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THE RELATIVE CLAIMS OF LOVE AND JUSTICE

THERE is nothing more necessary to the peace and prosperity of the Church of God than that its members should have a clear understanding and appreciation of moral principles, with a full determination to be controlled by them. Even among Christians there are often differences of opinion, with reference to principles of action, which greatly interfere with spiritual growth and prosperity. Such difficulties most frequently arise through a failure to rightly distinguish between the relative claims of love and justice. Therefore we deem it profitable to briefly consider these principles and their operation among the children of God.

Justice is sometimes represented by a pair of evenly poised balances, and sometimes by the square and compass, both of which are fitting emblems of its character. Justice knows no compromise and no deviation from its fixed rule of action. It is mathematically precise. It gives nothing over for "good weight" or "good measure:" there is no grace in it, no heart, no love, no sympathy, no favor of any kind. It is the cold, calculating, exact measure of truth and righteousness. When justice is done, there is no thanks due to the one who metes it out: such a one has only done a *duty*, the neglect of which would have been culpable, and the doing of which merits no favor or praise. And yet, cold, firm and relentless as this principle is, it is declared to be the very foundation of God's throne. It is the principle which underlies all his dealings with all his creatures: it is his *unchangeable business principle*. And how firmly he adheres to it is manifest to every one acquainted with the plan of salvation, the first step of which was to satisfy the claims of justice against our race. Though it cost the life of his only begotten and well beloved Son

to do this, so important was this principle that he freely gave him up for us all – to satisfy its legal claims against us.

The principle of love, unlike that of justice, overflows with tenderness and longs to bless. It is full of grace, and delights in the bestowment of favor. It is manifest, however, that no action can be regarded as a favor or a manifestation of love, which has not underneath it the substantial foundation of justice. Thus, for instance, if one comes to you with a gift, and at the same time disregards a just debt to you, the gift falls far short of appreciation as an expression of love; and you say, We should be just before we attempt to be generous.

And this is right: if justice is the foundation principle in all of God's dealings, it should be in ours also; and none the less so among brethren in Christ than among those of the world. As brethren in Christ, we have no right to presume upon the favor of one another. All that we have a right *to claim* from one another is simple justice – justice in the payment of our honest debts to each other, justice in our judgment one of another (which must make due allowance for frailties, etc., because we realize [R1535 : page 163] in ourselves some measure of similar imperfection), and justice in fair and friendly treatment one of another. This is all we have any right [R1535 : page 164] to *claim*; and we must also bear in mind that while we have a right to claim this for ourselves from others, we are just as fully obligated to render the same to them.

But while we *may claim* justice – though there is no obligation to demand it for ourselves, and we may if we choose even suffer injustice uncomplainingly – we *must*, if we are Christ's, *render* it. In other words, we are not responsible for the actions of others in these respects, but we are responsible for our own. And therefore we must see to it that all our actions are

squared by the exact rule of justice, before we ever present a single act as an expression of love.

The principle of love is not an exact principle to be measured and weighed like that of justice. It is three-fold in its character, being pitiful, sympathetic or reverential, according to the object upon which it is centered. The love of pity is the lowest form of love: it takes cognizance of even the vile and degraded, and is active in measures of relief. The love of sympathy rises higher, and proffers fellowship. But the love of reverence rises above all these, and delights in the contemplation of the good, the pure and the beautiful. In this latter sense we may indeed love God supremely, as the personification of all that is truly worthy of admiration and reverence, and our fellow men in proportion as they bear his likeness.

Although we owe to every man the duty of love in some one of these senses, we may not demand it one of another, as we may the principle of justice; for love is the overflow of justice. Justice fills the measure full, but love shakes it, presses it down, heaps it up and overflows justice. It is therefore something not to be demanded, nor its lack to be complained of, but to be gratefully appreciated as a favor and to be generously reciprocated. Every one who craves it at all should crave it in its highest sense – the sense of admiration and reverence. But this sort of love is the most costly, and the only way to secure it is to manifest that nobility of character which calls it forth from others who are truly noble.

The love of sympathy and fellowship is also very precious; but, if it come merely in response to a demand, it comes robbed of its choicest aroma: therefore never demand it, but rather by manifestation of it toward others court its reciprocation.

The love of pity is not called out by the nobility of the subject, but rather by the nobility of the bestower, who is so full

of the principle of love that it overflows in its generous impulses toward even the unworthy. All of the objects of pity are not, however, unworthy of love in the higher senses; and some such often draw upon our love in all the senses.

To demand love's overflow of blessing – which is beyond the claims of justice – is only an exhibition of covetousness. We may act on this principle of love ourselves, but we may not claim it from others. The reverse of this exhibits a manifest lack of love and a considerable measure of selfishness.

Thus, for instance, two of the Lord's children were once rooming together and, through a failure to rightly consider the relative claim of love and justice, one presumed upon the brotherly love of the other to the extent of expecting him to pay the entire rent; and when the other urged the claims of justice, he pushed the claim of brotherly love, and the former reluctantly yielded to it, not knowing how to refute the claim, yet feeling that somehow some Christians had less principle than many worldly people. How strange that any of God's children should take so narrow and one-sided a view. Cannot all see that love and justice should work both ways and that it is the business of each not to oversee others in these respects, but to look well to his own course, and if he would teach others, let it be rather by example than by precept.

Let us beware of a disposition to covetousness, and let each remember that he is steward over his own goods, and not over his neighbor's, and that each is accountable to the Lord, and not to his brother, for the right use of that which the Master entrusted to him. There is nothing much more unlovely and unbecoming to the children of God than a disposition to petty criticism of the individual affairs of one another. It is a business too small for the saints, and manifests a sad lack of that brotherly love which should be specially manifest **[R1535 : page 165]** in broad and

generous consideration, which would rather cover a multitude of sins than magnify one.

May love and justice find their proper and relative places in the hearts of all of God's people, that so the enemy may have no occasion to glory. The Psalmist says, "Oh, how love I thy law [the law of love, whose foundation is justice]: it is my meditation all the day." (Psa. 119:97.) Surely, if it were the constant meditation of all, there would be fewer and less glaring mistakes than we often see. Let us watch and be sober, that the enemy may not gain an advantage over us.
