

“Judging Righteous Judgment”
John 7:19-24
(Preached at Trinity, September 28, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Midway through the Feast of Booths, Jesus arrives in the Temple and begins to teach. Immediately a crowd gathers, and immediately His teaching is condemned by the religious leaders. Their chief complaint involved Jesus’ credentials. The rabbis quoted one another continually as the basis of their authority. Jesus had no formal training and quoted no man – His teaching came from above.
John 7:16 NAU - "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me."
2. The religious leaders had no desire to obey the truth. The hardness of their heart prohibited them from discerning the truth. It was shielded from their eyes.
John Owen: “Whatever natural or acquired talents a man may possess, if he is an enemy to God and his government, he will utterly fail of comprehending, in their full and gracious import, the spiritual and sublime truths of revelation. On the other hand, while sanctified learning furnishes great facilities for the investigation of moral truth, yet the humblest and least educated intellect animated by the love of God, will attain to clearer and richer views of redemption by Jesus Christ, than can possibly be reached by the highest order of unregenerate minds.”¹
3. The Jews were proud of their heritage. They were proud to be sons of Abraham. They were proud to be the people of God and under the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was a righteous law, yet they continually disregarded it according to their traditions.
John 7:19 NAU - "Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"
4. The Jews scrupulously followed the law of circumcision. It was their identity. They were referred to as “the circumcision.”
 - A. They were careful to circumcise according to the Law. When a baby boy was eight days old they circumcised him. It was the law. But what if the eighth day happened on the Sabbath, which it obviously did? They had no problem circumcising on the Sabbath. In other words, they were willing to suspend the Law of the Sabbath in order to practice the law of circumcision. They saw it as an act of necessity.

¹ John J. Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, on the Gospel of John*, (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1861), 158.

- B. Jesus condemned their hardness of heart. They would suspend the Sabbath to practice circumcision, which was an act of ceremonial significance, but Jesus did an act of actually making a man whole. They cared more for the ceremonial than they did for the actual needs of man. God's desire was circumcised hearts, hearts having sin and corruption cut away, but their hearts were filled with all manner of corruption.
- The entire Law could be summarized in one word, *love*. They were completely void of love—love for God, love for their fellow man.
- C. Jesus did a righteous act of love and mercy in healing a man and they condemned Him because it was the Sabbath. They were completely blind to the nature of the Law. Instead of love, their hearts were filled with hatred and murder.
5. When Jesus confronted their hypocrisy the crowd became furious.
- John 7:20** - "The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"
- A. The crowd included the religious leaders. They were guilty of disregarding the heart of the Fourth Commandment, while they condemned Jesus for showing mercy on the Sabbath. In disregard for the Law, they were truly trying to kill Jesus.
- B. The crowd would have also included citizens of Jerusalem as well as pilgrims from afar. They couldn't understand Jesus accusing them of seeking to kill Him. They had no intentions of taking His life.
- C. Not so fast. Six months later they would be gathered again at Jerusalem for the Passover. These people who were claiming innocence would demand His crucifixion.
- Matthew 27:22-23 NAU** - "Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!" ²³ And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"
6. Choosing right from wrong can be elusive if we fail to use the right standard. The crowds looked upon their religious leaders as being flawless. Their leaders were their standard. The religious leaders believed their obedience to the Law was beyond question. They were their own standard.
- All of this was while they looked upon the actions of Christ as being worthy of death. The crowds accused Him of being possessed.
7. Jesus condemned their faulty thinking,
- John 7:24 NAU** - "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."
- And this is where it takes great discernment. Its all about having a right standard. Jesus had indeed done a work on the Sabbath. Of this they were correct. But what kind of work was it? It was an act of necessity and mercy, and therefore it was lawful. It appeared to be a violation of the Sabbath, but in reality, it was not. They failed to practice righteous judgment.
8. We are always in danger of looking only upon the outward appearance and come to conclusions that may be faulty. We must judge with righteous judgment.

9. Without discernment we can be poor judges of character.
- A. Most people lack the discernment to recognize a true Christian. They naively call someone a Christian if he calls himself a Christian or if he goes to church or talks a good talk. J.C. Ryle wrote: "We are in danger of rating some men as good Christians because of a little outward profession of religion and a decent Sunday formality, because, in short, they talk the language of Canaan, and wear the garb of pilgrims. We forget that all is not good that appears good, and even as all is not gold that glitters, and that daily practice, choice, tastes, habits, conduct, private character, are the true evidence of what a man is. In a word, we forget our Lord's saying, "Judge not according to the appearance."²
- B. Equally dangerous are those who find it easy to condemn a good man who loves Christ but makes a mistake in judgment. There are critical, self-righteous men who find it easy to judge and condemn. J.C. Ryle – "We must not hastily suppose that all is evil, where there is an occasional appearance of evil. The holiest man may ball sadly for a time, and yet the grace within him may finally get a victory. Is a man's general character godly? Then let us suspend our judgment when he falls, and hope on."³
10. Too often, we are guilty of arriving to conclusions without having the right information. And then, we can have the right information and interpret it incorrectly. We must judge rightly according to the right information. We must judge righteous judgment. What is the source of the right information? Is there a righteous standard?
- I. The problem of a wrong standard of judgment
- A. The lost man sets his own standards
1. This is what Adam and Eve did in the garden – They decided to eat of the forbidden tree setting their own standard – it looked good, it seemed good, and thus it must be good.
Genesis 3:6 NAU - "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."
 2. This is also what they did after they had sinned. They decided their nakedness was wrong and they decided the solution.
Genesis 3:7 NAU - "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."
 3. This was the story of Cain. He decided the type sacrifice to offer. Why should God take greater pleasure in Abel's blood sacrifice than Cain's grain offering?
 4. This is what Paul was doing on the Road to Damascus. Destroying Christians as an act of righteousness

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, John Vol.2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007), Pages 16-17.

³ *Ibid.*, Page 17.

- B. Every sin is a declaration of our moral autonomy
1. Because each man sets a different standard there is in essence no standard
 2. This is the nature of self-righteousness. Every man decides for himself what is necessary to make himself right before God.
- C. This is the problem with the mere religious man.
1. He goes about trying to live according to his feeble standard. He comes to wrong conclusions because he has the wrong information.
 2. He lives according to a vain system of morality – don't drink, don't smoke, don't listen to rock n' roll, go to church, carry a Bible. But if you challenge him with God's holiness he becomes angry.
 3. His religious actions are all just vain efforts to cover over his true defilement
Isaiah 64:6 NAU - "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" Literally it refers to menstruation towels.
 4. Without a righteous standard a man can condemn others and excuse himself. Jesus condemned such hypocrisy.
Luke 6:41-42 NAU - "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."
Matthew 7:1-3 NAU - "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ² "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³ "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"
 5. This isn't an absolute prohibition against all judgment. It is a prohibition against judging men according to our standard instead of God's standard while refusing to judge ourselves according to God's standard.
John 7:24 NAU - "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

II. The right standard

- A. The standard of righteousness is Christ.
1. His perfections shined brightly upon the earth. Jesus is the light that shined upon the world. Fallen man cannot comprehend the light of Christ.
John 1:4-5 NAU - "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."
John 3:19-20 NAU - "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

2. This was the failure of the Jews
They condemned Jesus because His very presence condemned them. He put on display the righteousness of God. This is why He was so despised. He was perfect. His form of righteousness was unattainable so they went about seeking to establish their own righteousness.
John 7:7 NAU - "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil."
Romans 9:31-32 NAU - "but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. ³² Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,"
- B. God's standard of righteousness is revealed through His Word.
1. We read in our Confession: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture."
 2. We must measure ourselves and all others according to the standard of God's Word.

Conclusion:

1. God's Word must stand as our standard of righteousness. We can only judge righteous judgment when we have the righteous standard.
John Owen: "bring everything to the standard of divine truth, and thus test its true character and reach a just decision."⁴
2. We are not forbidden to make judgments. But they must be righteous judgements—not according to our opinions or prejudices but according to righteous judgment.
2. The Bible is the supreme judge, the source of righteous judgment.
LBC 1:10 – "The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scriptures delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved."

⁴ John J. Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, on the Gospel of John*, (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1861), 162.