

Righteous Judgment

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man” (1 Corinthians 2:14-15).

Human beings engage in judgment every day. They judge quality and quantity. They judge distance and time. They categorize and summarize. Everyone with a mind engages in judgment.

Human beings also engage in judgment concerning good and evil, right and wrong, and saved and lost. They all have some standard by which they make these judgments. Those who are unregenerate make these judgments according to their depraved natures; they do not have the ability to make right spiritual judgments. The standard by which they judge is usually based on outward appearance, sincerity, and/or reputation. They judge themselves and others to be in God’s favor based on their supposed “good deeds” while judging others to be out of God’s favor based on the others’ “bad deeds.” Jesus exposed this self-righteous judgment in the Sermon on the Mount: *“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7:1-2).*

In light of this, what does God command of those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Does God say that, since by nature all men judge by the wrong standard, His people are to refrain from judging? Any student of Scripture knows that God does not say that; in fact, He commands the very opposite: the people of God are to make spiritual judgments. We are to be a judging people.

Many religionists today think it is humble and pious to say things like, “I can’t judge. I don’t know their hearts. I can’t be sure. I’m not the Holy Spirit. I leave the judging to God.” But what does God’s Word say?

In the same chapter in which Jesus forbade self-righteous judgment, He said, *“Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (v. 6), and “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (vv. 15-20).* How are we to know who the swine, dogs, and false prophets are without judging? Notice that Jesus did not say, “Give not that which is holy unto those whom you think are probably dogs ... Beware of those whom you think are probably false prophets ... Ye shall have a pretty good chance of being right if you look at their fruits.” No! He said, *“Ye SHALL know them.”* We SHALL know who the dogs, swine, and false prophets are. We SHALL know the state of their hearts.

God commands us, *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 6:14).* How can we obey this commandment if we can never be sure whether or not someone has an

unbelieving heart? Notice that God did not say, “Do not be bound together with those who you think have a high probability of being unbelievers.” God is stating that we will know who the unbelievers are and that we are not to be bound together with them. He goes on to mention unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, infidels, and idols as those things with which the believer is to have no fellowship (vv. 14-16); judgment of what unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, infidels, and idols are is an absolute necessity for God’s people in order for us to “*come out from among them, and be ye separate*” and to “*touch not the unclean [thing]*” (v. 17). If you will not judge saved and lost, then you will not come out of Babylon (Revelation 18:4).

God commands us, “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1). It cannot be clearer. God’s people are to judge between false and true prophets. And we SHALL be able to know whether they are from God.

How shall we know? After all, we can’t read people’s minds. We can’t directly see people’s hearts. No, but Jesus states that we can judge the heart by judging the direct channel that comes from the heart: *the mouth*. After stating that “*every tree is known by his own fruit*” (Luke 6:44), Jesus states what that fruit is: “*for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh*” (v. 45). We CAN judge the heart by what proceeds from the mouth. The words spoken are the fruit of the state of the heart.

But is this talking about just any words? Does this mean, for example, that if someone utters a vulgarity we are to judge the person unregenerate? Here is where judging righteous judgment comes in. The standard that the true believer uses to judge saved and lost is THE GOSPEL.

There are two types of speech by which we judge a person to be lost. The first is speech that confesses a false gospel. “*If any [man] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed*” (Galatians 1:9). “*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God*” (2 John 9). Confession of a false gospel is a confession that any part of salvation is conditioned on the sinner. It opposes the true gospel of salvation conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone. It is speech that denies Christ (1 John 2:22-23; 4:3). It is speech that denies one’s own sinfulness (1 John 1:8,10). It is confessed by those who, “*being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*” (Romans 10:3).

The second is speech that tolerates and endorses a false gospel by “*saying, Peace, peace; when [there is] no peace*” (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). He who calls one who confesses a false gospel his “brother in Christ” speaks the lie of Satan, “*Ye shall not surely die*” (Genesis 3:4). He “*speaks great swelling [words] of vanity*” (2 Peter 2:18). God makes it very clear in 2 John 11 that he who speaks peace to one who confesses a false gospel “*is partaker of his evil deeds*” (see the article on 2 John 11 in this issue for a more extensive treatment of this verse). These are those who judge saved and lost not by right gospel doctrine but by outward appearance, morality,

sincerity, and reputation.

Are Christians then to judge that these people are reprobate (i.e., destined for hell)? By no means. We cannot judge their eternal destiny by these words; this is only known by God. We are only to judge that they are now unregenerate. God might save some of these lost people who believe, confess, and tolerate a false gospel; some of them might be among God's elect. One thing is sure: if God saves them, they will no longer believe, confess, and tolerate a false gospel! Upon regeneration and conversion, God causes His people to believe and confess the one and only true gospel.

To most, this method of judgment sounds ridiculous. "You mean to tell me that you judge someone lost who doesn't have his doctrine just right?" In the area of the doctrine of Christ, which is the gospel, the Bible answers, "YES." The Bible does not make belief in right gospel doctrine a condition of salvation (in fact, it says that those who hold to this view are lost); but it does make belief in right gospel doctrine an inevitable and immediate result of salvation and a fruit by which we judge saved and lost.

Reader -- Are you one who opposes God's word by saying that you cannot judge saved and lost? (I would submit that most of you who say this do judge saved and lost in some instances based on some standard. If you see a woman who is a practicing harlot, would you say, "Well, I can't really judge her heart"?) Are you one who judges by the wrong standard? Are you one who confesses a false gospel? Are you one who tolerates and/or promotes those who confess a false gospel? Or are you one who judges saved and lost based on God's testimony and will not speak peace when there is no peace?

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