

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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“Judge Righteous Judgment”

A part of Jesus' teaching at the feast of tabernacles in **John 7** is the command, “*Don't judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment*” (**verse 24**).

Consider some things taught, not only in **John 7**, but throughout Scripture, about judging others.

Judging is Necessary - Perhaps one of the most well-known verses in Scripture is Jesus' command in **Matthew 7:1**: *Don't judge, so that you won't be judged*.

With this passage, as with all of God's Word, context and the totality of God's teachings must be considered. Before digging into the context, notice another passage in the book of Matthew that speaks to judging others. **Matthew 18:15**: *If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother*.

When we consider this verse and additional instruction given in **verses 16-17**, it is evident that judging others is at times necessary. We cannot know if a brother has sinned unless we do some judging. We cannot know if it's time for the church to withdraw from an erring brother unless we do some judging.

Judging Should Be a Good Thing - Perhaps the reason some imply that God never wants us to judge is that judging is viewed as a negative thing. Yet, when we consider what judging is intended to do, we should actually view judging as a *good* thing.

Notice what Jesus said to the Laodiceans in **Revelation 3:19**: *As many as I love, I reprove and chasten...*

Jesus' rebuke of the Laodiceans was intended to help them make needed corrections, and thus please God. If pleasing Him is our desire, we should be happy to hear needed rebukes (**Prov. 15:32**). Someone who helps us see when correction is called for should not be considered an enemy, but a friend (**Gal. 4:16**).

When judging is done right, it is a good thing rather than a bad thing.

We Must Judge Fairly - While judging is a good thing when done right, it can do great harm if done wrong.

A key to avoid judging wrongly is to judge others with fairness.

In the **John 7** passage, Jesus preceded His command to judge righteously with an illustration of how the Jewish leaders were not doing that. He was persecuted for healing a man on the sabbath, yet the persecutors had no problem with circumcising a boy on the sabbath (**verses 21-22**). His point was not to criticize circumcision on the sabbath, but to show the Jewish leaders' inconsistencies in their judgment of Him (**verse 23**).

We are not subject to the sabbath command today (**Col. 2:14-17**), but we still must judge fairly. We must not make false or careless accusations against others.

Before judging others, we should gather available facts, and fairly consider those facts. Oftentimes, unrighteous judging is tied to hasty judgments being made without giving a fair consideration of available facts (cf. **John 7:41-42; Matt. 2:1**).

We Must Judge According to God's Law - Furthermore, when we judge others'

righteousness, we should do so according to God's commands, and not according to the opinions and biases of *man*.

Notice what the Holy Spirit through Paul commanded in **Romans 14:3**: *Don't let him who eats despise him who doesn't eat. Don't let him who doesn't eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.*

The context of this command deals with things God has given no preference concerning. The specific topic of **Romans 14** is the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols. God neither requires nor forbids such eating, and we have no right therefore to accuse someone of sin because he or she chooses a different option than us.

The specific situations we face today may be different, but the principle still holds. If we judge someone as guilty of sin, such sin should be something that God teaches is wrong, and not merely based on our own opinions.

We Must Not Judge Hypocritically - Something else that is involved in judging righteously is to refrain from judging hypocritically.

This takes us back to the passage in which Jesus said "*Don't judge, so that you won't be judged*" (**Matt. 7:1**). The point Jesus was making in this passage is driven home in **verse 5**: *You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.*

It can be much easier to see faults in others than to see faults in oneself. Even King David struggled with this (**2 Sam. 12:5-7**).

We should *foremost* focus on things we ourselves need to correct.

In doing so, we can see more clearly to help others make needed correction.

We Must Judge with Love - Another need that is implied in Scripture concerning our judging of others is that judging should be done with love (cf. **1 Cor. 16:14**).

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were often guilty of saying negative things about others for selfish motives, rather than a genuine concern for righteousness.

For instance, in **John 8**, some of the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who was taken in adultery to Jesus to ask what should be done concerning her (**verses 3-5**). Notice what their motive was, as stated in **verse 6**: *They said this testing Him, that they might have something to accuse Him of.*

When judging others, the goal should not be to "bring someone down," "win" an argument, exalt ourselves, or any other selfish focus. Rather, the goal should be to please God and benefit other(s), including the one guilty of sin. **Galatians 6:1** teaches the need to point out faults "*in a spirit of gentleness.*" Such will be much easier if we have the love and humility we should, instead of self-centeredness and feelings of superiority.

Perhaps part of the reason judging is often viewed negatively is because it is often done unrighteously. The answer to such a problem is not to assume that all judging is bad, but to ensure that we judge rightly.

God has told us what we need to know to judge others correctly. May we heed His instruction and "*judge righteous judgment.*"

- **Michael Hickox**