

Discussion on 1 Peter 3:7

Sunday School – January 28 – February 4, 2018
Sleater Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA

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1. TEXT (1 Peter 3:7):¹

Likewise, husbands, live with [your wives] in an understanding way, because she's a more delicate person; always showing her honor because they also are joint-heirs of living grace. When you do this, your prayers won't be hindered.

2. THINKING THROUGH THE TEXT:

Q1: Peter writes "likewise, husbands." What does "likewise" mean?

- He's continuing the "submission" theme:
 - o (1) Christians to secular government (2:13)
 - o (2) Christian slaves to their masters (2:18)
 - o (3) Christian wives to their (sometimes) unbelieving husbands (3:1)
 - o (4) Christian husbands to their wives (3:7)
- The Christian life is one of submission to Jesus Christ as Lord
 - o (1) He's your King,
 - o (2) He's coming back to assume the throne and rule over all creation,
 - o (3) He's the one who will make all things new (cf. Rev 21:5),

¹ This is my own original translation from the UBS-5 Greek text. I've put all my translation and exegetical notes at the end of this document. I actually produced two translations; one more literal (closer to the KJV and NASB), and the other a bit more colloquial. I've decided to use the colloquial translation in the body of these notes, but you can find the literal version at the end of this document.

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- (4) He's the One who is the God of all who persevere in their faith to the end (cf. Rev 21:7),
- (5) He's the light who will light the new creation in place of the sun, moon and stars (cf. Rev 21:23), and
- (6) He's the One who will sit on the throne with the Father and receive worship from his servants (i.e. you, me, and every believer who's ever lived, from Adam and Eve onward); Rev 21:22 – 22:5
- And, Christ wants His people to (if necessary) endure hardship while suffering unjustly, in whatever situation and circumstances we find ourselves in – all for the sake of the Gospel
 - In a modern idiom, He's commissioned and sent us out to be insurgents in a pagan world for the Kingdom of God
 - But, *unlike the insurgents we see in the news*, our weapon is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our goal is:
 - (1) to be the instruments God uses (individually and collectively, as a local church) to win people to Him from every tribe, tongue, people and nation,
 - (2) so that, together, we can all serve Him in spirit and in truth when He returns to establish His kingdom, launch Eden 2.0, and set everything right
- And, part of that means living and modeling the Christian life *even behind closed doors*
 - Thus, Peter commands all husbands to honor their wives, and live with them in an understanding way

Q2: What does Peter mean when he commands husbands (not a suggestion, but a command!) to live with your wives in an “understanding way?”

- If your translation reads, “according to knowledge” (e.g. Tyndale, KJV), then that tells you nothing – **what is Peter saying?**
 - Husbands need to live with their wives according to *wisdom, understanding, or knowledge*
 - The real sense seems to be that husbands need to be *considerate*, which certainly goes to the idea of “knowledge” or “wisdom”

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- It takes experience, wisdom and understanding to treat a lady the way she deserves to be treated
- Anybody who thinks the Bible advocates a *crude, tyrannical, loveless and passionless* kind of husband/wife relationship hasn't paid attention, and *certainly* hasn't read the Song of Solomon lately
- Read **Colossians 3:18-24; Proverbs 5; Song of Solomon 4**
 - Song of Solomon, in particular, sketches out what a loving marriage could look like
 - This isn't erotica, cheap pornography, or one of those late-night movies on HBO where the women spend most of their time with their clothes off – this is genuine, Christ-honoring love, captured in poetry inspired by God, written by a deeply flawed man who rarely lived up to the wisdom God gave him
- It's not quite a cliché to say, "men are from Mars, and women are from Venus," but the bit of truth in that statement (and book title) is that men and women are different - *you can't treat a lady like you treat your male friends!*
 - You need to be considerate and understanding to your wife, and that takes a special kind of knowledge and wisdom – and every husband (and certainly every wife 😊) would agree he hasn't arrived yet!
 - Paul summed it up; "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them," (Col 3:19).

Q3: What does Peter mean when he writes that husbands should do this because (as all English translations put it), she is "the weaker vessel?"

- I'm willing to be persuaded on this one, and am torn between two different options. But, first, I'll outline some common views you've likely heard, your study bibles advocate, or you might already believe:
 - (1) Women are physically weaker
 - (2) Women are spiritually/morally weaker

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- (3) Women are more delicate or fragile, perhaps in an emotional sense
- (4) Women are in a subordinate and “weaker” position in the marriage relationship
- Whatever reason you choose, it has to fit the context – so here is the context:
 - (1) Husbands have to submit themselves to their wives
 - (2) so, they have to live with their wives in an understanding, considerate way
 - (3) because ... what?
 - (4) and, you do this (whatever it is) by showing her honor, because she is a joint-heir of living grace
- So, what on earth does Peter mean when he says the woman is a “weaker vessel” (the “literal” rendering)? Let’s briefly consider the options:
 - (1) Women are physically weaker
 - Thoughts?
 - Many commentators choose this option
 - I don’t like it, because it *literally makes no sense* – husbands have to be considerate and understanding to their wives ... because they’re *not as strong* as the men are!?
 - This is true, but pointless –
 - it’s like saying, “*Be nice to your wife, because she’s shorter than you, and she needs you to reach for tall things every once and a while!*”
 - Your response would be, “*Well ... ok ... is that it!?*”
 - (2) Women are spiritually or morally weaker
 - Thoughts?
 - This makes women out to be spiritual children, pretty dimwits who have to be shepherded along, a spiritual “damsel in distress,” etc.
 - I believe this is a very chauvinistic, insulting and un-Biblical idea
 - I don’t see that in Sarah, Deborah, Jael, Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, Naomi, Mary, the woman with the issue of blood, Phoebe, Priscilla, Song of Solomon, or Proverbs – or Peter (3:1-6), for that matter!

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- If you believe this, you believe men are better Christians than women are.
- In my experience, women are usually the more dedicated Christians in the marriage relationship (perhaps in Peter's day, too; cf. 1 Pet 3:1-6!). If you're a man, and you agree with this option, then I'll pray for you ... 😊
- As an aside, **how would you respond if someone told you that women are spiritually weaker than men, and pointed to 1 Timothy 2:12-14 as proof?**
- (3) Women are in the "weaker" or subordinate position in the marriage
 - **Thoughts?**
 - The sense would be that a husband's job is to take care of his wife, and because he's responsible for her and she relies on him, he's supposed to live with her in a considerate or understanding way
 - Not too thrilled about this one ... maybe it's possible 😞
- (4) Women are more fragile or delicate
 - **Thoughts?**
 - I think this makes the most sense of the command to be *considerate* or *understanding*
 - Delicate does not mean inferior; it just means different
 - Men are **generally** more callous and insensitive; women are **generally** softer, more understanding, and more delicate in an emotional sense
 - There's a reason why women are generally very interested in talking about feelings and being shown they're loved – God made us different!
 - Peter could have just as easily written to the wives, **"live with your husbands in a very understanding way, because he's a thick-headed, stubborn fool sometimes!"**
 - Has this conversation ever happened in your house:
 - **Wife:** *"I just wish you made time to talk to me!"*
 - **Husband** (sighing): *"Here I am! What do you want to talk about?"*

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- **Wife:** “Never mind. You don’t want to talk. You don’t ever make time for me!”
- **Husband** (genuinely confused): “What do you mean? I come home to you every night!”
- **Wife:** “Forget it! You have your priorities, and it’s clear I’m not one of them!”
- Women are (generally) much more interested in feelings than men, and men are (generally) too thick-headed and dim-witted to understand this without dedicated practice
- The result can be that a husband (wittingly or unwittingly) subjects his wife to years (or decades!) of criticism and emotional abuse ...
 - (1) because he’s harsh, hyper-critical and demanding,
 - (2) instead of being understanding, kind and considerate
- If this is you, then God’s word for you today is to repent, and commit to submit yourself to your wife by doing what Peter commands you to do:
 - (1) That’s why Peter said husbands are supposed to live with their wives in a very understanding or considerate way,
 - (2) which implies a certain kind of knowledge and wisdom,
 - (3) won from years and years of making bad, stupid mistakes, like, “Ok - here I am! What do you wanna talk about!?”

Q4: Peter tells you *how to be understanding to your wife – you always show her honor.* What does this mean?

- It means respect, reverence, esteem
- It describes what this “understanding way” actually looks like, and how you do it
- You do it by always showing honor, reverence and respect to your wife:
 - (1) You don’t do it by telling her she’s physically weaker than you (i.e. true, but pointless in this context)

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- (2) You **don't** do it by insulting her and telling her she's spiritually weaker than you; we all know this isn't true
- (3) You **could** do it by taking seriously your responsibility to take care of her
- (4) I believe you **do this best** by treating her like a lady, realizing she's different than you, God made her that way to complement your shortcomings, and honoring her for being the lovely woman she is!

Q5: Why should you show her honor?

- Because she's a Christian!
- She's your sister in Christ!

Q6: If you're a husband, and you always live with your wives in an understanding way, and always show her honor, what will the result be? What will happen if you fail to do this?

- If you do this, your prayers won't be hindered
- If you fail, your prayers might be hindered
 - It ought to be frightening to you when you realize God **may decide ignore your prayers** when you're deliberately disobedient to Him – like a good parent to a spoiled child

3. THOUGHT-FLOW DIAGRAM & GREEK TRANSLATION NOTES:

I can hardly think of anybody who'd be interested in these notes. I made them for myself as I studied the passage, and I need somewhere to store them so I find them later. This is as good a place as any. Please feel free to ignore all this, if you wish! These are not preaching notes, and are not intended to be. Nobody in his right mind should mistake them for teaching notes. They're simply translation notes about particular points of grammar and syntax.

a. Translation (1 Peter 3:7):

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Likewise, husbands, live with [your wives] in an understanding way, because she's a more delicate person; always showing her honor because they also are joint-heirs of living grace. When you do this, your prayers won't be hindered.

b. Thought-flow Diagram:²

TOPIC OF SUBMISSION (see 2:13, 18, 3:1)	- <u>Likewise, husbands,</u>
COMMAND FOR SUBMISSION	o <u>live with [your wives] in an understanding way,</u>
reason for submission	▪ <u>because she's a more delicate person;</u>
HOW TO DO THIS SUBMISSION	o <u>always showing her honor</u>
reason to show honor to your wife	▪ <u>because they also are joint-heirs of living grace.</u>
RESULT OF SUBMISSION – IF ...	o <u>When you do this,</u>
then ...	▪ your prayers won't be hindered

c. Translation Notes:

- **Row #1:** Greek text (UBS-5);
- **Row #2:** parsing;
- **Row #3:** gloss;
- **Row #4:** brief syntax notes;
- **Row #5:** cardboard, but more “literal” translation;
- **Row #6:** smoother, slightly more colloquial translation

Οἱ	ἄνδρες	ὁμοίως
npm	npm	adv.
the	husbands	likewise
<i>vocative sense</i>		<i>manner</i>
You husbands - likewise,		
Likewise, husbands,		

² This format is based off Richard Young's discussion on thought-flow diagrams (*Intermediate Greek* [Nashville, TN: B&H, 1994], 268-271) and the format in the ZECNT commentary series. It blends both versions, and I'm not entirely sure it gets the point across well, but I'm using it for now.

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ὁμοίως. This adverb hearkens back to the command in 2:18 (“always submit yourselves ... in a very respectful way”), in the same way the earlier command to wives did (3:1).

ὡς	συννοικοῦντες	κατὰ	γνώσιν
adv.	partnpm	prep	asf
likewise	you must live together with	according to	understanding, consideration, wisdom
manner	<i>imperative; descriptive; modifies Οἱ ἄνδρες; substantive</i>	correspondence	<i>dir.obj.prep.</i>
you must live together with them according to understanding, live with [your wives] in an understanding way,			

γνώσιν. What does this word mean, here? Most commentators and English translations understand Peter to be referring to the woman; that is, to live with your wives in a kind, considerate, wise and understanding way. However, Thomas Schreiner prefers to locate this “knowledge” in a husband’s God-given role, and his acknowledgement of that.³ This could make good sense, especially because the adverb *ὁμοίως* refers back to 2:18 and the command to submit “in a very respectful way.” More literally, this reads “in all fear.”

However, I am unconvinced; the sense would be that husbands must live with their wives in accordance with fear or respect for God. What does that actually mean? Well, doesn’t it mean that, because they fear and respect God and his command for their ordained role as heads of the household, they treat their wives in a kind, considerate and understanding way!? We always come back round to this, and that’s why I think the traditional rendering is best.

Lange observed, “The husband should be particularly moved to a considerate, loving and careful treatment of his wife by the thought – ‘God himself has thus appointed and made the nature of woman.’”⁴ Likewise, Matthew Henry

³ “I understand the phrase ‘according to knowledge’ (*kata gnōsin*), like ‘in fear’ (literal translation) in 3:2 and ‘conscious of God’ in 2:19, to refer to the relationship of husbands to God.173 Husbands, then, should live together with wives informed by the knowledge of God’s will, of what he demands them to do,” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, in NAC, vol. 37 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003], 159–160).

⁴ John Peter Lange, et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Peter* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 53. See also Edmund Clowney; “the husband must dwell with his wife as one who knows her needs, who recognizes the delicacy of her nature and feelings. On the other hand, Peter has warned against ‘the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance’ (1:14). Knowledge of God distinguishes Christian love from pagan lust. That saving knowledge enables the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it,” (Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988; Kindle ed.], KL 1928-1932).

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wrote that husbands should act, “not according to lust, as brutes; nor according to passion, as devils; but according to knowledge, as wise and sober men, who know the word of God and their own duty.”⁵

ὥς	ἀσθενεστέρῳ	σκεύει
adv	dsn	dsn
as, like	weaker	person, vessel
reason	reference	reference
because [she is] a more delicate person		
because [she's] a more delicate person		

ὥς. This conjunction is always rather tricky to place. Here, there are three options:

- *Adverbial of manner.* It could be comparing the “according to wisdom” to the “weaker person,” in an adverbial sense. That is, it could be explaining how this should be done. This makes little sense – we treat our wives according to wisdom by considering them to be weaker people!? Not a good choice.
- *Comparative (apposition).* It could be used to express the relationship between clauses. Here, it would have an appositional flavor⁶ and be rendered something like this, “according to wisdom; that is, like a weaker person ...”
- *Reason.* When used in conjunction with a participle, the conjunction could express reason.⁷ Here, it would be rendered, “according to wisdom, because [she is] a weaker person.”

The last two options are perfectly legitimate, and it’s very difficult to make a decision. On balance, I think the option #3 is the best one because, if you’re pressed to explain #2 to a congregation, you’ll quickly end up using the word “because.” Doesn’t that mean option #3 is the best!? Try it yourself; try and explain the comparative use of the conjunction *without* basically telling them, “husbands should do this **because** the woman is the more fragile person.” I don’t think you

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2428.

⁶ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1945), 138.

⁷ For this usage, see BDAG, s.v. “8075 ὥς,” 3.a.β.

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can do it, which is why we should probably just go with option #3, and save ourselves some time.

ἀσθενεστέρω. The word usage in the New Testament indicates it could either mean (1) a sickness in body (i.e. illness; e.g. Mt 25:43), (2) an inherent inability and impossibility to accomplish something (e.g. Mk 14:38; Rom 5:6; 1 Cor 12:22; Gal 4:9; Heb 7:18); (3) some sort of physical incapacitation (e.g. Acts 4:9); or (4) moral and theological immaturity (e.g. 1 Cor 8:7; throughout 1 Cor 8-10; 1 Thess 5:14).⁸ Which option makes the best sense?

- *Sickness in body.* Husbands should live with their wives according to wisdom, like sick women? Really? No.
- *Impossibility to do something.* This is well-nigh impossible to bring out in coherent English! Maybe it could go something like this; “Husbands should live with their wives according to wisdom, like as with a person who can’t do anything.” Yikes. No way ...
- *Incapacitation.* This doesn’t have to be a strictly *physical* incapacitation; it could have a figurative sense, too. So, the idea would be that women are physically weaker (e.g. NEB; Phillips) or (in a figurative sense) crippled as compared to men. The idea is physical or figurative incapacitation, when compared to men. As you can imagine, the figurative sense could go in many different directions; but the basic idea of the figurative crippling (in this context) is as compared to men. J.N.D. Kelly suggests women are spiritually weaker,⁹ but this certainly doesn’t follow. The most faithful and reverent Christians in many conservative churches in America are women!
- *Moral and theological immaturity.* The sense here would be that the women are less theologically astute than men and, thus, are more susceptible to fall back into pagan idolatry. I don’t see an explicitly doctrinal or theological context to substantiate this usage, here.

On balance, I believe option #3 is the best. The physical incapacitation makes little contextual sense to me. Does the Bible ever place much stock in

⁸ See especially David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, in BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 382.

⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1969), 133.

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women's lack of physical strength? Who cares? Is this ever an emphasis worth making, anywhere in the Bible? I'm not sure what Peter's point would be, then. Schreiner disagrees, and his analysis is worth thinking about:

- "In what sense are women "weaker"? Nothing else in the New Testament suggests that women are intellectually inferior, nor is it clear that women are weaker emotionally, for in many ways the vulnerability of women in sharing their emotions and feelings demonstrates that they are more courageous and stronger than men emotionally. Nor did Peter suggest that women are weaker morally or spiritually than men. Such a view would suggest that men are actually better Christians than women, which is not taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, nor is it evident in history. The most obvious meaning, therefore, is that women are weaker than men in terms of sheer strength."¹⁰

The main problem with this interpretation is that it makes no real sense for Peter to warn husbands to treat their wives with consideration, because they're physically weaker. It's a meaningless command. It's mundane and strange. It has no logical connection to this passage about household codes.

It seems best to understand this to be a *figurative incapacitation*, in the sense that women are less hardy and resilient than men in an emotional sense. This is "weakness" in the sense of *fragile* or *delicate*; the way a piece of china is more delicate than a block of wood. To be sure, china is not less valuable than wood – it's just *different*, used for *different* things, serving a *different* purpose. Therefore, we don't have to see this as a statement about a woman's intrinsic worth or value. Instead, this is a statement about the difference between men and women's intrinsic nature and makeup. Generally speaking, men are "tough" and women are "emotional." None is better than the other, and there are clear exceptions (e.g. Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, Condoleezza Rice, etc.); but the point is how the man and the woman complement and augment one another. One's strength is the other's weakness, and *vice versa*.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, in NAC, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 160. See also Scot McKnight, who wrote, "Inasmuch as the preponderance of evidence in the ancient world uses identical or similar language when describing a woman's physical condition, it is almost certain that Peter has in mind a wife's physical capacities," (*1 Peter*, in NIVAC [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 186).

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Husbands and wives are designed to *complement* one another; this statement by Peter doesn't imply a lower status of worth or value.¹¹ This usage also makes the best sense of γυνῶσιν, because it actually provides content for the word. How can husbands dwell with wisdom or understanding with women, because they're physically weaker? Unless we assume Peter is telling husbands to not beat their wives, this makes little sense. But, if we see Peter advising Christian husbands on how to live with and deal with their wives in a considerate, kind, wise and understanding way, then it makes perfect sense – especially if the wives are still pagans.

Wayne Gruden suggests Peter *may* be referring to a physical weakness, and to a wife's subordinate role in authority within the marriage. If this be the case, the sense would be something like, "because she is **the subordinate person.**" This is quite possible. But, he also suggests Peter refers to *emotional sensitivity*.¹² This is also possible.

$\tau\tilde{\omega}$	$\gamma\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omega$	$\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\nu\acute{\epsilon}\mu\omicron\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$	$\tau\iota\mu\acute{\eta}\nu$
dsn	dsn	παρηρημ	asf
the	wife, woman	rendering, showing, paying	honor
<i>indirect.obj.participle</i>		<i>adverbial of manner - συνοικούντες; iterative</i>	<i>obj.part.</i>
always showing the wife honor			
always showing her honor			

¹¹ Lange's comments are excellent: "This is not in the writer's opinion a question of superiority or inferiority, but one of diversity. There are mental qualities in which woman excels man and others in which he excels her. They seem to be well balanced under equal advantages afforded to each. His experience in schools constrains him to admit that up to the age of sixteen, girls are decidedly brighter and better students than boys. If they do not progress after that period in an equal ratio, the fault belongs to vicious social habits and to the superficial and fanciful ideas as to the maximum attainments of females, but not to the natural endowment of their mind. It came forth from the Creator's hand perfect after its kind, everyway adapted to man's mind and the two equally and healthily developed, working together in one direction, supply each other's defects and strengthen each other's powers. United, this natural diversity blends in harmony," (1 Peter, 53-54).

¹² "Yet there may also be a third sense of 'weakness' which would fit the context (because it is something husbands should not take advantage of), namely, a greater emotional sensitivity. While this is something which is also a great strength, it none the less means that wives are often more likely to be hurt deeply by conflict within a marriage, or by inconsiderate behaviour on the part of the husband. Knowing this, Christian husbands should not be 'harsh' (Col. 3:19) or fill their marriage relationship with criticism and conflict, but should rather be positive and affirming, 'living together in an understanding way', and 'bestowing honour on the feminine one, as the weaker sex,'" (Wayne A. Grudem, 1 Peter, in TNTC, vol. 17, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988], 152).

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τῷ γυναικείῳ. Why is this singular? And, why was there no object for the first participle (above); the translator has to supply one (“your wives”)? Lenski suggests Peter did this to guard against the idea that he was endorsing polygamy.¹³

ἀπονέμοντες τιμὴν. “[G]iving due respect to her, and maintaining her authority, protecting her person, supporting her credit, delighting in her conversation, affording her a handsome maintenance, and placing a due trust and confidence in her.”¹⁴ In effect, loving her as Christ loved the church

ὥς	καὶ	συγκληρονόμοις	χάριτος	ζωῆς
adv	conj	dpm	gsf	gsf
because	also	co-heirs, joint heirs	grace	of life
reason ¹⁵	ascensive	substantive - Οἱ ἄνδρες	objective	attributive
because they are also joint heirs of living grace				
because they also are joint-heirs of living grace				

συγκληρονόμοις. The wives are believers.

εἰς	τὸ	μὴ	ἐγκόπτεσθαι	τὰς	προσευχὰς	ὑμῶν
prep		neg	p,a,inf	apf	apf	2 nd ,pl,g
			to hinder	the	prayers	
standard result clause				obj.inf.		
As a result, your prayers will not be hindered.						
When you do this, your prayers won't be hindered.						

εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐγκόπτεσθαι. This could express *purpose*, but then the imperative would be rather mercenary. Husbands should do this so their prayers aren't hindered? Not because they love their wives? This is subtle, but I believe *result* is the best sense.

¹³ Lenski (*St. Peter*, 138).

¹⁴ Henry (*Commentary*, 2428).

¹⁵ For this usage, see BDAG, s.v. “8075 ὥς,” 3.a.β.