

SUBMISSION IN THE WORKPLACE

1 Peter 2:18-20

INTRODUCTION

- Have you ever tried to climb an escalator that was going down?
- It takes a lot of effort. If you don't keep moving, and moving quickly, you'll be taken back down.
- Then add to that a whole crowd of people descending towards you on the escalator, and having to fight your way past them to get to the top.
- That is not unlike the Christian life in this world.
- The world and its people are rapidly descending downwards, away from God, away from heaven, down into sin, and down into hell.
- But the believer is going the opposite direction. And while the way down can be taken casually with no effort, the road upwards requires diligence.
- When Christ taught his disciples and the people generally, much of his teaching consisted of setting forth the ways of the world they were accustomed to, before declaring the true way (Matthew 5:21-45; 20:25-28).
- When it comes to our human relationships, God's ways are not the man's ways – we must lay aside all human philosophy and seek out the wisdom of God from the Scriptures to guide us in how we are to relate to our fellow man.
- As noted previously, a major theme in this practical section of 1 Peter is *submission*.
 - ✓ The submission of citizens to government (2:13-17)

- ✓ The submission of servants to masters (2:18-20)
- ✓ The submission of wives to husbands (3:1-6)
- ✓ The submission of younger to elders (5:5)
- In this sermon we learn what God requires of Christian servants/employees, their subjection to their masters, the spirit they must possess in doing so, and the praise of God upon such faithful servants

I. THE OBLIGATION TO THE MASTER

A. The reality of hierarchy

1. Hierarchy is an important and vital part of all societies and is necessary for their proper function
2. Within the Godhead there is a form of hierarchy
 - a. All three Persons of the Godhead are the same in essence, equal in power and glory
 - b. Yet there is an economic (relational) subordination within the Trinity
 - c. The Father begets the Son; the Son is sent by the Father; the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son
3. God created man in his image, with all life having equal worth, yet to live and function within hierarchical structures (cf. Genesis 2:18)
 - a. In government there are rulers and the ruled
 - b. In the military there are generals and privates
 - c. In the workplace there are employers and employees
 - d. In education there are teachers and students
 - e. In the family there are parents and children

4. As Christians, our duty is to understand the place God has stationed us in life, and the conduct that is appropriate to the hierarchical structures we are in, both to those above us, and those under us
5. The Scriptures give us all the guidance necessary in these areas

B. Servants must be subject unto their masters

1. The word for “servants” is not *doulos* (bondslave), but *oiketes*, derived from *oikos* (house), indicating a domestic servant, and is applied to any position of servitude, whether a slave or employee
2. In the Roman Empire, there were about 60 million slaves, which did the majority of the work, from menial tasks to professions such as doctors
3. Roman law did not recognise these slaves as people, but as merely possessions
4. The Gospel however set forth these slaves as men and women made in God’s image, and as objects of his love and redeeming grace
5. In Christ, the distinctions of this world are removed – “there is neither bond nor free” (Galatians 3:26-28)
6. There was great appeal in the Gospel for such servants, many of them coming to faith in Christ, and many of them recipients of this epistle of Peter’s
7. Therefore it was important for Peter to give instruction to such servants who had come to Christ
8. Their Christianity did not absolve them from their obedience to their masters, but rather required them to be the *more* obedient to them

9. For us today, this would apply to the employer/employee relationship, or any other similar position of subordination
- C. This is an application of the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12)
1. The broader application goes beyond honouring father and mother to all those superiors above us
 2. There is a promised blessing upon those who keep this commandment and honour their superiors
- D. Some masters are good and gentle, some are froward
1. In the case where there is a good master, even a Christian master, the servant must be careful not to take advantage of his gentleness by seeking special privileges or slacking off
 2. In the case of a harsh master, the servant must not develop a spirit of resentment nor rebel against him
 3. “Froward” (*skolios*) means crooked, bent, warped, perverse, untoward
 4. The froward person deviates from the straight path of righteousness to the crooked way of unrighteousness, without respect of God or of his fellow man
 5. As is the case today, there are those who use their position of power to abuse and mistreat those under them, especially when their victims have few legal rights
 6. Yet even when the master is froward, the Christian servant is to submit to him

II. THE DISPOSITION OF THE SERVANT

- A. With all fear

1. This “fear” (*phobo*) is a spirit of respect and reverence towards one’s master and one’s employment
2. It is not so much a dread of punishment, but a disposition of healthy fear that motivates the servant to labour diligently and faithfully those God has placed over us
3. As a *person*, the master may not be worthy of respect, but in their *position* they are worthy
4. This is contrary to the ideas of communism and many trade unions that foment discontent and resentment among servants against their masters
5. David’s spirit of submission to King Saul, refusing to take vengeance on him, even when Saul sought his life, exemplifies the godly fear that God calls us to (1 Samuel 24)
6. God is the ultimate object of fear, knowing that God is observing our conduct and will judge and reward us according to our faithfulness on the great day

B. Conscience toward God

1. “Conscience” (*suneidesis*) literally means “with knowledge”, and here describes the Christian’s knowledge and awareness that God is his Master, which leads to a conscious commitment to do what is right in his sight
2. “*Thus one suffers patiently, not from a conscientious sense of duty, but from an inner consciousness of his relation to God as a son, and to Christ as a joint-heir, which involves his suffering with him no less than his being glorified with him*” (Marvin Vincent)
3. The Latin phrase *Coram Deo* means “in the presence of God”, and has been used by Christians throughout history as a reminder that our whole lives, our entire beings, are to

be lived in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and to the glory of God

C. Suffering patiently

1. There is no glory in suffering patiently for our *faults*
2. It is when we suffer patiently for *doing well* there is glory in the sight of God
3. This “patience” (*hupomeno*) is to remain under a particular trial not with bitter resignation, but with expectant hope, humbly acquiescing to God’s will
4. Patience is a Christian virtue, worked in us by the grace of God by means of tribulation (Romans 5:3)
5. As much as we would prefer to live out our days in this world without having to deal with froward, mean, nasty, irritating people, we ought rather to be thankful to God for bringing them into our lives in order for us to demonstrate God’s grace in our behaviour towards them
 - a. If no one ever spoke roughly to you, you would never have opportunity to answer them graciously (Proverbs 15:1)
 - b. If no one ever smote your cheek, you would never have the opportunity to turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:39)
 - c. If no one ever took away your coat, you would never have opportunity to let him have your cloak also (Matthew 5:40)
 - d. If no one ever compelled you to go a mile, you would never have opportunity to go with him twain (Matthew 5:41)

7. In that sense, we *need* these selfish, thoughtless people, or else much of our Christianity is mere profession, without practice
8. It is the tribulation that proves the difference between the stony ground and the good ground (Matthew 13:20-21)

III. THE COMMENDATION OF THE LORD

- A. The Christian's service/employment is not unto men, but unto God (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25)
- B. God's grace is displayed in the humble Christian servant
 1. The word "acceptable" in v.20 and "thankworthy" in v.19 are both from the Greek word *charis*, which is usually translated as "grace"
 2. The Christian who patiently suffers unjustly pleases God and finds favour in his sight
 3. It is only by God's grace imparted to us that we can ever hope to please God in this way
- C. Our humble service to man is an act of worship to God
 1. The instruction to servants, particularly those labouring under disagreeable masters, is not to rebel against them or to flee from them, but rather to sanctify their servitude
 2. Godliness/piety/religion ennobles even the meanest of circumstances, the most drudgerous employment
 3. Why? Because the Christian servant is not merely serving their master, but serving Jesus Christ
 4. Hence their employment becomes an offering, a sweet-smelling savour, an act of worship, not to man, but unto God

CONCLUSION

1. We can never hope to fulfil this command to submit to sinful human authority unless are first submitted to God's authority
2. Those who regard themselves as dead, as nothing, as worms, will not be even slightly offended when other people treat them as dead, as nothing, and as worms
3. *"Jesus calls us to His rest, and meekness is His method. The meek man cares not at all who is greater than he, for he has long ago decided that the esteem of the world is not worth the effort. He develops toward himself a kindly sense of humour and learns to say, "Oh, so you have been overlooked? They have placed someone else before you? They have whispered that you are pretty small stuff after all? And now you feel hurt because the world is saying about you the very things you have been saying about yourself? Only yesterday you were telling God that you were nothing, a mere worm of the dust. Where is your consistency? Come on, humble yourself, and cease to care what men think." (A W Tozer)*
4. Everything in our flesh moves us to resent and rebel against authority, especially those we perceive to be harsh and unjust
5. Only by crucifying the flesh, by being filled with the Spirit, and letting the humble, sacrificial mind of Christ be in us may we truly submit to those over us, both outwardly and inwardly
6. Christian employees should be careful to never join their workmates in maligning their employer behind their back
7. The obedient and faithful Christian employee "adorn(s) the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things" (Titus 2:9-10)
8. Those who dishonour their masters blaspheme the name of God and his doctrine (1 Timothy 6:1-2)
9. Am I *adorning* or am I *blaspheming* the doctrine and name of God by my conduct?