

Servants Be Submissive

1 Peter 2:18-25

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

(1 Peter 2:18-25 (NKJV))

“Submission”, “subjection” and “servanthood” . . . what do those words, those concepts mean to you . . . personally? “Submission”, “subjection” and “servanthood”. . . Are they concepts that are relevant and valid within your life circumstances today, or are they part of a philosophy of a bygone era, concepts no longer to be embraced within your life and within our modern culture?

The sad reality is that these are very excellent concepts and philosophies, given to us by God Himself for the betterment and the blessing of our souls, but have over time faded in their importance to us, almost to point of being non-existent, even within the hearts of those of us who profess to be Christian.

When did these so excellent concepts that form the very foundation of humble Godly character become so passé, so old-fashioned and unacceptable to the “pride-ridden” souls of men and women today? It probably began back there in the Garden intertwined within those specially chosen words of satan when he so cleverly tempted Eve to want to be “more than she was”, to want to rise above her “lowly subjection” to God, to want to separate herself from submission to God and to want instead to become “like Him in His glory”.

That, of course, as we are so well able to see today, was a miserably failed effort. But from that day until now men and women have never ceased to want to try the same failed efforts, to want to separate themselves out from any and every authority above

them and to exert themselves above anyone and everyone that they know. From Adam and Eve, to the street protests throughout our nation and world today, no man or woman is content to be subject to any other creature, and especially to the God who created us. We are a crooked, perverse and rebellious lot! I cannot imagine why God permits us to continue in our wretched ways!

Look again at our scripture passage. We are told,

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. (1 Peter 2:18-25 (NKJV))

Unfortunately, in our vernacular, even the word “servant” carries with it a connotation of lowliness, even worthlessness. And many “masters” over the centuries have contributed to a low perception of the value and position of their servants, regarding and treating them as being lowly and insignificant.

And that mistreatment has in turn provoked similar disdain and disrespect within the hearts of the servants back towards their masters, bringing us to where we are today where masters often despise their servants and servants often despise their masters, all living and working together daily within a difficult and uncomfortable and distrusting relationship.

Here in these words from our Lord, God does not address His exhortations to the masters. He does that in other portions of scriptures, but He instead here reserves His instruction for the servants, those who most suffer under a master’s repressive treatment.

In our modern day cultures, there are still remnants of actual servants similar to those being spoken about here. But for the most part, our today-servants are more often in the form of an employee, with the master being in the form of an employer. So may we, in the context of today’s scriptures, consider ourselves who are the employees as being servants, with our employers being the masters?

And as servants, we are told here that we must be “submissive” to our masters with all “fear”. “Fear”! The ESV renders the word “fear” as “respect”, saying “Servants be submissive to your masters with all respect”. And both of those words are a proper interpretation. However, the Greek word used here is “phobos”, the same word from

which we get our word “phobia”, that under-lying and on-going form of actual fear, even dread.

So then, our instruction from the Lord is two-fold. We must not only have and show respect to those in authority over us, holding them in the highest esteem, but we should also have an on-going measure of actual “fear” in our relationship with them.

And note that we are told to “be submissive to our masters with all fear, not only to the ones who are good and gentle, but also to the ones who are harsh.” I can recall my relationship with my last four bosses, stretching over the past 40 years. All four of them were relatively good and gentle towards me. And I counted each of them as being my personal friend as well as being my boss. But I also always knew that they were my boss and I held each of them somewhat at arms-length, knowing that if I were not able to do a good job, or if I did not remain respectful towards them, I could lose my job.

In the context of employment, fear and respect most always needs to go hand-in-hand. If an adversarial relationship ever develops between a servant and his master, between an employee and his employer, then the “goodness” and “gentleness” spoken about here can be lost, leaving only harsh feelings and sometimes mistreatment.

In our modern employment circumstances, if our master becomes too harsh towards us, we servants most often simply leave and find other, more pleasing masters.

But here in our passage, God is taking into consideration that there might often be times when our employment options are limited. And He is instructing us to have the same respect and fear towards an unkind employer as we would have towards one that is “good and gentle”, and that we should do the same excellent work for a harsh employer as we would for a good and gentle one. May I say that again? We should do the same excellent work for a harsh employer as we would for a good and gentle one.

And no, our employers are not allowed to actually “beat” us, as the example given here in our scripture text, but they sure can and do “beat” us up emotionally by making our daily work experience miserable. But God is instructing us here to remain faithful and to do a good job regardless of the way we are being treated.

And here, God tells us the real reason “why” we are to remain faithful in our behavior. It is because our behavior towards our employer has a direct correlation to our relationship with Him, with God.

Have you ever before connected those two, that we should do a good job for our employer because that which we do towards our employer we are doing towards God? Here we are being told that we really must make that connection because they are directly related!

One of my memory verses from Colossians 3 reminds me daily that

23Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23-24)

These words cannot be any clearer! And there are many, many other such references within these scriptures that say much the same. We cannot, we must not separate out our allegiances as we are so prone to do within our workplace. As these words tell us, that which we do for our employer we are doing directly for the Lord! It is ever and always the Lord Christ whom we serve!

And here in these words, God gives some specific instruction regarding our personal behavior. First of all, we should never show bad behavior that would merit mistreatment from our employer. If we do and we are in some way punished for it, demoted or even fired, then be that as it may. We deserve the treatment that we receive.

But here, God is telling us that even when we are doing a good job and we are showing godly respect and fear towards our employer, we may still get mistreated. It is then that good behavior and response will be commendable before God, pleasing to Him. Folks, simply put, if we please God in our behavior towards our bosses, then He, God, will surely look out for our welfare.

I can recall an occasion of long duration when I really was having a difficult time with my employer. He and I differed greatly in our philosophies about management. But I was the one at fault in that I was not showing proper and godly fear and respect towards him. And I experienced some miserable working conditions, and rightfully so. But thankfully, God brought the realization to my heart that I needed to let my boss be the one in authority and to quit always trying to “work around him”. With that realization in my heart, I repented and started behaving rightly. And with my repentance and change in behavior, God started me onto the road of a far more pleasant employment experience.

And again, note here that God gives us a very clear instruction regarding our need to elevate our responses and behaviors to the level on which they should rightly be held,

that of every part of who we are and what we do as being directly related to our personal relationship with Christ. Note these words carefully, verse 21,

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:21-25 (NKJV))

Why is it so very important that we have Christ at the forefront of every thought and behavior? It is because from the first moment you and I gave our hearts to Him in salvation, everything changed within us. We became whole new people. The old is gone, the new has come. And our attitudes and behaviors must follow. Fruit needs to grow within us and show itself in our thoughts and then outwardly in our behaviors. And please understand, God knows every one of our thoughts long before those thoughts are on our tongues. Nothing is hidden from Him with whom we have to do. Listen to these words in Psalm 139!

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4 (ESV))

And then in Hebrews 4,

13 . . . there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:13 (NKJV))

So then, as we read in today's passage, the Lord Jesus has given us the exact right example of the responses and behavior that we are to show. And we are without excuse as God's penetrating and probing Holy Spirit reaches into our hearts and minds and discerns our thoughts and our behavior . . . or misbehavior. Listen again!

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:21-25 (NKJV))

Simply put, while the Lord Jesus walked among us, every thought, every attitude and ever behavior was absolutely Holy and righteous. And He requires no less from you and me. And as we are considering here today, it would be in matters of our employment.

But how quickly do we respond to those words with excuses like, “but I can’t be holy. I can’t be perfect! Only God is holy and perfect”. To which God responds back to us . . .

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48 (NIV))

And

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

(1 Peter 1:15-16 (KJV))

So then, tomorrow as you go about your day in your workplace, what kind of employee, “servant”, will you be? What kind of attitude will you have and show to your master, your supervisor, your boss.

Think about this for a moment before we close! As you sit around your breakroom table or stand at the water fountain, what is the conversation that you hear taking place from your fellow workers? Is it complaining and back-biting? Do you join in with their conversation? Remember the verse from James 3 that we shared in an earlier message,

6 The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. (James 3:6 (NIV))

God is calling you and me to a higher standard, to no longer be like and blend in with all of the other complainers and backbiters, becoming like them in their sin. Even in the worst of times when we are suffering unjustly within our workplace, our mind is to be like that of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5)

If we show the same humility that the Lord Jesus showed when He was reviled and mistreated, then God will surely lift us up and exalt us in our time of suffering. Listen as we close!

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:18-25 (NKJV))