

Last week we looked at commands from both Peter and Paul to submit to the governmental authority that God has established over us. Granted, the command to submit is a difficult command to accept – our hearts don't want to submit, especially in an environment where governmental trust is hard to come by – but be that may, it is a biblical command none the less – that for the sake of Christ – for His reputation, for His honor, we are to willingly submit to those in governmental authority unless we are told to do something contrary to God's expressed will.

In an article for Decision magazine, Samuel Kamaleson illustrates the difficulty of submission through a Christian folk story from South India. There are several versions of it, but here it opens with a young boy who loved to play marbles. He regularly walked through his neighborhood with a pocketful of his best marbles, hoping to find opponents to play against. One marble in particular, his special blue marble, had won him many matches.

During one walk he encountered a young girl who was eating a bag of chocolate candy. Though the boy's first love was marbles, he had a weakness for chocolates. As he stood there interacting with the young girl, his salivary glands and the rumbling in his stomach became uncontrollable, and he thought to himself, I have got to get my hands on those chocolates. Concocting a plan, he asked the girl, "How about I give you all these marbles for those chocolates?" She replied, "Sounds fair to me."

He put his hand in his pocket, searching for the distinguishing cracks on the surface of the blue marble. Once he identified the blue marble with his finger tip, he carefully pushed it to the bottom of his pocket and pulled out all the other marbles. As he handed the marbles to the girl in exchange for the chocolate, the boy thought his plan was a success and turned to walk away. As he began to eat the candy, he suddenly turned to the girl and asked, "Hey, did you give me all your chocolates?"

When it comes to submission, our attitudes are similar to the boy in this story. We want everything the kingdom of God has to offer us. We want to have a sense of God's presence, we want our prayers to be answered, we want peace – we want it all – but so often, we are unwilling to do our part, we are unwilling to give our all.

Many times, there is a "blue marble" in our lives that we are unwilling to surrender – we are unwilling to submit. We will give God some things, but not everything – and until we can do that, our ability to really follow the Lord will be limited.

This morning, we are continuing with this very tough subject on submission, where Peter explores one of the everyday realities faced in his day and time. So, let's pick up where we left off last week and turn with me to **1 Peter 2:18**.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are harsh.

I have said on several occasions, that before we can understand and apply a Bible passage to our lives in the *here* and *now*, we must first understand what the original writer meant to say to the intended original readers back *then* and *there*. Context is so important when understanding Scripture and this is definitely the case here. So, before we get to the *here* and *now*, we first have to consider the *then* and *there* and that's where we are going to start.

In Peter's day, in the first century, *then* and *there*, under Roman rule, it was estimated there were some 60 million slaves, and from the Roman point of view, slaves were not people. They were "things" like tools, who basically did all the work for the Roman Empire. The Roman attitude was that there was no point in being the master and the conqueror of the world if you had to do your own work – therefore, force the slaves do all the work and let the Romans be pampered.

In those days, slavery had become an integral part of society, it was an everyday reality, it impacted all walks of life, and it included all types of people. Many slaves were well-educated individuals like doctors, and teachers, lawyers, musicians, and stewards over great estates. In context here, the slaves that Peter is addressing apparently held positions as domestic servants in households.

If you recall in our study through Galatians, we talked about the guardians in a household who were given great authority and trust to manage the children of wealthy Greek and Roman families. These children were the future heirs of the family estate, but as minors, they were under the strict management of guardians who were themselves slaves – domestic servants.

So, in our passage, Peter singled out these slaves, who attended these churches in large numbers – who may have been trying to sort out their personal roles and responsibilities inside and outside the church. Some may have mistakenly thought that their new spiritual freedom in Christ had somehow, somehow guaranteed their personal freedom as slaves, whereby they could ignore their obligations to their masters. In other cases, it was quite possible that both the master and the slave attended the same church as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to twist that a bit, a

slave could be a leader in a church and his master be a member of it. Think about that for a moment. This was a new dynamic involving these roles inside and outside the church, and there was the potential for a lot of confusion and even some abuse. It doesn't take much of an imagination to see where this could lead without some guidance – and in his guidance, Peter explains to the slaves that their status outside the church did not change. If they were slaves before they came to Christ, they were still slaves who still had the obligation to submit to their masters – they were to place themselves under the authority of their masters with all **respect**. That word “respect” literally means *fear*, which we might describe as *reverence*, and this reverence is not necessarily directed or focused on the master, rather it is a reverence for God. In other words, they are to submit to their masters out of reverence for God, and the Apostle Paul explained this really well in **Colossians 3:22-24** where he says,

²²Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Slaves were commanded to submit to their masters, not simply with lip service, not simply by going through the motions, but serving their masters wholeheartedly, out of reverence for God – working for their masters as if they were working directly for God.

Howard Hendricks tells the story of being on an airplane that was delayed on the ground, and passengers grew increasingly impatient. One obnoxious man kept venting his frustrations on the stewardess, but she responded graciously and courteously in spite of his abuse.

After they finally got airborne and things calmed down, Dr. Hendricks called the stewardess aside and said, “I want to get your name so that I can write a letter of commendation to your employer.”

*He was surprised when she responded, “Thank you, sir, but I don't work for American Airlines.” He replied, “**You don't?**”*

“No,” she said, “I work for my Lord Jesus Christ.” She went on to explain that before each flight, she and her husband would pray together that she would be a good representative of Christ on her job. She sought to please God first.

So, these slaves still had obligations to their masters, they were not set free from serving them – in fact, just the opposite – they were to serve their masters even better because they were serving the Lord – it was for the Lord’s sake.

Now apparently, Peter anticipated that some slaves might respond to this difficult command by asking about any limits or any exceptions to this command – and Peter speaks to this. Let’s go back to **1 Peter 2:18**.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are harsh.

In many households, slaves were trusted and respected, treated just like members of the family, and Peter described the treatment they received from their masters with the words **good** and **gentle**, and submission to that kind of master would not be difficult in those times. But not all masters were **good** and **gentle**, not all masters were fair and reasonable, instead some were described as being **harsh** in their treatment of their slaves.

That word “**harsh**” is the Greek word “*skolios*” which refers to that which is curved or winding. It’s where we get the word *scoliosis*, but it can also refer to the movement of snakes – which I think is the idea here. This word was used by Peter to describe a master who was crooked, who may have physically mistreated his slaves, who may have been dishonest with their pay, or may have worked slaves under poor conditions – but even under that kind of **harsh** treatment – Peter says the command to submit still applied.

So, I am going through this in my mind, and I’m left with some questions: **How are we to relate to this? How do we apply this stuff between slaves and masters to us in the *here and now*?**

Most commentators draw a comparison of the slave and the master relationship to that of an employee and their employer, and I can see why they would do that – there are some similarities in that relationship, but there are some major differences as well. Keep in mind that masters had total legal control and authority over the lives of their slaves, they were considered property – so unlike us, slaves couldn’t give a two weeks’ notice and leave to seek employment elsewhere. There were no labor and industry employment standards. They had no HR department. There was no grievance process. They couldn’t go anywhere until the master determined their obligation was satisfied, for they were slaves – not employees.

So, for me, the context given to us by Peter about slaves is not easily relatable. I suspect there are situations where Peter's instructions could apply to an employee, but using the same principle – maybe there are those who find themselves in circumstances where the context is different, but the problem is the same where for whatever reason you just can't go and you can't say "no". For example, maybe a believer is picked on for her Christian beliefs whenever she gathers with her extended family for the holidays. She feels obligated to be there, she can't get out of it, and she feels she can't say "no" because it would cause more harm than good – so she submits and represents the Lord. **Does that make sense?** Maybe when framed in that way, you can relate to these words by Peter.

Anyway, Peter continues and tells them in **verses 19-20**,

19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person endures grief 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.

Here, Peter described a situation in which the slave – again, those who cannot go, those who cannot say "no" – does everything by the book, does what is right, but still they suffer unfairly and unjustly, and in that case, Peter says they are to submit and patiently endure this treatment because they will find favor with God – meaning God is grateful and thankful to them – for they submit and suffer being fully aware that God knows, He sees what is happening, God hears their cry, God does care for them, and He is present.

This is some hard teaching by Peter, it goes against the very fibers of our being, but in His earthly ministry, Jesus talked about this very thing, in a broader sense, in **Luke 6**. Beginning with **verse 32**, Jesus said,

32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And 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 people.

This teaching applies to all followers of Christ, to include the mistreated slaves Peter was addressing. Slave or not, believers represent the Lord, and are to be different from the those in the world. Christians shouldn't act and react like everyone else – for we are holy, and instead of doing what comes naturally, instead of retaliating, and lashing out in defiance, and fighting back when unfairly and unjustly treated for doing what is right – these believers, with the help of the Holy Spirit, were to handle the wrongs against them by doing just the opposite – by doing what the Lord commanded – **to submit**, even when suffering.

In essence, believers are to treat others in the same way God treated them – for while we were still yet in our sin, while we were ungrateful and evil people as Jesus described, God responded with love and grace and mercy – all of which was clearly personified in the life of Jesus. Let's look at **verses 21-25**.

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you would follow in His steps, ²² He who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³ and while being abusively insulted, He did not insult in return; while suffering, He did not threaten, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and He Himself brought our sins in His body up on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by His wounds you were healed. ²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

In this passage, Peter draws truths from **Isaiah 53**, where Jesus, who was completely in the will of God, sinless, loved by His Father – was unjustly wronged and unfairly treated – and still, He did not retaliate. At any time, Jesus could have destroyed His enemies. At any time, Jesus could have called angels to come to His aid – He could have emptied heaven of its angels if He had so commanded. With a word, Jesus could have turned the old rugged cross into nothing but bark dust and crushed those who sneered at Him – but He did not because His undeserved suffering and submission led to our salvation. It was for us that He unjustly suffered – it was for the benefit of others that He submitted.

*A missionary told the story of two rugged mountain goats who met on a narrow pathway. On one side was a chasm 1,000 feet deep; on the other, a steep cliff rising straight up. There was no room to turn around, and the goats could not back up without falling. **What would they do?** Finally, instead of fighting for the right to pass, one of the goats knelt down and became as flat as possible. The other goat then walked over him, and they both proceeded safely.*

In a sense, this is what Jesus did for us in humble submission – He let us walk over Him, He laid down His life so that we might be saved.

So, for the Lord’s sake, for those who identify with Christ, for those who for whatever reason cannot go and cannot say “no” – we are to follow in His footsteps. We are called to submit, even in the suffering, for God has a purpose.

I retired from the Coast Guard about 21 years ago, and after my retirement, I wanted to begin a new career – ideally, in the field of probation and parole. I felt that field was a good marriage between my law enforcement background and my desire to help those like my father who had spent time in prison. So, my desire, my goal was to get into probation and parole, but there were no open positions in the area. At that time, I was offered a vice president position with a local company, and I was also offered an entry level corrections officer position in a prison. I felt the Lord strongly wanted me to take the corrections officer position, although I had no desire to work in a prison setting.

*I did try to make lemon-aid out of lemons, and thought about my background in prison ministry early in my Christian walk – so maybe I go there and I can share Christ with inmates housed in the prison facility. **How cool would that be?** That’s what I hoped for, but things did not go as I had hoped. Once I got there, I learned it was against the prison rules for an officer to share the gospel with inmates, so now I am questioning the Lord as to why I am there at all.*

But it gets worse. I was the new guy, so I got the worst hours imaginable – a shift that totally disrupted the other parts of my life. On top of that, if your relief did not show up or called in sick, you were compelled to work that shift as well – you had to work a double shift. At times, I was the one who felt incarcerated.

Then there was the prison environment itself. Regularly confrontational, and hostile, and toxic. I tried to separate work from home, but I’m sure that environment had a negative impact in other areas of my life. While I was at the facility, numerous employee investigations and corrective actions were taking place – staff were regularly getting into trouble, which made it even more difficult for me. I learned that word got out that I had been a criminal investigator with the Coast Guard, so the prison staff concluded I must be with internal affairs. I’m not who I claimed to be. So, as you can imagine, I did not have a lot support in the prison facility. It was a hostile work place for me.

I wanted to leave, I wanted to escape from prison, I wanted that vice president job I had walked away from, but God wouldn't let me go and He wouldn't let me say "no". I felt I had to submit, and I had to stay.

I was there for about seven months, unsure of what God was doing in my life and questioning why I was still there in that environment. One night, I was working with a new officer and we got to talking about his life. One thing led to another and I was able to share the gospel with him. That night, he prayed to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, and three days later the position I wanted in probation and parole opened up and I was hired into it.

God had a purpose for me at that prison facility, and He could not let me leave even though I knew that God saw my struggles. It was necessary that I submit and suffer and stay until God said my work there was done – it's for the Lord's sake and for the sake of another that I did so.

Source Material:

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