

Jesus and Paul Call Us to Judge

It seems that everyone in America today knows that Jesus said, "Judge not, lest you be judged." But how many people know that Jesus called us to make righteous judgments and that Paul called us to judge fellow believers?

One year ago, I wrote an article devoted to answering the question, "To Judge or Not to Judge?" It seems like now would be a perfect time to revisit the question, putting the emphasis on the importance of making righteous judgements.

I have to chuckle, though, when the "Don't judge" crowd is often guilty of the most ugly judgmentalism and name-calling, completely oblivious to the hypocrisy of it all.

To give one example, a colleague forwarded a link to me where some folks were not happy with my recent dialogue with Andy Stanley. One of them labelled me: "Christianity's foremost obnoxious blowhard. He's surpassed his usefulness and has become a self-serving, attention whore. You can be right and be so totally obnoxious doing it that you lose your opportunity to have your voice heard."

How sweet!

So, it's judgmental and wrong for me to respectfully call on Pastor Stanley to make a clear statement about homosexual practice and have a fruitful dialogue with him about the subject, but it's fine for this individual to blast me in the most carnally judgmental terms.

Isn't that how it works these days?

We politely say, "We've believe it's best for a child to have a mother and father," or "We don't believe God designed men to

be with men or women to be with women,” and we’re maligned in the most crude, profane and hateful ways. And then we’re accused of being judgmental!

When it comes to the biblical calling *not* to judge, Jesus, Paul and Jacob (James) said in the strongest terms that we were not to judge hypocritically or superficially or falsely and we were not to condemn (Matt. 7:1-5); that we were not to pass judgment on one another on disputable matters, nor judge God’s will for another believer (Rom. 14:1-13); and that we were not to speak evil of one another (Jacob [James] 4:11-12).

At the same time, the entire Bible calls us to make moral judgments, without which the world could not function.

That’s why the prophets often called on their people to “judge” righteously, meaning, to adjudicate on someone’s behalf, to take up their righteous cause, to expose the wicked and rule against them. And that’s why the Hebrew verb “judge” is used frequently in calls for social justice, as in Isaiah 1:17, “bring justice to the fatherless.” In contrast, the wicked “do not bring justice to the fatherless (Is. 1:23; the Hebrew is literally, “they do not judge the fatherless”).

That’s why Israel’s ancient leaders were called “judges,” as in the book of Judges, because they were called to govern the nation righteously. To this day, in our courts, we expect judges to make righteous judgments, otherwise society would completely collapse.

Where did we get this idea that all moral judgments were wrong?

Immediately before Jacob (James) urged his readers not to speak evil of each other or judge each other, he called them adulterers and told them that their friendship with the world made them haters of God (Jacob [James] 4:4).

Was he being judgmental?

Throughout Paul's letters, he had words of correction and rebuke for his readers, sometimes in the strongest terms, to the point of calling the Galatians "foolish" and saying they had been "bewitched" (Gal. 3:1).

Was he being judgmental?

And what did he mean when he wrote, "But he who is spiritual judges all things" (1 Cor. 2:15a)? And what do you make of Hebrews 5:14? "But solid food belongs to those who are mature, for those who through practice have powers of discernment that are trained to distinguish good from evil."

Should we not judge human trafficking as evil, or abortion as evil or ISIS as evil? In the days of slavery and segregation here in America, should Christians not have judged these wicked practices as evil?

We don't know what is in someone else's heart, nor can we judge motives, nor should we have a condemning attitude, but rather should always be offering grace and mercy and the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. And we should be models of compassion, being quick to forgive, always giving the benefit of the doubt, repaying hatred with love and cursing with blessing.

But by all means, we must obey the Lord's call to make righteous judgments. As Jesus said in John 7:24, "Do not judge according to appearance, but practice righteous judgment."

Jesus commands us to judge!

Paul says the very same thing, but with explicit instructions only to practice this when it comes to fellow believers: "I wrote to you in my letter not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I did not mean the sexually immoral people of this world, or the covetous and extortioners, or the idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. But I have written to you not to keep company with any man who

is called a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. Do not even eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But God judges those who are outside. Therefore 'put away from among yourselves that wicked person'" (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

He could not have made himself any more clear.

If someone claims to be a follower of Jesus but is walking in open, persistent, unrepentant sin, then we are to "judge" them—meaning, make a right judgment and cut off all fellowship, with the goal being their repentance.

But when it comes to the people of the world—whom Paul plainly described as being idolaters and swindlers and the sexually immoral—we are not to judge them, by which Paul meant not breaking off our association with them.

But to repeat, Paul says loudly and clearly that we *are* to judge those "inside the church," continuing this theme in the next chapter where he reminds the Corinthians that one day they will judge angels. Surely, he writes, they should be able to judge disputes in their midst (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

So yes, it is sinful and wrong for us to judge superficially, to judge hypocritically, to judge falsely, to be judgmental, to condemn, to put ourselves in the place of the one true Judge to whom all will give account.

But it is pleasing to the Lord when we make righteous judgments based on the clear teaching of the Word and on God's holy standards. That kind of judgment saves and liberates and redeems.

So, let us obey the Lord and make righteous judgment. It's not judgmental to obey Jesus and Paul.

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