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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“A GREATER PURPOSE THAN HAPPINESS?”**

First Peter 3:1-7

☑ In their 1966 hit single “Wouldn’t It Be Nice” the Beach Boys sang:

**We could be married  
And then we’d be happy  
Wouldn’t it be nice?**

Some couples find deep, abiding joy in matrimony.

☑ Five years later Carly Simon hit it big with “That’s The Way I’ve Always Heard It Should Be”:

**My friends from college they’re all married now;  
They have their houses and their lawns.  
They have their silent noons,  
Tearful nights, angry dawns.**

**You say we can keep our love alive  
Babe – all I know is what I see –  
The couples cling and claw  
And drown in love’s debris.**

Some couples find pain and loneliness in marriage.

☑ In a 2012 the Barna Group asked Christian women, “**What has been the biggest disappointment in your life?**” The third most frequent answer was “**Divorce or a bad marriage.**” Only the death of a loved one and family problems ranked higher.

☑ {?} “**Marriage**”, it has been said, is like “**flies on a screen door: Those on the outside are trying to get in, and those on the inside are trying to get out.**” That is a glaring overgeneralization: not everyone on the outside wants in; not all of us on the inside want out. Still, besides parenthood no institution inspires such hope *and* despair, joy *and* misery as wedlock.

? Why does matrimony often fail to live up to its great promise? *Why is marriage often a source of anguish instead of joy?*

There are many causes. As Leo Tolstoy stated, “**Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.**”

◆ Even so, there are common factors. One of the most prevalent – and most damaging – is confusion about the most basic purpose of marriage.

Ask people what it is, and you might hear any number of answers:

☞ {Ge 1:28} “Marriage exists to propagate the human species until we ‘**fill the earth.**’” Yes. But if sheer numbers were the point, they could be achieved more efficiently by ‘Baby Daddies’ and ‘Baby Mamas’ than by husbands and wives.

☞ “Marriage exists to establish a stable, nurturing environment in which to raise children.” Of course it does. Yet if that was the bottom line, each and every childless marriage would be a failure – and that is not true.

☞ “Marriage exists to protect and provide for women.” True. But if that was the main thing, marriage

would lose its merit as changes in culture and legislation make singleness safe and affordable.

☞ “Marriage exists to celebrate and grow the love between a man and a woman.” Absolutely! Yet a person who cannot love well outside of marriage cannot love well in marriage. (I am not speaking now of erotic love.)

☞ Besides, how many 21<sup>st</sup> century North Americans say “I do” for those reasons? Many of us take them into account – but in truth, we get married to be happy. We take it for granted that personal happiness is the most basic purpose of marriage. Am I right?

? Question: What if exalting happiness above all else in marriage is ultimately self-defeating?

☑ We tend to see marriage as a vending machine with the candy of happiness inside. We expect that if we walk the aisle and recite the vows, our marriage relationship must automatically dispense bliss and delight forever.

☑ In reality happiness is more like a duck. On the way back from Mackinac Beth and I stopped to eat. There was a flock of mallards and we wanted to get near to them, so after lunch we brought out saltines and they waddled over to us. A drake and three hens took the crackers straight from our hands. The others stayed barely out of reach. It was a fun and rewarding interaction.

But what would have happened if we had chased the ducks, or tried to grab them? They would have panicked and fled.

So it is with happiness. Aggressively chase it straight-on, and it proves elusive; but create favorable conditions for it, and more of it will come to you.

The “favorable conditions” for marital happiness include affection, passion, faithfulness, kindness, humility, gentleness, etc. When one spouse strives to love like this, the odds for happiness increase. When both love like this, happiness will come and stay.

☑ {T. Ward} But when we make personal happiness the top priority we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. **“Our obsession with being happy makes it easier for us to love happiness more than”** each other. **“And though being happy is a very real by-product of a healthy relationship, the value we put on personal fulfillment is so inflated, it’s causing us to miss... the more beautiful purposes”** – and greater happiness – **“of marriage.”**

? Question: *What if God did not design marriage mainly to make us happy?* What if holy wedlock has a greater purpose? What if the Creator’s intent includes, but transcends our personal happiness?

■ In First Peter 3:1 Peter commands, **“Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands.”**

To us he might sound like a chauvinist. To ancient ears he sounds like a borderline feminist.

Their philosophers write *about* wives, not *to* wives. Why would they? In their eyes a male is fully human but a female is not quite there. They are confident that men are capable of making moral decisions while women are not.

Peter does not write *about* wives, he writes directly *to* wives. Why wouldn’t he? He recognizes the

intrinsic dignity of women, so he addresses them as human beings who bear the image of their Creator and who are free and responsible before the Lord.

■ In verse 7 Peter commands, **“Husbands...be considerate...and treat [your wives] with respect.”**

Many women bristle at being called **“the weaker partner,”** but by and large males are physically stronger. In addition, in many cultures men have greater economic and legal power. Wives are generally more vulnerable to mistreatment.

Not only does Peter forbid husbands from abusing their power, he insists that they treat their wives **“with respect.”** More literally, he calls us to **“assign honor”** (τιμην [timēn]). It’s the same word he uses in 2:17 when he instructs us to **“Show...respect”** (τιμησατε) **“to everyone, love your fellow believers, fear God, honor”** (τιματε) **“the emperor.”**

A wife is worthy of her husband’s greatest deference and highest esteem. Yet for many men, simply showing their wives the level of respect that they extend to others would be a giant step forward.

■ **“Treat [your wives] with respect as the weaker partner and”** (continuing in verse 7) **“as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life.”** A wife is her husband’s spiritual peer, counterpart and equal.

● {1 P 1:1-2; Ro 8:17} And if she is **“God’s elect... chosen according to the foreknowledge of...the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood”**

she is an **“[heir] of God and co-[heir] with Christ”** on par with her believing husband.

Hence, the call to submission is not a cut-and-dried imperative. It must be nuanced.

☆ The first key is embedded in the phrase: **“In the same way submit.”**

● **“In the same way”** refers to 2:13-14a: **“Submit ... for the Lord’s sake to every human authority,”** and to 2:18: **“in reverent fear of God submit,”** and in 2:21-25 to the example of Christ who submitted to unjust suffering.

**“In the same way”** reveals that biblical submission is not an act of weakness or uncritical collaboration with sinful customs. It is a bold act of self-giving *for* God.

No preacher – and no husband – has the authority or wisdom to define precisely what this submission does and does not entail. That is determined by the Christian wife in cooperation with God. The one universal is that a wife is to submit **“for the Lord’s sake,” “in reverent fear of God,”** in the spirit of Christ

{Eph 5:25} Likewise, the husband’s imperative to **“be considerate”** and **“treat”** his wife **“with respect”** is also modified by the phrase **“in the same way.”** Honor her **“for the Lord’s sake,” “in reverent fear of God”** and *in the spirit of Christ*. **“Love [her], just as [he] loved the church and gave himself up for her.”**

☆ The second key is embedded in the phrase:  
**“submit... so that.”** Verses 1b-2: **“submit.... so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over...”**

● This points back to 2:12: **“live such good lives among the pagans [so] that they may see your good deeds and glorify God”**; and 2:15: **“Submit... for it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of the foolish”**; and in 2:21-25 to the example of Christ, by whose submission we lost **“sheep... have returned to the Shepherd.”**

{1 P 1:3; 2:16; Lk 4:18-19} Christian wives are to submit, not in order to reinforce the sinful status quo, but to subvert it from the inside out. A husband who by means of his wife’s witness receives **“new birth”** and henceforth lives **“as God’s [slave]”** will undermine oppressive structures as he and his wife devote themselves to fulfill the Messiah’s agenda

**“to proclaim good news to the poor.  
 .... proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
 and recovery of sight for the blind,  
 ...set the oppressed free, [and]  
 proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

Submission, consideration and respect do establish favorable conditions for marital happiness. They do not guarantee it.

But what if that is beside the point? What if happiness is icing on the cake? What if God designed

marriage mainly to glorify his Name, make us holy and benefit others?

First Peter 3:1-7 is the Word of the Lord.