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1 Peter 3:1-7

Tenth Message

Brian Morgan

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THE LIBERATION OF MAN IN MARRIAGE

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

We have been studying the apostle Peter's model of submission and servanthood in the person of Jesus Christ. What an amazing influence our Lord had and continues to have because he submitted to his Father's will for him! Today, in chapter 3 of his first letter, Peter will demonstrate how servanthood is worked out in the arena of marriage.

Martin Luther once said, "The Christian is free from all and slave to none by virtue of grace, but bound to all and servant of all by virtue of love." There is nothing more beautiful to behold than a Christian couple submitting to each other in love. Tertullian, an early church father, wrote these words at the close of a book which he dedicated to his wife:

How can I paint the happiness of a marriage...of two believers—one hope, one vow, one discipline, and one worship! They are brother and sister, two fellow-servants, one spirit and one flesh. Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. They pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort and support each other. They go together to the church of God, and to the table of the Lord. They share each other's tribulation, persecution, and revival. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids, neither annoys the other. They delight to visit the sick, supply the needy, give alms without constraint, and in daily zeal lay their offerings before the altar without scruple or hindrance. They do not need to keep the sign of the cross hidden, nor to express slyly their Christian joy, nor to suppress the blessing. Psalms and hymns they sing together, and they vie with each other in singing to God. Christ rejoices when he sees and hears this. He gives his peace. Where two are together in his name, there is he; and where he is, there the evil one cannot come.

Many of us had dreams that marriage would be a L'Abri, a safe haven from life's storms where we would have shelter and repose, but we woke up to discover that marriage itself can be a storm. Mike Mason, in his book, *The Mystery of Marriage: As Iron Sharpens Iron*, gives a counterpoint to Tertullian. He says:

It [marriage] is not a little bastion of tenderness designed to soften the blows of fate. It is not a clever system of protection in which another person is interposed between ourselves and the pain of living. On the contrary, the person interposed may actually become the source or focus of more suffering than we ever bargained for, the very vessel from which our own humiliation is poured. Is it not a bitter and ironic truth that the very person we love most in the world may appear to us, from time to time, to be the only thing standing between ourselves and our happiness?

The fact of the matter is that holy matrimony, like other holy orders, was never intended as a comfort station for lazy people. On the contrary, it is a systematic program of deliberate and thoroughgoing self-sacrifice. A man's home is not his castle so much as his monastery, and if he happens to be treated like a king there, then it is only so that he might be better enabled to become a servant. For marriage

is intended to be an environment in which he will be lovingly yet persistently confronted with the plainest and ugliest evidence of his sinfulness, and thus encouraged on a daily basis to repent and to change.

Marriage is not a comfort station, it is a crucible. But I believe it is a crucible that leads to freedom. According to Scripture, the best way to discover whether a man is godly is to examine his home. We are concerned about the state of many marriages in our congregation. There is hardness of heart, duty without affection, service without dying to self, activity without romance. Thus, I have decided to devote two weeks to these verses from 1 Peter 3. Today I will deal with the husband's responsibility. I have entitled this message "The Liberation of Man in Marriage," or, "Three Steps to Acquiring Your Liberty." My desire is that each husband will determine one area in which he is to die to his own desires for the purpose of serving his wife.

1 Peter 3:1-7 says:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (NASB)

I. Destroying Misconceptions of Authority (3:1-7)

Men, the first step to becoming free in a marriage is to destroy any misconceptions you may have about authority. Verses 1-6, which are addressed to wives, are often misinterpreted by husbands to mean that the husband is the boss, the authority figure. The wife is called to submit to this authority figure, to become a doormat, in effect, and not express herself, even when he is wrong. This incorrect view often leads to verbal and physical abuse, damaging the dignity of both husband and wife. I believe that much of the women's liberation movement is, in fact, a right reaction to a wrong interpretation of this text. The man who follows the counterfeit model, however, will not enter into freedom; he will remain a slave to his own immaturity.

A. Mutual Submission

I would like to point out two things about the first six verses of the text. First, whenever the scriptures teach on marriage, they talk about mutual submission. The key here is the word “likewise,” in verse 7. This suggests that Peter’s instructions to wives applies equally to husbands. The model we are given to help us here is our Lord himself. Just as Jesus submitted to his Father, so husbands are to die for their wives. The scriptures are not concerned about who has control in a marriage; rather, they always address the heart and the attitude. Mike Mason writes, “Who wins the battle of wills and whims is not the point; the point is that each tries to surrender as much as possible for the sake of the other so that the love between them may be honored and built up in every way.”

B. Commands Applicable to Both

Secondly, the description of godliness in these verses is addressed to both husbands and wives, and it applies to both. The exhortation to women to adorn themselves with the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit are the very words used of men elsewhere in scripture. For example, in 1 Timothy, Paul instructs men that in order to further God’s rule on earth they must learn to be men of prayer so that they might “lead a tranquil and *quiet* life in all godliness and dignity.” It is the Spirit who leads people to Christ. This is not accomplished by husbands asserting their rights.

In the Greek world of Peter’s day, “gentleness” was exalted as the highest virtue of humanity. The word was used of someone with a quiet, friendly composure who did not become embittered or angry because of unpleasant circumstances. It is quite the opposite of harsh, rough, contentious, or bitter. Gentleness in Greek thought was to possess an *active* attitude and a deliberate acceptance. We are not talking about passive compliance. This superior acceptance exhibited the greatness of the soul.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this same word to depict the ministry of Jesus. Zechariah 9:9 says:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you,
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble (gentle), **and mounted on a donkey,**
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The apostle Peter’s words are addressed to women in order to elevate them, for even in a submissive role in marriage they can further God’s rule exactly as Christ did.

Thus, men should first throw off all false conceptions of authority. True authority does not come from dominance but from dying—dying to self and becoming a servant. Men, abandon any idea that you are king in your home. Throw down your crown and instead up the towel of servanthood.

In practice, this means that when you go home after work, follow the example in the parable Jesus told of the servant coming home from the fields. The servant did not expect to be served by his master, but instead cooked dinner for him. He did what he was supposed to do because he was a servant. Men, when you come home, do not expect to be waited upon as you sit in your easy chair reading the newspaper. Help your wife in the kitchen. Wash the dishes. Put the children to bed. Then, at the end of the day, you can say, “I only did what is required of a servant.”

I have asked a couple from our congregation to share with us this morning. Dave is an example of a man who learned through hard experience that the best way to lead his wife, Lainy, to Christ was without a word.

Dave: When I became a Christian seven years ago, I felt a division between Lainy and me. I saw her looking at me when I was studying the Word, but I didn’t know what to do about her. So I started praying. I looked enviously at other Christian couples’ relationships. Once when I asked my boss why he was yawning at work, he said, “My wife and I couldn’t sleep last night so we had a wonderful time reading the Word together.” I realized I wanted that kind of a relationship. I thought my wife would become a believer through me so I took every opportunity to share what I was learning. But nothing seemed to work.

Lainy: Last year when we started coming to church, I could tell that there was something different about the people here, and I wanted that in my life. In July, I put in a prayer request to know the Lord. A few weeks later we started helping out in the kindergarten class for the summer. I told Dave that it would be great for our daughter, and maybe we would meet some new friends. Little did I know that I would meet the best friend I could ever ask for. Many things have happened to me that week. I had a bad weekend, and then I had an even worse Monday. When Dave came home from work, I was ready to unload. I said, “I can’t handle it.” I wanted comfort, but what I got was “You’re a big baby. That’s life. It’s just too bad.” I went to sleep that night feeling so alone. I felt like I didn’t even have my husband. I had nothing.

The next day I picked up a paper that our daughter had brought home from her high school Sunday School class. On it was a person who had the Holy Spirit. He had mercy and peace, quiet gentleness and goodness. The person who had Satan in him had jealousy, selfishness, earthly concerns and unspiritual thoughts. I knew where I stood, and knew I had to do something about it.

The next Saturday we went to a Christian wedding. I had never been to one, and was touched by the couple’s willingness to share their love for the Lord in front of unbelievers, co-workers, friends and family. When the bride promised to submit to her husband, there were nudges and looks in the church. I knew many people there did not like what they were hearing. I went away from that wedding wishing Dave and I could have that because it was so special.

A week to the day of my feelings of aloneness, Dave was looking for a paper on our desk, which is cluttered with every paper in the house. After I found it for him, he left, and I picked up some of the kindergarten curriculum for the next week’s lesson. In it I found a little booklet about Mary Ann, a five-year-old girl who gave a witness of her faith in Christ to a doctor. On the way to the hospital after an accident Mary Ann prayed to Jesus to take away her pain, and he did. The doctor on duty commented on how brave she was; she was just a little girl and yet she was not crying. She said, “It’s not me, it’s Jesus. I asked him to take away my pain.” Then she asked, “Do you know Jesus?” He said, “No, I haven’t really had a lot of time for that.” She said, “Oh, it’s so important! We’re all sinners and we have to ask Jesus to take away our sins, or we’re going to go to hell and pay for our sins here on earth.” The doctor thought about it, and Mary Ann led him to Jesus that night. When Mary Anne’s mother got a call from the doctor the next day, he said, “Last night was the last night that I

am practicing medicine. Without Mary Anne's accident and her willingness to share with me, I wouldn't have come to know the Lord. A nurse who was helping also accepted the Lord.'

I shut that booklet and asked myself why it was so hard for me when it was so simple for them. These people did not even think about it five minutes before it happened. They didn't even put in a prayer request at PBC! So I said a prayer asking Jesus into my heart. I opened my eyes and knew he was there.

The first thing I wanted to do was tell Dave. I said, 'Dave, something happened. I am different!' He said, 'You're pregnant?' I said, 'No, I've changed!' He said, 'You're going through the change?' I finally convinced him that I had become a Christian and told him how. Then I remembered my prayer request. I got it out and said, 'This is what did it.'

I was afraid to go to sleep that night because I worried that it would be gone when I woke up. The minute my eyes opened in the morning, however, I remembered the song we learned in the kindergarten class, "I've Got That Joy Down in My Heart." I knew that it was still there! I want to thank Jesus for loving me, Dave for being patient with me all those years, and everyone who prayed for me at that time. In addition, our daughter accepted Christ in Mexicali last week.

II. Cultivating Sensitivity to Differences (3:7a)

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman.

As we have noted, the first thing a husband should do so as to experience freedom is to take off his crown and take up the towel of a servant. Secondly, he should live with his wife with greater sensitivity than he is inclined to exhibit when he is dealing with men. What does Peter mean by "love with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel"? Does the the word "weaker" refer to the mind or the body, or is it spiritual in nature? I put this question to Elaine Stedman, and she replied, "That's easy. It's hormones."

The very contribution wives bring to a marriage, their ability to nurture life (and all the increase in hormonal activity that go with it), also makes their emotions subject to greater vacillation. A husband must treat his wife "according to the knowledge" of these matters, with skill and sensitivity. Far from hindering his effectiveness, this gives him greater depth and sensitivity in dealing with all people. A man cannot treat his wife like a man. He must have sensitivity, and must learn not to react to things at face value. When I sense there is a problem and I ask my wife what is wrong, she often replies, "Nothing." To understand her, I must continue probing beneath the surface. It is not my job to react, but to listen and not try to fix what I perceive to be the problem. Instead of taking up my time needlessly and making me ineffective, this makes me into the man that God intends me to be. Men need this increased sensitivity to others that living with a wife teaches them.

If a towel is the first symbol that will lead to a husband's freedom, the second symbol is a box of Kleenex. By being sensitive to his wife, a man may learn to weep as well.

III. Glorifying in Equality (3:7b)

But lest this be taken too far, as most ancient cultures did, Peter balances it with a command that husbands honor their wives, since "being a weaker vessel" does not imply that women are inferior

spiritually. The apostle exhorts men to glory in their wives' equality, granting them "honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." Not only do women need sensitivity, they need appreciation for their contribution. It is significant that Adam's first words celebrate his wife's equality with him:

**"This is now bone of my bones,
and flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man." (Gen 2:23)**

When Adam named the woman, he implied that he was her head (in the Ancient Near East, to name something implied dominion over it), however, he explicitly states that she is his equal. It is a wonderful balance to say, "I am your head, but you are my equal."

Marriage unites differences together in three areas: male/female sexuality, personality characteristics (which have nothing to do with gender), and spiritual giftedness. Although the devil seeks to use the differences between them to cause division between husbands and wives, God wants to bring about a complementary ministry that is unique to the world through each one's gifts, personality, and sexuality. As men we need to celebrate and glory in those differences.

Peter says, "If you don't grant your wife honor as an equal heir of the grace of life, God will not hear your prayers." He draws his analogy from Genesis 18:9-15, in the story of Abraham and Sarah:

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied it, however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

The angel of the Lord came to announce the promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a child. Since they both were past the age of child-bearing it would require a miracle on both their parts to conceive. First, the prophetic word of God came to Abraham supernaturally, and that word brought the miracle of life. Later, the angel returned to speak the promise directly to Sarah, not through Abraham. When she heard the word of God, a creative miracle occurred in her life, and she was able to conceive. Peter comments, "Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear."

We can see the physical analogy in this story. In order to give birth to a son, an heir, the promise was heard by both parties, not just Abraham. This is highly significant. It teaches that both are equal spiritually though they may have different functions. Just as a man cannot bear physical life by himself without a woman, so also a man must not bypass his wife in his efforts at cultivating spiritual life in others. If a husband attempts to do this without his wife's involvement and participation, the result will be as barren as if he tried to attempt childbearing on his own. This can be disastrous, as the physical analogy of Abraham and Hagar aptly demonstrates. Abraham's attempt to father the child of promise through Hagar resulted in the

birth of Ishmael, the father of the Arab nations, and the resultant conflict with Israel that is still the cause of Middle Eastern tensions down to this day.

So husbands, take up your towel, and your Kleenex, and third, take a photograph of your wife to work with you. Place it on your desk or on your work bench to signify that you include her as you cultivate your life as a man.

IV. Jacob and Rachel

I would like to take a few moments to explain how these principles have worked out in my own marriage. My marriage is more like Jacob's and Rachel's than Abraham's and Sarah's. I am very much like Jacob, a dreamer and an idealist. And my wife Emily is beautiful and practical, like Rachel. Jacob had to wait for his wife for seven years, and I had to wait for Emily for five years. My head was in the clouds the entire time!

When God called me to die to myself on behalf of my wife, I found freedom and fulfillment as she has become "an equal heir of the grace of life." The first important issue on which we differed involved children. As an intern at Peninsula Bible Church I had great plans for the future. I planned for Emily to get her teaching credential while I was an intern, and then she would work while I went to seminary. Then, after I graduated, we would start a family. But when I completed my internship, Emily told me that she would rather have children right away. I didn't see how that would work if we were to follow my timetable.

I prayed, walked the streets in distress, and went to see my friend Elaine Stedman once again. She said, "Brian, why do you think God gives us children when we can least afford it, and have no experience as parents? It is to teach us to trust him." After walking the streets some more, the Lord convinced me that I had put my career ahead of the needs of my wife. I told God that day that I would die to my career plans. "If you want me trained for the ministry," I said, "then I'll get trained. But I will submit to my wife." So we had children.

That led to tragedy. Like Rachel, we were barren. An enzyme deficiency resulted in the pain of losing two children within days of their birth in two consecutive years. However, the Lord ultimately gifted us with one adopted child and two natural children. The experience has given me far better training than any seminary education I could have anticipated—and greater fulfillment besides. Also, by God's grace I was given a superb theological education over the next seven years while I was a pastor at this church. And God picked up the bill!

Shortly after we adopted our first daughter, we bought a home. I walked the streets again, praying and dreaming. My vision was to share our home with our neighbors and to lead them to Christ. When I shared my dream with my wife, however, she did not encourage my scheme. Emily is shy, and not spontaneous by nature. She would not choose to do things on such a grand scale. So it appeared that my dream would not be fulfilled. I continued to talk to neighbors, but there was not the response that I had hoped for. I thought, "Maybe my dreams are futile."

When our children reached school age, Emily volunteered at their school, where she exercised her spiritual gifts of wisdom and helps. Five years later she became vice president of the PTA. I tagged along into her setting, served on committees, helped build a miniature golf course, etc. As a result, many close relationships have been established through these outreach opportunities at school.

For instance, at a dinner party we attended recently the hostess spontaneously asked me to tell them about my trips to Romania. I recounted the details and was able to share my faith in Christ. I went home praising God because my vision had come to pass, yet not through my plans or my gifts. The highway I walk has been paved by my wife. We were invited to a Jewish couple's house during the Christmas holiday season, and were allowed to enter into their life. There we enjoyed listening to the Los Altos High School choir singing Christmas hymns on the stairwell of the home. At another party a couple played carols on harpsichords. I am blessed to have these relationships, which have developed through my wife expressing herself in the community.

I agree with Martin Luther: "The Christian is free from all and slave to none by virtue of grace, but bound to all and servant of all by virtue of love." Dying to myself has given me great freedom. I no longer have to be confined by my own plans. I do not have to be in control, and that brings tremendous freedom. I have discovered, however, that the greatest freedom I enjoy is that by submitting to my wife I can enjoy her unique contribution. Life to me is a symphony, and I am only an oboe, an unexciting instrument. When I submit to those around me, however, and other instruments play in harmony, the result is a wonderful symphony of love, and a freedom that can open us up to freedom in all relationships.

I will conclude by reading a poem to my wife which I wrote a few months ago:

O Emily, you are my Rachel,
Your beauty and radiance captured my heart,
Five years was nothing to work for you,
It seemed like a few days because of my love for you.

Then a voice was heard in Ramah,
Rachel is weeping for her children because they are no more,
But the Lord said, "Keep your eyes from tears,"
"There is a hope, and your children shall return."
His loyal love was true, and I loved you more.

Now I am your Jacob, that dreamer of dreams.
While my mind is in heaven,
And my head lay on the stone,
You build the ladder,
That brings heaven home.

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