

April 10, 2016

Sojourners *Follow In His Steps*

1 Peter 2:18-25

We are still talking about submission this morning. The word is *hupotasso*, and it means a voluntary submission to authority. It is a Greek military term meaning "to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader", and in non-military use it simply means arranging yourself under someone else's control – arranging your attitude and thinking to correspond to the will of the one over you. The word carries with it the idea of relinquishing your rights to do as you please because you are under authority. And Peter began this section telling us to subject ourselves to the human authorities in our lives for the Lord's sake. That is, we are to subject ourselves for the sake of the name and the fame of our Lord. It is His reputation that is at stake here, it is His name that is front and center, and our submission to the authorities established by God is a means of grace to the unbelieving world.

And now Peter moves from the general idea of submission to the particular. **18 *Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.*** Peter says, 'Servants...' and the word he uses here is one that means a household servant who was usually a slave as well. Most likely he is speaking to the household slaves who are Christians among the believers. Curiously, the Bible does not directly condemn slavery as an institution; nor do any of the New Testament writers incite those who are slaves to rebel. Instead slaves are commanded to obey their masters¹ and Paul even asked Philemon, a Christian brother, to receive back a runaway slave of his, Onesimus, who had become a Christian.² But in this day and age, with the backdrop of the terrible legacy of American slavery, we tend to look at this issue and pass unfair judgment on Peter and Paul, and the rest of the apostles, who apparently were comfortable with the idea. But we are looking at this with 21st century blinders without understanding anything of the history or culture surrounding slavery.

Thomas Sowell, an African American author who has written extensively on the topic says, "*Today the moral horror of slavery is so widely condemned that it is hard to realize that there were thousands of years when slavery was practiced around the world by people of virtually every race. Even the leading moral and religious thinkers in different societies accepted slavery as just a fact of life. No one wanted to be a slave. But their rejection of slavery as a fate for themselves in no way meant that they were unwilling to enslave others. It was just not an issue -- until the 18th century, and then it became an issue only in Western civilization*".³ In books and articles, Sowell has thoroughly documented the widespread institution of slavery in virtually every major culture and civilization up until the 19th century. The Indians had slaves, the Chinese had slaves, Africans had slaves, Europeans had slaves, the great Ottoman empire had slaves, everybody had slaves. Having slaves was not unusual or strange or even considered morally wrong.

But it became a moral issue in our day because of one very important fact. You see in the ancient world, there were a number of reasons people were enslaved. Usually it was the result of war and conquest, the defeated became slaves of the winners. But sometimes it was the product of an economic system that didn't have any bankruptcy laws. People who couldn't pay their bills would often sell themselves into slavery, and they would work off their debt. But in most cases, people were not necessarily enslaved for life. There was the very real possibility of buying themselves or their family members out of slavery. Some even chose to remain slaves because the prospects of freedom often meant starvation or worse. Additionally, slavery in these cultures was across class lines and across racial lines. You had poor people enslaved, and you had rich people enslaved. You had black people enslaved to white people and white people enslaved to black people. Every color was represented in the world wide slave pool.

1 Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22; Titus 2:9

2 Philemon 10-16

3 Thomas Sowell, A Legacy of Cliches, Town Hall, July 7, 2015

But in the 19th century, and in Great Britain and the U.S. in particular, for the first time, slavery was based entirely on race. At one time, if you were black and living in the U.S. or Great Britain, you were a slave, period. Slavery now in the western world was not due to conquest or bankruptcy; rather it was the result of colonialism that needed cheap workers for sugar cane and cotton plantations. Furthermore, you could not buy your way out of this. This was forced slavery for life. And it was only through the gospel, particularly in the western world, through the efforts of men like Wesley, Wilberforce and Whitfield and others, that slavery began to be seen as corrupt and immoral and as something to be exterminated. Don't get me wrong, I am in no way advocating that any kind of slavery is a good thing. But you have to understand what Peter is saying so you don't label he and Paul and others as some kind of white supremacists. They were not fans of slavery. In fact in his first letter to the Corinthians Paul says, *'Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)'* In other words, Paul did not consider slavery such an awful prospect that you had to find a way to escape it by any means possible, but neither did he develop some sort of liberation theology of slavery.

And here Peter tells those who are slaves to submit to their masters with all respect – he doesn't say, 'Because you are Christians now, slavery doesn't apply.' Instead it is as though he says, 'Now that you are a Christian, you ought to be a better slave than ever.' It is just like the Holy Spirit to never seem to deal with the other guy. If you or I had been writing this letter, we probably would have rebuked the masters for owning slaves and told the slaves that now they are Christians they don't have to live in this evil system of servitude. Our tendency is to confess the other guy's sin, but Peter doesn't even say a word to the masters. We like to say, 'But what about him?' and God says, 'Let's not talk about him, let's talk about you.' Don't read the Bible for the other guy. The masters are jumping up and down saying, 'Preach it brother! Submission is good!' The husbands are jumping ahead to chapter 3 and lovingly reading the first six verses to their wives and saying, 'God be praised!' The wives are saying, 'Forget about the 1st six verses, let's look at verse 7!' Everybody is reading everybody else's mail.

Peter says, 'Servants...' If you identify yourself as a servant this morning; if you are someone under someone else's authority; if you are a bond-slave of Jesus Christ – the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. Have I left anyone out? Then *'Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect'*. That means, arranging yourself under someone else's control – arranging your attitude and thinking to correspond to the will of the one over you – with respect, with all respect. The word is literally, 'fear'. It is arranging yourself under the will of those over you with a proper sense of fear of the consequences of disobeying, and giving proper honor for the authority of their office. But you say, 'You don't know the monster I work for, or the wretch I live with. This guy's a tyrant, a bully, a loser, a crook – how can I respect him?' I don't know, the Bible just tells me I have to. Some of you are saying, 'That's not so hard – I have a great boss! He's kind, and good and gentle. I have no problem submitting.' Then get down on your knees and thank a gracious God for His kindness. But the rest of us have to deal with *'...the unjust'*. The word is *skolios*, and it means full of obstacles, disorganized, devious, corrupt, evil, unjust, and just plain crooked. Now it isn't hard to be a Christian around a good and gentle boss – but the test comes when it is a crooked man in charge. *19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.*

I think the NASB has a better sense of what Peter is telling us here. *'For this finds favor'* it says. What finds favor? Submission finds favor – this enduring sorrows and not retaliating or getting even – this finds favor. *'Favor'* is the word *charis*, which translated means *'grace'*. In other words, the grace of God is found in the most unlikely places. Who would expect grace to show up when submitting to a crooked boss, or an unreasonable husband? But the Bible says this finds grace. And we know from Hebrews 4:16 that grace is found at the throne of grace and that happens as we are on our knees submitted to God. So that must mean that if we expect to carry out this command to be submissive – we'd better be in prayer – for ourselves, for our boss, for our husband, for whoever the master is. It is prayer to change our stubborn, independent hearts to submit. Not prayer that so and so would be a better master – but prayer that I would be a better slave.

Again, this is still for the Lord's sake. Here Peter says, be *mindful of God*. That is we take God into account in this circumstance – we look to God and not to the unjust master – we understand that God is in charge and He is the one with whom we have to deal. It is for His glory and His name's sake that we submit. It is to magnify God that nothing in our actions would allow our conscience before God to accuse us of anything unchristian. How we behave toward authority, and especially unregenerate men either glorifies and magnifies God, or not. And it is our job to magnify Him.

Today in our culture, God is mostly not magnified. For the most part, God is whatever you think He should be – consequently He is nothing – weightless, if you will. Some time ago there was a book entitled *God in the Wasteland* by David Wells, and in it he talks about the absence of the centrality and supremacy of God in our society: *'It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. he has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgments no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertiser's sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness. It is a condition we have assigned him after having nudged him out to the periphery of our secularized life. His truth is no longer welcome in our public discourse. The engine of modernity rumbles on, and he is but a speck in its path.'*⁴

I am not arguing that God is in fact weightless, but that for all practical purposes in many ways He has become insignificant in this world. What we need, what this world needs is a weighty God – a God who matters, a God whose words impact our lives, whose commandments are not suggestions and whose appearance is awesome and startling. And when our lives reflect His glory, there is weight there. 2 Corinthians 4:17 tells us *'For momentary, light, affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory...'* Glory is something that has weight. The New Testament word most often used for glory, *doxa*, is virtually synonymous with the Hebrew word *kavodh* for glory that meant something *heavy, heaviness, weight or dignity*. When our lives reflect the glory of God, and the world sees us enduring *'sorrows while suffering unjustly'* – God becomes weighty and consequential to the world. And suddenly they are brought face to face with the very real presence of God and the realization that Jesus Christ is very significant, and their eternal destiny is hanging on what they do with Him.

Peter goes on to say: *20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?* The word *credit* is also translated glory, or honor or praise. So Peter says, 'What glory is there in getting what you deserve when you're bad?' There is no credit or praise or honor in that. There is suffering that has no other purpose than punishment for correction. When you sin you should expect harsh treatment – the word here means to strike with a fist – to beat someone. When you do wrong – you shouldn't expect a soft hand – you ought to expect to be beaten – and there is no credit in that. You still need to endure it patiently – but no one's going to give you a medal.

On the other hand: *But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.* This is where you get the credit. This is where you get the grace. This is praiseworthy – to do what is right and suffer because you did right – and you patiently endure the abuse, the injustice, the slander, the misinterpretation of your motives. When you think about it, there really is no sense in suffering for doing wrong – you don't get credit for that. If you are going to suffer anyway – why not suffer for doing what is right and get credit for it. *'For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.'* 1 Peter 3:17

But it is more than simply suffering for doing what is right. This is the road we have been called to follow. *21 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.* If you are a Christian, God has called you to patiently endure unjust, uncalled-for suffering without resorting to bitterness and anger and hurting back. Submission for the Lord's sake means giving up your right to revenge, retaliation or rage. How many of us live with the realization that it is our calling, our vocation, our purpose to be misunderstood, criticized, ignored, hurt or otherwise mistreated for doing what is right? We don't like to contemplate that. That's just not fair. But it's hard to argue with Scripture – *because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.* now you go and do the same. When you do right you will be criticized; when you do right you will be hurt; when you do right you will suffer; when you do right you will not be appreciated.

This is a common New Testament theme. Philippians 1:29: *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake.* Do you understand the gift God has graciously given to you? Faith, and the privilege to be abused. That's what the text says. We've been graciously given the gift of faith and the gift of suffering for His sake. Is this how you think of your calling as a Christian? And if not, why not? It is a constant New Testament theme. And Peter is picking it up here.

4 David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, (Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1994) 88.

Ruby Bridges was a little black girl in Mississippi in the 60's during the Civil Rights movement in the United States. The Supreme Court had ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional. And overnight, in the deep South, the schools had to integrate. When this little 8 year old black girl showed up at the all-white William Frantz Elementary school in New Orleans, there were riots. The white parents pulled all their children out of this school and showed up at the gates everyday, shouting obscenities, holding signs with incredibly hateful slogans, protesting this little girl's right to enter their school. They refused to let their children into the school, screamed their hate at her every day as she came to the school, escorted by federal agents to protect her. Day after day, little Ruby was the only student at this school, running the gauntlet each morning and afternoon of angry, bitter, swearing white parents and students. For a whole year Ruby was taught by one Christian teacher who braved that crowd.

This gained so much attention, that eventually a psychiatrist from Harvard wanted to find out what this was doing to that little girl. So he went down South and watched her as she went to school, day after day. He got to know her parents who were poor, semi-literate, godly Christians. And one day he noticed that as she was escorted into school by these federal agents, with the crowd surging around her, screaming their obscene threats, she stopped. And then she seemed to say something for a couple of seconds, and then she walked on into the school. Afterward, the psychiatrist asked her, 'Ruby, you stopped outside for a few moments and said something. What did you say to those people?' She said, 'Oh I wasn't talking to them'. And the psychiatrist said, 'Who were you talking to?' And Ruby said, 'Oh, I was talking to God'. 'Really? What were you saying?' Little 8 year old Ruby said, 'My parents have always taught me to pray for my enemies. And this morning I left home so quickly that I forgot. So when I heard them screaming at me, I remembered and I stopped. And I said 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'.⁵

Peter says that the life and death of Christ are meant to be an example of how we are to live this Christian life. He is not talking about WWJD. He is not saying, 'Look at the example of Jesus and try to emulate Him.' He says, '*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.* The word *example* is *hupogrammos*' and was used to refer to a pattern of letters of the alphabet over which children learning to write would trace the letters. It described an exact copy. We don't really have a word that captures the essence of this well in English. The suffering of Jesus is not simply one example or pattern, as if there were many. He is *the* example by which the gospel is written in bold letters over our lives. In other words, our lives are meant to trace out the pattern of His life so that we follow exactly in His footsteps. The essence of this is our willingness to suffer injustice and unfairness just as He did, without complaint. In her commentary on this passage, Karen Jobes says, '*...one cannot step into the footsteps of Jesus and head off in any other direction than the direction He took, and His footsteps lead to the cross, through the grave and onward to glory.*'⁶

And this is what it looks like: *22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. 23 When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.* Our natural response upon being reviled for doing what is right is to revile in return; an eye for an eye, or two eyes for an eye if possible. If we have been mistreated, ignored, misunderstood and reviled, we feel duty-bound to bring it to the other person's attention. We want to get them in front of the judge and shower them with justice and make sure they know they done wrong. We're not interested in restoration – we're interested in retaliation. We want to rub their noses in it. I've done that with dogs as a means to house train them and it doesn't really work all that well. I get frustrated – the dog gets confused and it doesn't do the carpet any good either.

No one has been more reviled than Christ – and yet He did not revile in return. No one suffered more than this man – and yet He didn't threaten back. The temptation for us when we suffer unjustly is to threaten our tormentors with dire consequences. It is a natural response. We hate it when someone takes advantage of us – we hate to let false accusations against us stand without correction – we hate it when crooked and evil people seem to have the last word. So what is the answer, what is the key, how do we keep from vengeful, bitter feelings of revenge? How do we not hurt back, or not plan to hurt back, or not boil with indignation when we are not allowed to hurt back? How do we find grace? How do we find credit in this kind of suffering?

5 http://www.cbn.com/special/blackhistory/undergod_rubybridges.aspx

6 Karen Jobes, Baker 1 Peter, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2005), 195.

Look at verse 23 again: **23** *When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.* The key is in entrusting – Jesus entrusted Himself to His Father, the righteous judge. That word means to give into the hands (of another); to give over into (one's) power or use, or to deliver to one something to keep, use, take care of, manage. When someone else is managing things, when it is someone else's responsibility to see that things get done right, when I don't have to worry that everybody gets their just deserts. I can bear up under unjust suffering because the guy who knows the score is in charge. He'll hand out credit where credit is due and punishment to whom it belongs. Jesus handed over to God the whole situation – not only Himself but those abusers and torturers and self-righteous prigs called Pharisees who thought they were better than God – and trusted God for the outcome. He had committed Himself, body, soul, and spirit to the loving, and wise hands of His Father and kept committing Himself to God – until the very end where He said, *'Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit'* and died.

This is not a one time commitment. It says He **continued entrusting**. That means this was something that happened over and over and over and over. This is key – we must keep entrusting our lives and circumstances and relationships to God. Don't stop entrusting your stuff to God. You can trust Him to do right – you can trust Him to see that everyone gets their just deserts – you can trust Him to see that all things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. You can trust Him all the way to the cross. When the good you do goes unnoticed, unappreciated – don't stop trusting. *'Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'* Matthew 6. When the good you do is rejected, misunderstood, or twisted – don't stop trusting. *'But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.'* Luke 17:25. When the good you do causes you to be reviled and slandered – don't stop trusting. *'Never take your own revenge beloved, but leave room for God. For it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink...'* Romans 12:19-20.

This is our calling, to patiently endure unjust, uncalled-for suffering without resorting to rage, revenge or retaliation. Do you believe, do you trust, that God sees every wrong done to you, that He knows every hurt, that He assesses motives and circumstances with perfect accuracy, that He is impeccably righteous and takes no bribes, and that He will settle all accounts with perfect justice? This is why we can trust God in the middle of unjust suffering and that is where we find credit in suffering. Listen to what this sounds like: *''And I thank God that he has given me the love to seek to convert and adopt as my son the enemy who killed my dear boys.'* These were the words of Korean Pastor Yang-won Son. The year was 1948; the place was the town of Soonchun, near the 38th parallel. A band of Communists had taken control of the town for a brief period, and had executed Pastor Son's two older boys, Matthew and John. They died as martyrs, calling on their persecutors to have faith in Jesus. When the Communists were driven out, Chai-sun, a young man of the village, was identified as one who had executed them, and his own execution was ordered. But Pastor Son requested that the charges be dropped and that Chai-sun be released into his custody for adoption. Rachel, the thirteen-year-old sister of the murdered boys, testified to support her father's incredible request. Only then did the court agree to release Chai-sun, and he became the son of the pastor, and a believer in the grace of Jesus Christ"⁷

Finally, God's commands carry with them the implicit promise of fulfillment. Since God is not a man that He should lie – He won't practice deception or hypocrisy and tell you to do something He knows you have no possibility of doing. He won't say 'Submit' and then either be surprised by your inability to submit; or on the other hand be confident in your ability to submit. It is not that He is trusting in us but in Himself. **24** *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.* Christ's obedient death on the cross released the power of God, through the Holy Spirit to do in us what we could never do by ourselves. His death means that we don't have to surrender to the sin of rage or revenge or retaliation. His death means that the power of sin is broken and we can live to righteousness. **25** *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* And the clear implication here is just as sheep follow in the footsteps of the shepherd, we should follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Left to themselves, sheep just stray. They wander wherever the desire of their selfish little hearts take them. And it usually takes them right into trouble. The thing about sheep is that they won't be driven. You can't guide a flock of sheep from behind. You have to lead them. And where is Jesus leading? Directly into suffering. But take heart, He's the Shepherd, He knows where He's going. He knows what is best for us. So follow.

7 Edmond Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, (IVP Academic, Downers Grove, Ill. 1988), 113.

You see, ultimately submission is liberating. Submission to God is real freedom. He takes the gold of our submission to Christ and puts it into the furnace of suffering and melts it down with the white-hot heat of affliction so that what comes out is pure and solid and real. And this is what glorifies God. If you believe this, if God is this real to you, then you will hand everything over to God, and although no one in the world may understand where your peace and joy and freedom to love is coming from, you know. The answer is God. And sooner or later they will know. And this will testify to the reality of Jesus to the world.

Our gracious and loving Father,

Grant that we would submit everything to You and put all our trust in Your capable hands. Don't let us resort to rage, revenge or retaliation when we are reviled for Your name's sake. Cause our hearts to rejoice and not grow bitter, and help us to bear up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. May we continually come to the throne of grace to find grace and help in our time of need. Let our lives reflect the glory of God to those around us. Clothe us with the mantle of praise worn by those saints in the past who gloried in Your name through all the unjust persecution. May we see and feel what Christ was willing to suffer on our behalf and follow Him in that suffering. May the gospel of Jesus Christ run and triumph through our joyful submission and readiness to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ our Lord – and in that powerful conquering name we pray, Amen.