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JUDGMENT – ITS USE AND ABUSE.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." – Matt. 7:1,2.

AVERY unlovely disposition in the eyes of God, and of all fair-minded men, is that which assumes the obligation of sitting in uncharitable judgment upon all the affairs and conduct of fellow-men, either within the Church or outside of it.

That our Lord referred to this abuse of judgment, and not to the legitimate use of that noble faculty, is very manifest from succeeding verses (3-5), which warn against the hypocrisy of condemning others for faults no greater than those which exist in one's self, but to which self-love is wilfully blind; and also from verses 15-20, which bid us beware of wolves in sheep's clothing, or, in other words, to use sound judgment in discriminating between the truly consecrated and faithful children of God, whose hearts are pure and free from guile, and [R1712 : page 312] those who studiously cover up a wolf-like character with the outward professions of godliness, in order to deceive and lead astray the unwary.

"By their fruits ye shall know them," said the Lord; and to use candid and unbiased judgment in comparing their fruits – of character, conduct or teaching – with their professions and with the Word of God, is necessary to the safety and protection of the Lord's people. This, therefore, is a very legitimate use of judgment; and those who, disregarding the Lord's warning, either recklessly or wilfully, fail so to exercise judgment, expose themselves to the deceitful snares of the great adversary. The wolf is not to be tolerated, nor his sheep's clothing respected: he has no rightful place in the assemblies of the true sheep until his character is changed by repentance and submission to the will of God. His presence can only bring reproach upon all associated with him, and sow the seeds of error and discord; and, learning the

shibboleth of the saints, he will deceitfully make merchandise of their holy things and demand that Christian charity should let him alone in his nefarious work.

Alas! many simple ones, ignoring the Lord's counsel, weakly yield to this demand, to their great detriment spiritually. They give that which is holy unto the dogs and cast their pearls before the swine; and the wolf is often tolerated out of respect for his sheep's clothing. It is not real charity to such characters to permit them to pursue their course unmolested; nor is it true loyalty to the cause of Christ. To firmly and candidly let such persons know that we recognize their character and refuse to fellowship or company with them until a change of heart is manifested, and to positively and openly resist their influence, is the noblest and truest charity, both to them and to the cause of Christ in general, though such a course will assuredly bring persecution in some shape.

To deal thus candidly and fairly may in some cases wake up the erring to a sense of their wickedness, and, by making it unprofitable to them, may lessen the temptations to continue the evil course. At all events, it gives the sheep and lambs of the Lord's flock warning of the dangers to be expected from such sources. To encourage or assist such, is to become partakers of their evil deeds. (2 John 11.) Nor would Christian charity demand that the wicked or the profligate should be protected against the natural rewards of their evil course. To thus aid them is only to interfere with the divine arrangement by which sin brings its own retribution for the correction of the sinner. Thus, for instance, if when a profligate son spends his substance in riotous living, an unwise father makes up his loss and starts him anew, not allowing him to realize the evil effects of his course, the son misses the lesson and proceeds to greater lengths in an evil course. The love of God is not thus unwise: if it were, he would not permit the great time of trouble, now impending, to come upon the world. But he will permit it, and when the judgments of the Lord are thus abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. (Isa. 26:9.)

It is not our part, however, to bring evil upon the evil-doers; for vengeance belongs to God. Nor would it be contrary to the spirit of the Lord to show pity and to alleviate the dire wants of those in distress from their own folly. This would not interfere with the needed lesson, but, on the contrary, would tend to soften the heart and make it more susceptible to the lesson.

While the legitimate use of judgment for wise and holy ends is plainly taught in this sermon of our Lord, the first verse of this chapter expressly commands that we should not reckon ourselves as the competent judges of men's hearts, to uncharitably condemn them on our own responsibility. But when their course of conduct is in manifest opposition to and defiance of God's law, as in cases of disguised "wolves," "swine" and "dogs," the condemnation of that law, which is *God's judgment*, not ours merely, should always be recognized.

As a matter of fact, if we have the spirit of the Lord, our judgment will coincide with his – approving what he approves, and condemning what he condemns: we will judge righteous judgment, which makes every possible allowance for the infirmities of the flesh, the strength of temptation and the imperfections of knowledge, and which, ever bearing in mind that we also are far short of perfection, never forgets [**R1712 : page 313**] the golden rule – "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." – Verse 12; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:40; Rom. 13:8,9,10; Gal. 5:14; 1 Tim. 1:5.

Verse 2 makes very imperative the application of this golden rule in such cases – "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Oh, if men and women would always consider these things, how much uncharitable judgment and evil-speaking, and how many bitter words, would be spared! If each could recognize in the other the spirit of love and candor, how quickly wrongs could be righted! If reproofs were

always expressed in the spirit of the golden rule, how much more effective they would be than when they are colored with the glare of hatred and revenge!

"How wise are God's commands!
How sure his precepts are!"

Let us ponder them well, and cultivate more and more in our own hearts the spirit of God's love and kindness – the spirit of his holy law.
