**1 Peter: Submission to Employers**

1 Peter 2:18-20

**Context**

**1 Peter 2:18-20**—*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.****19****For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.****20****For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.*

We live in a time and culture where everyone demands their rights—ethnic rights, workplace rights, immigration rights, sexual rights, reproductive rights. Most of their rights are motivated by a selfish issue and fundamentally that everyone is equal and everyone deserves the same rights. So if someone feels victimized or oppressed, they scream until they are heard and/or the other person capitulates.

Please note that when we refer to “rights”, it must be understood in the right biblical framework. Not unlike God’s design for government, God has likewise created a structure for the workplace. As beliers, our chief concern is to glorify God and seek to obey and submit to His will as perfect and right

In essence, that puts the focus and priority, not on this world or my current situation, but on an eternal perspective and divine objective.

There are plenty of OT characters that help illustrate this point, but let’s consider Dave (**1 Samuel 6-11; 1 Samuel 24:2-12**).

God would want us to live at peace with all people.

**Romans 12:17-19***—Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.****18****If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.****19****Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.*

**Luke 6:32-36***—If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.****33****If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.****34****If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount.****35****But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.****36****Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

**1 Corinthians 7:20-21, 24***—Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.* ***21****Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that…* ***24****Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.*

**Christian submission to God-ordained authority**

1. **The command: be submissive**

**1 Peter 2:18**—*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.*

1. *Servants* (oiketai)—“house”; a fellow resident, i.e. menial domestic:—(household) servant[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Acts 10:7**—*When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were his personal attendants*

1. Be submissive (hypotasso)—to arrange under, to subordinate; to subject, put in subjection[[2]](#footnote-3)
2. Masters (despotai)—a master, lord; absolute ruler[[3]](#footnote-4)

**1 Timothy 6:1-2***—All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.****2****Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.*

**Titus 2:9***—Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative*

1. *With all respect*—the submission is with bitterness, resentment but with gracious honor
   * + 1. To do so is a way of showing respect to God Himself
       2. It also shows a fear of God

**1:17***—If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth*

**2:17***—Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.*

* + - 1. The servant-master relationship was intended to be one of care, support, and productivity
         1. From the curse, there would be toil of the earth
         2. It was an institution from the fall onward (**Gen 3:17-19**)

God has designed a complex of abilities and opportunities, relations and experiences, to allow humans to draw the rich resources out of this plant.[[4]](#footnote-5)

1. Submission in the face of unreasonable requests
   * + 1. To do so is not without much restraint and prayer
       2. It is far easier to submit when one is good and gentle
          1. *Good*—of good constitution or nature; good, pleasant, agreeable, joyful, happy[[5]](#footnote-6)
          2. *Gentle*—equitable, fair, mild, gentle[[6]](#footnote-7)
       3. Unreasonable (skolios)—crooked, curved; metaphor: perverse, wicked, unfair, surly, froward
       4. To do so is not without much restraint and prayer

**Ephesians 6:5-9**—*Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;****6****not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.****7****With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,****8****knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.* ***9****And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.*

* + - 1. The application is clear: we are to serve our employer as if we are service Christ directly

1. **The reason: it finds favor with God**

**1 Peter 2:19-21a**—For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. **20**For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. **21**For you have been called for this purpose…

1. Finding *favor with God*—“this is a grace”
2. God is pleased when we do the will of those whom God has placed as superiors above us

**1 Samael 15:22**—*Samuel said, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*

***James 1:25****—But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

* 1. The chief end of man is nothing less than to do His will, please God, and delight in Him
  2. Our responsiveness will send a message to unbelievers
     + - 1. Either one that Christ makes a difference
         2. Believers are no different than the rest of the world

**Matthew 5:15-16***—…nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.****16****Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

**Mark 4:21***—And He was saying to them, “A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?*

**Philippians 2:14-15***—Do all things without grumbling or disputing;****15****so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world*

* 1. Although the context of what Peter addresses in Master/slave, today our setting is more akin to employer/employee
     1. Regardless, the objective is to please God
     2. James would identify it as “consider it all joy”

**James 1:2-4***—Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,****3****knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.****4****And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

* + 1. The greater blessing is actually for the one who suffers[[7]](#footnote-8)

1. Conscience toward God
   1. *Bears up under*—to endure, bear by being under, to bear patiently[[8]](#footnote-9)
   2. *Sorrows*—sorrow, pain, grief, annoyance, affliction[[9]](#footnote-10); carries the idea of either mental or physical anguish
   3. *When suffering unjustly*—a strong resolve that despite the circumstance and injustice that is occurring, knowing there is a sovereign God who is in full control

**Psalm 33:11***—The counsel of the Lord stands forever,  
The plans of His heart from generation to generation.*

**Psalm 103:19***—The Lord has established His throne in the heavens And His sovereignty rules over all.*

**Acts 17:28***—for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’*

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18***—For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,****18****while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

* 1. It is also having a confident assurance that God will bless those who honor Him

1. Context: those to who Peter is writing were scattered aliens
   1. Additionally, many were likely slaves

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29**—*For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;****27****but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,****28****and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,****29****so that no man may boast before God.*

As his (Peter’s) readers were under pagan rulers, so Christian slaves were under pagan master. There were many slaves throughout the empire, and when Christianity was preached to them, many slaves were converted to it.[[10]](#footnote-11)

* 1. “God did not institute slavery, men did that, but Christian slaves bow submissively to this human bondage.”[[11]](#footnote-12)
  2. They would likely have endured much painful and unjust beatings
  3. Roman law would have given great power to owners of slaves.
     1. They would have likely gone without proper nutrition, perhaps starved
     2. Worked excessively long hours with little to no breaks
     3. Had unreasonable masters—one’s whom no one could satisfy
  4. They were considered chattel (property associated with movable goods), i.e. animals, farm tools, and slaves
  5. They would have had no recourse, as chattel had no rights
  6. They were reminded to have a heavenly focus

**Matthew 5:10***—Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**2 Thessalonians 1:4-5***—therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.****5****This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.*

**James 5:11***—We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.*

1. Peter askes a rhetorical question and makes a rhetorical statement
   1. What credit if you do wrong and are wrongly treated?
      1. The implied answer is none
      2. There is no credit
      3. Natural consequences
      4. Moreover, a just result for your wrongdoing

**Psalm 66:18***—If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear*

**Jeremiah 5:25***—Your iniquities have turned these away, And your sins have withheld good from you.*

**Daniel 9:8***—Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You.*

**Hebrews 12:5-11***—and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;* ***6****For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.”* ***7****It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?****8****But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.****9****Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?****10****For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.****11****All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

* 1. If by doing right you suffer, this finds favor with God
     1. This isn’t simply doing right and having your supervisor acknowledge or even appreciate it
     2. This is the complete opposite: you’ve done right, and you suffer
        1. That doesn’t compute naturally in our thinking
        2. We chafe under such treatment
        3. Our natural reaction is retaliatory, leveling the charges so as to justify our actions, or “correct” the injustice
        4. In our world today, we can simply change jobs
        5. In this context, these slaves could not appeal; they had no means of doing so; they were owned property
     3. Suffering and being harshly treated for righteousness sake brings God glory
     4. Christ modeled a life pleasing to God

**Mark 14:65***—Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophesy!” And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.*

1. This is God’s purpose for all those whom He calls

**1 Peter 1:15***—but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior*

**1 Peter 5:10***—After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*

* 1. When God calls us and transforms us at regeneration, we become enemies of the world and the evil one

***John 15:18-19****—If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.****19****If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.*

***1 John 3:13****—Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.*

**2 Timothy 3:12**—*Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

* 1. Our witness and testimony on our reaction to unjust treatment will speak volumes to our love for the Savior
  2. If our perspective in this life is lived with a heavenly view, the temporal nature of this world, including wrongly being treated, will fade quickly
  3. That said, we often need the reminder and the reality check in our lives

1. **Conclusion**

God has so designed trials and difficulties in our lives as opportunities for spiritual growth and evangelism. Moreover, He leaves us on earth after He redeems us to show a needy world of the veracity of the gospel. It does have the power to save and to transform lives. When we suffer for righteousness sake, we are blessed—and the promise and blessing is not temporal, but eternal. We will never be disappointed that we obeyed Him and did what He required—by His mercy and grace.

**Source**

Most of the message and notes come from:

Richard W. DeHaan, Good News for Bad Times: 1 Peter

R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude

John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Peter

John MacArthur, Submission to Civil Authority, Pt 1, April 2, 1989, [www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org)

Jerome H Smith, The New Treasure of Scripture Knowledge

[www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

1. Strong’s 3610 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Strong’s 5293 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Strong’s 1203 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. MacArthur, 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Strong’s G18 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Strong’s G1933 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. MacArthur, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Strong’s G5297 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Strong’s G3077 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Lenski, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Ibid, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)