

When To Judge and When Not To Judge?

We are challenged in our "politically correct" culture to be tolerant. The very worst seemingly characterization of someone is to be labeled "intolerant." This kind of thinking is often supported with quotations from the Bible. For example, Matthew 7:1—"Do not judge so that you will not be judged." Or Matthew 7:3-5—"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." In fact, there are a number of passages, which warn against judging one another.

That would seem to settle it, but for the fact that there is another set of passages which instruct us to judge one another. For example, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13—"Do you not judge those who are within [the church]? But those who are outside, God judges." Or 1 Corinthians 6:2-3—"Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent [to constitute] the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?" The Apostle Paul goes so far as to shame the Corinthian Church because no one will step forward to judge between two brothers in dispute: "I say [this] to your shame. [Is it] so, [that] there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?" (vv. 5, 6; cf. Lu. 12:57; Jn. 7:24). A casual reading of these and other passages can leave us at a loss as to what to do. We are called to do more than just a casual reading, rather we must "*rightly divide the Word of Truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15). In so doing we will know when to judge and when not to judge!

I. First, we will look at the times and circumstances when we are not to judge.

A. We are not to judge when we are guilty of the very same offense (Mt. 7:1-5; Rom. 2:1-5, 11, 17-24).

We are to repent of our own sin (Rom. 2:2-5), and then, as Matthew records, we are to "*first take the log out of [y]our own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of [y]our brother's eye*" (v. 5). Note, we are not to ignore the sin in our brother's eye, but to first deal with the sin in our own eye, then from a position of strength we are to restore our brother. Without this sense of priority to first deal with our own sin, then we are being hypocritical, and this is to be avoided by first dealing with our own sin. To "tolerate" our own sin and/or the sin of our brother is first to put ourselves under God's judgment (Rom. 2:3-5) and, secondly, to reject the "*Law of Christ*" (Gal. 6:2) which is "*through love to serve one another*" (Gal. 5:13), or to "*Bear one*

another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2). It is to love one another as Christ has loved us giving up His life for us (Jn. 13:34). Therefore, we are constrained by the love of Christ to restore ourselves and then to restore our brother or sister.

B. We are not to judge when we are unauthorized to judge (1 Cor. 5:12, 13).

Paul wrote the Corinthians, *"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within [the church]? But those who are outside, God judges. . . . Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"* (1 Cor. 5:12, 13, 6:2). At first it sounds as though Paul was contradicting himself, but once we understand "spheres of authority" or "jurisdictions" we realize he did not.

First, Paul explains that he has not been commissioned to judge those outside the Church. This was not his jurisdiction. He had, on the other hand, been commissioned to lead and judge the Church (cf. 2 Cor. 13:10). He demonstrated this only verses earlier when he explained his judgment of the man living with his father's wife. *"I. . . have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present"* (5:3).

Next, he explained to the Corinthians that, in this age before Christ's return, they were to judge within the Church, but, at Christ's return in the age to come, as glorified children of the King, they would be commissioned to judge the world and the angels. In other words, their sphere of authority, their jurisdiction, would change. For the present their responsibility to judge was limited to within the Church as commissioned by God.

We find that civil authorities are commissioned to judge in the civil sphere (Rom. 13:1-5); parents are commissioned to judge in the family (Eph. 6:1-4). Further, elders are given special jurisdiction in the Church (Heb. 3:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). The Church also is to judge issues within the Church (Mt. 18:15-17; Acts 6:1-6; 20:28; 1 Cor. 5:12-6:4; 1 Tim. 5:19-25; Titus 3:9-11; Jude 20-23). The ultimate judgment for salvation is reserved for Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:22-23; Acts 10:42; Rom. 14:9-12; 1 Cor. 4:5; 5:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 10:30; 12:23; Jas. 4:12; 5:9). Yet, the foremost jurisdiction for every believer is to judge one's self (Mt. 7:2-5; 1 Cor. 11:27-32; 2 Cor. 13:5-6; Gal. 6:1-5).

C. We are not to judge independently of God's Law, or to go beyond what is written in God's Word (1 Cor. 4:5; cf. Jas. 4:11-12; Rom. 14:4).

The Corinthian Church found themselves splintered and in factions as they judged one of God's servants as over another. He wrote, *"For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not [mere] men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave [opportunity] to each one"* (3:4, 5). Paul then warned them against such judging. *"Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, [but wait] until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of [men's] hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn **not to exceed what is written.** . . ."* (4:5, 6). This

last phrase is critical to understanding Paul's admonishment. The Corinthians were wrong in passing judgment on and between Paul and Apollos because they had gone beyond "*what is written!*" They, and we, may judge everyone by "what is written," **but** we may not judge anyone beyond what is written in God's Word.

The Corinthians had a talent show going between Paul and Apollos as to which was the better preacher, and Paul explained this was not theirs to judge how effective he and Apollos were or were not, only our Master has this right. You, Corinthians, have gone beyond what is written! **When we judge, it must be based impartially upon the clear teaching of God's Word.** Paul did not hesitate to judge the immoral man in the Corinthian Church because his sin was described as accursed and an abomination to God (Dt. 22:30; 27:20). He did not hesitate to establish that when God's Word speaks then we must speak, but when God's Word is silent then we must be silent (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).*

D. We are not to judge others' decisions of conscience or their personal convictions, i.e., their scruples (Rom. 14:1-23).

This is really another case of going beyond what is written in God's Word, but it is perhaps the most violated and abused in the Church and outside the Church. Often, one Christian, from his or her own personal experience and personal lessons from the Lord, forms very firm convictions of what is right and wrong. These scruples, if not obeyed by that individual, are sin for the one convicted by them. Paul wrote, "*But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin*" (Rom. 14:23).

The trouble comes when we impose these scruples or personal convictions upon our brothers and sisters in Christ as though they were written in God's Word. These most commonly have to do with lifestyle decisions and preferences. Paul put it like this, "*Now accept the one who is weak in faith, [but] not for [the purpose of] passing judgment on his opinions. . . . One person regards one day above another, another regards every day [alike]. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. . . . I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean*" (Rom. 14:1, 5, 14).

Not only are we forbidden to judge one another for the narrowness of their convictions or the liberality of their convictions, but also we are commanded to guard and protect one another's consciences at the expense of our own freedom. Such sacrifice is "*walking according to love*" (v. 15). "*Now accept the one who is weak in faith, [but] not for [the purpose of] passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables [only]. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own*

* There are at least **four cautions** we should bear in mind when tempted to judge beyond what is written. **First**, we are out of our jurisdiction and trespassing on the exclusive jurisdiction of God (Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 4:5), so it is not our business. **Second**, our judgments can take in so little at best. For example, we cannot read the motives of others' hearts, therefore we are not qualified to rightly judge. **Third**, it is irrelevant if we should judge another because we are not counselors to God (Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 4:3-5). So we are wasting our time. **Fourth**, it is dangerous to judge others. Jesus said, "For in the way you judge you will be judged..." (Mt. 7:2). At best we should be very gracious in what we judge for we are establishing the standard by which we will be judged.

master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. . . .For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died" (vv. 1-4, 15). In the area of personal convictions we are given no allowance to judge one another, but rather we are given the command to accept one another. Yet, we are called to a higher standard of foregoing our own freedoms, if it becomes a stumbling block for own weaker brother. In this we exercise the love of Christ and fulfill the "Law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

In the area of scruples and the conscience of a brother or sister in Christ we are bound by Christ's Law, therefore we are to accept, even tolerate, one another's personal convictions. We are not to judge one's personal scruples and convictions of conscience, and neither are we to impose our convictions as law upon others. In doing either we are going beyond what is written.

II. Second, we will look at the times and circumstances when we are to judge.

A. We are to judge when we have a Scriptural warrant to judge, i.e., when God's Word has been violated (Gal. 6:1, 2; Mt. 18:15-17).

Paul explained to the Galatian Church, *"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; [each one] looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:1, 2). When one is caught or found in sin, we must judge the sin and seek the restoration of our brother or sister in Christ.

We should note that our first reaction to that sin of a brother should be our own brokenness over the sin. Paul reminded the Corinthians what their reaction to the immoral man's sin should have been, *"You have become arrogant and **have not mourned instead**, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst"* (1 Cor. 5:2; cf. Mt. 18:15-17; Jas. 4:7-10). Our second response is to go directly to that brother or sister (Mt. 18:15). We are not to go to someone else and to discuss the matter or even to pray about it. To go to someone else who is uninvolved is gossip and results in speaking evil, and in some cases it is slander! We are to establish the case as actual and factual and then confront our brother or sister. If we personally discover their sin, then we become personally responsible to confront them about the sin. Oh, that we would be faithful to this command! Its violation has caused so many hurts and heartaches.

In judgment strong and firm action is often required (1 Cor. 5:3-8; Mt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 5:19-21; Titus 3:9-11), but this must always be guided by love, patience, and gentleness (Gal. 5:9, 13; 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). Such judgment is not to be passed in anger or bitterness. The goal of such judgment must never be forgotten, namely, the restoration of the brother. Yet, as this sin of a brother or sister becomes public, and he or she continues to refuse to repent, then action must be taken for the health and well being of the

Body of Christ. This action is led by the elders and with the Church as a whole (1 Cor. 5:6-8; Mt. 18:15-17; Dt. 13:5, 11; 1 Tim. 5:19-21).

B. We are to judge when we have been given specific authority to judge (Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Tim. 5:19-21; Heb. 13:17).

For example, Paul instructed the Roman Church that *"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those, which exist, are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. . . .for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil"* (Rom. 13:1-4). God has given to civil authorities the authority, the right, to judge evil and to reward good. They have the God-given right to pass righteous laws and to administer those laws justly. Further, in the Church and the family, God has ordained authorities to judge--the elders of the Church and the parents, especially the Father, in the home.

This authority for judgment is commissioned to an office (Jn. 19:11; Acts 23:4, 5; 1 Sam. 24:6; 26:11). The office is an extension of God's own authority so delegated. In some cases, one authority falls under a higher authority, but all such authorities will ultimately be judged by God, for their just or unjust exercise of the authority delegated to them. Such authority is to be honored. This is clearly established in the Fifth Commandment to honor your father and mother. The disrespect of this authority is not to be tolerated, and it should not be confused with personal offenses. For example, Jesus commanded, *"But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also"* (Mt. 5:39). This is a command given within the parameters of a "personal offense." A slap is not a blow designed for serious bodily harm, but it is symbolic of an insult. We are to endure such an insult when it is inflicted on us personally, but we are not to forbear it if it is inflicted on our office. Thus, if a son slaps his father, or a citizen slaps a police officer the insult is inflicted on an office (cf. Dt. 21:18-21; Rom. 13:2, 4). As God has commissioned these offices, they accordingly exercise His authority by extension. To insult these offices is to insult their authority, and thereby, the insult is greater than insulting them personally. Thus, when God commissions the authority to judge He is in fact commissioning the exercise of His authority by extension or delegation.

From our brief study it is quite evident that there is **a time to judge** and **a time not to judge**. There is a time to be tolerant and a time to be intolerant. We know this not by what is "politically correct" but by the authority of God and His Word. Our culture may not like the thought of being intolerant, but someone wisely said, "Tolerance is the virtue of people who do not believe in anything." With Paul we should say, *"But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, □I believed, therefore I spoke□ we also believe, therefore also we speak"* (2 Cor. 5:13)!