

## “Judge Not”

Have you ever heard someone say that we shouldn't speak against sin in someone else's life because Jesus commanded us to not judge each other? I don't know about you, but I've heard that more times than I can remember. This paper was written to compare this idea to the Scriptures and see if it has any merit.

In Matthew 7 Jesus said this in his famous Sermon on the Mount:

**Matthew 7:1:** “Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine own eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?”

On the face of it that looks very conclusive. Jesus does indeed say “judge not” and goes on to state in verse 2 that we will be judged in the same way that we've judged others. The passage even condemns the hypocrisy of those who judge others when they themselves are committing the same sinful acts.

But Matthew 7 has more than just four verses. Christ goes on to say this in the *very next verse*:

**Matthew 7:5:** “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

What does Christ say here? Does He end by saying “And so, whatever you do, never, ever tell someone else about their sin”? No. In verse five He says to clean up your own life *so that you can then see clearly to help other people*. The focus of this passage is not “don't ever judge people under any circumstances.” Instead it is this: “don't judge people *for sins that you yourself are committing*.” The Lord wants us to help each other overcome sin, but He doesn't want us to be hypocritical about it. That is the whole point of those five verses.

That alone should put to rest the idea that the Lord wants us to be silent about the sin that we see in others, but let's look at a few other passages. James had this to say:

**James 5:19:** “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

First of all, notice that this passage is aimed at *brethren* who err from the truth. James is talking about believers here. And how do you “convert the sinner from the error of his way” after a brother “errs from the truth”? I'll give you a hint: it is *not* accomplished by refusing to say anything for fear of being seen as judgmental! No, what James is asking us to do is take our fellow believers aside and correct them in love. James actually *wants* us to address the sin in other believers' lives! This passage places high value on those who *turn others away from sin* – and you can't do that by ignoring the problem.

That brings up an interesting point: how did the apostles deal with this issue when they encountered sin in the lives of others? In Acts we find this exchange between Peter and two members of the church:

**Acts 5:1:** "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,  
2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet."

So here we have two members of the early church who are telling a lie, saying that they were donating all of the proceeds from a real-estate sale when they were actually just donating a portion of it. How does Peter handle this situation? Does he refuse to judge them? Not exactly:

**Acts 5:3:** "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?  
4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.  
5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things."

Not only did Peter harshly rebuke Ananias (and, later in the passage, his wife Sapphira), but Ananias *actually died*. That doesn't sound like Peter refused to pass judgment on them and just went on about his business! Peter saw sin and confronted it – and the results weren't pretty.

Even more striking is what Paul had to say to the Corinthian church. First, he told them that he had learned there was sin in their midst:

**1 Corinthians 5:1:** "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife."

Apparently some members of the Corinthian church were guilty of incest – a sin so awful that even pagan unbelievers abhorred it. Does Paul refuse to pass judgment on this? Does he say that we should just live and let live, and the most important thing is to mind our own business? See for yourself:

**1 Corinthians 5:2:** "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.  
3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed.  
4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
5 To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

This may come as a surprise to many modern Christians, but Paul actually condemns the

Corinthian church *for not removing this person from their congregation*. (The person does seem to be a Christian, for verse 5 mentions the spirit being saved.) In other words, Paul doesn't stop at just condemning the sin; he actually tells the Corinthians that since this person has refused to repent they should not allow him be a part of their church any longer. In fact, the sin was so awful that in verse 5 Paul *actually turns the Christian over to Satan so that Satan can kill him*. (Notice the bit about “the destruction of the flesh” – that sounds a lot like death to me.) That is about as far from “don't be judgmental” as one can possibly get.

But Paul is not done. He has a lot more to say about this:

**1 Corinthians 5:6:** “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.”

Paul is comparing the sin in the church to yeast, and points out that if you add a little yeast to a loaf of bread it causes the entire loaf to rise. Likewise, having a little sin in the church leads to problems and temptations that affect the entire church body. Think of it this way: if one person in the church is leading a sinful life, what kind of example does that set for others? How long will it take for other Christians to decide to give in to that sin and start following their example? Once the church leadership establishes that a certain sin is acceptable, how long will it take for the congregation to decide that it must really be ok after all?

That is why Paul was so adamant that this person be evicted from the church: he didn't want his appalling behavior to poison the rest of the body. Sin is a poison that must not be tolerated among Christians; it has to be dealt with or else there will be terrible consequences.

But Paul is still not done. He goes on to say that we *shouldn't even associate* with Christians who are living sin-filled lives:

**1 Corinthians 5:9:** “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

10 Yet not altogether the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat.”

Paul doesn't want believers to even *have dinner* with Christians who were doing the things that he listed in verse 11. Please note that he is not talking about people who fell into sin and then turned from it. He is focused on those who have been confronted with their sin but have refused to change. Such people should be avoided. This doesn't mean that we should ignore them entirely, but that we should not have fellowship with them. They are not to be our companions. Why? Because a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Your holiness isn't going to rub off on them, but their sinfulness will rub off on you. If there is one rotten apple in a barrel of good apples, the good apples aren't going to convert the rotten one. Instead, the single rotten apple will ruin them all.

There are a lot of other examples that I could list, but let's end this by going back to Jesus. In Matthew 18 Jesus said this:

**Matthew 18:15:** “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell

him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

Does Jesus say “If your brother sins against you, don't judge him”? No. Instead, Jesus commands us to *go and tell him his fault*. And why are we do to this? So that we can turn the brother around and win him back.

What happens if this doesn't work? Christ goes on:

**Matthew 18:16:** “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.  
17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

So Jesus said that if talking to the brother privately does not work, we should bring along a few more people so that they can correct him as well. If that fails then we should bring it before the church. However, if he doesn't listen to the church then we should consider the brother to be a pagan. Why? Because he was repeatedly corrected of his sin but he refused to repent of it. In other words, he decided that he would rather knowingly live in sin than live in holiness. This is a truly horrible thing for a believer to do, and we must not hang around such people – because if we do, their sin might rub off on us.

Of course, these days churches would never, ever dream of doing any of this. Churches aren't going to kick members out just because they have deliberately chosen a sinful lifestyle and have refused to turn from it. Likewise, Christians aren't going to refuse to associate with a fellow believer who is living in sin and who refuses to be sorry about it. The modern church has decided to not judge one another, and as a result our churches are full of sin and our congregations have been devastated. Holiness is hard to find these days, but that's to be expected. After all, Paul did warn us that a little sin goes a long way.

Interestingly, Christ told us that this was going happen. In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Him what signs there would be to indicate that His return was near. This was one of the things that He said:

**Matthew 24:12:** “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

Jesus is saying that in the last days the amount of sin will be so staggering that many people will lose their love for God and for one another. It's easy to see why. After all, if one Christian is refusing the path of holiness and has given their life over to sin, then that provides a strong incentive for others to do the same. When the church refuses to do anything about it the sin of one person starts spreading, and before long the whole congregation has stopped caring about holiness. Many people have rejected Jesus and become worldly. We no longer care about holiness; we'd much rather have all the pleasures that sin has to offer.

The reality is that the path of not judging other people actually leads to rampant sin and apostasy. Far from being “the right thing to do,” it actually *destroys* people's lives and kills their love for the Lord. It can even destroy entire churches. Sadly, that is the path that many churches have chosen. Jesus is aware of this and He is not happy. In Revelation He had this to say about it:

**Revelation 3:15:** “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would

thou wast cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of thy mouth."

In other words, the carnal nature of these churches *actually makes Jesus vomit*. That's putting it pretty strongly, but Jesus isn't done yet. He went on to say this:

**Revelation 3:19:** "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Verse 20 is often used as a verse of comfort, but it's actually very frightening. Notice that Christ is addressing a lukewarm church that couldn't care less about their Savior. In that church, where does Jesus claim to be? *Outside, knocking on the door*. Christ is actually outside the church and He is asking for someone to open the door and let Him in! He will forgive them if they will turn and repent, but right now they don't have Christ at all – and a church without Christ is not a church.