

# *Truth for Today*

## *The Bible Explained*

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## Problems Christians Face Dealing with unfair dismissal (Genesis 39:19-21)

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
King James (Authorised) Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### Introduction

From time to time in our broadcasts we come back to the subject of, 'the problems Christians face.' In our current mini-series we have looked at aspects of the life of Joseph under the titles of, 'dealing with forgiveness' and 'dealing with a Potiphar's wife.' The title for our talk today is, 'dealing with unfair dismissal.' I need to be clear, and say, that although Christians may face these problems, they are, of course, not only faced by believers. These issues and more can affect the lives of many whether Christian or non christian, whether moral or immoral. I guess the point is how we, as Christians, deal with these things.

As usual, in my talks, I will be reading and quoting from the Authorised Version of the Bible, sometimes called the King James Version, and these references will all be listed in the transcript which can be found on our website, [www.truthfortoday.org.uk](http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk). Please feel free to download any of our talks to listen to, or print them off to read.

As we consider these very practical matters, it is so valuable to have Scriptural examples to guide us as we seek to glorify God in our everyday lives, 'at home, at school, at play.' Some listeners will no doubt remember singing this chorus in the Sunday school,

Jesus wants me for a sunbeam,  
To shine for Him each day.  
In every way try to please Him,  
At home, at school, at play.  
Nellie Talbot

*What we can recall from our childhood days should be an encouragement to any who serve the Lord with young people. I'm sure many will recall choruses and memory verses, even in old age, which they learnt as children, and God can use those things to His glory and for their blessing. In the nineties there was a large number of Christians who wore WWJD on bracelets and clothing. We don't see so much of this nowadays, but the question of "What Would Jesus Do?" is still a vital one and one which should govern our daily lives.*

In writing to the Christians at Corinth, the apostle Paul said,

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (see Ch.10 v.13).

He listed many examples from the history of the Lord's people in the Old Testament. We need to know the Scriptures so the Holy Spirit can bring them to bear on our lives, so that we can be Christ-like Christians. There are answers to be found, to all of life's problems, in the Bible if we only knew it. Reading the Bible daily will help us become like Christ, God's perfect Man, and we then will instinctively do what Jesus would have done.

## Dealing with unfair dismissal

I'm not sure why I was asked to speak on this subject as I have no experience of being dismissed unfairly. But on the other hand, I have been accused of dismissing employees unfairly, so I have some knowledge of the subject. For most of my adult life I have been an employer, not an employee, and dealing with unfair dismissal claims has, I'm afraid, just become 'part of the job.' The increasing rise of 'no-win, no-fee' legal representation providers has accelerated this. Such lawyers who 'specialise' in these sorts of matters are quick to see where due process has not been followed to the letter. If as an employer there are gaps in your paper trail or record keeping, then you are really up against a system which, in my experience, seems to be biased towards employees.

However, I do not want to spend any time today talking about the unfair dismissal claim process. There are many websites which do that in great detail if you are interested in this process. Our Biblical example is found in Genesis (the book of beginnings) where we read in chapter 39 of Potiphar's unfair treatment of Joseph, his servant. In fact, there is another striking case found earlier in the book of Genesis where in chapter 16, Sarah, Abraham's wife, dealt very harshly with her maidservant Hagar and her young son, Ishmael. But perhaps before we go any further I will read the verses from Genesis Ch. 39, just in case some listeners are not entirely familiar with the story of Joseph.

### Genesis Ch.39 vv.11-23

“And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. And [Potiphar's wife] caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out. And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, that she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice: And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out. And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out. And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.

But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.”

### What is unfairness?

If someone were to ask you the question, “What is unfairness?” where would you begin with your reply? I suggest probably not with unfair dismissal, unless that was something you were going through at that present time. So I suggest that our subject today has a much wider application than just in the workplace. Almost everywhere we turn we can see unfairness, whether at home or overseas. How many times have we thought or said, “That's unfair?” I'm sure we could think of 100's of examples of unfairness, as we see it, but that's the point. Usually we view unfairness from our own standpoint. During the coronavirus pandemic we have heard calls of, “It's not fair” when one group have been subject to lock-down restrictions whilst another group has not. Residents of one city are allowed to do something, while the residents of another city are not, and the cry is, “It's not fair.” For some, it would appear that fairness is only achieved if they get the outcome they want.

When I was a boy, I vividly recall one occasion when I was told that I could go out on a fishing boat for a night's fishing. The boat was owned and skippered by a Christian man, and he had said that I could go with him and his crew out fishing. I was all set. My bag was packed and my sleeping bag ready. Then the knock came to the door, and the man explained to my dad that the weather forecast was not good and that he did not think it was a good idea for me to be out on the sea that night. Well as a child, I complained that it was not fair! I had been promised, and then that promise had been broken. Of course, looking back at that time, what would have been unfair would have been to expect that fisherman to be responsible for me, out at sea in poor weather. Although it appeared to me to be unfair, it wasn't unfair, it was a very sensible decision made with my best interests at heart. I just could not see that at the time.

In Matthew's Gospel the Lord Jesus told a parable of man who hired labourers into his vineyard. Early in the morning he made an agreement with some labourers to work all day for a penny (which, I believe, was the going rate). At the third hour he set more labourers to work, telling them that they would receive what was fair payment at the end of the day. He did the same at the sixth, the ninth, and again at the eleventh hour. When the day was done, those who were promised a penny received their pay, but the others also all received a penny. This was met with complaints from those who had laboured all day in the heat, but the householder, whose vineyard it was, explained that he had not broken his word. Their 'contract' had been fulfilled, and they should not complain about his generosity towards those who had worked less hours. Now I know that even some Christians have difficulty with this passage and the seeming unfairness of what these workers were paid. I don't know what you think, but I only draw your attention to this parable (so not necessarily a true story) to show that we need to try to look at the situation objectively and as widely as we can before we say, "It's not fair."

### **Grossly unfair**

Joseph was a young man, away from home and his father's influence, and in a foreign land, but he knew what was right and what was wrong. His moral compass was set better than that of Potiphar's wife. Potiphar had trusted Joseph and put him in a position of authority in his house but his wife's story made him angry, so angry that he had Joseph put in prison. We don't read of any investigation or trial. No, this was grossly unfair! No employment tribunal in the UK would have sided with Potiphar over his decision. But this was how things were done in Joseph's day in Egypt.

Often we hear it said, "Well there must be faults on both sides", and I expect that is indeed often the case in many disagreements, whether in the workplace or elsewhere. However, I believe on this occasion Joseph was entirely without fault. I have felt for some time that maybe Potiphar had an inkling that his wife's story was false, as I would have expected that a man of his standing could easily have had his Hebrew slave put to death. So perhaps, because he did not do this, and we don't read of any complaint made by him when Joseph found favour in prison, we can assume that Potiphar knew that there had been an injustice. I don't know, it's just my speculation when 'reading between the lines.'

If we feel we have been dealt with unfairly, then perhaps it is good if we reflect honestly on the matter, asking ourselves if we could have been at fault or have dealt with things differently. I have to be honest and say that in my experience, sadly, those employees who have professed to be Christians (and some undoubtedly were) did not always measure up to what Christian employees should be!

Perhaps for Joseph there was no opportunity for redress. I'm certain that no unfair dismissal claim could be lodged against Potiphar. But we don't hear of Joseph complaining either, neither at this point nor when he was forgotten by Pharaoh's butler, whom he had helped while in prison. Although we do not specifically read of Joseph praying, I'm sure he must have done. Certainly he would have known the words spoken by Abraham, his great grandfather, when he said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (see Genesis Ch.18 v.25). So while Joseph, as a foreign slave and a prisoner, probably had no voice at this time in Egypt, I think we can say that he appeared to be content to leave the matter of his unfair treatment in the LORD's hands.

In our modern day, if employees have a complaint against their boss or the company which employs them, they are encouraged to speak out. Each workplace will (or should have) a grievance policy in place and employees will (or should) know the procedure for raising their particular grievance. Many workers are

members of trade unions, whose job it is to 'protect' the rights of their membership. No doubt you will have your own view about this, and as I suggested previously, this will be influenced by your experience of the workplace. For some, the stance taken by the trade union on a particular subject will be fair and just, whilst to others it will be unfair and unjust. Often the notion of fairness versus unfairness is very subjective indeed, and maybe it changes too over time.

I often think of the apostle Peter, who as a young man often acted first then thought afterwards. I can picture him in the Garden of Gethsemane, leaping to the Lord's defence, by cutting off the High Priest's servant's ear with his sword. But in later life he wrote,

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously (see 1 Peter Ch.2 vv.21-23).

There was no greater injustice than that of the sentence of death conferred upon the blessed Saviour, Himself. Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus was an innocent man, and appealed to the crowd saying,

"I... have found no fault in this man". In reply to their cry, "Crucify him, crucify him" Pilate asked, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found no cause of death in him", but the voice of the crowd prevailed (see Luke Ch.23 vv.14, 21-23).

Following the incident in Peter's life that I have just mentioned, the Lord Jesus Christ said to him,

"Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (see Matthew Ch.26 vv.52-53).

Peter and all the disciples readily understood the power of these words, as they knew what force a legion of Roman soldiers could display. But the Lord Jesus did not pray that prayer, but rather He prayed,

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" and again, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Luke records these prayers, the first and last sayings of Christ from the cross (see Luke Ch.23 vv.34,46).

## Dismissed

Maybe you have been dismissed by your employer. Maybe it was your own fault, or maybe you felt that you were treated unfairly? Whether we have been dismissed at work or not, I expect that at some point in our lives we may have felt that we were dismissed. Perhaps you have been shown the 'red card' on the football pitch, or dismissed from a sports' game by the official for some indiscretion? Perhaps that project you were working on, or that idea you put forward was scoffed at, dismissed without any real consideration, and no reason was given.

When we are dismissed, our pride is hurt. "You cannot do that to me", and "I'll show you" are our natural responses. We want Justice! Even the apostle Paul used his Roman citizenship to get the justice he believed he deserved. You'll remember he refused to leave Philippi quietly stating that, as he and Silas had been beaten publicly as uncondemned men, their sending away should also be in public (see Acts Ch.16 v.37). And again later when bound in Jerusalem he complained to the centurion saying, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (see Acts Ch.22 v.25). After being examined by Agrippa and Festus, we read that Paul may well have been set at liberty, had he not appealed to Caesar (see Acts Ch.26 v.32). Even although I understand where Paul was coming from, and I would probably have done the same in his position, I'm not sure that was Paul's finest hour. If we read the letter Paul later wrote from prison to the Christians at Philippi, I think we see a different attitude in Paul. He does not complain

about being a prisoner of Nero but speaks of the “bonds in (or for) Christ” (see Philippians Ch.1 v.13). He writes, “For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (see Philippians Ch.4 v.11).

Going back to the story of Joseph, we don't read anything of this complaining attitude with him. He appeared to trust God's providence in his life, even when he knew that he had been wrongly dismissed. His dismissal by Potiphar was certainly unfair, as he had done nothing wrong. But perhaps his dismissal by the butler was even harder for him to bear. Joseph had been a help and encouragement to this man, who was given his position back as Pharaoh's cupbearer. How often we think of the words of Joseph to the butler when he said,

“But think on me when it shall be well with thee and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house” (see Genesis Ch.40 v.14).

But we later read,

“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him” (v.23).

Have you ever wondered what might have happened if Joseph had made a fuss, complaining about his wrongful imprisonment? Or even, if he had managed to get a message to the chief butler, saying “Remember me”. Perhaps if he had, he might have received a pardon for wrongful imprisonment, or an early release for good behaviour while inside. But it appears, as we have already said, that Joseph was able to trust God with his life, in the bad days as well as the good days. I wonder when it was in his life that it dawned on him that the ill-treatment he received was in the LORD's providence for blessing. Not for him only, but for all his father, Jacob's house. As he was dying, and was looking back over his life, he could say to his brothers, who sold him into slavery,

“Fear not... ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good...” (see Genesis Ch.50 vv.19-20).

[I think these were exactly the same sentiments expressed by the apostle Paul as he faced death, when he wrote to the Christians at Philippi saying, “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” \(see Philippians Ch.1 v.12\).](#)

Grace too had been at work in the life of the apostle Peter. We know how he acted, as a younger man, taking up the sword, but through grace he became more like his Lord and Master. In his first epistle he wrote,

“But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” and again, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf” (see 1 Peter Ch.3 v.14 & Ch.4 vv.15-16).

The Bible has quite a lot to say about relationships between employer and employee and supports the idea of an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. Perhaps you feel that you have been discriminated against at work because you are a Christian. Perhaps you feel you have been dismissed, or passed over for promotion because you are a believer. Well hopefully these verses we have quoted will give you the grace to trust God, remembering that “His way is perfect” (see Psalm 18 v.30). So for each of us there is a testimony to be rendered in our workplace, whether you are the boss or a manager, or an employee, or an apprentice, and this is especially so if you work for a Christian employer or organisation. Our work should always be as unto the Lord. And if your Christian boss gives you the sack, even if you feel it is unfair, remember what the apostle Paul wrote,

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust...” (see 1 Corinthians Ch.6 vv.1-8).

Christians should never face each other in the courts of men, but rather suffer the wrong done against us because we can trust the Judge of all the earth to do right.

May God bless you all.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on “Dealing with unfair dismissal.” Talk No. T1212.

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