

# Discernment: Spirit vs. Flesh

Aaron Beard  
Trussville  
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## Introduction:

- A. Quotes: "The only exercise some people get is jumping to conclusions, running down their friends, side-stepping responsibility, and pushing their luck!" and "Jumping to conclusions seldom leads to happy landings" and "Jumping to conclusions is not half as good an exercise as digging for facts" and "A conclusion is just simply the place where someone decided to stop thinking"
- B. **Illustration:** One day I saw a guy out walking his dog. I hollered "Hey" to him several times trying to be nice. He wouldn't acknowledge me. Later on I was talking to a neighbor of mine. I complained to him about the rude man walking his dogs. My neighbor laughed and said, "He's deaf"
- C. Relay story of the Israelites preparing for war against the tribes settling on the east side of the Jordan because they wrongly assumed they were setting up a separate worship place (**Joshua 22:9-34**)
- D. We all have felt the shame and guilt of jumping to the wrong conclusion. We all have been hurt by one who jumped to the wrong conclusion. Is this just a practical matter or is it a spiritual concern?
  1. We need to be careful about our conclusions, not just because we don't want to hurt someone, but because this is a matter of being spiritually minded or worldly minded.
  2. This also impacts our faith. Our faith is a matter of reaching conclusions. We have to hear the evidence, evaluate it, & decide what we will accept, reject, and practice. If we aren't careful about how we draw conclusions we can find ourselves on the wrong side of truth & grace!
  3. In John 9 we read the story of Jesus healing a man born blind. As the story progresses there are four groups of people who have to reach conclusions. It is very easy to see ourselves in these people and the mistakes we often make. Let's learn some lessons from them...

## THE MAN BORN BLIND – A LESSON IN DRAWING CONCLUSIONS:

### A. Four Groups Of People Seek To Draw A Conclusion:

1. The Disciples: Motivated By Misinformation And Misconceptions (**John 9:1-5**)
  - a. The disciples' short sightedness is amazing. Here they run across a man who had been blind all his life and all they can think about is a theological discussion. There's no real concern for him and they forget that Jesus has the ability to heal this man. Questions trump compassion!
  - b. They have made a wrong assumption about this man's condition – They assume that sin must be the cause of his problem. For some reason they just want to know whose sin it was:
    - 1) They are sure his blindness was the result of sin. His or his parents... The second option is especially interesting since the man was born blind... before he had a chance to sin!
    - 2) They jump to a conclusion without taking into consideration what Ezekiel had to say about inherited sin (**Ezekiel 18**) or how Job suffered for being righteous (**Job 1**)
    - 3) Perhaps they remembered a few statements about visiting the iniquity of fathers upon their children. But from where do they get blindness come as a result of sin?
    - 4) Why was this man blind? Jesus said that it was so the works of God be shown through him! Basically, it sounds like he was born blind because God wanted to use him to show God's power... God's power in Jesus. It's not because of sin, but for faith!
  - c. The disciples have created their own barrier to reaching the right conclusion by limiting their options too much. They are too short sighted. They reason that either this man sinned or his parents sinned. Is there not a third option? What about time & chance? What about God?

- d. Because the disciples made up their minds with misinformation and misconceptions, they are missing out on the opportunity to show compassion and the power of Jesus to this man.
  - e. Their jumping to a conclusion would have stood in the way of the work of God being performed through this man. The very work Jesus, who they were following, came to accomplish!
2. The Pharisees: Motivated By Preconceptions And Pride (**John 9:13-17, 24-29, 34, 39-41**)
- a. We read verse 6 and immediately know the problem... Jesus performs a miracle on the Sabbath:
    - 1) The Pharisees would have loved for Jesus to have just disappeared. Every miracle gave credence to Jesus & His claims. Any miracle left them frustrated and speechless
    - 2) But it's also done on the Sabbath so, based on their understanding, He's breaking the law
    - 3) Why does Jesus heal this man in this strange way? I can't be sure, but it may be to point out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They are willing to condemn Jesus for putting mud in his eyes on the Sabbath, but they say nothing to him for his washing.
    - 4) Jesus forced a conclusion. They had to wrestle within themselves. They had to consider the evidence of the miracle and what it said about their idea of the Sabbath laws & Jesus... Eventually they had to be dishonest with themselves or face what it all meant
  - b. The Pharisees went into this situation with preconceived ideas... Prejudices created the conclusion.
    - 1) They were sure that healing was breaking the Sabbath. And yet a miracle was performed that they couldn't deny. So how could one who broke the Sabbath do such a thing?
    - 2) They were unwilling to consider that their idea of the Sabbath was wrong. But they couldn't deny the miracle. They are searching for any answer other than the one that forces them to admit that they were wrong and accept Jesus.
    - 3) Whatever they'd accept as reality had to fit within the reality they had already decided on
  - c. The Pharisees proved themselves to be dishonest. They weren't really after the truth!
    - 1) They had a set concept of reality and truth. Jesus comes in and contradicts that truth. Instead of evaluating the evidence they dismissed it and rejected Jesus
    - 2) They appeared to be "searching" for answers, but the only kind they wanted were answers that pleased them or fit their theology. Only answers with consequences they liked.
    - 3) In the end we find that the Pharisees were really the blind ones. Not because they couldn't see, but because they wouldn't see. Their approach to the evidence kept them from the truth! They had to become like the blind man they just condemned
    - 4) They say they don't know where Jesus is from, but this is a lie! Earlier they had rejected the idea of Jesus being the Messiah because they knew where Jesus was from. They had wrongly concluded that the Messiah would come from an unknown place. Now they say they don't know where He is from... which is it? (**John 7:27-28**)
      - ➔ It is whatever position is convenient to their argument at the time
  - d. What conclusion did they draw? No conclusion... other than to reject Jesus! To do this they had to ignore the evidence... The miracle, all the witnesses, the blind man's goading words, etc.
3. The Parents: Motivated By Fear (**John 9:18-22**)
- a. The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders were extremely powerful people. They controlled so much of the Jews lives. Winding up on their wrong side could cause these parents many problems.
  - b. Their fear of the Jews is clouding their judgment. They become willing to sacrifice their own son's welfare to stay in the Pharisees' good graces. They know the truth, but won't face its consequences! So they are willing to let their own son take the fall instead of them.
  - c. The conclusion they are drawing is whether or not to face responsibility and consequences. It is easier in the moment to avoid it, than to face it. What a great opportunity they now blow!

4. The Man Born Blind: Motivated By Honesty And Openness (**John 9:11, 12, 17, 24-33, 35-38**)
  - a. Throughout all of this the blind man shows a heart that is open, honest, and simplistic
    - 1) Why doesn't he immediately confess faith in Christ? Because he's not sure yet. He's putting the pieces together. He never professes to know & be sure when he isn't!
    - 2) When pressed about the identity of Jesus, he says Jesus is a prophet... why? Why not the Messiah? He knows the O.T. – Throughout the O.T. it was prophets who performed miracles. Elijah, Elisha, Moses, and more. Jesus at least had to be prophet.
    - 3) As the man relates the story he only relates the parts he knows... In fact, he never says Jesus used spit to make the mud. Why? He probably couldn't see it at that point
  - b. As his faith and understanding develops, the blind man is freely confesses what he doesn't know. He shows humility in evaluating the evidence. He doesn't even try to weed through all the theological implications that frustrated the Pharisees – Just says, "I was blind, now I see!"
  - c. The blind man is courageous as he faces the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He is crafty & bold!
    - 1) As a blind man, they never cared about him before, but suddenly they care what he thinks.
    - 2) They show so much interest in Jesus. Does he really think they want to become a disciple of Jesus? Of course not! He is prodding them about this disingenuousness
    - 3) He even mocks their prideful ignorance – They are so sure Jesus is a fraud and yet they say they have no clue where Jesus is from.
  - d. He puts the pieces together to reach the only conclusion that was consistent and sincere... Jesus must be from God. He doesn't know it all, but he knows Jesus must be from God!
  - e. Finally, when Jesus reveals Himself to the man, he not only comes to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah, but he responds to that understanding appropriately... He worships Jesus. The Pharisees wouldn't make this conclusion because they didn't want to worship Jesus!

## **B. What Does These Individuals Teach Us About Drawing Conclusions?**

1. We have to guard against drawing fleshly conclusions about people and what is going on in their lives. It doesn't mean you can't draw conclusions, but we must make sure we are using "heavenly wisdom" not demonic wisdom" → As Jesus said, "don't judge by appearances" (**James 2:1-4; John 7:24**)
2. As Solomon warns, it is a foolish thing to answer a matter before we hear it (**Prov. 18:13**) → Do we jump to a conclusion based on part of the evidence, but not all of it? Are we quick to get upset before we are sure what happened? Do we make up our mind after hearing one side of the story?
3. Another bit of very practical wisdom from James applies here... We have to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. Not only is listening essential to drawing conclusions instead of jumping to them, so is keeping our emotions in check. Often our emotions cloud our thinking (**James 1:19-20**)
4. As we reach conclusions we must make sure we are being honest with ourselves and with the evidence. Do we seek what is right regardless of the cost or consequence? Are we willing to be wrong? Are we willing to change? Spiritual discernment is courageous and sacrificing! The saddest form of blindness is the blindness that could see, but chooses not to see! (**Acts 28:26-27**)
5. Especially when it comes to our faith... we must be after the truth, regardless of what it is. It's tough, but we have to peel away the layers of prejudices and preconceived ideas from our minds. (**Prov. 23:23**)