

WOMAN, THE ‘WEAKER VESSEL’?

Scripture references are to the NIV-UK unless stated otherwise.

Q 1 Peter 3: 7: ‘Husbands, . . . be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner [*vessel, KJV*] as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.’

Given that a woman today may engage in occupations and sports that are physically and mentally challenging, from flying jet planes and lorry driving to pole vaulting, why is she portrayed in Scripture as ‘weaker’?

A The Apostle Peter is speaking to the married couple, *one or both of whom* is a Christian believer. Matrimony is a figure of the spiritual union of Christ and the Church: she, Christ’s Bride, submits to Him, not the other way round.

Superimposing this figure on the text in question, the husband – who may or may not himself be a Christian (*see v. 1*) – is exhorted to treat his wife with respect and tender affection because having submitted herself to him in Christian matrimony, *she has made herself vulnerable* (Gk., *asthênēs* – strengthless).

As regards the faith, the wife is an *equal* heir with her husband of the ‘gracious gift of life [eternal]’: ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ (Gal. 3: 28).

The husband is obliged to follow Christ’s example of self-abnegation and service, and must not mistreat or otherwise take advantage of his wife, else his *own standing* before the Lord will be damaged. He is to take care that ‘nothing hinder his prayers’ (v. 7). *See also* 1 Peter 2: 21-25.

In the wider *social* order, women and men should be regarded as equals. Physical strength and mental acuity may vary between the sexes, but Peter is not addressing this point.

Note: For a comprehensive discussion of the role of women and men in society, see our six-part series, beginning at <<https://www.ukbiblestudents.co.uk/magazine/womensociety.htm>>