

**Before Reading:**

We read last week about how we are to be holy and distinctive in living the Christian life as it relates to *human authorities*. Peter's first example was submitting to the king and governors. It did not mean that every ruler was good, or every law godly. But, the key words were, submit 'for the sake of the Lord' because ultimately all authority derives from God.

We come to the second example today, which in Bible days involved slaves and their owners / masters; in *our* day, we think of employees and employers.

13 *Submit yourselves* for the Lord's sake to *every authority* instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.

18 *Slaves*, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of *unjust* suffering because he is conscious of God.

20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (Is 53:9)

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (NIV UK edition, from 1 Peter chapters 1 and 2.)

Christians have always found the work place difficult! We all agree work is important, valuable, not just to earn our living, but to contribute to society. But in every kind of job we face a host of problems.

The first in today's economic crisis is: do we *have* a job? 100,000 workers protested yesterday in Dublin at job cuts.

A Union leader claims a motor plant is near to closing. As clothing sales in UK fall due to the credit crunch, many overseas workers are being paid off.

Close second is: What do we have to do to hang on to our job so we can pay the mortgage? Work longer hours? Take work home - where we may neglect our family? Make our product sound better than it is, so we sell more? Toady up to the Boss? Tell lies for him/her?

We should not imply that the slave culture of Bible times is completely gone, for many foreign staff work almost like slaves to supply British stores cheaply enough to compete. But we recognize that we in Scotland today face problems at work, just as much as the slaves did in Peter's day.

He acknowledges v 18 some slave owners were good and considerate, but concedes others were harsh. And there are harsh bosses today.

In Peter's day, slaves who displeased their masters could be beaten for it. We are still capable of wrongdoing, and 'masters' / employers still can punish us, The trouble is, they can also take out on us

some anger that is not our fault. Perhaps they have serious money worries; they bottle up a deep anxiety, until a worker makes a little mistake, and the boss explodes.

Peter offers little sympathy to employees who deliberately do wrong and are found out. The punishment is their own fault.

As Christians, they are meant to do good, not evil.

The big problem comes when a person who has done nothing wrong is blamed and punished as if they were guilty.

Has that ever happened to you?... How did it feel?... Were you fizzing mad? Did you lie in bed at night, listing all the things others said falsely; and spouting things you could have said in your own defence?

That can be very destructive of your own health, causing your body to release adrenalin that puts stresses on your heart, and doesn't go away except by physical exercise.

Resentment usually feeds feelings of revenge, and takes you down the road of sinful thoughts. Even if the boss has wronged you, resentful thoughts don't solve anything; and two wrongs don't make a right.

Here is the God's remedy, in 1 Peter 2:19

'It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.'

And 20b. 'If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.'

This is not giving the bosses carte blanche to allow unsafe practices. Health and Safety rules have a purpose. Industrial tribunals can attempt to solve unfair dismissal, etc. We can speak up for others being treated unfairly.

But for slaves with no such remedies, Peter's remedy is remarkable: by putting up with unfairness to oneself, you are giving a testimony that others can see and hear.

This is just one example of v 12: 'Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God....'

Actually, Peter says far more than this here:

a) he shows in v11 we can identify work problems as part of the world's routine attacks on those who choose to follow Christ. We who have been born again have a different way of thinking that makes us seem like aliens and strangers in the world.

Paul puts the same point in Eph 6: Put on the whole armour of God... for our struggle is not against flesh and blood... but against the spiritual forces of evil...

So learn to discern when opposition that appears to come from a *person* is actually because the devil is trying to hamper your witness for Christ. All the more reason for handling the work problem with restraint, not flying off the handle, not doing something rash that brings dishonour on the name of Jesus.

b) Peter goes even further.

In v 21, he compares our restraint when falsely accused, with the reaction of Jesus. That is, he teaches us to interpret life Christocentrically.

Peter's recipe: handle the problems of living in this world, in a Christ-centred way. Let's see first how this applies to work-related problems. Has a harsh employer treated you unfairly?

People did worse to Jesus!

Peter quotes Isaiah 53 again, v22 = Is 53:9, v23 = Is 53:7

23 When they hurled their insults at him (at the illegal trials, and on the cross) he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. On the contrary, he prayed for his accusers: Father, forgive

them, they don't know what they are doing.

On the cross, you remember, he prayed, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' That's v 23c: 'Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.'

At the first level, we are to follow his example, in not retaliating. Some young people wear a wrist band with the initials, WWJD =What Would Jesus Do? Think of his example.

Those who limit Christ's work on the Cross to a mere example, however, miss the point; the whole NT consistently says: v24

'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... by his wounds you have been healed' (Is 53: 5) The death he did not deserve turned out to be inflicted on him in place of us! God had a different purpose in Christ's suffering, and petty attempts to get his own back would have defeated the greater purpose.

So we are to interpret any injustice to ourselves, Christocentrically, seeing how God can use it - and our reaction to it - to bring others somehow closer to faith in Christ.

I find that if I am accused of a wrong I did not do, I can take it to Jesus - and confess quite a few others of which I *am* guilty. And I lay all my wrong deeds, and the good I failed to do, at the foot of the Cross; I ask forgiveness for sins and sin in me.

So yes, applying Christ to difficulties helps with work-related problems, but also to all sorts of *other* kinds:

- Bereavement - Christ died and rose again. He is our ever-living Saviour, who will never leave those who have given their lives to him.
- Personal relationships: If someone tells you they feel broken-hearted at being let down by someone - maybe the failure of a marriage or marriage-like relationships - you can do what Peter did: point them to Isaiah 53:3 and his prophecy about the Servant of God who would suffer on our behalf: 'He (Christ) was despised and rejected by men'  
Have you just been rejected by someone? Do you think your pain is so great no-one can share it? Jesus can. It is why he came.  
And more, share and do something about it!

He suffered, first, to earn our pardon, our forgiveness.

But 1 Peter 2:24 says, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree *so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.*

(i) die to sins... explain...

Cf Paul, Rom 6:2 (but Paul uses a different word, 'to be missing')

(ii) live for righteousness... explain...

Jesus is the 'Shepherd and Overseer of our souls' v25

Tyrannical owners might have been treating slaves unjustly. But Peter is convinced that the real overseer is Christ.

By his wounds you have been *healed*.