

Judge Not?

The person not well versed in the Bible loves to wield a verse or two into the face of Christians. One of these is "Judge not lest ye be judged". To the unlearned, it is another way of saying, "mind your own business". But what does that mean? Are believers really to never judge?

It has been said, "All people are responsible to God. How they choose to serve him or not serve him is their own business." Sounds true enough, but how far can we take this statement? Are we just to sit back in our spiritual position and watch others fall? It is obvious in scripture that if our enemy hungers, feed him; it seems that providing food and shelter is a quite a bit easier involvement than actually taking responsibility with someone's growth or eternal destiny. But can we not view spiritual need far more important than physical?

Let us look at the basic structure of sin:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.
James 1:13-15

Temptation is caused by evil desires. If not dealt with, sin results. If sin is not dealt with, there is a spiritual death. We must never lose sight of the consequences of sin. With this sense of urgency in mind, let us look at our response to the world around us that is trapped in sin.

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside..."
I Corinthians 5:12

We are narrowed down to one group when it comes to judging, and that is the Body of Christ. We as Christians have no right judging those on the outside. We are to be witnesses of a living hope to the unbelieving world. God will judge the world at the appointed time. If we are to be witnesses, our lives must reflect the example of Christ as written in the gospels. Sin deters us from this goal and should be dealt with as an ever-present enemy.

Accept him whose faith is, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
Romans 14:1-4

Our first response to sin is to determine if it requires harsh action. Romans 14 warns us of getting involved with "disputable matters". Here we are responsible for our own particular walk with Christ and community witness.

"...continue to work out your own salvation in fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."
Phil. 2:12-13

We must be take care, judging has a harsh kickback if used foolishly.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal. 5:19-21

Paul has given us a list of sins that must be confronted for the safety of the believers involved. For those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God—but spiritual death.

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible... Eph. 5:11-13

Our second response to sin is to expose it. This does not mean going to others and telling them about it. This is not righteous exposure but prideful gossip.

A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.
Proverbs 16:28

In telling someone else about an offense and not the offender, you have actually said in your heart, "I am right, and to prove it, I will find those within my circle who will agree with me and support my resentment." This is very destructive behavior—it is a judgment born of pride.

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.
James 4:11

Correct exposure can be seen in the life of Jesus with the woman at the well.¹ When people live in darkness it is they who need the light. Jesus did not tell the Samaritan woman that what she was doing was wrong. He merely exposed light on the hidden sin. It was then up to her to respond accordingly.

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Our third response to sin is to confront it. It is surprising how much detail scripture offers in this area. Even the very teachings of our Lord lay a firm foundation for us. Confrontation is the "Frontline" of spiritual battle and many cower from it. If we are to do battle, then how should we arm and protect ourselves?

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Eph. 6:10-18

Our defensive weapons are salvation, faith, righteousness and truth. These are needed to extinguish the lies of the enemy. It should be noted that this means salvation by God, faith in God, righteousness from God and truth of God. Our offensive weapon is the Word of God's Holy Spirit. However, it is not enough to know the scriptures. You must be guided and prepared by the Holy Spirit or the end could mean spiritual death for those in your way. God will then hold you accountable. Never be careless with the Word of God.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Matt. 7:1-5

¹ Reference John 4:17-18

How do we prepare ourselves under the Great Instructor? It is clear from the scripture above that we are to judge those who are clearly hurting themselves and unable to see it properly. A splinter in the eye cannot be seen, only felt, and with great discomfort. So we say, "Brother, a splinter is what is causing your pain." This is exposure. Our next response is, "Here, let me pull it out for you." Stop immediately! You are endangering your brother.

At this point we are to first turn to the splinter in our own eye. This is accomplished by asking God in prayer to reveal any hidden sin in our own lives. The enemy will use it against you when he attacks. Unconfessed sin causes a weak spot in your defensive armor and the enemy will find a way to use it against you. When God reveals our sin and we repent; a very important change occurs. our pride is transformed into humility. Humility is the main and most important cleansing product to 20/20 spiritual insight. We are blind to our sin when pride is at work. Humility allows us to clearly see the splinter in our brother's eye. We then have compassion and empathy for our brother with the attitude of "I am no better than you are, what is happening is dangerous and I care what happens to you."

If you judge your brother without true self-examination, something unexpected will happen. The judgment used upon the sinning brother will backlash onto the accuser. The accuser is then left with the false idea that "God let's those who are guilty get away with their crimes and I am the one who suffers condemnation."

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth and when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? Rom. 2:14

As I have noted earlier, there is a danger to judging God's anointed improperly. So much so that most people avoid it at all costs. Cain asked God a rhetorical question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9) The answer to this question is most decidedly *yes*, it is one of the fruits of Love. (Rom. 15:12) So we can safely assume that one of our chief responsibilities in Love is to keep one another from the road to spiritual death. The way of the Lord is straight, but the road to destruction is twisted and curved. Twists and curves allow no foresight to take place, we cannot see what lies ahead. Those of us who have traveled that road before (or witnessed those who have) should warn the unknowing brother of the potential hazard.

One path to destruction is sin. When we see our family member in sin, we must stop and self-examine our attitude. Our first response is usually anger toward the stumbling brother. This is not a fruit of the Spirit, but a result of our flesh. Stop there, recognize that it is the tempter drawing the brother away through his weaknesses. Recognize that it is the devil who is the enemy and not the brother.² Our response should be to help bear the failings of our weak brother.³

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load - Gal. 6:15

In the scripture above we find two key words; caught and restore. "Caught" means that you are an eyewitness to the action or attitude. One should never tell anyone else what he has witnessed. Nor should you ever listen to one-sided complaints about an offending brother.

"Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passerby who meddles in a quarrel not his own." - Proverbs 26:17

The second key word is "restore". The Greek meaning of the word *restore* could also be translated as *mend* or *join together*. If we were to lift a heavy load incorrectly, the burden on our back would cause misaligned vertebrae. The back would then have to be *gently* joined together and allowed to mend. Perhaps if the other members of the body had helped carry the heavy load, the back would never have been injured.

As the Body of Christ, we should be in severe pain if our brother is misled into sin. We should never respond in righteous indignation. A woman was caught in sin then brought before Jesus.⁴ Christ's response was not condemning. He pointed, instead, to a path away from the road to destruction.⁵ Christ does not condemn us, neither should we condemn one another. Instead, we should point to the road to Life allowing the sinning brother the choice of two directions.

² Reference James 1:13

³ Reference Rom. 15:1

⁴ Reference John 8:3-11

⁵ Reference John 12:47

Let us look at our thought process for a moment. My brother is sinning due to poor choices with another family member. I bear witness with God's Word that this could lead to the bondage of sin. My first response is anger toward the family member for causing the brother to stumble. I then remember that it is the devil who is the enemy and these brethren are being manipulated. In response to my transference of anger toward the evil, I pray for God's hand in the matter. I ask Him to reveal any unconfessed sin in my own life including self-righteous motives. I look at the situation to see if, perhaps, there is any stress or burden that I could help bear. In humility and love I go and talk with my brother. At this point the Holy Spirit should do all the talking. Every situation is different and must be handled with loving care.

If your brother sins go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. - Matt. 18:15-17

There are now several ways he can respond. If the person is sinning out of ignorance then your gentle rebuke should be enough for his repentance. Note the fact that the conversation is one-on-one with the motive of winning back the brother. If the person is sinning out of rationalization, it would probably be necessary to confirm it with one or two witnesses. Remember that a witness is someone who has seen the offence and not heard from second hand source. If the person is sinning out of willful pride it has become a danger to the tender spirit of the church. The elders should be notified and the brother should be confronted concerning his serious position. In this extreme case, it is usually not so much the sin that is the issue but the willful negligence toward the body of believers. Pride is a deadly poison in the church and should be dealt with severely. Even to the point of separating him from the body of Christ.

A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy. - Proverbs 29:1

If a true repentant heart is present, the willful pride has been broken. Forgive him fully as Christ forgives us. If the sinning brother is an elder of the church, he is to be rebuked publicly before the church.⁶

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. - 1 Corinthians 5:15

The Corinthian church did not practice this step with the willful sinner. Paul himself had to pronounce judgment on the brother in order to purify the church. If we study I Corinthians we will notice his process of thought. He humbled himself, (I Cor. 2:3) he did not judge by appearances but by the Spirit, (I Cor. 2:15) and there was self-examination. (I Cor. 4:4) From there he confirmed that there was a dangerous sin in practice. (I Cor. 5:12) He not only exposed the sin of the individual, he exposed the attitude developed by the church because of the willful pride. We must always take a firm hand against sin that is enslaving our brother. Even to the point of not fellowshiping with him anymore in hope that he will repent. When he does, offer an open hand of forgiveness and love. (2 Cor. 2:5-11)

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. Matt. 5:21-22

The second road to destruction (I will only illustrate two out of many) is a family member offending another family member. Destruction does not come from the offense but from the resentment that follows. The Bible shows in many places that we are to settle our grievances quickly, not even to wait till the end of the day! If we do not settle it, the enemy will have time to lie to us, cloud the issue and cause resentment. (Eph. 4:26-27) I must stress again the importance of not telling others about an offense. This is not walking in humility, it is strutting in self-righteousness. We are trying to, whether consciously or unconsciously, seek people who agree with and re-enforce our position. This has caused many divisions within church bodies. We can subtly alter the facts that the hearer seems to be confused when another, more accurate account is given.

"The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." Proverbs 18:17

⁶ Reference I Tim. 5:19-20

To avoid self-righteousness, settle with that person immediately. If he will not listen, do not tell anyone else.

"He who covers an offense promotes Love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."
Proverbs 17:9

Instead, pray for an open spirit within them and another opportunity to settle the account. If they have offended someone else in the same way, it has become sin for them. For now he is causing the church to stumble with his disregard.

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last, penny. Matt. 5:23-26

But what is the responsibility of the other person? The one who is aware that *he* has offended someone? If we have offended someone with our action or attitude, our pride says, "I was right, if they were offended that's their problem." Even if you *are* right in your own eyes, the fact that you have offended your brother has put *you* in danger of the fires of hell. Reconcile with your brother quickly. In offending your family member you have given him cause to harbor the poison of hate in his heart toward you. Now you have caused your brother to sin. If we stumble a new Christian because of our righteous attitude, the words of Jesus hold our unfavorable position.

Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves! Luke 17:13

This will also affect your worship dramatically. You will be approaching God in self-righteousness.

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart." Proverbs 21:2

True righteousness is a position given by God as a reward for obedience. True righteousness and humility come when you lower yourself to wash your brother's feet, symbolically, reconciling with your brother in spite of who is right or wrong. After you have humbled yourself and have settled with your brother, go and worship God.

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. Proverbs 21:3

Deal with offenses one-on-one. As members of Christ, we should never have to bring in a third party to decide a matter. Perhaps this is due to a possible missed blessing. When two offended

parties come together of their own accord there is a desire for reconciliation and true righteousness to prevail. When all is said and done, when both parties have given their side in the matter, communication will be reestablished. The outstanding mood that now prevails is one of love and a deeper understanding and appreciation for your brother.

If an outside party is brought in (whether it is a pastor, brother or legal judge) and judgment is decided. One party will be hurt, misunderstood and resentful toward the whole incident. The second party will become prideful in his "righteous" position. "After all," he could say, "they weighed the facts and I won!" The result? Three people in a bad position. The offender in hurt and resentment, the other in prideful righteousness, and an outside party stuck in the middle.

Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, or the Lord will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from him. Proverbs 24:17-18

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life?

Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. I Cor. 6:18

On the contrary, if we cannot settle the matter between ourselves, we should absorb the wrong.

Above all, Love one another deeply, because Love covers a multitude of sins. I Peter 4:8

We should allow ourselves to be wronged and ask God to reveal the truth of the matter without having to take a stance in an "I am right, you are wrong" position. In absorbing wrong you will have a closer understanding of what Christ did for each of us on the cross (for which we deserved death).

But I tell you who hear me, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you I do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. But love your enemies, do good to them, then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:27-36 (edited)

If we choose to be merciful, the blessings of God will shower on each of us.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
Luke 6:37-38

Let us reason together in love and fellowship. Forgive, forget and care for one another. The world outside condemns us enough. We should find rest and understanding within the Body of Christ. Let us put away disputable matters that do not affect our salvation. But if a family member's action lead him or her to spiritual harm, let us clothe ourselves with humility. Chances are good that our approach alone could win the brother back and heal him.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other. John 15:12-17

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