

Servants And Masters

"Servants, be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your hearts as unto Christ, not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart: with good will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men: knowing that whatsoever good thing each one doeth, the same shall he receive again from the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And ye masters, do the same things unto them, and forbear threatening: knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with him" (Eph. 6:5-9).

This is the third couplet of those who are under authority and those who exercise authority over them. The role of servants and masters appears over and over again in the scriptures. From Genesis (where Abraham's wife has a bondservant who became, with her consent, the mother of Abraham's son, Ishmael) all the way to Philemon, the wronged master to whom Paul wrote urging him to receive his slave Onesimus as he would have received Paul, there are many, many allusions to servants and masters for, after all, very likely the role of servant-master is the third most prominent relationship men sustain in life.

The parables of Jesus likewise emphasize such relationships. One reads of the "Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard," the "Parable of the Talents," the "Parable of the Unrighteous Steward," the "Parable of Two Debtors," and while different lessons may be intended in Jesus' use of the parables, shining through them all is the master-servant concept.

Paul's instructions to servants consists of six positive things plus two negative commandments. His instructions to masters contain one positive and one negative command. Consider first, servants. *"Be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters."* Becoming a Christian does not eradicate fleshly relationships and responsibilities. The very nature of the word "servant" implies service rendering, to serve. All understand that the command to obey is limited to things which are not contrary to God's will for in the ultimate sense, there is but one master, whose authority is above and over all (Mt. 23:10). Although we have a duty to obey rulers, that duty only extends to what according with God's will, for *"we must obey God rather than man"* (Acts 5:29). Obedience to our masters is to be with fear and trembling, a phrase found also in Phil. 2:12 where we are told to *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*

Service to masters must be in singleness of hearts, as unto the Lord. Just as we have a sincere desire to please our Lord, we must equally have a sincere desire to please our masters; yet not with eyeservice, as menpleasers -- "yes men" who really are "polishing the apple" instead of sincerely doing their work. Our service must be doing the will of God from the heart, serving our masters as we would serve the Lord. To masters the command is given, do the same thing unto them -- render what is just and equitable, and from the negative standpoint, masters are to "*forbear threatening.*" Surely one does not have to threaten his servants to get them to do their task. In all things, both servants and masters must ever remember, there is no respect of persons with God.

Jim McDonald