The Christian's Work Ethic
Scripture: 1 Peter 2
Code: BQ9511

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose. (1 Peter 2:18–21)

It should be of little consequence to believers what their circumstances are in the workplace, whether they are chief executive officers or custodians, whether they receive a substantial pay raise or settle for a salary cut so the company can stay solvent. The factor of overarching significance is that they maintain their testimony before the watching world of sinners (cf. Matt. 5:15–16; Mark 4:21; Phil. 2:14–16), and in the workplace that occurs when believers labor with an awareness of God's glory. Such awareness is the motivation not only for godly behavior and submission on the job, but also for trusting in God's sovereignty in every situation.

Undoubtedly many recipients of this epistle endured painful and unjust beatings as slaves. Their masters might have deprived them of food, forced them to work unreasonably long hours, or punished them unfairly in a variety of ways. Unlike modern-day employees in Western industrialized countries, those slaves had no one to turn to for redress of grievances—no union representatives, no government boards or ombudsmen to settle disputes, and no way to file civil lawsuits. They just had to endure whatever painful and difficult circumstances their masters imposed on them—and they did so, much to the glory and honor of God (Matt. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:4–5; James 5:11), which evidenced their heavenly perspective.

Peter pressed his argument with a negative rhetorical question, followed by a positive statement. The implied answer to his question, **For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?** is, "There is no credit." Believers who sin deserve chastening (Ps. 66:18; Jer. 5:25; Dan. 9:8; Heb. 12:5–11), and they ought to endure it with patience.

On the other hand, Peter offered the positive assertion, **But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.** When the believing slaves did **what** was **right** some still had to **suffer for it,** even to the extent of being **harshly treated** as if they really deserved punishment. This indicates that, among various forms, harsh treatment came physically, by

means of repeated, hard blows with the fists or instruments (cf. Mark 14:65). Perhaps some were punished because of their Christian convictions. Again, those who endured such suffering **patiently** found **favor** or grace **with God.** It always pleases Him to see believers faithfully accept and deal with any adversity (3:14; 4:14, 16; Matt. 5:11–12; 1 Cor. 4:11–13; 2 Cor. 12:9–10; James 1:12).

Peter concluded this section with the amazing statement at the beginning of verse 21, **For you have been called for this purpose. Have been called** refers to the efficacious salvation call (1:15; 5:10; Rom. 8:28, 30; 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:6, 15; Eph. 4:1, 4). As soon as the Holy Spirit calls people from darkness to light, they become an enemy of the world (John 15:18–19; 1 John 3:13) and a target of unjust and unfair attack as they seek to obey Christ. Paul told Timothy, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12; cf. Mark 10:30; John 15:20; 16:33).

It is more important to God that those who are citizens of heaven display a faithful testimony, marked by spiritual integrity, than that they strive to attain all their perceived rights in this world. It is more important to God for believers to uphold the credibility of gospel power than to obtain a raise or promotion in their vocation. It is ultimately far more important to God that believers demonstrate their submission to His sovereignty in every area of life than that they protest against problems at their workplace.

Whenever believers encounter trials on the job, they ought to view them as opportunities for spiritual growth and evangelism. The chief reason God allows believers to remain in this world is so He might use them to win the lost and thereby bring glory to His name. Those who suffer with the right attitude will be blessed in this life and honored later in the Lord’s presence.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).