

# Submission in the Workplace

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1 Peter 2.18 - 25

The first recipients of Peter's letter were relatively new believers who had been displaced due to persecution and were living in the northern part of modern-day Turkey. Their lives had been dramatically changed when they were converted, and very quickly they encountered opposition because of their faith in Jesus Christ as their Redeemer. They faced the challenges of living in a God-honoring manner in a world that was hostile to their beliefs. Some were struggling with their faith; some were considering abandoning it altogether.

Since our lives consist of relationships, it is understandable that Peter gave direction on how to act in various relational settings. First, he gave attention to a category of relationships that would have been at the forefront of most of the minds of his initial readers – *How should they relate to their government?* Despite living under Nero who was a cruel and diabolical emperor, Peter made it very clear they nevertheless needed to subject themselves to him and those he delegated authority to. They were to be obedient *for the Lord's sake*. The only exceptions, which we deduct from other portions of Scripture, were when they were required to do something, or not do something, which conflicted with the teaching of Scripture.

Peter then turned to another relationship that was common to the first recipients of his letter – the relationship of servants to their masters. Many people in the Roman world were slaves; they were owned by others and had few freedoms and served under compulsion. Others, while not slaves, worked voluntarily for others. Some people were privileged to have good and fair masters, but others worked for meanspirited and cruel masters. How should they relate to them?

## Be Subject to Your Earthly Masters

The direction given in **1 Peter 2.18** parallels the direction he gave concerning governing authorities.

**1 Peter 2:18** (ESV) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

The term translated *servants*, designates a *household servant*, *domestic servant*, or *slave*, but undoubtedly was intended to encompass not just slaves who served under compulsion, but also those who willingly worked for another. While it is not an exact parallel to the employer/employee relationships of our generation, it is reasonable to conclude the same principles apply. The central point is that *servants* are to be *subject to*, or *obedient* to their masters, just as we are to be *subject* to our governing authorities. Christian *servants* are to comply with the wishes of their masters irrespective of whether they agree with their orders or not. It is especially when they disagree with their masters that the instructions in this verse come into play.

They are not to submit grudgingly, but *with all respect*. They are to view their masters with honor and recognize their authority. The image conveyed is certainly not the adversarial nature common today in many employee/employer relationships. Notice too, servants are not only to

be respectful of those masters who are *good and gentle*, but also of those who are *unjust*. Even if one's master is rough and unreasonable, the command to be obedient and respectful remains the same.

Just like obeying one's government is really a subset of obeying the Lord, so also in this case.

**1 Peter 2:19 (ESV)** For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

It is an expression of *grace* by a servant when he or she puts up with hardship and pain caused by his or her master. The reason to respond graciously is on account of, or because of the Lord. The servant is mindful or conscious of his or her overriding relationship to the Lord and that is why he rejects responding with malice or hate, but instead does so with grace. Enduring unjust treatment is radically different from the world and a person is only successful in doing so because he or she has been saved by Jesus Christ and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Peter goes on to point out that there is no reason for commendation if a person endures punishment which they deserved because of bad behaviour. On the other hand, if a person does what is right, and despite doing so, suffers punishment, then they deserve commendation from the Lord.

**1 Peter 2:20 (ESV)** For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Accepting persecution and unfair treatment graciously and without bitterness, whether it is at the hands of the governing authorities or by one's earthly master, necessitates a Biblical understanding of suffering. Peter directs their attention to:

### **Follow the Example of Your Heavenly Master**

Unfair treatment is something to be expected, and especially so for followers of Jesus Christ. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me [Jesus] before it hated you" (John 15:18 (ESV)).

**1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)** For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

The association of persecution with belief in Jesus is inescapable because it is something to which believers have been called. It proceeds from who we are – we are identified with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of being treated unfairly and enduring unwarranted suffering. Despite being God, the Creator of the universe, and having the ability to instantly disarm those who maligned Him, ridiculed Him, tortured Him, and ultimately murdered Him, Jesus voluntarily endured all of that. He suffered for us and in our place because there was no other way to rescue us from a hopeless existence on earth which would have culminated with a Godless eternity, forever separated from God. His selfless actions are an example to us on how to conduct ourselves in relationship with others. Rather than being self-focusing we need to be other person focused, considering the needs of others.

**Philippians 2:3–5 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Consider just how unfairly Jesus was treated and the magnitude of it! It ended with His crucifixion.

**1 Peter 2:22–24 (ESV)** <sup>22</sup>He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup>When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup>He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Summed up in these three verses are the key points of the crucifixion. A critical requirement for the acceptability of the sacrifice for sin was that the person who died had to be sinless. The only person in the entire universe who qualified was Jesus Christ – the sinless One. Quoting from **Isaiah 53:9**, Peter stated, “*He committed no sin.*” Other verses pointing out the same indispensable truth are:

**Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin.**

**1 John 3:5 (ESV)** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and **in him there is no sin.**

Understandably, since Jesus was without sin, He was not guilty of any deceit, or anything false. The Prophet Isaiah, who wrote more than 600 years before the time of Christ, recorded the details of His crucifixion with irrefutable accuracy. It is but one of many fulfilled prophecies that attest to the reliability and trustworthiness of the Word of God. Among the details in **Isaiah 53** is Jesus’ silence when falsely accused and His willingness to suffer without retaliation against His torturers.

**Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Jesus silently suffered and bore unspeakable pain because of His trust in His Father Whom He knew was, and is, just. He knew He was safe in His Father’s hands. He also knew there was no other way to deal with the sin of those who would accept His offer of forgiveness and eternal life and place their faith and trust in Him for their salvation. We are reminded in,

**Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Jesus bore our sins as our substitute so we would not need to. He did so, so that *we might die to sin and live to righteousness* – so that we might no longer be slaves to sin and be held in bondage by them but instead that we might live righteously.

**Romans 6:12–14 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup>Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup>Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup>For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

That is central to submitting to those who treat us unfairly or persecute us because of our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. We must follow the example of Jesus who willingly set aside the

comforts and glory of heaven so we could be freed from bondage to sin and enter into a personal relationship with the God of this universe.

### **Conclusion**

The behaviour Peter commends is radically different from that of the world. He directs us to submit, not just to those who are kind and reasonable, but also to those who are mean and mistreat us. The only way that is possible is through the enabling power of the living God.

When you face injustices in the world or workplace ask God to enable you to accept and respond contentedly; to follow His example.

Reflect on the message in the song, ***The Power of the Cross*** by Keith & Kristyn Getty

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wcULqyoINg&ab\\_channel=KeithandKristynGetty](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wcULqyoINg&ab_channel=KeithandKristynGetty)