

# How do we judge?

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Let us turn to **John 8: 12-15**

## **John 8: 12-15**

- 12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."
- 13 So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."
- 14 Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going."
- 15 "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone..."

The Lord Jesus declared that He was the Light of the world. The Pharisees challenged this; they said, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true." The Lord Jesus replied to that and said, "Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true..." and He explained why.

But then He went on to say, "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone..." Why did the Lord Jesus say that? What did the Pharisees do that caused Him to make this statement: "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone..."?

As we read this sentence, it may seem to us that it is wrong to judge. The Lord Jesus said, " I am not judging anyone..."

We look further into this and consider the meaning of judging. What does it mean to judge?

In general usage, if we say a judge judges a case, basically we say that he passes sentence on a particular course of action and the accused is brought before him and he passes his sentence. So, he judged. But then how did he come to pass the sentence? He must first judge the case by assessing the merits of the case; he must first find out what actually happened and what is the right judgment.

So, here we see that judgment has two components. The first is to assess accurately, to understand what happened if you want to make a good judgment. The second part of the judgment is to form a conclusion and then where appropriate, to pass sentence, to take action.

So for the Pharisees, what did they do?

They did both, and both were wrong. They assessed the Lord Jesus wrongly: they thought that He was claiming things that were not true. So they said, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true." That was their judgment: they assessed that His testimony was not true. Second part of their judgment was they passed sentence on Him: "Your testimony is not true, therefore You should be rejected. Action should be taken against You." And that was what they did: they sought to arrest Him, seize Him, kill Him.

The Lord Jesus said, "You judge according to the flesh..." What is the meaning of that?

"You judge according to the flesh..." We know that basically, living by the flesh has to do with a few components.

At the heart of it, it is the self-life: you live according to what you prefer, what you like; not according to what is good, not according to what God has instructed.

The flesh works against the Spirit: We do not listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit from God. Instead, we listen to our own voice, our own thoughts, our own desires and basically, much of that comes from what the evil one wants to bring about in our lives. So in fact when we walk in the flesh, we are often listening to the evil one rather than to God. So, a major element of the flesh has to do with the self-life.

Another element of the flesh is that we base our actions on natural thinking: We think according to what appears to be, according to what is generally practised, according to what our natural ability can bring us to, rather than listening to what God has to say, seeking to understand what God is accomplishing or wants to accomplish in the situation.

And living according to the flesh has very much to do with seeking to bring about results for our own ends; it is not to glorify God. At the heart of it, it is to satisfy ourselves, to glorify the self. And that is why people who live according to the flesh, they seek to glorify one another: I glorify you; you glorify me in this world. So the Lord Jesus told them, "Your approach is wrong, your conclusion is wrong, your action is wrong."

On the other hand, He said, " I am not judging anyone..." The Lord Jesus is the perfect person to judge. His judgment in assessment would be absolutely accurate; His judgment in terms of action, passing sentence, would be perfect.

Then why did He say, " I am not judging anyone..."? If anyone is qualified to judge it is the Lord Jesus, but He said, " I am not judging anyone..."

This is something very helpful for us to ponder over.

The fact that you qualify to do something does not mean that you should do it; the fact that you have some ability in some area does not mean that that is what you should work at.

We must always try to understand what is God seeking to do, what is God's purpose in that situation and we work together with Him. We may have our own ideas: "I can do this. I have done it before; I am qualified to do it." And so, we may even offer ourselves to do it or we may take action to start doing it, but is it truly what God wants to do?

Let us turn to **John 12: 47**.

**John 12: 47**

"If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world..."

This will help us to understand why the Lord Jesus said, "I am not judging anyone..." It is not because He was not qualified to judge the world. He was perfectly qualified, but His mission was not to come to this world at that time to judge the world. There will come a day when he will judge the world. God will entrust all judgment to the Son because He is the Son of Man, but now, that is not His mission.

He says, "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him... I let it be for the time being ...for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world..." So this tells us that the Lord Jesus came on a mission to save the world; He did not come to judge the world. The people of the world having gone astray, they are already judged, they are already condemned. The Lord Jesus came to save us from condemnation; He came to save us from our sins.

This is very important if we want to understand who the Lord Jesus is and how we should follow Him.

He came to save the world. So what does that mean?

It means that throughout His life, His emphasis was not to come here to find fault, to look at the people and say, "You are so very sinful. You have done this wrong, you have done that wrong; you deserve judgment, you deserve punishment" and to pronounce judgment on them. That was not His emphasis; that was not His mission.

His mission was to come to save the people from their sins. He came to help us recognize we need a Saviour, we need forgiveness and God has provided the way for us to be saved. So if we understand this, then we can understand better His whole approach to life.

He understood people were failing, faltering; who had difficulties; who were suffering, in pain. He came to save. If we want to follow the Lord Jesus, we should also take this approach.

When we look at things around us, when we look at people, it is quite easy for us to be critical: "This person: selfish; that person: proud; the other person: does not care about anything" and we can pass judgment quite freely and we think we are right. Well, sometimes we are right in terms of the assessment, but we are wrong in our spirit.

On the other hand, if someone were to do the same to us: "You are proud", our first reaction is to defend and to attack. If someone were to say you are inconsiderate, the response is "Of course not! Don't you know how much I have done for people?" So we are not accurate in our assessment of ourselves and also what we should do about it.

So if we want to follow the Lord Jesus, we must first learn to give up ourselves.

Why is it the Lord Jesus could come to save the world?

It is because He gave up Himself; it is because He was prepared to give up Himself to God and for the well-being of the world. And that is why He was prepared to go to such an extent to suffer.

If we are not prepared to follow His example in this way then what we do for others will usually be tainted by self-desires, by the flesh. Do we really want to save others or do we want some credit with it?

When we have this spirit to save the world in the right way, then our preoccupation is not with ourselves and what we are doing, but we are primarily concerned about the lives of other people: their needs, how they can be helped, what God wants us to do for them, how can they best benefit from the grace of God. Our concentration is on how we can contribute to their well-being. That is the principle of helping to save the world.

But then as we think further, we may pause and consider: the Lord Jesus came to save the world from what?

He came to save them from their sins. So in order to save them from their sins, the Lord Jesus must also make clear what sin is and how serious it is. So, as long as it helps and contributes in that direction, then there is a place to judge in both senses: to assess and to pass sentence at that point of time, in that situation. And that is what the Lord Jesus did:

**Matthew 23: 25**

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence..."

Here, we see the Lord Jesus judging, and judging very fiercely.

Why did He do that?

That is because He wants to save the world.

In order to save the world, He must show how serious sin is and He must also denounce these sinners who are drawing people astray. The Pharisees and the scribes were leading people away from God, away from the path of salvation, so they need to be dealt with. It is in line with His mission to save the world.

So, it is not an absolute statement that He would not judge anyone while on earth; He would. But basically, His approach, as you read through the gospels, you will see that His approach basically is to help, to help, and to help.

He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" So this is a very serious matter. Hypocrisy prevents us from benefiting from the grace of God. God hates hypocrites: You pretend to be good but you do not intend to be; you say that you love God but in your heart, you deny Him.

So if we want to be helped, then we must be humble, we must be contrite. The Pharisees were proud; they were self-confident. They were self-righteous; they condemned other people. They made outward show of things as if they were good; they prayed long prayers but there was no meaning in their prayers. They **clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence**: outside, inside very different.

God wants us to be honest, sincere and true. We live our lives based on good meaning and that meaning must be properly transmitted. We love what is good and what is good comes forth in our lives. So the Lord Jesus said **woe to** them because not only were their lives not good, they were also causing harm to other people.

So then for us, if we want to save other people, we may also have to be alert, be aware, be able to assess when things are wrong.

Where there are people who are leading others astray from God's ways, we need to recognize, we need to judge, we need to take action at times, so that they do not cause further harm.

So on the one hand we must be compassionate, we must love people who fail and be understanding, we must forgive if people hurt us and they are repentant, but there is also this aspect that we must also take action where necessary. Yes, Nehemiah was prepared to take steps where necessary and we see the apostle Paul very fierce in his attitude and approach towards the false teachers, towards those who cause dissension, hindrances to the gospel.

So, how do we judge?

We can learn from the Lord Jesus not to have a spirit of judgment as we live in this world, but to concentrate on what can we do to contribute to the well-being of others and in so doing, we must first give of ourselves to God and for the good of others. But along the way, there may be a need for us to assess, to judge and to take action, so as to preserve the path that is good and right.

Let us then come before the Lord and ask Him to help us understand these issues more clearly and to know how we can cooperate with Him, learn from Him, be transformed to be like Him.