

Chain of Command – I Peter 2:18-20

I. Introduction:

- A. Having just read this scripture, you may be thinking that this will be some sort of “*filler message.*”
 - 1. The preacher needs to look at these words only because they are in the context.
 - 2. You may think, this scripture doesn't apply to 21st century Americans, because none of us are servants or slaves like so many of the early Christians had been.
 - 3. I hope you don't think that way, because as I will try to show you, these three verses are as relevant today as they were in Israel two thousand years ago, or in this country two and three centuries ago.
 - 4. In fact, one of the major problems in America today is that our citizens, even Christians, refuse to consider what Peter is telling us.

- B. As an introduction, I will point out that an important part of the military is something called: “*chain of command*”
 - 1. A chain of command provides a proper avenue of communication. It is both simple and effective.
 - 2. The officer in charge gives his orders to his subordinates, who pass that command on to those under them, along with perhaps more details, & they relay those orders with even more specifics to the men under them
 - 3. This chain of command is essential in the military, and it is helpful in business.
 - 4. Usually the reverse is also true.
 - 5. If a soldier has a problem, he should bring it to the officer immediately above him, not to the Colonel or the General.
 - 6. All orders, instructions, and even complaints, should be passed through the proper channels.
 - 7. But there are exceptions as we shall see.

- C. In the scripture under consideration, we have servants, and the inference of the masters over those servants, and then we have the Lord God, the Master of the masters.
 - 1. There is a chain of command and authority here.
 - 2. For us, the lowly private – the servant – while obeying our superior, we must also keep our eye on our master's Master, because He is our Master too.

II. Consider first, the human master.

- A. “*Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear.*”
 - 1. I find it interesting that Peter in this context has no exhortations for those masters.
 - 2. He doesn't tell them to be good and gentle; He doesn't command them to behave like Christians.
 - 3. He doesn't remind them that they have a Master over them. He doesn't speak to them at all.
 - 4. And the word he uses to describe them is “*despotes*” (*des-pot'-ace*) from which comes “*despot*” – a ruler with absolute power.

- B. Of course, the human despot, no matter who he is, needs to remember there is a Master over him.
 - 1. The company supervisor had better keep in mind that he is not the owner, and he can be fired.
 - 2. The army major may have great authority, but he receives orders from the brigadier general.
 - 3. And even the president of the United States has a God above him to whom he must give an account some day.

- C. Some of these masters, whether Christian or not, were good and gentle, in a relative sort of way.
 - 1. But remember, Jesus once said, “*There is none good but God.*”
 - 2. Many masters – many employers – are good, but there are also the “*forward,*” which literally means “*crooked.*” But again, Peter doesn't deal with these people.

III. He spends most of his time considering the servants.

- A. The Greek word, “*doulos,*” translated “*servant*” and “*bond servant,*” is used 127 times in the Bible.
 - 1. It often refers to what we consider a “*slave;*” a person in bondage, sometimes under the ownership of another. But Peter does not use “*doulos*” here.

2. This is an entirely different word – a totally unrelated word – which speaks of a household servant.
 3. It is employed only five times in the Bible and always in a much more mild way than that of *“doulos.”*
 4. **Acts 10:7-8** – *“When the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, & a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually...”* sending them to Joppa to find Peter.
 5. We can look at the word Peter uses more like an employee than a slave.
 6. These are people whose purpose in life is to think about, and minister to, the needs of others.
 7. In other words, this scripture is speaking to you and me: to **employees** and employers, to **children** and parents, **wives** and husbands, to **Christians**, to **church members**, to **servants** of God.
- B. Even though this scripture is not quite the same as those while Paul gives to us in **Colossians, Ephesians, I Timothy** and **Titus**, where he addresses actual slaves...
1. Nevertheless, Peter similarly tells **us** to be **subject** unto our **employers**.
 2. He exhorts us to be **obedient** to our masters; **to do** what they tell us to do.
 3. He is talking about **obedience, respect, faithfulness, diligence** and care not to **inadvertently offend**.
 4. We need to remember that no matter who we are – servants, slaves, employers or owners – as Christians our commission is to glorify our Saviour and to spread the gospel.
 5. Therefore, *“servants, be subject to your masters with all fear.”*
- C. **Luke 2:51** is the first time this word, *“to be subject unto,”* is used in the New Testament.
1. And there we read that **youthful Jesus** went down to Nazareth and was subject unto His parents.
 2. If the word applied to our Saviour, then how can we even think that it doesn't apply to us?
 3. To the **Corinthians** Paul said, *“I beseech you, brethren... that ye submit yourselves”* to your Christian ministers, the pastors of your church – **I Corinthians 16:15-16**.
 4. And later Peter generalizes: *“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”* – **I Peter 5:5**.
- D. Then Peter says, *“For this is thankworthy”* – **verse 19**.
1. Here is an interesting and unusual word – at least in English.
 - a. William Tyndale, apparently believed that proper submission is worthy of being recognized.
 - b. Every parent, every employer, every husband needs to learn & use those two little words: *“thank you.”*
 2. And those who serve should make sure that their service is actually worthy of *“thank you.”*
 3. Ah, but it in Greek there is a much deeper and more important meaning than that.
 4. This is the word *“charis” (khar-ece)* which is so often translated *“grace,”* but which is also found in **verse 20** where it is rendered *“acceptable.”*
 5. Proper service to others is always acceptable, and should be laced with grace.
- E. When our masters or employers are mean and crooked toward us, it is difficult to be submissive and obedient.
1. When they buffet us for offenses which exist only in their unregenerated hearts and imaginations, it is hard to obey Peter's injunction and our boss' orders.
 2. From where does the ability to submit come when our master is unkind toward us?
 3. It comes by way of the grace of our God. It is only by grace that we are as godly as we ought to be.
 4. Here is one place where we are permitted to break the chain of command, looking to the Master of masters for the strength to be pleasing and acceptable in the sight of our boss.
- F. The word *“buffet,”* by the way, comes from the root word *“fist.”*
1. Evil men may *“fist”* you unjustly – metaphorically if not physically.
 2. It is part of our responsibility to make sure that it really is unjust abuse.
 3. Because the word *“faults”* – *“What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults”* – is the Greek: *“sins.”*
 4. Assuming you are not in any way sinning against God or your employer, when you are abused, *“take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.”*

5. Of course, Peter is **not** telling his readers to be **nonchalant** and **unconcerned** in regard to their employers, nevertheless our **first concern** should be our true Master, the Lord.
6. In our service, whatever it be, and under whomever we serve, is also under Christ.
7. Our first concern must break the chain of command and be to the smile of our God and Saviour.

G. *“Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear.”*

1. But as you might remember, the Lord *“hath not give us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” – (II Timothy 1:7).*
2. No matter how small we may be compared to our human master – governor, president, boss, whomever – the child of God is great in the sight of the Lord, and fear should not be a part of our day-to-day lives.
3. But Peter is not referring to that kind of fear.
4. This is **related** to the fear Christians are to have before the Lord, but on a much more shallow level.
5. *“Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, giving them the deference they are due.”*
6. *“Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; **FEAR** to whom fear; honour to who honour. Owe no man anything...”*

IV. *“For even hereunto were ye called.”*

- A. A few minutes ago, I began this lesson saying, *“you may be thinking that this will be a ‘filler message.’*
 1. *The preacher needs to look at these words only because they are in the context.”*
 2. I have to confess, that I was one of those people.
 3. But by the twelfth time I read these words, meditating on our King James Version, and then looking at the original language, I began to see things which excited me.
 4. Monday, I had to share them with Judy and our guests.
 5. I wish I could effective share my excitement with you.
- B. The first part of **verse 21** take the earlier three verses to a new level.
 1. The word **“called”** reminds us of the purpose, and the method, of our salvation.
 - a. Someone might say that he has a calling to be a medical doctor or something else.
 - b. That is fine, but at the same time, if he is a Christian, then the Bible says that he also has a higher calling.
 - c. Writing to God’s saints in Pontus and Galatia Peter says, *“For even hereunto were ye called.”*
 2. This is the word Paul used in **Romans 8:30** – *“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”*
 3. This is the word he used in **II Timothy 1:9** – God *“ Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”*
 4. This is the same word Peter used earlier in **verse 9** – *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”*
- C. Brethren, we have been called to be saints and to be servants: sometimes employees of other men, but always as the household servants of our Saviour.
 1. We are all, or have all, been children in the families of our parents.
 2. Some parents are better than others, but we are under those parents even as Jesus was subject to His.
 3. And if we have agreed to become employees or household servants to the masters of some company, then we are obligated by the calling of God to be the best servants and employees we can possibly be.
 4. If our bosses are froward and crooked, they are responsible to God for their sin, and we can either *“do well”* as **verse 20** tells us, or we can become the employee of someone else.
 5. But in the mean time, we are to serve our employers as if we were serving God under the established chain of command.

- D. By the way, the words “do well” have been used earlier in this chapter: *“Submit... for so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of of foolish men.”*
1. This is what we, as Christians, are to be about: silencing the foolish and magnifying the Name of the Lord.
 2. No matter what our position in this world might be, we are to be witnesses of our Saviour through our well-doing and our gospel-speaking.
- E. We live in a society which encourages people to think first and foremost of themselves.
1. If our neighbors don't get their way, they are encouraged to rebel, to buffet, to loot, to perloin and skim from the daily receipts, or to take vengeance.
 2. While the Christian may live *in* this society, we should not be *of* this same society.
 3. The Christian should remember that our masters have a Master over them, and He is our Master as well.
 4. And we should remember that our ultimate Master has said that vengeance is not a part of our prerogative; it is in His.
 5. As we shall see, in Christ we have an example: *“who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”*
- F. There may be various chains of command in this world, but for the saint of God, ultimately, our eyes and ears should be attuned to the commands of our Heavenly Father, and it should be for His glory that we serve.