

PROPER AND IMPROPER JUDGMENT OF BRETHREN

"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judgest another?" – James 4:12.

IN THIS Epistle, St. James has been discussing the fact that partiality had been shown in the Church – that some, without proper reason, were esteemed unworthy of as high honor as others. This is particularly brought out in the Second Chapter. Some who were rich and influential were given the choicest seats in their assemblies and treated with great deference and respect. Others, who were poor and humble, were given obscure places and treated with scant courtesy, as though they were inferiors. Judgment was passed upon the brethren contrary to the instructions of the Lord. The Apostle points out the sin of judging and of having respect of persons aside from the standpoint of character. He declares that as there is but one Lawgiver, Jehovah, so there is but one great standard. He who gave that standard, that Law, is to be the Executor of His own Law, although He may appoint various representatives. His special Representatives are to be Christ and the Church associated with Him in glory as judges. But they will judge by that standard given by the great Lawgiver; and there will be no other law in competition with it.

Since this is the case, and since there is an arrangement by which we are accepted as God's children, who is he who undertakes to say what degree of Divine favor or disfavor each of this class may have? Who is to say which will be destroyed in the Second Death and which saved to life? God has a personal dealing with each one of those who are accepted into His family. Hence the very fact that one has been thus accepted is a proof that God has seen something in that person pleasing in His sight. If He who is the Lawgiver has seen something sufficiently favorable for Him to choose such a one and anoint him with His Holy Spirit, what right has any one else to condemn him whom God has seen fit to approve?

THE CHURCH INCAPABLE OF JUDGING NOW

We might see in an individual certain traits which would seem more or less unjust, unrighteous. But we are not to judge. We cannot see into the heart. We might suppose a certain one to be an overcomer, and he might not be. Or we might suppose him not to be an overcomer, and he might be one. Therefore we are to "judge nothing before the time." We should avoid judging the brethren.

This does not mean that we would not be able to discern acts of positive disloyalty to God. But instead of setting up standards of our own, we should recognize for ourselves and everybody else the one standard which the Lord has given; namely, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Luke 10:27.) This is the very essence of the great Law of God. We should judge ourselves by this Law, to see to what extent we are loving God thus, and are loving our neighbor as ourselves. This is our primary work of judging.

The Apostle Paul, particularly, has pointed out that if any one in the Church is living in violation of the Law of God, then the matter should be taken up by the Church. This does not apply to any case except that of an outward departure from the Lord's Law. It would not apply if the individual happens to say "Tweedledee," when we think **[R5887 : page 126]** he should say "Tweedledum," or if he should in some way violate the ideas of some one else. It should be a positive violation of the principles of righteousness laid down in the Word of God. If any one is known to have done us a real injury, we are to go to him alone. If he refuses to listen, then we may take two or three others of the Church. If he still refuses to acknowledge his wrong, the matter may be brought to the attention of the Church in a proper manner. During all this time, however, the brother is not to be cut off from recognition. It is only if he still persists in doing the things contrary to the Divine arrangement, or refuses to make

reparation for a serious wrong, that he should be cut off from fellowship.

It is not our place to judge *others*, but to judge *ourselves*, to bring ourselves up to the highest possible standard. Let others see our good works, that thus they may glorify our Father which is in Heaven. It is the Lord who will judge His people. We are to assume, then, that if any one in the Lord's family should violate his covenant, the Lord will attend to his case. We are not to pass judgment upon his motives; we can only see when his outward conduct is wrong. And we may err even here. But we may not judge the heart. God alone is competent to do this. God gave the Law, and He is the One to decide whether the person is seeking to keep that Law.

STANDARD OF JUDGMENT FOR NEW CREATURES

The Apostle Paul says to the Church, "Ye are not under the Law, but under grace." (Romans 6:14.) But here in our text St. James seems to say that we are under Law and under the Lawgiver. How shall we harmonize these two texts of Scripture? We reply, When St. Paul said, "Ye are not under the Law," he meant the Law Covenant. The Law Covenant which God made with Israel of old was a different thing from the Law of God itself. It was an agreement between the Lord and Israel as to what they would do and what God would do. They were under this Law Covenant. Gentiles never were under this Law. They were without God.

The Apostle Paul intimates (Romans 8:4) that "the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Although Natural Israel were not able to keep the Law of God under their Covenant, we, the Gospel Church, are able to keep it under our Covenant. Under God's arrangement for the Gospel Age the New Creature alone is recognized; the flesh is reckoned dead. The New Creature, having been accepted into God's family, is still in possession of his imperfect fleshly body and must operate through it. He must do his best to control this body and use it to the glory of God.

In his heart, his mind, his endeavor, he can, as a New Creature, keep God's Law perfectly.

It is not the imperfect actions of the mortal body that will determine anything, but the heart intentions and endeavors of the New Creature. The body must be kept under and brought into subjection, as the Apostle Paul tells us. It is the New Creature that will live or die, so far as the Church is concerned, under the judgment of the Divine Law, the Divine Lawgiver.

In harmony with the thought of our text, the Apostle Paul declares that neither the world nor the brethren were capable of judging him – that only the Lord, who can read the heart and know all the conditions, testings and weaknesses to be striven against, can properly judge. He even declares, "Yea, I judge not mine own self." (1 Corinthians 4:3.) We should neither condemn others who claim to be walking conscientiously as children of the Lord, nor condemn ourselves, if we know we are truly striving to thus walk. We should simply press along day by day, doing the best we can by the Lord's assisting grace to cultivate the fruits of the Holy Spirit and serve our Master, leaving all the results with Him.

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