

# Who Do We Think We Are?

Within the various Churches of God there exists a multitude of beliefs and doctrines which separate us from each other. In many cases, these doctrines serve to divide us from one another. How can this be?

All of us recognize that Jesus wants us to walk as perfectly in the Way of God as we can. However, does the admonishment to walk in the Way carry with it the duty to judge whether, or not, our brethren walk perfectly and thereby to issue correction to them to “get them right with the Lord?” Does it give us the authority to proclaim that since they do not believe in identically the same way that they “must be worshipping a different God/Christ?” Yet, I have heard these claims made by some and directed at other brethren simply because of some minor difference in understanding.

Jesus, in John 7:24, tells us to judge righteous judgment. When we read that do we understand that to mean that we are to judge our brothers as to whether they accurately understand and keep every facet of the Commands of God? We ought to never take one scripture out of context to derive a policy or a dogma. Indeed, in Isa. 28:10 we learn that we are to understand the Word of God by taking wisdom from a multitude of scriptures on a topic.

With that in mind, we can move to other scriptures related to judging. In Luke 6:37 we find that Jesus tells His disciples to refrain from judging. Do we have a contradiction in the scriptures since Jesus told us in John 7:24 to judge righteously? Of course not. We all know that the scripture cannot be broken. What is the answer then? The answer is in understanding who or what we are to judge.

Jesus is unequivocal in His admonition that we are not to judge. Why? Because we will be judged with the same kind of judgment that we judge. Let’s consider that our brethren have differing beliefs that they can support in their own minds. If we judge

them as being less than brethren, we expose ourselves to being judged for being less than perfect in our own understanding. Do we wish to be judged about the things that we don’t understand perfectly? Then we ought to refrain from judging our brethren whose beliefs differ from ours.

Over the last year we have published articles containing somewhat radically differing views on various subjects. Those do not sum up the range of our differences. Some of us, for example, understand the Second Commandment very differently. Some us understand the command to keep the Sabbath Day holy very differently. There are not many different sects of Sabbatarian fellowship because we all believe the same thing!

What is our responsibility for our brethren having different beliefs from one another? As it relates to dealing with our differences, we find the following: 1Peter 3:15-16 “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

An answer presupposes a question. That is to say that we can and should discuss our differences. But, notice that the discussion is to be done with meekness and fear. We should not take the place of Satan and become an accuser. When we support our differing beliefs in discussion, it should be done with a good conscience—but respectfully! In other words, if a belief based upon scriptures differs from ours, and we can’t adequately support from scripture our different understanding, then we ought to be quick to recognize that there is something that we do not yet understand and go back to our study on that element. What we should never do is to create an enemy of our brother, either in thought or deed, simply because of a difference in understand-

ing.

Instead we should assume that our brethren are honest in their understanding just as we would like to be considered. Should we change our beliefs because our brethren have different beliefs? Of course not. But, we should always recognize that we could be wrong in our belief as to what the scriptures mean and be willing to go back with an unbiased mind to the study of the scriptures for the purpose of reaffirming our belief, or allowing God to redirect us to His truths.

Some take to heart Jesus' admonition to go into all of the world and preach the gospel, and because of that they feel as if it is their responsibility to make sure everyone has the exact, correct understanding. Unfortunately, they don't grasp that, while the Holy Spirit is promised to lead us into all understanding, that promise is nowhere stated to bring all understanding immediately, in a week, a month, or even a lifetime. Sadly, zeal for the Way sometimes leads to upsetting and alienating others, including our brethren.

We are told to judge ourselves if we don't want to be judged. If we are honest, we have to admit that we fall short of perfection in our walk with the Christ and the Father. This is one reason why, in Matthew 7: 1-5, we are told to extricate our own problems so that we can see clearly to judge the problems of others.

There are those of our brethren who are absolutely convinced of their righteousness in their understanding. That's fine as long as they are honest in their study as to their understanding. But, we all ought to take notice of the statement of Paul who tells us to "take heed lest we fall." The minute we begin to feel that pull of Satan to be negative with a brother who has honest disagreements with our understanding we ought to recognize that we could be wrong and instead open our minds to whatever understanding God might be presenting to us through our brethren. We ought to be honest enough about ourselves to understand that we have not always understood the Word of God as we do at this time and then ask ourselves "If we were wrong then, al-

beit honestly, could we not be just as honestly wrong now?"

We ought to be like the noble Bereans. Paul writes that they searched the scriptures daily to see whether what they were told was the truth. It is a noble thing to be able to look at a brother's different understanding and then go back to the scriptures to be certain of our understanding. It is an excellent thing to have that humility that recognizes our own inadequate understanding and is willing to accept a different understanding while at the same time having the strength of conviction that leads us back into the scripture to improve our understanding as God's Spirit leads us thereto.

The will of God is not about imposing our understanding on others. We ought to recognize that God is more than powerful enough to cause us all to understand His Word in exactly the same way. But, He does not. That idea should bring a question to mind, "Why does God allow us all to have differences in understanding?" The answer can only be that He wants to see if we are willing to put His love to work when we deal with our differences. It's easy to become outraged when our belief on a subject is questioned. It is Godly to be patient with those who have different understanding from ours. It should be our goal to be patient with them. We want others to be patient with us. We should use that Golden Rule to know that we need to be just as patient, or moreso, as we want others to be with us.

Patience and tolerance for non-sin beliefs have long been at the core of the teaching of the Bible Sabbath Association. Being patient with those of differing beliefs not only keeps us safe from judging others unrighteously, but it puts us on the side of the Father who is abundantly patient with us. I am not encouraging people to abandon what they know. I am encouraging everyone to put on the same patience for others that God has for us. If we do so, not only will we have common ground in the Churches, but we will not be giving a place at the table for Satan whose entire mission is to cause us to think and act in sinful ways toward each other. We will focus on how we agree instead of how we differ.