

Suffering in the Workplace

1 Peter 2:18-20

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 3, 2017

Well, to start us off, I want to read our passage today and then we'll just say a few words about it. So, if you would look at 1 Peter 2:9, and we'll read through verse 20 just to get the context for this. Peter writes,

But you are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession”, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were “not a people” but now you are “the people of God”, you had “not received mercy”, but now you have “received mercy”. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 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.

I've told you before in this series that every book in the Bible contains a reference to suffering. Every book in the Old and New Testament contains a reference to pain. 1 Peter's not alone in that. It's just one in a long line of books. Some think the Bible is full of stories of people who lived way up in the clouds in an ivory tower, but that's about as far away from reality as possible. The Bible is full of heartache and pain. In fact, you could argue that the people in the Bible knew more about pain than we do. They had very hard lives.

Just a few examples of this 'cause it ties in directly to 1 Peter. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword." "That's why I came," Jesus said, "I came to bring suffering." He said in chapter 10 verses 35 through 36, "Do not think I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

Some people think, and you hear this on the Christian radio a lot, that Jesus is safe for the whole family. And in a sense He is, when you come to Jesus. And He will change the way you interact with your family because He will change you. He will make you a better father, mother, sister or

brother. But come to Him and, in this text, He says He will cause division. He will drive you apart because some will listen to Christ and go this way, some will not listen to Christ and go this way. And He says a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Jesus came to do that, He says. He is the Prince of Peace but He also came to bring a sword.

In the next book the Gospel of Mark chapter 8 as you're just going through the New Testament, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it." Now as He gets into the Gospel of Mark, He's talking about losing your life. Before He's talking about losing your family, now He's talking about losing your life. There's a paradox here. If you want to save your life, you have to lose it. If you want to live a pain free life in heaven, you have to live a painful life on earth.

And He goes on in the Gospel of Luke chapter 6, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil." In John chapter 15:20, "Remember the words I said to you, a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you." And then you get into the Book of Acts and you see how the early church is persecuted, but the point is that suffering has been there from the very beginning.

If you read through your Bibles, you're going to read a book about suffering. Jesus said it was His mission, and it's the way to get to heaven. He said you will experience this if you are His disciples. And He even says, you're blessed over this. If you're poor, and hunger and thirst for righteousness, you are blessed. It's a good thing.

I hear people say all the time today, they look around and they say, "Why is the church in such bad shape? Why is it being persecuted? Why is it slandered and ridiculed and made fun of on the news?" Well, let me ask you a question, why not? It's always been that way. It's nothing new, in fact, when you see that on the news, you should look at your Bibles and say, "This is a true book because this book said that would happen." And if they did it to the apostles, why wouldn't they do it to you? If they did it to Jesus, why would you be exempt from this? Why do you get a pass? Martin Luther said, "God gave your Savior a crown of thorns. Do you really think He's going to give you a crown of roses?" This bring us to the Book of 1 Peter.

Oh, before we get there, a couple of stories about this. One of our church members was recently witnessing to someone in a coffee shop and inviting them to our church. You guys do a great job of this, and you would think as she was inviting this person to church the recipient would say, "Thank you very much, I appreciate that." It's not what happened. The person started shouting at them and yelling at them and belittling to the point that our church member had to leave the coffee shop. Now why did they do that? Well, the answer to the question is, why wouldn't they do that? It's what Jesus said they would do. This is how He said it would be. I've had family members tell me, "Stop preaching at me, I don't want to hear another sermon from you," and I've said, "But I'm a preacher. What do you want me to do? I give sermons, that's what I do." But they don't want to hear that.

And that brings us to the book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter was written to people who were getting shouted at in the coffee shop. It was written to people who were being told, "Don't preach at me." I

haven't told you this before, but Peter has been called the apostle of hope because that's what he does here. That's what we sang about just a moment ago. He's giving these people some hope. He's giving them something to look forward to, and he also gives them something to do. He doesn't want them to get dormant.

And starting in chapter 2, he tells them how to respond to the difficult situations they face by grouping them into categories. What I mean is that you just read this, starting in chapter 2 verse 13, he tells them how to suffer with the government. That's the first category he mentions. We talked about this last week, but he tells them how to experience pain with the authorities, or people in high places, then in verse 18, which we'll look at this morning, he tells them how to do it in the workplace. He tells them how to do it on the job. In chapter 3, he tells them how to suffer in marriage. I'm sure some of you had to suffer through marriage before, you've had to deal with persecution in that area. These people experienced that, first century, husband gets saved, the wife doesn't, problems start. And he goes into what do you do with that? Chapter 5, he tells you how to suffer in the church, in leadership and in membership. But carrying on with this theme throughout the whole Bible, Peter starts telling us how to suffer in different aspects of life. He tells us how to come down from the clouds and put on a crown of thorns.

And like I just said, in chapter 2 verse 18, he ties us into the workplace. This is the second category he mentions here. Just by a show of hands, unless your boss is here in the room, how many of you ever had to suffer in your job? Don't raise your hand if your boss is in the room. Jordan, put your hand down. How many of you ... I think we've all experienced this. How many of you have had to suffer in the workplace? That's what he's talking about here. In preparation for this, I did some research and I came across some statistics that said that only half of Canadians actually like their jobs. Only 50%, the rest just don't like what they do for a living. Canada actually ranked 17 out of 35 countries on the job happiness index last year, which is strange to me, because I love my job in Canada. And I love the fact that we have corn shacks here in Canada. I think that's the most brilliant piece of business ingenuity, you pull up and they give you corn. It's amazing. According to the Globe and Mail website it said, "Canadians might love a lot of things, hockey, poutine ..." (Am I saying that right? Anyway, you guys know what I'm talking about.) "... apologizing for no reason ..." That's what it says. And then it says in parenthesis, "Sorry about that." I didn't make that up. And then it says, "... But work is not one of the things that we love, we don't love our jobs," is what it said.

And there may be a lot of reasons for this, but let me ask you, what are you supposed to do when that happens? What do you do when you don't love your job? Specifically, as it relates to our passage and the theme of 1 Peter, what do you do when your job doesn't love you for being a Christian? I'm not gonna ask you to raise your hand if you've experienced that. You probably have. What do you do when your job doesn't accept your beliefs? Some of you work in places where you can't bring a Bible into the office, if you do that you will lose your job, right? Or at least you'll get reprimanded. You could bring all kinds of stuff to work and be okay, but you can't bring that. That's an unforgivable offense. Some of you work in places where you can't witness to anybody for the same reason. You can't tell anybody about Christ. If you did, that might be considered a hate crime, or something like that. Or they might call you insensitive and send you to therapy. Some of you work in places where you can't pray before meals. If you

bowed your head, and said a few words to God before eating lunch, you would get in a lot of trouble for that. Let me ask you a question, what are you supposed to do when that happens?

Now listen, if you haven't experienced this, just look at the person in the pew next to you and ask them about their job, they probably have. This is real stuff here. These are things we're all experiencing today. The laws are being constantly passed to make it harder and harder to be a Christian in the workplace. It seems like every time you turn around there's a new restriction or guideline in place telling us, "We can't do this, and we can't do that." What do we do? I think you need to be encouraged this morning because the Bible has answers for you. The apostle of hope has some hope to give you. Let's just dive on into this. If you're taking notes in 1 Peter 2:18-20, here's four responses to suffering in the workplace. If you're experiencing all the stuff we're talking about, all the pain and the frustration of some type of persecution or restrictions on the job, here's four responses to that.

And the first one is this: you need to suffer submissively. That's the first thing Peter says here, carrying on with the theme he started back in verse 13, he says you need to suffer submissively. He'll actually use the word "submit" four times in this letter. When you suffer, you need to submit to the government; you need to submit in the marriage; you need to submit to the local church you're involved in, and you submit on the job. That's the way to handle suffering. With a humble heart, with a submissive heart. And in verse 18, he says, "Servants, be submissive to your masters."

The word for "submissive" here is the same word used back in verse 13, it's *hypotasso* which is a compound word from *hupo*, which means "under," and *tasso* "to put something." So the word means "to put something under something else". It was used in the Roman army for soldiers who put themselves under a commander. They fought, they did their part, they laid their lives on the line but they did it under his leadership, under his guidance. Peter says, you need to do that with your workplace. You work, you do your part, you put your neck on the line, but you do it under the boss's leadership, under his guidance.

Peter calls his audience servants or slaves here, depending on the translation you have, which is interesting because we don't really have a word for this in English. But the ancient world was full of slaves. Everywhere you look you bumped into one. By some estimates, there were more slaves than there were free people. Some masters owned as many as 20,000 slaves. Some cities had as many as half a million in them. They were very diverse. You could be a slave and have blue eyes, you could be a slave and have brown eyes, you could be a slave and have dark skin, light skin. It wasn't a racial thing, it was an economic or a military thing. If you lost in war they would capture you and sell you off into slavery. And the Romans were very lazy people, they thought manual labour was beneath them so they captured slaves and they made them do all their labour; cook their meals, do their laundry.

Then this is interesting, there were so many slaves that the Romans had to categorize them to keep track of them. And what I mean is, there's several words in the New Testament for slave. It wasn't just one word, lots of words. One is *doulos*, which meant a total slave who had no rights or privileges, completely owned by someone else, subservient to the master. There was *oiketes*, which meant a servant-slave who was owned but they still received a salary, so that's an

interesting concept. They had a master but they also received a commission. *Oiketes*, house slave, someone who is a higher-ranking slave. Then there was *eleutheras* or, the free man who used to be a slave but they're free now. The Romans typically wouldn't make that kind of person a citizen 'cause they still considered them beneath them, but they were free, just former slaves. But the word Peter mentions here is referring to this middle category, the *oiketes*. This is why some of your translations have servants, some have slaves. These people were owned but they received a salary. They were free to some degree, but they couldn't really leave.

And the modern equivalent to this for us is, you need to submit to your boss. If we're putting this in a 21st century terms, you need to submit to your employer at work. If you work for a shoe company and your boss tells you to sell shoes a certain way, then you need to sell shoes a certain way. You need to do what he says. If you work for a restaurant, and the manager tells you to serve food a certain way, you do that. You can ask questions about it, you can voice your opinion, and tell him what you think, but at the end of the day, you need to submit. And here's the thing, if you can't do that, then you go work someplace else. If you can't put yourself under your boss at work, you find another job.

And this is interesting because slaves couldn't do that. The people Peter was writing to couldn't leave their job. This was such a big deal that if the Romans caught a runaway slave they would brand him on the forehead with an "F" for fugitive or a "CF" for "cave furem", beware the thief, beware the stolen property. If they were in a really bad mood, they might crucify the slave or bury him alive. There are stories of masters putting the runaway slaves in a bag full of snakes, pouring burning oil down his throat. It's just a terrible world in the first century. So you really can't complain about your situation at work. As bad as you have it, I'm guessing no one's ever done anything like that to you. And as bad as you have it, at the end of the day, you can leave. These people couldn't do that. They were stuck here for life.

And I don't want to downplay the difficulties of having a bad boss. When I was thinking ... I got through Seminary working eight jobs in four years, so I've had a lot of bosses. I'd never got fired, but I did work a lot of different jobs. And one of the hardest bosses I had was a ... This was in my university years, was an alcoholic. He would show up late for work every day, hung over, and sometimes start drinking. By the end of the day, he would be sipping beer on his car ride home. He would disappear for long periods of time. He would tell us what we needed to do, and then he would just vanish. Nobody could get a hold of him. Nobody knew where he was. He would say some rude things to the Christians at work. I don't know why he did that, but that's what he did.

Peter says even if you have a bad boss, you still have to submit to them. If you stay there and don't go someplace else, you have to put yourself under their authority. You don't follow them into sin, you don't have to be an alcoholic too. And this goes back to what we said last week about the government. You submit to God before the king. You follow God before your boss. But if they're not telling you to sin, then you need to be submissive.

And if you're wondering how to do that, that leads to our next response: you need to suffer respectfully. If you want to know how to suffer submissively, Peter says you need to suffer respectfully. You need to respect your boss. I didn't say imitate him, I said respect him. I didn't

say you need to do what he does, but you do need to pay him honour any way you can. You don't need to say, "I'm on my way to work now. Please, shoot me." I saw a bumper sticker that said that. You can't ... That's not respectful. It's a fun bumper sticker, but it's not respectful. You can't say, "This is not an office, it's a torture chamber with fluorescent lighting." You can't talk like that. That was another bumper. They got a lot of creative bumper stickers out there for bad jobs. A man once asked his boss for a raise, because several companies he said were after him, and the boss said, "Which companies?" And the man said, "The electric company, the gas company, and the mortgage company." I don't know if that applies, but I just thought it's pretty funny. But you need to be respectful. And that's the next response. If you look in the verse, Peter says, "Servants be submissive to your masters with all respect."

The word "respect" means "to hold something in high regard" or "to pay it honour". This is how you respond to your boss or your manager. You pay him honour, hold him in high regard. If you notice, Peter says to do this with all respect, meaning you do this in every aspect of the job. You do this any way that you can. It's an all-encompassing thing. You show respect with the way you talk to your boss, and you show respect with the way you talk about your boss when he's not there, or she's not there. You show respect with your behaviour and you do it with your attitude. You don't pout and stick out your lip all the time. Peter even adds to this, if you think that's enough. He even goes further and he says, "Not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable." I think we all understand it's easy to respect a boss who is good and gentle, but not one who is unreasonable.

And that word "unreasonable" has a connotation of evil to it. It means "crooked". You can imagine living in the first century and trying to follow a crooked master. There's stories of masters telling slaves, "Don't ever talk. I will beat or kill you if you talk, unless I ask you a question." Can you imagine? Peter says you respond equally to both with all respect. A German pastor went on a speaking tour of North America, and he was asked afterwards, "What did you think? How are the churches?" and he said, "They don't know how to suffer." He said, "They don't know how to deal with pain. If they don't get their food on time, they complain, and if they don't like their hotel room, they complain." He said, "If they don't stay healthy and they get a little cold they complain, and if they don't like their jobs, they complain and then they quit. They complain and they go someplace else." Peter says you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't suffer that way. He's not saying you can't leave your job. Of course you can do that, but you don't complain on your way out the door, see? You have a respectful attitude about it. To say this another way, you don't have to grit and bear it all the time, but you do have to grit and bear it some other time. I told the guys on Wednesday night, we were talking about the government, I said, "We live in a broken world where we have broken things fixing broken problems." And that's your job. That's your place of work. It's a broken place giving you employment, and there are times when you're gonna have to take it on the chin every once in a while.

I quoted some statistics to you earlier about Canadians and their job dissatisfaction. I also came across some other ones that talk about Canadians and their job hopping. This is bad everywhere, by the way. The States, this is even worse but, but people change jobs according to one statistic, once every two to three years. And the number one reason is their boss. They can't stand to work for their manager. He gets on their nerves. He's hard to follow, so they don't stay and work it out. They just leave. Friends, you've got to be different from that. You can leave if you have to, but

you got to stay somewhere, and that's what Peter is saying here. You've got to work somewhere, and here's why. Because you need to see God's sovereign hand in all of this. You need to see the bigger picture here. God led you to your job. He led you to that irritating boss.

John Feinberg is a professor of theology who has served in several seminaries and churches, and written a lot on the topic of suffering, but he said he never really understood this topic until he had to suffer himself. In the Fall of 1987, Feinberg's wife was diagnosed with Huntington's disease, which is a disease that attacks the brain and causes violent muscle spasms in the body. It's very painful to watch. And Feinberg says, to his shame, he says he repented of this because it was a terrible thought, he said. But he was being transparent. He said to his shame, he said, "One of my first thoughts about that diagnosis was if I would've known that, I never would've married my wife." He says, "I was a selfish man when we got married, and if I would've known she had that, I would not have married her." And he says this ... This is what he learned from that experience. He said, "For 20 years, the information of her diagnosis had been there, and at any time we could've found out. Why then did God not give it to us until 1987?" He says, "I wrestled with these questions. I began to see God's love and care for us. God kept it hidden because He wanted me to marry Pat, who is a great and wonderful wife. My life would be impoverished without her, and I would have missed the blessing of being married to such an amazing person." He said, "God would've wanted our three sons to be born. Each is a blessing and a treasure, but we would've missed that if we had known earlier, and I decided not to marry her. And so God in His mercy withheld that information. Not because He accidentally overlooked something, but because He cares for us. He waited until just the right time to give us her diagnosis." Do you see what he's saying? Now, I don't want to compare your bad job to something like that. It doesn't compare. The pain is not the same. The pain is much worse in the disease, but I think the principle is the same. And the principle is this: God led you to both. He led John Feinberg and his wife to that disease. He led you to your job, which means that it's good for you. That bad job is good for you. Eternally speaking, that bad boss is good for you. He will benefit your soul. Some of you have said to me, "Boy, if I would've only known how bad this job would be, I would've never taken it." But don't you see? God made sure you didn't know, so you would take it. He led you to it. And some of you have said, "Boy, if I only knew how bad this boss would be, I wouldn't have come here. I would have gone to another company." But you didn't know, and God made sure of that because He cares for you.

Maybe another way to say this is, there is a boss behind the boss, and you need to realize that. There is a manager behind the manager. Proverbs says, "Even the heart of kings is in the hand of the Lord." That's the ultimate boss you could think of. And until you see things from that perspective, you're not gonna understand these trials. There are lessons you learn in a bad job that you can't learn in a good job, amen? That make sense? There are people you meet in a bad job you can't meet in a good one. And God wants you to meet them and have an impact to them and be a blessing to them. And you need to be respectful to that. C. S. Lewis says, "You know, we don't want to Father in heaven as much as we want a grandfather whose plan for the universe is that a good time was had by all." He said, "But God doesn't do that. He puts us through pain to help us, and we want to respect Him."

That leads to another response to suffering in the workplace: you need to suffer sincerely. You need to respect and submit with a sincere heart, or a good conscience, Peter says. If you look in

verse 19 he goes on and he says, "For this finds favour, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly." "Conscience" is another way of saying "the soul" or "the inner part of us". One Puritan called it "the soul reflecting on itself as in a mirror". I think we've all looked into the mirror before we came to church today; fix our hair, get our clothes straightened out. Your conscience is your soul's mirror. It's what you look into to get your soul straightened out. It's what makes you feel good or bad about something. And as Peter is talking about suffering in the workplace, he ups the ante here and he says, "Not only do you need to respect your employer and submit to him on the outside, but you need to do it on the inside as well. You need to mean it. It needs to come from the heart. Especially," he says, "when you suffer unjustly."

I think we all understand there's a big difference between suffering justly and suffering unjustly. There's a big difference between suffering for something you did and suffering for something you didn't do. And Peter says you have to respond correctly to both. That's what's supernatural about Christianity. It teaches you how to respond correctly to both. Listen, a lost person is gonna respond, if he has any kind of conscience, could respond correctly as suffering justly. You see someone facing the judge, the judge says, "You've got this kind of sentence." The guy breaks down and cries. He understands he's suffering justly. Christians respond the right way when we're suffering unjustly, Peter says.

In 1755, an earthquake hit the City of Lisbon, Portugal, and killed an estimated 90,000 people. And the worst thing about the earthquake is that it happened on All Saints Day. It was a religious holiday for Anglicans and Roman Catholics, which meant the churches were full of people. And as the earthquake happened and the church buildings collapsed, they crushed thousands of worshippers. And everybody asked the question that you would be asking too, is "why?" Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen? They suffered unjustly. That's a hard thing to wrestle with. It's a hard thing to wrestle with in any area of life, but it's really hard at work.

Can we just be honest? There are days when we don't want to go to work anyway? And then if we suffer unjustly for it, it just makes it worse? You guys know what I'm talking about? Don't look at me like you don't know what I'm talking about. You guys know. You've got to go to work at 9:00 am. (Not tomorrow, it's a holiday, I found that out. I'm learning my holidays here in Canada. Tomorrow's a holiday.) It's hard to get picked on. It's hard to be made fun of. It's hard to be told, "Don't preach at me" on your lunch break. Peter says when that happens, you need to bear up under it with a good conscience.

The phrase "bear up" means "to carry the weight of something". You carry the weight of suffering with a good conscience, and here's why: because there are going to be days when the only thing you have to go on at work is a good conscience. There's gonna be times as a Christian when the only thing you have to take comfort in is the inner man, because the outer man is miserable.

Abraham Lincoln said he wanted to conduct his presidency in such a way that "If I lost every other friend I have in the world, I will at least have a friend left in my conscience." There are days as a believer and there are days that are probably coming where the only friend you're gonna have left at work is your conscience, is the fact that you did the best you could at work.

One poet said, "I have to live with myself, and so I want to be fit for myself to know that I'm not all bluster, buff and show." You want to know, in other words, "I did my best. I'm not a fake. I'm sincere." Some of you have told me your job, your boss is a jerk, your co-workers are rude. You don't get paid enough. But I want to tell you, when you're in a place like that, you can still please God by having a good conscience. Your work situation may or may not change. It may get worse. I don't know. But you can still have that. I've talked with others who have said, "I thought I would be farther along in my career by now. I thought I would be way up here, but I'm still down here. I thought I would be in management or something like that. I'm still working by the hour." I would say the same thing to you. How is your conscience? How is your inner man? Are you giving it all you've got? That's what God expects of you. God doesn't care how much money you make. God cares that you're sincere. He cares that you're working unto Him.

Colossians 3:23,24 says, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily as to the Lord rather than for man, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It's the Lord Christ whom you serve." Friends, when you go to work every day, whether you work in the church or not, whether you work in the store or the shop, whatever you do, you work unto the Lord. You don't work unto man. A friend of mine was working in a dentist's office, and she had her annual evaluation and the dentist said, "You do a great job. I really appreciate what you're doing." And what she said kind of stunned her a little bit. She said, "Well, I just want you to know I appreciate you, I appreciate the company, but I do this unto the Lord Jesus Christ." There's a long, pregnant pause after that. She said, "But that's who I'm serving when I come here." That's who you serve with all sincerity of heart.

And it leads to one more response to all of this suffering is: you need to suffer patiently. That's what all of this leads to, it kind of rounds off at that. You need to suffer submissively, respectfully, sincerely at work. And if you do all of that, Peter says, "Remember, you need to suffer patiently. You need to keep on keeping on. You need to stay the course. Whether you change jobs or not, your integrity needs to stay intact as you go about your business." And verse 20 says "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."

That's a little bit awkward to read, but Peter's point is that you get no credit for suffering for sin. Even evil people do that. Even bad people suffer for wickedness. But it pleases God, you find favour with Him, when you suffer for other things like bringing your Bible to work, or witnessing to your co-worker. Some of you have talked to me. You're brave. You witness to people at work, knowing it could cost you your job. See, that finds favour with God.

And you could say it like this, God is a God of patience. He is longsuffering and if you want to please Him, you need to be longsuffering, too. You need to be willing to put up with a lot of stuff from your boss and your co-workers and whoever. Friend of mine once said, "You gotta swallow it." Someone says something rude to you, you swallow it. Somebody says something that's inappropriate, maybe you need to confront it, maybe you don't, but love covers a multitude of sins. It's been said it took God five days to create the earth, one day to create man and several thousand years to put up with them. And you need to be willing to put up with your fellow man, too. Story's told of a man who came to visit Abraham one night, and after they talked for a while,

Abraham asked the man if he worshipped God. And the man said, "No," to which Abraham replied, "Not even a little bit?" And the man said, "No." And Abraham said again, "Not even sometimes?" And the man said, "No." Then Abraham said, "Then get out of my sight, get out of my tent. I never want to see you again." And later that same night God appeared to Abraham and said, "Abraham, why did you throw that man out? I've put up with him for 80 years, couldn't you do it for one night?" Friends, God has been putting up with you for 80 years, 70 years, 60 years, He's put up with your co-workers, He's put up with your boss for decades. Can't you do it for one night? Can't you put up with them for 40 hours a week? God has been patient with your shortcomings, patient with your sin, patient with mine, our failures, our mistakes. Can't we be patient with theirs? That's what this verse is saying. Endure it with patience. You might leave your job and find a better one, but you might leave your job and not find a better one. You have to be patient. Who knows? The Lord may use you to lead someone to Christ through your workplace. He may use you to bring your boss to faith in Him.

One of the neatest things about the ancient world is that slaves and masters would often come and sit together side by side in the service. Like I said, you couldn't tell them apart. Often times they dressed alike, they looked alike. And there were times (it wasn't often because of the social barriers, but sometimes) the slave would lead his master to Christ. The master would watch him suffer, the master would watch him take orders and experience pain and misery. And sometimes he said, "Why do you that?" and the slave led him to Christ. Who knows what God may use you to do the same thing at work. He may use your suffering to change someone's life. Listen friends, suffering is unavoidable. You can't get away from it. Follow Christ and you will suffer. Believe on His name and you will experience pain, but God could use that to bless someone forever in eternity. Now let's pray that He'll do that. Let's pray that the Lord would make us good witnesses in our workplace, in our families and everywhere we go. Let's pray.

Father, we do pray for Your grace and Your mercy in this. I don't think any of us probably would say that every day at work is easy. And I'm sure all of us would say that there are times when it is hard to follow orders, it's hard to submit to a fallen person. But Lord we need to remember we're fallen too. And we pray for Your grace in this. Lord, I pray for these dear saints here, as they go out to work this week, as they go into their offices and shops and fields and whatever business they have. That they would take these words to heart and apply them to their situation. God, give them much grace in being patient and respectful and submissive in all these things. And make them lights in a dark world. Father, we do want to work unto You. When we're here together as believers in the church, we want to work unto You and when we go out into a dark world, we want to work there, as well. Give us much grace in doing so, Father. Thank you for this example, from the first century of what these believers endured for Your glory. Maybe one day, we'll get a chance to sit down and talk with some of the slaves and masters from these churches and hear their stories, and rejoice in our common Saviour, the Lord, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. We pray all this in His name, amen.