

Judgment and Retribution

The word “judge” or “judgment” occurs in the Bible some 733 times, which demonstrates it to be a major theme that we need to understand. In our considerations today, we shall show that there are some judgments which we must make, and others which we must not make, depending on the circumstances of the case.

DISCERNMENT OF MATTERS IN THIS LIFE

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, the Apostle speaks of a judgment that brethren ought to be united on:

“Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be ***no divisions*** among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and ***in the same judgment***” (1 Cor. 1:10).

The context is to do with factions and contentions within the ecclesia, hence the Apostle exhorts the brethren to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind.” The idea of “judgment” here, is that of a discernment: the members were to be united in their discernment of spiritual things. A little later in this epistle, Paul chides with the brethren for their lack of judgment:

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ***ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*** Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?” (1 Cor. 6:1-3).

The situation here, appears to be that there was a personal dispute between certain individual members of the ecclesia. The matter itself remains unknown, but the brethren were going before the Gentile authorities, rather than to resolve their differences ‘in house’ as it were.

The Lord Jesus Christ provided a procedure to follow with regard to personal disputes:

“if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the ecclesia: but if he neglect to hear the ecclesia, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Mat. 18:15-18).

The circumstance at Corinth was evidently a trespass of a personal nature, rather than an affront to the Truth—in which case, the Master’s procedure would apply. Whether the divided parties had begun to follow it is not clear, but rather than to bring the matter before the Ecclesia as our Master commanded, they were instead going before the worldly law-courts, and Paul rebuked them for it:

“I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers?” (1 Cor. 6:5-6).

Personal disputes between brethren ought to be resolved within the household of faith, rather than to be determined by the gentile law-courts, who have no discernment of spiritual things.

JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY

Our Master also spoke of certain types of judgment which his brethren ought to exercise. Speaking to those who would condemn him because he healed a man on the Sabbath day, he said: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Jno. 7:24). According to the appearance of things, Messiah was working on the Sabbath day. But according to righteous judgment, if a man could be circumcised on the Sabbath, then how much better is making a man "every whit whole on the Sabbath day?" (Jno. 7:23). There is a need therefore, to look beyond the superficial appearance of things, to the principles involved with the judgment.

Isaiah chapter 11 speaks of Jesus himself, and his judgment:

"... the spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him ... And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of Yahweh. And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth ..." (see Isa. 11:2-5)

The context of Isaiah 11, is a vision of the coming Kingdom, and here, the judgments of the Lord will be made known in righteousness. He will not determine disputes according to a person's social standing (i.e. rich or poor), and neither will he be swayed by appearances, or smooth words. The principles of his judgment will be based on the fear of Yahweh, and an application of His principles to the case in hand.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Here is a judgment that we should not make. There is a judgment to come, when our eternal destiny will be declared before the angels of God:

"... it is appointed unto men once to die, but ***after this the judgment***" (Heb. 9:27).

And again:

"... for ***we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ***; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

We cannot know and must not presume to know what the individual judgments upon specific people will be. This is a mistake that some were making at the Ecclesia in Rome:

"Why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of

us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more ...” (Rom. 14:12-13).

The kind of judgment that Paul warns us about, is illustrated in our Master’s Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. They both went into the Temple to pray, and the Pharisee did so with the elevation of self, despising the publican:

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess ...” (Luke 18:11-12).

It is written that: “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” (Prov. 20:6), and the Pharisee in the parable is an illustration of this. He proclaimed his self-perceived goodness and looked down upon the sinful Publican. The Publican, however, recognised his true standing before the Almighty—He that is of purer eyes than can behold iniquity (Hab. 1:13):

“The Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

Rather than to be righteous in his own eyes, the Publican recognised the reality of his position before God. And he, rather than the other, was accepted:

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

VENGEANCE

This aspect of judgment is absolutely forbidden for the disciple of Christ. Proverbs 24 counsels us to “say not I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work” (Prov. 24:29). Messiah also commands: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets (Mat. 7:12). The principle was enshrined in the Law of Moses: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am Yahweh” (Lev. 19:18). And Paul in Romans chapter 12 speaks similarly: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). In the days of our mortal pilgrimage, we must turn the other cheek (Mat. 5:39), forgive our adversaries, and pray for those who spitefully use us (Luke 6:28). Though it is hard, and goes against the inclinations of the natural man, the commandment of Christ is to “love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you”. True strength of character is developed in demonstrating the same forgiveness to others, as we humbly request from our Lord.

ADMINISTRATION IN THE KINGDOM

We saw earlier that the Apostle used the role of saints in the kingdom as a guide for present day judgments (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Administering judgments in the age to come is a privilege which we must

prepare for now, in our relationships with each other. Isaiah chapter 1 provides an insight as to how things will be conducted in that day:

“I will **restore thy judges** as at the first, and **thy counsellors** as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isa. 1:26).

Before the days of king David, the nation was governed by Judges, with Yahweh being their king. So it was, that when Israel wanted to be like the other nations by having their own human ruler, that Yahweh said: “they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). In the age to come, however, Messiah shall reign as king, and the administration of the kingdom will return to the ancient judicial system as in times past. Another hint of that system is provided in Psalm 122:

“Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of Yahweh, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of Yahweh. **For there are set thrones of judgment**, the thrones of the house of David” (Psa. 122:3-5).

The Lord Jesus Christ alluded to this, when he told his apostles: “ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mat. 19:28). Psalm 122 depicts those 12 thrones, with each tribe of Israel going to Jerusalem for their affairs to be settled by an apostle-judge, and their delegates.

Another insight to administration in the Kingdom can be found in the Master’s parable of the nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom, to return. Those who used their resources wisely, were given positions of authority in the dominion:

“he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities” (Luke 19:17-18).

It would appear therefore, that these faithful servants are those who will be appointed as judges in Israel, having varying degrees of authority, based upon their use of their Master’s goods. The lessons for us are obvious.

In these few thoughts, we have considered many principles regarding judgment. But in the sacrifice of Christ which we meet together to remember, we see both mercy and judgment. We behold the judgment of Yahweh upon sin in the flesh, yet we also see the grace and mercy of the Lord in granting us a hope of life. We look forward to the future therefore with great faith and hope, when we shall be forgiven according to how we forgive those that trespass against us. Let us therefore be merciful in our relationships with each other, so that when Messiah comes the second time without sin unto salvation, we might be judged favourably by him, to inherit the glories of the Age to come.

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