

# Bible Language and Judgment

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | February 27, 2009



*I would be very interested to hear a discussion at some point which starts with your observations in Lesson 8 (?) about the purpose of “judgment” when someone is accused of murder and when they are accused of unhealthful living.*

*That was a great way of approaching the topic but I would like to hear a more in depth discussions which starts with that and addresses the issue of why that language is so explicitly and repeatedly used in the Bible. Although I do feel that this way of reading the scriptures makes sense it does seem to call for the wholesale “disregard” for the Biblical language. One clearly cannot simply read every word of the Bible literally but on the other hand I don’t want to base my theology on an argument about where to draw the line between prophetic/symbolic language and literal language. I have found that if that is the only “proof” I can offer then the people I talk with do not take it seriously. I also would like to read these passages as a child might and not feel compelled to make adult-like arguments.*

*Perhaps it isn’t so much that no judgment of any kind is ever passed but that the judgment that is passed is less of a legal assignment of arbitrary guilt and more of a “finding of fact” such as when an astronaut is judged fit for duty.*

*Regardless of the way these passages are read I continue to find very strong resistance to any attempt to change the wording or the “meaning” of any of these texts because they are so “clear” and so “unambiguous”.*

*If I had to work this hard to explain to my parents why I loved my girlfriend and wanted to marry her, all the while repudiating similarly clear and unambiguous things written in her letters I would definitely expect to be criticized because I would be accused of rationalizing and intentionally ignoring all the signs.*

JN

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Wonderful questions and insights, thanks.

If we read a letter from our great-grandfathers who were both in WWI stationed in Europe, and they wrote back that during leave they were having a “gay” time, what conclusion should we draw? Should we conclude they are homosexual? Should we disregard the clear meaning of the text? Or does meaning to words change? Is it important to understand what was meant to the parties involved at the time the letter was written?

If we were on our way home and heard a parent shouting at their child, “Get back here right now or I am going to beat your bottom raw,” might we conclude this is a cruel parent? What if the child was three and playing out near the edge of a three story roof, and the parent had already tried talking softly before we walked by? Do we need to understand the circumstances and context of what is transpiring when one in authority uses strong language?

If you were involved in some addiction and your girlfriend does love you but her letters are filled with strong language, refusal to visit until you are sober, unwillingness to go with you to a bar, threatening to end the relationship if you don’t get into treatment, would such strong language indicate she does or does not love you? If, like most addicts, you responded to her attempts to counsel you with, “I can handle it. I don’t have a problem,” might a loving girlfriend then say something like, “If you don’t get in treatment this relationship is over?” Might other threatening language be used? Why? Would it be because you don’t hear any other gentler language?

Does God act in similar fashion? Does this give insight into the Old Testament language?

I have discovered several recurrent mistakes people (including theologians) make when studying the Scripture. One is that they use the Old Testament Scriptures to understand Jesus and His ministry, rather than allowing Jesus, God in human flesh, to be the lens through which all Scripture is understood. Secondly, too many make the mistake of basing their theology on the declarative passages of Scripture without harmonizing the evidentiary passages of Scripture.

As an example, a declarative passage is 1John 4:8 “God is love.” This passage alone, severed from the rest of Scripture, is meaningless, because in isolation we don’t know who God is or what love is. What gives this passage ultimate meaning and power is the evidence of God’s actions culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The recorded history of Jesus is not a claim, it is evidence in action. Like the difference between what someone says and does, what a person does has more power than what one says. Likewise, with Scripture, we must bring harmony between what is done and what is said.

God's actions give us the ability to understand correctly His words. Gross distortions about God are drawn when people use the declarative passages and fail to harmonize them with the evidence of action passages.

I have demonstrated this on numerous previous blogs such as:

[The Question of Punishment I, II, and III](#)

[The Sword of God](#)

[Questions About Christ's Death 1 and 2](#)

God uses judgment language much like a parent with a child. Why does a parent threaten a child for failure to obey? Is it because the parent intends on executing the disobedient child? What ultimately happens to disobedient children? Their characters become so warped they destroy themselves. They are not destroyed by their parents. Thus the Bible teaches,

"Those who sow to the carnal nature from that nature will reap destruction." Galatians 6:8.

God doesn't want any lost, so He will speak with strong language, even threaten, in order to get us to stop our destructive course. But when we allow Jesus to be the lens through which we see God's ultimate purpose we learn,

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:17

"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" John 5:22

"You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one." John 8:15

"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day." John 12:47,48

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Mathew 12:33-37.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One, One in love, goodness, mercy, and truth. They are united in their plan to heal and save humanity. Mankind is sick, dying, and terminal.

We are born "dead in transgressions and sinfulness" Ephesians 2:1. Jesus came to heal our condition. All those who accept the remedy He supplies will be healed. Those who refuse it won't be. Thus God doesn't have to "judge" in order to determine who is saved or lost. It is self evident. Those who have partaken of Jesus are transformed to be like Him and their lives reveal it. But those who have refused to partake of Jesus and refuse His remedy, their lives are not transformed, their hearts remain selfish, and

their very condition will reveal itself in the end and be the cause of their destruction.