

Epiphanes: On Righteousness

Also known by the title "Concerning Justice", this text by Epiphanes, the son of the Gnostic teacher Carpocrates, is found in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatias*, III 6,1-9,3. On Righteousness

The *righteousness* of God is a kind of sharing along with equality. There is equality in the heaven which is stretched out in all directions and contains the entire earth in its circle. The night reveals all the stars equally. The light of the sun, which is the cause of the daytime and the father of light, God pours out from above upon the earth in equal measure to all who have power to see. For all see alike, since here is no distinction between rich and poor, people and governor, stupid and clever, female and male, free men and slaves. Even the irrational animals are not accorded any different treatment; but in just the same way God pours out from above sunlight equally upon all the animals. He establishes his justice to both good and bad by seeing that none is able to get more than his share and to deprive his neighbor, so that he has twice the light his neighbor has.

The Sun causes food to grow for all living beings alike; the universal justice is given to all equally. In this respect there is no difference between the species of oxen and particular oxen, between the species of pigs and particular pigs, between the species of sheep and particular sheep, and so with all the rest. In them universality is manifest in justice. Furthermore all plants after their kind are sown equally in the earth. Common nourishment grows for all beasts which feed on the earth's produce; to all it is alike. It is regulated by no law, but rather is harmoniously available to all through the gift of him who gave it and commanded it to grow.

And for birth there is no written law; otherwise it would have been transcribed. All beings beget and give birth alike, having received by justice an innate equality. The Creator and father of all with his own justice appointed this, just as he gave equally the eye to all to enable them to see. He did not make a distinction between female and male, rational and irrational, nor between anything else at all; rather he shared out sight equally and universally. It was given to all alike by a single command. As the laws could not punish men who were ignorant of them, they thought man to transgress. For particularity of the laws cut up and destroyed the universal equality of the divine law...

The ideas of Mine and Thine crept in through the laws which cause the earth, money, and even marriage no longer to bring forth fruit of common use. For God made vines for all to use in common, since they do not refuse the sparrow or the thief; and similarly wheat and other fruits. But outlawed sharing and the vestiges of equality generated the thief of domestic animals and fruits. For man God made all things to be common property. He brought the female to be with the male in common and in the same way united all the animals. He thus showed *righteousness* to be a universal sharing along with equality. But those who have been born in this way have denied the sharing which is the corollary of their origin and say *Let him who has taken one woman keep her*, whereas all can share her, just as the other animals show us. With view to the permanence of the race, he has implanted in males a strong and ardent desire which neither law nor custom nor any other restraint is able to destroy. For it is God's decree.....

Consequently one must understand the saying *You shall not desire* as if the lawgiver was making a jest, to which he added the even more comic words *Your neighbors goods*. For he himself gave the desire to sustain the race orders that it is to be supposed, though he removes it from no other animals. And by the words *Your neighbors wife* he says something even more ludicrous, since he forces what should be common property to be treated as private possession.