

SUBMISSION AND SUFFERING

1 Peter 2:18-25

Introduction:

Before we get into this week's message, I feel I need to follow up on last week's message. *Read vv. 13-14, 17...* I believe that a lack of clarity in what I said last week left some confusion in people's minds. I'm not sure that I have the words to clear everything up, but I will just say a bit more about this matter of being subject to or submitting to government and those in authority over us. I would like to address a couple of things.

First, what does it mean for us to submit to and honor the king (top person in charge) and the legal authorities of our government? I would suggest a few things:

- Pay your taxes willingly – “Render unto Caesar...” (Matt 22:21)
- Respect and honor your leaders
- Obey the laws of the land – even the traffic laws
- Vote – it is our privilege to have a say in who rules over us
- Pray for our government – 1 Tim. 2:1-2. *Story – “Trudeau nails”*

Read Romans 13:1-2 – To reject earthly authority is ultimately to reject God's authority.

Second, Both Peter and Paul tell us that the role of government and the legal system is to commend or praise those who do good and punish those who do wrong. This is where things start to get complicated. What do we do when the leaders and authorities begin to call good evil and evil good?

When earthly authorities make demands that directly contradict the commandments and standards of God, there comes a point when we must stand with God against the rule of law. Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29.

But, we must be certain that we are going against authority for the right reasons. And there is never a right reason to break the law in order to oppose authority or protest against government authority – withholding taxes, stealing, murder, etc.

Well, I don't know if any of that helps at all, but I pray that as we consider these things, the Lord will make it clear to each of us how we can honor and respect those in authority over us and at the same time stand firmly on the truth and do what is right in God's sight. With that, let's move on...

This morning we are going to quickly look at the rest of this 2nd chapter of 1 Peter. There are a couple of key areas to address: First, submission in the workplace, and our attitude toward suffering and affliction; second, the example of Jesus, the suffering servant as the model for all who suffer injustice.

Submission in the Workplace

“Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect...” The NIV says, “Slaves...” It may be very easy to look at this instruction and feel rather smug, because slavery was a first century problem but does not apply to us today. However, there are some important things to note.

First – the word used – *oyketes* – not *doulos*, the usual word for slaves. The word Peter uses here comes from a root word meaning *to dwell in*. It refers to household servants, those who live in the home to care for and look after the needs of the master and his family. In most cases they would have been slaves, but their role and status were much different than many of the slaves – those who worked the land, etc.

Second, even though we may not be slaves today, yet there are many who function in situations where they are under the unquestioned authority of another person and thus function little different than a slave. Most of us will find ourselves, at some time in our lives, in situations where we are subject to some master, who has control over our actions.

So, we are certainly not exempt from the principles given in this passage. Some observations about slavery: (*Ideas not original with me*)

In Peter's day, slavery was a way of life. William Barclay, in his commentary, gives a vivid description of slavery in the Roman Empire.

“To understand the real meaning of what Peter is saying we must understand something of the nature of slavery in the time of the early

church. Slavery began with Roman conquests, slaves being originally mainly prisoners taken in war, and in very early times Rome had few slaves but by New Testament times slaves were counted by the million.

It was by no means only menial tasks which were performed by slaves. Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards were slaves. In fact, all the work of Rome was done by slaves. Roman attitude was that there was no point in being master of the world and doing one's own work. Let the slaves do that and let the citizens live in pampered idleness. The supply of slaves would never run out.

Slaves were not allowed to marry; but they cohabited; and the children born of such a partnership were the property of the master, not of the parents, just as the lambs born to the sheep belonged to the owner of the flock, and not to the sheep.

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... The only difference between a slave and a beast or a farmyard cart was that a slave happened to be able to speak... In regard to a slave, his master's will, and even his master's caprice, was the only law."

The Bible does not commend or condemn slavery. It is treated as an institution in society, but certainly not something that was instituted by God. In the instructions of the NT, Christian masters are reminded to treat their slaves with care and concern, and slaves are entreated to serve their masters faithfully.

Peter recognizes that there will be good masters but there will also be harsh and cruel masters. His instruction is to be subject, and to serve with respect, regardless of how one is treated by their master.

With these thoughts in mind let's look at Peter's instructions to servants.

Read v. 18 – Peter makes it very clear that the expectation of faithful, respectful service is not only for those who are well treated, but for everyone. Being harshly treated by a cruel master was not a reason for an unjust response.

Application – we live in a society that has created a victim mentality. If you were mistreated as a child... if you were bullied when you were growing up... if you live in a difficult situation—an abusive partner... if you are wronged or mistreated by your supervisor at work... then there are those who would say that you have a right to do evil as a response. You have a right to rebel in return. All kinds of bad behaviour is excused because after all, look at what you have had to put up with.

That is not what Peter calls on us to do. He says, be subject... with respect, even to the unjust, the harsh and cruel masters.

Go on to v. 19 – *read it.* (NIV – "...it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.) When you respond with honor and respect to unjust treatment, Peter says it is a gracious thing (it is commendable). It is not only a demonstration of God's grace in your life, but it is an offer of grace to the one who has wronged you. But behind all of this, we must be mindful (conscious) of God. What does that mean? I think there are a couple of things: First, just being aware that God is with us, even (perhaps especially) when things are difficult, and we are suffering. Second, being conscious of what God has suffered willingly and undeservedly for us should make us willing to suffer wrongfully, and accept it graciously, as well.

Go through vv. 20-21 briefly – there is no credit for patient endurance when we suffer for doing wrong...

Christ's Example – Our Model

In the last few verses of this chapter, Peter expands on the thought of patient suffering when treated wrongfully and he sets forth the Lord Jesus as the perfect example that we should follow. Christ is always the perfect example of every good action and attitude in the Christian life.

Read v. 21 – Three quick notes on this verse: first, our call to suffer comes because Christ first suffered. Suffering was a part of His calling.

Second, His suffering was not for Himself, but for us. He suffered on our behalf. Third, His suffering is an example that we are called to follow.

In the following verses that example is laid out for us in more detail. There are again three important things to note about his example in suffering.

1. His suffering was not for doing wrong – He committed no sin, there was no fault in him. Obviously, we will never be sinless as He was, but our goal is to do what is right no matter what the circumstances. If we are to suffer, may it never be for doing wrong.
2. When He was reviled, he did not revile in return – he did not retaliate. Many people today operate on the principle, “I don’t get mad, I get even.” Getting someone back for what they have done is the order of the day for most. But Christ’s example encourages us to not retaliate when we are mistreated unjustly.
3. When He suffered, he did not threaten—similar to the previous point—but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly—that is, His Heavenly Father. When suffering, He knew that what was happening to Him was the will of His Father, and He entrusted Himself, body and soul, to the Father, knowing that He would do what is right. Way back in Genesis, when God revealed to Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom, Abraham questioned whether He would destroy the righteous with the wicked. He said, *“Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! **Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?**”* (Genesis 18:25) We can always trust God to do what is right and just.

In these verses we see a marvelous example set by Jesus. We see a picture of our Lord, even as he stood before Pilate, unjustly accused, unreasonably mistreated and beaten, yet he did not retaliate or threaten. In fact, for the most part, He refused to even respond to the accusations, knowing that his destiny was not in the hands of his accusers but rather his Heavenly Father. What an example! When we suffer as Christians, we ought to follow the same path, trusting our lives to God ...

Conclusion

Well, we need to wrap this up. The final two verses are a tremendous statement regarding Christ’s innocent suffering on our behalf for our salvation. We don’t have time to adequately cover them this morning, but let me make a couple of observations.

- He took our sins that we might have his righteousness
- He was wounded that we might be made whole
- We were wandering like lost sheep, but he suffered to bring us back

As we close, let me quote from Bob Deffinbaugh. He says,

*“How amazing to find Peter turning our attention to the sufferings of our Lord on the cross of Calvary! Peter is the one who so adamantly resisted our Lord’s words about His own innocent suffering. And now Peter instructs us to suffer, just as the Savior did. The cross, once so repulsive to Peter, has now become his central focus. Throughout this epistle, Peter keeps coming back to the cross. **The cross is not only the basis for our salvation, it is the basis for our spiritual lives and even for our suffering.**”*

“For Peter, suffering for Christ’s sake is not seen as a pain but a privilege. If we are living as God requires of us, we are living as His slaves, suffering joyfully on His behalf. This suffering is not to be tearfully endured with gritted teeth, but joyfully, as a high calling and privilege. We are to rejoice in our sufferings, regarding such suffering as a graciously granted gift, an opportunity to enter into a deeper level of fellowship with Christ as we gain a greater grasp of the meaning of His cross.”

Two questions:

1. Have you responded to God’s offer of salvation through Christ’s suffering on the cross? He suffered innocently that you might be saved from sin and eternal damnation.
2. Are you prepared to suffer, if need be, for the cause of Christ? Will you follow His example, entrusting your soul to the one who can be trusted to do what is right and just?