

God's Instructions to Christian Employees

1 Peter 2:18-25 (text)

11 October 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

There are many stories to tell about bosses and workers – about employers and employees.

You might have heard about the young man who got the job of lifesaver at an indoor pool. He was told to pay attention and not to let himself get distracted by using his headphones to listen to music. Well, it was not long into this job that he got caught listening to music from his iPod. You see, thinking that nobody would notice, he put his iPod in his windbreaker and ran the headphones along the inside to make it as discreet as possible. Then he couldn't understand why he got fired!

Then there was the young lady who badly needed money to pay her bills. So, she got herself two jobs. Her second job each day was that of lifesaver. In her contract it was stipulated that she should be vigilant at all times. However, it was not long before she was caught sleeping on the job! Then she, too, got fired – and wondered why!

Clearly, these two lifesavers (employees) did not submit to their bosses!¹

Then there was the lady employee who worked for an unreasonable manager. You see, this lady got approval to work from home one day a week. On such days, she and her lady manager used Gchat (Google Talk) to communicate. But, says this worker, "If I took my eyes off of my computer screen for three minutes, my manager harangued me. She told me I'd lose my remote privileges unless I started letting her know when I was getting up to take the dog outside, make a cup of tea—or use the bathroom."

See, how this employee, when she felt preached-to by her manager thought she had to blurt out her frustration on the Internet?²

Well, the reason why our text has been put in the Bible is exactly to teach Christian employees not to behave like the workers about whom we have just heard.

You see, here is the main message of our text: **Dear employee, do you say you're a Christian? Then submit to your employer with all respect – even if he/she is harsh/unjust/unreasonable!**

Our sermon has three points

- Christian, Submit to Your Employer
- Reason for Submitting
- Grounds for Submitting

Christian, Submit to Your Employer (v.18)

Verse 18 of our text exhorts servants/slaves to submit to their masters in all respect – even to masters who are unreasonable.

¹ For these two stories (and more), cf. **Bosses Share Their Worst Stories Of Firing Terrible Employees**
<https://www.journeyranger.com/stories/bosses-share-stories-of-terrible-employees/>

² Cf. **The Worst Boss I Ever Had: 11 True Stories That'll Make You Cringe**
<https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-worst-boss-i-ever-had-11-true-stories-thatll-make-you-cringe>

Now, right up-front we need to warn against a very sad thing – i.e. that, about 200 years ago at the time of slavery in the USA, many slave-traders and slave-masters abused this text as they tried to use it to back up their evil practices. Yes, many said as much as: “Slavery must be okay/acceptable, because the Bible does not talk against it, but actually, it even tells slaves to submit to their masters!”

Well, let’s be clear: That’s not what our text is saying! Our text does not say that slavery is a good and God-ordained thing!

Rather, our text goes out from the understanding that in this sin-infected world (a world so different to how God first made it) *it has sadly come to it* that there are masters and slaves.

And, *that being the sad reality*, how should a Christian slave now behave toward his/her master?

Well, in submission & greatest respect!

And *that’s* the point our text wants to make: it simply tells us how, within this sad & fallen situation in which there now are slaves, *Christian* slaves should relate to their masters!

Here are some questions...

How many slaves were there in the first century?

Indications are that, at least in the urban areas of the Roman Empire, slaves made up one third of the population.³

Thus, the Roman economy was heavily dependent upon slaves and their work.

If slaves would rebel – or go on strike – then there would be disaster. And the rulers would be angry!

How did one become a slave?

Well, most slaves were born that way, because their mothers were slaves! But some others, because they simply could not find work, then chose to become slaves.⁴

How did a slave become a Christian?

Well, sometimes slaves received Christ when their masters received Christ, but other times they converted on their own!⁵

My brother & sister, looking at how often the New Testament refers to slaves in the Christian household, it seems that *many* slaves became Christians.⁶

Now, think with me...! Yes, let’s place ourselves for a moment in the first century’s world of *low* slaves and *respected* masters. Now, what if, in that culture, a slave (low as he was) received Christ as his Lord & Saviour – and then learned that in Christ there is *no slave or free, but that Christ is all and in all*,⁷ could this not create a potential problem,

³ “Slavery was a diverse institution in the ancient world, altering itself from one culture to another. Yet the Roman and Greek worlds anchored their entire economic system in this institution. Some have estimated that one-third of the population in urban areas was slave population” (McKnight, S. (1996). [1 Peter](#) (pp. 163–180). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

⁴ And slaves were not all in manual labour. No, many were doctors, teachers, writers, accountants, agents, bailiffs, overseers, secretaries, and sea-captains (cf. e.g. McKnight, *ibid*).

⁵ Cf. McKnight (*ibid*).

⁶ Also cf. “We can infer from the presence of slaves in the early Christian household codes that many slaves became Christians and that their behavior was potentially problematic. They had to be exhorted to obedience both because they sensed a new-found freedom in the church and because it was important to the success of the gospel that they be ‘orderly.’” McKnight, S. (1996). [1 Peter](#) (pp. 163–180). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁷ Cf. Col 3:11 “**Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all**” (NIV 84).

especially if the Christian slave thought that his newly-found faith and freedom gives him license to disobey his master?

See the need for Peter to write the words of our text?

For the sake of the Lord (and for the sake of the Gospel's progress) it was important that Christian slaves would behave well – be good slaves!

They had to submit with all respect (deep respect) – even to masters who were harsh!

So, yes, there were *all sorts of* slaves. But Peter wanted the *Christian* slaves to show such sort of behaviour which would transcend the norm (standard/expectation) of society.

Indeed, as people saw the attitude of Christian slaves, they should go, “Wow!”

“Unbelievable!”

And what would such Christian slave behaviour be a sign of? Well, would it not be a sign of Christianity's supernatural origins!?

My brother & sister, I know there is a vast difference between a slave of the first century (or a slave of 200 years ago in the USA) and an employee today in New Zealand.

After all, whereas slaves had very little legal protection, New Zealand employees are very well protected by government laws.⁸

So, there are great *differences* between the position of a slave *then* and that of employees *now*. However, here is the *agreement*. You see, “whatever we think of the ancient institution of slavery, slaves were in some kind of employment relationship with their masters.” “This was how they ‘made a living.’”⁹

And in our day & age, Christians often find themselves employed by non-Christian bosses who can, at times, be unjust in their treatment of Christians. So, it is especially for Christian employees in such a situation that our text is holds out a message!

Now, a Christian employee in New Zealand has a great help (guideline) in his relationship with his boss – i.e. his employment contract.

You see, if the Christian sticks to the contract between him and his boss, then that's already a very good start, for many workers don't do that!

But that's also why the Christian must make sure that he/she can live under the conditions signed between him and his boss!

You see, I read about a young Christian lady in the USA who had just finished school and was looking for a part-time job. However, the place where she wanted to work was open on Sundays. So, her parents advised her to make sure with the employer that she would not have to work on Sundays.

Of course, as applicant for a job, that lady could not dictate to the boss how he should run his business, but, before she signed the contract, she had all the right to negotiate her hours.

Yet, once she signed a contract with that boss, that was the time to, as v.18 says, ***submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.***¹⁰

Yes, once you are in the job, your conduct should be according to that contract, *not by what you think of the personality of your employer!*

⁸ For employees' rights in New Zealand, cf. e.g. **Employee Rights NZ - Know Your Employee Rights** https://bellandco.co/services/employee-assistance/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw8fr7BRDSARIsAK0Qqr4axq2uOzWGHTUgMpGXnZR9AWsGTwr-7othEYg6cc69rCibubSTSMwaAoRyEALw_wcB

⁹ Well-said words of McKnight, S. (1996). *1 Peter* (pp. 163–180). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (1 Pe 2:18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Why?

Well, that brings us to point 2...

The Reason for Such Submission (v.19-20)

Why should Christian slaves/servants/workers submit to their masters – even if they were harsh?

Well, because v.19 & 20 say it finds favour with God!

Why?

Well, think about it: If someone has done a bad thing, is it not so that he should be disciplined/punished?

And how does God feel/think about it when His loved ones (when Christians) suffer because they have acted in a rebellious/sinful manner? Well, would not God be displeased?

But when is God pleased?

Well, when Christian servants/workers endure suffering/hardship in spite of being good – or even because of doing good!

My brother & sister, unlike slaves, you and I live in a culture which is driven by the desire to stand on one's personal rights! Yes, in our society, an employee will be seen as a weakling if he/she does not stand on his/her rights.

But look, is it not better for a Christian employee to endure the shame of not being promoted (or of not getting a pay rise), *for the sake of the Gospel!*? Is it not best, *for the sake of the Gospel*, if a Christian woman does not fight for equal pay?

Granted, claiming one's rights is not always wrong, but in our society, people have become dominated by such claims!

We live in a self-serving, litigant society – an age in which people sue one another for the smallest thing, like, e.g. when someone once sued his neighbour because the neighbour's apple tree dropped apples on his side of the fence!

Again, what will the Christian employee's attitude be?

Well, the Christian worker should not be known for his strong-willed & domineering behaviour, but rather for his industriousness, for his work ethic, for his kindness, for his loyalty, fairness, honesty and integrity!

Yes, while the Christian worker will certainly desire pay rises and promotions, there is no need for these things to overpower Christian virtues!

Question: Self-denial (self-surrender) in the workplace! Where does it start?

Well, already in your personal life of self-denial, like...

- not boasting with your children's success before others
- not being tightfisted with your finances
- not self-serving in your marriage (Is marriage all about you?)

So, Christian servants must remember what verse 12 said about all Christians (slave or free): ***Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*** ¹¹

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Pe 2:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

That's the *reason* why Christian workers should submit to their bosses! But what's the *grounds* for such submission?

Well, that brings us to the last point...

The Grounds for Such Submission (v.21-25)

On what grounds should Christian servants/workers submit to their masters/employers?

Yes, wherein is this call to submission anchored?

In Christ our Lord! He is our example!

Verse 22 says, *He did not retaliate when suffering...*

Does our text want Christians to acquiesce to injustices?

No, not necessarily.

But it does mean that if Christians obey our text's command to follow Jesus' example, they will refuse to see oppressors as enemies to be reviled and hated!

Why?

Well, because the Christian will remember that Christ loved us while we were still sinners!¹² Yes, the Christian will remember how God vividly & poignantly displayed His unfathomable love on the cross – and that for enemies!

So, what do we see?

Well, that Christ's life has become for us an example – actually a pattern¹³ – yes, like a child in kindergarten takes a pattern of plastic or carton, puts it on a big piece of paper, and draws all along the edges & the inside!

Christ is the pattern for the Christian worker who is to work in self-sacrificial manner!

But look! A life of self-sacrifice is not for the faint-hearted & weak-kneed!

So how will you (how will I) be even able to live our lives on the pattern of Christ's life?

Well, by not trying to pattern/model Jesus like you would your rugby/movie/singer star!

No, but to live in a personal relationship with Christ! To live in absolute heart-surrender to Him! To bow before Him as your Lord! To have Him in your heart!

Your whole life/being must be anchored in Him!

You will only be able to pattern your life on His, if you have a personal relationship with Christ – a heart-surrender to Him. After all, Christ's living that pattern was to free you/me from the blame/consequences of our sin! By His pain you are healed! Now you have died to sin (v.24)! What enormous reason to now live for Jesus!

My brother & sister, look, is this not how also the Apostle Paul exhorted Christians – i.e. that they should be obedient to their masters not merely to gain human approval, nor to in own effort try to coldly follow the pattern of Christ, but that they should be obedient, because, through their obedience, they want to honour the Lord whom they love!!¹⁴ Yes,

¹² Rm 5:8 ***But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

¹³ In Greek, *hypogrammos* (ὑπογραμμός) "...lit. 'model, pattern' to be copied in writing or drawing (2 Macc 2:28; cp. ὑπογράφειν Pla., Protag. 326d; also Just.), then **a model of behavior, example** (Ps.Clem., Hom. 4, 16; cp. Pla., Leg. 4, 711b πάντα ὑπογράφειν τῷ πράττειν) of Paul ὑπομονῆς γενόμενος μέγιστος ὑπογραμμός 1 Cl 5:7. Mostly of Christ **1 Pt 2:21**; 1 Cl 16:17; 33:8..." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 1036). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

¹⁴ Cf. Eph 6:5-8, "***Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is***

through their daily jobs, they are to look to the reward they will gain from the *Lord*, not the reward they might gain from their *masters*.

The other day, a 55-year old immigrant with years of experience in the hospitality industry (a man in the Palmerston North church) told me with tears of joy in his eyes. Said he, “Pieter, after three years of struggling in my new country, New Zealand, I have no more money in the bank. But as I left my bank last week, I cried for joy, because I am rich – rich in the Lord!”

Then this man told me how it went with his interview with a pie-making business in Palmerston North!

I forgot what the name of this company was – let’s say, it’s “Best Pies!”

Says this broke & humble migrant, “Pieter, I came for my interview at Best Pies. In front of me in a semicircle sat all the executive of Best Pies! Halfway through the interview they asked me, ‘Why do you want to work for Best Pies?’ Said I, ‘Oh, let me make it clear, I’m not going to work for Best Pies!’ Pieter, when I said that, I could see how they all shuffle in their chairs – question marks on their foreheads! I repeated, ‘I’m not going to work for Best Pies!’ ‘No, if I get this job, I’m going to work for God – for God in the first place! And, *as I work for God*, I will be working for Best Pies!’”

Well, when the interview was over, the boss of Best Pies asked my friend to go out! Then, after a while they called him back in again and said, “You’re exactly the man we were waiting for, for you will be in charge of this place when we still sleep! Yes, from 2:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m., when none of us will watch you (and only God will), you will be making the dough and meat ready for our pies, for we trust you!”

See? See how the Christian employee works firstly for the reward he/she will get from the Lord!?

But not just that! No, you see, the Christian employee who works with such a heart attitude – is it not logic that he/she will be evangelistic; that his/her work ethic and life will be instruments by which God can draw an unbelieving colleague or boss to Christ!? Is this not why Paul says about Christian slaves in his day, and about Christian employees in our day (in Titus 2:9-10), “***Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them,¹⁰ and not to steal¹⁵ (pilfer¹⁶) from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive*”¹⁷**

My brother & sister, as Christian, how are you (am I) doing in our jobs?

Are you (am I) faithful? Do we work with honesty & integrity – also when our employer is not watching; also when he/she treats us unfairly?

Have you ever clicked that the Gospel is at stake by the way you work?

Have you ever understood (like my migrant friend) that, in your day job, you should work for Christ, first & foremost!?

free.⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him” (ESV).

Col 3:22-25, “***Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality***” (ESV).

¹⁵ So the NIV84

¹⁶ So the NASB

¹⁷ NIV 84 (Emphasis mine). Also cf. 1 Tim 6:1, “***All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered***” (NIV 84).

Well, I praise God for every congregation member who does work like that – and who sees his/her work as a vital part of evangelism!

AMEN (2,738 words excluding footnotes)