
How to Be a Christian in the Workplace Part V

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Responsibility to those in Authority!

1 Peter 2: 18-25

Peter is calling upon servants to obey their masters. This not only applies to slaves but also to us today! We may not be slaves, but we are called to accept the authority of those who are in authority over us, even when they are harsh and cruel. This is hard for most Christians to understand because it is a call that goes against our nature and even our culture. This passage is not saying we are to be mistreated, taken advantage of, or abused; it is a firm call to be a good employee, student, and to strive to be a model Christian by sowing kindness, respect, and following through with good work ethics.

We are not to give up or skip out on opportunities or duty because they get difficult. We also are not to seek revenge or conspire to hurt others because we have been hurt. This is about being a good worker so we reflect Christ and give Him glory. It is also about being a good witness by showing that extra-ordinary virtue. The backside of this is there is no glory or honor in enduring rebuke and punishment that we deserve!

This passage was originally directed to servants who worked as household slaves to look at their situation as a privilege rather than despair over it. They were, as a whole, treated much better than the field slaves or war slaves. Peter knew there was nothing he could do to free them, so he gave them pastoral advice to work within the system and do their best for a greater purpose. It is far better to deal with your situation constructively then to cause more unrest.

This passage is a tough one as it asks us to do what we naturally do not want to do and for which we can easily rationalize our disobedience. However, to God, a greater theme is presented, one we usually do not see in our horizon, of putting Him first so our character and virtue are the display case for His work and person.

- *Servants* referred to slaves or hired workers. They were much like the butlers and maids we have today, except they were usually owned by another person. Some could save their money and buy their freedom, but most did not as their lifestyle was better than it would be if they were on their own. However, even the best-treated servants were subjugated to extreme prejudice. Others were in a hopeless situation. They were being encouraged to obey and allow their virtue to win others over. The stoic philosophers also taught this. The flipside is slaves and servants were to be treated with respect and dignity, never mistreated, and as spiritually equal before God (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:11; 4:1). Peter is not condemning or condoning slavery, just stating it as a matter of fact; thus, he urges them to learn to live with it and reform it by good character and the Gospel (Deut 24:1-4; Matt. 19:8; Eph. 6:5; Philemon). Slaves were also encouraged to seek their freedom by all legal means (1 Cor. 7:21-24; Philemon). (I firmly believe if we had done that in the U.S., we would not have the ongoing racial bigotry that we have in the U.S. I write this as a man who is descended from African and European ancestry!)

- *Conscious of God* means submission; we should focus on our duty and respect authority because it is for God. This is about being a good worker as our work reflects God (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25; 1Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10).
- *Sheep* is a metaphor for people who follow God (Psalm 23; Isa 40:11; John 10:1-18). *Sheep going astray* refers to the nation Israel, how they tended to stray far from God's path, and how He kept disciplining and rescuing them (Psalm 119:176; Hosea—whole book, Isa. 40:11; 53:6; Jer. 50:6; Ezek 34:6). This is a call to us to heed their history lest we too go astray!
- *Shepherd* provides for us an image of leading and protecting. Jesus comes as the Good Shepherd to rescue His lost sheep. We have gone astray and have given in to sin; He brings us back to His fold (Psalm 23:1; Isa. 53:6; Jer. 50:6; Ezek. 34:5; Matt. 14: 13-21; John 10:11; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:20; James 5: 19-20). This is also a name for Jesus (Psalm 23, 79:13, 95:7, 80:1, 100:3; Gen. 49:24; Isa. 40:11).
- *Overseer/Guardian* refers to being a guardian and protector—like a sentinel. This was someone who protected an estate or farm, and served its owners. Our Overseer is Christ (John 10:1-18)! Elders now fill this role, as Christ's workmen, as both shepherds and overseers; they are to look out for the welfare of the flock—the church—by training, caring for, and administering His love and precepts (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:2-7; 5:15; Titus 1:5-16; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- *You were called*. The call is the patient endurance of injustice and suffering, a call that seems no sane person should desire, yet it is our call. The Christian life is not about health and wealth but just the opposite—suffering and growth (John 15:18-20; 2 Tim. 3:12). Christ suffered for us and we are to understand the significance, power, and impact of this (Isa. 52:13-53:12; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10; Phil. 3:1-14; 1 Pet. 5:12). Thus, do not be harsh; endure harshness. Our conscience toward God may bring about suffering!
- *An example*. Philosophers were obsessed with the idea that we must have good and perfect "forms" of templates and examples from which to learn and follow. Jesus is our perfect example! Many people today are fixated on justice and proper treatment. This is important; however, who we are in our situation is more important!

In the ancient world, such people were treated as property and had little to no rights. There were many slave uprisings, but they only accomplished the killing of the slaves and made matters worse for future slaves. Peter wanted to fix the problem, but he could not. So, he called slaves and everyone else to a higher standard.

Slaves, in the early slavery period of Europe and America, were the vital forces that kept the economy going. Peter is not condoning slavery, but calls us to work within it for reform. If slavery had suddenly been eliminated, the society and economy would have broken down and anarchy would have replaced it. This would have made life worse for everyone, just as it did in 1860s America. It was the American and English Christians in the 1750s and onward who led the end of slavery by understating and applying this passage. If slavery here had been eliminated gradually, as it was in England, we might never have had the Civil War or the racial problems that have

followed for decades! Ironically, such problems are not as apparent in England as they are in America—the “land of the free.”

Questions

1. How do you feel about authority figures? Do you automatically respect them? Despise them? Fear them? Want to be one of them if you are not already?
2. Why would Peter ask servants to obey their masters? Why not lead an insurrection or an underground railroad (some Christians did these for good reasons)? How does this apply to you today?
3. What does it mean to you to accept the authority of those who are in authority over you? What about when they are harsh and cruel? Why is this hard for most Christians to understand?
4. How is this passage a call to be a good employee, student, and to strive with a good work ethic to be a model Christian?
5. How can this passage help you persist and to not give up or skip out on your opportunities and duty when it gets difficult? What is the balance between putting up with a harsh environment and show Christ there and moving on to a new location?
6. How does suffering and enduring hardships help us see a greater purpose in life in others and in God?
7. Why is it important to obey and allow our virtue to win others over in our work situations?
8. Why is the sinless nature of Jesus so important? How can what He did for you encourage you to remain faithful?
9. Knowing that Jesus faced all of the temptations we face and remained true and never disobeyed God help you when you are in a difficult situation?
10. How can you do a better job at focusing on our duty and respect authority? How can knowing that we are doing it for God help you in this endeavor? How can the suffering of Christ help you go through situations that are difficult for you or outside your control?

All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. 1 Timothy 6:1