342 To Serve, Servant (*Seruire, Seruus*)

Just as there are various lords, there are various servants. But “No man can serve two masters,” Matt. 6[:24], that is, to God and sin. And this because of the displeasure of the two, because where there is God, there sin is not, similarly and because of the contrariety to the servants, because a servant of God is good, a servant of sin is evil.

Again, the diversity of rewards, because [Rom. 6:23]: “The wages of sin is death. The grace of God, life everlasting.” But just as it is said in Matt. 4[:10]: We ought to serve God “only” for many reasons. Of which one is because he liberated us from the power of the devil. For according to Isidore, *Etymologiae*, book 9, chapter 48.[[1]](#endnote-1) And, according to Augustine, *De civitate,* book 19, c. 15.[[2]](#endnote-2)servant takes its name from preserving, because the captive in war could be killed, and however they were saved. We were such one made captive by sins, and God could have killed us by the law of war, but he saved us. Therefore, we are his servants, Num. 16[:9]: “The God of Israel has spared you from all the people and joined you to himself.” Luke 1[:74]: “From the hand of our enemies, we may serve him without fear.” Who serves God can serve without fear because with love, but he who serves the devil is always in fear, because Jer. 16[:13]: “You shall serve strange gods, which shall not give you any rest,” that is, for the devil seeing his servant wearied in sin, drags him in one sin to another kind of sin. This was figured in Pharaoh, Exod. 5[:7] who seeing the children of Israel wearied in mud and bricks, had them collect straw. And not only does the devil drag them to another kind of sin, but also brings opprobrium and confusion. Wherefore 1 Reg. 11[:2]: Naas the Ammonite did not want to have the children of Israel servants and confederates unless he brought opprobrium on them in Israel by gouging out their right eyes. Therefore, Gregory said,[[3]](#endnote-3) it is a serious offense that cannot be placated by office or obsequies. Therefore, the Lord said to Josue 24[:15]: “Choose that which pleases you, whom you would rather serve, whether the gods.” I dare that it is read in diverse histories that the lion for his perpetuity served that one who drew a thorn from his paw, just as it is evident in the *Legends* about Jerome.[[4]](#endnote-4) So, we must serve God who liberated us, first Thess. [1:9-10]: “You turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God ... who has delivered us from the wrath to come.” Augustine, book 19 *De civitate* c. 15,[[5]](#endnote-5) the condition of servitude is understood by law to be imposed upon the sinner. Therefore, we never read servant in the scriptures, before Noah this name was imposed upon the son of a sinner. So, he merited this name of servitude by fault, not by nature. Therefore, properly this name is pertinent to the devil or to a sinner, John 8[:34]: “Whosoever commits sin, is the servant of sin.”

¶ About which it is to be noted that when someone is made a servant by a deed of the parents and as if by nature, and from that servitude one cannot be liberated except by the grace of the Lord. Another is made by his own deed and as if by acts as when one is captured and incarcerated.

¶ By this one can be freed by his own deed either by cautiously escaping or by redemption. So spiritually we are servants of the devil by deed or our parents, just so we contracted original sin from which we cannot be liberated except by the grace of God. We are also servants of the devil by our own deed by committing actual mortal sin, 2 Pet. 2[:19]: “By whom a man is overcome, of the same also he is the slave.” From this servitude we cannot be freed except either by escaping sin or redeeming through penitence.

¶ There in a good servant three things ought to be found: fidelity, truth, and piety.

Concerning the first, Psal. [99:2]: “Serve the Lord with gladness.” The sinner cannot properly serve the Lord because he is the servant of so many lords of which they are vices, according to Augustine, book 4 *De civitate* ca. 3.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Concerning the second, Josue 22[:5]: “Cleave to him and serve him with all your heart.” In the kingdom of England, the progeny in common have heredity and other children not unless according to what that one wished to give and for service of those. So, Christ who is the progeny that has many brothers all according to the law. Therefore, if we wish to have anything, we should serve him truthfully. Many on earth say that, Gen. 47[:25]: “We will gladly serve the king.” But few do so for the heavenly king, Jer. 2[:20]: “You said: I will not serve.” Wherefore note that in the religions or in the days in which they sow, they offer themselves to serve at the table, but other days they offer themselves weeping. But alas because it is said to the Rom. [1:25]: “They served the creature rather than the Creator.”

¶ For some serve in paleness and at night serve the idol of the moon, which envy makes. Others the idol of the mother that is called the god of war, which wrath fashions. Others the idol of Mercury that is called the god of merchants, which avarice makes. Others the idol of Jupiter to whom it is attributed to thunder and lightning, which pride makes. Others the idol of Saturn that hardly in thirty years completes its course, which sloth makes. Others the idol of the sun consumes moisture, which gluttony makes. When however, they should rather be serving the true God than a creature, according to that of 1 Kings 7[:3]: “Prepare your hearts unto the Lord and serve him only.” Truly because they do not please accordingly, the rebellious, the blind, the contemptuous, the sleepy, the unfaithful, the leprous, and the stinking. Therefore, prepare your hearts for the Lord lest you be rebellious through pride, blind through envy, contemptuous through wrath, unfaithful through avarice, sleepy through sloth, leprous through lust, and stinking through gluttony. And serve him by distancing yourself through penance from these vices, by not rejecting the offered grace.

¶ Certainly pride at the door stands offering itself, but the door does not burst open, according to that of Apo. 31[:20]: “I stand at the gate, and knock. If any man shall open to me the door, I will come in.”

¶ Concerning the blind servant, the Lord bewails, Isai. 42[:19]: “Who is blind, but my servant,” as if saying, I cherish many blind men and hold them in my service.

¶ However, some serve from love as the virtuous, some from compulsion as the captives, and some from leadership as the merchants. But in all these God must be served freely with total benevolence, Psal. [17:45]: “A people, which I knew not, have served me: at the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me.”

Second, faithful with total diligence, Matt. 25[:21]: “Well done, good and faithful servant, because you have been faithful over a few things.”

Third, vigilantly without negligence, Luc. 12[:43]: “Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come, he shall find” him watching. Because of these three things are commended in servants. Fidelity, Eccli. 33[:31]: “If you have a faithful servant, let him be to you as your own soul.” Second work-minded, Matt. 20[:6-7]: “Why stand you here all day idle? [He said to them]: Go,” etc. Third wisdom, Eccli. 7[:23]: “Let a wise servant be dear to you.”

¶ Again, note what is incumbent upon us to serve Christ by reason of creation, because we are his original servants, Isai. 44[:2]: “Thus says the Lord that made and formed me, your helper from the womb.”

Second, by reason of re-creation because we are his purchased servants, Isai. 44[:21-22]: “Israel, for you are my servant,” and it follows, “return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

Third, by reason of rewarding because we are his hired servants. For he has hired us “for a penny a day,” by that which he will reward the workers in his vineyard, Matt. 20[:2]. And Matt. 25[:21]: “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into your joy.”

Again, the servant more often is bent under his load because of that “[As a servant] longs for the shade,” Job 7[:2]. And Eccli. 33[:27]: “Continual labors bow a slave.”

Second, a servant is whipped for a crime, because Eccli. 42[:5]: “The side of a wicked slave to bleed.”

Third, a servant is ungrateful for a benefit about which he complains, Job 19[:16]: “I called my servant, and he gave me no answer, I entreated him with my own mouth.” And Prov. 29[:21]: “He that nourishes his servant delicately from his childhood, afterwards shall find him stubborn.”

Fourth, a servant is boastful in his lord, which Jeremias deplores, Lam. 5[:8]: “Servants have ruled over us.” And Prov. [30:21]: “By three things the earth is disturbed, and the fourth it cannot bear: By a slave when he reigns: by a fool when he is filled: ... and by a bondwoman, when she is heir to her mistress.”

Fifth, a servant is removed intentionally, because in John 15[:15] it is said, “The servant knows not what his lord does”.

Sixth, a servant that is dispelled is at his pleasure, John 8[:35]: “The servant abides not in the house forever.”

¶ Again for three reasons the servant does not fulfill the will of his lord. Because either it is grave what is imposed or because although he does not do it, he does not fear the punishment of the lord because if it could be done, he would not hope for a reward. But in the commandments of Christ the first does not excuse because [1] John 5[:3]: “His commandments are not heavy.” Nor accordingly because if you did not do it you would not escape punishment, Luc. 12[:47]: “[That servant] who knew the will of his lord, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

¶ Nor the third, because from the fact that you pursue reward, John 12[[:26]: “Where I am, there also shall my minister be.” Matt. 12[:50]: “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he” will enter the kingdom of heaven.

1. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.4.43 (PL 82:352): Servi autem vocabulum inde traxerunt, quod hi qui jure belli possent occidi a victoribus, conservabantur, et servi fiebant, a servando, scilicet servi appellati. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 19.15 (PL 41:643): Origo autem vocabuli servorum in latina lingua inde creditur ducta, quod hi qui jure belli possent occidi, a victoribus cum servabantur, servi fiebant, a servando appellati; quod etiam ipsum sine peccati merito non est. Nam et cum justum geritur bellum, pro peccato et a contrario dimicatur: et omnis victoria, cum etiam malis provenit, divino judicio victos humiliat, vel emendans peccata, vel puniens. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Gregory cf. Marginal Gloss on Psal. 105:41: *Qui Oderunt eos* citing Cassiodorus: Grave est servire offenso qui nullo placatur obsequio.

   <https://gloss-e.irht.cnrs.fr/php/editions_chapitre.php?livre=../sources/editions/GLOSS-liber26_7.xml&chapitre=26_7_105>

   Cf. *Glossa ordinaria* on Psal. 104:41 (PL 113:1025): Grave est servire offenso, qui nullo placatur obsequio. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Jerome, cf. James of Voragine, *The Golden Legend* 146 (Ryan 2:213): On a day towards even Jerome sat with his brethren for to hear the holy lesson, and a lion came halting suddenly in to the monastery, and when the brethren saw him, anon they fled, and Jerome came against him as he should come against his guest, and then the lion showed to him his foot being hurt. Then he called his brethren, and commanded them to wash his feet and diligently to seek and search for the wound. And that done, the plant of the foot of the lion was sore hurt and pricked with a thorn. Then this holy man put thereto diligent cure, and healed him, and he abode ever after as a tame beast with them. Then S. Jerome saw that God had sent him to them, not only for the health of his foot, but also for their profit, and joined to the lion an office, by the accord of his brethren, and that was that he should conduct and lead an ass to his pasture which brought home wood, and should keep him going and coming, and so he did. For he did that which he was commanded, and led the ass thus as a herdsman, and kept him wisely going and coming, and was to him a right sure keeper and defender, and always at the hour accustomed he and the ass came for to have their refection and for to make the ass to do the work accustomed. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 19.15 (PL 41:643): Conditio quippe servitutis jure intelligitur imposita peccatori. Proinde nusquam Scripturarum legimus servum, antequam hoc vocabulo Noe justus peccatum filii vindicaret (Id. IX, 25). Nomen itaque istud culpa meruit, non natura. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 4.3 (PL 41:114): Proinde bonus etiamsi serviat, liber est: malus autem etiamsi regnet, servus est; nec unius hominis, sed quod est gravius, tot dominorum, quot vitiorum. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)