

Of the Duties of Masters and Servants.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the duties of both masters and servants, highlighting the importance of obedience, submission, and respect in their relationship.

Scripture: Ephesians 6:5

Topics: "Duties of Masters and Servants", "Christian Relationships"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the mutual responsibilities of masters and servants, highlighting that these roles are based on contracts rather than natural hierarchies. He explains that both parties are equal in God's eyes, and that servants should obey their masters in all lawful matters, while masters should treat their servants with respect, fairness, and care for their spiritual and temporal well-being. Gill stresses the importance of obedience to God's commands and the example of Christ as a model for both servants and masters. He encourages a harmonious relationship built on mutual respect and love, reflecting the teachings of the Gospel.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 4--Chapter 3

OF THE RESPECTIVE DUTIES OF MASTERS AND SERVANTS

These duties arise not from a relation founded in nature, as those of parents and children; but from a relation founded in contract, compact, covenant, and agreement. Men are by nature, or as to their original make, alike and equal; there is no difference, of bond and free[1]; God has made of one blood all men, all spring from the same original[2], whether that be traced up to Noah or to Adam; and, indeed, we hear nothing of a servant before the times of the former; and that threatened as a curse for sin, (Gen. 9:25) for as Austin says[3], it is sin, and not nature, that deserves this name; it is from the lust of the flesh that wars come, and from these captivity, servitude, and bondage, which is through force, and not will; no man has a legal power to make another man his servant against his will, nor has he any right to his service without his consent: that servitude which arises from contract, compact, and covenant, which almost only obtains among Christians, is of all the most just, lawful, and defensible, because with it best consists the natural liberty of mankind; such as an apprenticeship, which a man enters into of his own will, or with the advice and consent of those under whose care he is; when, by an indenture or covenant, he agrees to serve a

master for a certain term of years, on certain conditions, mutually agreed unto; or as when one is hired for certain service, by the year, or by the month, or by the day[4]; of which hired servants the prodigal in the parable speaks; "How many hired servants of my father", &c. and were as early as in the times of Job, (Job 7:1, 2) and it is of the duties of such towards their masters, and of the duties incumbent on masters towards them, that I shall now treat. 1.

First, of the duties of servants to their masters. These are more largely and frequently spoken of in the epistles of the apostles; because that Christian servants were impatient of the yoke of heathen masters, and had it insinuated into them, by some licentious persons and false teachers, that civil servitude was inconsistent with Christian liberty; from whence great scandal was like to arise to the name and doctrine of Christ, and the Christian religion, which were liable to be blasphemed, and spoken evil of on that account (1Co 7:21; 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:10).

And it may be proper to consider, 1a. First, of whom duty is required, and to whom it is to be performed; "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters" (Eph. 6:5). By "servants" are meant such of this character, male and female, men servants and maid servants, whose relation to them that are over them, their duty to them, and obligation to it are the same; as also they share alike in privileges and benefits belonging to them, (Ex 20:10; Job 31:13, 15) and "masters" also include "mistresses", as well as masters, who are to be submitted to, one as another, (Gen. 16:8, 9) and those of whatsoever temper and disposition, whether good or ill natured, kind and gentle, or churlish, morose, and perverse, and froward, (1 Peter 2:18) and whether truly gracious and religious, or not; "Masters according to the flesh"; or though carnal, and in a state of nature, and in things belonging to the flesh, outward and temporal things, are to be submitted to, (Eph. 6:5) and especially such who have "believing masters" should not "despise" them, and disobey their commands, "because they are brethren", in the same spiritual relation, and of the same Christian community; but, on the contrary, should rather do them "service", with all constancy, cheerfulness, and readiness, "because they are faithful", true believers in Christ, and beloved of God, and of his people; "and partakers of the benefit", of the same grace, and of the same redemption and salvation by Christ, (1 Tim. 6:2) and they are "their own masters" they are to be obedient to, and not others, who have no right to their service (Titus 2:9). 1b.

Secondly, the duties to be performed by servants to their masters; which are comprehended in these general terms of "subjection" to them, and "obedience" to their lawful commands, (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18) and which include "honour", that is to be given them; for they are to be counted "worthy of all honour", in mind and thought, and to be expressed by words and gesture. They are to be had in honour and esteem, and to be spoken honourably of, and respectably to (1 Tim. 6:1) "Fear", or reverence, which is to be given to all to whom it is due, to all superiors, and so to masters; "If I be a master, where is my fear" (Mal 1:6).

Strict and close attention to orders given; the words of their mouth are to be hearkened to, and the motions of their hands, pointing and directing to business they are to do, are to be observed, (Ps. 123:2) and a ready and cheerful compliance to execute their commands; "I say to my servant, Do this; and he doth it" immediately, at once (Matthew 8:9) Seeking to please them in all things, that they may obtain their affection and good will (Titus 2:9) Showing all fidelity in what they are intrusted with; not misspending their time embezzling their master's goods, and wasting his substance (Titus 2:10).

Acting the same faithful part as Jacob to Laban, and Joseph to Potiphar, and to the keeper of the prison. 1c. Thirdly, the manner in which this duty of obedience, in its several branches, is to be performed; it must

be universal; "in all things", (Col. 3:22; Titus 2:9) not in things sinful; but in all things lawful, which are not contrary to the law of God and gospel of Christ, and to the interest of true religion, and the dictates of conscience; over which masters have no power.

Obedience should be yielded "with all fear", (1 Peter 2:18) with the fear of masters, of offending them, and incurring their just displeasure; with fear of their frowns, rebukes, and corrections, and especially as fearing God (Col. 3:22). Servants that fear the Lord will say and act as Nehemiah did; "So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord" (Neh. 5:15). In "singleness of heart"; with simplicity and sincerity; not with duplicity of mind, dissimulation, fraud, deceit, and lying; as Gehazi behaved to his master, Elisha, (2 King 5:25, 26).

Not "with eye service"; that is, doing his master's business only while under his eye, and in his presence; but in his absence, and while they imagine it will continue, do as the wicked servant in (Matthew 24:48, 49) their obedience should be cordial and hearty; what they do they should do it "heartily as to the Lord, and not to man"; not as pleasing men, but "as the servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service"; not grudgingly, nor murmuring, nor by force and constraint, but willingly, and of a ready mind (Eph. 6:5-7; Col. 3:23). 1d.

Fourthly, the arguments enforcing such obedience are, 1d1. The authority and command of God; it is by the authority of God that the exhortations to obedience are given; and it is to be yielded in conformity to his will, as if done to him rather than to men. 1d2. The honour and glory of God, and of Christ, and of his gospel, is concerned herein, that his name and doctrine be not blasphemed, by a contrary behaviour; but that the gospel, and a profession of it, be adorned by a suitable conduct (1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:10). 1d3.

The example of Christ must be of great weight with the true lovers of him; who, though equal with God, took on him the form of a servant, and condescended to do the duty of one, was faithful and righteous, always did the things that pleased God, delighted in doing his Father's will and work, and was constant and assiduous in it; in all which he set an example to tread in his steps. 1d4. The benefit arising to servants from their obedience, in general, what good thing they do, the same they shall receive of the Lord; for God is not unrighteous, to forget their service; but will recompense it either now or hereafter, with a reward of grace, (Eph. 6:8) and particularly with the reward "of the inheritance", which they "know" they shall "receive of the Lord", (Col. 3:24) by which is meant, the heavenly glory, called an "inheritance", because their Father's bequest unto them; and a reward, not of works, but of grace; and so have the strongest motive and greatest encouragement to obedience that can be had. 2.

Secondly, there are duties incumbent on masters, with respect to their servants, "And ye masters, do the same things unto them", (Eph. 6:9) not the same duties; but what belong to them, they should do in the same manner, in obedience to the will of God, in the fear of God, and with a view to his glory. And, 2a. There are some thing, they are to do, with respect to the moral, spiritual, and eternal good of their servants. 2a1. They are to set good examples to them, of temperance, sobriety, prudence, virtue, and religion; examples have great force in them; as a man is so will his servants be (Prov. 29:12).

David determined to "walk within his house", before his children and servants, "with a perfect heart", with all integrity and uprightness, thereby setting an example to them (Ps. 101:2). 2a2. They are to teach and instruct them in the knowledge of divine things; as Abraham taught his servants, who were trained up in his house, as in civil things, so in matters of religion (Gen. 14:14, 18:19). 2a3. They are to pray with them, and for them; for prayer is to be made for all men, as for superiors, for kings, and all in authority; so for

inferiors, and for servants; which is a part of family worship (Jer. 10:25; Josh. 24:15). 2a4.

Should allow time and leisure for religious services, to read and hear the word of God, to pray and praise, and to meditate, according to the provision made for rest and cessation from labour, in the fourth precept of the Decalogue; and they should be put upon as little service as may be on whatsoever day for worship is observed. 2b. There are other duties, which relate to their temporal good. As, 2b1. They are to teach them the business they are put apprentices to them for, and learn them the whole mystery of their art, so far as they are capable of receiving it; or otherwise they will not act the faithful part. 2b2.

To give them that which is "just and equal", according to the laws of God and men, of justice and equity, food convenient for them, what is fit to be eaten, and a sufficiency of it; so in the house of the prodigal's father there was bread enough and to spare for the hired servants: raiment also is to be provided for them[5], if in the agreement, and what is suitable to their relation and circumstances; and when they are sick should take care of them, and be concerned for their health, and recovery of it; as the centurion was, who applied to Christ on the behalf of his servant (Matthew 8:5-10).

A contrary behaviour in the Amalekite towards his servant, was barbarous and cruel (1 Sam. 30:13). 2b3. They should pay them their just wages, and that in due time, according as agreed upon; the law of God directs to the payment of them immediately, and not let them abide all night, till the morning, (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:15) if they are detained, and they cry unto the Lord, he will avenge them (James 5:4). 2b4. Obedient servants are to be encouraged, and used kindly, and with respect: according to the law of God, enjoined the Jews, when a servant had served out his time, he was not only to be let go free, but he was not to be sent away empty; but to be liberally supplied from the flock, from the floor, and from the winepress (Deut. 15:12-14).

Disobedient ones are to be corrected; and if they will not be corrected by words, then with stripes; yet to be given with moderation[6]; servants are not to be used in a cruel and inhuman manner, as if they were beasts, and not men. Seneca[7] complains of some masters in his time, who used them worse than beasts, and speaks of them as most proud, most cruel, and most contumelious; (see Prov. 29:19; Luke 12:48) the apostle advises, to "forbear threatening", (Eph. 6:9) that is, not to threaten too much and too often, and with too great severity; nor should they be forward to carry it into execution; and especially when they repent and amend, they should be forgiven.

Now the argument to enforce these duties on masters, is taken from their having a "Master in heaven"; who is up other than Christ, who is a good Master, and where he is his servants shall be; he grants them his presence now, and will enter them into his joy hereafter, (Matthew 23:8,10 25:21; John 13:13, 15, 12:26) and who is the Master of masters, as well as of servants, and to whom they are accountable, and with him is no respect of persons, bond or free, (Eph. 6:8, 9; Col. 3:9-5) and he is in heaven, from whence he looks down and beholds all that is done on earth, by masters as well as servants, and who is able to plead the cause of the injured, and to avenge them.

Happy it is when love and harmony, freedom and familiarity[8], subsist between masters and servants, so far as is consistent with the relation; an instance of which we have in Boaz, who went to his reapers in the field, and thus saluted them, "The Lord be with you!" To whom they replied, "The Lord bless thee!" (Ruth 2:4) a good master and good servants, mutually happy in each other. ENDNOTES:

[1] fusei d' ouyen diaferein, aliqui apud Aristot. Politic. l. 1. c. 3.

[2] "Vis tu cogitare istum, quem servum tuum vocas, ex iisdem seminibus ortum, eodem frui coelo, aequae spirare, aequae vivere, aequae mori?" Seneca, Ep. 47.

[3] "Nomen istud culpa meruit, non natura", August. de Civitate Dei. l. 19. c. 15.

[4] "Corpora obnoxia sunt et adscripta dominis; mens quidem sui juris", Seneca de Beneficiis, l. 3. c. 20.

[5] "Est aliquid quod Dominus praestare servo debeat, ut cibaria, vestiarius", Seneca, ib. l. 3. c. 21. "necessaria ad victum", c. 22.

[6] "Servis imperare moderate, laus est". Seneca de Clementia, l. 1. c. 18.

[7] Epist. 47.

[8] "Vive cum servo clementer, comiter quoque, et in sermonem admitte, et in consilium, et in convictum, ib".

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