

How do you judge?

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Let us turn to **John 7: 19-24**

John 7: 19-24

- 19 "Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"
- 20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"
- 21 Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel.
- 22 "For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man.
- 23 If a man receives circumcision on *the* Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on *the* Sabbath?"
- 24 "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

As we seek to appreciate the Lord Jesus, how He lived His life and how we should learn from Him to be like Him in His character, there are many different aspects that we can ponder over to appreciate His life.

Today, I want to concentrate on **verse 24**. The Lord Jesus said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." This principle is very important for us in our everyday life and if we want to live a life of meaning, we must learn this.

How do we judge?

How do we judge in terms of what is right, what is wrong; what is good, what is bad? How do we judge people: What kind of person is he, what kind of life is being lived, what is it that is good before God?

It is very easy for us to judge according to appearance and the Lord Jesus referred to this in contrast with “judge with righteous judgment”.

To judge with righteous judgment means we judge based on what is morally right. So it will be fair, it will be just, it will be good, it will be pleasing to God, it will be morally positive.

If we do not judge in this way but instead we judge according to appearance, then this leads in the direction of unrighteous judgment.

This is very common in life.

How do we assess people? By the way they dress, by their status in society, by how powerful they are, by how wealthy they may be!

So, people are partial towards those who are more intelligent, more capable, more attractive, people who have more power in this world. People judge according to appearance. We also judge according to appearance in the sense of what appears better to us: what we prefer and what we like, what will make life more pleasant for us.

It is very difficult to judge with righteous judgment because in order to judge with righteous judgment, we must first value righteousness, we must be prepared to live by righteousness, we must understand what true righteousness is, and we must learn from God how to discern what is truly righteous.

So let us look at this context and see how the Jews judged the Lord Jesus and how the Lord Jesus judged them.

The Lord Jesus judged with righteous judgment, but the Jews judged with unrighteous judgment, according to appearance.

The incident basically was: The Lord Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath and the Jews accused Him of breaking the Law of Moses – that He had broken the Law with regard to the Sabbath – He should have been resting, not working, not healing a man. They were judging according to the outward appearance: The Lord Jesus was working.

It is true – He was working. He healed the man; He did work. But was that breaking the Sabbath? Of course not! But because the Jews concentrated on the outward appearance, they regarded that as breaking the Law: He was not resting on the Sabbath.

On the other hand, the Jews appeared to be very careful about keeping the Law of Moses.

But the Lord Jesus said: “Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law?” The Lord Jesus was judging according to the meaning: righteous judgment. He saw their heart: they did not truly love God. Their keeping of the Law of Moses was outward. It was not because of the devotion to God, not because they were committed to righteousness that they sought to keep the Law. In reality, they did not keep the Law and yet, they accused the Lord Jesus of breaking the Law. And this is a situation that is not uncommon.

Who did not carry out the Law of Moses? The answer is: the Jews. Who carried out the Law? The answer is: the Lord Jesus. And yet, the context arose because the Jews accused the Lord Jesus, wrongly, of having broken the Law.

The Lord Jesus said: “Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man.”

The Jews, they could circumcise a man on the Sabbath and to them that was all right. But the Lord Jesus made an entire man well on the Sabbath and that was not right.

So they were just judging according to what they preferred. They could do it on the Sabbath and claim that they were fulfilling the Law of Moses because that was what was prescribed: They should circumcise on the eighth day, so if it falls on the Sabbath, they will still circumcise. But when the Lord Jesus healed on the Sabbath: that was breaking the Sabbath!

Let us look at **Romans 13: 8-10** to appreciate the underlying meaning: what God is looking for.

Romans 13: 8-10

- 8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law.
- 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."
- 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.

Here, the apostle Paul was referring to the way we should treat our neighbours, our attitude towards them.

Yes, God gave many laws through Moses with regard to how they should treat one another, and various of these instructions and laws related to what they should do or should not do with regard to their neighbour. So the apostle Paul said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET": these are in relation to your neighbour. And He said, "...if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.""

So the Lord Jesus in His response to the Jews was trying to help them understand the meaning and purpose of the Law of Moses. Moses did not give the Law to the Jewish people contrary to the law that God had already given to all mankind.

God had already placed the law in the heart of men, in the conscience of men. The Gentiles did not have the Law of Moses but they understood what was right, what was good; they had the law written in their hearts.

God gave the Law to Moses and through Moses to help make them clearer, so that he elaborated on the meaning of these various instructions and the direction of life together with other ceremonial laws that would look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament times. But the heart of the Law has to do with love: loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving our neighbour as ourselves.

In this regard, it is obvious that the Lord Jesus fulfilled the Law.

Why did He heal that man on the Sabbath? It was out of compassion for the man. He had been suffering for thirty-eight years and he had longed to be healed. The Lord Jesus offered him this path where he could be healed and the man was very grateful. The Lord Jesus healed him.

But the Jews were angry with Him for having healed on the Sabbath. They were trying to keep the Sabbath in the outward form and in so doing they had no compassion for the man who was suffering. They did not appreciate what God sought to do by giving them these instructions.

The various instructions that God has given to us centre on the moral direction of life. If the Jews had concentrated on moral meaning rather than outward forms, they would have appreciated what the Lord Jesus did and they would then have judged with righteous judgment. Instead, they concentrated on outward forms. Why?

From what I can see from observation of life, from human experience, we know that it is much easier to judge by outward appearance – much easier in many aspects – much easier because we can also fulfil some of these requirements more readily if it is just outward forms, whether it be tithing, giving something to somebody, coming for meetings, praying at certain points of time. These are outward forms of things that can be fulfilled very easily.

But to learn to judge with righteous judgment requires that we concentrate on moral meaning. That means if you pray and your heart is not right, that prayer is useless. God sees the heart and He will judge. If you give to others because you want to show off, because you want to get a reward for yourself, because you want to be well-known, then that giving is of no value.

On the other hand, we may appear to be not very actively doing many things but if within our hearts, there is a genuine love for others, we truly care for their well-being and when the time comes and the Lord wants us to do something, we are prepared to do so, God sees the heart and He appreciates that.

In order to judge with righteous judgment, we must first learn to deal with ourselves, that there is a right direction in our hearts – right emphasis.

Of course, if our hearts are right, if there is a genuine love for God and for others, we will express it in outward forms as and when appropriate. And that is why the Lord Jesus healed the man. It was an outward expression of His love for the man. But it was also an expression of His love for God. God cared for that man; the Lord Jesus understood that. He was working together with God in order to bring this about.

The underlying principle that we should understand and concentrate on in all the things that we do is: moral goodness and fellowship with God, who is perfectly good.

And that is why the Lord Jesus made this very important statement in **Matthew 12: 12**. He said: "...it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath". It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. It may appear to be breaking the Law because of working on the Sabbath, but in reality, it was not. It is lawful. Why? Because it is good! The Lord Jesus worked on the Sabbath and it was good!

What this means is that if we want to understand what is good or not good, what is right or not right, we need to learn to look at the heart: we need to appreciate what is the meaning within the person. Why does a person do what he does? That is what will determine whether it is good or not good.

Based on that, if we understand the heart of the Lord Jesus, it is very obvious that what He did was good: His whole motivation was for the good of mankind; His whole motivation was to honour God. He came into this world because of love. He came into this world to sacrifice of Himself for the well-being of others.

So, that being His motivation, that being the basis of His actions, it was good and that is why He had the freedom to do the many things that He did, which another person without such an attitude should not do.

Because the Lord Jesus had that freedom, we can see that on the one hand, He could fast for forty days, not eating, to concentrate on His mission, to prepare Himself for His ministry in fellowship with God. Yet at the same time, He could also eat and drink heartily in such a way that others could accuse Him of being a glutton and a wine drinker.

He had the freedom to eat or not to eat, to drink or not to drink because he was motivated by the meaning and the helpfulness in that situation.

This principle is very important for us in the way we live our lives each day and how we want to develop our lives and spend our time.

If we live on the basis of outward appearance of things, then our approach will very readily be one in which we are attracted to many things in this world because the world concentrates on appearance: to appear good, attractive, enjoyable, helpful, kind, impressive...

The world concentrates on this and if we base our lives on outward appearance, we will be drawn to many of these things, and the evil one can deceive us very readily. We can move in the direction that we think is good and pleasing to God when in reality, it is not.

If we concentrate on moral meaning, we will have to come close to God, we will have to ask God to search our hearts, we will have to be open to Him to what He has to say, and it is in that context that we can properly deal with our lives when it is wrong.

It is in that context that we can be purified in our heart; it is in that context that we will enter into a deeper fellowship with God; and it is in that context we will learn to judge with righteous judgment; we will begin to see things as they really are.

But this path is very difficult because the path of righteousness may at times be very uninteresting; it can be very boring as far as the world is concerned, as far as the general direction of approach in this world and our bodily inclinations are concerned.

It can be very boring, tiring, unpleasant. Look at the life of the Lord Jesus: He lived as a carpenter – nothing significant, nothing very obvious; and when He started His ministry, He was readily misunderstood, unappreciated. In His hometown, He could not do many miracles because of their unbelief.

On the other hand, Satan can easily raise up people who can perform various kinds of miracles in a very interesting and attractive way, that people can benefit in terms of the physical realm and this can draw many people in that direction.

So in the spiritual realm, if we really want to make progress, we want to develop a character like that of the Lord Jesus, then we also need to identify with His approach.

The Lord Jesus was described as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He saw the sins of mankind; He was very grieved. He felt very angry at sin and yet at the same time, He was compassionate; He sought to help the people. That is why even though He was unjustly treated – and very unjustly treated – there was no grudge on His part, there was no revengeful spirit. He sought to help them if He could because He loved them.

This is the direction that we should concentrate on. This is the kind of Saviour and Lord that we have and if we profess to love Him, then we must be committed to walk in this path. We should choose the way we live based on the path of righteousness.

Let us then as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us to understand and to appreciate the right approach to life, so that we can go through life with deep fellowship with God and that our heart can be truly peaceful, joyful, contented because it is a life of meaning and we know that we are moving in the right direction.

If we do not do that, we may feel happy, excited, we may find life satisfying from a worldly point of view, but bear in mind that at the end of the day, we will know that it is a life of emptiness and a life that God will bring to account: How have we lived our lives? Have we spent it in a way that has eternal value or is it just for the passing pleasures of this world?

Let us ask the Lord to help us to know Him more deeply and to understand how we can follow His example, so that God may be pleased to dwell in us and to transform us to be like Him.