

Christian Submission in 1 Peter

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3-16-08

Introduction.

- A. One of the least difficult things we are called upon to do as Christians is to be nice to people who are nice to us. Unless we're just mean-spirited, ornery kind of folk, we instinctively return courtesy for courtesy, respect for respect, and kindness for kindness. This kind of reciprocally gracious behavior is the norm in human society, except for those who have been raised by wolves. However, when we feel like we're being jerked around, respect, graciousness, and willing obedience are no longer the natural responses.
- B. Maybe the best example of this occurs in our behavior on the roads. Most of us drive around in kind of a benevolent fog. We don't really think about other drivers, as long as they don't do anything to inconvenience us. But just wait until somebody cuts us off on I-55! That benevolent fog vanishes in a heartbeat, and we lay on that horn just to make sure they know how dumb they are and how mad they make us. Even I will do this, brethren, which is strange, because all the horn on my Corolla does is make kind of a quacking noise. It's so pathetic that I think the many young mothers here could use it to lull their children to sleep. But whenever somebody dares waste those precious seconds of my life by making me brake, there I am, quacking away.
- C. However, even when we feel like others aren't being fair to us, the rules that govern our conduct don't change. Look at what Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:19. The point here is not that the jerk in the left lane or our obnoxious boss have earned our respect. The point is that we owe those things to them, regardless of how they treat us. Peter explores this topic at some length in the last half of 1 Peter 2 and beginning of 1 Peter 3. Let's look at what he tells us we need to do when we aren't treated right. Let's look at Christian submission in 1 Peter.

I. Example and Authorities.

- A. This study of submission, as with everything else related to our faith, begins with the study of **THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST**. Peter embarks on this discussion in 1 Peter 2:21-23. We often talk about imitating the example of Christ. In this passage, though, which talks about the imitation of Jesus as clearly as any passage in the Bible, it is the SUFFERING of Christ we are being urged to imitate. Look at the contrast between what Jesus did and what He received. He did nothing wrong, even to the point of not telling a single lie, yet in response, He was reviled and made to suffer. As this passage says and the gospels confirm, during the hours of His trial and crucifixion, despite all of the provocation heaped upon Him, Jesus did not utter a single insult or threat. He knew that what was happening to Him was wrong. He knew it wasn't fair for Him to be treated in this way, and yet, rather than trying to get some of His own back, He trusted in the vindication of the judgment of God.
- B. All right, so Jesus was a nice guy when He was being persecuted. What does that have to do with us? Peter continues to explain in 1 Peter 2:24-25. His point is that when we were left to ourselves, we wandered away from God like a two-year-old toddling off to play in traffic. Jesus took the punishment that we deserved. He died with our sins so that we could be alive to righteousness that we hadn't earned. He returned us to God. Peter brings all of this up to point out that Jesus didn't take all that abuse randomly. He silently suffered for us, and the burden that that places on us is clear. If Jesus went through all that unfairness for our benefit, because we needed Him to, He has the right to ask us to do the same because He wants us to.
- C. This is why Peter says what he says about submission **TO AUTHORITY**. Look even at the language he begins with in 1 Peter 2:13-17. He says that we submit "for the Lord's sake." We submit, even to the unjust, because that's what Jesus did. In this case, he urges us to submit ourselves to the government, from the ruler even to the lowliest government officials. Let's be honest here, friends. We have it pretty good in this. If taxes are the worst things we can find to complain about, we're really not particularly oppressed. Even though that is true, it's still our responsibility to honor the government in everything and obey the government in everything, even in areas where those around us do not. Just because we know the traffic cops never lurk on a particular stretch of road, that doesn't give us a license to speed. The government is not always watching; indeed, it cannot be. Jesus, however, IS always watching, and it is for His sake that we obey.
- D. This, and indeed all of our submission, can have dramatic effects on those around us. Peter tells us in this text that by doing right we silence the ignorance of foolish men. There is nothing the world around us loves so much as a Christian hypocrite. In fact, many want to believe that all of us don't practice what we preach, and they want to believe it because it gives them an excuse not to obey the gospel. By contrast, though, if these scoffers see the way we live for months or years, and see that we do indeed live by a higher standard, they're out of ammunition. It reminds me of a story my mother tells about a really rough group of kids she taught in vacation Bible school years ago in New Jersey. One day, they were telling her about how they hung out outside of the local liquor store and watched all the other members of the church go in and buy booze. My mother replied, "I don't know about them, but you haven't seen me there." They said, "You're right; we haven't." A decade or more later, one of those kids came back out of nowhere and obeyed the gospel.

- E. This is equally important with respect to our earthly masters in 1 Peter 2:18-20. No matter how well they treat us, we still have to submit to and serve them. Note that when Peter discusses Christian servants being beaten for their faults, he's not speaking metaphorically. Roman slave-owners were not allowed to randomly torture and kill their human property, but they certainly did not have to justify beating them. Even in cases where they were physically abused, though, Christian servants still had the responsibility to submit. Of course, things are different for us today. Unlike slaves, we have the option of leaving one employer and seeking out another. However, while we serve that employer, the rule is the same. We gain no favor from God for bearing up under punishment we have earned, but when we are mistreated, He is pleased when we patiently endure it.

II. In Families and Generally.

- A. Peter next turns his attention to submission **IN FAMILIES**. His study of this question is not as extensive as Paul's in Ephesians 5-6, but he nonetheless says much that we need to hear. First of all, we see his instructions to wives in 1 Peter 3:1-6. Notice first of all the reappearance of a recurrent theme in this text. Wives of non-Christian men are supposed to treat their husbands in a chaste and respectful way so that those husbands will be persuaded to become disciples themselves. Obviously, I've never been the wife of a non-Christian man, but I have some inkling of how difficult it is because I understand the nature of men. Perhaps more than anything else, men hate to be browbeaten and talked down to by their wives. They feel like it takes away their manhood, and men whose wives try to drag them kicking and screaming into the church may never become Christians. Peter here emphasizes the persuasive force of example instead. Example is much less threatening, and in many instances, it offers the Christian wife the best possible way of reaching her husband.
- B. After Peter discusses this issue, he appears to go off on a weird tangent for the next several verses as he discusses modesty. In reality, though, this is just another way of approaching the same topic. For some strange reason, when we read our Bibles, we typically say that immodest and revealing mean the same thing. Actually, the Bible definition is much greater in scope. In Scriptural terms, immodest clothing is any kind of clothing that draws attention to the wearer's outside rather than the wearer's inside. A bikini is immodest, but so is the \$2000 suit a man wears to let everybody know that he's got money. Peter says instead that the woman of God is to adorn herself with a gentle and quiet spirit that manifests itself in submission.
- C. Here's the point: when a woman dresses immodestly, she does so to make the world recognize her as beautiful. By contrast, when a Christian woman adorns herself with a gentle, submissive attitude, she's doing what will make her husband recognize her as beautiful. Let me tell you a secret, ladies: Your husband doesn't care that much whether you carefully do your hair and makeup every day. It doesn't really matter to him that you dress in the latest fashions. What he cares about, what makes him love you, is that you admire him and look up to him. I remember when I was at Dowlen Road, there was a marriage-enrichment class that distributed a survey at the beginning of class. It asked both men and women what they most wanted from their spouses. The women's answers were all over the map, but something like 29 out of 30 men said that what they most wanted from their marriages was to have their wives respect them. That's what makes a wife beautiful in the eyes of her husband. Treat your man like a king, ladies, and he'll love you till his dying day.
- D. Of course, Peter doesn't let husbands get off scot-free. We see his words to them in 1 Peter 3:7. Now, to women, it might seem unfair that they have six verses to do and men only have one, but this is a fairly ferocious one. I've heard more than one preacher say that the commandment for husbands to understand their wives is the only command in the Bible that's impossible. They speak in jest, of course, but there's a lot of truth in humor. For most of us, men, it's hard to think about other people. That means that much of the time, in dealing with our wives, we're like bulls in a china shop. Without even thinking about it, we do things that cause our wives a great deal of emotional pain, and when they get upset, we too often say incredulously, "What? You're upset about that?!" The problem with that attitude is that it's not understanding and it's not honoring. When we deal with our wives, then, what this verse is telling us to do is to be considerate. It's telling us that we do need to treat them like they're made out of china. It's telling us that we need to think about how she will react to our words before we even open our mouths. Otherwise, brothers, if we don't listen to our wives and pay attention to them, God isn't going to pay attention to what we want either.
- E. We see next see Peter's thoughts on submission **GENERALLY**. These concluding remarks appear in 1 Peter 3:8-10. His basic point is that we are supposed to deal with everyone in a kind and humble way, and this duty exists regardless of how they treat us. They could be the nicest people in the world, and we're supposed to treat them right. They could be the rudest jerks in the entire world, but we're still supposed to treat them right. We don't just return courtesy for courtesy. We don't just return blessing for blessing. When somebody does evil to us, we do good to them right back. When somebody insults us, we bless them right back. God has expectations for all of us, and those expectations are the same regardless of our circumstances. Jesus is our model, and Jesus treated people the same when He was on the cross of Calvary as He does now that He's on the throne of heaven. Only in this way, as we bless the people around us, whether or not they deserve it, do we stand to inherit the blessing of eternal life from God, which we certainly do not deserve.

Conclusion. If you'd like to inherit that blessing by living in a godly way, start living for God today.