

- Rev. Grant Mangold,
Riverside Evangelical Free
Church, www.RiversideChurchlowa.com

WALKING THE LINE AT WORK

Does the Bible have any wisdom for people who feel like they're treated as slaves at work?

You don't have to be lowest on the totem pole to feel that way. Everyone in a business organization is accountable to someone else. Even the boss answers to others.

This was a very practical question in the 1st century AD when Peter wrote his first letter to believers scattered around the Roman Empire. Most were slaves or indentured servants, working off a debt.

Doesn't that sound familiar? How many people would go to work today if they didn't have debts to pay?

Peter has reminded his readers that believers in Christ make different choices than before, because His new life within – the Holy Spirit – gives them the ability and wisdom to make different choices.

Specifically, he says in chapter 2:18-19 *“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.”*

The underlying principle applies equally today to employers and employees as well as to vendors and suppliers – perhaps especially to those who feel like slaves!

But it certainly doesn't give those in charge any excuse to be unjust. Other Scriptures emphasize that masters must treat their servants with respect. And Christianity is directly responsible for the later outlaw of slavery as a human institution.

The underlying issue is authority structure. God, as Creator, made mankind in His own image, which includes the concept of authority, which reflects the character of God.

God takes this quite seriously. Believers are to submit to authorities as unto Him. And anyone in authority must recognize God's higher authority.

This is part of the new freedom of the believer – since submitting to an unjust master in no way condones his behavior.

It simply means that you trust God for the outcome.

So you might well suffer at work because you are a Christian, since your lifestyle is different than that of most of your colleagues.

But make sure you're the BEST worker around. Don't expect privileges because you're a believer. And don't respond to an unjust boss with reviling or retaliation, or slacking.

In today's world, if you have avenues of dialogue for grievances, use them with respect. If you don't have an ability to address problems at work, Peter's principle still applies.

Because no matter how believers in Christ are treated, they will respond in ways that speak well of their true master, the Lord Jesus Christ, who also suffered unjustly!

Because with your new life in Christ comes a new freedom to live according to His new perspective.

The believer's new life purpose is to bring others to Christ – to show and tell the good news about Him, so that others will also believe in Him and have their lives transformed.

Your attitude at work will be the key. Do you see your job as just a way to pay debts? Or as a way to help others see how Jesus has paid the ultimate debt they can never pay – the penalty for their sins.

That's the good news about Jesus – and whether you are exploited or exalted in your workplace makes no difference to how you respond to those in authority over you.

Peter says, receive new life in Christ, and let His new power and His new purpose in life direct your responses to everyone in your workplace, up and down the line.

HOW will that change where YOU work, today?