How do I apply the Gospel to my unique situation?

1 Peter 3:1-7
May 24, 2020

(Available in print form at corinthtoday.org/sermons or by audio at 828.328.6196.)

Trigger words – Pastor Paul

If you ever want good resources about evangelism, understanding scripture, understanding church policy, apologetics, etc., there is a great website called The Gospel Coalition (https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/). It’s filled with godly people who write wonderful things.

Someone passed along a Gospel Coalition article about how churches should proceed with reopening as we come out of our extreme lockdown. I thought I would read this great, godly article, and that it would show people exactly how wrong they really are.

When I opened the article, there was a lot of this inconvenient stuff like having patience with each other, practicing humility, deferring and submitting to one another out of love, and being meek towards each other.

I wanted to the article to say “These people are dumb and my position is right.” It wasn’t like that. It took me exactly where I needed to go which was to have a character study of Jesus Christ. “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Matthew 16:26)

Often we read this text and come at it with a lot of different baggage just like the Gospel Coalition article. There is so much in this—submission, patience, humility, kindness, meekness. What we need to come back to is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is patently counter-me. Our whole society is me, me, me—what I like, what I want—but the gospel is counter that.
Those who understand the precious gospel of Jesus Christ can say because of what was done for me through Christ, we can be like him. I can deny myself because of what was done for me, and it far outweighs the freedoms that I would lay down—submission, patience, humility, meekness. Because what was done for me was so much more precious than that, I can easily lay those things down.

One of the buzz phrases in our society is “trigger words.” We say a word, and it will trigger something in someone else and immediately cause them to shut down.

When we read this text, there are trigger words that will cause you to shut down. Some of those trigger words are submission, authority, the weaker sex, beauty, jewelry. It’s chock full of these words but before you get triggered, let me tell you that you are in control of your ears. You are in complete control of what you hear.

Instead of being triggered by these words and shutting down, if Christ laid down his life for the world and we are called to be like him, what might this relationship text in 1 Peter 3 look like?

In the same way – Pastor Bob

Some of you, both men and women, are going to be listening for your trigger words. Some of you want me to say that the husband is the head of the home and has final authority. Others want me to say that’s a very outdated idea. If you are listening for only that, you’re in danger of missing what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you.

I’ll summarize Peter’s primary point here, then come back to it after we look at the text carefully. The central question of 1 Peter 3:1-7, and I would argue of every page of the New Testament is “How do I apply the Gospel to my unique situation?” In other words, “How should a follower of Jesus live in my circumstances? What does ‘the next holy thing’ look like for me?” If you have ears to hear and a heart to understand, this is a passage not just for wives and husbands, but for those never married, for the divorced and widowed, for LGBTQ persons, for every believer in any situation.

Stay tuned, and I’ll show you why. First, let’s look carefully at Peter’s words. I love this text! Every word and phrase is powerful.

“...in the same way...” (1, 7). Peter has already set this up in the last chapter. Jesus is our example for submitting even when the cost of submission is unfair. For Jesus, radically unfair. I said last week that if you don’t like the principle of submission or authority, you not only don’t like Peter—you don’t like Moses, Jeremiah, Paul, John, or most of all, Jesus. And by the way, if you don’t like the idea of submission, good luck finding a job or a country to live in. Everybody submits to somebody, and most of us submit to more people than those who submit to us.

“Wives, submit yourselves...” (1). Submission is voluntarily giving up control. There’s probably not a woman in the world, at least one who’s been married longer than a week, who hasn’t learned that trying to control your husband not only doesn’t work, it’s actually counterproductive. (What about husbands? Hold on; we’re getting there.)
“...to your own husbands...” (1). Whatever else Peter is saying, he is making it very clear he’s not saying that every woman should defer to any man in every situation.

“...so that if any of them do not believe the word...” (1). Now we know more about the specific situation into which Peter was writing. In this passage, he writes six verses directed to women and only one to men. In the last chapter, he spoke only to household servants and not to masters. Why? Because almost everywhere the Christian faith has spread, it spread first among those with less power and privilege.

People with more comfortable lives usually rarely get the point of the Gospel, which is that we are all hopeless and needy until we meet Jesus. Jesus himself said it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter his kingdom (Mark 10:25).

Peter’s readers were first generation Christians, mostly of the servant class and mostly women. They lived in a culture that was condescending to both—even more so than we are today. It wasn’t universally true that women were treated like property, but more often than not women were uneducated and restricted. Peter acknowledges that many of his female readers not only feel powerless, but they are married to men who don’t believe.

“...they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1-2). If you’re married and you’re thinking, “I keep telling my spouse the same thing over and over with no results,” maybe go back and review that definition of insanity, often attributed to Albert Einstein. While you’re at it, review what Peter says.

The Christian faith eventually won the Roman empire, but not by trying to control it. They won the empire through martyrdom and service and agape, both in public and in private. Two pivotal figures in the conversion of the empire were Emperor Constantine and St. Augustine, both of whom were won to Christ by the godly example and faithful prayers of holy women—their mothers.

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment.... Rather, it should be that of your inner self” (3-4). Don’t get lost in the details. Peter certainly doesn’t say a woman should not go to the salon (except during the pandemic), wear jewelry, or wear nice clothes. What he says is don’t focus there. Your true beauty is your “inner self.”

This has been the focus of our own Emma Danzey’s (Burnham) ministry through her Polished conferences and more recently through her music, like the song “Deep Within.” “Spirit, reign in me. Ignite a change within. Pour out yourself to reach the world I’m in. When the waters rise and the rushing wind, Your love is still burning deep within.” Make your inner self your focus.

I don’t know if the original Superman story got its inspiration from Peter or not, but the Greek word for “inner” is krypton (“hidden”). Your killer advantage is not your eyeliner or wardrobe or shape, whether you’re a woman or a man. Your hidden kryptonite that changes lives in much deeper.

Both time and gravity take their toll on your outer body, so Peter wants the focus on “the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (4).
“Gentle and quiet” sounds too mousy to me. These words don’t imply a woman who has no vigor and no voice.

“Gentle” means “strength that is self-bridled,” and “quiet” is better translated “calm” or “self-controlled”—the kind of person that doesn’t stir up trouble.

The key to verses 3-4 is the end of verse 4: “which is of great worth in God’s sight.” The problem with all of us, men and women, is that we so often compare ourselves to others and measure our worth based on what we can see of them vs. what they can see of us. Peter urges his readers to focus on what God sees. God sees you, even with all your flaws, as a person of exquisite beauty, unlimited potential, and eternal worth. That’s who you really are.

In verses 5-6, he reminds wives there are wonderful models among “holy women of the past.” He had introduced us to holiness earlier in the book. “Be holy as I am holy,” is an Old and New Testament commandment.

In verse 6, he specifically names Sarah. She’s an interesting choice. To be sure, she had watched her 450 monthly cycles pass without a pregnancy, followed by decades more. If you heard Pastor Paul speak on Sarah Wednesday night, you might be thinking, “Wait! She was a role model for patient strength and calm endurance?”

Didn’t Sarai insist that Abram obey her in the infamous story with Hagar? Didn’t she then turn around and demand that Abraham send the mother and child away? Didn’t Sarah get her child named ‘Laughter’ (what ‘Isaac’ means) because when God told her at age 89 she’d have a baby, she exclaimed ‘Ha!’? Isn’t that when she called him “my lord”—and added that he’s “old”?

That’s precisely why I love Sarah as a role model for submission and hope. She was also the prototype for inconsistency and real-life faith struggle. But she kept coming back to what it means to “do what is right.” That’s actually what it means to “hope in God”—not to never fail but to keep coming back to God when you do.

Peter ends this verse with “do not give way to fear.” Literally, “never, ever fearing terror.” In other words, don’t let your worst fears prevent you from doing the right thing. “What if this doesn’t work? What if he doesn’t change?” Your job is to “put your hope in God” not obsess over your fears.

In verse 7, Peter turns his attention to husbands. “In the same way,” he says again, reminding us that he’s continuing the theme of what Jesus’ submission to God and self-sacrifice means.

I’m not fond of the translation to “be considerate” because we use that word to imply courtesy—like, “be nice to her.” This is not about manners.

The literal translation might be best: “Husbands, in the same way living together according to knowledge....” That’s almost Gary Chapman-ish. He’s the guy who writes about “the five love languages.” Husbands, Peter is saying, know your wife. Bob, you be the world’s leading Linda-ologist. Don’t make it about what you want from her, and certainly don’t make it about you controlling her. Listen. Observe. Know her.
He continues: “and treat them with respect as the weaker partner....” Once again, I wish the translators had left the original alone. It’s about “giving her the respect she’s due as the weaker vessel.” She’s not weaker or lesser as a partner.

Her “vessel” is weaker. Her shell. More than likely you as a man have the physical strength to force yourself on her—not just sexually but with all other sorts of abuse. “Don’t even think about it,” Peter says. Christians should have absolutely zero tolerance for physical, sexual, or psychological abuse in a marriage. Your wife deserves the highest honor. Treat her as a vessel of beauty and great value.

Why? Two reasons. First, she’s your spiritual equal (“heirs with you of the gracious gift of life”). Notice that while he assumes the wives among his readers are probably not married to believers, he assumes the husbands are. That’s because in their culture, as in most cultures, if a man changed his religion his wife followed—but not necessarily vice versa.

Second, husbands, if you do abuse her because of your physical strength, God’s gonna getcha! Peter’s way of saying it, “so that nothing will hinder your prayers,” reminds you that you will short circuit your relationship to God if you mistreat that beautiful vessel he has entrusted you with.

Do you see what I mean? All Peter is doing is asking you to apply the Gospel to your situation. The believer’s first question is not, “How can I control the people around me and the situation I’m in?” That’s true whether you’re a wife or a husband, living in a culture of male dominance or equal rights, whether you’re married to a strong Christian or an unbeliever, whether you’re not married and loving it, or longing to be married or grieving the end of a marriage, whether you’re straight or gay or something else, no matter your age or situation. That’s never the right question.

When your life has been transformed by the Gospel of Jesus, you ask a series of questions that are totally different. How can I follow Jesus’ example of self-sacrifice? How can my life in this situation win people over to Jesus? What does God see and what does he value? How do I not misuse my advantages? How do I learn to treat others the way God sees them? What might be getting in my relationship with Jesus? Those are questions Peter wants every follower of Jesus to ask.

**What consumes you – Pastor Paul**

There is a question in life we never think about. What or who has most influenced you in your relationships? If we are going to be myopic and look at marriage—who has most influenced you in your marriage? What examples have you seen?

What you have been most influenced by is going to be what consumes you the most in your marriage. The most influence on your own marriage is your parents. You watched your parents as children. Now as you get older, you might ask, “What are our kids going to say about us?”

Whatever influences you the most tends to be what consumes you in a marriage. If in the marriage you saw your father work to provide so that your mom could have nice things, that’s an influence. Those things influence us. Someone exists in the marriage to provide financially, someone
exists just to enable someone else’s behavior or to play a roll but there’s not a partnership—all of those things influenced you, and they tend to consume you.

When we look at this text, there are two things Peter is going to show that tend to consume people. He would say to women “Don’t let your outer beauty consume who you are. Don’t neglect your relationship with Christ.” He would look at men and say “Don’t be so ‘in yourself’ or in your literal man cave that you forget to give honor to your wife.” Both of those things are things that consume.

If consuming to you is not Christ, then you won’t follow his example. Christ was never married but I will point out that we follow his example because he lived and loved sacrificially. The example that you are called to follow and ought to most consume you and influence you is the example of the One who loved and lived sacrificially always. Amen.