

Christians And Judging

(Modified 23 Aug. 2011)

Many Christians misinterpret what the Bible says about judging and say that we should never judge. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus did say not to judge. However, a close look at these verses will show that He is referring to unloving and unjust judging. It is wrong to make judgments about a person's motives or thoughts because we don't know their mind. However, in John 7:24, Jesus said, "*Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.*" In this verse Jesus is talking about making righteous judgments in regard to God's laws. We must make judgments in matters of biblical doctrine and righteous living. The Bible is our foundation and if we don't discern and follow what God says then it will become just another book. Then everyone will be doing whatever they think is right, just like the Israelis did in the time of the Judges. Judges 21:25 says, "*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit*".

To keep God's commands, we must first judge what is right and what is wrong. For example, 1 Cor. 5:11-13 say, "*... you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you*". In these verses, God tells us to judge church members and expel them if necessary. Then we are told in Rom. 12:9, "*Hate what is evil; cling to what is good*". How can we do that if we don't first judge what is good and what is evil? So, we must make judgments about what is right and what is wrong so that we can live according to God's commands.

Let us now look at personal matters which are disputable.

Romans 14 talks about matters which we are not to judge because they are disputable. Disputable matters are things which God has left to our choice: things such as what we eat (Rom. 14:2), what day we worship (Rom. 14:5), what Bible translation we read, watching TV etc. These are matters of personal choice and are not essential for salvation. 1 Tim. 2:9 tells us that we must always dress modestly but other than that we should be free to dress how we like. However, in Rom. 14:21, God tells us, "*It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall*". This verse makes it clear that we must be careful not to do anything that could cause a person to fall because another person's salvation is far more important than pleasing ourselves. A certain matter may seem absolutely trivial to us but to another person, or in another culture, it may be a serious issue and damaging to their faith or bad for the Christian image. Note that Rom. 14:10-12 warn us that we will all give an account of our actions to God.

Now let us look at personal things that are not disputable.

To decide if a personal activity is disputable or not ask yourself, "Can this affect someone's salvation?" If the answer is yes, then you can be sure that the Bible warns us against doing it and we should warn others. The church is commanded to judge and discipline members concerning their personal conduct. The Corinthians were told to, "*...expel the wicked man from among you ... so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord*" (1 Cor. 5:13, 5). This man was expelled from the church after he was judged as being wicked. He was expelled in the hope that he would repent and be accepted back into the church.

Another example of warning our brothers and sisters is in James 5:19-20. These verses say, "*My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*" It's not possible to follow these instructions, and save this man from death, without first judging his actions. As hard as it may be to do, it is an act of love to confront a sinning brother or sister and it is uncaring not to try to help them. In Ezekiel 33:1-9, God warns the Watchman that if he fails to sound a warning, then he will be held accountable. All Christians are Watchmen so let us lovingly encourage brothers and sisters who have gone off the path of righteousness. Also, if we don't keep God's standards of holiness, sin will soon work its way through the people and the church will become just another unholy social club.

Even though people will tell us that we should not judge, the Bible makes it clear that we should. The following examples show where the Apostles exposed error:

- a) Paul named and spoke against certain men in 2 Tim. 2:16-17, 2 Tim. 4:14-15 and 1 Tim. 1:19-20.
- b) John named a man who was in error in 3 John 1:9-10.
- c) Paul publicly corrected Peter, a fellow Apostle, in Galatians 2:11-14.
- d) Leaders caught in false teaching or immorality are to be rebuked publicly as 1 Tim. 5:20 says.
- e) Christians who won't repent must be removed from the church - Matt. 18:15-17.

These examples make it clear that we must judge and publicly expose error and, if necessary, discipline those who are in sin. The salvation of souls and purity of the church depends on this.

There is a lot of peer pressure telling us not to judge and not to speak against false teachings even when it is known that souls are being misled. People will say, "We must not judge" or "Let's keep the peace and unity". However, if we don't show people their error then they may end up in hell. Jesus told us clearly in Matt. 24:10-11 that during the end times "*many will turn away from the faith... and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people*". Worldwide, the Ecumenical Movement is seducing millions of Christians into an ungodly unity of false hope which knows nothing about salvation through repentance and the Lordship of Jesus. We must not allow ourselves to be drawn into this lie as there is only one hope of salvation and that is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. All other promises of salvation are untrue. We should not have unity with error.

Throughout the world there are churches, televangelists and teachers with all sorts of false teachings, fake healing ministries and the false prosperity gospel. These people are described and condemned in 2 Pet. 2. Rom. 16:17 warns us to "*... watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them*" and in Gal. 1:8 God condemns those who preach false gospels. Like the Bereans, in Acts 17:11, we must check the scriptures to see if what we are being taught is true and we must warn others about false teachings otherwise they may be badly misled and leave the path of holiness. So, it is most important that we make righteous judgments according to the Word of God so that we can recognise and separate ourselves from false teachings. 1 Tim. 1:3-5 tells us "*... command certain men not to teach false doctrines ... the goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*". As we can see from these verses, the reason God commands us to judge is because of love for each other as false teaching leads believers away from God.

Finally, if you were in error, wouldn't you want someone to warn you? Of course you would! So, in love, warn a brother or sister when it is necessary. James 4:17 tells us that, "*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*" Failing to judge righteously is unloving and will leave a sinner on the Broad Road to destruction. Also, as I said before, if we don't have discipline in the church then sin will spread to other members and the church will soon become little more than a social club.

Be a watchman for the Lord's sake.

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God calls His people to separation and holiness, not compromise. A very good article on the subject of separation from error, written by Paul Mizzi, can be downloaded from:

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/miscellaneous/thedowngradecontroversy.pdf>

This article can be downloaded from -

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/miscellaneous/judging.pdf>