

JUDGING BY APPEARANCES

“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.” (John 7:24)

Nobody could tell that Jesus was the Son of God by His appearance. Isaiah said: **“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isa 53:2-3)**

The confusion over His physical appearance was compounded by His actions. Jesus did not conform to Jewish preconceptions about the Messiah. In the preceding verses to our text Jesus made reference to a miracle He performed on the Sabbath. It was apparently a deliberate challenge to their traditions as He selected only one man to heal out of a great many disabled people (Jn. 5:3). Truth is not always apparent by means of our initial observations. Quite frequently we arrive at the truth by focusing our mental energies to challenge our first impressions.

The goal of our investigation is to make a “right judgment”. This, of course, involves weighing evidence to discover truth. Remember! Jesus testified before Pilate: **“I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37)** The children of God are required to probe beyond surface appearances in order to make a “right judgment”.

Paul told the Thessalonians to “test everything” (1 Thess. 5:21). Just as an assayer “tests” samples in search for gold, Christians are commanded to examine evidence in search of truth. Albert Barnes writes in his commentary on this passage: *“Other religions require their votaries to receive everything upon trust; Christianity asks us to examine everything. Error, superstition, bigotry, and fanaticism attempt to repress free discussion, by saying that there are certain things which are too sacred in their nature, or which have been too long held, or which are sanctioned by too many great and holy names, to permit their being subjected to the scrutiny of common eyes, or to be handled by common hands, In opposition to all this, Christianity requires us to examine everything - no matter by whom held; by what councils ordained; by what venerableness of antiquity sustained; or by what sacredness it may be invested. We are to receive no opinion until we are convinced that it is true; we are to be subjected to no pains or penalties for not believing what we do not perceive to be true; we are to be prohibited from examining no opinion which our fellow-men regard as true, and which they seek to make others believe. No popular current in favor of any doctrine; no influence which name and rank and learning can give it, is to commend it to us as certainly worthy of our belief. By whomsoever held, we are to examine it freely before we embrace it; but when we are convinced that it is true, it is to be held, no matter what current of popular opinion or prejudice may be against it; no matter what ridicule may be poured upon it; and no matter though the belief of it may require us to die a martyr’s death (Barnes Commentary Thess. - Phil. p. 61).*

Communism, by contrast, forbids investigation. Nicholai Lenin wrote: *“Why should freedom of speech and freedom of the press be allowed? Why should a government which is doing what it believes to be right allow itself to be criticized? It would not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are much more fatal things than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinion calculated to embarrass the government.”*

The Bible reminds us that presenting your bodies as living sacrifices is “reasonable” (Rom. 12:1). The longer you live and the more evidence you acquire, the more reasonable it is to place your confidence in Christ. You didn’t have a choice about being born, and you do not have a choice about dying. While your death is inevitable, your destiny is not. It doesn’t matter what shallow and superficial thinkers say or do, “right judgement” requires that we believe in Jesus Christ.