

# Judge Not

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In the first installment, we saw when Christians are and are not to judge their brethren. Now, we will look at judging the world.

## **Judging the World's Morality**

First Corinthians 5 directly answers the question of whether Christians are to judge the morality of the world. Although we have seen parts of this already, I am going to fully quote 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

I wrote to you in my letter to have no company with sexual sinners; yet not at all meaning with the sexual sinners of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters; for then you would have to leave the world. But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. Don't even eat with such a person. For what have I to do with also judging those who are outside? Don't you judge those who are within? But those who are outside, God judges. "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves."

Paul clearly states that we are to have nothing to do with judging those who are outside the assembly of the saints. That is God's jurisdiction.

Yet, only a couple of verses later, in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, Paul seems to contradict himself: "Don't you know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" Paul is here plainly teaching that, besides the judging we have already seen, the assembly is to judge disputations that "pertain to this life" (verse 3) between brethren when they cannot settle them privately. This is the procedure Jesus details in Matthew 18:15-17.

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Looking carefully at these verses, we see that Paul's statement that the saints will judge the world is speaking of a future time—not this life. This is verified by the fact that he says we will also judge angels. We are certainly not judging angels now. In other words, our judging in this age concerns only matters within the assembly, and, as we have seen, only under certain circumstances. As far as our judging the world is concerned, 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 is obviously speaking of a time in the next life when we will sit with Christ and judge the world and, apparently, the fallen angels. But in this life, we must leave the judging of the world up to God.

In John 8, we read that the Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus whom they had caught in the act of adultery. Interestingly, if they caught her in the act, they must also have caught the man, but they never say anything about him. So we immediately see their hypocritical double standard. They say to Jesus, "Now in our law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. What then do you say about her?" (verse 5). They want to trap Jesus into contradicting the law: "They said this testing him, that they might have something to accuse him of" (verse 6a).

His response was to stoop down, write with his finger on the ground (we don't know what He wrote, so speculation is useless), and say, "He who is without sin amongst you, let him throw the first stone at her" (verse 7). This is completely consistent with what Jesus said about judging. We are all sinners and sinners have no right to condemn others of sin.

Somewhat amazingly, this got through to the Pharisees, who, "being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning from the oldest, even to the last. Jesus was left alone with the woman where she was, in the middle" (verse 9). And then we read, "Jesus, standing up, saw her and said, 'Woman, where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on, sin no more'" (verses 10-11). Preachers often make much of the fact that Jesus told her to sin no more. But more astounding is the fact that Jesus, who truly was sinless and was the only man there who could rightly condemn her, did not do so.

And what did Jesus say immediately after this to the others who were gathered? "Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life'" (verse 12). Why did Jesus use this incident

to proclaim that He was the light of the world? Because His ministry and message focused on grace!

In verse 15, He tells the Pharisees, "You judge according to the flesh. I judge no one"—at least, not in this age. Being judged and condemned does not make people receptive to the Gospel. In Romans 1, Paul tells of the natural progression and effects of sin and of God's judgments on humans who have rejected Him. But Paul never adds his own condemnation of these people. Then, in Romans 2:1-4, Paul says,

Therefore you are without excuse, O man, whoever you are who judge. For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things. We know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. Do you think this, O man who judges those who practice such things, and do the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Scholars debate whether Paul is addressing the Gentiles or the Jews here. Most likely, it is the Jews, but what he says is a universal truth: "For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things." This is again the exact same truth that Jesus gave. We are all sinners and have no right to judge others. If we are Christians, we are even more responsible to understand the last sentence: "Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. Despite what the Catholic church of the middle ages, the Reformers, and the Puritans may have said, it is not the law, or preaching hellfire and brimstone that leads us to repentance. It is the goodness of God. The Greek word for "goodness" in this verse is *chrēstos*. It is the word translated "gracious" in 1 Peter 2:3. It is translated "kind" in Ephesians 4:32: "And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God also in Christ forgave you" and Luke 6:35: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind towards the unthankful and evil."

This is how we are a light to the world and the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-14)—by being gracious (including telling people the gracious Good News), kind, tender hearted, forgiving, loving our enemies, doing good, lending and expecting nothing back, being kind even to the unthankful and evil. In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus taught,

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48

"Perfect" is from the Greek *teleios*. In this case, it means nothing missing to make it complete. Love is the most important ingredient in the recipe of a Christian. Whatever other gifts we may have, without love we are a "sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). And that is certainly the way the world hears Christians who are pointing their fingers and shouting, "Sin!" In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul says, "Love is patient and is kind [*chrēsteuetai*—is kind by being useful]; love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud."

Homosexuality, adultery, incest, infanticide, abortion and many other sins were common in the Roman Empire of Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles. Where do we read in the Bible of their lambasting the unconverted Gentiles of the Roman Empire for these or any sins? Nowhere. John the Baptist criticized Herod for taking his brother's wife (Mark 6:18). But both were Jews, and this was more like John trying to deal with the gross public sin of an individual brother Jew. But the finger pointing, Ten Commandment quoting, morality legislating tirades of today's right-wing, Christian conservatives are not found in the New Testament. And they don't win converts.

A Barna Group study of 16- to 29-year-olds found that 87% see present-day Christianity as judgmental and 85% see it as hypocritical. Also, 75% perceive Christianity as too involved in politics. This study also said, "Today, the most common perception is that present-day

Christianity is 'anti-homosexual.' Overall, 91% of young non-Christians and 80% of young churchgoers say this phrase describes Christianity" ("A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity" <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity#.UmrxQIOzKMQ>). That they would think that anti-homosexuality describes Christianity is a tragedy that illustrates how totally off-course the modern, evangelical church has become. Its stress on condemning homosexuality and lobbying for anti-homosexual laws has hindered the Great Commission work of preaching the Gospel.

In another survey conducted by the Barna Group, researchers asked a nationwide, representative sample of Christians twenty questions to determine whether their actions and attitudes were more Christ-like or more like the Pharisees. "The findings reveal that most self-identified Christians in the U.S. are characterized by having the attitudes and actions researchers identified as Pharisaical.... On the other end of the spectrum, 14% of today's self-identified Christians—just one out of every seven Christians—seem to represent the actions and attitudes Barna researchers found to be consistent with those of Jesus" ("Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?" <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/611-christians-more-like-jesus-or-pharisees#.Umrw7IOzKMQ>). The rest were somewhere in between.

In his article, "The coming evangelical collapse" <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html>, Michael Spencer lists the number one reason for the failure of evangelical Christianity as, "Evangelicals have identified their movement with the culture war and with political conservatism. This will prove to be a very costly mistake.... The evangelical investment in moral, social, and political issues has depleted our resources and exposed our weaknesses. Being against gay marriage and being rhetorically pro-life will not make up for the fact that massive majorities of Evangelicals can't articulate the Gospel with any coherence. *We fell for the trap of believing in a cause more than a faith*" (emphasis in original).

Too many Christians have lost sight of the grace-centeredness of the Great Commission. When James and John wanted to command fire to come down from the sky to destroy a village, Jesus' responded in a way that many Christian leaders today would do well to heed: "But he turned and rebuked them, 'You don't know of what kind of spirit you

are. For the Son of Man didn't come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56). Too many Christians today are also of a wrong spirit—a spirit of harshness, judgmentalism, condemnation, and even violence. Jesus had a spirit of compassion and mercy and grace.

### **Summary**

In summary, we've seen that, while Jesus gave us a command not to judge, He was speaking of a specific kind of judging. Jesus did not mean that we are not to judge the doctrines that someone teaches because He elsewhere told us to do just that. And He did not mean that we are to always turn a blind eye to a brother's obvious transgression, because when we do that we cannot help him and we endanger the assembly by allowing the wicked behavior to spread like leaven through a lump of dough.

But Jesus did mean that we are not to be critical of the practice of brethren in nonessential areas. And, He especially meant that we are not to critically, accusingly, and hypocritically point out the sins of our brethren as if we, of ourselves, don't sin. We are all sinners and we must be understanding of each other. We must not be looking for fault in others, and we must be forgiving when we come across faults. This applies even when the brother sins against us: "Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven.'" (Matthew 18:21-22). And even in cases of conspicuous sin that must be dealt with, our motive should be love. We should want the brother to be restored, not condemned or punished.

We have also seen that, in this age, Christians are not to judge the world. After all, the only reason we are not a part of this sinful world is because of the grace God has freely given us: "Not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6). When we point out the sins of the world, we are not shining lights pouring forth God's grace but rather we are disgracing the name of Christ and Christianity to the world which sees right through such hypocrisy.

There is an account that when English Reformer John Bradford saw a group of prisoners being led to their execution, he said, "There, but for

the grace of God, goes John Bradford." Each one of us would do well to put our name in that statement and always bear it in mind.