

More About Jesus, Week 28: Jesus judged righteous judgment

by Paul Hammons

Christians are called to be people of discernment, which means that we are called to judge. But when the subject of judgment comes up, it inevitably causes people to respond, “But Jesus said ‘Don’t judge!’”

We live in a culture where any sort of criticism or disagreement is immediately labeled as “judgmental,” and people will even quote Jesus, who said in **John 8:15**, “*I judge no one!*”

But as it happened, Jesus did judge - just not in the way we often do. We judge people in terms of superficial things, such as appearance, background, knowledge, associations. And in some cases - many cases - those judgments might be accurate. But not always. Because we can’t see the hearts of the person we are judging, and we don’t always see the whole story.

Jesus saw the whole story.

But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. - John 2:24–25 (ESV)

The point Jesus made about judgment in **John 8** was about comparing HIS judgment to the judgment of the Pharisees, who as he said, “*judge according to the flesh.*” In the context of the passage, the Pharisees were claiming that Jesus’ teachings were false because he was testifying about himself.

And yet, Jesus had shown already that the testimony about him was coming from multiple sources: John the Baptist (**John 5:33**), the voice of the Father (**John 5:37**), the signs he performed through God’s power (**John 5:36**), and the scriptures themselves (**John 5:39**). The Pharisees’ judgment was based on their own preconceptions, their worldly concept of who and what the Christ must be, which led them to judge wrongly about Jesus.

When Jesus said, “*I judge no one,*” he was saying that his judgment didn’t originate with his own opinions or from the same sort of limited observations that the Pharisees could make. Jesus’ judgments were dictated fully by God’s word:

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. - John 12:49

Because Jesus’ judgment was in line with God’s teaching, it was true (**John 8:16**). When Jesus said to the Pharisees, “*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires,*” he was speaking not just through his own divine insight, but from the evidence of their own actions. By refusing repeatedly to accept his words after seeing the signs, they showed the condition of their hearts.

Jesus said, “*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment*” (**John 7:24**) in reference to the Jews’ misunderstanding of the Sabbath and their belief that healing someone on the Sabbath was a violation of the law, rather than the natural extension of the law and the Sabbath’s intent (**Mark 3:4**). Their judgment was hypocritical (**Luke 14:5**), born from a desire to justify themselves and condemn the righteousness of Jesus.

Jesus’ judgment of the Jewish leaders wasn’t about claiming superiority over them (although he was superior); it was about making a true assessment of their behavior. Rejecting God’s revealed world will always be a clear sign of rebellion against God; there is no risk of “misreading” intent because the evidence is in words and actions that are clearly seen, not thoughts or intentions that we may never know with full assurance.

Jesus is our model for judgment, knowing that while we cannot know the hearts of men completely, we can use the discernment God has given us (**Mat. 7:16, 16:3, Mark 13:29**) not to condemn out of self-righteousness, but to properly evaluate the nature of someone’s actions.

John wrote “*test the spirits to see whether they are from God*” (**1 John 4:1**). The implication is that we can know what is good, and we are called to condemn what is evil (**1 Tim. 5:20**) based on a right understanding of the God’s word (**Rom. 12:2**).

And like Jesus, our goal is not to condemn based on our own preferences or inferences. We may see an activity that might suggest to us something sinful, but we have to be cautious that whatever judgment we give is not from us, but from “the words Jesus has spoken” – the words that came from the Father. Because it is only Christ whose judgment truly matters (**Rom. 14:10**).