

1 Peter 2:18-25

As we carry on in our study of First Peter we run into some verses that we're often not sure what to do with.
So let's jump right in to the deep end.

1 Peter 2:18-19

You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you –not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment.

First reaction: This Is Hard.

Second reaction: No. This is impossible ... without considerable medication.

Third reaction: Whew. He's only talking about SLAVES. I'm off the hook.

Here's the problem, based on what we've already read in Peter's letter, and based on the direction he goes after these verses, he's not talking about slavery. He's talk about trust and faith and godliness.

Let's remember the Roman World. There were not a lot of big factories or large companies.

There were business people involved in trading. There were trades people.

There were not a lot of 9to5 jobs.

Most of the people involved in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, domestics were slaves.

They had an owner / a boss who told them what work to do and what they'd benefit from it.

In many ways the authority and power relationships between a master and slave in the Roman world have similarities to the boss-employee relationship in our world. Some of you are not surprised. So we do need to listen carefully to Peter. Especially when we get to verse 19

For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment.

The real hard core issue is not the relationship between slave and master, boss and employee, husband and wife, parent and child.

The real hard core issue is the relationship between each individual and God - each of us -

our consciousness of God's will and our determination to cling to God's will.

This is where Peter is going. In fact everything in the Bible boils down to these same issues.

Which is why I love how Peter sneaks in verse 20 here.

1 Peter 2:20

Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.

I kind of think Peter was giggling when he wrote that but maybe not.

You ever hear someone say, "They're picking on me 'cause they know I'm a Christian," and you're thinking, "No. They're picking on you 'cause you have bad social skills."

Or someone says, "I was persecuted for preaching the gospel," but you're thinking, "For the last hour you've merely tried to prove that they're wrong and you're right. That's not evangelism. That's bullying. They're treating you like they would any bully."

Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.

The question we need ask about these verses is not, "How would we act if we were slaves?"

The question is, "How do we respond to authority?"

Or more importantly, "How do we AS REDEEMED PEOPLE respond to authority?"

Raised as we are in a culture steeped in traditions of democracy, labour laws and trade unionism. We naturally wince when this topic comes up. Let me assure you we don't have to deny those values that we cherish in order to discuss the spiritual dynamic of simply doing what your boss tells you.

Now if you're in a work environment you don't like and you decide to look for another job, there's nothing unbiblical or unspiritual about that.

But if you're on your fourth job in five months, and in each case you quit because your boss was an idiot then maybe there is an issue to address.

You've heard of the guy who goes into the doctor's office and says, "My entire body is wracked in pain and I don't know why. When I touch here it hurts. When I touch here it hurts. When I touch here it really hurts. What do you think it is, Doc?"

The doctor pauses for a moment and finally says, "I think you may have a broken finger."

What if I tell you, "I had this trouble with this boss and that trouble with that boss and those troubles with those bosses." Hmmm. Every problem in our country is because of some government at some level. I resent the authority of the police. I didn't get along with most of my teachers and I certainly didn't like my principal. And every time my team loses it's because of the refs."

You'd probably thinking, "You know, Brian, maybe your problem isn't just the quality of the authority figures."

1 Peter 2:18-19

You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment.

One of the reasons that we struggle with this is because of a lie that e've been told: that authority is an indicator of value. If someone gets to tell me what to do they think they're better than me. If I get to tell someone else what to do then I guess I'm better than them and they better not question it. This is not a Biblical idea.

Let me use an illustration that I've used in talking about marriage and family life but it fits here too.

It raises the issue of authority and value. Our fallen nature and our fallen society seems to assume that authority equals value. God never makes that equation.

So think of a hockey game. Think of why people like to watch hockey. Then ask yourself who has the authority and who has the value.

Most of the authority is with the referee. He starts the game and ends the game. His decision is always final. If he says it's a goal, it's a goal. If he says it's not a goal, it's not a goal. The game cannot continue until everyone submits to his authority. He can kick out players. He can kick out coaches. He can even kick out fans. He has most of the authority.

The coach has some authority. He decides which players go on the ice and who position they play. He can tell players to do certain things and not do certain things and often whether or not the player gets on the ice is dependant on his willingness to obey the coach's authority.

The player has very little authority. They get their few minutes on the ice and they have to do their best within the limitations set out for them by the authority of the ref and the coach.

Now, who has the most value?

No one is going to pay a hundred bucks to watch the ref skate around blowing his whistle. No one spends their time watching the coach tell players to get on and off the ice.

The value is watching the players play a good game.

In this case authority and value are opposites.

Our human tendency is to think that if someone is telling us what to do it's because they think they're better than me. And we also lean to other side fo that: If I get to tell others what to do then I guess I'm better than them.

That is never how God sees it.

Does God love your boss more than He loves you? Does God value your boss more than He values you? Does God trust your boss more than He trusts you? Of course not. But the boss has a certain job with certain authority and you have a job with certain authority and in the end we are all answerable to God for how we treat each other.

We see this is many important figures in scripture.

In Genesis we have Joseph. Sold into slavery by his brothers. He's a good slave and gains respect in his master's house. He lied about and mistreated and goes to jail unjustly. He's a good prisoner and gains people's respect but is mistreated. Finally ends up working for Pharaoh and is a god employee. Becomes prime minister and saves the nation and in fact his now family from starvation including the brothers who sold him in the first place.

And when they realize who he is they're afraid of him.

Genesis 50:19-21

But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

He never asks if he's getting what he deserves.
He never asks if he's being treated fairly

Joseph is more concerned with what God thinks of him than what others think of him.

Joseph is more concerned with how God treats of him than how others treat him.

Joseph changed the course of human history.

There are many great examples in the Bible of faith leading to submission leading to God's blessing.
But Peter chooses the best example.

1 Peter 2:21

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

He is your example.

Sometimes we read these hard instructions and we think, "God is testing me. He's just seeing how much I can put up with. He's like a chubby football coach who sends his players off to run 10 laps of the field but you know if he ran half a lap he'd be in intensive care. God, our father is inviting us to be like Him. He's urging us to get back to living in the image of God like we were created to in the beginning.

1 Peter 2:22-24a

He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right.

He was a good son, employee, student, disciple, worshipper.

Luke 2:51 Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.

Hebrews 5:8-9 Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him.

And the good news is that Jesus is not JUST an example. He lives in us by the power of His Spirit and His will for us is this.

2 Corinthians 3:18

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

Our goal is not to just ACT more like Jesus but as we apply ourselves to obey His word His Spirit works within us to make the transformation deep and eternal.

This is how deep and eternal:

1 Peter 2:24

He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.

1 Peter 2:25

Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

By his wounds you are healed.
This is part of our healing.

Part of freeings us from sin and death and the flesh and godless living.

Yes, Jesus died on the cross so we can appropriate his blood as our sacrifice and be forgiven of our sins and receive the gift of an eternity in the presence of God. On the cross he changed our destination.

But on the cross He also changed our destiny, our purpose in living, our daily mundane, go-to-work-and-go-home lives.

He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right.

Live for what is right.

What is the basis of all sin? Living without God. Rejecting God's authority, His values, His desires for us. In other words, "looking out for number one." Taking care of me first.

What is righteousness? Putting God first in all things and trusting with fierce determination that He is taking care of me: slave or master, boss or employee, parent of child, referee or defence man.

MY case is in HIS hands.

Peter wraps up these thoughts with this image:

1 Peter 2:25

Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

Once we were like sheep wandering away, going here, going there, whichever is easiest, nibbling on this and on that, whatever's closest. Pointless. Aimless. Not even self-aware enough to realize we were lost.

But now we have turned to our Shepherd, the Guardian of our souls. The great lamb of God who showed what sheep were truly meant to be and now trains us and transforms us to be like Him and to walk with the father as He walks with the Father.

It's good to remember Peter's desire for his readers including us.

1 Peter 1:2 May God give you more and more grace and peace.

Grasping what Peter is talking about in terms of our relationships doesn't make life harder, it doesn't increase the struggles of daily life. It leads to a sense of peace and grace.

So what does a true disciple of the Messiah look like in the work place. Being a Christian doesn't mean you won't have conflicts. Of course not. But how do you approach them.

Again, let's keep in mind, Peter doesn't just throw these verses out as a random command. "Here. Do this. Try harder. Do better." No. This is an application of what his main message is. **As we entered this book study Jeff made it very clear that the message is to know**

who God is and know who we are and this is how we apply that knowledge in different aspects of our lives.

So on one hand I know that my boss is a complete moron. Maybe he or she is.
On the other hand God designed me, created me according to His perfect desire, sustains me with the air and food and water that He supplies even if I don't thank Him, sent HIS Son to the cross to pay MY debt, sent HIS Spirit to live in MY fallen body in order to redeem ME, has a plan for my life, has a better plan for my eternity, knows everything about me and still loves me.

Which hand do I focus on?
Which defines me?

If Christianity is merely a set of beliefs and opinions then maybe that won't impact you much at the work place.
But if you have a living, triumphant, hilarious faith that a Holy God has overcome your sin and Has invited you to live His life - that can't stay hidden.

So how do we approach conflict at work?

Let's keep in mind that most conflict at work really has nothing to do with the quality of our product or the success of our business.
It really doesn't matter what shelf the coffee maker sits on or if the blinds are half way up or two-thirds of the way up. What really matters is if I let you win this power struggle then I better win the next 2 power struggles. Those are the kinds of conflicts we usually face.

So think of some poor boss. They were good at their job so they got a promotion.
Now part of their job is making people like me do their job.

The last thing they need is some "rebel-without-a-clue" like me making sure I fill my quota of 5 times a day giving them a dirty look, or rolling my eyes, or sighing as they walk past, or making a comment to another worker just loud enough for them to hear about how they're doing a bad job. They know they're doing a bad job. They don't like that part of their job.

I'm part of the reason their doing a bad job. I'm pretty sure part of their job description is not "make sure your subordinates grumble and complain." No one has that in a job description except maybe drill sergeants and gym teachers.

If I change my attitude. If I become a positive influence, they're automatically doing a better job. One less whining subordinate.

So if...

God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:2

...how do you respond to this kind of conflict?

And if we give...

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, 4 and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. 1 Peter 1:4, 5

...then how does that perspective impact our relationship with those in authority over us?

How do we, as ambassadors of Christ, bring peace and grace into a hostile, worldly work environment?

WE submit to those in authority.

"Yes, I admit that part of your job is to make me do a good job. Let's work with that. You want me to do this ? I will. Now it might go better if I do it this way. Can I try it this way or do you want me to do it your way. It's up to you. Great. I'll do it your way."

SO we do it their way, knowing it's less efficient.

'May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering!' Hallelujah.

Maybe next time, when they don't feel threatened, they'll let you do it your way. But maybe not. Maybe your boss is a complete moron. That's not the issue.

Because it's not between you and your boss, it's between you and God.

It's not about the quality of their leadership but the strength of your faith.

One of my favourite novels is The Voyage of Dawn Treader: one of C. S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia.

And one of my favourite lines from literature is from that book:

"There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it."

At one point on their travels they land on an island and Eustace, wanting to avoid work, wanders off and finds the treasure and jewels of a dead dragon. He thinks he's rich. He puts on some of the pieces and falls asleep on his pile of gold. He awakes to a burning pain in his arm and realizes he has become a dragon and the golden arm and he put on as a boy is too small for his dragon legs.

Eventually he remembers that dragons are reptiles and reptiles shed their skin so he tries to peel off his skin thinking he might become a boy again. IT's painful but he does manage to peel off some skin only to realize there's more dragon skin underneath.

Finally he encounters the mighty lion Aslan, the son of the Creator.

Aslan pounces on him and with his sharp claws pulls away at the dragon skin digging deep until all the dragon is gone and only Eustace is left.

We are promised that one day the great Lion of the Tribe of Judah will fully get ahold of us, with his mercy and power he will dig deep into our layers of shame and guilt and anger and pride and selfishness and we will be set free. And what will we be like?

Let me rephrase Peter's description of Jesus:

We will never sin, nor ever deceive anyone. We will not retaliate when we are insulted, nor threaten revenge when we suffer. We will live as if our case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. We will live for what is right.

And we will have infinite and eternal grace and peace.