

Two Kinds of Obedience

Michael Sattler (1490-1527)

The following is excerpted from "On Two Kinds of Obedience," a tract written by Michael Sattler. He was also the author of the Schleithem Confession, which was originally printed under the title, "Brotherly Agreement of Some Children of God." This confession is generally recognized as the first confession of those who were called "Anabaptists" by their persecutors.

Obedience is of two kinds, servile and filial. The filial has its source in the love of the Father, even though no other reward should follow, yea even if the Father should wish to damn His child; the servile has its source in a love of reward or of oneself. The filial ever does as much as possible, apart from any command; the servile does as little as possible, yea nothing except by command. The filial is never able to do enough for Him; but he who renders servile obedience thinks he is constantly doing too much for Him.

The filial rejoices in the chastisement of the Father although he may not have transgressed in anything; the servile wishes to be without chastisement of the Father although he may do nothing right. The filial has its treasure and righteousness; the servile person's treasure and piety are the works which he does in order to be pious. The filial remains in the house and inherits all the Father has; the servile wishes to reject this and receive his lawful reward.... The servile is Moses and produces Pharisees and scribes; the filial is Christ and makes children of God....

The servile produces self-willed and vindictive people; the filial creates peaceable and mild-natured persons. The servile is severe and gladly arrives quickly at the end of the work; the filial is light and directs its gaze to that which endures. The servile is malevolent and wishes no one well but himself; the filial would gladly have all men to be as himself.

The servile is the old covenant, and had the promise of temporal happiness; the filial is the new covenant, and has the promise of eternal happiness, namely, the Creator Himself. The servile is a beginning and preparation for happiness; the filial in the end and completion itself. The servile endures for a time; the filial will last forever. The servile was a figure and shadow; the filial is the body and truth.

The servile was established to reveal and increase sin; the filial follows to do away with and extirpate the revealed and increased sin.... Moreover, the law gives occasion to people to depart farther from God, not because of itself (for it is good) but because of the sin which is in man. This is also the reason why Paul says that the law was given that it might increase sin, and sin might thereby become known. Yea, the law is the strength of sin and therefore it is just like the servile obedience, that is, obedience to law, which leads people into the most intense hatred of God and of one's neighbor. Therefore filial obedience is a certain way through which man escapes from such hatred and receives the love of God and of one's neighbor. Therefore, as one administers death, the other administers life. The one is the Old Testament; the other, the New.

According to the Old Testament only he who murdered was guilty of judgment; but in the New, he also who is angry with his brother. The Old gave permission for a man to separate from his wife for every reason; but not at all in the New, except for adultery. The Old permitted swearing if one swore truly, but the New will know of no swearing. The Old has its stipulated punishment, but the New does not resist the evil.

The Old permitted hatred for the enemy; the New loves him who hates, blesses him who curses, prays for those who wish one evil; gives alms in this manner that the left hand does not know what the right has done; says his prayer secretly without evident and excessive babbling of mouth; judges and condemns no one; takes the mote out of the eye of one's brother after having first cast the beam out of one's own eye; fasts without any outward pomp and show; is like a light which is set on a candlestick and lightens everyone in the house; is like a city built on a hill, being everywhere visible; is like good salt that does not become tasteless, being pleasing not to man but to God alone; is like a good eye which illuminates the whole body; takes no anxious thought about clothing or food, but performs his daily and upright tasks; does not cast pearls before swine, nor that which is holy before dogs; seeks, asks and knocks; finding, receiving and having the door opened for him; enters through the narrow way and the small gate; guards himself from the Pharisees and scribes as from false prophets; is a good tree and brings forth good fruit; does the will of his Father, hearing what he should do, and then doing it.

The church of true believers is built upon Christ the chief cornerstone; stands against all the gates of hell, that is, against the wrathful judgment of the Pharisees, of the mighty ones of earth, and of the scribes; is a house and temple of God, against which no wind and

water may do anything, standing secure, so that everything else which withstands the teaching which proceeds from it, denying its truth, may itself finally give evidence that it is a dwelling of God.

The believer's church is now maligned by the Pharisees and scribes as a habitation of the devil: yea, finally they shall hear, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God, etc. But of the house of the Pharisees and scribes, it shall be said, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird, etc. But to God (through whom everything which boasts that is not, may be manifested that it is) be all honor, praise and glory through His beloved Son, our Lord and Brother Jesus Christ. Amen.

In May 1527, Michael Sattler was arrested in Horb, in southern Germany. During his trial, the following exchange took place:

Town Clerk: "O you infamous, desperate villain and monk, shall we dispute with you? The hangman shall dispute with you, I assure you."

Michael said: "God's will be done."

The town clerk said: "It were well if you had never been born."

Michael replied: "God knows what is good."

Town Clerk: "You arch-heretic, you have seduced the pious; if they would only now forsake their error, and accept grace."

Michael: "Grace is with God alone."

One of the prisoners also said: "We must not depart from the truth."

Town Clerk: "You desperate villain and arch-heretic, I tell you if there were no hangman here, I would hang you myself, and think that I had done God service." [By apparently not realizing the context of the Scripture from which he was quoting (John 16:2) this man helped fulfill it.—ed]

Michael: "God will judge aright."

On the morning of May 21, 1527, Michael Sattler was bound while his torturers used hot tongs to rip off parts of his flesh. They then cut off part of his tongue. He was then taken outside the city and tied to a ladder and a sack of gunpowder was tied around his neck. Despite having part of his tongue missing, he prayed, "Almighty, eternal God, thou art the way and the truth; because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with thy help on this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood." He was then pushed into a fire. When the ropes around his hands burned away, Sattler gave a signal to his group to show he was confident about his fate and prayed, "Father, I commend my spirit into thy hands." His wife was executed by drowning a couple of days later.