

To Judge Or Not To Judge

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Matt. 7:1-6

Some time back a brother came to me with concern. Another member had given him a list of scriptures on the subject of “Not Judging” and wanted him to give a sermon using these scriptures. This person wanted to “punish” others because they were judging him. The person who came to me said he didn’t feel comfortable about giving this sermon, so I said I would speak on this subject, but thought to myself I wouldn’t use just from a limited selection of scriptures on the subject.

One problem behind the list of scriptures was that it was completely one-sided, thus giving a skewed view of what the Lord said on the subject.

Another problem is that it was prepared for the wrong reason. The person wanted to use the scriptures to “punish” others. A favorite saying of many people is “*Judge not, that ye be not judged*”. This is frequently quoted as a response whenever someone is pointing out the sins or faults of another. The impression is that we should never make moral judgments in what we see in others.

Is that true? Is that what Jesus meant when He said this? Are we never to make moral judgments about the right or wrong in another? If we see wrong in others, can we never point it out?

I am persuaded that Jesus’ statement is often misused, that Jesus taught...

- There are times when we must judge.
- There are times when it is appropriate to point out the faults in others.

“To Judge Or Not To Judge?”, that is the question before us. The proper answer comes from a closer look at Jesus’ words in Matt. 7:1-6. First note how His words are frequently misused...

Forbid all manner of judgment?

His words are often used to forbid “all” manner of judgment; such as adverse or unfavorable criticism — like pointing out a fault in someone else, even if it be truly “constructive” criticism, such as the exercise of church discipline. Exercising discipline of any sort does require “judging” others as to their moral or spiritual condition.

Since such “judgment” is involved, some feel verses 1-2 rule out any sort of church discipline, such as exposing those who teach error.

It requires making a judgment in order to consider whether someone is teaching error. Therefore, some people, in light of verses 1-2, believe we cannot speak out against those who teach error.

Is that what Jesus means? Must we remain silent when we see people overtaken in a fault, bringing reproach upon the name of Christ, or blatantly teaching error? Let me suggest that Jesus did not rule out “all” forms of judgment.

Note the “immediate” context which reveals that in some cases “proper” judgment must be made. Matt. 7:6, *“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”*

This implies judgment is to be made as to who are “dogs” and who are “hogs”. Otherwise, how can we know when not to give that which is holy to “dogs”? Or, how can we know when not to cast our pearls before “swine”?

Matt. 7:15-20, *“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”*

This implies that we must make judgments in determining who is a false teacher (*“by their fruits ye shall know them”*).

Consider the “remote” context which speak of times when judgment must be made! Jesus said in John 7:24, *“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”*

Christians have a responsibility to “judge those who are inside” the local church. Paul told the church at Corinth that they had a problem that they had better deal with. He did not tell any brethren from Colosse, Philippi, Ephesus, any of churches in Galatia, or anywhere else to go to Corinth to take care of this matter. He told the church at Corinth to do this.

1 Cor. 5:9-13, *“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”*

Each congregation must judge matters that come before them concerning their own congregation.

We are taught by John (the apostle of love) to “*try the spirits*” (which requires making judgments, does it not?). 1 John 4:1, “*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*”

There is no contradiction here, for as we continue with our text, we notice that Jesus defined what “kind” of judging He condemned: Judging when one is blind to his or her own faults.

Matt. 7:3-5, “*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 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? 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.*”

Jesus is saying that is it wrong for anyone to concentrate his attention on the speck in his brother’s eye, and ignore the beam in his own eye.

Just Paul taught the necessity of examining oneself when helping others. Gal. 6:1, “*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*”

Jesus condemned judging without mercy and love. Luke 6:36-37, “*Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*”

James warned against making judgments without mercy. James 2:13, “*For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*”

If we make judgments without showing mercy, then no mercy will be shown when we are judged! Just as Jesus said in verse 2: Matt. 7:2, “*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*” With the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

The implication is not that we should never judge, but when we do judge, remember that we shall be judged by the same standards we use! Let mercy and love temper our judgments.

Jesus implies there are times when we “must” make judgments!

It is “after” we have first examined ourselves and corrected our own faults.

First, we must remove the “beam” from our own eye. Matt. 7:5, *“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.”*

When we have done so, then we are able to see, we are able to discern (judge), and be of help to others who are overtaken in their faults. Indeed, “the law of Christ” requires us to! Gal. 6:1-2, *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”*

Again, we must judge between those “worthy” and those who are “hogs” and “dogs”.

Note carefully Jesus’ words in Matt. 7:6, *“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”* Some people are not worthy of that which “holy”. Some are like “dogs” or “swine”. Determining who is which requires “judgment” upon our part!

With those who are receptive, we are to be long-suffering in trying to help them come out of their error. Listen to what Paul said is needed: 2 Tim. 2:24-26, *“And the servant of the Lord must not strive [attack, attack]; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”*

But for those who are not receptive, we are not to waste what is good and holy on them! Jesus instructed His disciples to not waste their time on the unworthy. Matt. 10:12-15, *“And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”*

Paul told the Jews at Antioch that they were unworthy of everlasting life. Acts 13:42-46, *“And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews*

and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

What about unjust judgments or treatments?

Some may feel that they have been unjustly judged or treated by other members of the church and they want to retaliate in some way.

Let me tell you about some Christians who were really mistreated. Many early Christians were slaves to non-Christians masters. Some objected to their treatment and thought or attempted evil retaliations against their masters in some manner. Some of these slaves came to Peter about their grief and wanted him to do something about it. Undoubtedly, they were surprised by his answer. Peter taught that they were to be patient and endure whatever grief they might suffer at the hands of their masters. 1 Pet. 2:18-24, "*Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*"

Even though they were Christians, they had no legal rights. They could be beaten, maimed, or tortured and had to endure it. Peter said they could not call on the fact of being a Christian to cease their grief, but had to endure it, suffering even wrongfully.

Jesus Christ suffered wrongfully and is our example as to how we are to react when we think we suffer wrongfully, as well.

Philemon, however, was a Christian who owned slaves (or at least one, Onesimus). Onesimus was not a Christian, at least not before the time

he left Philemon and escaped to Rome where he somehow met up with Paul who was in house arrest at the time.

Now, during that time, many were slaves because of capture during war. Some were born slaves, their parents being slaves. Some were made slaves willfully to satisfy some debt or because of some wrong done. I believe it was because of one of the latter in the case with Onesimus, for Paul said: Philemon 1:18-19, *“If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.”*

Onesimus was an escaped slave. For this, by Roman law, he could have been scourged to the maximum and been branded physically as a thief. What could Onesimus do as an escaped slave? Where could he work? What could he eat? He may have heard that Paul, who had taught Jesus Christ back home, and had convinced Philemon and others to become Christians, was captured and taken to Rome. Undoubtedly, he went to Paul seeking advice.

During the time Onesimus was with Paul he also became a Christian. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter asking for forgiveness and receive him for he had gained a brother in Christ; that he would now be much more profitable to him and to Paul working as a Christian. Philemon 1:11, *“Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.”*

Philemon could have demanded his rights as a slave owner. Paul asked him to put those rights aside for the sake of Christ. Because they were both Christians they had an opportunity to get much accomplished for the Lord.

Some today feel that when they were wronged they even take their matter to earthly legal systems, instead of working their problems out as Christians. This happened even in Paul’s time, and he taught against it. 1 Cor. 6:7-8, *“Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.”* Just as Peter told the Christian slaves.

Paul said it is better to suffer wrongfully, being defrauded, than to stir up trouble by suing your brother.

Christians should have this attitude even when it is not a lawful matter, but a matter of conscience; that is, as long as it doesn’t go against the law of Christ. Rom. 14:13, *“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.”* Judging, in this case, concerns

matters that are not taught in the scriptures — when one believes something is religiously acceptable, but another believes it is a sin.

Notice the example of which Paul teaches concerns the eating of meats. Rom. 14:14-15, *“I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.”*

I am convinced he is referring to the eating of meats that may have been offered to idols, because he dealt with the same subject in Corinth as he did in Rome. 1 Cor. 8:4-12, *“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.”*

Our Lord told Peter it was okay to eat meat that was previously forbidden under the Mosaic Law. Acts 10:9-17, *“On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate,”*

So, since the Lord said it was okay to eat meat, I don't believe the eating of meat itself was the issue. As I said, however, there were some in Paul's time that thought it was a sin to eat meat that may have been sacrificed to idols. He said this was a matter of one brother's conscience that he could not eat, and another's liberty that he could eat.

Paul said of himself, 1 Cor. 8:13, "*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*" Remember, Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that he had been talking about the eating of meats that may have been sacrificed to idols.

Just because you believe you may have a right to do something, doesn't mean you should do it, if your brother's conscience is damaged. Paul said in: 1 Cor. 6:12, "*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient:...*" That is, all things not covered by the law of Christ, but we should love our brother enough to not offend him.

Conclusion.

The kind of judging forbidden by Jesus is self-righteous, hypocritical judging which is false and calls down God's judgment on oneself. This is the kind of judging that was also condemned by James when he wrote: James 4:11-12, "*Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?*"

This is in reference to speaking evil about others and making judgments without knowing all of the facts; spreading perhaps false information among the brethren. May God help us to refrain from such type of judging; to be more apt to remove the "beams" from our own eyes; to then be more useful in helping others with their problems.

But to say we should never judge, is to abuse what Jesus taught, not only in this passage but elsewhere as well!

However, we need to be careful in judging matters of conscience in things not covered by the law of Christ.

Speaking of judging, are you preparing yourself for the day in which you will be judged by the Lord? John 12:48, "*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.*" 2 Cor. 5:10, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*"

Remember we are servants (slaves) of the Lord. Once we have offered Him our servitude and then depart from Him, the punishment will be worse for us than it was for an escaped slave. 2 Pet. 2:20-21, *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”*

Let’s take our service to the Lord seriously.

