

Living Together

1 Peter 3:1-13

Some children were asked about relationships. They were asked:

“How can a stranger tell if two people are married?”

- “Married people usually look happy to talk to other people”
- “You might have to guess based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids”

“How do you make a marriage work?”

- Tell your wife that she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck
- If you want to last with your man you should wear a lot of nice clothes”

Advertising Slogans:

Hands that do dishes can feel soft as your face – Fairy Liquid

Have a break, have a... - KitKat

.... A day helps you work, rest and play – Mars

Because you're worth it – l'Oreal

Loves the jobs you hate – Mr Muscle

Soft, strong and very very long – Andrex

Every little helps – Tesco

Try something new today – Sainsbury's

Put a tiger in your tank – Esso

Help you breathe more easily – Tunes

We are all quite used to advertising slogans. Every day we turn on our TV sets and have people trying to sell us something, with a catchy tune or a clever slogan that we remember. There seem to be so many adverts on the TV now. There are so many adverts on TV that half of the time when you switch the TV on, you get the adverts. Of course the radio is just the same, full of adverts. Our newspapers are full of adverts, our letterboxes are crammed with adverts, we even get people phoning us up to advertise something.

We get a bit sick of adverts don't we? But one place I do appreciate adverts is on the underground. While you're waiting for a train it gives you something to read while you're waiting. I saw an advert once though that freaked me out a little. It was when I used to catch the train to college. Well, you know how it is. You work out in the end where to stand so as the door opens right in front of you, and you stand in a certain place so as when you get off at the other end, you are right by the exit. Well I was standing there one day, in my usual place and I looked across and right opposite me was an advert that said “You stand here every day don't you?” It was a little disconcerting that my life was so predictable but the advert caught my attention.

Peter in his letter is talking about how to advertise the Christian faith. This letter is written in the context of intense Christian persecution under Emperor Nero who is considered to be so bad that some scholars argue that this is who John is referring to as ‘the beast’ or the antichrist in the book of Revelation.

It is a time when it was not easy to speak out as Christians. It was not easy to witness to others about the Christian faith but it was also a time when people desperately needed to hear the good news of Jesus. At the beginning of our passage for today, Peter talks about marriages in which

Christians are married to non-Christians. He begins with Christian wives who have non-Christian husbands.

This was an even more difficult situation to witness in than under persecution. Under Roman law, a man was head of the household and a husband / father had absolute authority over all members of his family, including his wife. Now, if a man became a Christian, he would usually take his whole family to church with him. He was head of the household and so he made the decisions on what the family would and would not do. This was not the case for a woman. If a woman became a Christian but her husband remained an unbeliever, she could not demand that her husband came to church and even the suggestion of it could endanger her marriage.

So how does a woman in that situation persuade her husband to become a Christian? At ADBC we hold a lot of outreach events where we ask people who live in this area to invite their neighbours along to the events. For some, it might be an opportunity to invite your husband or wife along, to hear something of Jesus. But what if that wasn't an option. What if the mere suggestion of going to church with you might begin divorce proceedings or even worse, might have you arrested and killed or tortured.

Last week we looked at authority and submitting to those who have authority over us. Peter here tells women to submit to the authority of their husbands as it was under Roman law. This is not because God has deemed that men are superior to women, we will explore that in a moment. This is not what Peter is saying, rather he is saying that it is of no benefit to the gospel for women to challenge the accepted Roman law with their non-believing husbands. Instead they should work within the limits of their situation. Then, he says, even though they refuse to accept the good news, they will be won over by your godly lives.

¹Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ²when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

Notice there Peter's play on words. If any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words.

A preacher famously once said:

“Preach the gospel – use words if necessary”

Can you imagine what a relief this must have been to Peter's female audience? In a context where they would have been scared to speak out, especially against their husbands, but Peter's words must have brought great comfort to hear that they actually did not need to speak out. They could win their husbands over without using any words, simply by being good wives.

It is no lesser a challenge that Peter puts to the women. I think this is an almighty challenge that Peter says they can witness by the way they behave and their husbands will be won over by “the purity and reverence of their lives”. That is a tall order isn't it? But Peter is saying basically that they can be good role models, so much so that their husbands see something in their character that they want for themselves. In short, that when the husbands look at their wives, they want to be like them, they want what they've got – which is of course, Jesus. In a sense Peter is telling them to be attractive to their husbands.

So how do wives become attractive?

Well, of course for many people the answer lies in designer clothes and makeup and if needs be, cosmetic surgery. Women today spend £1000s on trying to look good. We have programs on the TV like Trinny and Susanna telling us what we should wear, or at the other end of the scale is Gok Wan telling us how we can look good naked.

But Peter says that external beauty is not what counts in terms of winning people over for Christ. That doesn't mean that we should disregard it altogether but what is really important is internal beauty. That is the way that wives should be attractive to their husbands.

Nigel Wright, Principle of Spurgeon's College said that his goal in life was to be an attractive Christian and he wanted us all to be attractive Christians. Not people who necessarily look good on the outside, but people who attract others to Christ. That is my prayer for all of you and for us as a church is that we are attractive Christians, that we are an attractive church. People who attract others to Christ. I'm sure we all know of people who are like magnates, people who attract other people. We can all be like magnates in a way, but magnates can do one of two things, they can attract or they can repeal. I'm sure we have all experienced people who attract us to Christ. People who inspire us, and we go away feeling more ready to serve Christ, more eager to roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty for him. Equally, we can probably all think of people who do the opposite. People who present the gospel in such a boring or complicated fashion that we are uninspired by it, people who make us feel inadequate or simply people who lack passion.

I heard of a minister who went to see a play once and at the end of the play, people were in tears and as the actors came out to take a bow, there was a standing ovation and raptures applause. After the performance everyone was talking about the show and saying how they would love to bring their friends along to see the show, the minister got to speak to one of the performers afterwards and asked "how is it that you present a fictional story and manage to touch people and inspire them, when every week, I tell people something that is fact and yet they are unmoved". The actor replied "That's because I present fiction as though it were fact, you present fact as though they are fiction."

Peter is talking about being people who attract others to Jesus, not repeal them. You'll remember that when Samuel was trying to find God's chosen king for Israel and he went to the house of Jesse. The scripture says this:

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." ⁹ Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these." ¹¹ So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?"

"There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep."
Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down ^[a] until he arrives."

¹² So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."

Eliab looked great on the outside, a worthy king in Samuel's eyes, but he was not the one that God wanted. God was looking for inner beauty, not outward beauty. This is what Peter says will also win over non-Christians.

So what about husbands?

⁷Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

The message puts it like this:

⁷The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.

As I said earlier, under Roman law, husbands were above their wives but Peter reminds them that they are now under a law of grace. Christian marriage is a marriage of equals, as God intended. So husbands should be good to their wives, they should not take advantage of them as many men would undoubtedly do but in their conduct they could also be good witnesses to Christ. Imagine if all the women in the area saw the way that Christian men treated women and so all the women wanted a Christian husband. That is a good witness to women (and great if you're a Christian singleton looking for a wife) but imagine the position also for non-Christian men. Would they perhaps want to become Christians?

Finally Peter applies this to us all.

⁸⁻¹²Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing.

Much of what Peter is talking about here is being counter-cultural. To be seen as different to the way the world operates. To be salt and light. Peter's desire is that the opinions of the world around them in relation to the church will be changed, they will be proved wrong and people who are opposed to the church will be won over for Christ.

There is perhaps a need today for us to be counter-cultural. What do we have in our church today that repels people from Christ and his church? For many a big factor is that they see a church that is at war with itself. One denomination fights another. This is the view many on the outside of the church have of the church. However, when we come together and do things together in unity, we prove this theory wrong and perhaps then the view of the world changes. When they see the church in unity in a world that is full of disunity, it becomes an attractive place, an oasis in the desert that people want to come to.

In a nutshell, Peter is saying to be a good advert for Christianity, all of you. Imagine that your life was the poster on the wall of a tube station, would it be a good advert for Christ? Does your life preach

the gospel without words? Would it be obvious to people that you are a Christian if you didn't tell them? Are you an attractive Christian?