

JUSTICE

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Lesson: John 7:14-31

You will remember, perhaps, that a few weeks ago we began to speak about the virtues we should seek from the Lord if we want to become good and wise. We talked then about the virtue of temperance—which is never to go to extremes about anything, but always to take the middle course. The virtue about which we wish to tell you now is one, which is called justice. It is very important, and is the virtue we must have if we are to be able to obey the command of the Lord, which we read in our lesson to “judge not according to the appearance, but judge just judgment” (John 7:24).

Some of you may study “law” when you grow up, and you might even become judges in the courts of your country. But even if you do not, you will find that you have to act as judges every day of your lives. You will be living and mixing with other men and women, and you will find that you have to try to decide every day whether they are good or bad people, and whether the things they do are right or wrong. Of course we cannot tell if a man is really good or bad. That is, we cannot tell whether he will go to heaven or not. Only the Lord can do that, because He alone can see right into the hearts of men; and we should never take it upon ourselves to judge in that way. But we are allowed to think that people seem to be good or bad, so that we may decide whether we are going to make friends of them or not; and whenever we treat someone as if he were good or bad, we perform an act of judgment.

It was of this kind of judgment the Lord was speaking, and if we are to be able to judge as He says we should, we must be just, that is, we must have justice. To be just is to give to everyone with whom we have any dealings his proper due and right, and true justice is much scarcer than you might think. We cannot have it until we have learned temperance and moderation in all things, and until we love the truth of the Lord’s Word. It is His truth that makes us just, and until we love it we are not really just to other people, though we may think that we are. You know that if you taught yourself to play football or tennis, or to drive a car, you would make many mistakes and do many things in a wrong way, and that if you went to a teacher afterwards he would have to correct your mistakes before you could practice doing the right thing. It is the same with justice. If we try to teach ourselves to be just we will make many mistakes. Only the Lord can teach us, and we must learn from Him what not to do before we can begin to do the right thing.

If we were really just, we would think only of a person's actions. If we were wiser still, we would try to understand why these actions were done; and whenever someone did a good deed with a good purpose we would favor, praise, and reward him, and we would blame and punish others only when they purposely did something wrong. But all too often we think of the person who does the deed, rather than of the deed itself; and we praise or blame, that is, we judge, according to whether we like them or not, which usually means according to whether they like us. Sometimes when there is a group of children who always play together, one child, who is very much admired by all the others, will be praised by his or her playmates, whether what he or she does is really good or not. And perhaps there is another child—maybe a younger brother or sister—who is sent to play with the group, and whom the rest do not want. That poor child will soon find that he gets no credit for anything he does, but only blame. His good points will be ignored and his faults made much worse than they are because he is disliked—while nothing will be said at all about the faults of the one who is liked. But it is not only children who do this. Parents are not always willing to admit that their children can do anything wrong. Also men and women often feel the same way about their country or their friends and their fellow-countrymen.

There is no true justice in acting like that, and yet another mistake we may make is to judge the actions of others by what they have done to us, without stopping to think whether we have deserved what happens to us. If we are praised we are pleased, if we are punished we are angry; and we do not stop to think that perhaps we did not deserve the praise, but did deserve the punishment. It is not easy for us to be just—not easy to blame someone we like, and to praise someone we dislike—not easy to refuse praise which we have not earned, and to accept blame when we deserve it. Yet the Lord wants us to learn to do these things, and to begin learning now in childhood. So when you are tempted to be unjust to someone, try to forget your feelings toward them, and to see as far as you can whether they are trying to do the right thing and what the Lord wants. If you do this, you will be judging justly, even as the Lord judges us. *Amen.*