

Servants of God

Aim:

To show from the scriptures how we, as servants of God, should obey and serve Him.

Reading:

Philippians 2:5-11¹ “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*”

Introduction:

- Most of us are familiar with verses **5-8** of the reading, which talks about Jesus leaving Heaven to come here as a man, and to ultimately die on a cross.
But what about verses **9-11** ? They show us the position, or status, that Jesus now holds – a status given to Him by God, the Father (see also **Acts 2:36**).
 - His name is above all names. *i.e.* His name is greater and more important than any other name
 - Every knee should bow to Him, *i.e.* to show Him the honour, respect and reverence that He deserves.
 - All should confess / acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, *i.e.* that He holds the position of “*supreme in authority, God, Lord, Master*”².
- As Christians, we are His servants (**Romans 6:22**) - a person in subjection. Various New Testament writers described themselves and/or other Christians as “servants”. For example;
 - **Galatians 1:10** Paul describes himself as a “*bond-servant*”.
 - **Colossians 4:12** Paul describes Epaphras as a “*bond-servant*”.
 - **2 Timothy 2:24** Paul refers to an evangelist as a “*servant*”.
 - **James 1:1** James describes himself as a “*bond-servant*”.
 - **Jude 1** Jude describes himself as a “*bond-servant*”.

Note: We should not think that being called “servants” (or “slaves” in some translations) means that God doesn’t think much of us, *i.e.* that we are not important in God’s eyes. On the contrary. God considers our souls so important that He was prepared to die for us (**John 3:16; Romans 5:8**).

- Therefore, having Jesus as our Lord and Master, and we being His servants, what implications does that have for us ? What does it mean for us in every-day practical terms ?
This lesson won’t answer these two questions completely, but will hopefully make a start by establishing some principles.

Lesson:

1) God’s principles with regard to earthly Master/Servant relationships

We can gain an understanding as to what our responsibilities are as servants of God by looking at what God has to say about servant responsibilities in the secular world.

¹ All scripture reference are taken from New King James Version

² Strong’s Concordance - Greek word “*kurios*” (2962) means God, Lord, Master.

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- a) A servant is to be submissive.

In **1 Peter 2:18** we read “*servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good...but also the harsh*”

Being “*submissive*” means that we are not the ones in control, our master is. We are to do our master’s will, not our own. Our master’s will takes precedence over our own – not always easy to accept. At times, we don’t like the idea of having someone else telling us what to do or not do.

The term “*all fear*” does not mean that we are to be “*quaking in our boots*”, but rather, based on what is said in **1 Timothy 6:1**, would mean that we are to show our masters “all honour”. When we don’t honour our masters, we cause the name of God and His doctrine to be blasphemed.

Note: We are to submit to our masters with all fear, not just to the good, but also the harsh. As with all things, our behaviour is not to be based on what other people do, or how they act, *etc.* Rather, it is to be based on what is right (**James 4:17; Ephesians 5:8-10**). We cannot justify our own sins by pointing to the sins of others (**Ezekiel 18:20**).

- b) A servant is to be obedient

In **Ephesians 6:5**, we read, “*Bond-servants, be obedient to those who are your masters...*”. The natural result of submission is obedience.

Notice also the manner in which we are to be obedient;

- “*...in fear and trembling...*” *i.e.* as mentioned earlier, it is to be with all respect and honour. Note that there is no qualification such as, “*but only if they deserve it*”.
- “*...in sincerity of heart...*” *i.e.* not just our outward actions are involved, but also our attitudes. Essentially, we are to be obedient because we want to be obedient.

2) The example of Jesus as a Servant

Not only do we have God’s teachings regarding the role of servants in a secular sense, we also have the example of Jesus.

- a) Jesus’ attitude

From the reading in **Philippians 2**, we saw how Jesus left the glories of Heaven to become a servant here on earth. In verse **7**, we read that He “*...made Himself of no reputation...*”. In other translations, it says that He “*...emptied Himself...*”. This means that he put aside the rights and privileges that He had with God the Father in Heaven, and took on the form of a man.

In verse **5** we read about a “mind-set”. In other words, this was Jesus’ approach (or attitude) towards obeying the Father – “*if I am the one who has to make sacrifices, then so be it.*” The Father’s Will would take priority over His own. Even to the extent that if it meant that He had to give His own life, then so be it. This attitude was shown throughout His life here on earth – **John 5:30b; Luke 22:42**.

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b) Jesus' actions

The submissive and sacrificial attitude that Jesus showed towards the Father's Will was reflected in His actions. In **John 6:38** we read, "*For I have come down from Heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me*". In **John 8:29b** we read, "...for I always do those things that please Him"

Even the words that He spoke were the words that the Father told Him to speak – He did not speak on His own authority **John 7:16-17; 12:49**.

c) Jesus' attitude towards the Word

Jesus had the utmost respect and trust in the Word of God. When faced with temptation from Satan, He appealed to the Word each time - see **Matthew 4:4, 7, 10** "*..It is written..*"

When people asked Him questions on spiritual matters, He would respond by saying to them, "*what is written*" (**Luke 10:25-26**)

Not only did He teach the Word, but He also lived it. He was determined to carry out "*what was written*" Himself, even though it ultimately meant His death on a cross. (**Matthew 26:24a, Luke 18:31-33; John 19:28**)

His attitude towards the Word was that, if God has said that this is the way it is to be, then that was it – end of story.

d) Consequences

Being a servant of God, and putting the Father's Will before all others, has its consequences – some good, some not so good. Some of the "not so good" consequences for Jesus were;

- **Matthew 13:54-57** People in His "home community" where He grew up were offended at Him. (It looks a bit like the Australian "tall poppy" syndrome.)
- **Matthew 19:21-22** What He taught was not always what some people wanted to hear. The young man went away sorrowful.
- **Matthew 16:21-23** He had to rebuke one of his close disciples, Peter, when Peter suggested something contrary to God's Will.
- **Matthew 12:10; 22:15** His own countrymen were trying to trip Him up, catch Him out, with his own words.
- **John 11:53** Some of His own countrymen plotted to kill Him.

In other words, taking a stand for God and serving Him first and foremost doesn't mean that everybody is going to love you for it. Striving to be pleasing to God will mean that there will be times when you won't be pleasing to men (**1 Thessalonians 2:4**).

But what really matters, of course, is how God sees things, not men. We read in **John 15:10b**, "*...just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love*". Jesus' obedience to the Father's Will kept Him in His Father's love. In **Philippians 2:9** we read that, because of His obedience, "*.....God has highly exalted Him...*". God rewards the faithful (**Revelation 2:10b**)

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3) Application for us

At the beginning of this lesson we saw that we, as Christians, are servants of the Most High God. We have just seen the actions and attitude that Jesus had in being a servant to the Father. What then should be our attitude as servants ? What is required of us ?

a) Our attitude

In **Philippians 2:6-8** we saw the attitude of Jesus when it came to the Father's will, *i.e.* no sacrifice was too great. He was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in order to do the Father's Will. But here comes the "cruncher" – we are to have the same attitude, verse 5.

Our aim should be to please the Father, first and foremost. We read in **Colossians 1:10**, "*...that you walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him...*". This verse tells us who we are to please (*i.e.* the Lord), and how much we are to please Him (*i.e.* fully). What we want to do is to take second place behind what He wants us to do.

He is to come before all others. In **Matthew 10:37** we read, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*".

While this may seem a little harsh, at the end of the day, it is to God to whom we must give account (**Matthew 25:31-32; 2 Corinthians 5:10**) not to our parents, not to our spouse, not to our friends, not even to our brethren, but to God.

b) Our actions

Having the right attitude should then influence us to have the right actions.

In **John 14:15** we read, "*If you love me, keep my commandments*". The same idea is also taught in **1 John 5:3**. If we profess to love God, then we are to keep His commandments. When it comes to serving God, you cannot separate love and obedience – they both go together, hand in hand.

While we are on the topic of obedience, let me address something that is raised every now and again.

At various times, the terms "rule keeping" and "legalism" crop up. It is important that those who use these terms clarify exactly what they mean by them, and in what context they are using them. For example;

- If the terms are being used to refute the idea that we are saved by "works alone", then I would have to say, "Amen". The Bible clearly teaches that works alone will not save us, *i.e.* we cannot earn our salvation simply by doing meritorious works (**Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9**). While works are important, works alone will not save us, just like faith alone will not save us (**James 2:14-26**). We need both working together with love (**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**), and the grace of God (**Ephesians 2:8**) will cover our sins (**1 John 1:8**).

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- However, if the terms (“rule keeping”, “legalism”) are being used in a context of trying to down-play the importance of works and obedience, then that would be the wrong use of the terms. Along with faith, love and grace, works also play a part in our justification. In chapter two of his letter, where James showed that faith without works is dead, we read this; **James 2:24** “*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*”. How can anyone read that verse and then conclude that works are not important? When you look at the New Testament illustrations of the judgment scene, you see that the outcome of judgment is not based so much on what you believe (although what you believe is very important), it is based on what you have done or not done – see **Matthew 7:21-23; 25:31-46; John 5:26-29; Romans 2:5-10; Revelation 20:12**. Look particularly at **Matthew 7:21-23**. Those who were rejected by God in this passage were not rejected because of unbelief, nor were they rejected for being lazy. They were rejected because what they were doing was not in accordance with God’s Will, God’s Word (**John 12:48**).

God has always required obedience from His people, both in the Old Testament and the New (**Deuteronomy 6:1-2; Matthew 28:20**). In **Hebrews 5:9** we read that “...*He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.*” The implication is that, if we don’t obey Him, we will be lost. The idea of “*once saved, always saved*” is not taught in the scriptures. In fact, the scriptures talk of people who were once saved, but have since jeopardised their salvation;

Galatians 5:4 Some had fallen from grace.

1 Timothy 1:19 Some had shipwrecked their faith.

2 Peter 2:20-21 Some had gone back to what they were before.

Revelation 2:5; 3:16 Some congregations were on shaky ground.

So then, we need to be obedient. But in order to be obedient.....

Firstly, we need to know His Will. And the place where we find His Will is in His Word. God has always let His people know what He requires of them - **2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3**. Therefore, we need to spend time with “the book”.

Secondly, we need to be constantly examining ourselves to see if our thoughts and actions are aligned with His Word (**1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Corinthians 10:5**), and make the changes where necessary (**Ephesians 4:17-24**)

c) Consequences

As we saw earlier with Jesus, when we serve God and put Him first and foremost, there will be consequences. At times, our stand for God may put us “at odds” with our friends, family, maybe even brethren. It is not that we are looking to cause trouble (**Romans 12:18**), nor should we set out to deliberately offend (**1 Corinthians 10:32; 2 Corinthians 6:3**), but the ways of the world are not the ways of God (**Isaiah 55:8; John 18:36a**), so there is bound to be a clash at some point.

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But if we remain faithful to the end, God will give us the crown of life
(**Revelation 1:10b; 2 Timothy 4:8**).

Conclusion

As Christians, we serve the Most High God. Our God is a loving God, a merciful God, a God who is prepared to go to extra-ordinary lengths, even sacrificing Himself, for our benefit. None of us are anywhere near worthy of what He has done, and continues to do, for us.

We are His servants, and the role of servants is to obey the will of the Master. And the will of our Master is found only in one place – His Word. Brethren, we need to be “people of the book”.

God knows that we are not perfect. He in fact tells us that we will sin (**1 John 1:8**). That is why we need His grace.

But the person who says that they love God, but chooses not to do what He says in His Word, “*is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*” (**1 John 2:4**)

But the person who truly loves God does their best to be obedient to Him, and in spite of their failings, this is the person who is “*walking in the light as He is in the light...and the blood of Jesus (continues to) cleanse him from all sin*” (**1 John 1:7**).