

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, August 19, 2012**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 421, 65:4, 624, 234, 625.

Lessons: Proverbs 31:10-31, 1 Corinthians 7:1-17, Matthew 19:3-12.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:1-7

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Is there anything in Scripture that does not pertain to you? We must remember as we read in Romans 15:4: ***"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."*** Regardless of your status in life right now, I pray that you can learn from this sermon which is primarily about wives and husbands.

The selfish sinner in us does not particularly care to yield to authority. In our past two sermons we have addressed the authority of governments and the authority of employers or masters. Today we must realize that marriages will be troubled when women do not allow their husbands to function as the head of the family and just as respectful Christian citizens and respectful Christian slaves make Christ look good so too do respectful and submissive Christian wives. Pagan Romans and Greeks who feared that Christianity would destroy society by destroying government, business, and family relationships were surprised to learn that Christians made the best citizens and workers and that Christian women made the best wives.

In that pagan society, women were expected to follow their husband's religion. The family religion was supposed to be that of the husband. No Christian can or should yield in that way. God's Word is plain in Acts 5:29: ***"We must obey God rather than men!"*** It is neither right in God's sight nor safe if a Christian sets aside his or her Scripture-bound conscience to seek to obey another human being.

In many marriages today, many Christian women struggle to maintain the truth of God's Word as they have been taught, or as they have come to know it by hearing and believing it. Today let's look at what God has to say about

**THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP**

- 1. Responsibilities of wives**
- 2. Responsibilities of husbands.**

Men are not superior to women in God's view of things. What we intend to say is that they do not have greater worth, intelligence, or value. Men do however have a different God-given function within marriage.

Scripture puts that into the proper context in 1 Corinthians 11:3: ***"Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."*** And as you heard in our epistle lesson: ***"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior."*** (Ephesians 5:23)

Just as Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for it, so too the husband is to be as Christ to his family, loving them and sacrificing himself as Christ, using his greater strength, authority, and leadership to honor God and provide for and protect them. Christian men are themselves submissive to Jesus Christ, who is their head. A woman has nothing to fear about submitting to a man who himself has submitted to the Lord, for the man will use his headship not to serve himself and make demands but to serve and bless his wife and children.

This is one very important reason it is so important for Christian single people to seek a spouse who is a Christian.

But what if a woman comes to faith in Christ and her husband doesn't? Does the fact that he does not recognize Christ as his head mean that she doesn't have to recognize him as her head? No, says Peter. If he is an unbeliever, winning him over to Christ should be her first priority, and that will not happen if she withdraws from him, shows him that she despises him, or disrespects him publicly or privately. Then he would blame her Christianity for making their marriage miserable. God's way is for the believing wife to treat her husband well – in this way the silent testimony of her love and submission will make Jesus Christ look good, and it is entirely possible the husband may come to faith because of the wonderful way in which she treats him.

Peter is concentrating on women whose husbands are not Christians, but the same certainly applies to women whose husbands are Christians. Peter does not in any way suggest that the women should give in to their husbands and discontinue their Christian activities, such as worshiping with fellow Christians, praying ***“without ceasing”***, and teaching their children the truths of God's Word daily. They should not allow their freedom in Christ to make them feel superior to their husband and obey him less. Instead, they are to be model wives. This is far more likely to win their husbands to Jesus Christ than continual nagging. It will also give a good witness of Christianity to the larger community, as others outside the family also see the lives of these Christian wives. The term “win over” is a commercial term meaning “to get commercial gain” or “to win something,” but in Christian usage it is a missionary term meaning to lead someone to Christ.

When Peter uses the phrase ***“purity and reverence”*** this is a reference especially to Christian virtue, that is, honoring God with a pure heart. It goes without saying that a Christian will be faithful to the spouse, leading a pure and decent life, as we learn from the Sixth Commandment.

The wife submits, but her whole motivation is to serve, honor, and fear God. The unbelieving husband would realize this when he sees that his wife is subject to him whether he is nice or not whenever his requests fall within the range of what is allowed by Christianity and the Word of God. It goes without saying, as we said earlier, that one will not disobey God to obey another human being.

The actions of a believing wife toward an unbelieving husband are part of bringing him to Christ. However, we must remember that faith does not come about in a vacuum. Romans 10:17 makes it very clear that ***“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** It is only by hearing the Word of God – in worship and when the wife would read it, perhaps reading it out loud to their children and the husband would hear – that faith can come.

Fearful wives would call all of this marital slavery. Peter thought of it as liberating. He says do not give way to fear. He reminded his readers of Sarah the mother of the chosen nation, who gave her husband Abraham, her respect and submission, calling him master in Genesis 18:12. You are her daughters if you do what is right. Sarah's spiritual daughters have God's blessing on their homes, and they have his promise of protection too when they choose to live his way.

Another destructive pressure that Christian women faced was the pressure from society to be beautiful. Then, as now, women felt relentlessly judged, valued and graded on their appearance. Peter assured them that they didn't have to play that game, asking them whose approval they sought most. Instead of dressing to compete for the attention of men and the approval of other women, Christian women should ask themselves what God values. The holy women of the past who put their faith in God cared most about what God thought of them, and so they didn't allow feelings of insecurity with their outward appearance to make them feel miserable and drive them to fancy hairdos, cosmetics, jewelry, and designer clothes in the vain hope that that would make them somebody special or more important.

The kind of beauty that God values most is inward. He much prefers a gentle and quiet spirit to one that is loud and forceful. Our text is not telling women today that braids, jewelry, and nice clothes are sinful, but that women and men should prize the beauty of character more than the beauty of fashion magazines. True beauty comes from the inside out, not vice versa.

I think that all Christians find it extremely discouraging and upsetting when someone who may have a pleasant, handsome, or beautiful appearance according to the world's standards betrays that with a foul mouth, speaking profanities and misusing the name of God, or slandering others.

The traps that Christian husbands might fall into were twofold: First, using their headship and authority selfishly – to control, abuse, and to dominate. And second, thinking of their greater physical and in some cases

emotional strength as making them superior, despising their wives for being weaker than they. Just as society measures young women and grades them on the basis of their beauty, society also measures and grades young men on the basis of strength. Strong young men without Jesus Christ tend not to respect people they perceive as weak. In Christless relationships, the strong prey on the weak.

God wants his men to think about the way they treat their women, to be considerate of them, see the male and female differences as God-given and therefore having a purpose. The fact that women in general are weaker physically has always made them more vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation.

Wives need their husbands to treat them with honor as the weaker partner, not with disdain. Husbands need to remember that their wives are fellow heirs of heaven. God is watching his men and holding them accountable.

Our epistle lesson began with the words *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."* (Ephesians 5:21) It continued with these words: *"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church."* (Ephesians 5:22-29)

In the same way that Jesus Christ humbled himself and gave himself selflessly for sinful humans, we, especially in marriage, have the opportunity to give to one another. I have offered the opinion that husbands have the greater, more difficult responsibility. Scripture shows how husbands are to love their wives, Love humbles itself and puts itself last. And this true, genuine love does not come easily. It does not come naturally from within us sinful human beings. It comes from God. Love defers. Love puts the other first.

Peter starts with speaking of the responsibility of wives, especially believing wives married to unbelieving husbands. They are to submit so that God may be honored. But our text also speaks to husbands: Husbands, love your wives and put them first, in the same way that Jesus Christ loved the church and put her first. Love them in the same way that Christ continues to love us. God says wives, defer to your husbands and put them first.

Show your love for one another, not in giving things but in giving of yourselves to one another, not putting yourself first, but giving your self to the other.

That will require work to find time and really, to MAKE time to put each other first. In God's Word – the Bible – we find the example of God's tremendous love for us in sending his Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from all our sins and give us eternal life. May all of us spend time daily with the Word of God in the Bible, realizing how much God loves us – he loved you, each of you, each of us gathered here, so much that he sacrificed the life of his one and only Son so that all who believe this may have everlasting life simply by believing this. Let Christ's love be your model. Amen.