

Is It Always Wrong to Judge?

Jason Patrick Hilburn

Today there is a widespread belief that no person is allowed to question or “condemn” the actions or teachings of anyone else. Perhaps you have heard someone say, “Who are you to judge?” or “You can’t judge me!”. Does the Bible teach that it is always wrong to judge, or has the Bible been mishandled to lead people to the wrong conclusion on this subject?

First of all, what exactly does it mean to “judge”? Some assume that to judge always means to condemn, but to judge simply means "to discern; to distinguish; to consider accurately for the purpose of forming an opinion or conclusion" (Webster). To condemn is "to determine or judge to be wrong, or guilty; to disallow; to disapprove" (Webster). As will be shown, the Bible teaches us in many passages that we must discern whether the actions and teachings of both ourselves and others are right or wrong. The purpose of this “discernment” is to save ourselves and others, and it is absolutely commanded and necessary. The reader is encouraged to take a Bible and read the passages referenced in this article to gain a better understanding of God’s will on this subject.

Someone may ask, “Didn’t Jesus say, ‘Judge not’ in Matthew 7:1?” Yes, He did, but Jesus was giving a warning to hypocrites (“*Thou hypocrite...*,” 7:5; cf. Rom. 2:21-23). The context of Matthew 6 and 7 reveals that Jesus was simply teaching us to “judge not” in a hypocritical way. Remember that Matthew 7 is a continuation of what Jesus had been discussing in chapter 6—this is all from the Sermon on the Mount. Please notice what Jesus taught:

1. DO NOT GIVE ALMS (as the hypocrites do) Mt. 6:2.
2. DO NOT PRAY (as the hypocrites do) Mt. 6:5.
3. DO NOT FAST (as the hypocrites do) Mt. 6:16.
4. DO NOT JUDGE (as the hypocrites do) Mt. 7:1-5.

The truth is that Jesus did not forbid us to judge any more than He forbade us to pray! In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus was speaking as if He were directly addressing a hypocrite. He warns the hypocrite to get his life right and then help others get their lives right (7:5; cf. Gal. 6:1).

Jesus actually commands us to judge! In Matthew 7, Jesus went on to say that after you get your life right, you then can help your brother get his life right: “...*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*” (Mt. 7:5; cf. Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). Jesus also teaches in the very next verse that we must determine who are “*dogs*” and “*swine*” (7:6). In the same sermon and chapter, Jesus said that we will be able to judge (know, discern) false prophets “*by their fruits*” (7:15-20; cf. 12:33; Lk. 6:43-45; 1 Jn. 4:1; Rev. 2:2). The phrase “*judge not*” is also found in John 7:24: “*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*” Judging righteous judgment means:

1. “Judge not” hypocritically (Mt. 7:1-5).
2. “Judge not” with prejudice or without knowing the facts (1 Sam. 1:13-16; Jn. 7:24).
3. “Judge not” in matters of opinion or scruples (Rom. 14).
4. Judge according to the Truth of God’s Word (Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21; Heb. 5:12-14).

If it is always sinful to judge, then here are some questions to consider:

1. Did Jesus teach us to sin? "...judge righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24).
2. Why did Jesus commend the church at Ephesus for determining that some religious people claiming to be Christians were "liars"? (Rev. 2:2).
3. How can we determine who the "dogs" and "swine" are (as Jesus commanded), if we are not allowed to judge people by their fruits? (Mt. 7:6, 15-20; Lk. 6:43-45).
4. Should we be concerned about a brother who has "ought against" us, if nobody has a right to judge us?
 - a. Jesus said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mt. 5:23-24).
 - b. Surely many today would go on and worship God without being reconciled to their brethren, stubbornly claiming that nobody has a right to judge them!
5. Did the apostle John teach us to sin? "...try the spirits whether they are of God..." (1 Jn. 4:1).
6. Was it wrong for John to say to Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife"? (Mark 6:18). Should John have "minded his own business"? (cf. Mt. 11:11).
7. Were the Bereans in sin for judging Paul's teachings by the Scriptures? (Acts 17:11).
8. Some say we cannot judge others regarding doctrinal matters, so were Aquila and Priscilla wrong to judge Apollos regarding baptism? (Acts 18:24ff).
9. Why is it acceptable among many "Bible believers" to speak out against immoral sins, but "taboo" to speak out against many blatant doctrinal errors, which are just as sinful? (cf. 2 Tim. 2:17-18; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:6-9; 5:4).
10. Was Paul wrong to judge Hymenaeus and Philetus regarding a doctrinal matter? (2 Tim. 2:17-18).
11. Was Paul in sin for confronting Peter and judging that he was "to be blamed"? (Gal. 2:11ff).
12. Was Paul wrong to "judge" that the fornicating brother at Corinth should have fellowship withdrawn from him by the church? (1 Cor. 5:3).
13. Why did Paul rebuke the Corinthians for not judging their brethren? (1 Cor. 5:2, 6, 12; 6:1-5).
14. Why did Paul say that Christians should all be of the same mind and judgment? (1 Cor. 1:10).
15. If Lydia was "judged...to be faithful" by Paul, did Paul sin in so doing? (Acts 16:15).
16. Why is it that people who condemn judging do not mind when others judge them to be right? Why do they only have a problem when someone judges them to be wrong?
17. How can we determine who is teaching Truth and who is teaching error? (Isa. 8:20; Mt. 7:15-16, 19-20; 12:33; Heb. 5:14; 1 Thess. 5:21; Titus 1:9-11; 2:1; 1 Jn. 4:1; Rev. 2:2).
18. Why are there commands in the Bible to "reprove" and "rebuke" others? (Lk. 17:3; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9-11, 13; 2:15; Eph. 5:11, etc.).
19. How can we ever "mark" and "avoid" false teachers as we have been commanded to do? (Rom. 16:17; cf. Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; Rev. 2:2; 2:6; 2:15; 2:20).

20. How can we ever obey the command to “restore” an erring brother without fear of “judging” him? (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20).
21. How can the process of church discipline that the Lord commanded even begin to be carried out? (Mt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15).
22. How can we seek and save the lost if we cannot determine who is lost?
23. Would a person be guilty of “sinfully judging” if he said that only people who are “in Christ” will be going to Heaven? (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; Mark 8:38).
 - a. After all, such a statement would “condemn” everyone outside of Christ, and we are not allowed to do that if we are not allowed to judge others...Has it come to the point in our “politically correct” culture that proclaimed “Bible believers” will not even say that people who reject Christ will go to hell? (Mk. 8:38).
 - b. Let us speak as the Bible speaks, “warning every man” (1 Pet. 4:11; Col. 1:28).
24. If a person says we are wrong to judge others, is he not being hypocritical? Has he not just committed the same “sin” he is condemning?

Although Christ will be our Final Judge, He has commanded us to make judgments (discerning right or wrong) in this life based on the authority of His Word. This is for the purpose of saving ourselves and others. This entire false idea that one person cannot judge another cripples and paralyzes efforts commanded by God to help others get to Heaven. For example, if those in the Lord’s church believe they cannot judge others, it is highly unlikely that they will go to those in error to help them obey the Truth and get to Heaven (Jn. 8:31-32; Mt. 28:18-20). If those outside of the church believe nobody is allowed to judge, they will not allow those who know the Truth to teach them the Truth in a loving way. They will immediately play the “no judging” card and refuse to listen. Understanding all of this, and realizing how widespread the doctrine of “no judging” is, it is surely one of Satan’s most powerful devices! Paul wrote, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). Do not fall for this lie of Satan—the truth is that we must make judgments to save others and ourselves!

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