

JUDGING OTHERS

By Tim Haile

"Judge not, that ye be not judged!" Have you ever been told this? If so, was that person guilty of "judging" you by criticizing your "judging" of others? Ironically, by using this particular Bible passage to condemn another person's judging, many people are guilty of violating the principle of the very passage they invoke!

Though they may not even know where it is in the Bible, many people are familiar with this Bible statement. Why is the verse so popular? Because, taken out of its context it appears to condemn *all forms* of judging. This would mean that one is wrong every time he is critical of a thing, whether it was a false practice or a false doctrine. Is this what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7:1? Is He condemning all denunciations of sin and error? If so, then He contradicted Himself on many occasions, for Jesus Himself was frequently critical of sin, error, and hypocrisy. For example, to the churches at Ephesus and Pergamos, Jesus expressed His hatred of the "deeds" and "doctrines" of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6,15). Jesus condemned both their *deeds* and *doctrines*. According to the position held by some, in doing this, Jesus contradicted His own teaching in Matthew 7:1. One knows he is wrong when he takes a position on a passage of Scripture that indicts God Himself as being wrong. Paul said, "*Let God be true, and every man a liar...*" (Rom. 3:4).

It should be observed that in most cases where one is condemned for "judging others," the person was actually just teaching the Bible! The "kill the messenger" mentality leads some to attack the messenger and ignore the message. Of course, like Paul, we should be ready to "*spend and be spent*" and to "*die daily*" in the service of our Lord. However, the conscientious Bible teacher who "speaks as the oracles of God," is not the one doing the "judging" when he speaks. Hear the words of inspiration in Hebrews 4:12:

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Notice the word "*discerner*." It is from the Greek word *kritikos*, which means "skilled in judging." When it is taught in its pureness, in its simplicity, without fear or favor, God's word judges and critiques its hearers. It is God's word that actually does the judging, not the speaker. A hearer's anger and resentment is often directed against the truth *teacher*. However, it is the *truth itself* that pricks the heart. Honest hearers are moved to ask what they must do to be rid of their sin and guilt (Acts 2:37). Dishonest hearers are also "cut to the heart," but they get mad at the teacher (Acts 7:54). In either case, it is the soul penetrating power of the Gospel that caused the reaction, whether the reaction is positive or negative.

Not All “Judging” Is Condemned

The Bible does condemn certain types of judging. However, not all types are condemned. Let us consider some passages that speak of “judging” in a positive way:

JOHN 7:24: Jesus said, “Judge not according to outward appearance, but **judge righteous judgment**” (John 7:24). Just as Matthew 7:1 *condemns* a particular kind of judging, John 7:24 *commends* and *commands* a particular kind of judging. We are commanded to “judge righteous judgment.” The word “righteous” (*dikaios*) as reference to what is fair and equitable. The context of John 7:24 provides valuable commentary as to what constitutes “righteous” judging. Jesus was commenting on the persecution He had earlier received for healing a man on the Sabbath day (John 5:9). Jesus defended His actions by pointing to the common practice of the Jews circumcising male babies on the Sabbath day in cases where the eighth day fell on the Sabbath day. Jesus said, *“Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? **Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment**”* (John 7:22-24). On what logical or scriptural basis could the Jews *condemn* the healing of a man on the Sabbath day while *accepting* and *defending* the practice of performing circumcisions on that same day? They were not judging “righteously!” They were quite inconsistent and hypocritical. Thus we conclude that, though Jesus does condemn hypocritical judging, He actually commands us to judge righteous judgment, i.e., judgment that is fair and right.

LUKE 12:57: Jesus said, *“Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?”* Here Jesus criticizes people for not judging things as they should. Jesus demands the kind of judging that forms a conclusion from an honest consideration of the available and observable facts, conditions and implications. Jesus observed that the Jews were able to discern from the rising of clouds in the West, that it was going to rain; and from Southerly winds that it was going to be hot. However, they had failed to judge from Jesus’ miracles and teaching, and from many prophetic predictions, that Jesus was the Messiah! Jesus rebukes them for failing to “judge” properly!

ACTS 4:19: Luke recorded, *“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.”* Peter plead with listeners to make a judgment about a matter. He wanted them to judge whether or not it was right to place man’s rules over God’s instructions. This is a kind of judging that God expects all men to regularly do. He wants them to *apply* the principles of divine law to everyday situations and events. Not *all* judging is bad!

1 CORINTHIANS 5:3,12: The Corinthians were criticized by the apostle for their failure to make a judgment about the fornicator who *“had his father’s wife”* (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul said he had “judged already” concerning this matter and he wasn’t even at Corinth! They *were* there and knew the details of the case, yet they had refused to act (1 Cor. 5:3). Paul strongly emphasized their need to repent of their sinful tolerance of the evil and impenitent man. If action were not soon taken, the leaven of sin and compromise would

work through the whole batch of dough. **The Corinthians were rebuked for refusing to judge!**

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-5: The Corinthians were also rebuked for their unwillingness and/or inability to judge small matters of disagreement that arose between themselves. Rather than settling differences among themselves, "*brother would go to law against brother, and that before unbelievers.*" Paul argues that since saints shall judge *angels* and *the world*, surely they ought to be able to judge the "small matters pertaining to this life!" Yes indeed, we are commanded to do *some* judging. The Bible doesn't condemn *all* judging.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:31: This passage speaks of another type of judging that should be done: we must judge *ourselves!* In order to commune with the Lord in a scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper, one must *examine himself* to see that he properly associates the unleavened bread with the Lord's body and the fruit of the vine with His blood (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Failure to do this turns the Lord's Supper into a common meal, robbing it of its intended purpose. By "judging ourselves," we avoid being "*chastened by the Lord*" and "*condemned with the world*" (vs. 32).

Matthew 7:1 Condemns One Certain Type Of Judging

As we have learned from the above passages, not *all* judging is condemned in the Bible. In passages that *do* condemn judging, we must consider the context to see why the judging is condemned. It is clearly wrong to base sweeping conclusions on the teaching of a single passage of scripture. Let us see what we can learn from the context of Matthew 7:1:

- 1: Judge not, that ye be not judged.
- 2: For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.
- 3: And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
- 4: Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?
- 5: Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Notice the word "for" (Gr. *gar*), at the beginning of the second verse. This word introduces *reason*. What, then, is the *reason* given for one NOT doing this type of judging? Jesus said, "...for **with what** judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." The words *with what* suggest a comparative standard. The judging condemned here is when one condemns another for doing either same thing, or something worse than what he does. Such a person is quick to point out the *small* offences in another's life, but he is slow to see even the large offenses in his own life. He is hypocritical. He attempts to remove the tiny piece of chaff from his brother's eye, while completely ignoring the large beam in his own eye. Paul accused 1st century Jews of this very thing. Romans 2:1 says, "*Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the*

same things.” Why were the Jews wrong in their criticisms of the Gentiles? Because they did the same things that they condemned the Gentiles for doing. This is what Jesus condemned in Matthew 7:1. Yes, this kind of judging is despicable and ungodly. Such a disposition stands in absolute opposition to what is holy and just. God-fearing men and woman will strongly denounce (judge) this brand of “judging” as being sinful and wrong. Let it be understood, however, that just because the Bible condemns this kind of judging does not mean that all kinds are condemned!

Other Types of Judging That Are Condemned:

- **Judging After The Flesh**

Jesus said, *“Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.”* The Jews judged by outward appearance (Jn. 7:24). Their judgments were skewed by their preconceptions and prejudices. They judged that since they were “Abraham’s seed,” they had never been in bondage to anyone (Jn. 8:33). Biased judgment is sinful and wrong. However, there are those, even among brethren, who judge others by their skin color or race.

- **Judging By Worldly Standards**

James said, *“Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”* (Jas. 2:4). Some Christians were giving preferential treatment and showing partiality to others based upon their wealth. Poor people were not given the same level of respect that was given to the rich. Even today, judgments are made on the basis of a person’s socio-economic background. Some brethren will only worship in churches that are composed of the affluent and influential. They do not associate with those who are less fortunate. James sharply condemned this attitude (Jas. 2:1-9). We are not to judge people based upon their degree of wealth, but on their character.

- **Judging By The Wrong Spiritual Standard**

Paul said, *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:”* (Col. 2:16). Some will boldly condemn what they perceive as inadequacies in another’s religion, or what they see as false practices in that religion. However, their judgments are based upon wrong standards. Some bind their own opinions. Some bind the opinions of others. Colossians 2 refers to some who bound the Law of Moses after Jesus had already nailed it to the cross (see Col. 2:14). Christ’s words are the standard by which men will be judged. Jesus said, *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (Jn. 12:48). Humanly devised standards are to be rejected (Gal. 1:8-9).

- **Judging The Scruples Of Others**

” Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand” (Rom. 14:4; *see also verses 10 and 14*). Paul warned the saints at Rome against condemning others for doing things that were not *inherently* wrong. The principle taught in Romans 14 is that one should not condemn others for not doing what God does not specifically require. Neither should one condemn others for doing what God does not specifically condemn. Christ is our Judge (Rom. 14:10). And as we said before, His word is the standard by which we are judged (Jn. 12:48).

Conclusion

The Bible teaches that some types of judging are right and other types are wrong. We must carefully consider the context in each passage where judging is discussed to determine what kind of judging is being discussed and why it is either right or wrong. We should not pick out just one place in the Bible where “judging” is condemned and conclude that *all* judging is condemned! As we have seen, this is simply not the case.

Tim Haile
7693 Russellville Rd.
Bowling Green, KY. 42101
timhaile@insightbb.com