

Sabbath School Lesson #4 – Social Relationships – 15-21 April 2017

Christ is the Master of all and all are His servants. We focus on the Monday section: Masters and Slaves. “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Christ paid the price for all; let all say: “O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds” (Psalm 116:16). From this we may learn that the Lord’s servant is a free man. The Lord looses the bonds of those who acknowledge themselves to be His servants, and that freedom which He gives them is what binds them more closely to Him.

Every soul on earth might, if he would, say with the Psalmist, “O Lord, truly I am Thy servant,” for the Lord has purchased all mankind with His own blood. He “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us” (Titus 3:14). “Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,” “but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). And He has proclaimed liberty to all who are bound (Isaiah 59:1). It matters not who the man may be, he is the Lord’s servant; for Christ has bought all. He tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). But there are two classes of servants, – those who serve, and those who do not serve, – the “good and faithful” servants, and the “wicked and slothful” servants. The fact that a man does not acknowledge himself to be a servant, does not diminish his obligation to serve.

He who does not acknowledge himself to be the Lord’s servant, is a slave. “For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14). “Everyone that committeth sin, is the bondservant of sin” (John 8:34). “Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is He brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:19). “Ye have sold yourselves for nought, and ye shall be redeemed without money” (Isaiah 52:3). The last text shows not only that all who do not serve the Lord are slaves, but also that those who serve Him are free. Whoever says in his heart, “O Lord, truly I am Thy servant,” may truly say, “Thou hast loosed my bonds.” “He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s free man” (1 Corinthians 7:21).

So the sum of the matter is that all men, from the greatest king to the humblest peasant, are in truth the Lord’s servants; those who do not acknowledge the Lord as their Master, are slaves, even though they be kings; while those who yield themselves to the Lord’s service, are free, even though they be servants. “One is your Master, even Christ” (Matthew 23:10).

“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10). “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). For “all live unto Him” (Luke 22:38).

This is what is written in the law: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27). We are not obliged to distinguish between different lines of duty, for the law is one, and love is its fulfilling. Loving our neighbour as ourselves is part of our duty to God. If we do not love our fellowmen, it is because we do not love God. Our one anxiety should be to seek the kingdom of God, and His righteousness. His kingdom is “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;” and “he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men” (Romans 14:17-18). Let it not be forgotten that the Lord is the only Master. This is shown by the fact that we are to serve Him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind. So if we do our whole duty to God, we have no strength for any other service than His. If all our strength is given to the Lord, there can be none left for any one else. And to this end the Apostle Paul says:

“Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men” (1 Corinthians 7:23). Yet the same one who wrote, “Be not ye the servants of men,” wrote also, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ” (Ephesians 6:5); and “Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God” (Colossians 3:22). There is no contradiction here. The secret is found in the last clause of each verse quoted, and in what immediately follows. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; *for ye serve the Lord Christ*” (Colossians 2:22, 24). And so also in Ephesians where servants are exhorted to serve “in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will *doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men*" (ibid 6:6-7).

If all servants acted on this plan, regarding themselves not as servants of men, but as servants of Christ alone, no employer would ever have occasion to complain of unfaithful service. With such a servant it would make no difference whether his master were present, or not; his real Master is Christ, who is always present. Encouragement is herein for every labourer, no matter what his employment. Somebody has well said, 'Whatever you know how to do best, God knows how to do it better.' That is, God knows far more than we do, even of that of which we may think ourselves masters. The master of workmen in any line of work is one who knows all about that work. If he is a competent master, he knows more about it than any of those who are under him. But the Lord is the Master of us all, so that no matter what the business may be, if we are in trouble we may go to Him with confidence that we shall find "grace to help in time of need." To give us confidence in coming to Him, He came to this earth as a servant, and passed a thorough apprenticeship as a labourer.

The dignity of service depends much on the Master whom one serves. The servant partakes of the dignity or dishonour of his master. If one serves a mean master, then his is a mean service. Without any play upon words, we may truly say that such service is menial. But the one who realises that in all things he serves Christ, can never have any degrading work. The humblest service is noble and dignified, when done to the Lord, and not to man.

"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matthew 6:24). The servant who thinks to follow two lines, making a distinction between service to Christ and his master according to the flesh, will become hopelessly confused. No matter what our grade of service, nor what the rank of our earthly master, we have only to consider what will please the Lord. He who does this, will render to man every service that he has any right or duty to give. If two servants are together, and one of them is unfaithful, that is no excuse for the other one to be unfaithful also. If a dozen servants refuse to serve, that does not warrant another in neglecting his duty. Even though the others, being in a majority, persecute the faithful servant, and threaten him with the worst kind of treatment, it is evident that he is not justified in neglecting his duty. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Proverbs 1:10). It makes no difference whether the enticement be in the shape of gifts if we yield, or of threats of vengeance if we do not, we are forbidden to be a party to sin.

Remember now that all men are alike servants to God. After the exhortation to servants, the apostle addresses masters, saying, "Masters, render unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven" (Colossians 4:1). Still more emphatically, "Ye masters, do the same things unto them, and forebear threatening; knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no respecter of persons with Him" (Ephesians 6:9). Both masters and servants are servants of one Master, Jesus Christ.

If some servants do not acknowledge their obligation to serve Him that does not in the least diminish the obligation. Suppose that the master so far forgets his duty to the one Master, as to demand that his servant shall do that which is sinful, and shall offer large inducements for such acts; we have the injunction, "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

The fact that the servant who is entrusted with greater responsibilities refuses to serve, does not warrant the more humble servant in neglecting his duty. We have the following instruction for such a case as that: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:18-20). If a servant did everything that even the wicked master told him to do, he would have no occasion to suffer. But the fact that he is exhorted "for conscience toward God" to "endure grief, suffering wrongfully," shows that one may be obliged to refuse obedience to some command, since it will involve sin against God. If he is indeed a faithful servant of the Lord Christ, that very fact will keep him from yielding to a simple requirement. In that case, he must suffer patiently the buffeting that may follow. The Lord, the real Master of both, will settle the case when He comes, for He has told what shall be the fate of that evil servant who smites his faithful fellow-servant.