

Why We Shouldn't Judge Pope Francis for Not Judging Gays

Recently, Pope Francis said the following: "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?"

To be clear, Pope Francis was not condoning homosexual acts, which are contrary to the Bible and Catholic doctrine. But what about his reference to not judging, which is now being conveniently exploited by liberals and misinformed people as categorically meaning "Don't judge"?

First of all, let me commend Pope Francis for his example and sermons since becoming the pontiff. He has challenged Catholics, especially leaders, to take a more humble approach to life. He's emulating St. Francis, who in the 1200s passed by an old and collapsing church and was inspired by the Spirit to go in and kneel before the image of the crucified Jesus. Tears welled up as he gazed, and Francis said he heard an audible voice tell him three times, "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you can see, is falling into ruin."

I was raised Roman Catholic and attended Catholic schooling for 12 years. Years ago, I wrote a book called *Clap Your Hands* that amazed me as over a quarter million copies went forth worldwide, especially touching Catholics and helping them find a true conversion experience. The final chapter of the book had a scene where I was standing before the pope in Rome and appealing for a return to the simple preaching of the gospel and faithfulness to the Scriptures in everything. If not, I stated prophetically and tearfully, there would come a major exodus from Catholicism in the years to come.

Sad to say, I've seen this come to pass worldwide.

Returning to Cleveland, Ohio, last year with my wife, we

visited the Catholic parish where I grew up. I was stunned to see the paltry attendance at the few masses that were offered. "Where are the young people?" I thought. The church had a new name, as three parishes in the area had combined to try and beef up attendance. Few nuns and priests were seen, as vocations have plummeted and the annual cost in the parochial school has gone from under \$50 to now \$10,000.

In light of the above, I can empathize with Pope Francis trying to refurbish a hemorrhaging institution and be as relevant as possible. Almost 40 years ago, I authored this script and pray this dedicated servant of God brings renewal without confusing his flock.

Yet I'm concerned that has just happened with his recent statement.

When Nehemiah was commissioned by God to rebuild the walls of the devastated city in his day, he did everything according to the pattern given him by God. The final chapter of the book of Nehemiah reveals him judging very strongly three areas that had contaminated God's people: mixture, materialism and marital unfaithfulness. This last area applies today to not only marrying unbelievers or those committing adultery but also those digressing from God's standards on biblical divorce, homosexuality and premarital sexual activity. This is where a clear understanding of homosexuality and judging is critical.

Biblical Guidelines on Homosexuality

1. All of us are broken with a fallen nature that gives us a tendency to do wrong.
2. Some people are more susceptible to homosexuality than others, but predisposition is not predestination. In other words, we all struggle with various sexual temptations but don't have to surrender to them.
3. Practicing homosexuality is most definitely sinful and

contradicts biblical teaching on God's order for human relationships and family.

4. Calling oneself an authentic Christian and remaining a practicing homosexual is a direct contradiction of biblical teaching and contrary to the abundant life promised by Jesus Christ.

5. Through the new birth experience, individuals are not only forgiven their sins but freed from sin's power. Their new identity in Christ is not that of a gay person but of a new creation—a child of the living God, set free to serve Him and humanity joyfully. In other words, don't keep reinforcing and recycling "I'm gay," but declare boldly what God calls you: "I'm redeemed. I'm transformed. I'm more than a conqueror through Christ who loves me!"

To agree with God's assessment and proclaim the above brings liberty and faith to live the abundant life Jesus promised us as His disciples.

Biblical Guidelines on Judging

"He who is spiritual makes judges all things" (1 Cor. 2:15, NKJV).

The word used in the above passage for *judges* is *anakrino*, meaning "to examine, to search out and evaluate." While Scripture clearly condemns leveling a judgment in a mean-spirited, self-righteous or hypocritical way, we are directed to carefully investigate situations in a responsible, redemptive way.

Righteous judgment, according to Scripture, is not an elective but a directive for the obedient child of God. Done correctly, it is an act of love. It is our positive duty, as affirmed by Jesus: "You have rightly judged" (Luke 7:43).

In Matthew 7, we have one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted portions of God's Word. Few of us who have seen

a TV talk show or read an advice column could say we haven't been exposed to the famous retort, "The Bible says, 'Judge not!'"

Does the Bible really say that?

Correct examination reveals Jesus did not issue a blanket statement, "Judge not" (v.1), but rather a challenge to His followers to judge properly and not be "hypocrites" (v. 5). We should not construe His words as an outright prohibition, but rather as a caution. Jesus then went on to command righteous judgment with the words, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs what is sacred; nor cast your pearls before swine" (v. 6). Identifying folks who behave irresponsibly as dogs and hogs implies judgment!

Jesus then went on to say, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (vv. 15-16).

Simply stated, this portion of Scripture is not a prohibition against righteous judgment but a caution against hypocritical judgment. Judgment and discipline are a true part of biblical love. Why? Scripture declares it: "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Heb. 12:6, NASB). In Revelation 3, the enthroned Christ declares, "Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent" (v. 19, NIV). In John 7:24, our Lord states, "Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

Judging correctly and administering discipline are not confined to God alone. He calls Christians, leaders and—yes—the Pope to make judgments charitably and clearly too! Moreover, Proverbs 27:5 states, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love."

When we have a biblical worldview, we learn that far from teaching a blanket "Judge not," God in His Word calls us to compassionate yet responsible judgment. That is how we grow

and change. Anything less is like the world, which desires at all costs to be ever nonjudgmental, politically correct and cool, letting “every man do what is right in his own eyes.”

God is gently reminding Pope Francis and all the rest of us that we must make judgments in a compassionate way based on the plumb line of God’s Word. This requires maturity and our “senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:14, NASB). The Word of God is always our objective standard. It is always the “canon” (measuring rod) in all areas of judgment, whether the issue is pornography, men and women living together outside of marriage, adultery, idolatry, homosexuality, abortion, premarital sex or unbiblical divorce.

“Judge not”? Not according to the unchanging Scriptures to which every faithful follower of Christ adheres in these turbulent times.

Excuse me—I gotta go. Sister Paulina’s judged me giggling at Mass and wants to see me up in her office!

Larry Tomczak is a best-selling author and cultural commentator with over 40 years of trusted ministry experience. His passion is to bring perspective, analysis and insight from a biblical worldview. He loves people and loves awakening them to today’s cultural realities and the responses needed for the bride of Christ—His church—to become influential in all spheres of life once again.