

We were at Bongeen a couple of weeks ago, and one lady said to me, “You know, sometimes we get to the stage where we think there’s nothing more to learn – that we’ve been a Christian long enough, we’ve got a pretty good understanding of it now, and there’s not too many areas of our life we haven’t given over to God... But then God’s Word challenges us, in a whole new way...

And when someone says something like that to me, I rejoice, because I know that God has been at work in their heart...

Hebrews 4:12-13 (ESV)

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

And, I’m finding this letter that Peter wrote, is some of the sharpest of the blade of the Word of God – it cuts easily/deep... And yet very few preachers will preach from this book ... It’s a part of God’s word (you see) that isn’t very comfortable for those who hear it – it cuts deep...

As we read through the Gospels, we get a pretty good picture of the Apostle Peter **constantly** getting challenged by Jesus – just as Peter thinks he’s got it all figured out, Jesus throws a spanner in his works, and he learns that the Kingdom of God is much more Godly and it’s a very different kind of ‘godliness’, to what Peter had figured.

And then of course, Peter would amend his attitude, to align with Jesus...

And I'm finding, that in this letter that Peter wrote, he's really good at passing on this same experience, onto us.

Righto:

Last week was pretty confronting too... We're in a section where Peter's telling us, that the battle – the battle for our soul, is a war against the passions of the flesh... And the confronting thing for **me**, has been Peter's revelation that one of the biggest passions of the flesh that we war against, is our desire to be our own master, and our desire to put ourselves before others – that part of us that has the attitude "*You're not the boss of me*"...

And the general command is often overlooked, in place of the specific command... (it's very easy to find exceptions to specifics)..

Alright, so the **general** command last week (which paints the picture of the normal life of a disciple of Jesus), is "Be subject/submit to every human creation" – in other words, submit to everyone (and I'll quickly insert the caveat there "We did talk about exceptions)... But the general command, was "Submit to/Honour everyone" – and over the next few paragraphs (next few weeks for us), Peter gives some examples of specifics... And so the specific example last week, was for those in positions of authority...

This week, for us, I think it's best for us to think of this in terms of relationships with our work colleagues and particularly, our employer (boss).

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to [submit] your masters

Now, this is going to take some unpacking. The Greek word for servant is οἰκέται (oiketai) (oikos = house) – household servant / domestic servant – in that era, most likely a household slave...

And this in itself, is a marvel of the Christian church... You see, in that society, nobody would ever write to a slave, and teaching of morality, you would never give that to the slaves – that was for the thinkers... (You don't teach a slave, moral values – you just tell them what to do).

And so, you wouldn't write to a slave. But in the Christian church you see, there is no slave and free; there is no employer/employee,, We are one, on equal footing, in Christ our Lord...

But this isn't talking about our relationships with the church (at this stage) – this is talking about our work relationships (Servants and Masters).

And the Greek word for Master – δεσπότης, (despotais) (yes, from which we get our word “despot”, but it doesn't

have to mean in a bad way) “The lord or master of the house”...

And in his second letter, Peter actually refers to Jesus as the δεσπότην (despotēn) – Jesus is the master/Lord.

Now, the commentaries I read, were at pains to point out, that we shouldn't view slavery in New Testament times, in the same way as slave ownership in America (prior to its abolition) – they say that ancient slavery is nowhere near as bad... I'm actually not convinced by that – I'm pretty certain it would depend entirely on the character of the slave owner, as to how bad the experience of the slave was...

Just as there's good employers and bad employers, there were good masters and there were bad masters... There were those who would honour and care for their slaves, and others who would abuse and demean them...

And this is something that Peter acknowledges... It's out of our respect for God and our fear of **God**, that we submit to our employer, whether they're really nice to us, or whether they're crooks...

And I'm not sure why our English translations have done this, but they've actually shifted the order of the words, to what's in the original Greek... Alright, so the original Greek actually says this:

Domestic servants, be subjecting yourselves in all fear, to the masters, not only to the good and gentle, but to the crooked...

And so, the original shape of the sentence had the phrase “**in all fear/respect**”, coming **before** the word “**masters**”, and so it’s actually tying it in with the verse before (V17), which told us to fear God....

Alright, so when Peter wrote this letter, he didn’t go “Hmm, I might put a new heading in here, because I’ve been talking about submitting to all people (out of fear and reverence to God), but I’m going to talk about something entirely different...”. He didn’t do that... He just continued writing his letter, and continued his train of thought – That we respect and honour others (BTW not just those who have authority over us) – We submit to others and honour others, because of our fear and respect for God”...

What does that look like??? Well, **Domestic servants, be subjecting yourselves in all fear** (fear of what) Well, he’s just told us in V17 – The Fear of God

And so, out of respect & honour & fear of God, we submit to our masters/employers, and it doesn’t matter whether they’re good and gentle, or whether they’re nasty & crooked ,,
Because we fear God, we submit to them...

BTW, if you’re a little bit worried that I’ve shifted the order of the words (compared to your English translation), I’m more than happy to loan you the Word Biblical Commentaryⁱ / the New International Commentaryⁱⁱ, which both explain what I’ve just said....

But wow!!! Submit to your boss, **even if he's a nasty crook...** Alright now, (same as last week), **because** we do this out of the Fear of God, we don't also become crooks... If the boss tells us to do something illegal, or against God's command, don't do it...

- If your employer directs you to lie for him, don't lie.
- If he directs you to falsify a document, don't do it;
- If s/he tells you to inflate the hours billed to a certain job – no way;
- If their business practice is to mislead people and to take advantage of them, you can't do that...

But in everything else, (even if your boss mistreats you), submit... **Why???**

It's about being a witness to Jesus, by being the very best employee that you can be, whether your boss is a 'good bloke', or whether he's a rogue and a scoundrel... you be a witness to Jesus – Your ministry, is to be the very best employee that you can be..

Now of course, for us, we have freedom, don't we don't have a good boss, we can leave and get employment elsewhere, and that's fine,,, but let's never use that as an excuse to **not** be a good, hardworking employee, who defers to the boss, as if he is the boss...

We don't put ourselves up there and act as if we're better than they are...

*Oh, it's tempting, isn't it:
To (at smoko time), to sit around with the other workers, and
have a winge about the boss and pull him down a rung, and to
make fun of your boss (he knows nothing)... That's not the
way of disciples of Jesus...*

You see, it's Godly (Peter actually says ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.)

No, your boss does **not** deserve, for you to submit to him, and to respect him, and to honour him (even if he's been nasty to you),,, And that's why it's called "grace" – it's an undeserved gift... Can you see where Peter's going with this??? We have received the grace of God – Our salvation, is an undeserved gift of God. Christ suffered for us – that's the Grace of God in action. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, By His wounds you have been healed.

God has shown us grace, and therefore we show grace, to all people (even to a despotic boss)...

But Peter takes it even further than this... Disciples of Jesus Christ, have been called to suffer...

That's not a popular message today... The biggest, fastest growing churches in the western world won't tell you that... The prosperity teacher will never tell you that... But Peter does. Peter leaves no doubt about it – Disciples of Jesus, are called to suffer for Jesus...

And that was a commitment Peter made, when **Matthew 16:24-25 (ESV)** ²⁴ ... Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Disciples of Jesus, are called to suffer for Jesus...

You see, if we suffer for doing wrong, so what – we deserve it... But when we do the right thing/good/honourable,, if we suffer for doing the right thing, this is the way of Jesus...

V²¹ For to **this** you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

I don't know if you are grasping, how enormous this is... *For me personally, this is an enormous challenge, and an enormous shift... I'm not good at a lot of things, but something I'm really good at, is I have the ability to make somebody look stupid... If somebody wrongs me, I'm pretty good at cutting their legs out from under them (and making them feel about that big). I use logic, to demonstrate their stupidity... And I used to feel that was ok – a non-lethal/violent method of getting back at someone... But it's not the way of Jesus...*

This is an enormous thing, for me to shift from ‘Michael-likeness’ to ‘Christ-likeness’... How does one make that shift... By copying Jesus....

For those of my era, you might remember the old Copybook. And they would have faintly traced letters (duplicator & purple writing), for us to write over the top of, to get the shape and size of the letters correct. And once you’d mastered that, you’d have lines of different colours and heights, that we had to shape our letters to meet, to get the right sizing... Alright, the Copybook had the perfectly formed letters for us to trace over the top of, and to copy...

And that’s the exact word that Peter uses here, for Jesus to be an example for us... **Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example,**

And the word Peter uses in the Greek, is literally a Copybook. Here’s the definition:

The commonest use of the noun (cf. the vb. hypographō) is for the faint outlines of letters which were traced over by pupils learning to write, then also of the sets of letters written at the top of a page ... to be copied repeatedly by the learner on the rest of the pageⁱⁱⁱ

When it comes to submission, (when it comes to suffering [even though we’ve done the right thing]) Jesus is the copybook... He’s the perfectly formed letters, that we trace

over, as we submit. And we copy; copy; copy... submit; submit; submit

Jesus was perfect. There was:

- No sin
- No deceit

When He was insulted and abused, He did not return in kind. He would've been quite within his rights... When He suffered, he didn't threaten...

Jesus had the ultimate power in His grasp... When Peter tried to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said "Put that sword away".. "If I wanted to, I could ask my Father, and immediately he'd send me 12 Legion of Angels (3000-6000 soldiers/legion). That's 36000 – 72000 angels.) (I think that would take care of the situation)

Jesus had the power to retaliate, but he didn't...

You see, we have it in our heads, that if I submit, I'm weak. And so, we only submit if we're too weak to fight back... but Jesus demonstrated His strength in submission...

He didn't take matters into His own hands – He entrusted Himself into the hands of the one who will judge. Those who treat God's people unjustly – They're not going to get away with it...

You know, all the evil in the world, and remember, Peter's writing to a church who are suffering terrible persecutions...

And for any Christian slave who was mistreated by their master, what recourse would they have??? (“I’ll take it to the Union/arbitration commission/fairWork”) None!!! Well here’s the reminder, “Injustice might be happening to you today, but the injustice doesn’t go un-noticed, And so we hand it over to our Lord who will judge, and bring justice....

This is the same Lord, who loves us so much, He died for us on the cross...

And Peter can’t help himself here – he’s just got to tell them the Gospel...

You see, submission (even in the face of injustice) only makes sense in the light of the Gospel. It was unjust that Jesus was crucified,, but ²⁴ **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.**

You know, a lot of the time, we talk about an almost theoretical righteousness... You know, the great exchange took place – Jesus took my sins away from me, and so therefore I’m righteous... But here Peter’s talking about dying to sin, and living to righteousness...

Does righteousness fight back if we’re in the right??? No... The ultimate righteousness, was demonstrated by Christ on the cross. He suffered, even though He did nothing wrong...

And Jesus is our copybook...

At this point, Peter quotes Isaiah 53 (Prophecy about the suffering servant). What a moving touch... He's writing to servants who suffer (even if they do right). And He reminds them that Jesus was also a suffering servant **By his wounds you have been healed.** ²⁵ **For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**

Here we see the strength and **Gospel necessity** of submission (Submitting, even to those, under whom we suffer)

Jesus has saved us – Jesus has brought us back into His fold... And He did it through His patient, suffering, submission...

And we follow the copybook. We are a witness to Christ by our patient suffering. **this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.**

So there you go. That's a tough passage, isn't it... It's not tough because it's hard to understand... It's tough because it's so simple to understand, and it goes so much against the grain, doesn't it...

And it's pretty much the exact opposite to the message the world would give... The world would say, "Be strong and

stand up for yourself”... Whereas the challenge for us, is to be gracious as Christ is gracious. And submit, even if we suffer unjustly.

Questions?

We could come up with all these “What-if’s”, or we could follow the copybook.

Let’s pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,

We want to thank You,

that You were the Suffering Servant for us.

We thank You that you didn’t retaliate when you could;

Even though when You did good, You suffered,

You submitted to that suffering,

For our sake...

And Lord Jesus,

Help us to follow You (as our copybook).

Lord, it’s so ingrained into us,

- to stand up for our rights;
- To fight back;
- To disrespect those who haven’t earned our respect.

God, forgive us.

Lord forgive us, for when we've disrespected our
bosses;
And when we've not submitted...

Lord, help us to honour You,
By being the very best servants we can be,
(even if our boss is a nasty piece of work)
Lord, out of fear and reverence for You,
Help us to be good examples for Jesus,
In all situations,
As we demonstrate the Grace of Jesus,
As we submit to those who don't deserve our
submission.

And let us not be ashamed – “I do this to honour God.”

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Michaels, J.R., 1988. *1 Peter*, Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

The effect of παντί in the phrase ἐν παντί φόβῳ is to intensify rather than universalize the reverence of which Peter speaks, yielding the translation “with deep reverence” (cf. BGD, 631.1a, d). Although the word order could suggest that the reverence is directed toward slave masters (cf. διὰ τὸν δεσποτικὸν φόβον in Philo, Spec. Leg. 1.128), the clear distinction in 2:17 between reverence toward God and respect for the emperor demands that here too φόβος means reverence toward God and not toward human masters. In the admonitions to slaves in the Pauline household duty codes, fear or reverence is directed either explicitly

toward God or Christ (φοβούμενοσι ψὸν κύριον, Col 3:22) or toward slave masters with the assumption that they somehow stand in Christ's place (μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ... ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ, Eph 6:5); cf. Did. 4.11, where reverence is urged toward masters as God's image or representative (ὡς τύπῳ θεοῦ). Peter makes no such assumption here; the mention of "deep reverence" is intended to motivate his readers in much the same way as διὰ τὸν κύριον in v 13 or διὰ συνείδηδιν θεοῦ in v 19.

ⁱⁱ Davids Peter H. 1990. *The New International Commentary of the New Testament – The First Epistle of Peter*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids. P.106

That this reverence or fear is directed to God, not to the masters, is indicated by the facts that (1) the phrase comes before the reference to the masters in the Greek word order, and (2) fear or reverence in 1 Peter is always directed toward God, never toward people, whom Christians are not to fear...

ⁱⁱⁱ Bruce, F.F., 1986. ὑπογραμμός L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.