

The Character of a Ruler Over Men: Just, Ruling in the Fear of God; Found With Christ.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a ruler being just and righteous, ruling in the fear of God, and treating his subjects as rational creatures.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 23:3, Psalm 72:1-2, Proverbs 28:15, Isaiah 9:6-7, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Ezekiel 34:31, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 28:18, Revelation 19:16

Topics: "Christ as King", "Righteous Leadership"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the essential qualities of a ruler over men, highlighting the need for justice and the fear of God in leadership. He explains that rulers should treat their subjects with kindness and righteousness, reflecting God's character, and warns against tyrannical governance that degrades humanity. Gill also points to the prophetic nature of these qualities, ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who embodies the perfect ruler--just, righteous, and ruling in the fear of God. He encourages believers to recognize Christ as their King and to submit to His authority, rejoicing in His just and loving rule.

Transcript

THE CHARACTERS OF A RULER OVER MEN:

JUST, RULING IN THE FEAR OF GOD;

FOUND WITH CHRIST.

2 SAMUEL 23:3

He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

These words may be considered as a declaration of what ought to be in every one that bears the character of a Ruler over men. He ought to consider, that he is a ruler of men, and not of brutes that he should be just; just to men in protecting their persons and property, and in administering justice and judgment unto them; that he should act as in the sight of God, as having the fear of God before his eyes, and do those things which are agreeable to him. Or they may be considered as a prophecy of what would be: that that there should, in after times, arise a Ruler over men, that would be just and righteous, ruling in the fear of God.

I say, it may be considered as a declaration, under divine inspiration, of what ought to be found in every one that beareth so high a character among men, as to be a ruler over them. I repeat it again, such an one should consider, that he is appointed a ruler of men, not of brutes; and therefore ought to treat his subjects as rational creatures, and rule over them in a humane, kind and gentle manner; and not as tyrannical princes and governors do. The Lord, by the prophet Ezekiel, complains of some that go by the name of Shepherds in Israel (which not only intends ecclesiastical, but civil rulers), that they ruled with force and cruelty, though the people they ruled over were the flock of the Lord; concerning whom he says, Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 34:31).

Persons that rule over men in such a tyrannical manner, disgrace human nature, and degrade themselves from the character of men, to that of beasts and therefore such are compared in Scripture to them. The four monarchies, and the heads of them, in Daniel are said to be four beasts that arose out of the sea (Dan. 7:3). They are compared to those wild creatures that are the most fierce, cruel and savage: As a roaring lion and a raging bear, so is a wicked ruler over the poor people (Prov. 28:15).

One that, rules over men, ought to be just and righteous in the administrations of his civil government. David delivers this as a precept under divine inspiration, commanding and obliging such persons so to be: and he confirmed and established it by his own example, who was a just ruler over men. "He ruled over all Israel, and executed justice and judgment among them:" this is the testimony bore of him in 2 Samuel 8:15. There was nothing more desirable to him than that the same administration should be continued in his successors, particularly in Solomon his immediate successor.

Psalms 72, which was a psalm wrote for Solomon, begins thus, Give the King thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the King's son: that is, may he be directed, assisted and enabled to execute justice, judgment and righteousness among his subjects. This is requisite in every ruler of men whatever, wherever he is, or over whomsoever he is a ruler; for the king's throne is established by righteousness: that is the surest basis, the best security and strength of his throne and government.

A ruler of men ought also to rule in the fear of the Lord: and the rather as he is to consider that he is the Lord's viceroy; that he stands in his room and stead; personates and represents Him; acts in his name; is accountable to him for what he does; and still more, as he, whom he represents, and under whom he acts, is able to set up and put down at his pleasure. Then may a ruler over men be said to rule in the fear of God, when he rules as under the eye of the omniscient God whom he represents and according to the laws of God: and when he is an encourager of every thing good and virtuous, and a discourager of every evil; a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well; when he makes use of his power and authority, to promote and protect the interest, of God and of religion among his subjects; when he not only tolerates, but encourages, those that fear the Lord, to serve and worship Him according to his revealed will: then, may such a ruler, he, or she, be said to be a nursing father or a nursing mother to God's Israel.

But the words may be considered as a Prophecy of some certain person that should arise; to whom these characters altogether agree. A ruler over men should be righteous, ruling in the fear of God (the words will bear to be rendered, There shall be, &c.) and the rather, this may be supposed to be the sense, because the last words of David, of which these are a part, were spoken under a spirit of prophecy; and David might encourage and comfort himself with a view of this, as he did with a view of the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure (2 Sam. 23:5).

Although my house be not so with God: though his family was not in such a condition and circumstances as he could wish for, yet this was what gave him relief and supported his spirits, that God had made with him an everlasting covenant; ordered in all things and sure. And well it might be a support unto him, and yield him relief and comfort in a view of the discouraging prospect he had of his family; when he was assured that there would be one arise, of his seed, that should be a Ruler over men, that would be righteous, and rule in the fear of the Lord; he could see, by the spirit of prophecy, that there would be a numerous race of kings spring from him, and few of them good: the greater part evil rulers; but yet there would be one, the King Messiah, who should rule over men just and righteous, and ruling in the fear of the Lord.

To him I apprehend these words belong: and our business will be, to shew that these characters agree with him; or that there is that to be found in the true Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, which answers to them all. This prophecy, which is here given forth concerning Christ, may be observed to agree with some others. Thus the prophet Isaiah speaks of the Messiah as the Prince of Peace; of whose government and the peace thereof, there shall be no end: who sitteth upon the throne of David to order and establish it in righteousness, to execute justice and judgment in the earth (Isa.9:6, 7).

Jeremiah has a like prophecy, where he says, that the Lord would raise up unto David, a righteous branch; a branch that should spring from him; a son of his; one of his seed and offspring; one that should be just and righteous in the administering of judgment; and afterwards he adds, a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute justice and judgment in the earth: in his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is the same whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness (Jer. 23:5, 6), or the righteous Lord.

Zechariah speaks as clearly to this point as any; and says, for the comfort of Zion in her low estate, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass (Zech. 9:9). Now our work will be to shew how these characters agree with Christ, and make it appear that there is that in him which answers to them, as I. He is a Ruler. II. A Ruler over men.

III. A just and righteous one. IV. Ruling in the fear of God. I. He is a Ruler. This, we find is a character which is given unto our Lord in Scripture prophecies; as in that famous and well known one, Micah 5:2. But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be a Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting. And by ruler, is not meant an inferior magistrate: but the chief and principal one the supreme Ruler of the tribe of Judah.

It is said of Judah that he prevailed above his brethren, and for this reason, of him came the chief Ruler (1 Chron.5:2). This is no other than the Messiah the King, that should rule in righteousness; and who is different from all other kings, and his kingdom different from all other kingdoms, as to its nature, quality and extent. His kingdom ruleth over all. As he is a divine person, the Creator of all things; the government of the whole world, of right, belongs to him. The kingdoms of nature and providence are his, and he is the Governor among the nations.

But this title of Ruler, King, or head, which is frequently given to our Lord, respects him in his mediatorial office and is that branch of it which may be properly styled, his kingly office: for let it be observed, that he was set up, as such from everlasting. From everlasting he was King and Head of his church and people. I

was (says Wisdom) set up from everlasting (Prov. 8:23): that is, as Mediator, or with respect to his office-capacity, and particularly in this part and branch of it, his Kingly office: agreeable to what God says, I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6): that is, "I have anointed him," as in the original text: and that, from everlasting.

God has given him to be head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22): He has appointed him King. These are our Lord's words, I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me (Luke 22:29). Agreeable to those purposes, counsels, and designs of God, that his Son, the second person in the glorious Trinity, should be King, should be Ruler over men, particularly over his church and people; He was promised and spoken of from the beginning of the world, throughout the whole Old Testament dispensation as such.-- Thus he was spoken of by the prophet, A Sceptre shall arise out of Judah; that is, a sceptre bearer: a sceptre being a token of regal dignity.

David in the Book of Psalms speaks of him as a king, again and again. We have a remarkable prophecy of him as king in the forty-fifth Psalm, where it is said his tongue was as the pen of a ready writer to speak of the things he had made touching the King: and by what follows, it plainly appears he means the King Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ; as, that he is fairer than the children of men: riding forth in his majesty and glory: and whose arrows are said to be sharp in the heart of his enemies.

Isaiah, and all the prophets after him, spake of Messiah, as a King; a Ruler of men. Especially does Isaiah, in that glorious vision he had of him, and when he had such an apprehension of himself, as a poor, vile, unclean creature; the reason of which was, because his eyes had seen the King, the Lord of hosts, of armies in heaven and earth: when he saw him upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple, and the seraphim covered their faces with their wings, and cried one unto another and said, holy holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory (Isa. 6:1, 2, 3).

So, many other of the prophets spake of him as a King, especially Zechariah, in the place I have before referred to (Zech. 9:9). Daniel calls him, the Messiah, the Prince (Dan. 9:25); that is, the King Messiah. He came into the world as such, he was born such. The wise men inquired after him saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him (Matthew 2:2). They might, perhaps, have no other notion of him, than as a temporal King; but he was more than that.

Indeed he was not a temporal one at all; his kingdom was not of this world, but of another kind and nature. His kingdom came not with observation, so that it gave the Jews a disgust against him; because they expected a temporal prince, and no other. Indeed his spiritual kingdom did not appear very conspicuous at that time. Very few that were converted under the ministry of Christ, his forerunner, or the apostles: and few that entered into the kingdom of heaven, (the gospel-dispensation), that embraced the doctrines of the gospel, and submitted to the ordinances thereof, had a clear view of him as a King, in a spiritual sense.

But after his sufferings and death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, he was declared to be both Lord and Christ. Then it appeared more plainly, that he was King and Ruler over men. God the father highly exalted him; then he placed him upon the same throne with himself; crowned him with glory and honour; set him at his right hand until he should make his enemies his footstool, or they should become subject to him in one way or another. In consequence of his being thus exalted as King, He sent forth the rod of his strength out of Zion, the everlasting gospel, the power of God unto salvation: that word that comes out of Sion, and out of Jerusalem.

He sent forth this, and sent forth his apostles to preach it: and as King of saints, and Head over all things to the church, gave them gifts in an extraordinary manner, by which they went and preached the Gospel every where; He going along with them, and diffusing the savor of his knowledge in every place to great advantage. He rode forth upon the white horse of the gospel, conquering and to conquer. These were the weapons of their warfare which were not carnal but spiritual, and mighty through God for the reducing of souls to the obedience of Christ; which they were enabled through divine grace to do everywhere; so that wherever they came, there were multitudes ready to say, the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King, he will save us.

The hearts of men were opened by the powerful and efficacious grace of God. The everlasting doors were made to stand open at the voice of this King of Kings; and the King of Glory entered in, and took up his residence in their hearts; set up his throne there; dwelt by faith there, as a King in his palace. They became subject unto him, willing to serve him, and willing to be saved by him. This has been more or less the case in the Gentile world: and will be more manifest in the latter day, when Christ will take to himself his great power and reign; and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; when he will reign before his ancients in Jerusalem gloriously.

Thus he appears to have a just title to this character of a Ruler. Let us consider further, more particularly, II. His being a Ruler over men. Christ is indeed a Ruler over angels; and he has a right to rule them, as he is the Creator of them: for all things were made by him, whether visible or invisible. As he created them, he has a right to govern them: and he is, as Mediator, appointed to be head over principalities and powers, angels as well as men; all are subject unto him.

Angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto him (1 Pet. 3:22). The angels wait upon him to receive his orders; ready to obey his commands, whatsoever he enjoins them. They are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who are the heirs of salvation. But here he is said to be a Ruler over men. He is a Ruler over the greatest of men: yea, one of his titles is, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16), and upon his vestment and his thigh it is written.

He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. All are subject to his dominion and government. By him kings reign and princes decree justice: and they are all accountable to him. He can, at his pleasure, set them up, and put them down; and they must all stand before him another day, to give an account of their administration of civil government. He is a Ruler over men, over the greatest of men. He is made higher, by his divine Father, than the kings of the earth. He is a Ruler over the worst of men: over wicked men, who say, we will not have this man to reign over us: yet, whether they will or not, he is a Ruler over them.

Though they refuse subjection to him, he will let them know he has power and authority over them, by punishing them for their rebellion. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me (Luke 19:27). Such who are unwilling to yield subjection to his government, he will rule them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel. Whether they will or no, some way or other, they shall be subject unto him; for he has sworn in righteousness, the word is gone out of his mouth, that to him every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess to God (Rom. 14:11).

But in a particular sense, he is a Ruler over the best of men; over good men; over holy men; over the children and people of God, which are sometimes in Scripture, signified by Sion. The church is signified thereby in the Old, and in the New Testament. In the New Testament it is represented as the privilege of

the people of God, that they are come to Mount Sion; which is explained of the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven (Heb. 12:23).

Called by the name of Sion; because Sion was the object of divine love--because it was the object of his choice. He has chosen Sion for his habitation. An high, conspicuous, firm, and stable mountain: the holy hill; a representation of holy and good men. Now God has set his Son over this holy hill of Sion, or over his church and people, whom he has loved, chosen, redeemed, and sanctified. Good men are sometimes called Israel, as in Micah 5:2. Yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel.

Not Israel in a literal sense for the greater part of them, the Jews, would not have him to reign over them; nor merely the spiritual part of them, the lost sheep of the house of Israel: but the whole Israel of God, Jews and Gentiles. Every one of these will say as Nathaniel did, Rabbi, thou art the son of God, thou art the King of Israel (John 1:49). Of good men Christ is the Ruler. They are called saints, and hence his title runs, King of saints: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints (Rev.15:3).

Saints, such who are sanctified and set apart by God the father, separated to holiness and happiness. Such whom Christ has sanctified by his blood, making atonement and expiation for their sins; wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate (Heb. 13:12). Such to whom Christ is made sanctification as well as redemption and righteousness; and such who are sanctified by his Spirit and in his name, have a principle of grace and holiness wrought in them; in virtue of which, they live holy lives and conversations.

Christ is King of them. And these are sometimes represented as a kingdom of priests, or made kings and priests unto God for what is said by the Assyrian in a boasting manner, Are not my princes altogether kings? (Isa. 10:8). Christ may say of his subjects, that they are princes, and these princes are altogether kings; and these are not only whom he rules over, but they reign with him. They shall reign with him on earth, and shall reign with him for ever and ever. Now these persons whom Christ rules over, are not subject to him, naturally; no, they are rebels, as others.

They disapprove of him as a king; reject his government; are unwilling to submit to his institutions and ordinances; and enemies in their minds by wicked works; yea, they possess enmity itself against God. Their language is like that of the carnal Jews, We will not have this man to reign over us (Luke 19:14). They do not care to be subject to his ordinances and appointments; but say, "let it cast away these cords from us, and break these bands asunder." In conversion, the Lord strikes his arrows into their hearts, whereby these enemies fall under him, and submit unto him.

He cuts them to the heart by his Spirit, in the power of his grace, under the administration of the gospel: then they cry out, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? They are willing then, to do, and be any thing. They are made willing in the day of his power to be saved by him in his own way; to submit to his righteousness; to receive him as their King, and be subject to his ordinances. Then their language is, other Lords beside thee (Satan and the world), have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name (Isa.26:13): that is, thou only shalt be our King, and we will serve and obey thee, and thee only.

Thus their hearts being opened by his power and grace, he enters in, takes his throne, and sets up his grace as a governing principle, which reigns in them, through righteousness, to eternal life. He now, as a king, exercises his authority over them by enacting laws, which they yield ready obedience to; and by writing these laws upon their hearts, in which he acts a different part from all other rulers whatsoever. When they make laws and publish them, they are written. fixed in different places, or printed in books, that

persons may read them; but this Ruler of men, writes his laws in the hearts of his people.

I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts (Jer. 31:33): and more than this, he puts his Spirit into them, in order to enable them to walk in his statutes, and do them. He subdues the enemies of his people over whom he rules. This was the view the Israelites had in desiring a king, that he might go in and out before them, and fight their battles for them. Christ is such a king. He fights the battles of his people. He subdues their enemies. He has finished transgression, and made an end of sin; has overcome the world; destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the Devil; has abolished death itself, the last enemy, and makes his people more than conquerors through him.

He, as a Ruler, protects them from all their enemies. In his days Israel shall be saved, and Judah shall dwell safely, for he employs all his power on their behalf. He is able to keep, and save them and none shall pluck them out of his hands. As a Ruler and King, he provides for them every thing they want. It is very usual to denominate kings, shepherds, who feed their flocks. Christ is such an one, that stands and feeds in the strength of the Lord, and in the majesty of his God.

He feeds his people like a shepherd, leads them into green pastures, and beside the still waters. He has all fulness in his hands for the supply of their wants; and therefore they want no good thing. As he is a Ruler of men, and exercises his authority in the manner he does, it is most happy for them. It is not only an instance of divine love and favour that Christ, as man and mediator, should be head over all things to the church, and have all fulness of grace in him for the supply of their wants; but it is an instance his love and affection to his church and people, to appoint such a Ruler over them, who is every way qualified for such an office, being so wise, so good, so kind and tender, and so powerful.

It is a remark of the queen of Sheba, concerning Solomon, that the Lord had a love to his people, and therefore appointed him to be king over them: so God the Father has a love to his church and people, and therefore appointed Christ to be the Ruler over them. It is an act of his free favor and good will towards them. This rule and government is what is delegated to him, by his divine Father, of a spiritual nature; and, as we before said, is a government for which he is every way qualified.

III. This Ruler over men, is just or righteous: which respects not his essential righteousness as God, who is righteous in all his ways and works. Nor does it regard the course of his life as man: as such he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Nor does it respect his being the author of righteousness, working out a righteousness for his people. Nor his mediatorial office at large, which he performed with so much integrity that he justly merited the character of God's righteous servant; but it respects him as a King.

His sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness. His ways are just and true as King of saints. Righteousness is the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness is the girdle of his reins, in all the administrations of his kingly office; thus he answers to his type, Melchisedec, whose name signifies the king of righteousness; as well as also king of Salem, which is king of peace. IV. He also rules in the fear of God. As man, the grace of fear was in him; as mediator, the spirit of fear was upon him.

Not only the spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and counsel, but of the fear of the Lord; which respects his administration of the kingly office. He always did what pleased the Father. What he did flowed from affection for him; so that he might be said, in the highest sense, to serve the Lord with reverence and with godly fear. But there is another sense in which these words may be taken. They may be rendered, ruling in the fear of God. Not only ruling such persons that have the fear of God upon their hearts, and before

their eyes; but ruling, appointing and ordering the worship of God; having it at his command, and wholly under his direction.

The fear of God, sometimes signifies the whole worship of God, internal and external; because this, when rightly performed, is done in the fear of God: serve the Lord with fear and rejoice before him with trembling (Ps. 2:11). Now our Lord Jesus Christ, as king of saints, has this fear, this worship of God, wholly at his command, altogether under his authority; and by his direction every gospel ordinance is administered. Thus in Matthew 28:18 he says, all power is given to me in heaven and in earth: all power and authority as Mediator.

In consequence of which he appoints and commissions his disciples to preach the gospel; for it follows, therefore, (because I have all power given to me in heaven and earth) go ye, and teach all nations. Go and preach my gospel every where, baptizing them that are taught (for that is the meaning of it) in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Christ, as king of the church, has power and authority over the fear and worship of God, under the gospel dispensation.

Indeed the very law itself is in the hands of Christ, as King of saints and of the church; and there it is as a rule of walk and conversation to his people; so that they are not without law to God, but under the law to Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). Now there are various duties incumbent upon us with respect to Christ as a Ruler of men, of the church and people of God. We ought to own him as King of saints: to say of him, the Lord is our King, the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, and he will save us: my Lord and my God.

And not only own and acknowledge him to be King, but to be subject to him; for to acknowledge this in words is not enough. "Not every one that says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom, but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven:" (Matthew 7:21). Which is the rather to be attended unto because his commands are not grievous: his yoke is easy, and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30). You regard him as a priest, and expect the pardon of your sins through his blood.

He is, indeed, an interceding High Priest (of good things for you at the throne of God): and should you not regard him as your King? What! think to receive all benefit from him as a priest, and not serve him as a King! Your receiving him as a Priest lays you under the highest obligations to serve him as a King. It is your duty also to rejoice in your King; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. They have reason so to do: he is so wise, so good, so just, so able to subdue their enemies, and provide all good things for them.

O what matter of joy is this, that Sion's King reigneth! You should do all you can for the enlargement of his kingdom: pray for the prosperity of it, and its coming in greater glory. Say, thy kingdom come: and, as he is pleased to say, behold I come quickly, you should reverberate, and say, even so, come, Lord Jesus.

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