

I believe in judgments. Now to understand why I believe judgments are so important, you must first understand a little bit about me. If you have ever heard of the Enneagram, then you will recognize this as a classic type one personality. Type one personalities believe in moral absolutes, blacks and whites, standards. Each of us is motivated by something; I am motivated by my wish to live up to my standards, to perfect my life. Growing up, this wasn't so hard; my parents set goals and morals for me to live by and I simply had to jump through the hoops. There were times when I rebelled, just like any other kid, but I always had a sense that if I was rebelling against something, then there must be some better standard to live by, some greater moral imperative.

Coming to college, I lost this moral compass provided to me by my parents. While they only lived across town, I could control what they saw, and when they saw me, and I was also exposed to a whole new group of people who challenged my ideas of right and wrong. Being a science major, my friends and mentors were scientists as well and it taught me a lot about making judgments.

Science is really all about making judgments and judging oneself most of all. Any idea starts out as a hypothesis, and then gets dragged over the coals of scientific analysis and peer review before it is accepted. Times when data was accepted simply because they are comfortable, or made someone feel good resulted in serious setbacks in science. Think of Ptolemy's geocentric universe, the concept of universal ether, or the common medical practice of bleeding. While we now know that the earth goes around the sun, light can move in a vacuum, and removing someone's blood doesn't make you get better, these mistakes were first accepted as truth because people failed to judge others work, people died and others were put in prison. Scientists, while flawed individuals, have a goal of being tolerant and open-minded, but making critical judgments, something we should all strive to do. Albert Einstein is credited with a famous quote, "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." This quote is commonly misused to advocate for non-judgmental thinking, but if you think about it, this quote does not mean is that one shouldn't judge the fish; rather one simply needs to judge to with the appropriate ruler.

It is unpopular these days to judge people. It is unpopular even to judge ourselves. Instead we are encouraged to accept ourselves however we may be and be content. There are good things to be learned from tolerance and acceptance, but I believe that as humans, we should try to improve ourselves every day. How can we improve if we are content with ourselves? We can't. The human need to improve has been shunted off to technology and science, but if we truly wish to mature and grow, then we must accept the responsibility to make informed and respectful judgments. This is the season of advent, that time in the church year when we are reminded to take some time to reflect on ourselves and prepare for Christ's coming. I encourage you, whatever your religious beliefs, to take some time out and examine yourself and make appropriate and respectful judgments. I am Robert Kleven and I believe in judgments.