DO NOT JUDGE BY MERE APPEARANCES

John 7:24
Stop judging by mere appearances*, but* ***INSTEAD JUDGE CORRECTLY****.” **NIV***

One of the most quoted statements in Christianity is: “Do Not Judge.”

But what if Jesus Christ was not forbidding discernment altogether?

What if the real issue was not whether we judge, but HOW we judge?

Because according to Scripture, believers are not called to be spiritually blind, naïve, or incapable of discernment. Rather, we are warned not to judge by mere appearances, human sentiment, social consensus, or natural perception.

Instead, we are called to judge correctly (**John 7:24**).

But how can human beings, whose perception is often flawed, discern rightly?

That is where the Holy Spirit comes in, and that's what this study is all about.

RECAP

This study is the follow-up to the article "***Do Not Judge***", which was an exposition of **Matthew 7:1-5**.

In the prequel, we established that Jesus Christ wasn't warning His followers not to judge so as to avoid being judged, as most people would assume from the first verse (**Matt 7:1**). But instead He was showing that one needed to be in right-standing first before they can administer justice (**Matt 7:3-5**).

This is a pattern all through Scripture that whoever judges, or is used as an instrument

of judgment, is going to be judged by that same measure if they are found wanting (**{**Deut 9:4-6**,** Lev 18:24-28**, [**2 Kings 17:7-9**,** 12-15**,** 17-20**], [**2 Kings 21:2**,** 6**,** *9-16*, 23:26**,** 24:1-4**,** Jer 15:4**]},** ***Rom 2:1-3***).

So Jesus Christ was giving this warning in **Matthew 7:1-5** to help people get right, so that after they serve as judges or instruments of God's judgment, they would not be liable to judgment (**1 Cor 9:27**, **11:31-32**, **1 Peter 4:17-18**).

By the way, serving as judges is part of our priestly ordination (**[****1 Peter 2:5**,** 9**,** Rev 5:9-10****], [**Lev 10:10-11**,** Malachi 2:7**,** 2 Chron 15:3**,** Deut 17:8-13**,** ****Ezek 44:23-24****]**).

From that study we learnt that when a person is made righteous through Jesus Christ, they receive the Holy Spirit (**2 Cor 5:21**,** John 7:37-39**)**;** then they are in a position to make judgment on all things without fear of being judged (**1 Cor 2:15**, {1 John 4:16-18** *— Love is the fulfillment of righteousness* ***[Matt 22:37-40**,** Rom 13:8-***

***10]**, hence the one who truly loves can judge from that righteous position without fear of being judged**}**).

That said, one must judge in righteousness and love.

So what the previous study and Scripture firmly established was not that we should refrain from judging, but rather that we should judge everything and discern between good and evil (**1 Cor 2:15**, **1 Thess 5:21-22**, **Heb 5:14**).

And even as we're going to be God's effective tools in judging others, both in the natural and spiritual realm (***1 Cor 14:24-25***, **Eph 6:12**, ***3:10-11***), we must submit ourselves to judgment, both internal (i.e. personal evaluation, and that of the Church), and God's evaluation (***1 Cor 14:19***, **[Matt 18:17-20**, **Gal 2:2]**, ****2 Cor 13:5****, *****Ps 139:23-24*****, **1 Peter 4:17-18**).

We're going to pick it up from there in this study. Here we'll get to understand HOW we're expected to carry out judgment, and what this responsibility is all about.

*(It would be really helpful if you study especially the highlighted Passages in asterisk **. They give depth and meaning to this post)*

ALL JUDGMENT BELONGS TO GOD

It is important to begin by recognizing that we are not free agents judging however we please. All judgment belongs to God; we are merely the agents and instruments through which He manifests it on Earth (**Deut 1:17, Matt 6:10, 7:21**).

For instance, God can use you, via the Spirit of prophecy (**Rev 19:10**), to pass judgment on people, thus revealing hidden things and convicting them to REPENT (**1 Cor 14:24-25**); but this kind of judgment does not originate from you, because prophecy stems from the Holy Spirit (**2 Peter 1:21**).

And on the spiritual side, God can use you to judge spiritual entities, just as He used Moses to judge the gods of Egypt (**Ex 12:12**); but again this is something that He

must lead you to do otherwise, the consequences can be disastrous.

People who judge solely based on instinct or logic often bite off more than they can chew, especially when they pass judgments on spiritual entities, when God did not send them (**Acts 19:13-16**, ****2 Peter 2:10-12****, **Jude 1:8-10**).

So it is not in your place to come up with any judgment concerning a person, place, or even spiritual entities.

We are not free agents judging however we please.

Our responsibility is to discern the verdict of God by the Holy Spirit and follow that.

THE WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE VS GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

In so many ways, a lot of things in the world are upside down relative to the perspective of God as revealed by Scripture. It is for this reason that we are taught not to solely rely on our senses but put our trust in God (**Prov 3:5-7**).

The definitions of things such as marriage, morality, etc. by cultures and societies all over the world have been fluid and subject to change from generation to generation; but God does NOT change like that (**Num 23:19**, **1 Sam 15:29**, **Malachi 3:6**, **James 1:17**), nor does His Word, which endures forever (**Isaiah 40:8**, **1 Peter 1:23-25**).

Hence if we go by the flow of humanity, we are at some point going to be at odds with God (**1 John 2:15-17**, **James 4:4**). It is for this reason that God encourages us to be mindful of the pitfalls of wrongful perception, and He redirects our focus back to Him.

Isaiah 5:20
Woe to those who call evil good and good evil*, who put darkness for light and light for darkness,* ***who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter****.* ***NIV***

Isaiah 8:12-13
*"**Do NOT call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy**; do NOT fear what they fear, and do NOT dread it. [13] **The Lord Almighty is the ONE you are to REGARD AS HOLY, HE IS THE ONE YOU ARE TO FEAR**, He is the One you are to dread.* ***NIV***

THE FEAR OF THE LORD AND JUDGMENT

Naturally, I would have used this opportunity to deeply discuss "the fear of the Lord," but that would be a rather lengthy detour. However, there is something very important worth highlighting.

Isaiah 8:13 above clearly shows that we are to "fear the Lord". What I find remarkable is that of all the dimensions of the Holy Spirit that were bestowed on Jesus Christ, His "delight" was in the "fear of the Lord" (**Isaiah 11:3**). And then immediately the Passage goes on to speak of how He would execute judgment (**Isaiah 11:4-5**).

We'll discuss this further in the next section. Anyway, I believe this shows a strong connection between judgment and the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord isn't just the access point to wisdom, but it is the means by which one shuns evil (**Ps 111:10**, **Job 28:27-28**, **Prov 16:6**, **14:16**). The primary responsibility of one who judges is to discern between good and evil, and then to uphold the good, and resist that which is evil. The fear of the Lord caters to both of these requirements (***Ps 34:9-22***, **Prov 10:27**, **14:26-27**, **22:4**, ***Isaiah 33:6***).

And if you're wondering whether “the fear of the Lord” is just an Old Testament concept, then take a moment to study the following, and also note that the fear of the Lord is very compatible with the love of God (**Psalms 33:18**, **103:10-13**, **2 Cor 5:11&14**):

Luke 12:4-5, **Heb 10:26-31**, **11:7**, **1 Cor 10:20-*22***, ***Acts 9:31***, **1 Peter 1:17**, **2:17**, **Jude 1:22-23**, **Rev 14:6-7...**

The fear of the Lord isn't a bad thing. It helps maintain a consciousness of God in everything one does, knowing fully well that NOTHING escapes His attention (**Prov 24:11-12**, **Heb 4:12-13**).

This consciousness is absolutely necessary for anyone who serves as a judge, because it is a reminder that they are serving on behalf of God, and His will supersedes theirs (****2 Chron 19:6-7****).

This is the consciousness that Jesus Christ embraced while on earth. He came to fulfill the will of the One Who sent Him, hence He resolved to do only that which pleased the Father (**John 5:30**).

We are in that same position here on earth. We are in service to Jesus Christ, Who sent us (**John 20:21**). Our goal is not to please people, or ourselves, but rather to please Jesus Christ (**2 Cor 5:9**, **15**, **2 Tim 2:3-4**, ***Gal 1:10***).

Hence our judgments must not originate from self, but rather the Holy Spirit, Who is the only effective means for us to please the

Father and Son (**John 16:13-14**, ***Rom 8:7-9***, **[Matt 3:17**, **Gal 4:6**, **John 15:5]**).

JESUS CHRIST JUDGED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus Christ was destined to be Judge, and to usher in righteousness and justice (*****Isaiah 42:1-4*****, **John 5:22**).

Nevertheless, since He was going to enter our framework to be made fully Man (**Phil 2:7-8**, **Heb 2:14**, ***17***), He could not rely on human senses to discharge His judicial responsibilities.

It was for this reason that He was FULLY endowed with the Holy Spirit (**Matt 3:16-17**, **John 3:34**); and everything He did was channeled to Him by the Father through the Holy Spirit (**[John 8:28-29**, **7:16-17]**, ***6:63***).

The free book "***Early Steps in Christianity***", and some other posts (links at

the end), adequately address the fact that Jesus Christ, while on earth, was simultaneously fully Man and fully God. I'll address this briefly here, but I'd have to refer you to those resources for further study.

Jesus Christ voluntarily laid aside the privileges and glory of His Divine status to enter the world fully as Man (**Phil 2:7-8**, **John 17:4-5**).

And He had to be fully Man, otherwise it would have been impossible for Him to be tempted. This would have prevented Him from gaining the necessary experience to adequately mediate for us when we're tempted (**James 1:13**, **Heb 4:15**, **2:18**).

So He was fully Man, but at the same time, He was baptized with the Holy Spirit, Who remained fully Divine (**2 Cor 3:17**, **John 4:24**, **Phil 3:3** **NKJV** — *these proving that the Holy Spirit is One with God; and also showing that it is by the Spirit that we can serve God* **Acts 17:24-25**, **Rom 8:7-8**; *hence, in the same way Jesus Christ rendered His service to God by the Holy*

Spirit and not the flesh – **Heb 9:14, 10:29**).

I'll have to leave it at this and refer you to those other materials so that we don't get off track.

The point here is that Jesus Christ did not depend on His Human faculties to execute His assignments on earth, He depended on the Holy Spirit (**John 8:15-16, 1 John 3:24** — *to show that the Father was with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit*).

And as Christians, which literally means "followers of Christ", we are to follow His example (**Matt 16:24, John 13:15, 1 Cor 11:1**).

The example He set for judging was that one needed to be first filled with the Holy Spirit. And then when judging, one must not just depend on one's physical senses. I believe the Passage below illustrates this (read also **Isaiah 42:1-4**).

Isaiah 11:1-5

[1] A Shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. [2] ***THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD WILL REST ON HIM****— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge* ***AND FEAR OF THE LORD****— [3] and* ***HE WILL DELIGHT IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD****.* ***He will NOT judge by what He SEES with his eyes, or decide by what He HEARS with his ears****; [4]* ***BUT WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS HE WILL JUDGE*** *the needy,* ***WITH JUSTICE HE WILL GIVE DECISIONS*** *for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of His Mouth; with the breath of His Lips He will slay the wicked. [5]* ***Righteousness will be His belt and Faithfulness the sash around His Waist****.* ***NIV***

The prophecy above shows that first of all Jesus Christ would be fully endowed by the Holy Spirit. And then secondly, He would not depend on human senses to pass judgment.

It ought to be the same with us. We need the Holy Spirit so that we can connect to the Divine, and gain the perspective of God (**2 Peter 1:3-4**, **John 3:5-6**, **1 Cor 2:11-12**). And then in submission to the Holy Spirit (**Rom 8:14**, **Gal 5:24-25**), we are then able to judge all things (**1 Cor 2:15**).

Just to be clear, “judge all things,” does not mean believers become infallible or omniscient and at liberty to do as they please without consequence (**Gal 5:1, 13, 16-18**). But rather that spiritual discernment becomes possible through the Holy Spirit. And then it is by this discernment that we evaluate or judge everything.

The issue is not whether Christians judge.

The issue is whether we judge by the Spirit of God, or merely by human perception.

In other words, you're not at liberty to judge as you please, instead all judgment must be carried out by the revelation that the Holy Spirit gives.

WE MUST JUDGE THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

This is the anchor point of this study. We are not at liberty to judge however we choose or

feel. Rather, we are called to administer the judgments of God (**Ps 149:6-9 NKJV**). And this is only possible by the wisdom and insights that the Holy Spirit gives (**1 Cor 2:10-12, [2 Chron 19:6-7, Deut 1:17]**).

When Moses was burdened with the task of judging all Israel alone (**Ex 18:13-18, Num 11:10-14**), God addressed the issue by depositing the Holy Spirit on the 70 elders so that they could assist Moses in the administrative task of Israel (**Num 11:16-17, 24-29**).

This illustrates the fact that God did not leave the administration of His justice system to human sentiments, but rather He sent His Spirit to guide the judges on what was right (**Ps 143:10, Isaiah 11:2, Prov 8:12-17**).

They were not alone when passing verdicts, because God was with them; and they were to turn people from sin and teach them the laws of God (**2 Chron 19:6-10**).

This illustration is even stronger when we consider the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He sought to please God alone (**John 8:29,**

15:10), and God was with Him all the way (***John 8:16***).

In like manner, our goal is to please God. And in our service to Him, proclaiming the decrees of His Kingdom (i.e. The Gospel), He stands with us all the way (***Matt 10:19-20***, **2 Tim 4:16-18**, **[Acts 6:8-10**, **7:55-60]**, **Heb 13:5-6**).

WHY DISCERNMENT REQUIRES THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our struggle on earth is not merely against natural things that our senses can perceive; we are in contention with spiritual forces (please read **Eph 6:11-13**, **Rev 12:17**, **2 Cor 10:3-5**, **2 Tim 4:7**).

For this reason, our discernment cannot be limited to the natural, we must be able to judge or distinguish between good and evil spiritual forces, and their influences (**1 Cor**

12:4, **10** **NKJV**, **1 John 4:1-3**, **1 Thess 5:19-22**).

Our natural perception of good and evil can be quite misleading if we try to juxtapose it with spiritual realities. Because even the devil masquerades himself as being “good”, and his agents do the same (**2 Cor 11:13-15**). They may say and do the “right” things on the outside, but deep down the spirit driving them is evil (**Acts 16:16-18**, **[Matt 23:2-7**, **25-*28***, **John 8:39-47]**).

So then what happens when something appears righteous externally, while the spirit behind it is corrupt? Your guess is as good as mine.

If you're led by sight, and you judge by mere appearances, then you'll be susceptible to deception (**2 Cor 5:7**, **Matt 24:23-25**, **1 Tim 4:1-2**, **6-9**). That's why you must pass judgment from the Divine perspective driven by the Holy Spirit.

This doesn't just apply to discerning and judging things pertaining to the spiritual unseen realm, it applies to everything.

HUMAN BEINGS CAN BE VERY DECEPTIVE

Jeremiah 17:9-10
*[9] "**THE HEART IS DECEITFUL** above all things, And desperately wicked; **WHO CAN KNOW IT?** [10] **I, THE LORD, SEARCH THE HEART, I TEST THE MIND**, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.* ***NKJV***

Human beings are very complex. Even the prophets of God had a difficult time reading people going by appearances (***1 Sam 16:6-7*****, 2 Kings 4:27**); they always needed God to step in and paint the full picture (***Jer 12:6*****, [11:18-23, 1:1, Mark 6:4], 9:4-6, Ezek 33:30-32, Prov 26:22-28, Ps 28:3, 12:2**).

If you depend solely on appearances, you'll quickly find how challenging it is to discern and judge people (**Prov 18:17**, **[2 Sam 16:1-4, 19:17, 24-30]**). This was why Solomon prayed for wisdom; it was primarily

so that he could administer justice (**1 Kings 3:5-12, 28**).

THE CHURCH'S DISCERNMENT PROBLEM

One significant issue in the Church is a practical lack of discernment and the adoption of political correctness as a guiding principle (**2 Tim 4:3-5**).

The Church was never established for political correctness, it was established to stand for Truth. The issue is that a lot of Christians don't understand that the handling of Truth requires discernment, or else one is prone to abuse the Truth (**Matt 4:3-7**).

For instance, Christians understand all too well the need to show love and grace, and be hopeful that sinners will repent as a result (**Rom 2:1-4, *1 Tim 1:12-16***).

But one danger in the modern Church is an approach to Grace that avoids confronting sin for fear of appearing unloving or intolerant (**Isaiah 26:9-10**, **Jude 1:4**).

This political correctness ignores the fact that God is going to judge sin, and He is warning people so that they won't have to face His wrath and judgment provided they repent (please read ****Eph 5:5-7****, ****Prov 28:13****, **John 3:16-18**, ***36***, **Rom 5:8-10**).

And on the other extreme, you have Christians who are overly judgmental, and condemnatory, without any show of empathy, mercy, and Grace (**James 2:12-13**, **Matt 9:11-13**, **12:7**, **John 8:3-9**).

The truth, however, is that there is a time for everything and a balance to everything (**Eccl 3:1-8**). And we need to discern by the Holy Spirit what is appropriate in any given situation.

We cannot just assume that we are to be welcoming and accepting of everything,

because that is “nice” or politically correct (**1 Cor 5:1-3**).

And we cannot also assume a stance of being closed off and judgmental out of fear, or to protect the familiar and convenient status quo (**[2 Cor 2:5-8, 7:9-10], Acts 9:26-27**).

So on one hand we may end up fostering that which we're called to reject. And on the other hand, we may reject what was intended for good, or reject those whom Jesus Christ is in the process of reforming (**Acts 9:10-16, [{13:5, 13, 15:36-39}, {2 Tim 4:11, Col 4:10}]**).

So in everything we need the discernment of the Holy Spirit to rightly judge, because ultimately God knows those who are His (**2 Tim 2:19**).

Jesus Christ was loving, welcoming, and gracious to sinners (**Matt 9:10-13, 11:19, Luke 4:22, 7:37-*48*, 19:5-10**). But He also confronted hypocrisy (**Matt 23:13, 27-28, 33**); and He encouraged sinners to

abandon sin (***John 5:14, 8:11 NKJV***). He was balanced in everything, so must we.

Truth without love becomes cruelty.

And Love without discernment becomes compromise.

GOOD AND EVIL ARE NOT ALWAYS BLACK AND WHITE

This is a mature subject matter that I won't be able to fully address here. But hopefully, this would be sufficient enough groundwork to facilitate a necessary paradigm shift. This is to illustrate and buttress the fact that human perception isn't always reliable (**Prov 3:5, 16:1-5, 12:15**).

On average, if multiple people judge or examine a situation based on observable facts, they may arrive at the same consensus. But majority consensus doesn't

automatically mean that such judgment would hold true in every situation.

Understand that the human legal system is heavily dependent on “precedence”. Meaning the judgments from previous cases serve as the blueprint for how similar cases in the future would be judged.

So what I'm saying is that this guiding principle that shapes a lot of justice systems would not hold in the Biblical context.

For instance, if you ask people if “sorrow” or “fear” is good or bad, the consensus view may likely see it as being bad. And if you ask whether “love” is good or bad, the majority may lean towards it being good.

This consensus is then applied to future decisions. And this is how human sentiments shape judgment.

For example, if “sorrow” and “fear” are viewed as being bad, hence one's natural judgment would be to absolutely avoid these things, or whatever may cause or produce them.

So to avoid facing the source of sorrow or grief one may try to cheer themselves with entertainment, or substances, or various forms of escapism; instead of facing and processing the grief soberly, without dwelling on it (**1 These 4:13-18**).

And to avoid fear, they may convince themselves to be fearless and unyielding. Thus initiating a bravado that is void of wisdom, which is simply just pride (**Prov 16:32**).

However, from a Biblical perspective, there are dimensions of these same things, i.e. “sorrow” and “fear”, that are judged as being beneficial.

For example, Godly sorrow leads to repentance (**2 Cor 7:9-11**); and there is a wisdom that is most effectively obtained in the soberness of grief (****Eccl 7:2-5****, **Lam 3:26-33** – ****v31-33****).

With regards to “fear,” we've already discussed the benefits of the fear of the Lord. But it is also worth noting that for our

survival, God put in us the natural fear-triggered fight-or-flight response which surges us with adrenaline to help us in dangerous situations.

So if you judge solely by appearances or feelings, your natural judgment would be to avoid “sorrow” and “fear” at all costs. But if you have spiritual discernment, you'll be open to the reformative effects of grief and sorrow that God permits, and the life preserving effects of the good kind of fear (**Heb 11:7, Prov 19:23**).

Could it be that some things we instinctively avoid are sometimes the very things that God intends to use for our transformation? That's something worth pondering. And this saying comes to mind, “what doesn't kill you, will make you stronger.”

Either-way, balance and discernment is key. It will not be prudent to assume or accept every situation with a predefined disposition. Like assuming from our perspective that everything that looks and feels good must be from God, while the others must be from the devil.

Most things are two-sided, and we must be careful to discern each side and the Spirit/spirit driving it (please read – **Matt 16:15-17, 23**).

For instance, without a healthy dose of fear, i.e. speaking of someone who is entirely fearless, that person will proudly walk themselves into avoidable troubles (**[Prov 22:3-5, John 8:59], Prov 14:15-16**).

But at the same time being timid and overwhelmed by fear isn't good either (**Heb 10:38-39, Rev 21:7-8**).

However, in walking by the discernment of the Holy Spirit you can obtain balance (***2 Tim 1:7 NKJV*, *Acts 4:29-31*, Matt 14:27**).

Furthermore, the overarching sentiment is that “love” is good. The seemingly unquestionable wisdom that some people offer is “do what you love,” or “follow your heart.” This elevates passion as the guide and driver of one's life.

“Love”, or I should say passion, is generally a powerful force capable of propelling people to accomplish incredible feats.

Nevertheless, your heart and mind, which fuel your passions, cannot be trusted (**Jer 17:9**, **Prov 28:25-26** **NKJV, 21:2, Gal 6:3**). Hence the fact that love or passion is involved doesn't automatically justify anything.

The Holy Spirit is to be our guide, and not our feelings, regardless of how “good” that feeling is. Being led by “love” or passion can easily lead one astray, if the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is not there to regulate the person (**Jer 13:10**). That's why self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (****Gal 5:22-23, 1 Thess 4:3-8****).

Without regulation by the Holy Spirit, the power of “love” and passion will destroy an individual or cause needless suffering.

For instance, Ammon harbored a forbidden love for his half-sister Tamar. He became ‘*love-sick*’ and his best friend essentially advised him to “follow his heart” or passion.

In other words, that he should fuel his passion and satisfy his urges by whatever means.

This led to the tragedy of him raping his sister; and then immediately afterwards his love and passion turned to extreme hatred (**2 Sam 13:1-20**). And then subsequently Absalom killed him in revenge (**2 Sam 13:22, 28-32**).

How his love turned to hatred shows how deceptive or unstable one's heart can be.

Furthermore, Solomon loved his wives so much that he turned away from God to worship idols (**1 Kings 11:1-6**). This is another example of love leading someone astray.

So what happens when passion contradicts wisdom, truth, or obedience to God? What path must we choose?...

Hence, the one who embraces the sentiment or judgment that love or passion is always good, may find themselves justifying all sorts of things in the name of love, or making

foolish decisions because of it. But judging by the Holy Spirit can save you from this powerful pitfall.

Love is not something to be trifled with (**Song of Songs 2:7**, **3:5**, **8:4**). It is powerful, and something that has the potential of being incredibly good or extremely hurtful (**Song of Songs 8:6-7**). It is therefore important that we properly channel our passions and affections (**1 John 2:15-17**, **Matt 10:37**, **6:24**, **1 Tim 6:10**, **17-19**).

So in short, our way of thinking is not like that of God (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). Hence, if we depend on our paradigm, chances are we will be at odds with God (**Luke 16:15**, **1 John 2:15-17**, **James 4:4**, **7-8**).

So we cannot simply judge based on societal perception or human sentiments. We must submit our judgment to the Holy Spirit.

IN SUMMARY:

• Judgment itself is not forbidden in Scripture;

• Unrighteous and fleshly judgment is what is condemned;

• Human perception is often unreliable;

• Spiritual discernment requires the Holy Spirit;

• Christians are called to judge rightly, not superficially;

• Truth and love must work together;

• And ultimately, all judgment belongs to God.

So in short, the Christian is not called to abandon judgment, but to abandon fleshly judgment and become yielded to the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

FINAL EXHORTATION

The Church has been entrusted with a priestly mandate (**1 Peter 2:4-5, 9, Rev 5:10 NKJV**), and this includes the responsibility of discerning between good and evil, and passing the appropriate judgments (**Ezek 44:23-24**).

This responsibility is what has the potential to reshape the world for good (**Matt 5:14-16**). However, if we fail to rise up to this responsibility, things in the world would deteriorate; and the blame for our sufferings and the sufferings of the world would rest on us (**Matt 5:13, Prov 25:26, Rom 8:19**, ***Jer 29:7***).

Furthermore, the authority and power that we wield are not for us to do whatever we please. Even in doing the apparently "right thing," we would find no justification if we do not execute the will of God (**Matt 7:21-23**). Our service is for His pleasure, and not a show to make us feel pious or good about ourselves (**1 Cor 13:1-3, Col 2:23**), or make people perceive us in a certain light (**Matt 6:1-6, 23:5-7, 2 Cor 12:6, *Rom 12:3***).

But if we walk in Love and in the Holy Spirit (**Gal 5:22-25**), then we can effectively judge all things (**1 Cor 2:15**). And the decrees and pronouncements that leave our mouth would not fall to the ground, but be accomplished (**1 Sam 3:19**, ***Isaiah 44:26***, **Job 22:27-28 NKJV**), because we have spoken the very verdicts of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit (**1 Peter 4:11**).

The angels are not directly obligated to us (**Josh 5:13-15**), they heed the commands of God (**Ps 103:20-21**). It just so happens that God has sent them to minister to us (**Heb 1:7**, **14**); nevertheless, they ultimately operate under God's authority rather than independent human command.

And God is not obligated to perform whatever we decree, nor accomplish whatever we imagine (**Ezekiel 13:2-3**, ***6***, **22:28**, **[Jer 23:20-22**, **25-28**, **31-32**, **36]**, **Jer 29:8-9**). He is only obligated to fulfill His words (**Jer 1:12**, **Isaiah 40:8**, **Matt 5:18**, ***Mark 16:20***).

So it needs to be said, and intimately understood that:

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Our authority is derivative, not autonomous.
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(**John 14:12-14, 16-19** — *everything we are is because of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit*).

So the sooner you discern what God is saying, and receive the revelation of His will through the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 2:11-12, Col 1:9**), then the sooner you'll be able to experience the joys of praying with authority and making declarations that come to pass (**1 John 5:14-15**).

The things we pray and declare are executed on our behalf, because we are an extension of God's heavenly will, and His judgments manifested on earth (**Matt 6:9-10, [***please read* **– Matt 18:18 AMPC, 16:19 AMPC]**).

Again, I repeat that we are not to be autonomously operating on earth. Rather, as ambassadors of Christ, we're to sync with the Kingdom of Heaven and proclaim Its judgments.

Note that the words “prayer” and “petition” are both legal terms that are still being used in our human courts.

It just so happens that we have access to the Heavenly courts, where: God sits as Judge; Jesus Christ as our Mediator and Intercessor (**1 Tim 2:5**, **Heb 7:24-25**); and the Holy Spirit serves as our other Advocate (**John 14:16-17**, **Rom 8:26-27**); while satan is the opposing counsel bringing accusations against us (**Rev 12:9-10**).

So prayer is not merely religious speech. It is participation in the government and judgments of God.

When God pronounces judgments in the Heavenly Court, we are His ambassadors and agents here on earth to then pronounce and enforce His will (**Matt 6:9-10**, **2 Cor 5:20**, ***Ps 149:4-9** **NKJV***). These pronouncements we make on earth are God's verdicts, hence they give the angels an occasion to act on the declarations we make (**Ps 149:5-9**, **103:20-21**).

That's part of the way we carry out our role as priests and judges, who are agents, or instruments of God's judgment. This is how the Kingdom of Heaven gets manifested on earth, i.e. when God's will is done (**Luke 17:20-21, 11:20**).

But don't forget these two vital lessons from the series:

• As we learnt in the first part, "***Do Not Judge***," any agent or instrument of judgment must be found righteous otherwise they would be judged. So ensure that you are right with God just as Jesus Christ (John 15:9-10, 1 John 3:3);

• And as we've covered in this study, you're not to judge by mere appearances (John 7:24), but rather you are to judge all things as guided by the Holy Spirit.

Once again I pray that you rise into everything that God ordained you to be (Eph 2:10); and I pray that you're not carried away by the things happening on earth, being limited by the discouraging picture the natural world presents (Luke 8:14, 21:25-

26); but instead you receive Divine insight and encouragement to forge ahead and maintain a spiritual and Heavenly paradigm (**Luke 21:27-28**, **2 Cor 4:17-18**, **Col 3:1-4**).

Where people see dryness, may God reveal lush fruitfulness (**Gen 26:1-6**, **12-13**, **21:15-19**): where people perceive darkness, may God cause His light to shine through you (**John 12:35-36**, ***2 Cor 4:3-6***); and where people see hopelessness, may God revitalize you with hope and vigor that will not fail (***Rom 15:13***, **Heb 6:18-20**).

Be blessed as you resolve to yield to the good plans of God for your life. Shalom!

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