

WE CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS

—by Elias Miniatis, bishop of Kerniki and Kalavryta—

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt. 6:24)

God and the world¹ are two opposites that are completely foreign and infinitely distanced from each other. These are the two masters Christ is referring to when He states that it is impossible for someone to serve both simultaneously. If someone decides to draw near to one, he necessarily distances himself from the other. If he begins to love one of them, he will inevitably develop hate for the other. If he chooses to concern himself with and admire one, he must neglect and loathe the other. **“For someone will either hate the one and love the other, or be loyal to the one and despise the other.”**

Our eyes cannot simultaneously look at the sky and the ground. Our mind cannot concurrently be devoted to heavenly and earthly matters. Our heart cannot at the same time love both God and the world. It is either one or the other; because it is impossible for a person to have both: **“You cannot serve both God and mammon.”**

There are two reasons for this. The first one is this: God wants man entirely to serve only Him. However, the world also wants man to completely submit himself to it. Thus, it is impossible for man in total to be in both places. The second reason is that God’s law is diametrically opposed to the world’s ordinances. It is likewise impossible for someone to follow two totally different sets of instructions. On account of these two reasons, it is impossible for someone at the same time to be the slave of two different masters; namely, God and the world.

The first and great commandment that God gave in the Old Testament, and which Christ repeats many times throughout the Gospel, is this: **“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord our God from your whole heart, from your whole soul, and from your whole power” (Dt. 6:4-5).** In other words, God says, “you have only one natural and genuine master, O man! It is Me the Lord. For I created you out of nothing, I gave you life and your soul, I ransomed you with My own blood, I granted you salvation, and I have prepared the Kingdom of Heaven for you. You are My creation, My

¹ The term “world” takes on various meanings when used in Scriptures. It can refer to i) the earth, or the universe; ii) the people, or mankind. More often, however (as in this present text), it is used to refer collectively to the worldly, earthly, and sinful mindset and lifestyle prevailing in the majority of people on earth, in contrast to the spiritual, godly, and holy way of life practiced by the minority of people who chose to follow Christ’s commandments.

possession—you belong entirely to Me.” Thus, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt. 22:37).**

“I the Lord thy God am a jealous God” (Ex. 20:5), and I want to be your only Lord. **“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Dt. 6:4).** I want you entirely, both your soul and your body. This is why I want you to love only Me and to serve only Me with all the senses of your body and with all the powers of your soul. **“You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart, from your whole soul, and from your whole power” (Dt. 6:5).** This is what God commands us. However, because we are born and raised in the world and have become entangled within the world’s many and various sinful webs, the Son of God came to the earth armed with a sword to sever these very bonds. **“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt. 10:34).** “Do not think,” says Christ, “that I have come to bring peace to the earth.” That is, do not think that I have come to make a pact with the lawless world. Even though the world was created by God, it did not recognize and acknowledge God. **“The world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (Jn. 1:10).** I want to declare unending war against the world, because it is My enemy. Thus, Christ wants to sever every sinful bond that keeps us tied to the world, in order for us to become entirely His sole possession.

On the other hand, the world also wants us entirely. It does not permit us to have even the slightest relationship with God; on the contrary, it attempts to distance us from Him in any and every possible manner. Are you familiar with how oppressive Pharaoh was to the enslaved nation of the Jews? In order to utterly subjugate them, he kept them in a perpetual state of toil and drudgery, forcing them to plow vineyards, clean gardens, erect buildings, and be ceaselessly occupied with hard and painful work. God sent Moses and Aaron to instruct the Pharaoh to release the poor people for a few days, so that they may have the opportunity and time to offer sacrifices to God: **“Let My people go, so they may hold a feast to Me in the desert ... Let us go three days’ journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God” (Ex: 5:1-3).** “Oh!” said the irreverent king. “The Jews still remember their God? They still desire to offer Him a sacrifice? They have too much time on their hands. I better increase their workload so they have no time at all to think of such things. Let them serve me every hour of the day so that they have not even a minute to serve their God.” **“Let the works of these men be oppressive, and let them occupy themselves with these things” (Ex. 5:9).** Indeed, this is what followed. Even though these poor people previously had as their primary task to make bricks, the Pharaoh gave them another job: to collect hay. He doubled their workload. Not only did he prevent them from offering a sacrifice to their God, but he did not allow them—even for a minute—to think about God. The king appointed

supervisors who watched over them and obligated them to work non-stop. They didn't give them a chance to catch their breath. **“Let the works of these men be oppressive, and let them occupy themselves with these things.”**

The ungodly world, this tyrant of our souls, wants to enforce the same slavery upon us Christians. It desires to hold us enslaved and occupied solely with the cares and works of this present life. This is especially true when we intend to fulfill our obligations toward God. This is when the world presents a plethora of obstacles; this is when the verse **“Let the works of these men be oppressive, and let them occupy themselves with these things”** is implemented. Have we decided to pray? This is when twice as many worldly thoughts come to mind, scattering our attention to thousands of vain and vulgar recollections. Have we decided to attend the Divine Liturgy? That's when twice as many worldly affairs appear, which drag us from church to the marketplace or other commitments. Do we feel the need to go to confession? This is when worldly cares increase exponentially, preventing us from carrying out this God-pleasing deed. In this manner, the day goes by without prayer, the feast days roll by without church, the year passes without repentance. This is how the world wants us to dedicate our entire life to its service, so that not even a moment remains for us to serve God: **“Let the works of these men be oppressive, and let them occupy themselves with these things.”**

This is the first reason that **“no one can serve two masters”**—the world, that is, and God.

The second reason that **“no one can serve two masters”** is due to the fact that God's law is diametrically opposed to the laws of the secular world. What does God's law command us first and foremost? To love every person like ourselves—to love even our enemies and to do good to those who harm us. The laws of the worldly society, on the other hand, teach us that it is acceptable to hate them who wrong us, that it is logical to seek revenge, and that there is nothing wrong with being ungrateful toward our benefactors. God commands us to show compassion to the poor and needy, to help them, and to be charitable to them. The world, on the other hand, advises us that we are not obligated to help others, and it recommends that we hoard and save our money, in order to use it for our own personal enjoyment alone. God commands us to speak the truth; the world, on the other hand, hates nothing more than the truth. This is why Christ states, **“the Spirit of truth, which the world is not able to receive, because it neither sees it nor recognizes it” (Jn. 14:17)**. Instead of speaking truthfully, the world likes to flatter, to gossip, to criticize, and to defame. God wants us to be humble, to trust and hope in Him, to live with purity, to dress modestly, to endure difficulties with patience and thanksgiving, to exercise temperance and abstinence, to fast, to pray. The world promotes the contrary: it incites us to be self-confident and trust in ourselves, to boast in our beauty and

accomplishments, to dress fashionably, to delight in sexual immorality, to complain, to demand our rights, to blame others for our problems, to fulfill our physical desires, and to enjoy all the sensual pleasures of this present life. This is why the law of God is the narrow path of virtue leading to the Kingdom of Heaven; whereas the law of the world is the wide road of sin leading to eternal Hell.

Who can actually keep two laws that are so different and serve two masters who are so opposed to each other? Absolutely no one! **“No one can serve two masters.”** There is no middle ground. It is impossible for someone to please both masters. It is either one or the other. Neither the wisest genius nor the greatest and holiest saint will ever find a way to please both masters simultaneously.

Since this is how things are my fellow Christians, what are we to do? Which of the two masters should we serve? God or the world? If we are destined to live on this earth forever without ever dying, then fine: Let us enslave ourselves to the world and enjoy everything it has to offer. If, however, we are mortal and will end up dying one day, if this present world is transient: **“For the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31)** states the Apostle Paul, if we are mere sojourners on this planet and our homeland is in Heaven: **“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Hb. 13:14, Ph. 3:20)**, if God alone is our master and Father, if during our baptism we pledged an allegiance to Christ and vowed to remain His faithful servants, and if we will give an account to Him for all our actions and sins when we die, then let us choose to serve God **“with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength.”**

Oh you treacherous and deceitful world! Let them who do not believe in the crucified Christ and who do not hope in any other Paradise serve you and enjoy you. We who believe in Christ, however, will serve Him in this life, so that we may reign along with Him in His Heavenly Kingdom in the next life. Amen.