

John 41 – Right Judgment

01/19/2025

Scripture 1: (Jn. 7:24 ESV)

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

Sermon:

After surprising everyone by appearing in the Temple to teach during the Feast of Booths and, after having explained “*My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.*” (Jn. 7:16 ESV): telling them that what He taught was nothing new, only what had already been revealed through the Law and the Prophets; and, after explaining how everyone could know the source of His authority to teach by knowing God's Word and, after arguing why the justification for the Jewish leadership wanting to kill Him was flawed and wrong, Jesus concluded this occasion of teaching by saying, “*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.*”.

First, it is important to note that the Greek term here translated as “judge” and “judgment” is *krino*, a related term analogous to the term *krisis* used in John 3:19, which you should remember specifically refers to a decision or choice. Therefore, Jesus concludes this teaching by empowering the crowd and exhorting them to judge things for themselves: to judge Him and His teaching themselves, rather than blindly accepting the opinions and judgments of other supposed experts. Not only does He exhort them to decide for themselves and choose whom they will trust, but He also encourages and commands them to use the only correct standard for judging: God's Word; so that, according to that standard, they may **know** (1 John 5:13) that He truly is the Christ.

However, despite what many people out in the world wrongly think and believe, this declaration of Jesus is not a contradiction or an error. Immediately, after hearing this, all of our mental ears probably heard people saying, “But the Bible says, 'Don't judge!'.”; except that is never what it says in context.

- In Matthew 7:1 Jesus says, “*Judge not, that you be not judged.*” and then He finishes His thought declaring, “*For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*” (Matt. 7:1-2 ESV)
- In Luke 6:37, Jesus is recorded saying the same thing, “*Judge not, and you will not be judged...*” but He adds more qualifiers, “*...condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you.*” (Lk. 6:37-38 ESV). Then He explains the thought, “*Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*” (Lk. 6:38 ESV).

So, Jesus never commands us to **not judge** other people, or things, or opinions, or even the evidence of our senses. Instead, He frequently tells us **to judge**.

Jesus does not tell us {Judge not, so that you will not be judged.}, intending that we would never judge anything. Instead, He means that it is better for us to not make unnecessary or inappropriate judgments (judging wrongly) because “*...with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*”, for the standard we use to judge others, is the same standard which will be used to judge us.

- Therefore, we should not be judgmental or condemnatory because we do not want to be judged or condemned.
- Therefore, we should be more merciful, forgiving, and gracious towards others because we want to receive mercy, forgiveness, and grace.
- Therefore, we are this way because we know: by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit within us and the testimony of Scripture; the judgment that has passed us over and the condemnation that has been turned aside. We know the mercy, forgiveness, and grace which the LORD has given to us through the redeeming and justifying work of Jesus Christ.

So then, if we must judge, how then shall we judge? What standard must we use?

Jesus told us by saying “*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.*”; because He was explaining both how not to judge and how to judge. Jesus gave very specific guidelines regarding how to reach our own judgments. Not judging by appearances means:

- Do not simply take everything at face value.
- Do not assume that everything you see and hear must always be true.
- Do not judge things according to your own opinions and preferences, or your assumptions and expectations.
 - Basically, Jesus said “You cannot judge a book by its cover.”.

But then, how are we supposed to judge? Judging with “*right judgment*” means:

- That you must use an objective standard to judge against.
- That you must use an absolute and unchanging standard.
- That, according to all that He had been arguing, the only objective, absolute, and unchanging standard is the Word of God:
 - His authoritative and divinely inspired revealed will; and,
 - the only rule for our faith and practice.

Therefore, Jesus instructed them to judge Him and His teachings according to the standard of Scripture and to also judge the Jewish leadership (particularly the Pharisees) and their teachings, so that they might know and understand and decide for themselves whom they should trust without needing to rely upon others.

Although we take this attitude for granted today: those of us who received a classical liberal education and who were taught “how to think” rather than “what to think”, those of us who learned how to reason things out for ourselves; we risk forgetting that this was an extraordinary idea during Jesus' cultural time and place. Jewish men were not taught how to think, instead they were taught what to think. They were taught Torah: what it says and means; and they were taught interpretations of Torah, but not how to interpret Torah.

- They were taught to use and judge things according to the mediatorial standard provided by their “tradition” {the oral Torah} as taught by the Priests, Levites, scribes, and Pharisees rather than using the authoritative text of Scripture as the standard.
- They believed the “Oral Law” and the “tradition of the elders” (Mark 7:5) to be actual specific interpretations and applications of the Law given by Moses {itself an unverifiable tradition, which was passed down and learned solely as an oral tradition until the recording of the *Mishnah* during the 3rd century AD} and were therefore, considered unquestionable and unchanging, authoritative and perfect.
- They used memorized examples of “case law” to judge the present by using the light of the past as their lens.
- They were taught to rely upon and trust the opinions of other men:
 - trusting in their knowledge;

- trusting in their wisdom;
- trusting in their ability to discern;
- trusting in their good nature and positive, helpful intentions;
- instead of trusting and relying upon the original, ultimate, and only authoritative source.

Jesus, in encouraging them to use the rule of Scripture: God's revealed will as their standard; was actually exhorting them to become free from the judgments of other men. He was exhorting them to trust the judgments of God over men. This continues to be a command of freedom for us today, yet we are each responsible to preserve and participate in this freedom. The only way we can do so is by knowing, understanding, and believing Scripture ourselves. We are all blessed because we each have our own personal Bible to read (but, if you do not have one, please come see me after worship and I will ensure that you leave with one). Yet, since none of us here can read and understand both Greek and Hebrew fluently, we are indebted to the pioneering work of Christian saints who translated Scripture into the common languages of their day, saints like:

- Jerome, who translated it into Latin;
- John Wycliff and William Tyndale, who first translated it into English; and,
- Martin Luther, who translated it into German;

These men, along with countless others, have enabled everyone to read and hear the Bible in the language with which they were most fluent, and since the invention of the Gutenberg press we have had widespread and easy access to printed copies of Scripture in an understandable language. This has given us the freedom to read the Bible for ourselves; to know what it actually says and to think for ourselves about what it really means, instead of relying solely upon the words of a Roman priest, speaking in a language (Latin) that few people understand.

- They have placed the best rule by which we should rightly judge the things of this world, God's Word, at our fingertips.
- They have freed us to interpret Scripture for ourselves and they have also enabled us to hold our religious leaders accountable for maintaining sound doctrine and reasonable interpretation.
- They freed us and enabled us to know what is right and what is wrong; freeing us to know the difference between the two, so that we may rightly chose the good which Jesus has freed us to choose; the good that Jesus and His Holy Spirit empowers us to do.

We are better off today because we can read the Bible for ourselves, and read other books about the Bible and Scripture. We can read and learn what other people have said in the past and how they applied the Word of God to their lives in order to learn from them: their positives and negatives, and from their successes and failures; because we may judge it for ourselves by comparing what they said or did against the standard of God's Holy Word. So,

- Do you want to hear God speak to you? Then read His Word, and listen.
- Do you want to know what God wants for you and expects from you? Then read His Word, trust His promises and, do what He commands.

While reading, knowing, and believing Scripture for ourselves is the best way by which we can have a confident understanding of God's will, we must also remember that we can never know or understand His whole will because there will always be some things that He chooses not to reveal to us.

Although this may seem like a digression from what Jesus was saying about “*right judgment*” but, to better understand how to judge more rightly, we ought to consider the two different aspects of God's revealed will in Scripture: His decretive will and His preceptive will.

- The decretive will of God is something that we can only know in part. Understood simply, this relates to God's sovereign will and activity that ensures everything He declares (or decrees) will surely come to pass when, where, and how He has determined. What we may know of this will is revealed clearly in Scripture as: history fulfilled, as prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:21-22), and as the many promises of God. Meanwhile, everything else, especially God's reason for “Why”, remain the “*secret things*” that belong to the LORD God alone (Deuteronomy 29:29).
- The preceptive will of God, however, belongs “...to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deut. 29:29 ESV) because this is what the Law is: the precepts and rules that God has given to guide our whole lives, including the entirety of our faith and practice. These are the written “do's and do not's” which, together with their implied opposites, are God's standard for our lives: the Moral Law. This is the absolute divine standard that a person must obey perfectly in order to **be** righteous. One single act of disobedience, one transgression, or one violation of this Law would ruin the whole and makes a person a sinner which is where our forebear Adam failed us by permitting Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge and good and evil and then joining her in rebellion against God's command. Thus, everyone descended from Adam is born a sinner since we are his natural heirs.

When the LORD promised Adam life for perfect obedience, or death for disobedience in Genesis 2:15-17, he received those promises on our behalf. Therefore, both he and we, all receive the just fulfillment of them as “...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...” (Rom. 5:12 ESV). But now, since “...it is appointed for man to die once” on account of Adam's sin and our own sins, “and after that comes judgment...” (Heb. 9:27-28 ESV): a judgment where we shall universally be judged according to the standard of God's preceptive will; a standard that no one, barring Jesus Christ, has met. No other human person can meet the standard since everyone is born a sinner and therefore, sins. But, it is not God's fault that we cannot measure up to His standard since He originally created us able to, it was Adam's sin that cost us the ability.

Regardless, because this is the standard which shall judge us, it is also the standard which we should use to judge. God's preceptive will is “*the measure*” that we should use for every judgment we make. Comparing things against God's preceptive will and deciding what is most in line with God's commandments is how we may “...judge with right judgment.”.

- That is what everyone who's “...will is to do God's will...” (Jn. 7:17 ESV) wants to do and tries to do.
- That is what everyone who is regenerate: filled with God's Holy Spirit, renewed in mind, body, and soul, and possessing a new “*heart of flesh*” (Ezekiel 11:19); wants and tries to do.
- Therefore, the only way for a person to use “*right judgment*” is by first knowing, understanding, believing, and trusting God's Word as the absolute and unchanging truth, and then using it as their standard for judgment: for all others and for themselves.

Which brings us back around to what Jesus told the crowd and the Jewish leadership, “*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.*”. Here He was:

- Exhorting them to judge Him according to the standard of Scripture (John 7:17-18) instead of their opinions, cultural mores and assumptions, politics, social status, or popularity.
- Exhorting them to judge Him by the only unchanging standard rather than according to things that quickly change upon a whim.

So, having a better and good knowledge and understanding of Scripture not only encourages us in our faith and our builds confidence in Jesus Christ and the promises of God, but it also helps us to become more wise in all our worldly engagements, dealings, and decision making. The standard and rule of Scripture will help us will all of our many judgments, but it does not provide answers to every question. Here are some examples:

I have said before that our religion should guide and inform our politics and honestly, every sphere of our lives. We should use this standard of Scripture when judging a candidate and/or political groups positions, statements, and activity to determine whom we should support or endorse.

- Although none will ever measure up perfectly, we should still endeavor to support whomever is closest to the Standard and closest to its priority.

Using the standard of Scripture will not help you in deciding what color of car you should buy, but it can help you in deciding what kind of car to purchase. It can help you to think through answers to questions like:

- Will a truck, SUV, or sedan best suit your work and/or family's need?
- Will the vehicle's degree of fuel efficiency help enable good stewardship of your finances (per Matthew 25:14-30), or will it better serve at protecting the environment because it generates less pollution (per Genesis 2:15)?

Using the standard of Scripture will not help you decide “What's for dinner?”, or what foods you should or should not eat (unless you choose to follow a “kosher diet”, but that would only be by choice and not by either a biblical mandate, since we have been freed from that requirement (Mark 7:19; Acts 10), nor for your personal sanctification). Instead, it will guide you and encourage you to:

- exercise self control (1 Corinthians 7:5; Galatians 5:23; 2 Peter 1:6);
- avoid gluttony (Deuteronomy 21:20; Proverbs 23:21);
- drunkenness (Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; 1 Peter 4:3); and,
- other expressions of sinful excess (Matthew 23:25).

Using the standard of Scripture will not help you to decide what specific person you should date, marry, and take as your spouse, but it can help you to define and decide upon the quality and general characteristics of such a person.

- Are they a professing Christian? Scripture says, “*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.*” (2 Cor. 6:14 ESV).
- Do they share your same specific beliefs and convictions about Scripture and who Jesus is? If not, are they close enough that they will not be in conflict or cause division?

- Do they show evidence of having the fruits of the Spirit, evidence of having been regenerated, “...*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*” (Gal. 5:22-23 ESV) or are they still living enslaved to the works of the flesh, “...*sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.*” (Gal. 5:19-21 ESV)
- Do you share the same understanding concerning household roles, duties, relationships, and responsibilities? Scripture says, “*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*” (Col. 3:18-20 ESV) and, “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...*” (Eph. 5:25 ESV)

These examples of necessary decisions, judgments, and related questions are not meant to be exhaustive but still, almost every decision and choice that you make (certainly every important decision: important for life and faith); every judgment can be rightly made using the standard of God's Word.

But, when we do so, we must still remember that such decisions and choices are not the result of our own judgment, but are actually the judgments of Christ. Furthermore, we must always remain careful that, when we make such decisions and choices, we do not condemn because condemnation goes beyond our authority and that is the final point or element of Jesus's command and warning about “judgment”:

- that while we are charged, commanded, and empowered to make decisions by using “*right judgment*”; and,
- that while the ultimate judge is the LORD: He who has established, revealed, and published the absolute standard by which judgment shall be universally made;
- that we should not become judgmental, because we do not judge by our own authority or wisdom.

Therefore, when we do judge (whenever we render such a decision) we do not condemn whatever we decide against, because (thankfully) that responsibility is above our pay grade. Therefore, when we judge and we make our negative judgment known, we must humbly remember that these are the judgments of God and “speak the truth in love”, calling the wrong to repentance: to seek the LORD's forgiveness and mercy. Furthermore, we must consider ourselves, that we also do not fall under the same negative judgment. Then: and this is where our own personal application of this becomes very challenging; we must navigate:

- expressing a negative judgment, with
- calling those judged against to repent, by
- warning them against the just, **divine** condemnation which the negative judgment deserves, with not
- sinfully condemning them ourselves in our own self righteousness.

We must remember that we do not have the right or power to condemn anyone because we ourselves, apart from the mercy of Christ, should also be under His judgment as well as His just and righteous condemnation. But, the good news is, “*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is **God** who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is*

written, *"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Rom. 8:31-39 ESV)

Jesus Christ, the LORD, is the only one with the right and power to condemn us or anyone, yet He took our judgment upon Himself; suffering our deserved condemnation as well as the condemnation of everyone who turns to Him in repentance and faith: in *pisteuo*; to deliver them and to show them mercy.

- That is why, if Christ has truly done so, then nothing and no one is *"...able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*
- That is why, at the end of the day, the only Person's judgment that ultimately matters is God's (is Jesus's) because:
 - *"...we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."* (Rom. 8:28-30 ESV); and we remember that,
 - *"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* (Jn. 1:10-13 ESV)

Jesus has empowered us and He has given us the freedom to judge rightly, for ourselves: to know and believe that He is the LORD; because He has first chosen us, called us, regenerated us by and filled us with His Holy Spirit, all for God's glory and honor.

So, *"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."* Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph, Jesus the carpenter was no one of any obvious account. He was not apparently anyone special. He was not anyone's first choice to be king or anyone's expected Messiah. If we judged Him according to appearances, then we would have no special regard for Him and we would not look upon Him with any great favor. But, when we judge Him according to God's Word, comparing Him to the unchanging and absolute divine standard then we can only admit that He is only perfectly obedient, sinless, holy, and righteous Son of God.

AMEN