

# Submitting to authority, even when it is Hard

**Hook** – Our natural revulsion to being under authority:

Noam Chomsky (2007, MIT Linguistics Professor) – “Authority is illegitimate, it has to prove itself, and it very rarely can. The burden of proof is on authority, not on opposing authority, and that's true in every aspect of life.”

Ron Harris (1960, Seaman's apprentice, US Navy) - “Why should the captain be over me? He pulls his pants on the same way that I do!”

Mark Harris (1992, CPT, MC, US Army) – walking by a female major on a sidewalk, didn't salute. She stopped me and demanded to be saluted. I saluted her and replied “You can call me Doctor.”

Legitimate authority	<b>How to submit even, when it is hard</b>	What does it mean to submit?
Seeking the favor of God, and maybe getting man's favor as a side effect		After the example of Christ

**Book** – 1 Peter 2:18-25

**Look**

Legitimate authority

**V18** – Peter continues the theme of this section, found in verse 12, which is “keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles”, so they may “glorify God.” He has instructed the followers of Christ to submit to human authorities, all the while knowing that we are of all men most free. Now he comes to a special case, what are servants to do, especially those who serve wicked masters?

The word used for servant (οἰκέτης *oiketēs*) in this passage is only found four times in the New Testament. It refers to “one who is in the same household as another and is under the authority of that person.” The most common word for servant or slave in the New Testament is δοῦλος *doulos*, which is more general, applying to household slaves and to others. The harshest form of slavery in the Roman Empire was working in mines or rowing galleys; either being a sentence of death and reserved for prisoners of war and criminals. These slaves did not belong to an individual household.

Therefore household servants are to submit to (ὑποτάσσω *hypotassō*) and respect (φόβος *phobos* - fear, *revere*) their masters. This includes those who treat them fairly and those who do not (σκολιός *skolios* - crooked, surly, perverse). The command to submit to an unjust master, however, is qualified by believer's responsibility to fear God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

We see that, contrary to the opinion of Noam Chomsky and many others, authority as a concept is legitimate. Further, God calls His people to obey legitimate authorities; those with legal relationships of authority over us. We are commanded to obey even those authorities which are not good, except for when they command us to do things directly opposed to the word of God.

The most common employer-employee relationship in the Roman Empire was that of master-slave, since the social order and market system in Rome was vastly different than we experience. The best application of this passage, therefore, in modern America is that of the employer-employee relationship.

What does it mean to submit?

The Greek “Hypotasso” suggests soldiers lining up under their commander to do their job. Roman infantry would line up in maniples, three ranks of 40 men each with a three foot square of fighting space around each one. Javelin-armed skirmishers would go before the line before the battle was joined and on the flanks afterward. Equestrians were heavy cavalry usually intended to assault the enemy flanks.

Slaves in the Roman Empire were considered property of their masters, but by the first century were protected by many laws. For example, [Claudius](#) announced that if a slave was abandoned by his master, he became free. [Nero](#) granted slaves the right to complain against their masters in a court. Slaves held a variety of positions, from teachers, accountants and physicians, to manual laborers.

Submitting, therefore, meant performing one’s assigned task to the best of one’s ability without complaining. “Right away, all the way, and with a happy heart” might be one way to describe it. Given the natural penchant of people to resist authority, this is hard enough if the master is good. What about if the master is abusive?

Despite the legal protections, even household slavery in Rome could be harsh. Peter understood this, but still told his readers to submit to their masters. Sometimes Christians even suffered physical abuse at the hands of their masters. At this time, they had gained legal recourse

How does this apply to the employer-employee relationship today?

Seeking the favor of God, and maybe getting man’s favor as a side effect

**V19** – Working for an unjust master surely causes the servant to suffer, but to do so for the sake of service to the Just Master, the Lord Himself, brings favor from the Lord. In many circumstances it can also bring favor from the unjust master. Consider the passage from Tacitus; Christians gained sympathy and even adherents from those who watched their unjust suffering.

"Therefore, to stop the rumor [that he had set Rome on fire], he [Emperor Nero] falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most fearful tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were [generally] hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition - repressed for a time, broke out yet again, not only through Judea, - where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, whither all things horrible and disgraceful flow from all quarters, as to a common receptacle, and where they are encouraged. Accordingly first those were arrested who confessed they were Christians; next on their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city, as of "hating the human race."

In their very deaths they were made the subjects of sport: for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when the day waned, burned to serve for the evening lights. Nero offered his own garden players for the spectacle, and exhibited a Circensian game, indiscriminately mingling with the common people in the dress of a charioteer, or else standing in his chariot. For this cause a feeling of compassion arose towards the sufferers, though guilty and deserving of exemplary capital punishment, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but were victims of the ferocity of one man."

**V20** – Peter delineates suffering for wrongdoing from suffering for doing good. If a servant has an unjust master and resents and resists him, or even more does something bad like destroying the master’s property, that servant will suffer punishment. Enduring harshness with patience in that case gains no credit with God or man.

The Greek (κολαφίζω *kolaphizō*) refers to striking with the fist, so Peter is describing a well deserved beating.

If a servant has an unjust master but is nonetheless cheerful and faithful, working hard for the master's benefit even though the master shows no concern for his, that servant will gain great credit from the Lord. Furthermore, unless the master is sadistic or otherwise deranged, he will be influenced and perhaps even saved by the behavior of his servant. The servant would then receive the blessing of God and a good master, and the Kingdom would gain another member. Is not the story of the Philippian jailer similar (Acts 16:22-34)?

**After the example of Christ**

**VV 21-24** – It is hard to suffer under an unjust master, and it is only possible when done for the love of Christ and in accordance with His example. Suffering is hard to endure, but suffering perceived as unjust is impossible to endure. Because Jesus Christ suffered terrible injustice, more than anyone else in history, for our sakes, our suffering in His service has meaning. We can endure it.

1. Jesus committed no sin, and His people must avoid sin at all times.
2. Jesus had abuse heaped upon Him (λοιδορέω *loidoreō* - reviled) and returned no verbal abuse; neither should His people.
3. Jesus physically suffered but never threatened retaliation. Instead He trusted that justice would be done by the One who is the source and standard of all justice. Should Christians doubt that the Father of Justice will grant them justice as well?
4. Jesus bore of sins of all men and took the punishment for all of their sins. He also bore the sins for each of us. If Jesus willingly suffered for the sins of each man, should not each man willingly suffer for the sins of others, including their unjust masters?

Notice the reflection of Isaiah's fourth "Servant Song" (52:13-53:12) in this passage. The New Testament was not complete at this time and the Old Testament was the Scripture that early believers studied.

**V25** – Peter reminded his readers that like sheep straying from the safety of the shepherd, they continually strayed from the truth, sinning again and again and causing Christ more and more suffering. Only on returning to Him, their shepherd and guardian, do they find protection for their souls.

**Took**

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**Verdict – What do you want them to DO as a result of the truths they have just received?**

**Closing Prayer**