

John 13:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

Analysis

Verily, verily (ἀμὲν ἀμὲν, amēn amēn)—Jesus' signature formula marking solemn, authoritative pronouncement. The doubled "amen" appears 25 times in John, always introducing crucial teaching. **The servant is not greater than his lord** (δοῦλος, doulos; κύριος, kyrios)—a proverbial truth Jesus applies to justify the foot-washing command. If the Master serves, the slave cannot claim exemption from service.

Neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him (ἀπόστολος, apostolos; πέμψας, pempsas)—the second clause uses apostolic terminology. "He that is sent" translates the root of apostolos (apostle). Since Jesus Himself is the sent One (the ultimate Apostle, Hebrews 3:1), His followers who are also sent cannot claim superiority to their sender. This principle governs all Christian ministry: representatives cannot exceed their representative capacity. Jesus used this same saying in Matthew 10:24 regarding persecution—disciples should expect treatment no better than their Master received.

Historical Context

Master-servant relationships structured ancient society. Jewish rabbis expected disciples to serve them in menial tasks, but not vice versa. Jesus inverts this by serving, then citing the master-servant hierarchy to enforce mutual service. Written to late first-century Christians facing persecution, John preserves this

saying to encourage endurance—if Christ suffered, His followers should expect no less.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does accepting your identity as "sent one" (apostle) under Christ prevent spiritual pride?
2. In what areas are you tempted to claim exemption from humble service that Christ performed?

Interlinear Text

ἀμὴν	ἀμὴν	λέγω	ὑμῖν	οὐκ	ἔστιν	δοῦλος	μείζων
Verily	Verily	I say	unto you	not	is	The servant	greater than
G281	G281	G3004	G5213	G3756	G2076	G1401	G3187
τοῦ	κυρίου	αὐτόν	οὐδὲ	ἀπόστολος	μείζων	τοῦ	
G3588	lord	him	neither	he that is sent	greater than	G3588	
	G2962	G846	G3761	G652	G3187		
πέμψαντος	αὐτόν						
he that sent	him						
G3992	G846						

Additional Cross-References

Luke 6:40 (Parallel theme): The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

John 15:20 (References Lord): Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also.

John 3:5 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

John 3:3 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

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