

The authority of judgment

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Let us turn to **John 8: 13-16**

John 8: 13-16

- 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.
16 "But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me.

Here, I see that there are two issues that arise from this encounter between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees.

One was with regard to the testimony that the Lord Jesus bore about Himself. The Pharisees said that He was testifying about Himself, that testimony was not true. So, that was one issue: the testimony of the Lord Jesus – was it true or was it not true? To that, the Lord Jesus answered, "Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true..." and then He explained why. So, we have considered this before.

The other issue here is with regard to judgment.

Not only did the Pharisees assess the Lord Jesus to see whether what He testified was true or not true, but they also passed judgment on Him. They were seeking to kill Him because they claimed that He was blaspheming, that He claimed to be God when He was a man. So, they passed judgment on Him.

To that, the Lord Jesus said, "You judge according to the flesh... The way you judge, the way you pass judgment is not right: your spirit is not right, your basis is not right."

On the other hand, He said, "I am not judging anyone." This was to tell us that the approach of the Lord Jesus was not to come into this world to condemn us, to judge us. His approach: basically, He came to save the world.

But now He says, "But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me."

Here, it is very helpful for us to ponder over this issue: judgment. Where is the authority of judgment; who has the authority to judge?

Here, the Lord Jesus tells us, "I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me."

We know that God is the final ultimate Judge. He is absolutely accurate and He is almighty and all are accountable to Him. So, He is the One who will pass judgment on the Judgment Day.

None of us can do that; none of us can pass such a judgment. First, our assessment may be wrong. Secondly, we have also sinned and we are not in a position to pass that judgment. We are not the final authority.

But then does it mean that we cannot pass judgment on anyone?

Does it mean that we must always say, “I do not know. Maybe it is good; maybe it is bad. I do not know. I am not the final Judge.” Is this the way that we are called upon to live our lives? If not, then what should be the approach?

Let us consider what the apostle Paul said:

1 Corinthians 4: 3-5

- 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.
- 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.
- 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

The apostle Paul was quite clear: he lived his life before God; he was not afraid that people would judge him, examine him, criticize him, pass judgment on him. He said, “...it is a very small thing... You want to examine me? Go ahead, it does not matter to me, whether examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.”

Why did he say that he did not examine himself?

Here, the context is not that we should not evaluate our lives to know whether we are living right or not – we should. But here, he is saying that he was not examining his life with a view to acquitting himself. He said, “I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted...”

So, we may think we are all right; we are not guilty, we have not done anything wrong. We examine ourselves and we think we are okay. But the apostle Paul says: by this we are not acquitted. Why?

He says: “...the one who examines me is the Lord. He is the One who will examine me; He is the One who will pass sentence on me.”

And what is the basis ultimately, where the Lord will deal with us?

There is a very important issue that all of us must take into account if we want to follow His example in terms of the right approach to life.

He says, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."

So first he says that ultimate judgment comes from God, whether praise or condemnation. But the issue here that he brings to our attention is: the Lord ... will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts.

In our lives, there are many things hidden in the darkness, even from ourselves. There are things we are not comfortable with; we do not want to think about them, so we push them aside into a dark corner and we think after some time, they are not there. So too in other people's lives, there are many things in the darkness that we may not know, so it is difficult for us to judge correctly.

More than that, he says, "and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts".

This I see is critical. If we want to understand what is really good or bad, if we want to understand the value of a man's life, look at the heart in terms of the motive.

What motivates us? What is it that drives us to do the things that we do? What is it that we want to obtain, to accomplish in this world or beyond?

If we are prepared to let the Lord search our hearts and be open to Him to understand what is going on even within our own hearts, we will learn many things. If we are genuinely open, the Lord can show to us many things, which we may not want to know, and if we are prepared to face them properly, then we can deal with them effectively; and when that happens, then we may not need to be judged on the Judgment Day.

In that sense, if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged: that means we deal with our own failures; we deal with our own wrong motives; we deal with our wrong values – deal with them properly. If we do that, then the Lord will forgive us and we will be able to stand on the Judgment Day.

Notice that the apostle Paul said, "...do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes..." This is a helpful issue for us to remember.

Many things are wrong in this world, many things are wrong in our own lives, but we may not yet be held accountable.

Yes, the Israelites who did not trust God, they died in the wilderness; there was a judgment there. Korah and the people who were rebelling against God, God passed judgment on them there.

But in general, there are many things that are wrong in this world that God has not dealt with yet and that includes our lives. There can be many things that He is displeased with, but He has not dealt with us yet. Let us not assume that that means everything is fine.

So, what is important is we must first learn to be examined by the Lord.

Our heart must be open to the Lord, that He has the freedom to search us, to show us if there is anything that is not good, that is not right; and when we know, we must be prepared to deal with them and deal with them drastically, deeply, fully.

If we do that, then we can have confidence in the Day of Judgment because the Lord is the final Judge and when we are open to Him to examine us, we will receive accurate understanding of ourselves.

Yes, of course the Lord can speak to us in many different ways, whether it be through the Scriptures, through church life in general, through friends, through circumstances. There are many ways that God can speak to us but ultimately, it must be from the Lord, that He is the One who shows to us what is the right path.

It is very ironical that the Pharisees passed judgment on the Lord Jesus, condemned Him to death when He is the One who came into this world to save them from their sins.

So often, we are destroying what is the very best that God gives to us and sometimes we may not even realize it. We need to be careful. We need to seek to understand what God is seeking to do.

The apostle Paul before his conversion, he thought that the Lord Jesus was mistaken and he sought to persecute the Christians, but he was actually persecuting what God had brought to save mankind. However, he was honest enough to deeply repent when the Lord showed to him what was the right path.

So, one important aspect to remember is that God may not judge us immediately. So, we must not assume that things are all right. Instead, we should be very, very grateful because God not judging us immediately means He is giving us time, He is giving us opportunity, to change for the better.

He is giving us opportunity to evaluate our lives, to understand what ought to be, to seek Him, to respond well to Him, to benefit from His grace. And God wants to help us; He wants to give us the very best.

Yes, in the midst of sin and rebellion, the Lord is compassionate. He wants to help us if only we will listen to Him. He cannot simply give us the best when we are not prepared to obey Him. So that is why He has many instructions, but they are for our good if only we would listen.

So this is something that all of us should ponder over carefully. The Lord Jesus came to this world not to judge the world; He came to save the world. But one day, He will be the Judge. By that time, there will be no further opportunity to say, "Oh, now I realize I was wrong; I want to change now." There will be no more opportunity then.

We must do it now: TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS. Respond to Him and you will benefit from His grace.

The evil one seeks to deceive us, to tell us, "Oh there is so much time. Enjoy yourself first. Do not be so serious as a Christian; you have time later on to develop your life." We do not know.

The man who accumulated many things for himself, the Lord said, "You fool! Tonight your soul will be required of you." We do not know how long God will give to us the opportunity. Let us treasure every moment.

And also, we should be conscious that our development is not a one-time thing. It does not mean that if we respond well today and are grateful to God, well, that is the end of the story. Every day, every moment we can increasingly respond to Him and grow into His likeness, so that He has more and more freedom to work in our lives and to work through us.

So then, can we judge other people?

The answer is yes. We do not judge on our own; we can only judge when we are in fellowship with God and we understand what He wants to do.

Peter passed judgment on Ananias and Sapphira and they fell down dead. That was because that was instruction from the Lord, so Peter could pass that judgment. So too Paul could inflict blindness on the magician. So, there is a place for us to pass judgment. The apostle Paul passed judgment on the false teachers, those who were leading people astray.

So, there are situations where the issues are quite clear; there are situations where as we walk with God, the issues are reasonably clear for us to respond.

So the Lord Jesus said, "...even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me." The Lord Jesus said that He would not do anything on His own initiative, by Himself. So He says, "...even if I do judge, My judgment is true..." which means that He also will judge – but He is not alone. It is because the Father is with Him and the Father wants it to be done.

So too for us: If we learn to walk with God, there is a responsibility to fulfil. We need to stand up for God, but make sure that we are standing up for Him and not for our own ideas, our own preferences, our own views.

So let us then, as we come before the Lord, thank Him for His grace. Let us learn to appreciate that ultimately, true judgment, final judgment comes from God.

Our approach is not to go around judging people; our approach should be to love others, to seek their well-being, to do all we can for their good. But there are times when evil has to be dealt with and we must be prepared to take our stand when that happens.

Let us then ask the Lord to help us to consider our lives and to respond well to Him.