



SUBMISSION ON THE JOB—

Reconciling an Ancient Comman in a Modern World: Part 2 (I Peter 2:18-25)

Pastor Al Detter

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Please open your Bibles to I Peter 2. We'll be looking at verses 18-25 today. READ. When I do teaching on submission, I recognize three realities. First, if we're going to live the Christian life, it's going to involve submitting to some people in our lives. All of us need to come under authority as Christians. Submission must be part of our living experience.

Here's the second reality—we're not naturally wired for submission. There's something in us that doesn't want to submit. Let me say it stronger. There's something in us that hates to submit. We don't want anyone telling us what to do. In fact, we really don't enjoy this kind of teaching.

And the third reality is—our culture doesn't reinforce submission. It sends strong messages that we're free to live the way we want to. We don't have to respect authority and we don't need to do what those in authority tell us to do. This philosophy starts with young children these days.

But God has ordered the world around a system of authority and submission. My kids picked this up early in life. One night we were sitting around the dinner table when one of the kids said, "Rachel is the boss of Ben and Jared is the boss of Rachel and Jason is the boss of Jared and Mom is the boss of Jason and Dad is the boss of Mom and God is the boss of Dad." I was kind of amazed.

Submission is a strong teaching in the Bible. It's part of what following Jesus is about. Submission is yielding or surrendering to the discretion or decisions of a God-ordained higher power. It's in places like I Peter that we learn what God's will is for us in these matters.

Peter deals with three areas of submission for Christians in his little letter. We looked at the first area three weeks ago—submission to mandatory institutions like the government. Christians are to submit to the laws of the land except when they conflict with the laws of God.

A news story caught my attention this week because I often feel like the guy in the story. He got tired of waiting at long red lights so he bought this \$100 device that would trip the light to green as he approached the intersection. That kind of device would be my dream. But it's illegal and he got caught. As Christians, we're to submit to the laws even though we'd love to use devices like that.

Next week, we'll look at the third area of submission. It's in marriage. I make two requests about that one. First, don't stay away next week. That's a tough subject in today's world. Second, please give me an honest hearing. I'll do my best to teach you the truth of God's Word.

Today, we're looking at the second area of submission in I Peter—to the boss at work. Most of us will go to work at some point in our lives. For many of us, that will be the #1 time consuming chunk of our adult lives. Think about it. If you get a full-time job at age 21 and work to age 65 with 3 weeks of vacation per year, that will translate to 86,240 hours or 10 years of your life working 24 hours per day. So this matter of submission to the boss affects a major part of our lives. There's probably no area of our lives so involved in having to submit to someone than our jobs.

Back in the first century, jobs were structured differently than they are today. If you weren't fortunate enough to be a wealthy landowner, you were owned by them as either a slave or a household servant. How you fared

depended on the owner and your work could consist from hard slave labor to a servant all the way to managing a household. You didn't get paid. You got what you needed to live—room, board, clothes, and no benefits.

Even though we don't have "masters" today, this passage is equivalent to how we're to relate to our bosses. They have authority over us in the workplace and we need to recognize that God-ordained hierarchy.

Today we're going to learn how to relate to our bosses when things aren't going well. I don't know whether you have a good boss or a bad boss. But if you have a bad boss, this teaching is especially for you. It's hard to be in a job with an unreasonable boss. I pray that God will give you grace to receive the message. I wish I could tell you to do what country singer Johnny Paycheck said back in the 70's—go to your boss and say, "Take this job and shove it." But that's not what the Bible teaches.

So here are three key principles to practice with tough bosses.

I. Submit to your boss with all respect (vs. 18).

Here's the situation. Since servants were owned by their masters, they couldn't quit their jobs. These people were stuck in their job situation for life without recourse. Look what Peter says to them, "Submit to your master. Do what they tell you to do. Follow their orders."

Peter puts masters and bosses into two categories in this verse, the good and gentle ones and the unreasonable ones. I'm the first type. Just ask my staff. It's easy to work for good and gentle bosses. But not everyone has a boss like me. The word here for the bad boss in verse 18, translated "unreasonable" in my text, is literally "crooked". It's talking about a person who cares only for himself and is dishonest, harsh, rude, insensitive, and unresponsive to difficulties. Here's the wrinkle. Peter says that we're to submit to them with all respect as well. That's not exactly what I want to hear. I would have expected Peter to say, "If you have a good boss, submit and respect. But if you have a bad boss, refuse to obey. Join any movement you can that speaks against the ills of servitude and slavery. And if it gets bad enough, run away."

There was widespread unrest by slaves at the time Peter was writing. He could have fanned the flames of rebellion and freedom. But Peter doesn't give a message of emancipation against injustices. He doesn't say, "Find a way not to be a slave." He says, "Find a way to be a better slave. Respectfully submit even to a master or boss who's unreasonable."

But what's our natural response to mean bosses? To resist doing what they say. To become angry. To find a way to retaliate. To resent them. To speak ill of them to others. We're not inclined to be kind to them, to do what they ask gladly and without murmuring, to show respect for them in the eyes of others.

It's so easy to get drawn into disrespectful behavior concerning the boss. You're at lunch with fellow employees and the boss's name comes up. Everybody lays their gripes on the table in very unflattering terms. You're a Christian. What do you do? I'm not saying this is an easy teaching to apply. It's very difficult to obey and afford respect to an unreasonable boss. But this is what God asks us to do.

That takes us to our second principle—why we're to obey and respect our bosses, mean ones included. It has to do with our relationship with God, of all things.

II. Realize that you find favor with God when you suffer for doing what's right (vss. 19-20).

In my opinion, we come to some of the hardest portions of the Bible in these verses. They're the portions that call us to suffering. Some people find the miraculous portions of the Bible hard to swallow, like creation and special divine interventions and prophecy. I don't have a problem with Scriptures like that. I believe in a God of all power and miracles. It's in sections like this that I really struggle. I want you to know that I don't doubt for a moment that these verses are from God and meant for our good. They're just very difficult.

In verses 19-20, we're told that if we suffer unjustly under unreasonable bosses, we find favor with God. Suffering to find favor with God doesn't really excite me. I'd rather find favor with God in more conventional ways like doing good to my neighbor, tithing, serving in the church, being a good husband. But to take hardship from the boss?

We have to ask ourselves, "How in the world could we find favor with God by suffering this way?" I'm going to venture my best understanding of this. Suffering more than anything else in our lives shows our true character. It reveals our true nature. When God sees godly responses in us during suffering, we find favor with Him. When we show ungodly responses, it reveals how much of self is still alive in us.

Peter tells us that God is looking for two character qualities in us when we suffer. **The first is a conscience towards God (vs. 19).** Our conscience is our inner awareness or judgment about right and wrong. It's the law of God written on our hearts. When we're being meanly treated by our boss, God is hoping that we'll want to please Him by doing what's right even when the boss is doing what's wrong. God wants to see a commitment in us to do what's right before Him under any circumstances. The greatest test of our willingness to do right before God comes under adverse circumstances. It did in the Bible and it does today.

One of the problems we have today is that we've allowed our consciences towards God to become dull. We've found all kinds of ways to excuse ungodly responses when suffering unjustly. We justify bad attitudes and disrespectful words and behavior and even get people to side with us. In short, we've convinced ourselves that we have a right to react in ways the Scriptures condemn.

Unjust suffering reveals what's going on in our conscience. Will we decide to do what's right when others are doing wrong? If yes, we find favor with God.

There's a second character quality God is looking for that only comes out during unjust suffering. **It's patient endurance (vs. 20).** Will we take ill treatment in a godly manner over a period of time or will we become testy and nasty and try to subvert the process?

At this point, Peter draws a contrast. He asks in verse 20, "What credit is there if we sin and get harshly treated for it yet endure our punishment with patience?" Answer? No favor. Maybe the boss overreacted, but we had it coming. What God notices is when we do what's right and get poorly treated and we patiently endure it. That's what catches God's attention.

Again, there's nothing like how we bear injustice to show what we're made of. And I must confess, I still have a long way to go. I still get riled up when I feel like an injustice is committed against me.

When I was in youth ministry, I had an unfortunate moment at a Christian camp. I took a group of guys to Hume Lake in California. I was one of their counselors. The Athletic Director at the camp created this intensive game of competition that lasted several days. We had to do some tough things that were tame but kind of equivalent to "Survivor". We went over all the rules and the competition began.

When it came to recreation, the Athletic Director was my boss for the week. On day two, my team was ahead when all of the sudden, he took some points away from our team. He said we weren't following the rules. What he was talking about and what I understood the rules to be were two different things.

My sense of fairness and injustice was aroused and I began to argue with him. I mean, it got nasty. I felt he was being unreasonable and I took him to task in front of all the campers. Not only did I not win the argument, I modeled an unbiblical response to my campers, and I didn't find favor with God. My job was to submit with all respect and I failed.

By now, you might be wondering if God is a sadist. Does He enjoy seeing what we'll do when we have bosses that continually pour on the pressure? Well, let me give you some relief.

First, nothing here says we can't talk to our boss. If you feel like you're not being treated properly, have a conversation with your boss. But make sure you keep the conversation respectful. You can be honest but don't be disrespectful.

Second, nothing here says you have to stay in the job you're in if it continues to be bad. In the first century, they were pretty much stuck for life with bad masters. Their only hope was that through their godly behavior the master would be won to Christ and change. Responding well to harsh treatment is the most powerful witness we can have.

But today, we can change jobs. We don't have to stay in a terrible situation. In fact, I Corinthians 7:21 says, "If you were called a slave and you are able to become free, rather do that." Our only responsibility is to do what's right while we're in the job.

If you have a mean boss and you can't change jobs or you have to stay on awhile longer, then you're in the company of the people Peter was writing to. You're going to have to find a way to submit and respect over the long haul.

So Peter adds his third principle to practice:

III. When suffering on the job, follow the example of Christ (vss. 21-25).

Peter adds one more important dimension to unjust suffering under an unreasonable boss. Verse 21 says, "Do what Jesus did when suffering unjustly. Follow His example." Verse 22 says that Jesus never did anything wrong. We were the ones who did what was wrong. Yet Jesus suffered unjustly because of our sins (vs. 21). Since Jesus suffered unjustly for us, He asks us to also bear up under sorrows when we suffer unjustly (vs. 19) and follow His example.

In fact, Peter says in verse 21 that we've been called for the purpose of suffering unjustly. Because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ suffered unjustly, we're called to follow in His steps.

So what Jesus did when He suffered has become our example. The word "example" in verse 21 means a "tracing or a writing over". We're to recreate the design Jesus left us as though we had a sheet of tracing paper over a drawing.

So what did Jesus do? Look at verses 22-23. He retaliated. He sought revenge. He protected Himself. He rallied others against the perpetrators. That's not in my Bible. He was sinless. He never lied. And He didn't allow unjust suffering to blemish that record. When reviled, He didn't revile in return. When they hurt Him badly, He uttered no threats. He refused to let people who did wrong cause Him to do wrong.

Rather, He turned towards God. Verse 23 says that He entrusted Himself to the Father because He believed the Father would ultimately bring about proper justice towards those who were doing wrong. He refused to do the Father's work. He didn't take matters into His own hands.

Church, that's what Peter is asking us to do when bosses or anyone causes us to suffer when we're doing what's right. He tells us not to sin in response to others' sins but to trust God to care for the matter even though we might not see immediate results.

As I said earlier, this is really hard teaching because it flies in the face of everything we feel naturally. So I want to make three important observations about following in Christ's steps when suffering unjustly.

1. Except for the cross of Jesus Christ, the behavior prescribed in these verses would be ludicrous. It would be foolish. It would be detrimental. The cross became the ultimate demonstration that we don't have to sin when being wronged. Christ's suffering became a pattern for Christians. He had every right and reason not to endure suffering. He had the power to stop all His suffering. But He refused to remove Himself from the process because He knew the good that would come from suffering unjustly. Jesus calls us to take the high road when being wronged just like He did when He faced the cross. It's a call for us to imitate Christ in His suffering. There is no other rationale for this.

Here's the second observation:

2. It's through suffering unjustly that we best understand our salvation. We're not going to understand the depths of our salvation by going to church, singing songs, hearing sermons, and taking communion. We're never going to understand our salvation with all the blessings God showers on us. We'll never understand the depths of our salvation in small groups and friendships we have with fellow Christians. We'll never even understand the depth of our salvation by doing good works and sharing the good news of Christ with others even though everything I've just said are great things to do.

The one thing that really brings us to the realization of what it cost Christ to save us is to get as close to doing what He did for us as possible—suffering unjustly. Verse 24 says that Jesus bore our sins on His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. That was unjust suffering for us! The perfect Son of God took upon Himself our sins so we could be set free from them. By His unjust wounds or literally “lashings”, we were healed. In other words, by His unjust suffering, Jesus made it possible for us to be right with God.

Friends, when we suffer for things we didn't do, that's when we can most identify with what Jesus did for us. Without suffering unjustly, we would have no idea what Jesus went through for us. It's by suffering unjustly that we get the ability to understand what He did for us.

So next time you suffer for doing what's right, realize what's happening. You're experiencing something of what Christ went through because of our sin. The good thing in all of this is—we'll never, never, never have to suffer unjustly to the degree Jesus did. All we'll ever get is a small taste of what He went through. But each of us needs that taste!

One more observation:

3. Following Christ's example when suffering unjustly is possible only in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's when we're controlled by the Spirit of God that we can follow in the steps of Jesus and not sin when suffering, trusting God to do what we can't see. If we really want to know how filled we are with the Spirit of God, all we have to do is watch our behavior when we think we're suffering unjustly. We'll get a status report real quick! It's only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we'll ever learn to suffer with patience, grace, calmness, kindness, and confidence in God.

Conclusion

Wouldn't it be nice if we were all our own bosses? We could be nice or mean to ourselves. But sorry, God didn't design things that way. Most of us are going to work for a living and most of us will work for a boss.

It's great if you work for a nice boss. I wish that for you. And if you're a boss, be a good and gentle boss? Don't be a pain to those who work for you.

But the likelihood is high that some day you'll work for a harsh and mean boss. That's where you'll learn what kind of Christian you are real fast. And so will your boss. My plea to you is to be submissive and respectful to your boss.

If your boss mistreats you when you do what's right, realize that you'll find favor with God for suffering unjustly. But more than that, realize that by experiencing unjust suffering and responding well, you'll never get a clearer understanding of what Christ did when He suffered for you.

And should the time come when you feel you can't take it anymore, don't let your job cause you to live a defeated life. Get another job. God is not asking us to seek suffering or suffer needlessly if we can do something about it.

I sincerely believe that the weakest part of our faith in the American church is a biblical theology of suffering. I hope we've come to understand unjust suffering a little more today and the great spiritual ramifications that are involved. And don't forget what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:17, “If we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him.” It's by becoming partakers in His suffering that we'll share His triumphant life.

Suffering unjustly will not destroy us. It will save us. If the sufferings of Jesus were meant to show us anything, it was that.

