

Judging

Introduction

In this discussion we will once again see how wrong opinions can be formed by using Bible verses out of context. An example of this is the idea that is so often expressed that we as Christians may not judge. This mind-set is as result of a very superficial study of what is taught in Scripture. In the light of the many warnings given by Jesus and the apostles about deception in the last days, it is of the utmost importance that we fully understand what the Bible really has to say about this matter. Because this topic is not addressed adequately by most churches, many believers are being misled to believe the false doctrines that are being propagated in books, on TV and DVD's in these days (**Matt.7:15-16, 1 Tim.4:1-3**).

Matt.7:1

The most well-known verse quoted to say that we should not judge, is **Matt.7:1**: *“Do not judge, or you will be judged.”* Although Jesus says that one should not judge, it seems as if, just a few verses further, He contradicts Himself by commanding the opposite: *“Watch out for false prophets...By their fruit you will recognize them”* (**Matt.7:15-16**).

Paul seems to do the same. He says that you must not judge your brother (**Rom.14:10**), but then says in another letter: *“Are you not to judge those inside (the church)? Expel the wicked man from among you”* (**1 Cor.5:12**). James does exactly the same. After warning that you must not judge your brother, he goes and does the opposite of what he has just commanded! (**James 4:11**). He criticizes the adulterers and those who love the world (**James 4:4**). He does not spare the rich either (**James 5:1**). Remember, he is writing to Christians! As we go through Scripture, we see that God often sends people to judge and warn others. It is true that we read in Scripture that we are not supposed to judge, but what about all the other places where we are told to do the opposite? How do you explain this apparent discrepancy?

The word “judge” must be defined

Before we look at the Biblical use of the word, let's see what the dictionary has to say about it. The Webster's Dictionary explains it like this: **judge – to form an opinion through careful weighing of evidence and testing of premises – to determine or pronounce after inquiry and deliberation.**

I would like to see what would happen if someone walked into a courtroom one day, quote **Matt.7:1** and tell the judge and jury that the Bible says that they must not judge! I can imagine their reaction. Authorities and rulers are appointed by God to judge the guilty and to protect the innocent (**Rom.13**). We have to make judgements nearly every single day of our lives; when we have to buy a new car, which job to apply for, who to vote for and what to eat. If we are wise, we will base our decisions on sound research and make use of all the information that we can get hold of. Would it be less important to make sound judgements

when it comes to spiritual things? On the contrary, the Word of God instructs us *“do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1)*. The context shows that these *“spirits”* refer to people. Furthermore, Paul instructs: *“Test (**dokimazo**) everything. Hold on to the good” (1 Thess. 5:21)*, (**dokimazo**, (Greek) – to discern, to examine, to test Zodhiates Word Study Dictionary). If we allow Scripture to explain Scripture, we find that nowhere is an unqualified statement made that we are not to judge. But, because the church in general teaches that we must not judge, many things, in practice and in doctrine, are done that are not sanctioned by Scripture.

Scripture teaches that we must judge, but that we must not judge according to appearance, “but judge with righteous judgement” (John 7:24).

How must we judge with *“righteous judgement?”*

God is the Judge and the One who decides what is right or wrong, not us. When God says in His Word that something is wrong, and we comply and act in accordance with it, it is not us judging, but God. To judge righteously means not to express your own opinion about a matter, but to carefully weigh what God says about it.

What the Word says about judging – Cases where we are not permitted to judge:

1. Only God can judge in terms of somebody’s eternal destiny

*“In the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will judge (**krino**) the living and the dead” (2 Tim.4:1).*

(**Krino** – to decide judicially, to try, to judge, to go to sue at the law, ordain...). We do not have the right to decide whether somebody goes to heaven or to hell.

2. We may not judge according to external appearance or in terms of material possessions

“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘Stand here,’ or sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:2-4).

3. Only God can judge motives

*“Therefore, stop judging prematurely, before the Lord comes, for he will bring to light what is now hidden in darkness and reveal **the motives of our hearts**” (1 Cor.4:5, my emphasis).*

4. We must be careful not to judge in terms of things of secondary importance

“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables...One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike” (Rom.14:1-8).

This scripture is often used in a general way to state that Christians must not judge one another. What must be kept in mind, though, is that Paul is admonishing those who are strong in the faith, not to look down on those who are still weak in the faith. But this piece of scripture cannot be used to justify a state of permanent spiritual immaturity. In one of his other letters he rebukes believers of longstanding because, instead of being teachers already, they still had to be fed on milk (Heb.5:12-14). Although we must be patient with those who are still weak in their persuasion concerning matters of secondary importance, we must be careful that a state of weakness in the faith does not become the standard of the church. The goal should be that we all grow up in the faith, *“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...”* (Eph.4:11-16).

We are commanded to judge in terms of the following:

1. We are to judge ourselves

“But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement” (1 Cor.11:31).

2. All utterances, and teaching and preaching, must be judged in order to determine whether it is in line with Biblical doctrine

*“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh (**diakrino**) carefully what is said” (1 Cor.14:29).*

Diakrino – to separate thoroughly, discern, judge, be partial ([Zodhiates Word Study Dictionary](#)).

This principle goes right back to the Old Testament. If a prophet’s word did not come true, he had to be stoned (Deut.18:20-22). Today we are commanded to evaluate all teaching and preaching in the light of God’s Word. A very common mistake believers make, is to think that because somebody is such a good person and leads such a holy life, his teaching must be right. The good lifestyle of a person is not proof enough of somebodies doctrine. It is his doctrine that must be evaluated, not his character.

3. We must judge between brother and brother

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you...If he will not listen, take one or two along...if he refuses to listen, tell it to the church...”(Matt.18:15-17).

4. We may not judge hypocritically

This is what Jesus warns against in **Matt.7:1**. He warns of judging someone whilst we are guilty of the same thing: *“Do not judge...You hypocrite (**hypocrites**), first take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (**Matt.7:1-5**).

5. All things should be judged

*“The spiritual man makes judgements (**anakrino**) about all things”* (**1 Cor.2:15**). **Anakrino** – to examine or question in order to pass a judicial sentence (Zodhiates Word Study Dictionary). If we ignore this scriptural instruction to judge **all things**, we are being disobedient and prone to become victims of deception which is so rife in these days.

6. We are instructed to judge immorality and sin in the church

“But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater, or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat...Expel the wicked man from among you”
(**1 Cor.5:9-13**).

Jesus teaches that a person will be known by his or her fruit (**Matt. 7:16-20**).

7. Believers are to judge in ordinary, everyday type of disputes between brothers

“Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church...Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?” (**1 Cor.6:4-5**).

May names be mentioned when judging?

Paul openly warns Timothy against Himenaeus and Alexander who did not hold on to a good conscience and who had shipwrecked their faith (**1 Tim.1:19-20**). So also he mentions Phygelus and Hermogenes who were amongst those who had deserted him (**2 Tim.1:15**). Furthermore, he does not cringe away from naming Himeneus and Filetus as two who were amongst those who were spreading false doctrine in the church (**2 Tim.2:16-17**). Demas also gets mentioned as one who left Paul (**2 Tim.4:10**). Even the apostle of love, John, names Diotrephes as one who was causing trouble amongst believers (**3 John 1:9-10**). How can people think that untruth which is so widely spread around publicly by means of TV, pulpits and books, should not also be corrected publically? I wonder what would have

happened if the Reformers of the Middle Ages did not publically denounce the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church?

The gift of discernment

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in **1 Cor.12:10**, is the gift of discernment. The word “discern” in Greek, is **diakrisis**, which also means to judge, to decide and to discern. Those who are of the opinion that one should not judge, must consider the fact that they might be working directly against what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in the church, that is, to enable believers through this gift, to recognize the lie. Years ago discernment was known to be something that enabled believers to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Today deception has become so subtle, that discernment must now enable you to discern between what is right and between **what is almost right!**

Conclusion

Paul’s instruction is very clear:

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim.4:16).

Although we are admonished to evaluate everything, we must remember that as far as people are concerned, we must do it with a spirit of forbearance.

“For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God”(1Pet. 4:17).

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