

# To Judge or Not to Judge

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- Doesn't Jesus say not to judge one another—period!?
- Should Christians judge people who are divorced, remarried, homosexuals, or others who can't help being what they are?

When I grew up, the verse quoted by most evangelical Christians was, *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:16). Today, the most quoted verse is, *Do not judge lest you be judged* (Matthew 7:1). When I grew up, most evangelicals knew the context and reference for John 3:16. Today most Christians have no idea where the do not judge verse is. So, of course, they have no clue about its context.

Fact is, in the Bible, we are told both to not judge and to judge.

## DO NOT JUDGE

*Do not judge lest you be judged* (Matthew 7:1)

*For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you* (Matthew 7:2)

*Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things* (Romans 2:1)

*And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?* (Romans 2:3)

*For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment* (James 2:13)

*Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it* (James 4:11)

*Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes ...*  
(1 Corinthians 4:5a)

## DO JUDGE

*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye* (Matthew 7:5)

*Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces* (Matthew 7:6)

*But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man* (1 Corinthians 2:15)

*And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?* (Luke 12:57)

*You have judged correctly* (Luke 7:43)

*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment* (John 7:24)

*... judge those who are within the church*  
(1 Corinthians 5:12)

*Judge for yourselves ...* (1 Corinthians 11:13)

*... judge the body rightly* (1 Corinthians 11:29)

*For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* (1 Peter 4:17)

## In what sense are we not to judge one another?

There are three which come to mind:

(1) We should not judge motives. Only God can judge motives. Paul wrote, ... *God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus* (Romans 2:16). He told the Corinthians, ... *I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. ... the Lord ... will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God* (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

(2) We should not attempt to bring about justice—an eye-for-an-eye. Jesus said, *You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also* (Matthew 5:38-39). Governments, not individuals or private groups, should seek to bring about justice (Romans 13:1-3). Parents and churches should discipline (bring others back on the path who have strayed off) but not punish (seek equal pay back—justice—an-eye-for-an-eye).

(3) We should not measure others by our own standards. What is illegitimate here is to conjure up a set of rules to live by apart from God's, and then use that as a basis for judgment. Hypocrites are hypocrites because they not only judge others by their own rules, they also judge (and justify) themselves by those rules. Even Jesus said, ... *My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me* (John 5:30). Paul wrote, *Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions* (Romans 14:1). (See also Job 29:14 and Proverbs 21:15.)

## In what sense are we to judge one another?

In the Bible, person-to-person judgment is in the sense of discernment, not justice. We are to be sin sensitive, both in ourselves and in our fellow believers. That sin sensitivity should lead us to action, which can be generalized under the word “discipline” (correcting ourselves and others) not “punishment” (bringing about an eye-for-an-eye type payback—that's only for God and government, as mentioned above). Every page of the Bible calls upon believers to judge in the sense of discernment. Here is a corollary to that basic truth.

Knowing good improves judgment. Experiencing evil destroys judgment. When Adam and Eve sinned, God said, ... *be-hold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil* (Genesis 3:22). Paul told the Romans, *I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil* (Romans 16:19b). Joseph's knowledge of good kept him from adultery with Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:9; see also Psalm 119:1-11).

When Adam and Eve sinned, they felt shame (Genesis 3:7), experienced guilt (3:8), lied to God (3:10), and blamed someone else for their sin (3:12-13). Their knowledge of evil marred their judgment. Sin makes us less capable of dealing with sin—in ourselves and others. We often conclude former drug addicts make better drug counselors, divorced/remarried counselors make better divorce counselors, and former alcoholics make better alcohol counselors. What makes these people counselors is their availability, probably because they realize the extensiveness of the damage, and they can be helpful if they have taken the log out of their own eye (Luke 6:42). But if they lived through it and justified it, their judgment will be clouded.

## Here are some reasons why believers should judge one another

(1) One of the purposes of judging one another is to help make us less naive. Solomon states the purpose of the book of Proverbs like this. *To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion* (Proverbs 1:3-4). Later he writes, *Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the Lord understand all things* (28:5). Jesus said, ... *beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees* (Matthew 16:6, also verse 12). The apostles told the church to be sensitive to false prophets (Acts 13:6, 2 Peter 2:1), false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), false brethren (2 Corinthians 11:26, Galatians 2:4), false wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9), and false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3). If we refuse to discern truth, wisdom, and righteous behavior under the flag of non-judgment or tolerance, we mortgage the future of our children and disciples. Discernment-type judgment is essential for spiritual growth and maturity.

(2) One of the purposes of judging one another is to help keep one another from the judgment of God. James wrote, *My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins* (5:19-20). Paul told the Galatians, ... *if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness* ... (6:1). Judging one another is one way in which we bear one another's burden (v. 2) and love one another (1 John 4:17-21).

(3) Judging one another helps keep the leaven out of the whole lump. An unrepentant brother left alone in his sin can be corrupting to other believers. Paul said, *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?* (1 Corinthians 5:6b).

(4) Judging one another helps keep believers out of civil courts. Paul said, *Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?* (1 Corinthians 6:1-3). ... *I say this to your shame.*

*Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren* (v. 5). His advice is to be wronged rather than to go to court (v. 7). This would involve marriage/divorce, child custody, estate settlement, property disputes, etc. Christian judgment is to replace the judgment of civil courts.

## Questions and Answers

**Q:** *Doesn't Jesus say not to judge one another—period!?*

**A:** Not if your definition of judgment includes discernment. We should not judge one another in the sense of (1) motives, (2) bringing about an eye-for-an-eye, or (3) measuring others by our extra-biblical standards.

**Q:** *Should Christians judge people who are divorced, remarried, homosexuals, or others who can't help being what they are?*

**A:** Christians should help one another before they become divorced, remarried, or homosexual. After they have sinned, we should help them repent. But whatever we do, to help anyone requires judgment in the sense of discernment. The better our discernment, the more capable we are of loving one another.