

House Season 8, Episode 11 Nobody's Fault

This episode looks at issues of blame, fault, right and wrong, good and bad, caring for others, and judgement

Synopsis

Dr Walter Cofield is Chief of Neurology at Mercy Hospital and Dr Foreman's mentor. Dr Foreman has asked him to investigate a case handled by Dr House's team in which Dr Chase was stabbed in the heart. The question is: who is to blame for the chain of events which led to the stabbing? The issue is significant because if Dr Cofield finds that it was Dr House's fault, then he will go back to prison and Dr Foreman will lose his job as Dean of Medicine as well.

The episode proceeds by a series of interview clips with members of the team and Dr Cofield as well as passages from the treatment of the patient who stabbed Dr Chase.

The episode begins with shots of the patient's room with broken equipment and blood everywhere. There has clearly been a disaster. We next see Dr House sitting with Dr Cofield and being told the process for the disciplinary hearing. House says 'who the hell are you?' and Cofield replies 'I'll be deciding your fate today'. House begins to walk out but returns when he's told the facts don't look good for him. He begins to tell the story of the patient, a chemistry teacher who collapsed while jogging, slanting it so that Dr Foreman begs for help and House is bathed in supernatural light. House takes his Vicodin and says that 'my process is proven: good things usually happen. Bad things sometimes happen'. Dr Cofield says we need to learn from bad things to make sure they don't happen again, but House says it's to 'assign blame instead of recognising bad things sometimes happen. It's nobody's fault'.

We next see House making glib remarks as he hands round the patient's case to his team 'those who have no arms or legs teach us to laugh at others'. It turns out this is Dr Adams' account and Dr Cofield wonders if she's trying to imply what happened was House's fault. Dr Cofield also adds that he knows that different people will colour the facts differently, but Dr Adams says that she does not think it was House's fault.

Other team members and House recount the opening discussions of the case. Dr Cofield pulls House up on his recalling saying to Park 'unsquint your eyes' (she is Asian) and wonder if he is deliberately provoking him to censure him because he feels guilty. A re-run of the opening discussion reveals House spiked some shampoo that Dr Chase used, turning his hair red. House claims that he needs to play pranks to relive tension among his team. Dr Adams says that House likes to provoke chaos and mistrust to create good ideas and that he is 'not wrong'. Dr Cofield asks 'opposed to being right?'

Dr Taub recounts the point at which they learned that the patient had been in an explosion when his chemistry experiment blew up. It was a student prank to make a video for Youtube. Dr Taub says 'if there was an oversight, it's mine'. Like Adams, Taub also says of House's method 'he's not wrong'. Dr Cofield then asks House if he should be more involved with the patient and family to find out the truth about the case. The next scene shows the patient getting worse. House says the case got interesting and Dr Cofield wonders why the patient's suffering could be called 'interesting'. House says 'why, is that bad?'

Dr Park is now evasive about Dr House's next decision, because it turns out he brought a stink bomb (actually Chase's revenge prank which House found) into the room while wearing a gas mask to make the team think fast. Dr Cofield accuses House of manipulation, but House says safe ideas wouldn't work. He needed them to make inspired decisions. Dr Cofield then tells Dr Park that if she failed to speak up about Dr House's methods then she is equally to blame. Dr Park says she went to Dr Foreman about what House was doing and Dr Cofield has a conversation with Foreman saying that he is not going to look the other way just because Foreman is his protégé.

The patient was ready for discharge when he developed a rash and became agitated. Park, Adams and Taub all disagreed on what was happening and House tells Dr Cofield that his method is to run a diagnostic trial, defending the fact that it could make the patient worse and that the result was the disaster caused by the 'disobedience' of his team. Dr Chase brought a scalpel to biopsy the rash and the patient, now psychotic, grabbed the scalpel and stabbed Chase with it. Cofield asks House who he blames: Adams or Chase or both. House says he doesn't blame either. Cofield asks again: 'So who do you blame, Dr House'. There is no reply.

Dr Adams recounts the same episode and says it's her fault: 'If you're looking for someone to blame, blame me'. Chase is operated on and House comes to see what is happening, but is still concerned for the patient. Dr Cofield wonders whether House is just callous for not apparently caring about Chase and also asks Taub whether Chase was at fault for not obeying House.

House continues to press the team for help for the patient although they want to stay with Chase. He argues that the patient needs their help just as much and should be cared for just as much. Then Chase wakes up and says he cannot feel his legs. We next see Cofield asking Chase who he thinks is at fault for what happened to him. Chase replies that it was nobody's fault – and why does it matter? He emphasises the importance of the future, which is dependent on House's genius to help him walk again. The scene returns to Chase just after he has woken up, with House working out what might be causing the paralysis and sending Chase back to surgery. House comes into the surgery still talking about the patient, who is being transferred. Dr Cofield thinks this is more evidence of callousness, but Chase says it was his way of finding an excuse to check on him without looking like he really does care: his lack of concern is evidence of deep concern.

Chase recovers some movement and function but Cofield says that his view is that House creates an atmosphere that promotes recklessness and that was why Chase did what he did. Cofield now goes off the record to ask House why he's not apparently bothered about Chase: 'it's not an admission of guilt. He's your friend and he's not well'. House refuses to be drawn and reaches for his Vicodin. The bottle explodes – another revenge prank, but gives House his eureka moment about the patient. He walks out. The patient is being transferred to a new hospital, but House tells his wife what the true diagnosis is and how to treat it. House returns to Cofield 'I'm not done testifying' but Cofield has gone. After this House is seen sitting at a table with bread and a wine glass before him, then looking at Chase in his bed. In the next scene, darkness (which has covered the whole 'trial') changes into light. The team assemble for the verdict which starts with Cofield saying that House's behaviour cannot be condoned or excused, but he is interrupted by the patient's wife who comes to say that House has saved her husband's life. Cofield then says that House is clearly effective and that the stabbing is officially 'nobody's fault'. House then accuses Cofield of being a coward and changing what he was really going to say which was to condemn House and send him back to prison. He

repeats 'Good things usually happen. Bad things sometimes happen'. He argues that Cofield should not have allowed the wife's intervention to change his mind: 'does that change whether or not I did the right thing?'

We see House visiting Chase as he learns painfully to walk again. They discuss the hair dye incident which was in fact just a way for House to 'tell' Chase not to be late in future. House tells Chase about the verdict of 'nobody's fault' and says 'they're wrong. I'm sorry', taking the blame on himself. Chase returns to his painful struggle.

Comment

In some ways this is an episode with overtly Christian overtones. House is a Christ-figure, the healer who is put on trial and agrees to take the blame for the one who 'sinned' by disobeying him (Chase). Chase, once whole, is now broken, but his task is to struggle to get better.

Dr Cofield is like a Pontius Pilate figure trying to understand what the 'truth' of the matter is and finally deciding (as Pilate does) that there is no case to answer. The rest of the team are like different disciples, some loyal, but some denying House as well. They give testimony or 'witness' to the presence of House in their lives and how they feel about him. House several times says nothing (as Christ remains silent before Pilate) and the episode is at pains to show how much he cares for his team and for all his patients.

Some excerpts to watch:

One or two of the scenes with the team where Cofield asks them who is to blame

The different scenes where House comes to check on Chase

Cofield's verdict

House's apology to Chase

Some questions to consider

What do you think about the idea that if something bad has happened, there should be someone to blame?

What evidence is there around us that we live in a culture of fault and blame?

What do you think the episode was saying about punishment for disobedience?

What do you think the episode was saying about judgement and how judgement happens?

How do you feel about Cofield's conclusion? About House's taking the blame?

In what ways do you think this episode might be more about spiritual issues than a medical story?

Some Bible passages which reflect issues in this episode

John 19. 8-12 Christ before Pilate

Genesis 3 The Fall

Romans 5. 18-end What Christ has done for humankind

Hebrews 4. 12-13; Judgement