

Christians And Judging

Should Christians judge? The issue of judging is a contentious one, despite the Bible giving us clear guidelines about making judgments. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus said not to judge. A closer look at this passage will show that He is referring to personal, hypocritical judging, telling us to take the log out of our own eye (v.5). Also, it's quite obvious that we should not judge a person's motives or thoughts as we simply don't know what they are (1 Cor. 2:11). In John 7:24, with regard to a matter of the Law, Jesus said, *"Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."* In clear terms, we are instructed to make judgments in matters of doctrine and righteous living (see Matt. 7:15 and Rom. 16:17 also). If we fail to follow these commands then the Bible will become just another book and we will be without a foundation. We'll then be like the Israelites in the time of the Judges: *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit"* (Judges 21:25).

If we are to follow God's commands such as:

"... 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. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Cor. 5:11-13);

"Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thess. 5:21);

"Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9) and

"...watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Rom. 16:17),

then the question isn't "Should we judge?" but "What do we judge?"

Romans 14 and disputable matters.

Romans 14 discusses matters which we are not to judge because they are disputable (v.1). Disputable matters are issues which are not essential for salvation and matters on which God has not given clear guidelines. Being disputable, individuals can choose and this includes what we eat (v.2) and what day we hold as sacred (v.5). What we wear may be disputable but it must at least be modest and appropriate (1 Tim. 2:9). Hair length is spoken of in 1 Cor. 11:14-15.

It may be difficult to determine cut off points with clothing issues or whether hair is too long or short but this is dealt with in v.21 which says, *"It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."* Also, 1 Cor. 10:31-32 say, *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble..."* These verses make it clear that if we are upsetting someone in **anything** we do, possibly causing them to stumble and fall, then we must cease doing it even if it is a debatable point. The matter may in fact be absolutely trivial to us, but to a particular person it can be a serious issue and damaging to their faith (see 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:23-33, taking particular note of 1 Cor. 10:31-33). In 1 Cor. 9:22, Paul said, *"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."* From this verse it can be seen that we must also be careful in our actions before the unsaved as we may be a bad witness to them.

So, even with issues that we consider trivial, we must make careful judgments so as not to cause anyone to stumble. Not only can it affect someone's faith but Rom. 14:10-12 warn that each one of us will be giving an account of our actions to God. We are warned in Jam. 4:11-12 that slander and speaking against others is judging God's law which tells us to love our neighbour. Rom. 13:8 says, *"...for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."*

Be Bereans and check the Scriptures - Acts 17:11.

However, not everything is disputable. To determine if something is disputable ask yourself, "Can this affect someone's salvation?" If the answer is yes, then you can be sure that God warns against it and that we are obligated to do the same. This is a vitally important issue with two aspects. A person can be misled not only by what is said or done but also by what is *not* said or done. The salvation of a soul is of such eternal importance that we must be careful in both what we do and what we don't do. We all know the consequences of doing wrong but God also warns us that not doing right also has consequences. In Ezekiel 33:1-9, God warns the Watchman that if he fails to sound a warning, then he will be held accountable. All Christians are Watchmen.

We are commanded to judge fellow believers concerning their personal life. The Corinthians were told to, "...*expel the wicked man from among you...so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord*" 1 Cor. 5:13, 5. This man was expelled as a result of his first being judged as wicked by his brothers in Christ.

Furthermore, James 5:19-20 say, "*My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*" It's not possible to follow these instructions without first judging. As hard as it may be to do, it is an act of love to confront and judge a back-slider, and irresponsible not to. Also, if we fail to maintain God's standards of holiness, the heaven will soon work it's way throughout the church and turn it into an unholy, do-what-you-feel-is-right get-together.

On a wider scale, worldwide there are churches, televangelists and teachers with false gospels, fake healing sideshows, and the clearly erroneous, money-grabbing Prosperity Gospel just as described in 2 Pet. 2. The Bible urges us to separate from these errors: "...*you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness...Hate what is evil; cling to what is good...what fellowship can light have with darkness?*" (1 Tim. 6:11, Rom. 12:9 and 2 Cor. 6:14). God condemns false gospels in Gal. 1:8, "...*even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.*" What God condemns, we must warn others against getting caught up in otherwise they too may be condemned. 1 Cor. 2:15 says that "*the spiritual man makes judgments about all things*" and 1 John 4:1 tells us to "*test the spirits.*" Be a Berean and compare all teaching with the Bible rather than trust in what is popular.

There is considerable pressure not to speak against error even when it is clearly known that souls are being led to a Christless eternity. "We must not judge," they say, "let's keep the unity," and in the meantime souls are being led to hell day after day. Jesus told us clearly in Matt. 24 that there would be many false prophets and to watch that no one would deceive us. Rather than not speak against error, we are instructed to expose it:

- a) Paul openly named men in 2 Tim. 2:16-17, 2 Tim. 4:14-15 and 1 Tim. 1:19-20.
- b) John named a man in 3 John 1:9-10.
- c) Paul openly criticized Peter, a fellow Apostle, in Gal. 2:11, 14.
- d) Leaders caught in false teaching or immorality are to be rebuked publicly as stated in 1 Tim. 5:20.
- e) Christians who persist in sin are to be rebuked before the church as stated in Matt. 18:15-17.
- f) In other passages, such as 2 Cor. 11:5, 13-15 and Rev. 2:2, problem individuals were not named but the recipients of the letters would have been well aware of who was being spoken of.

We too should expose error when we are sure of it. The truth is, we are commanded to speak against it. 1 Tim. 1:3-5 says, "... *command certain men not to teach false doctrines ... the goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*".

The Ecumenical Movement is seducing millions, from Christendom and worldwide religions, into a unity of false hope that knows nothing of salvation through repentance and the Lordship of Jesus. The pressure to become part of this lie is even sucking in many people who know better but can't gather the courage to stand against their peers. Jesus said, *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters"* Matt. 12:30.

If *you* were in error, wouldn't *you* want someone to go against the trend and warn you? Of course you would - so, in love, do it for your neighbour. James 4:17 warns us, *"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."* Failing to judge righteously is unspeakably callous as it will leave a sinner on the broad road to destruction (or exposed to false teachers willing to lead him there) and will, bit by bit, turn the holiest of congregations into little more than a social club.

God calls His people to separation and holiness, not compromise. A very good article on Charles Spurgeon and the subject of separation from error, written by Paul Mizzi, is called The Downgrade Controversy and can be downloaded from:

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/miscellaneous/thedowngradecontroversy.pdf>

Be a Watchman, for your Lord's sake.

This article can be downloaded in a printable booklet format from:

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/miscellaneous/judgingbooklet.pdf>

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