

How Should Christians Respond to Ungodly Authorities?

[1 Peter 2:16-21](#)

1 Peter, Day 11

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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.

- 1 Peter 2:16-21, ESV

Have you ever had to work for someone you just didn't like or respect, maybe someone who wasn't a believer and who actually lived a very immoral life? Or, have you ever had a president you had a hard time respecting morally? (Almost everyone would probably say yes to that second question.) So, what do we do?

Sadly, I can tell you what I have seen countless Christians do, and which I have done at times myself: Slander, back-bite, complain, disrespect. Is that what we're supposed to do?

Peter told believers to "*honor the emperor*" at a time when the emperor was Nero, an immoral madman who would later crucify Peter. Yet, God had made Nero the emperor, and Christians were to honor him as such. What they could not do was honor him as Lord, which is what he demanded. Proper honor, in its proper place, was something they could offer and must offer.

And then, after telling believers to honor an immoral emperor for his God-given position as emperor, Peter tells the Christians who are slaves to honor and obey their earthly masters. This is hard enough when your earthly master is a decent, kind, fair man, but Peter tells them to be subject with all respect "*not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.*"

How in the world could Peter expect Christian slaves to be respectfully obedient to unjust masters? Well, he tells them that it "*is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.*" Here we see that motives are everything in the Christian life. If the Christian slave is respectfully obedient only because he wants to avoid getting beaten or is hoping for some kind of reward, then his behavior is just self-serving and not particularly commendable. If he is obedient because he fears his master and thinks of him as some kind of earthly god, then such subservience is definitely not God-honoring. But if he is "*mindful of God*" - consciously thinking of his service to his cruel master as obedience to God, whose providence has placed him under this man - then his obedience to his earthly master can be obedience to God, and that kind of service is gracious indeed.

Then Peter gives instruction which is helpful to all Christians living in every kind of situation: "*If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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.*"

Christ suffered injustice at the hands of cruel men. The Sanhedrin, the Roman guards, and Pontius Pilate were all guilty of treating the Lord with cruel injustice. And yet He graciously submitted to their cruel mistreatment. He could have escaped. He could have struck them down and called down fire from

heaven on the whole lot of them. But He submitted. Why? Because He loved His Heavenly Father, and this is what His Father had assigned to Him as His suffering.

When we accept the unjust suffering we experience in faith - whether that's being slandered or attacked or discriminated against or whatever - we are honoring God. We are accepting what He has sent our way, trusting that He has a good reason for sending it. In this way, we are walking in the footsteps of Christ.

I should say that submitting to injustice is not always the righteous thing to do. If you are in an abusive relationship with someone who is hurting you, it is most loving to get help and force them to get help, too. Peter is not telling wives to stay with abusive husbands. But in other areas - dealing with an immoral president, an unfair boss, slanderous co-workers, etc. - we can honor God by accepting mistreatment and graciously treating with love and respect those who mistreat us.