

Are You Judging Righteously?

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God has purposed that all things should be established by two or more witnesses and the two most pronounced witnesses He has given to the church are the Spirit and the Word. Unfortunately, much of the church has polarized around one or the other of these witnesses and they end up being set against one another.

A large segment of the body of Christ focuses almost exclusively on the Word and they apply principles of hermeneutics and exegesis to discern the application of the Word. This group is fond of developing principles and precepts for living, and an answer to nearly any conceivable life decision can be found to have a plethora of corresponding scriptures that have bearing upon it.

Another segment of the body focuses on being Spirit led and they have a great focus on words of knowledge, prophecy, words of wisdom, and in general discerning the voice of the Spirit of God for all situations they encounter.

What is unfortunate, even tragic, is that often the body of Christ fails to discern that God gave these two witnesses to stand in agreement with one another, not to be set in opposition. There are large segments of the body of Christ that focus on the Word of God who teach that God doesn't even speak to man personally today, asserting that all things have been recorded in scripture and scripture alone is to be the guide for life.

On the other hand, many who focus on the voice of the Spirit become off balance because they do not know the Word of God and they are easily deceived by other voices due to their failure to gain a second witness to what they believe they are hearing. At some point, all saints stumble by being out of balance in one area or another, and I have certainly done so in both extremes, but God would have us to come into balance and to have the witness of the Spirit and of the Word in our lives.

It is certain that both of these witnesses are vital for the believer and to discard either one is to embrace great error and to ensure that one will go astray at some point. The scriptures reveal the importance of both of these witnesses.

John 16:7, 8, 13, 14

7 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

8 "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment...

13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

14 "He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. (NAS)

Romans 8:14

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are [mature] sons of God.

(NAS)

II Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. (NAS)

II Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

(NAS)

I Corinthians 10:11

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

(NAS)

In these scriptures we see the vital importance of both the Spirit and the Word. Many more scriptures could be used, but these few clearly show the need for the witness of the Spirit and the Word. Both are necessary for the believer to walk as God would have them in wisdom and understanding in this world.

These two witnesses are in no way contrary to one another. The Spirit and the Word ALWAYS agree. If this were not so then God would have a divided kingdom and it could not stand. What then is the source of disagreements between so many believers who point to the same scriptures and come to different conclusions? We are told that there is no private interpretation of scripture.

II Peter 1:20-21 20

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

(NAS)

This is a key to understanding the problem of scriptural differences. The scriptures were given by inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. THE SCRIPTURES THEREFORE CAN ONLY BE INTERPRETED AND APPLIED UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Disagreements come for one reason. The Holy Spirit has not led one or both parties to their interpretation and application of scripture. What then did these saints rely upon to interpret scripture? Most often it is their own intellect.

II Corinthians 3:5-6

5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

(NAS)

If our adequacy, our ability, our working, finds its source in ourselves then it

will bring forth death. However, if these things find their source in the Spirit of God then life will be the result. This truth is readily seen as one looks at scripture.

How many of the righteous saints of God have been condemned and even put to death due to a wrong application of scripture, an application that arose not from the Spirit, but from the evil heart of man? Even the Son of God was condemned by religious men who used the holy scriptures to condemn Him. Jesus was crucified as a blasphemer and a violator of the Sabbath laws, and the scriptures were used to bring these charges against Him. Were these scriptures rightly applied by the leading of the Holy Spirit? We know they were not. The scriptures in the hands of these men therefore became a minister of death rather than life.

Any time the scriptures are interpreted apart from the leading of the Spirit of God the end result will be death. The mind of man cannot conceive how to properly apply scriptures. Our minds demand that God always apply scriptures in the same way to every person. The Jewish leaders could not understand how God could proclaim that a man under the Law of Moses was to be put to death for violating the Sabbath prohibition to work, yet this same God could bear witness that it was His will for His Son to heal on the Sabbath.

Jesus even spoke to the Jewish leaders, reminding them of occasions recorded in the scriptures when other men violated the letter of the Law, yet in God's sight they were not accounted as transgressors.

Matthew 12:1-8

1 At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions;

4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?

5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent?"

6 "But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here.

7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

(NAS)

How often today are similar wrong interpretations and applications of scripture made that result in condemnation of the righteous and justification of the wicked? I am convinced that more wrong interpretations are made than right, for men regularly rely upon their own intellect and reasoning to interpret and apply the word of God. But God has testified that His righteous ones will not make judgments according to their rational senses and natural mind.

Isaiah 11:2-4

And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

3 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear;

4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth...

(NAS)

This scripture is clearly a prophecy of Jesus Christ, but it applies equally as God's intent for all of His sons and daughters, for we are being conformed to the image of His Son. If His Son does not judge by sight, hearing, or human intellect, but by the Spirit, then this is God's will for us as well.

There is an incredible thing spoken of here in this passage from Isaiah and the church clearly has not gotten the message. God's Son, and those being conformed to His image, must not judge by what their eyes see, nor make a decision by what their ears hear. Can you say that you are fulfilling this scripture? Can any saint of God?

This is a marvelous thing. The saint almost has to cut off his own head to come into agreement with this passage. Isn't the mode of judging and making decisions among the body of Christ today to examine the evidence at hand

and to form a “reasoned” response based upon an understanding of scripture? However, this is exactly what God said we are not to do. It was this same pattern of operation that led the religious leaders of Jesus’ day to condemn Him and sentence Him to death as a violator of the Law of God. It has been this same mode of operation that has led to pronouncements of condemnation of many righteous saints of God down through the ages resulting in death for many of them.

Consider the impact of the following scripture.

John 16:2

They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

(NIV)

Jesus here is speaking to His disciples and He is also speaking prophetically of those who will believe in Him through their testimony. He is saying that there are those who will put His followers out of the synagogue, the place where the saints gather, and they will even put them to death. In doing so they will think they are doing a service to God. Who could be making such a grievous error in judgment? There is only one conclusion. Since they think they are doing God a service, it must be people who claim to be followers of God and who seek to serve Him. Indeed, I am convinced that Jesus was speaking of many of those who would later consider themselves Christians and who would be found among the saints of God.

How could these “Christians” exile righteous believers and put them to death and think they were doing God a service? They would do so by using the word of God to form a code of right and wrong with which they would make judgments based upon what they see and hear. In effect, they would violate that which was spoken of in Isaiah 11. Their judgments would not be righteous judgments because they did not originate with God, but rather they had their origin in the mind and intellect of man.

Now, you may say, “Not too many church members are killing other church members today in their service to God.” This may be literally true, but many righteous Christian brothers and sisters are having their character assassinated, their reputations destroyed, their fellowship rejected, their intentions maligned, and their motives impugned by fellow church members

that think they are doing God a service. You yourself may be one of those who have made these judgments based upon what you have seen or heard as you processed it through your mind based upon your understanding of the word of God. If you have not done this, then you are a rare saint indeed.

In the church system of today, this is the basic method of judgment and decision making that is taught. Many know of no other way to function. Many do not believe that God speaks to people today, and among those who do believe He speaks, only a remnant seek the mind of God when their eyes and ears have already given them the information they feel they need to form an opinion.

This is a most difficult habit to break free of. Most of us who have been in the church system have been taught principles and precepts in a one size fits all fashion. We have been taught that what is wrong for one is wrong for all and what is right for one is right for all. When we observe a situation, or merely hear about it, we feel that we do not need to seek the mind of God or try to discern the voice of the Spirit, for we already have made our judgment.

The saint who operates in such a fashion is essentially independent of God. He has adopted a standard of judgment and decision making based upon the creeds and doctrines of his church or denomination, or upon his own interpretation of the word of God, and he feels no compulsion to seek God when he sees or hears of a matter that to him is cut and dried. In this way many saints have done injury to one another and they have felt that they were doing God a service as they rendered their judgment.

I cannot stress the importance of this fact enough. The scriptures if not interpreted and applied according to the leading of God's Spirit will bring forth death. However, we think that so many scriptures are so apparently plain and precise in their instruction and meaning that they could not possibly be misinterpreted or misapplied, even by man's reasoning, if the one making the interpretation is walking in integrity. Is this true? Consider the following examples.

One of the most contested issues in scripture is the subject of divorce. God says that He clearly hates divorce. Many saints, churches, and denominations knowing that God hates divorce teach that all divorce is a sin and it is the basis to disqualify a man for leadership. However, there were times when God spoke to His people and told them to divorce their wives (Ezra 10) and He also said that He would divorce Israel (Jeremiah 3:8). Did God then do that

which He hated? Did God sin?

Now answer this riddle: If God told the men of Israel to divorce their foreign wives so that they would not lead them astray into idolatry, then would He not apply the same standard to Christians today who are married to non-Christians so that their spouses would not lead them back into the things of the world? "For what fellowship has light with darkness, and what communion has Christ with Belial" (II Corinthians 6:15). Yet Paul says that if an unbelieving spouse is content to remain with the believer, that they should be allowed to do so. He also says that if they desire to leave, then let them leave. He makes it clear, however, that this is his instruction, not the Lord's (I Corinthians 7:12).

How much do we need the mind of Christ and the witness of the Spirit to properly interpret these things and make application to the lives of men and women? Often God will give instructions to the saints that seem to contradict what is clearly revealed in scripture. Peter resisted greatly when the Lord instructed him in a vision to arise, kill, and eat animals that were not kosher. This went against what he had been taught and what he knew to be the witness of the scriptures.

Consider the case of God's testing of Abraham's heart. How many people today would tell Abraham that God would never instruct him to go and kill his son, sacrificing him on an altar? We know God's commandment "Thou shalt not kill", and though the Law had not yet been given, Abraham knew the character of God. We also know that God considers child sacrifice to be an abomination. He condemned this practice among the heathen population who bordered Israel. How then could we ever agree with what Abraham clearly heard God instruct him to do unless we too had heard the same thing by the Spirit of God?

In the same way, I believe God is bringing many of the children of Abraham to similar trials and tests today that seem to fly against what we know the scriptures to say, or just as bad in the minds of many, it goes against what is considered orthodox behavior. Unless the Spirit is clearly discerned then we will condemn such ones for their actions even as we would try to dissuade Abraham from that which he went to do. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Let us not judge by the seeing of the eye, nor the hearing of the ear, but by the Spirit.

I cannot stress how much this goes against all that is natural and which we

consider normal. When everything we see and hear tells us that something is wrong or right, yet the witness of the Spirit testifies otherwise, who will we listen to?

This may sound like I am saying that the Spirit and the Word are testifying different things, but this is not so. The scriptures reveal that God can and will ask men to do things that are contrary to what they understand to be proper behavior in keeping with the character of God and the testimony of scripture. The scriptures reveal that we must be led of God's Spirit and that a dead and lifeless adherence to the letter of the word of God is not what He desires of us. God will choose what scripture is appropriate to our situation and what the application will be. It will not be the same for all men. God did not ask all men to go and sacrifice their children. This He required of Abraham. What might He require of you? Don't expect it to line up with the experience of your neighbor, or your brothers and sisters at church. You are unique before God and He has a unique plan for your life.

I know that it will disturb some that I said that God will ask men to do things that are contrary to what they understand to be proper behavior in keeping with the character of God and the testimony of scripture, but let me give you a few examples. We know it is proper to clothe ourselves decently and to not expose ourselves in an unseemly manner. Ham was cursed because he did not try to cover the nakedness of his father Noah. Yet God instructed Isaiah to go about naked and barefoot for three years (Isaiah 20:2, 3). David similarly was not clothed in what many considered to be a proper manner when he danced before the Lord when the ark was being brought into Jerusalem. His wife Michal did what many saints would do today if they saw the spectacle of David dancing, she condemned him.

We know that God said that harlotry was evil and a harlot was even to be stoned and that men were to be very careful about whom they wed, yet God instructed Hosea to go marry a prostitute and to keep taking her back when she proved unfaithful to him.

Did God instruct all men to go about naked? Did He instruct all men to marry prostitutes? Did He instruct all men to kill their children? No, but He did clearly tell some to do these things. Is it not possible then that God could ask you to do something that violates all that you understand to be right and proper? If God told you to go about naked, could you receive the instruction as being from Him? If He asked you to marry a prostitute, would you rebuke the word as being from the devil?

I say this because God has asked me to do things that go against reason and against many people's interpretation and application of the word of God. Many have condemned me, but have they judged according to the hearing of the ear and the seeing of the eye, or have they judged according to the Spirit of God? The scriptures reveal how prevalent this type of judging is and the peril of it.

Consider Job. If you knew a man who was wealthy and prosperous and who was regarded as a righteous man and you saw extraordinary and supernatural calamity come upon him, would you not judge that God had struck him? Think soberly about this. We might view the raiders who came in and stole his flocks and killed his servants as being a natural event and attribute it to the wickedness of man, but how about when a whirlwind arises at the same moment and destroys the house that his children are in, killing every one of them? Also, one of Job's servants came and said that the fire of God fell from heaven and destroyed all of the sheep and the servants tending them. This calamity was referred to as "the fire of God." Isn't it then reasonable to assume that God was behind it? To top it all off, Job himself was then afflicted with severe boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet, evidently marking him as a transgressor whom God had appointed for punishment.

We often condemn Job's friends for speaking what was wrong concerning Job. They falsely imputed sin to an innocent man, condemning the righteous. How many of us would have done the same? Could you see all of this happen in a moment of time and not conclude that God was behind it and, from your understanding of God and His character, would you not conclude that God would only visit such calamity on a man if he had sinned greatly? Those who observed the suffering of Jesus made a similar judgment. Isaiah reveals that He was considered to be "smitten and stricken by God."

The church with all of its teaching of prosperity and blessing today often makes such false judgments. Multitudes are taught that God wants to bless and prosper His children and if they suffer then they are out of His will or not walking in faith. This flies in the face of scripture. Jesus Himself said that "the foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Jesus was further described as a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief. Paul described the apostles in this way:

I Corinthians 4:9-13

9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

(NAS)

This passage is enough to give a prosperity preacher nightmares. Jesus further told His disciples that if He was persecuted, then so would they be. How many would view saints in extremities as these today and not judge that they were somehow suffering for their own misdeeds. After all, are we not taught that we will never suffer lack if we are walking after the will of God? Why then did Paul suffer lack? Was it due to some sin in his life?

Consider the life of Joseph. Rejected by brothers and sold as a slave. Falsely accused of attempted rape and put in prison. Could you hear of such a testimony today and truly believe that such a person was innocent? Could you, especially if the moment of vindication had not arrived and the person was still wasting away in a jail cell?

How many could see David fleeing for his life from the presence of the ruler of the nation, cast out, rejected, living in a foreign land, living in caves, mistreated by those to whom he did good, and believe that he was God's man of whom He testified, "He has a heart after me." What? If he has a heart after you God, then why would you allow this to happen to him? Our reasoning will not lead us to righteous judgment as we evaluate what we see and hear. In like manner, many saints of God have been condemned, stoned and crucified as the scriptures were hurled at them in condemnation of their righteous obedience to the Father.

I do not say this to shame anybody. I too have fallen into this perilous trap of

thinking I knew the scriptures and its interpretation in a one size fits all mentality. I have falsely judged brothers because I relied upon reason instead of discerning the voice of the Spirit of God. I am convinced that God let me endure much of the hostility I have encountered to break this pattern off of my life and to cause me to ever seek the mind of the Lord no matter how cut and dried things appear on the surface.

This is such a difficult matter to find conformity to Christ in. His judgments were always righteous because He was always beholding the Father and He always knew the Father's mind. He did not judge by the seeing of the eye, nor make a decision by the hearing of the ear. Consider the following two examples and how it was absolutely necessary to know the mind of God in order to form a righteous judgment.

John 9:1-3

1 And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.

2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?"

3 Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him."

(NAS)

Matthew 9:2

Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

(NIV)

In the first case mentioned, the disciples assumed that the man before them was blind due to sin in his life or his parent's lives. This was the teaching of the day, that such disabilities were always the result of sin. The pharisees later confirmed this belief when they said to the man, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" (John 9:34). Likewise, many saints and churches and denominations hold to teachings that are wrong and that ultimately result in unrighteous judgments.

In the second case Jesus did equate the person's disability with sin. How is

the saint of God to judge righteously in such cases unless they, like Jesus, know intimately the mind of the Father and all of their judgments find their origin with Him? It is impossible to create a foolproof formula, or to devise a theological structure, that will allow man's mind to discern rightly in such situations. Only if we have heard from the Spirit of God can we know anything for sure.

This brings to mind the practices in many churches and among many ministries regarding healing. How many conduct their healing services according to some formula? They treat each person the same. But Jesus did not do so. Jesus treated each situation in a unique manner as He discerned the will and mind of the Father. Many churches and ministries have failed today by teaching their people formulas rather than teaching them to discern the mind of God. Not every case is the same and it is assured that God would not have every person treated in a similar fashion. We must discern God's will for each individual.

Perhaps you are one of those saints who have suffered grievously at the hands of others who have formed unrighteous judgments against you. Perhaps the ones who did so even thought they were standing in agreement with God in doing so. Please consider that God may have allowed you and I to endure the slings and arrows of others in order that we might come to see the utter importance of judging by the Spirit of God and not by sight and hearing. The church needs to learn this lesson today. It has to start with a few and it may be that the best way for us to learn this lesson was for us to be recipients of false judgments weighed against us. If so, then thank God that He has been merciful in allowing you to have your eyes opened. His instruction is often painful, but afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

I must confess that although I know the manner in which God would have me to make judgments and decisions, it is still difficult. The mind of man is quick to form opinions and I find within myself a war between the flesh and the spirit. I have found that it is often wise to reserve judgment and to delay making a decision until things become clear, for what seems certain in one moment often proves to have not originated with the mind of God. How desperately we need to have our senses attuned to the voice of God. In all the clamor around us it is often a struggle to hear the still, small voice of God.

I wonder, would I try to convince Abraham that he had not heard God correctly? I hope not. But I know that if I used my reason to show him from

scriptures whether his behavior was appropriate or not that I would surely conclude that he was in error. But never has an act of obedience pleased God more than Abraham's when he went to sacrifice his son to God.

In conclusion, I would reiterate that the scriptures are Spirit breathed and therefore they can only be interpreted and applied as we are led by the Spirit. Anything less will certainly receive the applause of men, but it will result in death. These two witnesses must be joined together, the Spirit and the Word. Many have chosen to stand on the word while rejecting the witness of the Spirit and this has resulted in division and in the condemnation of the righteous and the justification of the wicked. But God's righteous servant will not judge in this way.