



Church of God-21st Century

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Who Should *Decide*?

Is there a *perfect standard* by which all mankind should judge *everything*?

Who should decide all *moral* and *doctrinal* questions—*man* or *GOD*?

by Raymond F. McNair

The world has lost its way! It badly needs *reliable criteria* for judging what is *right* and *wrong*! The Bible alone gives us an *infallible standard* for discerning *truth* from *error*!

God's Word reveals that His people are now being trained to become wise and understanding JUDGES in the wonderful *World Tomorrow* (Rev. 5:10; 20:4-6). But we must first learn how to *live righteously*, so that we will know how to *judge righteously* in the soon-coming Kingdom of God (2 Sam. 23:3)!

Disillusion over Unjust Jury Decisions

A widely publicized court case in Los Angeles in June 2005 underscored what many believed to be a **serious problem in America's "criminal justice system."** The vast majority who avidly followed this unusual trial were *shocked* to see that the *accused person* (a well-known *celebrity*) was found "**not guilty**" when the facts in the case clearly *indicated* that a "**guilty**" verdict—on at least some of the charges—would have been *justified*.

Some observers were so incensed—at seeing what they believed to have been a serious *miscarriage of justice* by the jury's unanimous decision—that they referred to the famous "defendant" who had been judged "not guilty" as the "**Teflon Molester**"!

A few years earlier, another case involved a *well-known actor*—who was charged with the murder of his wife—and was found "**not guilty.**" Again, the *majority* of those who followed this trial believed that the facts indicated that a "**guilty verdict**" would have been proper in this case. Many brethren will also recall the apparent *miscarriages of justice* that occurred during the *trials* of numerous other celebrities, who were *judged* to be **not guilty**, even though the *facts* and *circumstantial evidence* in those cases appeared to many to *prove* that the accused were in fact *guilty* of the crimes of which they were charged.

Some years ago a *celebrity* who had been charged with committing a double murder was found "**not guilty**" in the *criminal* case brought against him. Later, however, this same *defendant* was found "**guilty**" when tried on a "felony charge." Why was it that at *two different trials*, the *same basic facts* were presented to each jury, yet one jury found him "guilty," while the other found him "not guilty"? Millions of Americans were *puzzled* when the accused person in this criminal case was found **not guilty** of the commission of **double**

murder; but a later trial by a different jury found him “guilty” of the same charge which had been brought against him in this gruesome murder.

“How could this occur?” Yes, how could one jury *not convict* a man charged with *double murder* in a *criminal case*, while a later jury found the same man guilty of murder on a *felony charge*—yet both juries seemingly had access to the *same facts*.

Many people are very *disillusioned* with a **criminal justice system** which often allows a *wealthy, famous, guilty celebrity*, with a high-powered attorney, to get off “Scott free,” while in all-too-many cases a relatively unknown, *innocent “nobody,”* having little or no money to pay for legal fees, is often wrongly *convicted* of a *crime* or a *felony*. In all-too-many instances, evidence, such as DNA test results, later comes to light proving the person who had been charged with the crime was *totally innocent!*

Such *miscarriages of justice* should not surprise anyone who is truly familiar with the Word of God. Nearly 3000 years ago, wise King Solomon said, **“If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of JUSTICE and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter”** (Eccl. 5:8). The Authorized Version says that if one sees “the oppression of the *poor*, and *violent perverting of* JUDGMENT and JUSTICE in a province, marvel not at the matter: for **HE** [God] that is higher than the highest [*human judge*]...and there be **HIGHER** than they.” Meaning? When “*judgment and justice*” are *perverted*, there is a **HIGHER POWER**, God, who sees this perversion of justice, and will do whatever He determines is proper to punish those who pervert justice.

God's People Are Now Being Judged!

Jesus Christ said He did not come to “judge the world” at His First Coming, but His mission was to come as mankind's Savior, and “build [His] Church,” through which God would offer salvation to those who were to be called into His Church during this N.T. Church Age (Matt. 16:18). Those who *accept Jesus* as Savior, *obey God*, and *endure to the end*, will be granted *immortality* at His Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:50-58), which will be the “First Resurrection” (Rev. 20:4-6). Others will later rise up in the “Second Resurrection” (vv. 11-15; Dan. 12:2-3).

But with salvation being granted to us now, we are also admonished to make our salvation secure by watchful *prayer* and *obedience* to God's Word. We are also told, **“For the time has come for JUDGMENT to begin at the HOUSE OF GOD”** (1 Pet. 4:17). New Testament Christians comprise the “first-fruits” of those who are *converted by* receiving *salvation* during this New Testament Church Age. Jesus Christ and His apostles all upheld God's law, including the Ten Commandments; and as Acts 15 reveals, many of God's *statutes* and *judgments* are also upheld in the New Testament Scriptures.

Jesus put it very well when He said, **“Do not JUDGE according to APPEARANCE, but JUDGE with righteous judgment”** (John 7:24). All of us must be careful not to fall into the same pitfall as the *scribes* and *Pharisees* of Christ's Day. Jesus Christ told them, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, *hypocrites!* For you *pay tithe* of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the *weightier matters* of the law: **justice, mercy and faith**. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matt. 23:23).

When the Hebrew Prophet Samuel thought God would choose one of Jesse's tall, handsome sons, God told Samuel: “Do not look at his **APPEARANCE** or at the **HEIGHT** of his stature, because I have *refused him*. **For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the OUTWARD APPEARANCE, but the LORD looks at the HEART**” (1

Sam. 16:7).

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the Messiah—who will rule all the earth during the Millennium, judging the people of the world: “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of *wisdom* and *understanding*...the Spirit of knowledge and of the *fear of the LORD*... **And He shall not JUDGE by the sight of His eyes**, nor decide by the hearing of His *ears*; but with ***righteousness*** He shall JUDGE the poor, and decide with *equity* for the meek of the earth” (Isa. 11:2-4). It is quite natural for humans to judge by “appearances,” giving credence to “circumstantial evidence,” while neglecting the anomalies and *misleading circumstances* that often mislead us when it comes to judging others and their actions. Many professing Christians are all too quick to be **JUDGE, JURY, and HANGMAN!**

That is why Jesus Christ also said, “JUDGE not, and you shall not be judged. CONDEMN not, and you shall not be condemned. FORGIVE, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). Some wrongly *assume* that Christ told His followers it was wrong to “Judge” *anything* or *anyone*. That is not what Jesus meant, for—as we noted earlier—Christ also said, “Judge not according to the *appearance*, but **JUDGE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT**” (John 7:24)! God wants us to learn to *judge* many things, making certain we judge according to “righteous judgment”! That is why the judges in ancient Israel were commanded to “**make diligent inquiry**” into accusations or other controversial matters that would affect the outcome of any legal case they were judging (Deut. 19:18).

It is so easy to run off “half cocked,” and draw erroneous conclusions before making a “diligent inquiry,” to get all the facts before making any decision as to the *guilt or innocence* of any person accused of a crime: “**He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him**” (Prov. 18:13). It is easy to jump to hasty conclusions, before getting the facts. Anyone who wants to “judge righteously” must learn to make diligent inquiry, then after getting all pertinent facts, will be able to make a much wiser judgments regarding any important matter!

Examples of *Misjudging by Appearances*

Here are a few *interesting examples* that will help to illustrate how misleading “appearances” can be when judging a situation:

[1] **A big pig:** A young man was driving his convertible along a narrow country road one afternoon—when suddenly around the curve came a woman driver in a red convertible from the opposite direction. After careening dangerously around the curve, she was barely able to get her car under control and back on her side of the road before whizzing past the startled young man. As she sped past him she looked at him and yelled “**PIG!**”

The young man yelled back some *profanity*, and speeded up so he could turn around quickly to catch up with the woman driver to give her a piece of his mind. Just as he got around the corner, he crashed into a huge PIG in the middle of the road. He then realized the woman was not calling *him* a pig, but was trying to warn him of a **BIG PIG** just around the corner. Of course, the young man had completely *misjudged* both her actions and the *word* “pig” which she had yelled out as a warning. Had he not *misjudged* what she said, and if he had not become emotional, he would probably *not* have wrecked his new car! He judged too quickly, too emotionally—without first getting the facts!

[2] **A misunderstanding between neighbors:** My father and a *neighbor* once almost

got into a *fight*—all because of a total misunderstanding. A neighbor was driving his cattle across the road and into his own hay field, where his cattle were not normally allowed to graze. My father heard the neighbor hollering and thought he was trying to *prevent* the cows entering into that particular field, where they were not normally permitted to graze. But my father—thinking his neighbor wanted to turn his cattle around and not let them destroy his hay field—got in front of his neighbor’s animals waving his arms, hollering, and throwing things at the cattle to turn them around.

But when the neighbor saw this, he became *furiously*, began *cursing* and throwing rocks (apparently at *my father*) and as a result, an *ugly scene* quickly followed. It was very difficult for my father to convince his neighbor, who was known to be *hot-tempered*, that he had *misunderstood* my father's intentions. My father was trying to *help turn his cattle around* before they destroyed his neighbor’s field. Both this neighbor and my father had *misjudged* the situation, but both finally came to understand the real truth of the matter.

[3] A hitchhiker and a bag of money: A young HITCHHIKER asked a motorist who had given him a ride to let him off on the main street of town. But, as he waved good-by to the motorist and stepped up onto the curb, a *robber* came running around the corner of the buildings located on the street corner and ran into the hitchhiker, knocking the startled youth to the pavement.

As he got to his feet, three or four excited people ran up to him, grabbing him angrily and accusing him of just having robbed the local drug store. They were some distance behind the robber whom they were chasing when they rounded the corner and nabbed the young hitchhiker, thinking he was the robber! Unfortunately, when the *robber* had run into the hitchhiker, knocking him down, the nervous thief ran off—leaving a paper bag full of money lying at the feet of the dazed hitchhiker.

Circumstantial evidence made this robbery look like a “closed case.” Wasn't the young man with the bag of money nearby the masked robber who had just robbed the local drug store? How could the young hitchhiker prove his innocence? How could he prove that “circumstantial evidence” was very misleading—that, in fact, he was *not* the robber, but was totally *innocent* of the crime with which he was now being charged?

Fortunately, the hitchhiker was able to remember the *license plate number* of the car in which he had been riding, having observed it as the driver drove off. Furthermore, in court, he was able to prove that he had been in the car with its driver after 6:00 pm—for both he and the driver had heard the beginning of the evening newscast, and had briefly commented on it. The evening news was aired exactly at 6:00 p.m., but it was proven that the robbery occurred at 5:50 p.m.—over ten minutes *before* the hitchhiker was let out of the car! After the hitchhiker had later contacted the driver of the car, he testified in court to the truth of the young man's statements, thus proving that the hitchhiker could not possibly have been the robber of the store.

[4] Misjudging a non-smoker: Here is another example of how people often *misjudge* others by looking at “circumstantial evidence.” As a young minister, I was visiting a “prospective member” who wished to discuss with me whether or not *smoking* was a sin. I explained that, although there is no “thou-shalt-not-smoke” command in the Bible, nonetheless, *biblical principles* reveal that God would not want His Spirit-filled children to “defile their bodies” which are the temples of God's Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Further, there is much scientific evidence proving that smoking is a bad habit, which contributes toward heart and lung diseases and shortens the lives of those who smoke.

While talking to this *prospective member* about the evils of smoking, and suggesting he

immediately attempt to overcome this bad habit, I mentioned that, the sooner he took the first step in breaking this habit, the better off he would be. Therefore, I suggested that he might wish to hand me his cigarettes—lest he not have the courage to destroy them himself—and I assured him I would be happy to throw them away for him. He then handed me his cigarettes, which I put in the breast pocket of my jacket, with the intention of later disposing them.

Unfortunately, when I was later visiting with either a church member or another prospective member, I reached into my pocket to get a small Bible, only to discover that I had pulled out the *pack of cigarettes* in front of the people I was visiting! Being somewhat embarrassed, I quickly explained how I had come to possess the cigarettes, and that I had not yet been able to dispose them. Further, I mentioned that I had never smoked in my life, and certainly had no intention of either beginning the bad habit, nor did I intend to in any way use the cigarettes. I think they were quite convinced of my sincerity.

[5] Misjudging a woman's handshake: Here is a *final example of misjudging* in the Church. My wife related to me that before we were married, an interesting example of *misjudging* happened to her. She felt a certain “married young man” seemed somewhat *obnoxious*. Realizing her *aversion* toward this person, she prayed about it and then determined to go out of her way to be *kind* to him. The following Sabbath, to show her genuine friendliness toward him, she greeted him with a warm “Hello!” while *clasping his hand* between her hands.

Later, however, he informed her minister that she had made a pass at him—which was certainly not the case! Some time later, when the Pastor of the Church corrected her for her alleged “misconduct” she explained the situation, yet she felt the whole thing was completely *ludicrous!* [Note Sadly, many in God's Church have experienced similar examples where one member had totally *misjudged* another person about one thing or the other.]

A Valuable Early Lesson Learned

As a young minister of Jesus Christ, I began to learn the dangers of either the brethren or of fellow ministers judging by *circumstantial evidence*, rather than learning to first get all the *pertinent facts*, thus avoiding the error of drawing a hasty, unfounded conclusion. Here is the earliest example I recall of being *wrongly accused* by a minister, over fifty years ago, who had listened to brethren who brought up a false report about me. This minister then took this false report to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, and I was then asked to travel over 1000 miles to our Headquarters in Pasadena to discuss this “charge” against me. I had not the slightest idea of what I was being accused before being called to appear before Mr. Armstrong in order to give *my side* of the story. I don't recall having any fear, but I did *wonder* what it was all about.

When I spoke to Mr. Armstrong in his office in Pasadena, he was very careful to first *get the facts* from me, as to what had happened; I could see at the time that he was quite *open-minded*, and appeared very *sympathetic* to me after I had related the truth concerning the matter. The accusation against me was based on the *fact* that I had been about 45 minutes late in arriving at the hall where I was to conduct the Church's annual Passover service. After explaining to Mr. Armstrong that I had to repair a *flat tire* en route to the hall where the Passover was to be observed, he warmed up and informed me that he did *not* believe I had done anything wrong; and from that day forward, until his death, thirty years later, he entrusted me with greater ministerial responsibilities.

I later spoke to the minister who had reported my “problem” to Mr. Armstrong

without first getting the facts, and I informed him that if such a thing ever happened again, I would immediately call Mr. Armstrong and clear it up—hopefully without having to take the *time, expense* and *effort* of making a long trip to Headquarters to answer any **baseless accusations**. Clearly my superior (the *minister* then over me) had not made a “diligent enquiry” into the matter, and had not so much as even discussed the matter with *me* before taking it to Headquarters. I am sure that experience taught him a valuable lesson of *first getting the facts* before “receiving an accusation” against an *elder* in God’s Church: **“Do not receive an accusation against an ELDER except from two or three witnesses”** (1 Tim. 5:19).

The preceding examples show that *circumstantial evidence* often gives a false impression which, in turn, frequently leads to *a miscarriage of justice*, and can cause one person to wrongly judge another.

Let us never forget that thousands, yes millions, of *innocent victims* have been convicted of crimes they did not commit. Multitudes have lost their fortunes, their liberties, or their lives—simply because we humans often do not get the facts and “judge righteous judgment.” Instead, countless victims have been misjudged by *hearsay*, or by purely “circumstantial evidence.” All-too-often the world judges *by appearances*—by *circumstantial evidence*. But our heavenly Father expects us to make it a *habit* of judging righteously, by first getting all necessary facts before making any important judgments regarding others. We, like Christ, must never *judge* by the “sight of our eyes” or by the “hearing of our ears” (Isa. 11:3-4).

God's Standard of Judging

God’s Word is very clear in its revelation of the *standard* by which *judges* should judge all cases brought before them. After God had called about 2,500,000 Israelites out of Egypt, He gave them precise instructions—a yardstick to use in making all their judgments. The LORD chose Moses, a truly God-fearing man, to instruct them in this important matter.

What kind of qualifications must judges have? Moses’ father-in-law, *Jethro*, told Moses that he should “select from all people *ABLE MEN*, such as *FEAR GOD*, men of *TRUTH*, hating *COVETOUSNESS*; and place such over them to be rulers [*judges*] over *thousands*, rulers of *hundreds*, rulers of *fifties*, and rulers of *tens*. And let them *judge* the people at all times. Then it will be that every *great matter* they shall bring to you [Moses, their ‘chief judge’] but every *small matter* they themselves shall *judge*” (Exod. 18:21-23).

“So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said” (v. 24). Stephen, the first New Testament martyr says, “This Moses whom [the Israelites] rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a *ruler* and a *judge*?’ is the one God sent to be a *RULER* and a *deliverer*...” (Acts. 7:35).

God inspired Moses to write down many of the *judgments* of God in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy—*judgments* by which the Israelites were to judge those legal cases that arose in Israel (Exod. 21; 22; 23). Moses then wrote those judgments down in the “Book of the Law.” “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the *JUDGMENTS*. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘*All the words, which the LORD has said we will do*’” (24:1-18).

Moses’ “Book of the Law” also contained the *CENTERPIECE* of *God’s judicial system*—the *TEN COMMANDMENTS* (Exod. 20 and Deut. 5), which held the *central position* among all of God’s laws, statutes, judgments, etc. God also told Moses to inform

the Israelites that when they later set up a KING to rule over them, their KING should “write for himself a copy of THIS LAW in a BOOK.... And it shall be with him, and he shall *read it* all the days of his life, that he may learn to *fear the LORD* his God and be careful to observe all the words of *this law and these statutes*” (Deut. 17:18-19). The king, the chief civil leader/judge in Israel, was to become familiar with God's laws, statutes and JUDGMENTS, making certain that the judges in Israel used them as their *standard for judging*.

Here is another important principle in judging: “For any kind of trespass...**both parties** shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn” was to pay whatever *penalty* the judges imposed (Exod. 22:9). Other “judgments” of God are mentioned in Leviticus 19. God says, “You shall do no INJUSTICE in judgment. You shall not be PARTIAL to the *poor*, nor honor the person of the *mighty*, but in RIGHTEOUSNESS you shall JUDGE your neighbor” (v. 15).

Not long before Moses' death he reminded the Israelites of some of the important divine principles in regard to JUDGING, which he had taught the Israelites *forty years* previously: “So I took the HEADS of your tribes, WISE and KNOWLEDGEABLE, and made them *heads* over you, leaders of *thousands...hundreds...fifties...tens*, and officers among your tribes. And I charged your JUDGES at that time, saying, 'Hear the *cases* between your brethren, and JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY between a man and his brother or the STRANGER who is with you. You shall not show PARTIALITY in judgment; you shall hear the *small* as well as the *great*; you shall not be *afraid* in any man's presence, for the JUDGMENT IS GOD'S” (Deut. 1:15-17)!

Later, Moses instructed the Israelites further in what they were to do when they inherited the Promised Land: “You shall appoint JUDGES and *officers* in all your gates...and they shall JUDGE the people with JUST JUDGMENT. **You shall not PERVERT JUSTICE; you shall not show PARTIALITY, nor take a BRIBE**, for a *bribe* blinds the eyes of the WISE and TWISTS the words of the RIGHTEOUS. You shall follow what is altogether JUST, that you may live and inherit the land which...God is giving you” (Deut. 16:18-20).

Deuteronomy 17 explains other *judgments* of God: “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to *judge*.. matters of *controversy* within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses, and you shall come to the PRIESTS, the LEVITES, and to the JUDGE there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the *sentence of judgment*. You shall *do* according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. According to the sentence of the LAW in which they instruct you, according to the JUDGMENT which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the *sentence* which they pronounce upon you” (vv. 8-11).

How should judges handle *false accusations*? “If a *false witness* rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then *both men* in the *controversy* shall stand before the LORD, before the PRIESTS and the JUDGES who serve in those days. **And the JUDGES shall make DILIGENT INQUIRY**, and if the witness is *a false witness*, who has *testified falsely* against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; **so you shall put away the evil person from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter...not again commit such evil among you**” (Deut. 19:16-20).