

# SUBMIT TO MASTERS OR EMPLOYERS

## 1 PETER 02:18–20

### *Introduction*

William Barclay points out that there were millions and millions of slaves in the Roman Empire during the days of Paul. He says that there were over sixty million (*The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 249). The gospel was bound to reach many of these, and the churches all over the Empire were bound to be filled with slaves. For this reason the New Testament has much to say to slaves (1 Cor 7:21-22; Col 3:22; 4:1; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Tit 2:9-10; 1 Pet 2:18-25 and the whole book of Philemon is written to a slave). However, slavery is never directly attacked by the New Testament. If it had been, there would have probably been so much bloodshed the scene would have been unimaginable! The slave owners and government would have...

- attacked the church, its preachers and believers, seeking to destroy such a doctrine.
- imprisoned and executed any who refused to be silent about such a doctrine.
- reacted and killed all of the slaves who professed Christ.

The Expositors Greek Testament has an excellent statement on how Christianity went about destroying slavery:

“Here, as elsewhere in the NT, slavery is accepted as an existing institution, which is neither formally condemned nor formally approved. There is nothing to prompt revolutionary action or to encourage repudiation of the position...the institution is left to be undermined and removed by the gradual operation of the great Christian principles of...

- the equality of men in the sight of God
- a common Christian brotherhood
- the spiritual freedom of the Christian man
- the Lordship of Christ to which every other *lordship is subordinate* “ (Salmond, SDF. *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. “The Expositor’s Greek Testament,” Vol. 3, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970, p. 377).

The instructions to slaves and masters in the New Testament are applicable to every generation of workmen. As Francis Foulkes says, “...the principles of the whole section apply to employees and employers in every age, whether in the home, in business or in the state” (*The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*. “Tyndale New Testament Commentaries,” ed. by RVG Tasker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 167).

- I. He is to submit with all respect (v. 18).
  - II. He is to submit to both the good and the unfair master or employer (v. 18).
  - III. He is to submit for conscience’ sake, that is, being conscious of God (v. 19).
  - IV. He is to submit in order to secure God’s commendation (v. 20).
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## **I. 1 Peter 02:18 The Christian Workman is to Submit to his Employer**

The Christian slave or workman is to submit himself to his master or employer with all respect. The word *submit* means to be submissive and to obey. He is to follow the instructions of the person over him. In the workplace there is no instruction that is not to be obeyed. This, of course, does not mean he is to obey when the orders are contrary to the teaching of Scripture and damaging to himself or to others. However, it does mean that the Christian workman is to do what he is told to do. Why? Because he has been given the privilege of a job, the privilege...

- to earn a livelihood and to provide for himself and his family.
- to serve humanity through providing some needed product or service.
- to earn enough to help meet the desperate needs of the world and to carry the gospel to the world.

The attitude of the Christian workman is that the energy and effort he puts into his job is important to the Lord. Note: the slave and employee is to submit “with all respect.” He is to labour respecting the Lord. This is to be the very mark of the Christian workman. It is to be his respect and reverence for the Lord that stands out to those working around him. Every man is to be judged for what he does upon this earth, judged for the kinds of things he does and judged for how diligently he did the good things. The Christian workman knows...

- that God is watching his diligence.
- that God is going to reward him for his diligence.
- that the heavenly work that is to be awarded him is being determined by his faithfulness and diligence upon earth.

Therefore, the Christian workman labours ever so diligently in the respect and reverence of the Lord — labours arduously lest he become disqualified and miss out on the best that God has.

*1 Cor 9:27* No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

*Mat 10:28* “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

*Luke 1:50* His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

*Acts 10:35* But accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

*1 Pet 1:17* Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

*Psa 25:12* Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.

*Psa 31:19* How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.

## II. *1 Peter 02:18 The Christian Workman Serves All Employers*

The Christian slave or workman is to submit himself to both the good and the unfair master. Note two things.

1. It is a wonderful thing when a Christian workman can have a good and considerate master or employer. It is even more wonderful when the employer himself is a Christian. Under a good and considerate employer the workman can expect to be treated justly and fairly and in a brotherly spirit. However, the workman faces a serious danger, the danger of feeling that he should...
  - be given special treatment.
  - be allowed to slack off some.
  - be treated with more leniency.
  - be given more consideration.
  - not be as readily corrected or rebuked for inefficiency or mistakes.

In the case of slaves in the Roman empire, or for that matter anywhere else, the slave would have faced the temptation to *despise or be disrespectful* of his master. He could have easily felt that a master, upon becoming a believer, should grant his freedom or at least show some favour. However, the fact that a master became a Christian did not mean that a believing slave was to appeal for better and easier treatment. On the contrary, the believing slave was to become the best worker he could because the master was now a Christian believer.

Once the believing slave became the best worker possible — once he began to work diligently as though he was working for Christ — then he could expect to reap some benefits from having a Christian master. He could expect to reap benefits such as fair and decent and brotherly treatment. Believing slaves were to treat believing masters as brothers, faithful and beloved, and there was to be a greater testimony because of greater production and efficiency and fruitfulness.

The point is this: the Christian workman is to give great service to a Christian employer because faithfulness bears fruit. Both the workman and employer doing the best they can will bear more fruit of the Spirit and a greater production of work. Thereby they will together bear a greater testimony for Christ.

**Thought 1.** In reality, being a slave or a master has nothing to do with a person's commitment to life and work. The believing Christian, whether slave or master is to do the very best he can at whatever he is doing. His state or condition or environment or circumstance is to have nothing to do with faithfulness to his work. He is to do his very best no matter who or where he is. (See note, 1 Cor 7:20-23; 7:24. Cp. Eph 6:6-7; Col 3:23-25.)

2. There is the Christian workman's duty to the unfair and cruel masters or employers. The Christian workman is to subject even to the overbearing and crooked employers. Why? Why would Scripture demand such a thing? The Book of First Timothy tells us: "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." (1 Tim 6:1).

God does not want His name blasphemed. He wants no believer failing in his duty to love and to witness to all men. God wants all men to be won to Christ, no matter who they are or how unfair and cruel they may be. This may be a bitter pill to swallow; nevertheless, it is what God says. What is often overlooked is this: if the workman does not give a full day's work for a full day's wage, he dishonours the name of Christ. If the workman is lazy, slothful and beating time or if he is disrespectful, the employer or supervisor knows something: the God of the new convert is a laugh, for He is inactive and dead. God has made no difference in the life of the workman. Therefore, the employer or supervisor slanders the name of God and the teachings of the gospel.

*Eph 6:5-9 Slaves [workmen], obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men. Because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.*

*Col 3:22-25 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism.*

### **III. 1 Peter 02:19 Obey Being Conscious of God**

The Christian slave or workman is to submit for conscience' sake, that is, being conscious of God. As A.T. Robertson says: "Suffering is not a blessing in and of itself, but, if one's duty to God is involved (Acts 4:20), then one can meet it with gladness of heart" (*Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. 6, p. 103).

Alan Stibbs says:

"[Conscience] is best understood in the sense of consciousness....The whole phrase, therefore, means prompted by a conscious awareness of God's presence and will. Such a man knows that God sees, and knows what God expects. His concern is to please Him" (*The First Epistle General of Peter*. "The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries," p. 115).

The Pulpit Commentary says:

“Conscience of God; that is, consciousness of God’s presence, of His will, of our duties to Him” (B.C. Coffin. *First Peter*. “The Pulpit Commentary,” Vol. 22, p. 75.)

The point is this: the Christian workman is to submit himself to his master or employer in order to please God. God loves all employers, no matter how unjust or unfair and God wants every employer to be reached for Christ. The only hope of his ever being reached is for Christian believers to live pure, holy and righteous lives before him and then sharing Christ with him as opportunity arises. If the Christian workman fails to live for Christ by shirking or failing in his duty at work, then he is failing to please God. His conscience is going to bug, convict and cause problems for him. His fellowship with God is broken, and he is living a lie, walking contrary to God’s standard.

*Acts 24:16* So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

*Rom 13:5* Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

*2 Cor 1:12* Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.

*1 Tim 1:5* The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

*1 Tim 1:19* Holding on to faith, and a good conscience. Some have rejected these so have shipwrecked their faith.

*Heb 9:14* How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

*1 Pet 3:16* Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

#### **IV. 1 Peter 02:20 Work to Secure God’s Commendation**

The Christian slave or workman is to submit in order to secure God’s commendation. This verse is as direct and straightforward as it can be.

=> No person is going to be commendable to God if he does wrong; but if he does well, he shall be commendable to God. it is that simple; the fact that a person might suffer for doing good has nothing to do with it. God is good; therefore, for a person to be commendable to God, the person must do good.

Now, put the verse in context. It is talking about Christian slaves and workmen. It does not say that you should suffer for doing good and there is no glory in that. But if you do good and people mistreat you for doing good, then you are going to be commendable to God. You are commendable not because you suffered, but because you did good. If a Christian workman is to be commendable to God, he must do good, work and labour just as Christ tells him to do.

The point is this: the Christian workman is to work at it with all his heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. This is exactly what Scripture declares.

*Col 3:23-25 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism.*

The phrase “all his heart” (*ek pusches*) means *out of the soul*. The Christian workman’s labour is to arise out of his soul, from the innermost part of his being. He is not working for the men of this earth, but for the Lord. He is working for the deepest reason possible, for a reason that arises out of his very soul: the Lord Jesus Christ has told him to work and to work diligently. The Lord Jesus is his Lord; therefore, the Christian workman does what his Lord says. But note: there are two other critical reasons why he works diligently.

1. Diligent work will be rewarded by Christ. On earth the workman may be mistreated, used, misused, abused, cheated, by-passed and taken advantage of; but the Lord knows, and He is going to abundantly reward the diligent workman. In fact, the reward of the inheritance simply explodes the human mind. It stretches far beyond and above all that we can ask or even think. It includes a new body that will be eternal, a new heavens and earth, and positions of enormous leadership, authority and service for the Lord Jesus. (See notes, Lk. 16:10-12; Rom 4:13; *Inheritance*, Rom 8:17.)

*1 Cor 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*

*1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

*1 Pet 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.*

2. Slothful work and idleness will be judged by Christ. Many workmen do wrong on the job; they do wrong by...
  - being slothful
  - being lazy
  - being irresponsible
  - being unconcerned
  - being unproductive
  - being uncaring
  - being prejudiced
  - cheating
  - stealing
  - lying
  - Being careless
  - being selfish

The list could go on and on. The point is this: every single person on earth is going to face God for the wrong he has done on the job. He will give an account for his labour and be judged exactly for what he has done. And note; there is no respect of persons. Everyone is going to stand before God — no matter who he is.

**Mat 25:23** *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

**2 Cor 5:10** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

**Col 3:25** *Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism. ■*