

Mutual submission in [1 Peter 3:1-7](#): Husband submit to wife?

By [Philip B. Payne](#), Contributor | Wednesday, May 17, 2023

29

It is almost universally acknowledged, even by George Knight III in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, 166–168, that [Ephesians 5:21](#) teaches “mutual submission” and that 5:22 continues that teaching. Similarly, [1 Peter 3:7](#)’s “in the same way” implies “submit” and so commands husbands to submit to their own wives.

[1 Peter 2:13–3:7](#) gives Christian exiles undergoing suffering a series of four commands to “submit”:

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to the emperor, as having authority, or to governors, as sent by him to punish wrongdoers and to praise those who do good” (translations by Payne).

Although commanding submission to those in authority, Peter affirms the believers’ freedom as God’s slaves ([1 Peter 2:16](#)).

The following commands to submit are addressed specifically to Christian slaves, wives, and husbands. [1 Peter 2:18](#) calls Christian exiles who are slaves to “submit” to their masters.

Peter then commands wives:

“In the same way, wives submit yourselves to your own husbands so that even if some of them disobey God’s word, your conduct may win them over — even though you might not speak God’s word — when your husbands observe your God-fearing, devoted conduct ... For this is the way holy wives of old who put their hope in God adorned themselves, submitting themselves to their own husbands. Sarah, for example, obeyed Abraham, calling him, ‘lord.’ You have become her children if you do good and do not fear any terror” ([1 Peter 3:1–6](#)).

Peter was probably referring to the only instance in the Bible where Sarah refers to Abraham as “my lord” ([Genesis 18:12](#)): “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?” Peter does not explain what obedience or submission by Sarah to Abraham he had in mind. Was it her dutiful preparation for the feast for the divine visitors? As possibly implied by “this pleasure,” was it her having sexual relations with Abraham even at her age, resulting in her conception of Isaac” (cf. [1 Corinthians 7:3–13](#))? Was it how God saved Sarah from terror when Sarah’s submitted to Abraham’s plan that put her at risk ([Genesis 20](#))?

Evangelism is the motive Peter states for wives' submission, not the common Greco-Roman belief that women, since they are by nature inferior, ought to be subordinate to men. It was precisely wives' belief in Christ, contrary to their husbands' beliefs, that put them at risk. It could be crucial for the wife's physical safety to have a silent witness. Wives were expected to adopt their husbands' religious beliefs (Plutarch *Moralia* 140d). Nevertheless, Peter writes, "You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors" (1:18). He urges wives, "Do not fear any terror" (3:6). 1 Peter throughout is an appeal to believers who have been tested "by fire" (1:7), faced "abuse" (4:4) and "the fiery ordeal" (4:12), and have been "insulted because of the name of Christ" (4:14). Peter commands, "endure" (2:20) and "be not ashamed" as they suffer for the faith (4:13–16), but "stand fast" (5:12), "firm in the faith" (5:9).

Peter next commands husbands who have believing wives:

"Husbands, in the same way submit yourselves to your own wives, as you dwell together wisely, recognizing her as a weaker feminine (BDAG 208) precious vessel. Honor them as coheirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so your prayers won't be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7).

In Greek, this sentence has no main verb, but the command "submit" is implied because "in the same way" demands something parallel to the preceding commands. Each of the three preceding sections begins with a command to "submit" using the same verb, *hypotassō*:

- "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human creature" (2:13).
- "You who are enslaved, submit yourselves in all fear to your masters" (2:18).
- "In the same way [*homoiōs*], wives submit yourselves to your own husbands" (3:1).

So when Peter writes in 3:7, "Husbands in the same way [*homoiōs*] ...," the only command supplied by the context is "submit," and "submit" fits the context perfectly. Even the advocate of patriarchy, J. N. D. Kelly (*Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 132) affirmed this, as does Peter Davids (*Discovering Biblical Equality*, 243). Furthermore, the close parallel between "Wives in the same way [*homoiōs*] submit yourselves to your own husbands" and "Husbands in the same way [*homoiōs*] ..." naturally implies, "Husbands in the same way [submit yourselves to your own wives]." The ESV and NIV unjustifiably introduce a new main verb, *live with* or *be considerate*. But neither of these verbs is in any manuscript of 1 Peter 3:7, nor is there anything similar to it in the preceding context. All this implies Peter's intent: "husbands in the same way submit to your own wives."

But, you may ask, "What makes you think Peter would honor wives as equal in standing with their husbands?"

Peter's description of the wives as "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life" (3:7) shows that he recognizes wives' equal standing in Christ with their husbands. This contrasts sharply with women's unequal and disadvantaged legal position regarding such things as inheritance in Peter's day. Furthermore, "treat them with respect" uses the Greek noun for "honor" which conveys social status. Peter, therefore, commands believing husbands to grant their wives honor and social status that was exceptional in that culture.

You may also ask, “What makes you think Peter believed in mutuality like this?”

Immediately after writing “Husbands, in the same way [submit to your own wives],” Peter encourages mutuality: “Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble” (3:7, 8). Two other events in Sarah’s marriage illustrate mutual submission in marriage: God told Abraham to obey Sarah in [Genesis 21:12](#), and Abraham “obeyed” Sarah in [Genesis 16:2 LXX](#).

The phrase “weaker feminine vessel” may mean that wives tend to be physically weaker than husbands, so husbands should treat their wives with consideration and respect and not use their strength to their advantage. “Weaker” may also refer to the wife’s weaker social position in that culture. The use of “vessel/pottery” with “weaker” and “feminine” in the context of “joint heirs” suggests a fragile, precious vessel. Although women were regarded as weaker than men in that culture, they are precious in God’s sight. Indeed, they are full inheritors in Christ.

“So that nothing will hinder your prayers” shows that husbands not submitting to and honoring their wives will have serious consequences. It gives God pleasure for husbands to honor their wives as coheirs of the gracious gift of life, treating them as the equals God created them to be. God blesses husband-wife mutual submission.

In summary, Peter gives guidance to Christians who were exiled in a pagan land. This passage has close parallels to Paul’s command to wives to submit to their husbands in the explicit context of mutual submission in [Ephesians 5:21–22](#). Here Peter also not only commands wives to submit themselves to their own husbands but also commands husbands to submit themselves to their own wives and to honor their wives as joint heirs of the gracious gift of life ([1 Peter 3:7](#)).

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