



The Good News

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Judging According to Appearance

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Despite the calls of society to not judge based on appearances, we as human beings naturally come to conclusions based on what we observe. In fact, in many ways, we are required to do so to process everything we see and hear throughout the day. If our male coworker comes to work with bags under his eyes, we will assume he didn't get much sleep the night before. If we observe he is sneezing and blowing his nose throughout the day, we will further deduce that he didn't get any sleep because of a cold. But then, what if we observe a female coworker suffering from the same symptoms? Some would go so far as to assume that the reason these two have the same symptoms is that they shared in some sort of sordid extracurricular activity that included the swapping of germs. Now suppose we started spreading the news around the office that the two co-workers are romantically involved with one another, and use the shared symptoms of a cold as proof? Now suppose that information got back to one or both co-workers being discussed and, come to find out, one or both are married? Imagine how much damage can be done by simply judging a situation based on appearances. While observing the lack of sleep in our coworker, and that it was because of a cold, is perfectly reasonable (and most likely accurate), there is a problem when we then jump to concluding that something sordid is taking place.

Jesus says in **John 7:24**, "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*" Jesus, dealing with unreasonable people, taught them to not simply take a situation at face value, but rather think it through with all the facts before passing judgment. And while these scenarios happen all the time with people in the world, often to the detriment of relationships, it also happens among brethren. And it usually follows the same pattern: Someone observes something that is done or said (or NOT done or said) and jumps to a conclusion (often inaccurate); this observation then gets passed along

to other brethren at the congregation, whispering and gasping, while the brother or sister in question is completely oblivious; inevitably the brother or sister then find out about what was observed, how it was interpreted, spread throughout the congregation, leading to their feelings being hurt. They become discouraged because their brothers and sisters thought evil of them without even talking to them about the perceived problem. This brother or sister may even become so disillusioned by the lack of love among the brethren that they leave the church and fall away. This pattern is found repeatedly among brethren in churches of Christ everywhere when brethren are not careful to follow the commands we find in the Bible.

How can we avoid this? The love we should have for one another always assumes the best about each other, not the worst. When something is observed, the conclusion that is reached should be one that assumes a lack of sin. That same love causes us to approach the brother or sister to make sure that we have all the facts about what we saw or heard. When our brother or sister then tell us their side of the situation, placing our observation in its proper context, our love for them should lead us to believe what they say, without reservation. Will there be occasions when a brother or sister might lie? Sure, it has been known to happen. But if this is the case, then the lie will be made manifest through facts, not supposition or assumptions. In the end, we are called to trust one another. We will not always be perfect, and there will be times we will have to acknowledge fault in something we said or did that we shouldn't have. But let's be diligent to make sure that we give one another the benefit of the doubt. It's the least we can do for love's sake.