

JOH 7:24-27 "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." 25 At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? 26 Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? 27 But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

Jesus has made His case that the Jews were using a double standard concerning the law, as they were willing to circumcise a child on the Sabbath, which was a sign and seal of the covenant God made with Israel, but weren't willing to allow that same God to heal an Israelite on the Sabbath.

JOH 7:23 "Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?"

And then Jesus added a very interesting statement.

JOH 7:24 "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

The judgment Jesus is speaking about here is one which these Jews do not take into consideration regarding who Jesus Christ is according to the word of God. Their judgment, or their determination of who Jesus is, was based only on what they could see, not on what God revealed about His Messiah in the Scriptures.

Now, it's often at this point where many people, including some Christians, will conclude that no one has any business judging anyone at any time. The fact of the matter is that our Lord makes it quite clear in verse 24 that these people must be judging Him. But He qualifies that judgment by saying that if you are to judge Me, don't do it on mere appearances but make a right, or righteous judgment.

By this Jesus means that you must determine that what I say and claim for Myself matches up with the word of God which addresses the Messiah and His qualifications.

We've all heard the argument that we can't judge other people. And to the degree that we are trying to judge the hearts of people,

as only God knows the heart, that is true. But that doesn't mean we can't make judgments based on the word of God.

Yeah, but what about what Jesus says concerning how we look at the faults of others when we may have some faults of our own?

MAT 7:3-5 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

This is absolutely true, but again this has nothing to do with eliminating judgments. In fact, Jesus is saying that a righteous judgment will include yourself, but certainly would not exclude your brother.

He is saying that righteous judgments must take into account what God has to say on any particular issue. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to make such judgments if the kingdom of God is to go forward.

Think about it. If we never made such a righteous judgment we could not share the gospel of Jesus Christ with anyone. Do you realize that? Why? Because that would be a judgment on people where we are declaring that they are sinners and therefore guilty before a holy God in need of His salvation through Jesus Christ.

When you come along-side a believer who is not walking in a way that is consistent with what the word of God says, you have made a judgment. Is that a bad thing? No, not necessarily. But as Jesus says, if you too are not walking with Christ and you make such a judgment then you need to consider your own life, if your counsel is to be effective, otherwise it becomes hypocritical.

The other thing to consider is making judgments which are based on one's own sense of righteousness, not the word of God.

"I don't think you're a mature Christian because you, as a woman, wear pants instead of a dress." Or, "I don't think you're a mature Christian because you eat foods which might be bad for your health."

I've actually had people tell me that it is sinful, in light of the command given to Adam and Eve, not to eat only what the garden provided in the way of fruits and vegetables. Now, someone might

make the argument that eating fruits and veggies exclusively is a good diet, but to make a judgment that not to eat that way is sinful is not a righteous judgment, especially in light of what Christ told Peter while he was once in a trance.

ACT 10:11-15 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

A righteous judgment would say that there is no restriction on what I can eat. I may not approve of eating limburger cheese or liver for myself, but I can't make that judgment on someone else.

The same is true in the spiritual realm when it comes to what the word of God teaches regarding doctrine. There are those who would say that we can't judge one group simply because they don't believe the same way we do. And that might be true, but only to the extent that their doctrine does not change or alter the plain meaning of the word of God.

For example, if we were to go back to the issue of prohibiting what a Christian can or cannot eat, I can make a right judgment by saying that they are being legalistic when making such a judgment since the word of God does not prohibit what I can eat, only that I not be a glutton with any food.

If a Christian tells me that I can only pray to God on my knees, and that any other posture will not allow my prayers to get to God, I can make a right judgment concerning that statement by saying that I agree that being on my knees is a good place to be in the presence of God, but with David I can also pray on my bed, or with Nehemiah, who when asked a question by King Artaxerxes, in an instant with his eyes wide open as he stood before the King, prayed to God for wisdom.

The point is that to make a biblically right judgment the whole counsel of God's word must come into play. And only when we are willing to be honest with ourselves regarding the word of God will we be able to make these kinds of right judgments to where we can discern that which is of God and that which is of man. This is the point the writer of Hebrews makes.

HEB 5:13-14 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The milk being referred to is a reference, not to the milk of God's word which Peter addresses in his first epistle, but milk in the sense of man's carnal understanding of spiritual things.

When we compare the word of God to milk in the sense that some of the word is for infants and other parts of the word is for the mature, we set up an artificial division within the body of Christ.

Yes, it's true that some teaching is deeper than other parts, but when you read the epistles of Paul, for example, he doesn't distinguish between mature and infants as far as how he teaches.

When you read through the book of Romans there is some very heavy teaching going on there. And yet, when he gets to those parts, he doesn't stop and say, now this part is for the mature, and this part is for the infant. It's for both.

Remember, even the brand new believer in Christ has the same Holy Spirit that the seasoned saint has, and has the ability in the power of the Spirit to be taught even deep truths.

This is why I teach the way I do. I believe that dumbing down the word of God for the sake of reaching only the babe in Christ is not fair to the babes or the mature. I prefer to trust the Holy Spirit to speak to all as I just give the plain teaching of the text.

And so, yes, there will be some who glean something different as the Spirit speaks to them, but whether you're young in the Lord, or not, you can understand God's word, if it's explained in plain language.

And so, this is why the word of God can be referred to as milk at one time and yet it can also refer to man's teaching and wisdom as something negative. There is nothing negative about God's word, but the believer in Christ who desires the *milk of the world* will always come away hungry and in fact will be fed in such a way where this kind of milk will have an adverse effect. This is what Paul meant when writing to the Ephesians.

EPH 4:11-15 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that

the body of Christ may be built up 13 *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, *speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

Remaining an infant in Christ is directly proportional to one's desire and ability to feed on the truth of God's word as opposed to receiving and dining on the wisdom of man and the teaching of men which will eventually leave you anemic in the faith; what I refer to as spiritual bulimia, where we choose not to eat the truth because we think it's too deep to understand.

But it's not just studying the word of God and gaining knowledge in the word. And that is what the writer of Hebrews was saying in the portion I quoted just a moment ago.

HEB 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Solid food is good, but unless we use the food, the truth of God's word, and apply it to our lives on a daily basis, then we will find that we have not trained ourselves to walk in that truth in a way where we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

JAM 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

We have a tendency to take this verse and skip over those four little words which no respecting Christian ever thinks could happen to him or her. "*And so deceive yourselves.*"

Listening and not doing is deception. And what makes deception so deceptive is that you don't even know it until it's often too late. Proper training in the word of God and then using that training goes a long way in combating the deception of the world, and our sin natures.

It's like training in any other endeavor. If you don't train as a soldier, for example, then when it comes time for combat you will cut and run when the enemy attacks; not because you may not be brave, but because of the uncertainty of the outcome due to the lack of tactics to effectively combat the situation.

Spiritual warfare is like that. When we get attacked on every side our first reaction is to wonder why. When we get past that stage we then wonder, what do we do now? But when you've been trained and you are confident in that training and the leadership and your God who supports you then your ability to stand and fight is very high.

I was watching a special on the Army Rangers who fought together in World War II. These guys were actually trained to fight while they were surrounded. In fact, they were more confident in that situation because their tactics were well suited for that.

I'll never forget what this Ranger veteran of Normandy said in an interview. His unit got caught up in an ambush, and at the time they had hooked up with regular army troops. And the regular troops were in somewhat of a panic because they were now surrounded. But this guy being interviewed made the comment, "yeah, we're surrounded, but don't worry because we have them right where we want them."

To the untrained soldier, being surrounded was a bad thing. To the trained soldier it was a totally workable situation. In spiritual warfare if we are not trained, or in the process of being trained, in the word of God, then when we're surrounded we're more likely to not just cut and run but to become a casualty.

Paul reminds us that our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, ***you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*** (EPH 6:12-13)

Our Almighty God, our commander-in-chief, if you will, has given us all the spiritual weapons we need to fight a spiritual battle, and the support that goes along with that as the Holy Spirit empowers and protects us.

But unless we train in this theater of war in the truth of God's word then we will see the spiritual battle only with physical eyes and we won't recognize the enemy or his tactics as God has revealed them, and we will be deceived.

And this all goes back to what Christ said in making right judgments, not according to appearances, but according to righteous judgments, biblical judgments. When we hear people

who claim to be experts in any area of the bible or in the Christian walk we need to measure all that they teach according to God's word.

1JO 4:1 Dear friends, 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.

Have we trained ourselves to put up our spiritual antenna when people teach? Do we take what they teach and measure it against the whole counsel of God's word, or do we simply get caught up in the excitement of the moment and like infants just take the bottle without any regard for the potential kool-aid inside, not being concerned if it's laced with poison or not?

I don't mean to suggest that we are always paranoid or cynical when it comes to being taught the word, but being trained in the truth will automatically put you in the truth mode, and when falsehood comes up you will recognize it in most cases.

In the case of these Jews in our text, they did not have this spiritual training or the spiritual discernment to distinguish the truth from man's teachings.

JOH 7:24-27 "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." 25 At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? 26 Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? 27 But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

Notice the progression here. Verse 25 tells us that some of the people were asking, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?" And the reason for this comment is because they concluded that it wasn't wise for a marked man to be teaching in public in this way. After all, Jesus was surrounded by the enemy in one sense.

But Christ continues to speak the truth. The crowd then, in verse 26, makes another judgment. But their judgment, which had to do with the leaders of Israel, was also off base. "Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ?"

They come to this conclusion based entirely on appearances, not on the truth.

They concluded that because they knew that the authorities wanted to kill Jesus, and since they had not taken advantage of this opportunity to grab Jesus in public, that they must have changed their minds and were now on our Lord's side. Therefore some of the people concluded that the authorities regarded Jesus as the Christ, or Messiah.

This conclusion is based entirely on appearances. It's not unlike what is happening in Palestine today. As of yesterday, Arafat finally made a public announcement, from pressure from our government, so that he condemned the murder of Israeli's by Palestinian suicide bombers.

It appears that he has come around to our way of thinking and that now the peace process is back on track. What most news outlets have not told us is that that same night, after his condemnation of the suicide bombers, he actually commended, on Palestinian TV, those same suicide bombers who partook in the murder of Israeli's.

If we judge on appearance only and not take into consideration the substance of the truth then we make wrong decisions. This is why the Israeli's are not judging on appearances, but are judging by the actions of Arafat in the past and have concluded that for the protection of their land they will continue to root out the terrorists.

But back in our text, what I find fascinating is that some of the crowd have actually concluded that they are smarter than the leaders of Israel, which probably wouldn't have been too hard to accomplish, but it does show some arrogance on their part, in light of the fact that they still are not making right judgments.

JOH 7:26-27 Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? 27 But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

Here's what they're saying. The authorities have been duped if they think Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. In fact, He can't be the Christ because we know that when the Messiah comes, He'll appear on the scene mysteriously where no one will know where He came from.

Where they got this notion was not from the word of God. Evidently, they got it, either from their teachers or arrived at it on their own, based entirely on their own wisdom. How do we know this? Just read the word of God.

MIC 5:2 "But you, ***Bethlehem Ephrathah***, though you are small among the clans of Judah, ***out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel***, whose origins are from of old, from [eternity] ancient times."

In fact, the Jews knew exactly where to go to find out where the Christ would be born.

MAT 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, ***he asked them where the Christ was to be born.*** 5 ***"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"***

Somewhere along the line the Jews made the Messiah into a mystery person whose origins were unknown and whose nature was not truly human.

Remember that the Jews will not accept Jesus' claims because He appears to them to be a mere man and their perception of the Messiah is one who is supernatural and will destroy the enemies of Israel when He comes to power.

JOH 7:11-12 Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" 12 Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."

They only saw a man, but it also alluded them that the Messiah must be a man. What was Eve told by God in the Garden of Eden?

GEN 3:15 "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

The offspring of the woman or the seed of the woman must necessarily be a man. But the Scriptures clearly tell us that this man will be no mere man, but also the very God who takes on flesh as He will come into this world, thus making Him both God and man.

ISA 9:6-7 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given*, and the government will be on his shoulders. And *he will be called* Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. *He will reign on David's throne* and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and *forever*. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

If the Jews had made a right judgment they would never have said, "we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from."

Rather, they would have been looking for the Messiah as a man who demonstrated that He was also God as Jesus did with the signs and miracles He was performing, and with His teaching where He clearly stated that salvation was only through Him.

Do you see how dangerous it is to make a wrong biblical judgment? It can have eternal consequences. And it's just as true today. For the believer it can also have consequences in the way we grow and are used by Christ.

Don't make judgments based on appearances only, or based on what we feel is real, or based on what the world deems to be true. Make judgments based on the truth of who Christ is and what He has revealed for us in His word.

And then be doers of the word, and not hearers only who delude themselves. But be the kind of doers who seek God for grace and strength as He alone is able to make us stand. And we will stand in Him.

EPH 6:14-18 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.