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# The Effective Witness of Submissive People

## 1 Peter 2:10-3:12

**Introduction** Submission is a difficult topic for many, not the least is in being submissive to the Bible. Think about these with me for a moment.

A husband has asked a wife to...

A boss has asked a Christian employee to...

The government tells us to...

This raises some really important questions.

What does it mean to *be submissive*? Submission is to place myself under the authority of another with a poise to obey except when commanded by commission or omission direct disobedience to God. At that point, I may disobey, but submit to the punishment.

We define it, describe it and discuss it, **do we practice it?**

When do we know that we are really submissive? In what circumstance does our submission really show?

Seeing our deeds they will glorify God on the day of His visitation. Peter argues that the effectiveness of our witness to those around us is directly related to the extent of our submission to those over us. Our submission to God is expressed in submission to the authorities that God has ordained.

## God Honoring Precepts

**(v.13-20)**

Peter begins with two spheres in which we are usually interacting with unbelievers. We have God honoring precepts to be in submission to our government and to our employers.

### In Relationship to Our Government

**(v.13-17)**

Keep in mind that the submission commanded here was to the Roman government who crucified Christ, beheaded Paul, imprisoned John and crucified Peter. It was a dictatorship led by evil and corrupt men.

We are to submit to government at both the national and local levels (v.13-14a). Peter expresses it here in the layers he lived under. We recognize the familiar federal and local governors. He also commends the importance of seeing who is authoritative or supreme. As much as we admire and respect our system in which the people are supreme who then grant authority to the states who grant authority to the federal government, this system is not necessarily Biblical. It is not the only system that can command our submission.

Peter shows us the reasons we are to submit to the governments God places over us (v.14b-15). This reflects Paul's teaching in Romans 13.

We submit because of their purpose. God has ordained two primary purposes for human government: to punish and to praise. They were to punish those who do evil and were to promote those who do good. While most governments, including both the one Peter was under and the one we are under, seek to become the gods of their societies, they are still to be submitted to even when they go beyond their God-ordained function.

We submit because it is God's will (v.15). At the end of the day, we submit to government because we are submitted to God. He declares His will. His will is to live holy lives under our government. But God in His grand wisdom, has ordain that our submission silences ignorance and folly of those who foment rebellion against ordained authorities.

Our submission is an act of restrng our freedom (v.16). We are to live as free people but not use that freedom to cloak or mask evil. In other words, we are strangers and exiles, citizens of heaven and thus are free. But we are not free to rebel against ordained authorities.

We express our submission (v.17) through these brief commands in a chiasm. We are to be respectful of all people and show respect to the emperor (president). The word honor means to show outward respect in our words and deeds. This means we must guard what we say about our leaders, even if they are a Nero or a Caligula. At the center of the chiasm is loving our brothers and sisters in the faith and loving God. Be respectful of unbelievers; sacrificially love God and His people.

## **In Relationship to Our Employers**

**(v.18-20)**

This is set in the context of the lowest possible form of working relationship, servant and master. The New Testament writers clearly meant for the principles to be applied in all employee-employer relationships.

Submission is commanded to both good and bad employers (v.18). The word *unjust* here could be *perverse* or *crooked*. Certainly it is easy to respect a good and gentle master or supervisor. But we must also submit with respect and honor to those who may even be unjust. Have you reflected on this in the context of your work situation? Many of you work for employers who are crooked and unjust. Do you use this as an excuse to disrespect and dishonor them in your heart and in your words?

We must seek to have God's favor even when we cannot have our bosses' favor (v.19-20). Patience while suffering what we deserve is not particularly commendable. But to graciously and kindly bear up under harsh treatment does please God. We can only do so when we are seeking God's favor. If we are all about defending our rights and standing up for ourselves, we will struggle. God's favor is on those who patiently bear abuse at work.

## **Purpose Giving Pattern (v.21-25)**

Here is the theology of suffering that is going to give meaning and purpose to the humbling submission whose evident end will be suffering.

### **Example of His Suffering (v.21-23)**

Peter, remembering Jesus' conduct while suffering, sets Him before our eyes as the example of submission (v.21). Submissive suffering is the mark of Biblical sacrifice. You have been called to this so that you can follow in Jesus' steps all the way to Calvary. The cross is the supreme example of submission and suffering humbled under God's mighty hand.

Note the particulars of Jesus' conduct (v.22-23). These are the very things we are prone to do: sin, lie, retaliate when insulted and threaten. We want vindication and vengeance. Instead, Jesus trusted the rightness of God's immediate providence and long-term justice. Notice that the outward expression of sin is rejected as a result of an inward orientation of the heart. He believes God will deal justly. He wants to be pleasing to God. So He commits Himself to God's justice.

### **Enablement of His Sacrifice (v.24)**

The truth of the cross enables this kind of suffering. Jesus' sacrifice makes possible the dying to self and the living to righteousness that suffering submission requires. Once again, that foundational truth rests underneath a most difficult call. That we have died and are raised again to live righteously gives us the power to mortify self when we are suffering unjustly.

### **Encouragement of His Shepherding (v.25)**

How prone we are to straying and how powerfully encouraging is Jesus' shepherding and overseeing in our lives. Not submitting to government or employers is a way sheep stray. Humbling ourselves under the great pastor and overseer of the church, the Lord Jesus, is how sheep return and are restored.

Why does Peter introduce these two ideas here: Shepherding and Overseeing? Now we will turn our attention to submission as believers. Our submission as believers is under the shepherding care and overseeing governorship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Marriage Sustaining Perspectives (3:1-7)**

"In the same way" as in 2:25 that believers have returned to their Shepherd and Overseer, so wives submit to husbands. Much of what Peter presents here has been misused by men and denied by women that we will need to think carefully and Biblically through this. Having recently preached in-depth on this text, I want to follow Peter's thought and allow the Spirit to make particular application to you. I am certain that these next two points address where many of you are struggling. Our single women and men need to begin to cultivate what God is commanding here. Many of our wives need to repent of not responding as Peter instructs. Many of you husbands need to repent of your attitudes and actions towards your wives. So, listen carefully.

## **The Power of a Wife's Submission (v.1-6)**

I get this from the phrase “they may be won over without words.” So this is not *empowerment* in the modern sense, but having a God-enabled affect on a husband through submission.

### **In Her Actions (v.1-2)**

Submission results in behavior which is a powerful witness, maybe even more powerfully affecting than her words. This is a lifestyle marked by purity and respect (reverence). Here is a wife living with a disobedient husband. He may be a believer disobeying God and being addressed by the church. He may be an unbeliever. She aims to see God change him through her respectful and pure conduct.

### **In Her Adorning (v.3-4)**

Christian ladies should cultivate the inward person and godly character rather than emphasizing the outward appearance. The point here is that a wife's most powerful influence is through her character, not her clothes. She seeks to win her husband through what God prizes. She cultivates a meek and quiet spirit. In quietness, she so rests in God that her own heart is at rest. In meekness, she so trusts the sovereign power of God that she restrains her own strength.

### **In Her Attitudes (v.5-6)**

She sets herself to model her life after women in the Bible who exhibited submission in the most extraordinary of circumstances. Doing so gives her confidence to submit in the face of the possibility of being misused and misunderstood. She sets her hope in God and moves with calm courage through difficult circumstances. She reads stories of great women in the Old Testament like Sarah who sets an example and whose faith and walk are commended by God.

## **The Strength of a Husband's Gentleness (v.7)**

In the same way that Jesus is our Shepherd and our Overseer, we must shepherd and govern our homes and spouses.

### **In His Responsibilities**

These are particularly important for a husband not to become a tyrant in the exercise of his authority, particularly when a wife is being submissive. Be gentle and understanding, recognizing her vulnerability. Share with her. Seek her counsel. Involve her in decisions. Do not just rule – shepherd your wife and govern your home *in the way you are shepherded by God and want to be shepherded by Elders*.

Show her honor and respect her, as a sister in Christ. You are joint-heirs of God's grace. Once again, we must have a fundamental reordering of how we think of ourselves. As believers, we are first brother and sister in Christ, then

spouses. Most of what is required of you is because of your eternal relationship, not your temporal relationship.

### **In His Reasons**

If we do not treat our wives as we should, our prayers will be hindered. We will not have freedom of conscience nor access. Wonder how much praying by men is snarled on the thorns of their poor treatment of their spouses.

## **Relationship Building Practices (v.8-12)**

To wrap this discussion up, Peter gives us commands which will cultivate and build our relationships and provide a context in which we can submit within our roles and support those whose submission is resulting in suffering.

### **The Conduct Expected (v.8-9a)**

How many churches and homes would be very different if we just did these things. Reflect on what changes we all need to make in these areas.

These core heart attitudes have a powerful affect on our leadership and on our submission. These attitudes cluster around being focused on others first. They are a reversal of self-focus and self-serving. All true, godly submission, whether in home, work or ministry, will be shaped and motivated by affirming these truths and valuing them.

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| Harmony      | Our submission aims to promote and produce harmony. We are working toward one mindedness that makes submission a joy.   |
| Sympathy     | We submit with a heart identifying with the struggles and sufferings of those who are responsible for us. We try to know others well enough to care for their troubles.                                 |
| Love         | We submit with brotherly love. This is a single adjective used to describe our relationship with others. Always we are to have hearts trusting and treasuring people as an expression of familial love. |
| Kind hearted | We submit with a tender heart. Callused, hard hearts will be unwilling to submit when it is hard to. We must have broken hearts before God so that we will have kind hearts toward those who lead us.   |
| Humility     | We submit with a lowly mindedness that looks like courtesy. The word here is an adjective that describes a way of thinking of oneself that causes us to be courteous.                                   |

Is this the way you think? Do you have these attitudes as the soil in which your submission will grow well?

When faced with difficulty with submitting to leadership, we must be careful in our responses. Peter warns us about how we are to respond when we are opposed or attacked. As brothers and sisters, when we are in conflict, particularly in the context submission, then this is how we must respond as following the example of Christ.

**DO NOT REPAY IN KIND.** When you are sinned against, do not respond by doing sin against them. Other people's sins do not excuse your responses. So, we are not allowed to respond sinfully *no matter what the provocation*.

**DO NOT RETURN INSULTS.** God's people have always had a bent to place verbal interaction in a different category. We tend to think that if a person attacks us verbally, we are allowed to attack them. If they revile us, we can revile in return. You insult me; I'm going to let you have it. Godly submission must put away all forms of ungodly talk about those who are leading us. This is true at home, at work and in ministry.

Rather, we are to respond positively. **WE BLESS.** This is a verb. In what we do and what we say, we aim for the good of the other. Even in the midst of their sinning against us, we point them through our actions and our words to the good God has promised and the glory He has purposed.

Why do we cultivate these attitudes and actions? So that we may inherit a blessing. The word here refers to a bequest upon death, an inheritance. So we will live together in a godly, humble way, with a heart for others and careful, measured response to opposition with the aim to be qualified to inherit the blessing. And it may well require a Christ-like sacrifice of self in submission to the will of God.

## **The Cause Explained**

**(v.9b-12)**

This is what you were called to which will end in eternal blessing. He grounds his instruction in Psalm 34:12-16. The whole Psalm gives us the motivation for submission. We are free to submit when we understand the fear of God. We submit under all those God has put over us for His eye is on us. We submit as before the face of Go.

**Conclusion** Consider some of the motivations for God honoring submission:

For the Lord's sake (v.13)  
Silence ignorance of foolish people (v.15)  
As bond slaves of God (v.16)  
For the sake of a good conscience (v.19)  
Finds favor with God (v.19,20)

In our submission in contexts outside the church, may we show how great our God is as we humble ourselves under His sovereign hand and submit to our government and to our employers.

True submission can only be tested when we are asked to do something we don't want to do. When we must bend our wills to the will of another, this is when we know whether we are truly submissive. This is true of teenagers – are you submissive to your parents? This is true of wives – are you submissive to your husbands? This is true of employees – are you submissive to your bosses?

In Christ as a suffering servant on the cross:

We have the pattern for submission that pleases God.

We have the power for submission that suffers well.

Let us cultivate an environment in the church where we engage one another in a way that enables and encourages this kind of submission.

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## Notes