. So maybe that means you open the door for her. Perhaps it means you open the car door. Perhaps it means you carry things for her, whenever and however you can. Always it means that you honor her by using her strength to bless her.

Notice what else Peter says.

v.7 "...giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life."

Honor your wife as being heirs together of the grace of life. Honor your wife as being joint heirs with her, spiritual equals. And as joint heirs, standing on the same plain with her when it comes to your relationship with the Lord, give her,

B. The honor of stimulating her spiritual vitality.

Honor her, by being her spiritual leader. What does "nourish and cherish" mean if it doesn't first of all apply to her spiritual well-being. Honor her by encouraging her. Honor her by stimulating her, leading her, providing for her spiritual needs.

Men, this is your calling as husbands, that you concern yourself with the spiritual encouragement of your wife. Unmarried men and young boys, this is the chief focus of your preparation to be married, that you be able to be the means which God uses for the spiritual nurture of a woman whom God would give you to be a wife.

How sad it is to hear statements such as, "religion is a woman's responsibility." How sad is the situation in many older, liberal churches in which the presence of men is almost non-existent. How often has it been said that one reason for women elders is because there are no men! How sad it is to see the results of families in which men are negligent in their spiritual leadership, in whose families wives are compelled to take the initiative and leadership.

Shame on us as men whenever and wherever that occurs. For this is your calling, men. This is how you honor a woman, but nourishing and cherishing her soul, by caring for her soul. By encouraging her soul. By encouraging her walk with the Lord. By encouraging her ability and interest in maintaining and preserving the warmth and intimacy of her communion with the Lord. Never forget, she is your joint-heir.

And that leads me to my final point, namely,

III. THE BLESSING OF HONORING YOUR WIFE.

As verse 7 concludes, "that your prayers may not be hindered."

God does relate to his people in this context of promise and blessing, the contingency of God's blessings being attached to the performance of your faithful duties.

The reality is simple. When you are not faithful in your normal and ordinary duties of life, like in your marital relationship, when you are not faithful in doing those things which God wants you to be doing, your prayers will be hindered. There are consequences in your relationship with God when your relationship with your wife is not what it ought to be. Your prayers will be hindered. Fascinating words, aren't they?

It doesn't mean you lose your salvation. It doesn't mean God leaves you or abandons you. But as a matter discipline, fatherly discipline, the effectiveness of your prayers will be affected. Negatively affected. Your relationship with God will be impacted.

So let me put that positively. For those men who are committed to loving their wives as the Scriptures command, for those men who are committed to knowing and understanding their wives as the Scriptures require, there is a blessing.

A. The practical benefit of effective prayer.

We read in,

James 5:16 "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

So the exercise of personal righteousness is connected with the effectiveness of your prayers. So when there is a problem at home, there will be a problem with God. And when there is faithfulness at home, there is blessing from God.

Ultimately, it is,

B. The blessing of communion with God.

Prayer, after all, is communion. It is conversation. It is the evidence of a relationship. And so, again so simply, men, when you have a warm and vital relationship with your wife, you will enjoy the blessing of a warm and vital communion with God.

How dangerous it is to think that those two things are disconnected. How dangerous to think you can be careless and negligent in your marriage and pretend to be faithful in service to God. No, the test of your relationship with God begins in your home. The foundation of your communion with God is to found in

your home and your family. There just is no escape from that reality.

May this lesson from the Word of God be the motivation in for men to give honor to women, to use our leadership and our strength in a way that is always, always designed for their benefit and profit.

Only then can we as men begin to think that we know what it means when God says,

Eph. 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

So,

v.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."