

Judging

John 7:14-24

¹⁴ About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and **began teaching**.

¹⁵ The Jews therefore marveled, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?"

¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.

¹⁷ If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"

²⁰ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?"

²¹ Jesus answered them, "I did one work, and you all marvel at it.

²² Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.

²³ If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?

²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

****Author's Note: This sermon only coincidentally overlaps recent events at Chick-fil-a. ☺ ****

A “Tolerant” Nation?

At the end of our passage today, Jesus makes this important statement, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24). We will look at what he is talking about later. It needs to be brought up here before the rest of the passage, because we live in a culture that can’t get past the idea of “judging” in the first place. Frankly, it has absolutely no idea what this even means. Since that is the case, then it doesn’t do any good to explain what Jesus means about making a right judgment. First, we have to understand our culture’s view and of what it means to judge someone. We have to understand this, because sadly, a large percentage of Christians are now buying into it. Then we have to understand the biblical counterpart and how opposed to the cultural view it is. Only then will “making a right judgment” even make sense.

This is a tricky business. As we will see, Jesus is basically commanding the people he is talking with to judge him. But our culture has come to believe that you must not “judge”

anyone. At least, that is what they *say* they believe. If only I had a nickel for every time I've heard someone say, “Don't judge me/us.” That is itself a judgment.

Instead of “judging” people (whatever that means), we are supposed to be tolerant of them. This is the flip-side of judging. But this idea of “tolerance” is really where our culture has fallen into deep, murky, dangerous water.¹ Tolerance has become the mantra of Western culture. But what do they mean by “tolerance?” I'll tell you, it isn't what we used to mean. D. A. Carson has a book titled *The Intolerance of Tolerance*. He explains what has happened by noting a shift between what he calls the “old tolerance” and the “new tolerance.”²

We go to the dictionaries to find the meanings of words. “Tolerate” is a verb. In the way we are thinking about it, the

¹ D. A. Carson writes, “The sad reality is that this new, contemporary tolerance is intrinsically intolerant. It is blind to its own shortcomings because it erroneously thinks it holds the moral high ground; it cannot be questioned because it has become part of the West's plausibility structure. Worse, this new tolerance is socially dangerous and is certainly intellectually debilitating. Even the good that it wishes to achieve is better accomplished in other ways. Most of the rest of this chapter is devoted to unpacking and defending this thesis.” D. A. Carson. *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Kindle Locations 41-44). Kindle Edition.

² Another good resource: J. Budziszewski, *True Tolerance: Liberalism and the Necessity of Judgment* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000).

word means “to allow to exist or to be done or practiced without authoritative interference or molestation.” This is the idea the Founders had in mind with the First Amendment. The First Amendment says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” The idea is that the government must put up with (“tolerate”) religious freedom and expressions because this freedom is a God given right, even if a person or religion happens to be wrong. And yes, under the old tolerance, you could be wrong. They saw the dangers of intolerance regarding religion as too great a sacrifice to make in a free society. Putting up with or bearing with another person **without repugnance** is what Carson means by the “old tolerance.” God himself is tolerant in this respect (**Rom 2:4**),³ as Jesus’ own actions in our passage will demonstrate and thus it is a virtue to hold.

³ The word translated as “tolerant” by the NIV is *anochē*. It means “to receive, take up, bear and endure” and also “to restrain oneself.” (Kittle, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel,

The old tolerance was based in a worldview that there is such a thing as objective right and wrong. So, it didn't "tolerate" everything, nor did it have to. The first amendment was never meant to be absolute. If a religion says "we must kill all infidels," the First Amendment doesn't give those who practice that religion the right to practice that part of it. In this circumstance, it isn't intolerant for the government to bear with a religion that wants to destroy it, because tolerance doesn't trump morality. To tolerate those parts of a religion would be to commit a form of self-cannibalism, to eat yourself alive until there is nothing left.

Of course, the old tolerance was never adhered to perfectly, which is why, for example, racism against people of other colors was rampant under the old tolerance. The problem wasn't the old tolerance, however. **The problem was sin.** This kind of bigotry was never tolerance, even under the old definition, because it didn't bear with others *without repugnance*.

But something has happened. Somewhere along the line, our culture no longer understood how to define sin correctly (if at all), and partially in response to the sins of racism and other real intolerances rooted in objective morality (it is not a sin to be a different race), our culture shifted its attitude away from the old tolerance to new tolerance (which I will start to capitalize). The whole point of multiculturalism, for example, is to reprogram the culture to accept this “New Tolerance.” In fact, “acceptance” is the key of New Tolerance. For New Tolerance radically shifts our definition of “tolerate” from bearing with to accepting and approving. This is no small shift.

If you are lost or find this irrelevant, “bear with me,” because I promise you that this is at the heart of our passage today and at the cultural attitudes that effect almost everything we do as a society, from what we judge to be good and bad, to how we implement policy, to what we report as “news,” to who businesses must hire, to the way they are allowed to operate, to the things pastors are allowed to say in their own churches, to

the things you are allowed to do in your own house with your children or in Bible studies. In my opinion, **this single attitude shift** is perhaps **the most dangerous and damaging thing** that has ever hit Western civilization, because it seeks to turn everything on its head.

What is this “New Tolerance?” In older dictionaries, the noun “tolerance” was similar to the verb “tolerate.” It meant, “a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward opinions and practices that differ from one’s own.” But in newer definitions, such as Microsoft’s digital encyclopedia *Encarta*, the term now means, “**ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENT VIEWS** the accepting of the differing views of other people, e.g., in religious or political matters, and fairness toward the people who hold these different views.”⁴

Listen to the shift. It is subtle but deadly. It is the *acceptance* of different views vs. *accepting* different views. As Carson explains, “**To accept that a different or opposing position exists and deserves the right to exist is one thing; to**

⁴ D. A. Carson. *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Kindle Locations 51-52). Kindle Edition.

accept the position itself means that one is no longer opposing it. The new tolerance suggests that actually accepting another's position means believing that position to be true, or at least as true as your own. We move from allowing the free expression of contrary opinions to the acceptance of all opinions; we leap from permitting the articulation of beliefs and claims with which we do not agree to asserting that all beliefs and claims are equally valid. Thus we slide from the old tolerance to the new.”⁵

Let me give an example. Recent events have sparked a national controversy over homosexual marriage, and Chick-fil-a is the most recent epicenter of the cultural earthquake. Chick-fil-a's owner, who by the way says there is no such thing as a Christian business, because Jesus died for individuals not corporations, nevertheless took a biblical stand when asked about this cultural hot-potato. For his stance, he was immediately vilified and demonized by those who disagree

⁵ Ibid., location 53-57.

with him. We all know the protests and support that has followed Chick-fil-a in the aftermath.

Now then, my wife has a friend on Facebook who claims to be an Evangelical Christian. She posted this week the following words about a blog written by an out-of-the-closest gay person who wrote about why we must stand up to Chick-fil-a. “I truly feel that in 20 years my kids will look back on all this debate and wonder why it was ever even an issue, just as we look back on segregation in the 60's with shock & horror. This is the beauty of America, we are all different & that is our right. Live & let live!!” What was the heart of this other person’s article? “Teenagers who grow up gay are **four times more likely** to take their own lives. No, that has nothing to do with our sexuality on its own -- suicide rates **are lower** where gay kids are *accepted*” [italics and green mine, pink his]. This is all about **acceptance and approval of our choices**. This is the new tolerance in a nutshell, and if you don’t accept and approve of what I do and who I am, then you are responsible if I kill myself, because your hate drove me to it. Even “hate”

takes on a new definition. Whereas it used to mean “extreme hostility towards,” now it means “you disagree with me and won’t accept my views as true.”

Under the old tolerance, you could still hold your opinion and even disagree with another person. You didn’t have to approve of what they did, you had to bear with them without repugnance. But under the New Tolerance, you are not allowed to “judge” someone else’s opinion or their actions. In fact, your opinion has to accept their opinion and their actions as true and good. What happens if you don’t? Then you are “intolerant.”⁶ In reality, you aren’t being intolerant at all (unless you don’t believe they have a right to hold an opinion). But they changed the definition of the word on Wikipedia while you were asleep. They changed the rules of the game and didn’t tell you about them.

This “New Tolerance” is nothing but the wolf of relativism in sheep’s clothing. What makes it so despicable is that [it is by](#)

⁶ Which, as Carson puts it is no longer “a refusal to allow contrary opinions to say their piece in public, but ... any questioning or contradicting the view that all opinions are equal in value, that all worldviews have equal worth, that all stances are equally valid. To question such postmodern axioms is by definition intolerant. For such questioning there is no tolerance whatsoever, for it is classed as intolerance and must therefore be condemned. It has become the supreme vice.”

definition hypocritical and judgmental (not to mention anti-Christian). For, whenever the New Tolerance claims that someone else is intolerant, they are themselves intolerant and non-accepting of those they disagree with. They are “judging” you. Thus, it becomes **the ultimate double standard**. You must accept whatever I say you must accept, but I don’t have to accept anything that I don’t want to because you are intolerant. Never mind that I’m intolerant of you; I have a right to be, because I make up the rules of the game and I say so. The New Tolerance is like the ultimate bully on the school playground.

What Does the Bible Say?

At this point, we should ask what the Bible says about this tolerance and judgmentalism? It is common to hear from people of the New Tolerance chirping Jesus’ famous teaching, **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matt 7:1)**. In other words, you don’t have a right to tell me that I’m wrong. This is the bully’s way of taking your lunch money. Carson again

writes, “The biblical illiterate claim that this frowns on all attempts at moral discernment (though the verse occurs in the Sermon on the Mount, which abounds in moral distinctions) and prohibits making any moral judgments about others paying no attention either to the immediate context or to the dominant emphases in Jesus’ life.”⁷

The New Tolerance calls this being “open-minded.” G. K. Chesterton once said, “The purpose of an open mind is the same as that of an open mouth - to close it again on something solid.” Someone else, commenting on this added, “If ‘open mindedness’ is being defined as a refusal to make judgements about religious truth and sexual ethics (for instance) then we are prone to contracting a form of intellectual lockjaw.”⁸ Of maybe Steve Taylor put it more succinctly, “You’re so open-minded that your brain leaked out.”⁹ We do want to be open-minded as far as being fair to different arguments and opinions others have, even from different religions. But we don’t have

⁷ Ibid., 1149-43.

⁸ Richard Cunningham, “Unity in Diversity,” *The Guardian*, Monday 27 November 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2006/nov/28/highereducation.students>

⁹ Steve Taylor from the song “Whatcha Gonna Do When Your Number’s Up.”

to give up objective truth or our own convictions in order to do this. In fact, it is only when you stand on the solid ground that you are able to look out and assess the world around you. If you are sinking into quicksand because you refuse to believe in anything, you very quickly won't be able to assess anything but yourself.

It is absurd to think that Jesus is saying “**don't ever make a moral or religious judgment about anything.**” How many times does Jesus himself tell people about hell or call the religious leaders “**white washed tombs**” or “**a brood of vipers?**” Jesus wasn't exactly the marquee of non-judgmentalism. So what is going on?

Jesus is referring to a **two-faced judgmentalism** that refuses to see its own hypocrisy. As Paul says, it is a **judging of others not realizing that you yourself do the very same thing (Romans 2:1)**. As a matter of fact, it is those who are judging you when they say you shouldn't judge them that are the example *par excellence* of what both Paul and Jesus are talking about. It is a need to see the speck in your brother's eye without realizing

that you have a log in your own eye. You simply can't go around yelling at people, "Don't judge me," because that it itself an act of judging them. You are telling them that they have no right to judge you. That itself is a judgment.

Make a Right Judgment

It was important to go through this exercise so that we don't import our own views of judging and tolerance into what Jesus says. If we do that, we will utterly destroy his teaching. As we come now to our own passage, we will quickly begin to see how relevant this whole discussion is to Jesus' conclusion to "make a right judgment." The entire episode strikes at the heart of our own culture's refusal to make moral and religious judgments (or to at least let anyone other than themselves do that).

Jesus is back in Jerusalem. It is six months before he will be put to death. The time is [the Feast of Tabernacles](#). During the middle of the feast he goes back to the temple, the place where Jesus was last at in ch. 5 when he found the man he had

healed and commanded him “sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you” (John 5:14). This time, rather than healing, we find him teaching (7:14).

They ask, “How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied” (7:15)? John is interested in the reaction of the people to Christ’s teaching, because they have not yet been able to figure out who Jesus is. That doesn’t mean they don’t have opinions about him. In chapter 7, there are several opinions that people have (“he is a good man” or “he is leading the people astray” (7:12) or in our own passage, “You have a demon!” (7:20). Up to this point, no one has made a proper judgment about him. In fact, their judgments are becoming increasingly perverse. Jesus is more than a good man. He most certainly is not leading the people astray. And the idea that he has a demon is completely absurd. But why were they making such judgments about him?

The reason Jesus gives is that it is due to their own sin. This is the point of John recording that the people “marveled” (*thaumadzō*) when he taught (7:15). There is a curious use of

this Greek word in the LXX. **Leviticus 19:15** says, “You shall not act unjustly in judgment: you shall not accept the person of the poor, nor admire (*thaumadzō*) the person of the mighty; with justice you shall judge your neighbor.” Clearly, the people are marveling at Jesus in a way that is not good, for they are judging him by outward appearances. It is a form of favoritism or discrimination, depending upon the person.

The ESV tells you the context of this Levitical law. “You shall do not injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but *in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor*” (**Lev 19:15**). The context is making a judgment of someone who has **committed a crime**. This is exactly what the kind of outward judging of the Jews would eventually lead them to do: Charge Jesus with a crime (i.e. blasphemy, breaking the Sabbath, or whatever). The kind of judging that they were engaging in was improper because they had no right to make this kind of judgment. First of all, they were **not policemen** and second of all, **Jesus was not on trial**. They have no legal authority here. But in their hearts, they act as if they

have authority to judge him like this. But this personal suspicious judgmentalism is deeply rooted in their own sinful hypocrisy. In one sense, it is rooted in the very same attitudes that pervade our own supposedly “tolerant” society today. And people continue to do this very same thing as it regards Christ and Christianity today. Jesus addresses this near the end of our passage.

To see it, let’s look here at **John 7:19-23**. Jesus says, “**Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law.**” He then adds, “**Why do you seek to kill me?**” That the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus was made abundantly clear in **John 7:1**. It is part of the reason he came privately to Jerusalem and the Feast of Tabernacles. Let’s look at this in two phases.

First, Jesus talks about Moses and the law and then charges everyone there with not keeping the law themselves. Jesus reaffirms the OT teaching of **total depravity**. “**There is no one who does good, no not one**” (**Psalms 14:3**; see **Mark 10:18**); “**Every thought of our heart is only evil all the time**” (**Gen 6:5; 8:21**); and so on. Jesus is also **attacking the self-**

righteousness of the teachers of the law, who had this opinion of themselves that they were not, in fact, totally depraved. They were so self-righteous that they stood on the Temple mount and prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers” etc. (Luke 18:11). They were also so entirely self-deceived that they actually told Jesus that they have kept the entire law since their youth (Luke 18:21; see Paul’s pre-conversion assessment of himself in Php 3:6). So when Jesus tells them that they have not kept the law, he is attacking their pride, or to put it another way, he is *judging* them.

The second thing Jesus does is reveal their hidden plot to kill him. And what is the result of this? It causes the crowds to become judgment of Jesus, and not in a good way, “The crowd answered, ‘You have a demon!’” (John 7:20). Ah, the kindness, tolerance, and non-judgmentalism of sinless people. These people remind me so much of the New Tolerance crowd in our own day by their secretive hypocrisy. Their nerve increases now as they deny their true intentions by asking him,

“Who is seeking to kill you?” This is not an honest question, at least not from all of them. The Pharisees know perfectly well who is seeking to kill Jesus: They are. The crowds also know that the Rulers are seeking to kill someone, for they admit as much in vs. 25, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill?” (undoubtedly, many in vs. 20 did not know it was Jesus they were after).

Jesus now reveals something extremely important relating to our whole discussion on the New Tolerance. Jesus notes that the judgmentalism they are engaging in is being driven by their own improper outward acts. Don't let anyone fool you, because it is identical to this day. He starts off saying, “I did one work, and you all marvel at it,” sort of like marveling at the rich man in the law in Leviticus or perhaps at the mad man foaming at the mouth because of a demon. Either way, it is not impartial or good, but rooted in its own moral perversion that seeks to continue in its way, ensuring that it does by demonizing the only person that has even actually lived in perfect obedience to the law of God.

Jesus continues by bringing up the “work” he has in mind. Here he is particularly interested in the Jewish leadership. “Moses gave you circumcision (John adds his own comment here for his reader’s understanding, “not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers”), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath” (John 7:22). Stop here and consider why they would circumcise on the Sabbath. Read absolutely, you would have a contradiction between two laws, if a baby boy was born on the Sabbath. On one hand, you are not to work on the Sabbath, and circumcision could easily have been designated as “work” if they wanted to really be consistent. But another law said you must circumcise a baby on the eighth day. What if the eighth day is the Sabbath? Which law do you break?

You see, the Rabbis knew perfectly well that working on the Sabbath was not an absolute commandment, which is why they allowed circumcision on the Sabbath even though it was work (that’s Jesus’ point—it *is* work). But these Pharisees have a double standard, and the only reason they have it is because they hate what Jesus is doing and saying and threatening.

Jesus uses this example to ask, “Are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well?” (John 7:23). (He is referring back to the man he healed and told not to sin again, see above). Jesus is not saying that either himself and the Pharisees *were* sinning by breaking the Sabbath, for he also knew that the Sabbath was not an absolute commandment. In fact, neither one is breaking the Sabbath, because the intent is to keep God’s law. His point is, they make one exception but not another, even though their exception takes place regularly and his only happened once, and also the exception they will not allow him is much greater than the exception they allow for themselves. He is pointing out, yet again, their gross hypocrisy.

Let’s look one last time at their hypocrisy in our passage. First, they claim to keep the whole law, but yet do not (vs. 19). Second, they say he has a demon, knowing full well he does not (20a). Third, they lie about wanting to kill him (20b). Fourth, they refuse him the greater exception on the Sabbath that they are perfectly willing to give to themselves (23). All of

this leads our Lord to tell them, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (24) or as one translation puts it, “Stop judging by surface appearances, and judge the right way” (CJB). In other words, “Knock it off you hypocrites.” “Take the plank out of your own eye.”

The point is, it is their own moral corruption and sin that is the cause of them not being able to make a correct judgment. Their incorrect judgment is the root of their intolerance towards him. This is at the heart of the New Tolerance in our own day. At the root is not a desire to do what is right, such as have people of different colors be treated as equal humans. That was the Old Tolerance, and it has to go. Today, it is the desire to have immorality be accepted, as the NBC program coming out this fall puts it about as in your face as possible: “The New Normal.” They want to redefine morality, force others to approve of it, and demonize them if they don’t by calling them intolerant as they have redefined the word. Then they call it normal, and the next generation doesn’t know any different. Can you see how this is destroying

the fabric of a civilization? But there is nothing new under the sun, and our passage today proves it.

So how does a person make a “right judgment?” Jesus has told them earlier, and now we will return to those verses. We will now go back to **John 7:16-18**. To make a right judgment, you have to be obedient to God. This is fascinating. He tells them something that seems exactly backwards. “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (**vs. 17**).

Jesus is doing something here he has done before. He has told the people that he comes from the Father. They are asking him how he got such great learning, since he wasn’t trained as a Rabbi. Jesus tells them that he gets his teaching from “the one who sent [him]” (**16**). This is the heavenly Father. He is taught by the heavenly Father. Are people supposed to just accept that, or does he offer them proof? Lots of proof is offered in the Scripture, but the proof he gives them here comes from inside of them. But it isn’t subjective. It is

the result of a changed life, something that can only happen by an objective work of God.

The proof is their own obedience to the Law of God. But it is not works-righteousness he is getting at here, we have already dealt with that with total depravity. Rather, **the desire** to do God's will (see **Ps 40:8**) **is prior** to actually doing God's will. And where does this desire come from? **It comes from faith!** As Carson says in his commentary on John, upon this **“faith commitment God then fills the seeker's horizon ... this moral choice, is properly basic, and renders impossible any attitude that sets us up as judges of God's ways.”**¹⁰ People always seem to want to judge God, but you cannot assess him and his ways from the outside as if you are some neutral observer able to make a decision for him, because sin clouds all of your reason. Rather, you must be on the inside, and it is God's pleasure to create for himself people who will be on that inside as he changes their hearts through the proclamation of words like these. Upon that change of heart, a person exercises

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 312.

faith, and when they exercise faith, God allows them to experience the truth of Christ and to see that truth because they see that Christ is indeed the ultimate manifestation of God and his holiness to the world.

This is what Jesus is getting at in the last verse we have not looked at today. “The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood” (vs. 18). Christ never sinned, never taught a sinful thing, never led people into sin. He only obeyed his Father, revealed the truth of the Word from the Father, and did everything the Father sent him to do. He is not a witness unto himself. He is not talking about himself. He is not self-seeking as the people are. He is the man of truth who never sought honor for himself. He is honoring another, the Heavenly Father. He is not trying to persuade others, and he is not seeking anyone’s approval. He is quite unlike you and I. Because of these things and more, he can be trusted.

Jesus tells you to make a right judgment about him. It is a command. You can't afford not to. The consequences are too great. If you are looking for the approval of others, if you are looking to prop yourself up in the eyes of the world, if you are seeking the New Tolerance thus acting in hypocrisy about your own sin, you will not be able to make a right judgment.

Therefore, before anything else, you must bow your head in prayer of confession to Christ and you must ask him to forgive you and tell him your trust in him despite the way your twisted mind makes things out to be in this crazy, messed up world.

Know that God's word does not return void and that he loves to save sinners like you and I. Know that his promises are certain. Know that Christ is not a charlatan. Come to know by fearing God first rather than men. Seek his approval and you will learn true tolerance, biblical tolerance, tolerance which is able to maintain its own opinion while lovingly allowing others to hold theirs, tolerance that is able to have a rational discussion with people that disagree, just as Jesus did her, tolerance that trusts in God to perform mighty works knowing

that we don't have to, and tolerance that doesn't have to accept that all opinions are equally valid, true, or good. Then pray that this message will get out to the broader world and that God might use you to be a part of it for his glory and honor.