

The Christian and the Workplace

1 Peter 2:18-21 (08/28/16)

Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, Indiana

1 Peter 2:18-21 *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. 19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows 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. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.*

Ephesians 6:5-8 *Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; 6 not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. 7 With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.*

Dickens in *A Christmas Carol* described Ebenezer Scrooge as a “squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!” Let me assure you, Ebenezer Scrooge wasn’t the last or only surly, bad-tempered boss in this world. The reality is that some of you may currently be working for such a character! Or even if your employer isn’t that bad, you may still have grievances. Here’s the question Peter answers in our passage this morning. How do you proclaim God’s excellencies every day out there in the workplace, and especially when you have a Scrooge-type boss?

Peter has taught us how to proclaim God’s excellencies under the governing authorities. Later he’s going to teach us how to live for Christ in marriage. This morning we’ll see his instructions on how to live day by day in a job that is really pushing your patience. We might call it “Monday Morning Christianity.”

If you’ve got a nice boss, thank God and tell your boss how much you appreciate him. If you have a nasty boss, know you are not alone. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says you won’t face a temptation that someone else hasn’t also faced. Your situation is not unique; you’re not the only with a difficult boss. So what does God say here about your working world? Here’s a truth to hang on to. Never forget that there is no distinction between the secular and sacred for the Christians. Every legitimate job is sacred. Tomorrow, regardless of where you work and what you do, you are going to work for God. He is your Master. He is the one you serve. Here are four directives for you to take to work tomorrow morning.

First, don’t just submit to your boss, but submit respectfully – vs. 18 *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect.*

Peter addresses household servants here. They were basically slaves owned by their masters or despots. Slavery was common in first century Rome and perhaps a majority of new believers were slaves. Christianity didn’t attack slavery directly. Christ changes individual hearts and as we know, over the centuries the gospel worked in the Christian world to stop slavery. Sadly, according to the Australia-based Walk Free Foundation, there are still millions of slaves today in various countries. As of 2013 Mauritania in West Africa had the largest amount, followed by Haiti, Pakistan, and India.

But God’s Word here is addressing not only slaves, but all who labor in any number of occupations. So if you go to work every day, whether outside or in the home, God has something to say to you. One commentator notes how the Bible speaks to even the lowliest worker, the common laborer, and takes him by the hand and leads him, not just to salvation, but even to how to function in their particular calling. Do you think of your Bible as God’s hand reaching down to you every day to lead you through your day? That’s exactly what it is, if you allow it to be!

God says in verse 18 you are to work for your boss with a submissive attitude. That means a yielded, willing attitude, not a snarky, lazy, goofing-off attitude, or with eye-service as men pleasers. When I worked for a contractor building houses in Seymour, IN, the construction manager would set up his transit across the field and monitor the workers from a distance. He found that the saying "When the cat's away, the mice will play" was true way too often! How much time is wasted by employees every day? Lots! Chatting with fellow employees. Trolling FB. Playing Words. Checking out Amazon products. Some of you have been there.

Not only does God say you are to have a submissive attitude toward your employer, but He adds, "with all respect." There's a difference between saying under your breath, "Alright, I'll do it," and saying with a smile, "I'd be happy to do that! I want the best for this company. I'm thankful you gave me this job." Instead of reacting to an assignment with a disrespectful attitude of rolling the eyes, heavy sighing, kicking the door on the way out, slamming the drawer, or muttering, "Yeah, yeah, I hear you," submit to your boss with a respectful spirit. That's God's will.

There's more, but for now, would your boss say you love your job and carry a respectful spirit with you toward him or her every day? If so, you are showing God's excellencies. When a boss knows he has a Christian employee who is working for the good of the company with a respectful spirit, he's seeing something of the excellencies of God being proclaimed! Listen to this: Titus 2:9-10, "Urge bond slaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." Your boss should have implicit trust in your character and performance. That is how you adorn and show God's doctrine.

Submitting with a respectful spirit means you take correction humbly and you give your employer a full day's work. You don't take advantage of him. Some Christian employees think the boss is paying them to read their Bibles or evangelize on the boss's time and when corrected they cop a "martyr" attitude. I worked in respiratory therapy at the Greenville Memorial Hospital while in college. I'd go into rooms and give breathing treatments and I figured while I was there and had a captive audience, I could witness to the patient. I even led one older gentleman in a prayer to trust Christ right there on the job. Sounds good and spiritual, right? But then I got word from my boss who was told by a higher up that my religious activity had to stop; they were not paying me to do that. Being able to talk to patients about Christ was good while it lasted, but I couldn't blame them or say they were against Jesus because they told me to stop my "religious activity." Now if you're the patient and the respiratory therapist comes to you to give you the treatment, you should feel free to seize the opportunity and talk with that person about Jesus! They won't fire you!

Second, don't just submit respectfully to the nice bosses, but to the nasty ones as well! vs. 18b
Not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

Here's where it gets tough. How easy it is to work for a good and gentle boss, one who's looking out for your best interest and concerned for your time and family. That word "gentle" is used in James 3:17 of God's wisdom, wisdom from above. A boss that has that kind of "gentle" is easy to work for. If you have one like this, be thankful and let him know how much you appreciate him.

But there's that other kind! The word unreasonable is *skolios* or crooked, warped, perverse. There are the Nabals of this working world. Remember him? 1 Samuel 25 describes Nabal as a surly, mean man who was married to a kind woman named Abigail. His name meant "fool" and that's what he was. No one could reason with him. He was harsh and evil in his dealings. He was the kind of master who thought his slaves were just property and would kill one without a thought. Thankfully we don't have this today, although there are wicked, evil, abusive authorities in this world.

Google gives all kinds of sites describing bad bosses. One site lists 39 traits of a bad boss. Here are 19 traits of a bad boss: Narcissist. Screamer. Bully. Unapologetic. Fawning toadies to higher-ups. Poor Communicator. Terrible Listener. Always Right. Unavailable. Never Praises or Encourages. Blamer. Unrealistic and Demanding. Indecisive. Micromanager. Tolerant of Mediocrity. Manipulative.

Vindictive. Inconsiderate and Shaming. Takes Credit for Other People's Hard Work. If you have such a boss, remember God's words about evil people in Romans 12:19, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

So how exactly does God expect you to handle a bad boss? Begin with this fact: God is sovereign over every person in your life and God will hold bad people accountable. What do you do with a nasty boss? 1 Cor. 7:21 says if you can better your condition, do it. Change your job if you can. God doesn't lock you into a caste system. Be careful though! Don't be rash and don't burn your bridges behind you by wrong words and actions. If you can't change your situation, God says here in 1 Peter that you are to still live every day to honor God. That's your purpose, your goal. In a moment we'll see that you aren't working for the old fool Nabal; you are working for God! You really aren't Nabal's slave; you are God's slave and He loves you!

And remember this: never does sin #1 excuse sin #2. Matthew Henry says, "The servant is bound to do his duty, though the master be sinfully forward and perverse." This is where your heart is put to the test. Mistreatment is the test of your character. Will you react to mistreatment the same way the world does? You can respond with a growing hatred and bitterness in your heart and you can return evil for evil, but it will destroy you from the inside out. Or you can bring your theology to work with you. Act on what you know to be true. God is sovereign in your life and over all the people you work with, including your boss. You can trust God today knowing He is working on you, using this perverse boss to help you grow and become more like Christ. God uses hard situations to shave off your rough edges, to expose your own selfishness and those fleshly lusts that want to control your heart. Will you go to work tomorrow to please God, knowing these eight or twelve hours ahead of you are part of God's plan for you? Your work day is sacred and gives you opportunity to display to those around you God's excellencies hour by hour, moment by moment.

Read and meditate on Romans 12:17-21. This is so good and presents God's answer for how to handle a nasty boss.

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

You must plan ahead to do the right thing, whatever may come. You can't change others, but *you* can change and try to be a peacemaker. Trust God to do the judging. Return good for evil.

Third, don't just endure a difficult situation, but be mindful of God on your job. vs. 19 *For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.*

It's one thing just to grin and bear it when things or people are nasty at your work. But listen up – God is most impressed when you are suffering unjustly and you handle it well, when you carry it to the glory of God. Notice that phrase, "conscience toward God." ESV says "mindful of God." This is the difference between a lost person and a believer. You as a believer go to work mindful of God. And when you are falsely charged or somehow mistreated, you are mindful of God, knowing you are serving Christ, not man. This consciousness of God at work in your situation allows you to behave differently.

Joseph in Genesis is the best example of this. He lived his life "mindful of God." Throughout the times of being betrayed by his brothers, sold as a slave, made the house servant of Potiphar, falsely charged by Mrs. Potiphar, sent to the clink, he was always mindful that the Lord God was with him. Each of Joseph's masters noticed him and had implicit trust in him. Potiphar put him over his entire estate. The jailor made him head over all the others. Concerned about others, Joseph sees a couple of guys not doing well and kindly counsels them. They made promises to Joseph, then forgot him for two years in that dungeon. But Joseph is mindful of God all the way! When he comes before Pharaoh, the head of the Egyptian empire

sees his character and amazingly puts him in the second position over Egypt. Joseph used every situation to proclaim the excellencies of God, always being “mindful of God.”

Are you mindful of God on Tuesday afternoons at that desk, by that bedside, in that meeting, on that line, selling that product, answering that phone, sitting in your home? Are you mindful of God in your situation or does your mind go to how miserable everything or everybody is or how you've been done wrong or figuring out how to get even with that person? How easy for anger and bitterness to push their way into the cockpit of your heart and take control, hijacking your heart at the very moment when God wants you to demonstrate what it means to follow Christ, to proclaim His excellencies. Don't let that happen! Be mindful of God! See Him as your master. You are working every day for God and you are mindful that God is there with you even when suffering unjustly. People are watching you and you desire to please God above all things. You can teach the gospel by your God-pleasing reactions to unjust suffering. This finds favor with God! God delights in this!

Allow your theology to govern your life. Allow it determine how you think, what you say, and how you act in the workplace on Monday mornings. You can work with joy and satisfaction in any job because you are really working for God. You can't let how others treat you affect the quality of your work. Remember, every morning that you get up and go to work, you are working for God; whatever you do, you are going to serve and please God. And He is with you and totally interested in what you are doing – that's the Joseph spirit.

Fourth, don't suffer for doing wrong, but suffer for doing right. vs. 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.*

Having a submissive, respectful attitude when you do right and are appreciated is good. But what really shows your theology is your attitude when you do what's right and suffer for it! Now we're in the big leagues with God. This is what God notices. If you get clobbered for doing wrong and you put up with it, you get no credit from God for that. That word “harshly treated” means whacked with a fist. Matthew 26:67, “Then they spat in His face and *beat Him with their fists*; and others slapped Him.” Have you ever gotten whacked by an authority for doing something wrong? I got slapped twice in high school for being a smart aleck; once in gym class and again right in the middle of history class. “How dare they! I'm telling my parents.” Are you kidding? Not in my day. I took it patiently and hoped they would never find out.

Now notice the word “but.” It's a strong adversative that deserves an exclamation mark. If you do well and suffer and patiently endure it, that gets God's attention! God's right there with you. You might be thinking, “I just don't agree with this. We have recourse to bring grievances to the attention of the authorities.” You are right. Paul used his civil rights to appeal to Caesar. And if you can bring your grievances in a godly way, do it. But don't miss the point here. Peter is going to point us to Christ our Savior and example. They unjustly beat Him and He patiently endured it.

It is one thing to endure when everything is going swimmingly or because you deserve the harsh treatment. But when you are doing your best, working hard, going beyond expectations, keeping a positive “mindful of God” attitude, trying to encourage your co-workers, and suddenly you are smacked with a false accusation...BAM!...this is very difficult. For no obvious reason you hear your boss bringing an unjust charge against you. He yells at you, spurns your best efforts, and accuses of something you didn't do. He's already decided it is true without asking you what happened. Even worse, your integrity is squelched and you know you did the right thing. That is suffering for doing good. Now, how you respond to such accusations is crucial. Instead of reacting in anger and demanding your rights, you must return good for evil. And you can do this because you know God is in control of your situation and is at work here. He has purpose and is helping you to grow and become more like Christ. He wants you to proclaim God's excellencies by your right reactions. You know God is paying attention. This finds grace with God and God gives you grace for unjust suffering for His glory. There's one grand reason why this finds grace with God.

WHY?

1 Peter 2:21, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."

How does a believer show forth the excellencies of God and display the gospel in the workplace?

- Respectful submission to your boss
- To the nice as well as the nasty boss
- Being mindful of God throughout the day, like Joseph
- Willing to suffer for doing what is right, following Christ as your example

When you get up tomorrow morning, remind yourself of these truths:

1. You're going to work to please God, regardless of what comes your way.
2. God has you there to show His reality and how the gospel has changed your life.
3. You're there to be a gospel influence to those people God has put around you, including your boss.
4. Given the opportunity, be ready to talk with those around you about the gospel.