

## To Judge or Not To Judge

Let's read: **Luke 6:37-6:42 NIV**

*37"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." 39He also told them this parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher. 41"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 42How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

Let's pray:

I don't know if you remember this guy or not but a few years ago there as a bank robber in New Jersey the newspapers called the Gentleman Bandit. What made the robber stand out was his politeness. He just gave the tellers a note which said, "Please place your money in this bag. Thank you."

The widespread publicity led to a very unlikely arrest - the suspect was a Catholic priest. His church was appalled but stood beside him, saying they knew he could not be the bandit. They signed petitions, held protest marches and came up with his bail. But the police were certain they had their man. All of the eyewitnesses positively identified him. And the news media dug into his past, to find that in a previous church he had left under a cloud because of financial irregularities in the parish. For a priest he had a pretty expensive lifestyle - his own apartment and a fast car. His church was probably standing up for him because otherwise they looked like dupes.

As people across the country watched the story unfold on the news, they were positive this priest had pulled a fast one. He probably had a sociopath personality so he could rob banks and preach the next Sunday without feeling any guilt. No one outside his congregation was standing up for this guy. But then a funny thing happened. The REAL Gentleman Bandit was caught red-handed. As it turned out, he was the spitting image of the priest. It's just that he WASN'T the priest.

The priest was released, his church threw him a big party, and the news media and those who had prematurely judged him felt a little sheepish.

[Source: Rev. David Holwick First Baptist Church Ledgewood, New Jersey]

Unfortunately, that true story is all too common. Without knowing all the facts, we all make judgments about people all the time. And - really unfortunately - such judgments are all too common in the church.

And for right or wrong the Christian church has a bad reputation as a bunch of judgmental hypocrites. I've had too many conversations with people who have been hurt by the church because of the unfair judgments and condemnation they have felt. And there are way too many people out there who have vowed to never set foot in a church because they don't want the first thing to do with such a group.

And this is a tragedy. It's a tragedy Jesus spoke up about in Luke chapter 6:37-42.

I'd say that this passage of scripture, more than just about any other, is familiar to unbelievers. And it is used by all sorts of people who accuse Christians of being wrongly judgmental. "How dare you say my actions, my lifestyle, my choices are sinful? Didn't Jesus say 'do not judge'?"

How do we respond? Is this teaching of Jesus really meant to keep us from saying anything is right or wrong? Should we join our culture in buying into the new definition of "tolerance" which means accepting all opinions, thoughts, actions as equally valid?

NO! But if we're to know when it is appropriate to judge and when it is not we will have to shift our focus from just this passage to see the bigger picture of the New Testament's teaching on this subject. Only then will we be able to confidently apply Jesus' teaching correctly.

A proper Biblical understanding of this issue leads us to the conclusion that the Christian's "default" stance toward others is to be one of forgiveness and mercy, not judging and condemning.

Nevertheless, there are certain times when Christians are called upon to judge. Understanding when these times are will come only from a

careful study of the scriptures!

## **When are Christians NOT to judge?**

### **1. Christians are not to pass judgment on people for their moral failures.**

#### **Romans 2:1-5 NIV**

*1You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? 5But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Here Paul writes to us that when we pass judgment on others for their inability to follow God's law - we're doing two things.

a. We're really showing contempt for God and His ways of leading people to repentance - through kindness, tolerance, and patience. In effect we're saying - God, since you're taking too long to bring discipline upon this person - I'll help you out!

b. We're storing up wrath against ourselves - for as Jesus said in Luke 6:38 "*... with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*"

Ouch! That'll leave a rash!

Instead of passing judgment on people when they fail - Jesus clear command is that we forgive them and that we offer the same mercy that God offers us.

Remember last week as we studied about loving our enemies, the Golden Rule, '*do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*'

### **2. Christians are not to judge other Christians regarding disputable matters.**

#### **Romans 14:1-10 NIV**

*1Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*

There were all sorts of things that God-fearing people in Paul's day disagreed upon:

- Was the "sabbath" more holy than other days?
- Was it OK to eat meat from animals which had been sacrificed to idols?

Paul's point to them then and to us now was that on matters like this it was much more important for people to follow their conscience than to impose their conscience upon someone else.

- Is it OK to drink alcohol in moderation?
- Is it permissible to go to the movies?
- To gamble?
- To drive over the speed limit?
- What about theological debates?
- Must we all agree on exactly how the end times will play out?
- What role can women play in ministry?
- Which version of the Bible is the best?

Paul here is continuing Jesus' theme that it is NOT our job or our role to judge and condemn people for their opinions and accompanying actions on such disputable matters - matters of conscience.

Paul reminds us that we are each fellow servants of God. Our relationship to each other is horizontal - but our relationship to God is vertical. And as such, each of us answers to God as our one and only master.

### **3. Christians are not to judge people's hidden motives.**

#### **1 Corinthians 4:5 NIV**

*'Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.'*

\*In 1 Corinthians 12 the spiritual gift is discerning of spirits not discernment. Don't use this as an excuse to judge.

A grocery store check-out clerk once wrote to advice-columnist Ann Landers to complain that she had seen people buy "luxury" food items—like birthday cakes and bags of shrimp—with their food stamps. The writer went on to say that she thought all those people on welfare who treated themselves to such non-necessities were "lazy and wasteful."

A few weeks later Lander's column was devoted entirely to people who had responded to the grocery clerk. One woman wrote:

I didn't buy a cake, but I did buy a big bag of shrimp with food stamps. So what? My husband had been working at a plant for fifteen years when it shut down. The shrimp casserole I made was for our wedding anniversary dinner and lasted three days. Perhaps the grocery clerk who criticized that woman would have a different view of life after walking a mile in my shoes.

Another woman wrote:

I'm the woman who bought the \$17 cake and paid for it with food stamps. I thought the check-out woman in the store would burn a hole through me with her eyes. What she didn't know is the cake was for my little girl's birthday. It will be her last. She has bone cancer and will probably be gone within six to eight months.

There is no way any of us can know exactly why someone is doing something. We can save ourselves - and other people - a lot of grief by quitting altogether trying to figure out people's hidden motives for behavior - and instead love and accept them.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly...

#### **4. Christians are not to judge unbelievers.**

##### **1 Corinthians 5:12-13 NIV**

*'What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.'*

**John 3:17 NIV** *'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.'*

If even Jesus did not come to condemn the world - what business is it of ours to do so? The scripture is clear - the role of Christians is to love, accept, forgive unbelievers - and through our kindness lead them to a point of repentance for their sins.

Again we must remember that God's way of dealing with disobedience is with patience, kindness, and tolerance - with the hope that they will some day come to repentance before it is too late. As His representatives - Christians must do the same.

In each of these passages we are reminded that God alone is the judge of people. He alone knows the motives of people's hearts. He alone knows the proper time for judgment, and the perfectly just response to sin.

And yet still, the question remains - are there not some appropriate times for disciples of Christ to judge others?

The answer is YES - but we have a very short leash!

When are Christians to judge?

#### **1. Christians are to use the mind of Christ to make judgments about all things.**

##### **1 Corinthians 2:15-16 NIV**

*'The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ.'*

The spiritual man - that is - the man, woman, or child, who is filled with the Holy Spirit through their relationship with God - is called to walk through life constantly seeking the mind of Christ for what is right and wrong. We know what is right and wrong because the Holy Spirit guides our consciences.

## **2. Christians are to judge themselves.**

### **1 Corinthians 11:31-32 NIV**

*'But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.'*

Paul calls upon us to judge ourselves. To examine the things we do, say, and think, in the light of God's word, and in the light of the Holy Spirit's guidance.

This may not be as fun as judging somebody else but it is vastly more productive!

This is what I believe Jesus was getting at when he said *"get the plank out of your own eye before you go around pointing out the sliver in other people's eyes!"* The focus of our judging is to be our own actions, rather than the actions of others!

I read a quote once that said *'If each of us swept in front of our own house the entire street would be clean.'*

If we judge ourselves - and confess our sin to him - we no longer have to worry about the judgment to come.

## **3. The church is to judge un-repentent sin among those who claim to be Christians.**

### **1 Corinthians 5:1-5 NIV**

*'It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.'*

Here Paul gives an example of someone who is claiming to be a Christian, but who is engaged in sexual relations with his step mother. Such activity clearly comes under those things that God has already spoken about. And it is wrong.

Here's the point. There really is right and wrong.

The Bible gives us clear guidance about how we are to live our lives. The 10 Commandments give clear guidance about things like stealing, worshipping idols, and coveting. There is no need for further debate about such things. God has spoken.

And when people claim to be Christians and yet go against the clear law of God - discipline is necessary to bring them back into the fold. At such a time, it is not only our right to judge the behavior of fellow Christians, but it is our loving responsibility to do so.

But always in love - and with restoration, not punishment, as the goal.

### **2 Timothy 2:24-26 NIV**

*24And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

At such times the focus must be on the clearly stated word of God and the actions that person has done which go against that command. And if all goes well the person receives the loving rebuke with humility, repents, and is freely offered support and encouragement and love from those who have had to bring up the issue. That is the way God wants it to happen!

**To judge or not to judge:** That is the question

#### **CONCLUSION:**

As disciples of Christ we are called to create an authentic Christian community that effectively reaches out to un-churched people. Some of the marks of such a community are:

forgiveness and mercy - when people in our church have moral failings, and when people who are unbelievers act like unbelievers, we allow God to be in charge of their judgment, and we fulfill our role as dispensers of grace, mercy, forgiveness and love.

mutual accountability - keeping each other on the right track when it comes to clearly delineated sin.

freedom - to disagree on disputable matters, and to allow people to form their own convictions about how they will practice their faith.

Where can you find such an environment? Wouldn't you want to be a part of such a place?

Though in some ways these things may be experienced in this setting - the place where these attributes of community can really develop are in a small group.

There are a number already meeting and more preparing to start this fall. You will be hearing more about it in the weeks ahead.

Would you like to be a part of a group of people who will provide accountability and encouragement in your spiritual development?

Are you longing for a place where you can experience forgiveness and mercy instead of judgment and condemnation for your failings?

Do you dream of a place where you are loved and given the freedom to practice your faith as the Holy Spirit leads you to?

That's what we want to be about. And I want you to know if you're a believer who has been beaten down by the condemnation of the church, or if you're an unbeliever who has been afraid to be yourself around Christians in the past - I hope you'll find a home here.

A place where you will experience healing, and be led toward repentance through the kindness of God's people.

I pray that I, and every person here, will contribute to creating such an authentic Christian community.

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We understand that we are called to judge or examine our self. Right now as we prepare to share in Holy Communion, let's take a moment and allow our hearts to be cleansed of our sinfulness by the Lord. That doesn't just happen automatically; the bible tells us that *'if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'*

Luke 22:14-21

1 Corinthians 11:23-32