

1 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Week 6: Christlike Conduct in Relationships

1Peter 3:1–7

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 3:1–7 applies the Christlike conduct of the previous chapter to the marriage relationship, and it touches doctrines that our culture finds especially sensitive. What is at stake here is the biblical teaching on the roles of husband and wife, the source of true beauty and worth, the power of godly conduct as witness, and the equal standing of men and women as fellow heirs of grace alongside their distinct, God-given roles. The teacher should be ready to explain biblical submission clearly (what it means and does not mean), to affirm without embarrassment that Scripture assigns different roles to men and women in marriage and in the church, and at the same time to insist with equal force on the full and equal worth of women before God. Handled poorly, this passage breeds either resentment or domination; handled faithfully, it reveals the wisdom and beauty of God's design.

This passage is also deeply formational and intensely practical, because it lands in the home, where discipleship is tested most honestly. Peter calls wives to a winsome, respectful, inwardly beautiful, fearless life, and husbands to understanding, honor, and care so serious that neglecting it hinders their prayers. The teacher's task is to help every student, married or single, male or female, see that the way we treat the people closest to us is not separate from our walk with Christ but is its truest test, and to press toward concrete change in a real relationship.

Keep both targets in view. Students should leave with a clear, scriptural, and unembarrassed grasp of God's design for men and women, free of both worldly distortion and harsh caricature, and with a specific resolve about how they will treat a spouse or another close person this week. The disciple we are forming is someone whose home and closest relationships are increasingly governed by the gentle, honoring, self-giving character of Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter calls wives to "be subject to your own husbands," even husbands who "do not obey the word," so they may be won by conduct (vv. 1–2). What does biblical submission in marriage actually mean and not mean, and how does it fit with the equal worth of husband and wife before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by defining biblical submission carefully, because few words are more misunderstood. The word means to arrange oneself under, to yield in an ordered relationship. Peter calls wives to be

subject to “your own husbands,” a voluntary, loving deference within the marriage God designed. This is part of a consistent New Testament pattern (Ephesians 5:22–24; Colossians 3:18) in which God assigns the husband a role of loving headship and the wife a role of supportive submission.

Be equally clear about what submission does not mean. It does not mean the wife is inferior in worth, intelligence, or standing before God; Peter will call her a fellow heir of grace in verse 7. It does not mean silence, servility, or the loss of her voice, gifts, or judgment. It does not mean obeying a husband into sin; a wife’s ultimate submission is to Christ, and no human authority may command what God forbids. And it never licenses a husband’s harshness or abuse. Biblical submission is the free, dignified yielding of an equal, not the crushing of an inferior.

Show how submission and equality fit together. In the being and worth of persons, husband and wife are fully equal, both made in God’s image, both heirs of salvation. In the ordering of the marriage relationship, God has assigned different roles. Equality of worth and difference of role are not in conflict, any more than they are within the Godhead, where the Son is equal to the Father in deity yet willingly submits to the Father’s will. Difference of role does not imply difference of value.

Finally, note the evangelistic edge in this passage. These wives were often married to unbelievers, and Peter says their respectful conduct could win their husbands. Submission here is not weakness but a powerful, Christlike witness, the same self-giving spirit Jesus showed. Helping students grasp this protects them from both the world’s caricature of submission and any abuse of the doctrine, and helps them grow in faith in God’s wise design.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Biblical submission as voluntary, loving deference within God’s design (Ephesians 5:22–24)
- What submission does not mean: inferiority, silence, servility, or obeying into sin
- The wife’s ultimate submission to Christ above any human authority
- Equality of worth alongside difference of role (compare the Son’s submission to the Father)
- Submission as a Christlike witness, not weakness

Discussion Prompts

- What does biblical submission mean, and what does it clearly not mean?
- How can a wife be fully equal in worth yet called to a distinct role?
- Why is a wife’s ultimate submission always to Christ first?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter says an unbelieving or disobedient husband may be won “without a word” by his wife’s conduct (v. 1). Where in your relationships are you tempted to win people by nagging, lecturing,

or arguing rather than by Christlike conduct? What might change if you trusted your life to do the persuading?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes Peter's phrase "without a word" and applies it broadly. Peter is not forbidding all speech about the faith; elsewhere believers are told to be ready to give a reason for their hope (3:15). He is warning against a particular failure: trying to badger, nag, or argue someone into the kingdom, especially a spouse who already feels preached at.

Help students recognize their own version of this. We are quick to think that if we just explain it one more time, more forcefully, the other person will finally see. With those closest to us, this often backfires; our words become noise, and our inconsistency becomes the real message. Peter says a transformed life can accomplish what argument cannot, because it is harder to dismiss and impossible to out-argue.

Move toward trust and action. The deeper issue is whether we trust God to work through a quiet, consistent witness, or whether we feel we must force the outcome ourselves. Invite students to name a relationship where they have been relying on words and pressure, and to consider what it would mean to let their conduct do the persuading while they pray and wait on God. This is real growth in both humility and faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Conduct as a more persuasive witness than argument, especially with intimates
- The difference between giving a reason for hope and badgering people into faith
- Inconsistency undermining our words
- Trusting God to work through a quiet, faithful life

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to win people by nagging or arguing rather than by conduct?
- Why do words often fail with the people who know us best?
- What would change if you trusted your life, and God, to do the persuading?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter contrasts external adornment, "braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry," with "the hidden person of the heart" and "the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit," which "in God's sight is very precious" (vv. 3–4). What does this teach about where true beauty and worth are found, and is Peter forbidding all attention to appearance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter contrasts two kinds of beauty. The first is external: elaborate hairstyles, gold jewelry, fine clothing, the visible adornment the ancient world prized just as ours does. The second is internal: “the hidden person of the heart,” marked by “a gentle and quiet spirit,” which Peter says is “imperishable” and “very precious” in God’s sight.

Clarify what Peter is and is not saying, since this verse is often misread. He is not forbidding braided hair, jewelry, or attractive clothing as such; if he were, he would also be forbidding the “putting on of clothing,” which is obviously not his point. He is using a common teaching device, contrasting two things to establish priority. The issue is not whether a woman may attend to her appearance, but where her true adornment and identity are found. The outward fades; the inner beauty of a Christlike heart endures and delights God.

Develop the idea of the “hidden person of the heart.” God sees what no one else sees, the inner self, the character, the spirit. Our culture pours enormous energy into the outward self that others see and comparatively little into the inner self that God sees. Peter reverses the priorities. The beauty that matters most, and lasts longest, is the beauty of a heart being conformed to Christ.

Apply this to everyone, not only to women. While Peter addresses wives, the principle that God prizes the hidden person of the heart over outward show is universal (compare 1 Samuel 16:7). Help students grow in faith by examining the ratio of their own investment, how much time, money, and worry goes into appearance and image, and how much into the cultivation of a Christlike inner life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True beauty and worth located in the hidden person of the heart (1 Samuel 16:7)
- The contrast device: priority of the inner over the outer, not a ban on appearance
- The imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit as precious to God
- The universal principle that God prizes character over outward show
- Examining where we invest our energy: the seen self or the unseen self

Discussion Prompts

- Where is true beauty and worth found, according to Peter?
- Is Peter forbidding all attention to appearance, and how do you know?
- How does the ratio of your own investment compare, outer self versus inner self?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter prizes “a gentle and quiet spirit” as precious to God (v. 4). In a culture that rewards loud self-promotion, where is your spirit more anxious, harsh, or self-assertive than gentle and settled? What in your inner life most needs the calm that comes from trusting God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the “gentle and quiet spirit” of verse 4 and presses it inward for every believer. A gentle and quiet spirit is not timidity or having no opinions; it is a settled, peaceful inner life that is not driven by anxiety, the need to dominate, or the craving for attention. It is the calm of a soul that trusts God.

Help students see how counter-cultural this is. Our age rewards the loud, the self-promoting, the perpetually outraged. A gentle and quiet spirit can look weak by those standards, but Peter says it is precious to God. It is, in fact, the spirit of Christ Himself, who was “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). This is not a personality type imposed on the naturally quiet; it is a fruit of the Spirit available to every temperament.

Move toward honest self-examination. Where is each student’s spirit harsh, anxious, or self-assertive rather than gentle and settled? Often the harshness at home or the anxiety that drives our control flows from a failure to trust God. Invite students to name the area where their inner life most needs the calm that comes from resting in God, and one practice that might cultivate it: prayer, Scripture, casting their anxieties on God (5:7). This is concrete inner transformation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A gentle and quiet spirit as settled trust, not timidity or passivity
- The counter-cultural value God places on inner calm
- Christ Himself as gentle and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29)
- Harshness and anxiety as fruits of failing to trust God
- Cultivating inner calm through prayer and casting anxiety on God (1 Peter 5:7)

Discussion Prompts

- What does a gentle and quiet spirit actually look like, and what is it not?
- Where is your spirit more anxious or harsh than gentle and settled?
- What in your inner life most needs the calm that comes from trusting God?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter points to “the holy women who hoped in God” and to Sarah as examples of inner beauty and trust, saying believing women “are her children” if they do good and “do not fear anything that is frightening” (vv. 5–6). How does hope in God free a person from fear, and how is this kind of fearless trust connected to godly conduct?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter grounds his appeal in the example of “the holy women who hoped in God” and especially Sarah. Their inner beauty was not a matter of temperament but of faith; they “hoped in God,” and out of that hope flowed their godly conduct. Peter is pointing to a deep link between trusting God and living well.

Draw out the connection between hope and fearlessness. Peter says believing women are Sarah’s children if they do good and “do not fear anything that is frightening.” Hope in God frees a person from being ruled by fear. Sarah followed God into the unknown, trusting His promises; her security rested in God, not in controlling her circumstances. A heart anchored in God’s faithfulness can do good and stay steady even when life is frightening.

Explain why this matters for conduct. So much sin is fear in disguise. We manipulate because we are afraid of not getting what we want; we lash out because we feel threatened; we shrink back because we fear loss or rejection. When hope in God displaces that fear, the grip of those sins loosens. Fearless trust is therefore not recklessness but the freedom to do right without being driven by anxiety.

Help students grow in faith by seeing hope as the root and godly conduct as the fruit. The way to a gentler, braver, more faithful life is not mainly to grit our teeth and try harder, but to deepen our hope in God until His faithfulness, not our fears, governs how we live. This applies to every believer, married or single, man or woman.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Inner beauty rooted in hope in God, exemplified by holy women and Sarah
- Hope in God as the source of freedom from fear
- Sarah’s trust in God’s promises into the unknown
- Much sin as fear in disguise (control, lashing out, shrinking back)
- Hope as the root and godly conduct as the fruit

Discussion Prompts

- How does hope in God free a person from being ruled by fear?
- How is fearless trust connected to doing good?
- Where would deeper hope in God change the way you act under pressure?

Question 6

Student Question:

Peter says godly women do good and “do not fear anything that is frightening” (v. 6). Fear drives much of our sin: we control, manipulate, lash out, or shrink back because we are afraid. What frightens you most right now, and how is that fear shaping the way you treat the people closest to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes Peter's phrase about not fearing "anything that is frightening" and turns it into honest self-examination for every student. Peter has just shown that godly conduct flows from hope that displaces fear; now students name the fears that actually drive them.

Help students identify their controlling fears. Beneath much of our behavior toward those closest to us lies fear: fear of being hurt, of losing control, of being abandoned, of failure, of not being loved or respected. These fears rarely announce themselves; they hide behind anger, withdrawal, nagging, perfectionism, or the need to manage everyone around us. Naming the fear is the first step toward being freed from it.

Move toward hope and action. Invite students to connect a specific fear to a specific pattern in a close relationship, and then to bring that fear to God, who is faithful. The antidote Peter offers is not denial but hope, trusting God enough that the fear no longer rules our conduct. Encourage one concrete step this week: a prayer that surrenders the fear, a hard conversation approached in trust, a controlling behavior laid down. This is where the passage transforms a relationship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fear as a hidden driver of sin in close relationships
- Naming controlling fears as the first step toward freedom
- Hope in God as the antidote to fear, not denial
- Surrendering a specific fear that distorts how we treat others

Discussion Prompts

- What frightens you most right now?
- How is that fear shaping the way you treat the people closest to you?
- What would it look like to bring that fear to God this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter commands husbands to "live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman," treating her as "the weaker vessel" yet a fellow heir "of the grace of life" (v. 7). What does this teach about a husband's God-given responsibility, and how does "fellow heir" affirm the equal standing of wives before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter now turns to husbands, and though he says less, he assigns a weighty calling. Husbands are to "live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman." This is the

responsibility side of headship, and it rules out passivity, harshness, and selfishness as firmly as the wife's submission rules out domineering on her part.

Unpack "in an understanding way." The husband is to know his wife, to study her, to understand her needs, fears, burdens, and hopes, and to live with her accordingly. This requires attention, patience, and self-denial. A Christian husband does not use his role to get his own way; he uses it to understand and serve, after the pattern of Christ, who loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25).

Handle the phrase "the weaker vessel" carefully, because it is easily misread. It does not mean the wife is weaker in character, intellect, or spiritual capacity. In context it most naturally refers to physical strength and to the vulnerability that comes with her position, calling the husband to protective honor rather than exploitation. Far from demeaning women, it commands men to treat their wives with special care and respect, as one handles something precious.

Now stress "fellow heir of the grace of life," because this is the doctrinal key. The wife is every bit the husband's equal as an heir of salvation. Whatever the difference in marital role, there is no difference in their standing before God or in their inheritance in Christ. A husband who honors his wife is honoring a coheir of eternal life, a daughter of the King. Helping students grasp this guards the doctrine of distinct roles from ever sliding into contempt, and grows their faith in the dignity God gives to every believer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The husband's calling to understanding, honor, and self-giving care (Ephesians 5:25)
- Headship as responsibility and service, not privilege or domination
- "Weaker vessel" as a call to protective honor, not a claim of lesser worth
- The wife as fellow heir, fully equal in standing before God
- Distinct roles that never license contempt or neglect

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for a husband to live with his wife "in an understanding way"?
- How does "fellow heir of the grace of life" affirm the equal worth of wives?
- How does this passage rule out both passivity and harshness in a husband?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter warns husbands that mistreating their wives can hinder their prayers (v. 7). Whether you are a husband or not, where is a broken or neglected relationship quietly hindering your walk with God? What step toward understanding, honor, or reconciliation is God asking of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter adds a sobering motive: a husband is to honor his wife “so that your prayers may not be hindered.” This is a remarkable statement. How a man treats his wife directly affects his relationship with God. Mistreatment in the home does not stay in the home; it rises to heaven and obstructs prayer.

Draw out the broader principle, since this question applies it to all students, not only husbands. Scripture repeatedly links our relationships with others to our relationship with God. Jesus said to be reconciled to your brother before offering your gift at the altar (Matthew 5:23–24), and that we are forgiven as we forgive (Matthew 6:14–15). A broken or neglected human relationship can quietly hinder our walk with God, dulling prayer and clouding our sense of His presence.

Help students examine their relationships honestly. Most of us have at least one relationship marked by neglect, unresolved conflict, bitterness, or withheld honor, a spouse, a parent, a child, a fellow believer. Peter says these things matter to God. Invite each student to name the relationship where something is broken or neglected, and to ask what step toward understanding, honor, or reconciliation God is calling them to take. This is where the passage moves from doctrine to obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The direct link between our treatment of others and our relationship with God
- Mistreatment in the home hindering prayer
- Reconciliation before worship (Matthew 5:23–24; 6:14–15)
- Honest examination of neglected or broken relationships

Discussion Prompts

- How can the way we treat people hinder our prayers and our walk with God?
- Where is a broken or neglected relationship quietly affecting your walk?
- What step toward understanding, honor, or reconciliation is God asking of you?

Question 9

Student Question:

Throughout this passage Peter assumes that men and women, though equal in worth and fellow heirs of grace, are given different and complementary roles in marriage and in the Lord’s church. How does Scripture hold together the full equality of men and women before God with their distinct God-given roles, and why is this a matter of God’s wise design rather than human worth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it deserves a clear, confident, and gracious treatment, because the surrounding culture often misunderstands it. The whole passage rests

on a truth taught consistently across Scripture: men and women are equal in worth and dignity, yet God has assigned them different and complementary roles in the home and in the church.

Establish the equality first and firmly. Men and women are both made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), both fall under sin, both are redeemed by the same blood, both receive the same Spirit, and both are fellow heirs of the grace of life (v. 7) and one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). There is no hint in Scripture that women are inferior in value, intelligence, spirituality, or standing before God. Any teaching that demeans women contradicts the Bible and must be rejected.

Then state the distinction of roles, also clearly. From creation, God established an order in which the man bears a particular responsibility to lead and the woman a particular calling to support, an order rooted not in the fall but in God's good design (1 Timothy 2:11–14 grounds it in creation). In marriage, this appears as loving headship and supportive submission (Ephesians 5:22–33). In the church, God assigns the public leadership of the assembly and the teaching of the gathered congregation to qualified men, so that the roles of elder, and of teaching or exercising authority over men in the assembly, are filled by men (1 Timothy 2:8–15; 1 Corinthians 14:34–35; 1 Timothy 3:1–7). Women have rich and essential roles of service, teaching other women and children, hospitality, encouragement, and countless ministries, but not the role of leading or teaching in the mixed assembly.

Explain why this is wisdom, not unfairness. Difference of role does not imply difference of worth, just as the Son's submission to the Father implies no inferiority within the Godhead (1 Corinthians 11:3). God, who designed male and female, has the right and the wisdom to assign their roles, and His design, received in faith, produces flourishing rather than oppression. The problem is never God's design but our sinful distortions of it, whether men's domination or our culture's rejection of any God-given distinction at all.

Help students grow in faith by receiving this with trust rather than embarrassment. The aim is neither to apologize for Scripture nor to wield it harshly, but to embrace God's design as good. Men are called to lead by self-giving service after the pattern of Christ; women are called to a supportive strength that is precious to God. When both are lived in the Spirit, the result is not a battle for power but a beautiful picture of Christ and His church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The full equality of men and women in worth, image, and redemption (Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:28)
- Distinct, complementary roles rooted in God's creation design, not the fall (1 Timothy 2:11–14)
- Loving headship and supportive submission in marriage (Ephesians 5:22–33)
- Male leadership of the assembly and teaching of the mixed congregation (1 Timothy 2:8–15; 1 Corinthians 14:34–35)

- The role of elder reserved for qualified men (1 Timothy 3:1–7), with rich service roles for women
- Difference of role without difference of worth (1 Corinthians 11:3)
- God’s design as wisdom that produces flourishing, distorted only by human sin

Discussion Prompts

- How does Scripture hold together the equality of men and women and their distinct roles?
- Why does difference of role not imply difference of worth?
- How can we embrace God’s design with confidence rather than embarrassment or harshness?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage. Peter brings Christlike conduct into the home: respectful, winsome, inwardly beautiful, fearless, understanding, and honoring. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses, in marriage or in any close relationship. What is the single truth from 1 Peter 3:1–7 you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole passage. Peter has called wives to winsome, respectful, inwardly beautiful, fearless conduct (vv. 1–6) and husbands to understanding, honor, and care (v. 7), all as expressions of the character of Christ brought home. The question asks each student, married or single, to name one specific way Christ is forming them through these verses.

Resist generalities. Walk students back through the movement of the passage: the witness of conduct over words, the inner self versus the outer self, the gentle and quiet spirit, the fear that drives our sin, the honor owed in our closest relationships, the broken relationship that hinders prayer. Invite each person to name the single point that lands most directly on their life right now.

Close by reminding students that the home and our closest relationships are where discipleship is tested most honestly. The goal is transformation: letting the character of Christ reshape how we treat the people nearest to us. Encourage each person to carry one truth from this passage into the week, to return to it, and to act on it, so that Christ is seen at the kitchen table and not only in the pew.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christlike character brought into the home and closest relationships
- The home as the truest test of discipleship

- Transformation expressed in conduct toward those nearest us
- Self-examination leading to one concrete step

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage lands most directly on your life right now?
- What one concrete step in a close relationship can you take before we meet again?
- How can this group support and pray for you in that specific step?