

### **“The Pilgrim Christian in the workplace.”**

Over the last couple of months, we have been unpacking what it means to live life as a Pilgrim Christian. What it means to live life as one who does not belong to this temporal world, but as one who belongs to the eternal kingdom of the LORD Jesus Christ. Peter began this discussion in 1 Peter 2:11, by urging his readers, to live as sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh, and to keep their conduct honorable amongst the Gentiles. As we walk through this world our behaviour should be characterized by holiness. Our actions and our behaviour should be without spot and without blemish. As a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, our behaviour should not give our critics, or the critics of Christianity, any fodder for their assaults against us, or the church, or the LORD Jesus Christ. Our behavior must be worthy, it must be excellent, it must be honorable –fully pleasing to the LORD God. So much so, that when evil is spoken against the children of God, the accusers, and the world, might see our good deeds and glorify the LORD God on the day they are visited with salvation.

In 1 Peter 2:13, Peter commands his readers, as sojourners and exiles, to be subject to every human institution. As citizens of the kingdom of heaven our responsibility is to be subject to the LORD God, by being subject to those whom the LORD God has appointed over us. Christians are not to be characterized by aggression, or rebellion, or civil disobedience, but by quiet and voluntary submission to our earthly authorities.

Romans 13:1-2, For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.

To submit to our earthly authorities, that the LORD God has placed over us, is in fact the will of God, and it is by doing the will of God, by doing good, that we will silence the ignorance of foolish people. The manner in which we live our lives is an unspoken testimony, it is an unspoken sermon, it is an unspoken rebuke to the critics and opponents of Christianity. To a hostile and watching world, the holiness and purity of our lives reflects the holiness and purity of our heavenly Father. And so, we are to live as free men. We are to live as men who have been freed from the penalty of sin. We are to live as men who have been freed from the power of sin. We are to live as men who have been set free from the bondage of the Adversary, the world, and the things in this world.

Galatians 5:13, For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

We must live as servants of the LORD God. Our lives are to be lived in service to him, and in service to one another. As Christians, we must strive to live our lives in service to the King, to the praise, glory, and honor of the King. In short, we must honor everyone, we must love the brotherhood, we must fear God, and we must honor the emperor.

In our passage this morning, Peter continues this line of thought, but he now addresses how the Pilgrim Christian is to behave in the workplace. Our text this morning is 1 Peter 2:18-20.

1 Peter 2:18-20, Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 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.

Here in this passage we see the mandate of submission (v18a), the attitude of submission (v18b), and the motive for submission (vv19-20). Let us look at each one in detail.

### **The Mandate of Submission.**

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

Just as citizens are to be subject to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good, so are servants commanded to be subject to their masters. The Greek word translated servants refers to a household slave, or to one who serves the owner of the home. This term was used to speak of all who are under the authority of one and the same householder. On the use of this term, Matthew Henry remarked, "By servants he means those who were strictly such, whether hired, or bought with money, or taken in wars, or born in the house, or those who served by contract for a limited time as apprentices." The term servants can refer to any of these. A servant's service was rendered to the master of the house, to him who had the authority, the control, and the power.

Servants are commanded to be subject to their masters. The Greek term translated subject literally means to arrange under, or to order under in a systematic and orderly fashion. This was a term commonly used by the military to describe troops falling into rank, and ordering themselves under their commanding officer. Soldiers fall in line and subject themselves to the chain of command, following their instruction, orders, and will. The command to be subject is also in the present tense, which means that it is calling for submission to be an ongoing continual lifestyle, or an ongoing habitual action. Servants are to be continually placing themselves, under their masters, in an orderly fashion. Servants are to continually fall in line, and be submissive to the direction and command of their masters.

Now, it is important to note that in submitting to our masters, we should never be focused on their personality, but rather on their position of authority. In other words, we need to view our masters, as not acting on their own behalf, but as acting on behalf of the LORD God. In doing this, we recognize that our authority, our masters and our employers, are actually instruments in the hand of the LORD God. If we look at our authorities as acting on their own behalf, it can be very easy to become angry and frustrated, which will allow bitterness to set in and take root. But, if we can look at our authorities as acting on behalf of the LORD God, as the LORD God has ordained them, then we will be sanctified, and we will be made holy. For those who love God, Romans 8:28, all things work together for good. All things, including our masters, including our difficult masters, including our unjust masters, including our deceitful and ungodly masters. All things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. And what is the LORD God's purpose in these things? God's purpose is our conformity to the image of the LORD Jesus Christ. Romans 8:29, For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

The LORD God is more concerned with your character, than he is with your comfort. Your relationship with your master, or your employer, is one of the means that the LORD God will use to sanctify you. All authority is from the LORD God, and the LORD God has a reason why you find yourself in your current situation, and that reason is your sanctification –your ongoing conformity to the image of the LORD Jesus Christ.

Servants, be subject to your masters. This command is a continuation from Peter's previous charge for all believers to submit themselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution. This same motivation, for the Lord's sake, certainly applies to the relationship between masters and servants, or employer and employees. However, it is also important to remember, to whom Peter is speaking. Peter is speaking to the

elect exiles of the dispersion, to those who were scattered all throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Many of these elect exiles would have been slaves. Many of these elect exiles would have been involuntary slaves.

At the time that Peter wrote this letter, the dominant social structure in the Roman Empire was slavery. It is estimated that there were as many as 60 million slaves scattered throughout the Roman Empire during this time. As the Roman Empire began to expand and conquer more and more lands, foreign captives were taken by force and made to submit. These captives lived out the rest of their lives, under the yoke of Roman slavery and oppression. Another means to acquire slaves was kidnapping. Men, women, and children were taken against their will and committed to live as slaves of the empire. Also, those who lived in extreme poverty, or those who found themselves in debt, would often sell themselves into slavery, for their own survival, or to pay off the debt that was owed. At this time, most slaves lived oppressive and miserable lives. It was commonplace for slaves to suffer brutal mistreatment at the hands of their masters –beatings, brandings, and all other types of abuse. But some slaves were better off than others. Some slaves were well educated and served in important positions. Many slaves served as doctors, teachers, managers, musicians, craftsman, and some could even own other slaves. In fact, often times slaves were better educated than their masters whom they served.

William Barclay comments, “It would be wrong to think that the lot of slaves was always wretched and unhappy, and that they were always treated with cruelty. Many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family; but one great inescapable fact dominated the whole situation. In Roman law a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever. For that reason there could be no such thing as justice where a slave was concerned.”

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher wrote, “There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things. Indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common. A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.”

Another writer sums up the relationship between master and slave as: “Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgement, justice and law.”

In light of these comments, you can image the despair, and hopelessness, and the burden of oppression that slaves lived under during this time. To be a slave meant that you had absolutely no rights, no protection, and no legal recourse to which you could appeal if mistreated. A slave, separate from his master, had no practical individual or independent existence. Apart from their masters, slaves were alone and without an advocate. A slave was regarded as an object, a tool, a possession – to be wielded at the whim and discretion of the master. Even in the midst of this social and cultural context, the mandate to be submissive is crystal clear. Servants, be subject to your masters.

Ephesians 6:5-9, Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

1 Timothy 6:1, Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.

Titus 2:9-10, Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

These passages do not only apply to slaves and servants, but also to apprentices, to contractors, to part-time employees, and full-time employees. Employees are to be subject, to obey, to yield, to fall in line, to be subordinate, and to be submissive to employers.

### **The Attitude of Submission.**

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

What is the right attitude of a servant? Peter adds the qualifying phrase with all respect. The Greek word translated respect is *phobos* (fa-boss), which literally means in all fear. In other words, be subject to your masters in all fear. The idea that is being conveyed here, is a reverence which induces respect and faithfulness to one's duty. It is descriptive of an attitude of healthy fear, which motivates servants to conduct themselves in a manner that pleases their masters on earth, and thus their Master in heaven. The LORD God wants all believers to have respect for the system of authority in the master/servant, employer/employee relationship. A reverence for the LORD God, who is our true Master, should motivate and empower us to submit respectfully, to all those whom the LORD God has put in authority over us.

To whom should our fear be directed? To our masters? No, to the LORD God. The phrase, with all respect, is a reference to the fear of God. In every instance of the word "fear" used in 1 Peter (which is 5 times), the term is always directed toward the LORD God, and not to man. We are to fear the LORD God, not human institutions, not the emperor, not our fellow man, but God. To live in the fear of the Lord, is to live with a sense of awe and wonder at the character of God. It means that you have such a high reverence, and such a high regard for God, that it impacts every aspect of your life; that it impacts every aspect of your work, including your most menial and most despised tasks. To live in the fear of the Lord is to worship Him, adore Him, respect Him, obey Him, and submit to Him in every area of life, even in the midst of suffering and trials. It is our relationship with the LORD Jesus Christ, our fear of the LORD Jesus Christ, that serves as the basis for our obedience to this command.

Colossians 3:22-24, Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

The phrase, obey in everything, is a comprehensive list, which ranges from our most enjoyable duties to our most dreaded as despised duties. In everything, we must be subject to our masters. Note, the obedience that the LORD God requires of a slaves is not by way of eye-service. It is not an external service, nor is it performing a duty with a reluctant and sour attitude, as those who people please, as those who fear men. Rather, our service is to please the Lord, by working with a sincere heart, by working in the fear of the Lord, by working hard for the Lord, by working with an eternal perspective. Our obedience to our earthly masters, our submission to our employers, in everything, must be carried out with the same fervour, with the same intensity, and with same diligence that you serve the LORD Jesus Christ.

I have always found this passage, Colossians 3:22-24, to be a great comfort and encouragement amidst difficult work environments. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

I have not always been a pastor. I have had quite a few different types of jobs in my lifetime. In my late teens, I was a commercial fisherman. In my twenties, I was truck driver. Then I was an I.T. Consultant. Then I was a software engineer. I was a heavy equipment operator. And most recently, I was groundman for the municipal light department. I dug holes, installed telephone poles, and cut down trees. In every single one of these jobs, I never really enjoyed what I was doing. Some of these jobs were better than others, but I was never really thrilled and excited to get up and go to work. None of these jobs were very meaningful to me.

None of these jobs were personally fulfilling. The people I worked with were often great, but the jobs themselves were more or less a means to an end, and that end was a paycheck. And quite often, it was really hard to maintain a right attitude and an eternal perspective in the midst of these jobs.

After being in fulltime ministry for 10 years, in 2016, I found myself working at a scrap yard, which was a very dark and rough place to work. I was a crane operator. I loaded and unloaded trucks with a giant magnet or with clamshell grapple, which sounds really cool, but in reality it was a very repetitive and tedious job. Since I was the newest crane operator, I was given the worst crane in the entire yard. It leaked hydraulic oil, so the windows were always oily and filthy. It had no air conditioning, so on a warm day the cab would reach temperatures well over 100 degrees. It had no defrost, it had no windshield wipers, and it had no radio. The other shift operators were smokers, so the crane always smelled of smoke, and the controls were always sticky, and there was often pornographic material left in the cab. It was really a miserable place to work. Before my shift, I would park my car in the employee lot, and then I would walk slowly through the gates, and make my way down the long road to the yard. And I would pray the entire time, “Lord, please help me today. Lord, please be merciful to me today. Please be gracious to me today. Lord, how long? How long must I endure?” It was extremely difficult to keep a right perspective during this time. It was really hard to keep a positive attitude. It was hard not to complain. It was hard not to grumble. It was hard not to feel sorry for myself. I would eventually reach the break room, wait in line to clock in, and in my spirit I would remind myself of Colossians 3:23. I did this every day. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. In my job, as a crane operator, I was serving the Lord Christ. As a crane operator, I was to work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. It didn’t matter how I was treated. If I was yelled at, or ridiculed, or disregarded. It didn’t matter how tedious, or boring, or dull that day might be, I was to work as for the Lord and not for men. I was to work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. Whatever you do, work heartily, work hard, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

Always remember, in your employment, you are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be reminded of this truth. At the office, at home, on the road, when you are under scrutiny, when nobody is watching you, you are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, slaves, servant, employees must be subject to their earthly authorities with all respect, in the fear of the Lord.

Now, you may be thinking, “Easier said than done. You have no idea how demeaning and difficult it is to do my job. You have no idea what it is like to work under my boss. You have no idea how poorly I am treated.” It’s true. I don’t, but take another look at 1 Peter 2:18.

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

Our respectful submission is to not only extend to the good and gentle masters, to the good and gentle employers, but also to those who are unjust and unreasonable. Our respectful submission is to extend to the most demeaning and difficult employers. The terms good and gentle describe someone who is upright and beneficial. It describes someone who is reasonable and fair. These terms describe someone who is virtuous and gracious, the kind of master to whom it would be very easy to submit. The LORD God desires that we not only submit to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unjust. We are called to submit to those to whom it would not be easy to submit. The Greek word translated “unjust” is *skolios* (skoll,ee-oss) meaning bent, or crooked, or curved. It can be translated as wicked, surly, or perverse. It refers to someone who is unfair, someone who is harsh, hard to deal with, unkind, ungracious, and difficult.

I’ve had multiple employers who fit this description. I know firsthand the difficulty of working under someone who is unjust, bent and crooked. I used to play racquetball at lunch with a handful of my co-workers, and one day my boss decided to join us. He and I played 3 games, and I just happened to beat him

all three games. At the end of our lunch hour, instead of going back to the office, he wanted to continue playing. So we played again, and I beat him again, and again, and again. We kept playing and ended up taking like a two and a half our lunch break. I could tell he wasn't very happy about losing, but I was thrilled that I got to spend the extra time not working. Later that afternoon, he called me into his office and HR was with him. I was given a written warning for taking an extended lunch break without permission. I thought he was joking, so I poked fun at his racquetball skills, and he told me I needed to be more respectful of him, and more diligent in how I use my time. It was his idea to keep playing. I was angry and irritated at the injustice of this situation, but I also knew this passage, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. It was very difficult, but from that moment on I did everything I could to be respectful of him, and to be diligent in my use of time. I wasn't always successful, I still failed, and grumbled from time to time, but I made a conscious effort to treat him with all respect. Matthew Henry remarked, "The sinful misconduct of one relation does not justify the sinful behaviour of the other. The servant is bound to do his duty, though the master be sinfully inclined and perverse."

Again, you may say, "You do not know my boss. You don't know the difficulty that I am under. You don't know my situation." It is true, I don't, but the LORD God does. And the LORD God promises to never test us beyond what we can endure.

1 Corinthians 10:13, No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

There is just no getting around it. There are no exceptions. It does not matter if your boss is good and gentle, or if your boss is unjust and perverse. The mandate of the LORD is clear, be subject with all respect. Today, if someone has a boss who is unjust, wicked, perverse, bent, or crooked, most likely we are going to look for another job. We are going to walk away. We are not going to endure that kind of turmoil and suffering. But remember, in their culture, in the cultural context in which 1 Peter was written, you simply did not have that option. There was no way for you to walk away. There was no way for you to find a better job. The reason being, you were a slave. And the master owned the slave, and however the master decided to treat the slave, whatever the master decided to do with the slave was judgement, justice, and law.

The only option for a slave, the only option for a servant, was submission.

1. The mandate of submission –be subject to your masters.
2. The attitude of submission –with all respect.
3. Lastly, the motive of submission –this is a gracious thing.

### **The Motive of Submission.**

1 Peter 2:19-20, For this is a gracious thing, when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 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.

The motive for our submission –our submission is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Our submission to our masters, to those who are good and gentle, but especially to those who are harsh and unjust, is a gracious thing in the sight of the LORD God. Our submission to authority in the midst of unjust suffering is commendable. Our submission to unjust authority pleases the LORD God. Here Peter is asserting that unjust suffering is a gracious thing, it is a commendable thing. It is to your credit, it is to your benefit, to suffer pain, harsh treatment, and persecution, so long as you are mindful of God. What does that mean? What does it mean to be mindful of God? The phrase mindful of God refers to our relationship to God. It refers to a conscious awareness of God. A conscious awareness of his presence, a conscious awareness of his sovereign control, his power, and his dominion. In other words, in the midst of unjust suffering, you have an eternal

perspective. In the midst of unjust suffering, you are aware that the LORD God is near. You are aware that the LORD God is watching. You are aware that the LORD God is carrying out his divine purposes, for his glory and for you good.

You are aware of:

James 1:2-4, Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, For this momentary light affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Romans 8:18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Always be mindful of the LORD God. Be mindful of these things. Be mindful of eternity, and the great reward and inheritance that is waiting for you. Unjust suffering, while being mindful of God, has great significance and value. If it is your relationship with the LORD Jesus Christ that is causing you suffering in the workplace, then rejoice, and count it all joy. For your suffering is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us, an eternal weight of glory, far beyond all comparison. On the flip side, however, there is no benefit, there is no value, nor is there any merit, when we suffer justly. In other words, suffering for unrighteousness sake, or suffering as a result of wrongdoing, has no temporal or eternal significance.

1 Peter 2:20, 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.

What credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? The answer is there is no credit. If you sin and suffer harsh treatment as a result of your sin, there is no credit, there is no benefit, there is no value. If you sin and suffer harsh treatment as a result of your sin, you are receiving justice. You are receiving what is owed, you are receiving what is deserved. There is no virtue in suffering for our sins. There is no glory in suffering for our sins. There is certainly no glory for the LORD God in our suffering for our sins. Suffering for our own sin will not mark us out as Christians, nor will it attract others to Christianity. If anything, our sin will hinder and impede the spread of the gospel.

But if when you do good, and suffer for it, you endure, then this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Suffering patiently for righteousness sake, suffering patiently for well-doing, is what pleases and glorifies the LORD God. To those who do not know the LORD Jesus Christ, enduring unjust suffering is completely unnatural, it is completely counter intuitive, it is contrary to every one of man's natural impulses and desires. The reason being, their eyes are fixed upon the things of this world, their eyes are fixed upon the temporal, their eyes are fixed upon themselves and their comfort. As for us, our eyes are fixed upon the eternal, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Our eyes are fixed upon our kingdom, a kingdom that is not of this world. Our eyes are fixed upon our inheritance, our imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, which is kept and guarded in heaven. Our eyes are fixed upon a loving and compassionate God, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-sovereign.

This is one of the recurring themes throughout the book of 1 Peter.

1 Peter 3:14, But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.

1 Peter 4:14-16, If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

When, being mindful of God, we suffer unjustly, we not only please the LORD God, but by doing good we silence the ignorance of foolish people. By our actions, and by our testimony, we proclaim the LORD Jesus Christ, and the message of his gospel is clearly seen throughout the world. John MacArthur, remarked, "It should be of little consequence to believers what their circumstances are in the workplace, whether they are chief executive officers or custodians, whether they receive a substantial pay raise or settle for a salary cut so the company can stay solvent. The factor of overarching significance is that they maintain their testimony before the watching world of sinners, and in the workplace, that occurs when believers labour with an awareness of God's glory. Such awareness is the motivation not only for godly behaviour and submission on the job, but also for trusting in God's sovereignty in every situation.

Endure sorrow while suffering unjustly. Patiently endure your difficulties, for this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. So be subject to the authority that the LORD God has put over you, and fall in line. And when things get difficult, labor with an awareness of God's glory –be mindful of God. Be mindful of his character. God is good. God is just. God is faithful, he will never let you be tempted beyond your ability. Be mindful of his purpose. God is doing something in your life, and God is using the authority that has been placed over you, for your good, for your spiritual good, and for his ultimate glory. Our God is omniscient. Our God is all-knowing. Our God is all wise. He knows exactly what he is doing; he knows the beginning and he knows the end. You may not understand it, but LORD God most assuredly does –trust in him. Be mindful of eternity. You are a sojourner. You are an exile. You do not belong to this world. You are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. The difficulties and issues that you face today are but momentary light afflictions.

Thus, be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution. Be subject to your masters with all respect, to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. Do good, and if you suffer for it, endure, and persevere, for this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

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