

When Your Boss is Wrong

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Day One

What you do when your boss is wrong? Because managers and employers are people, like you and me, sometimes they are wrong. They may be wrong in their attitudes, wrong in their management techniques, wrong in their tactics, wrong occasionally, wrong all the time—but it happens! What do you do when your boss is wrong?

For example, how should a Christian respond in a situation when a boss belittles you? Unfortunately, this is a fairly common occurrence in our business worlds, where a boss gives negative feedback in front of other people or makes fun of you in some way. Or there's the boss who always manages to find something wrong in everything you do, and he or she tells you about it in a meeting, or loudly standing at your desk. It's humiliating and belittling.

Our first human reaction in cases like this is usually either to resist and strike back, or to be intimidated and retreat or run away. Neither reaction is proper. When any person tends to belittle other people frequently, we should understand that it is a symptom of insecurity. Underneath the intimidating facade is a person who can only feel good about himself or herself by making someone else look small.

A Christian needs to learn to move from the self-focused reaction which is typical in these situations—"Oh, poor me, this is not fair to me"—to a God-focused reaction, understanding how God sees this person. And that comes only through prayer. Start praying for that boss.

Now, I don't mean that you pray for lightning to strike your boss, but pray that God will give you his perspective of this person. Pray that God will help you see beneath the facade and get a glimpse of why he or she is like that. Pray that in spite of the unfair treatment, you will be able to respond in Christ-like ways, and ask God for his wisdom.

You know, every person in your life is there through God's permissive will, and that means that God can turn the tough situation into an avenue of growth and learning for you, even if the other person never changes.

So, my first advice is to pray for that boss every day before you leave for work. And pray for wisdom. James tells us that God will give wisdom to us liberally, and in a situation like this, you need a lot of godly wisdom. So, pray for wisdom—and expect God to give you the wisdom you need.

You will be amazed to see what happens when you start to pray for that difficult manager.

Day Two

Recently someone asked me how to deal with a boss who uses belittling and humiliating tactics. You may have found yourself in that type of situation. As Christians, we need careful thought and guidance to act and react according to biblical principles.

Remember to make this person an object of concentrated, daily prayer and see how prayer changes your perspective and your attitude. Now, it may be that the changes in your attitude, brought about by prayer, will actually cause the other person's attitude and tactics to change. If you're resenting the treatment, feeling misused and abused, chances are your reactions to this person are making the problem worse. Once you get out of that chain of thinking and begin focusing on God's purpose in the situation, it may so change your behavior, that it will affect the other person as well.

However, let me hasten to say that it may not, and you may be faced with a situation where confrontation is called for. However, before you confront, be certain that you check out your motives carefully. Are you simply trying to be vindictive? Are you reacting out of self-pity? Are you fighting for your rights? Those are not biblically-based motivations. Jesus frequently confronted people, but he always did it for their own good, not to vindicate himself.

That confrontation will have to be bathed in prayer and God's wisdom, done at the right time in the right way. Please don't over-react, and don't confront when you're emotionally upset.

You may start with something like: "I wonder if I could ask a consideration of you. You're probably not aware of it, but it seems that often you choose to give me criticism and negative feedback when it is the most embarrassing. I know that I need feedback, but could I ask you to do it privately?" Be prepared to cite dates and situations, for most people will deny that it is happening.

And remember that biblical principles teach us to go the extra mile, to endure unfair and unkind treatment much longer than others would. I would refer you to Matthew 5 to see what Jesus had to say about taking unfair treatment.

You know, God may have good purposes for leaving you in that unfair situation for a period of time. Perhaps others are watching you and if you respond in a Christ-like way, that could be a very effective witness. God has a right to use us in these ways, and we must be willing to allow him to do so.

Day Three

I wonder if you have ever been confronted with unethical practices by your employer? That's a tough spot to be in. What should you do?

Well, let's begin by saying that if the product or service your organization is engaged in is not contributing to the good of society by providing a worthwhile end product, you need to question seriously if God wants you in that company. As Christ-followers, we are called to be *in* this world, but not *of* it. For example, being employed by the lottery commission or a sleazy magazine would place you in the position of helping a product that brings destruction and grief into our society.

I can't believe that Jesus would want us to expend our time and gain our financial support from such goods or services. They may not be illegal, but certainly they are not edifying or positive forces in our communities. There are any number of these kinds of industries that we should avoid, and the criteria is simply to determine if the company provides a product or service that helps rather than harms.

Now, suppose you work for a firm that is providing a good service, but you are aware of unethical practices that are allowed or encouraged. Maybe hours are billed to the client which were not actually worked and expenses are charged which were not incurred. As a Christian, what action should you take?

Well, if you were asked to exaggerate your hours or expenses, your response is clear-cut. A Christian should never be part of lying or deception of any kind. You have to draw clear black and white lines in your behavior in situations like this.

Of course, when you take these difficult stands, you want to do it with as little fanfare as possible, and as gently as you can. If you don't have to say anything at all, that is best. Just do what is right and let it go. But if you're told to do something unethical, or asked why you didn't, that's when you must be willing to say that you have done what you believe is right and accurate and you're not willing to falsify a report of any type.

A friend of mine lost his job once because he refused to falsify a government report for his employer. He was unemployed for a few months, and it looked dim. But the Lord blessed him, and he eventually found a much better job in a firm that was very ethical.

Day Four

If you've been in the business world very long, it's likely you've run into a manager who just wasn't doing the job right. We need to know biblical principles in dealing with incompetent or unethical bosses.

Someone once told me that you can learn as much from an incompetent or bad manager as you can from a good one, and I think that's probably true. But the learning is more difficult and painful! I've heard many sad stories of trying to work for a boss who is either lazy, disorganized, inexperienced, or unqualified for the job or who cuts too many corners.

The first biblical principle we need to consider is our attitude toward those in authority. While we recognize that level or position does not make anyone better than anyone else, Romans 13 gives us clear teaching on authority.

"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:1-2).

God has established authority as the order for the universe. If it were not for the principle of authority, we would have nothing but chaos. The same is true in our business world. Authority is essential.

Therefore, the people in positions of authority are part of God's plan for authority. And as Christians, we are directed to submit ourselves to those people who have risen to those authority positions.

But we see so much evidence that many people in authority are neither godly nor competent. Can their authority be God-given? Yes, even though they may not use their position well or appropriately, their authority is nonetheless from God, and as Christians we are to respect it. To rebel against that is to rebel against God's order, and, Paul said, it will bring judgment on us.

Obviously, we're going to need special grace and strength to be able to submit to and respect incompetent management.

Day Five

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 13 that we are to submit to and respect those who are in authority, because authority is God's order and plan. But how do you respect and submit to someone in authority who is incompetent?

Smart employees understand that their job description includes making your boss look good. First Corinthians 13 describes the kind of love we are to develop in our lives, a love that is like God's love. And that kind of love "does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

As Christians we should try to make our bosses look good because God's love motivates us to protect others from bad exposure, to delight in the good things they do, not the bad things, to try to cover up their mistakes whenever we can.

Proverbs 17:9 says, "Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." It's likely if you work for a truly incompetent boss that everyone else feels the same way you do, and therefore, at lunch and on breaks that's what you talk about. Instead of covering up the offense, you repeat the matter and make the situation much worse.

If you work for an incompetent boss, stop talking about him or her to other people. Pray for that boss; talk to the Lord; get counsel from respected Christians outside the company. But don't be a part of the office gossip and character assassination which usually happens when you have this type of boss.

Should we ever confront an incompetent boss or take any steps to try to correct this kind of situation? Yes, if that person's incompetence is affecting the customers, or causing unfair treatment for employees, or doing things that are contrary to your organization's stated standards and policies. If you're convinced there is a larger picture, then confrontation may be advisable. But, again, this must be done with great respect for their authority.

This kind of situation is simply not easy, I know, but the good news is, it should cause you to pray more and depend upon God more to get you through your days and respond appropriately. The good news is, because of Jesus you have the power to be victorious, even when you work for a difficult boss.