



Making Right Judgements of Others

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“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement” (John 7:24). The moment we meet somebody for the first time we naturally judge him.

We instinctively classify him by noting his appearance, his words and general expression and behavior pattern.

Too often however, our judgement of people can be wrong. We can be deceived. We can mistake a good person as one that is evil, or we can mistake an evil person as one who is good.

Safe in Christ

Only Christ can help us make righteous judgements. Without Him we can only end up making wrong judgements and committing injustice and injury against our brother. Jesus Christ is not only the Savior. He is also our Judge. His redeeming work will be completed when He returns to judge the world. We confess the Nicene Creed: *“He will come again to judge both the living and the dead whose kingdom shall have no end.”*

Jesus will execute judgement when He comes again in glory. He will *“separate the sheep from the goats,”* the believers from the unbelievers, the righteous from the unrighteous. Final judgement means Jesus will reward the just, but He will consign the unjust to everlasting punishment. He will honor and give a place of glory to those who received Him as Savior. He will condemn to the flames of everlasting Hell those who refused to

believe Him.

Unlike man’s judgement, divine judgement will be executed with perfect justice. The Lord will not fail to reward every single righteous individual. He will not neglect to render due honor to those who truly are entitled to such honor.

On the other hand, He will not fail to mete out due punishment to those who deserve such punishment. It is unthinkable that Jesus Christ would make any exception and show favoritism to anybody. He is no respecter of persons. The Lord is neither partial nor biased in His judgement of men. He is a just and perfect Judge and exercises judgement with perfect justice.

Man’s judgement is not always just and perfect. Many very often judge others on the basis of amiability, attractiveness, intelligence, background. They are deemed acceptable when they put us at ease in terms of immediate comfort and convenience. It is a judgement made in the flesh. It is determined by self-seeking considerations.

Man’s judgement is imperfect because it is perverted by sin. *“No good thing dwells in our flesh.”* As a result, we can end up being unjust, unfair and harmful in our judgement of others. Very often the innocent and righteous are condemned and those who are deserving of condem-

nation are honored.

Man in his sinful humanity is frequently partial and biased in his judgement of others. He is a respecter of persons, and, as a result, he commits sin. God’s word tells us: *“If ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors”* (James 2:9).

The Gravity of Misjudging

To misjudge a person is a serious matter in the eyes of God. It entails grave consequences to the one who misjudges. He is answerable to the Lord for permitting himself to engage in unrighteous judgement. It is a serious offence to unjustly judge your fellow-man. It is a sin against love and a sin against justice. All we need to remember is that such an offence against justice put Jesus Christ to the Cross.

How can we love our brother and sister in Christ and still allow ourselves to hurt them by unjustly criticizing them? How can the love of our Divine Savior be in our hearts when we repeat rumors we have heard about our fellow-believer and show no interest in ascertaining his or her true character?

Judging flippantly and unjustly serves the purpose of Satan. It is his work to misrepresent and distort what is real and factual. He twists the truth and causes those who are righteous to be slandered as evil-doers. He prompts the sinner to cast calumny upon the righteous man.

In some cases there is no deliberate intent to harm. It can be simply a matter of insensitivity, indifference and neglect. This too often occurs in judging someone who happens to be

controversial in the public eye.

Let us consider the case of those who have the reputation of being controversial. They have their supporters and they have their critics. But far too many look upon anyone who is controversial as suspect. They are apt to say: "I keep away from him – he's controversial," or "I don't trust him. He's controversial in the Church."

There is usually a reluctance to discover why a person is controversial and to determine if he is in the right or the wrong. They claim they are not interested "in taking sides." They will not take the trouble to investigate the issues involved. They ordinarily accept the opinion of others about a controversial person. Sometimes they are afraid of offending those in positions of authority.

It is axiomatic for such people to believe that the opinions to those of high rank are true and righteous. They rely totally on external authority for making judgements. They will never listen to the voice of the inner authority of their conscience, that is, of the Holy Spirit, even if it means risking the chance of committing a travesty of justice.

The Classical Case of Pilate

The most dramatic case of such travesty of justice was the condemnation of Jesus by Pontius Pilate and the release of Barabbas. Though "*he knew that for envy they had delivered him*" (Matt. 27:18), yet he refused to acquit Him.

Pilate appealed to the crowds, saying: "*Why, what evil hath this man done?*" (Matt. 27:23) "*I have found no cause of death in him. I have found no fault in this man*" (Luke 23:4).

The Roman governor called Jesus "this just man." There was no

question in his mind that Jesus was innocent of the charges leveled against him. However, rather than exercise just judgement, as he should have done, "*he delivered him to be crucified.*"

Pilate preferred "*to content the people.*" Justice was not upper-most in his mind. He was more interested in keeping the peace rather than in rendering justice, although he was convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was guiltless: "*Behold, I have examined him before you, and have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him*" (Luke 23:14).

Pilate was convinced of Christ's innocence on the basis of his examination. His opinion of Jesus Christ was not the result of hearsay. He did not content himself with rumors and second hand reports. We have to give him credit for at least inquiring as to who Jesus was by interrogating Him himself.

What makes Pilate even more accountable to God and his sin even more unpardonable is the fact that he recognized the envy that motivated the accusers. Indeed, he made a verbal attempt to have Christ released. "*And from henceforth Pilate sought to release him.*" He even disputed with the Jews and argued in behalf of Jesus. Finally, however, he capitulated to their demands.

Pilate refused to pay the price of persisting in his own objective judgement of Jesus. He was afraid of arousing the Jews and creating turmoil and causing a problem even with Caesar, since the Jews cried out: "*If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar*" (John 19:12).

He felt threatened by these

words. The future of his position was in jeopardy. He was not about to risk losing his place of authority even in the case of justice.

Judging by Hearsay

This is typical of many people. They give lip service to the cause of justice. They will not accept the consequence for standing up for someone who happens to be maligned and condemned unjustly. They are not ready to accept the displeasure of interest groups. They shirk whatever decision would make them unpopular. Out of fear they are prepared, like Pilate, to deliver an innocent one over to unjust maltreatment, character assassination and even death.

Such people, many of whom claim to be Christians, put their self-interest over and above moral responsibility to justify a fellow-Christian who happens to be suffering from injustice. Rather than risk the chance of getting labeled, we prefer to sit back silently while a fellow-Christian is unjustly abused. Who wants to be guilty by association? Who in his right mind wants to support someone who is controversial at the risk of becoming himself controversial?

To be uncertain is not in itself sinful, but to stay in a state of ignorance and uncertainty is morally unjustifiable. To remain uncertain when all the while you are able to verify the facts is a sin. To be indifferent over the facts concerning a person who is controversial is a sin condemned by God. Willful ignorance of the facts is sinful when only a reasonable measure of effort is required to verify the facts about the man in question.

Still worse is to pass judgement on a controversial figure merely on the basis of hearsay or rumor. To

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form an opinion by what you have heard or what “they say about him” is morally irresponsible. Never go by what anybody says. After you hear the pros and cons about him, reserve judgement until you have investigated the facts yourself.

Certain people find special delight in being constantly on a witch-hunt. They find heresy under every stone and behind every tree. Like the Pharisees of old, they are zealous more over the “*form of religion,*” rather than “*the power thereof.*” They are the ones who delight in picking up and spreading rumors like: “Haven’t you heard? --- is a heretic. Keep away from him.”

Men of spiritual distinction and giants of faith have been unjustly condemned in the past by the highest authorities in the Church. No one man, regardless of rank, or even Church synod can be infallible.

Charisma of the Discerning of Spirits

In judging other people we can be safe only when we rely on divine grace. Otherwise, we will be mistaken in our judgements. We can be either deceived in our impression of others, or we can fall into the sin of doing injustice to them by failing to see the Holy Spirit in them and their activity.

Satan can appear as an “*angel of light*” and deceive us. On the other hand, Satan can deceive us by causing us to reject those who truly are born of God and are truly Christ’s own. The Christian is directed by Holy Scripture: “*Test the spirits.*”

It is for this reason, therefore, that the Church Fathers stressed the importance and usefulness of the spiritual charisma of the “discerning of spirits,” listed by the Apostle Paul among the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual gift of the discerning of spirits (*diakrisis pneumaton*) is made available to each believer for the purpose of judging people in the Church correctly and justly.

This charisma to which the desert Fathers attached much importance secures “righteous judgement” in the believer. It prevents him from imputing error unjustly to those who are genuine Christians.

This special grace helps us to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and the unclean spirit that is operating in a person with whom we come face to face. We can tell the difference. The Holy Spirit in us enables us to verify



which spirit is present in others.

Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit and live in purity have an inner witness in their own spirit as to what kind of spirit is present in those about them. Very often it is an immediate witness from within that testifies in this regard. You feel, as it were, spiritual vibrations coming from those who are in your presence. You perceive inwardly that they are not on the same spiritual wavelength you are on.

When you impute blame to the person who in reality is righteous and innocent, obviously you are not being led by the Holy Spirit. Misjudgment is the work of the adverse spirit, because Satan is the “*father of lies.*” The lying spirit and the spirit of deception cause us to mistake falsehood for truth and heresy for orthodoxy. They drive the

individual to make false judgements and erroneous evaluations of others, especially of those who happen to be controversial. It is the work of Satan to impel us to unjustly malign those who are genuine servants of Christ.

The Interference of Sin

The sins of pride and envy interfere with making a “*righteous judgement.*” They darken the mind and harden the heart. They cause us to be devoid of the full light of the Holy Spirit. In such a state of spiritual blindness we are incapable of acknowledging the true character of

the controversial individual. The impurity of the heart prevents us from “*judging the righteous judgement.*” Demonic oppression causes them to “*judge according to the appearance.*”

Such perverters of justice are “*respecters of persons.*” Immediate gain for self and expediency govern their judgements.

They pervert the justice out of selfish considerations. Their judgements are calculating.

Those who pervert justice do not have the “*mind of Christ.*” Christ is not in control of their thought world. He is not their personal security. They have not yet known Him and “*the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.*” They have not died to self. They see others about them as either a potential threat or as a potential support of their status in the Church.

A pure vision is possible only when Christ exercises lordship over our mind and heart. A “*spirit of a sound mind*” is a gift that comes with obedience to the Lord. He enables us to see the real and the true with the eyes of our soul.

Only the Spirit of the Lord that indwells in us can enable us to distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit. His word becomes the standard of judgement. He places that desire in our hearts to be faithful to His word.

When the word of God *“dwells richly in our hearts,”* we look at others as potential brothers and faithful faith-partners and not as a potential threat. **Christ gives us the perfect security we need.** He holds preeminence in our lives and in our thoughts. It is not public recognition that gives us a sense of security.

Those who are truly Spirit-filled see all things through the eyes of Christ. They do not have a mind of their own. They have *“the mind of Christ.”* The genuine child of Christ cleaves unto the Lord with an all-consuming love and becomes one Spirit with Him. He thinks His thoughts and makes judgements and evaluations that He would make.

In our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ we must seek His will from moment to moment. We must not only wait for a crisis to make us feel the need to turn to the Lord. The true believer constantly asks Jesus to live His life in him. He keeps saying: *“I am crucified with Christ; I live, yet not I any longer, but Christ liveth in me.”*

When we view others as Jesus would view them, then we naturally desire to *“judge the righteous judgement.”* We do not have to make some special effort or to struggle with the matter. In a very natural way we are just and right in our evaluation of others.

When Jesus lives His life in us to judge others out of self-seeking considerations. The standard of our judgement is the word of God – not man. Our ultimate authority is God – not man.

Remaining in obedience and submission to Christ’s lordship causes us to be sensitive and averse to committing any injustice to our fellow-man, least of all to our fellow-be-

liever. Rebellion, on the other hand, banishes every vestige of love we must have toward others. Love, however, casts out fear and distrust and feelings of insecurity in the presence of others.

One of the many evils that plague our Orthodox Church today is the lack of love and justice. Even in the ranks of the clergy mutual distrust and jealousy are rampant. And, again, I affirm the cause: personal insecurity and the lack of knowing Christ in an intimate relationship.



What is the solution to this predicament? A drastic and radical change that is possible only with re-evangelization and a clearer proclamation of repentance and reconversion to the living Christ. A revival of faith and a spiritual awakening: this is the mandate of Christ for His Orthodox Church in our day.

Message of St. John Chrysostom

A restoration of love and justice is possible only with a fresh preaching of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the only way of coping with the evils that afflict the Church today. Only the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit can replace injustice with justice, love and righteousness.

To use the words of St. John Chrysostom, the incredible is occur-

ring: the godly Orthodox are very often looked at by the Church as *“an enemy and an alien and not a body to which they belong.”* What a frightful situation! **That the Church can no longer recognize her true members!**

Is it any wonder that in the early Church many who desired a close communion with Christ were compelled to distant themselves from the urban churches and seek refuge in a remote monastery or hermitage.

To think that a similar condition existed as early as the fifth century! St. John Chrysostom lamented the state of affairs in the Church of his own day: *“These things one shall not see now these days, even in teachers. They are all gone and perished. And the cause is that love hath waxed cold, that sinners go unpunished, (1 Tim. 5:20). It is that the rulers are in a sickly state. For if the head be not sound, how can the rest of the body maintain its vigor?”*

“But mark how great is the present disorder. They, who were living virtuously, and who under any circumstance might have confidence, have taken possession of the tops of the mountains, and have escaped out of the world, separating themselves as from an enemy and an alien and not from a body to which they belong.” (Homily VI, Commentary on Ephesians).

Only a direct intervention of God can save the Church. And that divine intervention has already begun. It is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel: *“In these last days I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”*

May God give us the eyes to see His mighty move in this last hour. May He sensitize the hearts of His shepherds to recognize the sovereign stirring of His Holy Spirit in the lives of His people.

Yet, God will not push His renewal upon the Church. He is waiting for our repentance and a dramatic, collective expression of the admission of our desperate need for His supernatural intervention.