

## Is It Wrong to Judge Others?

**Intro:** Almost every day we hear people talk in religious discussions about judging others. People will say things like, “The Bible says not to judge” or “I can’t judge them”. Ironically people can get pretty “judgmental” about others who are judging (a self-contradiction). Many appeal to various Biblical texts for a justification of toleration of all people and all ideas; and clearly the Bible does address this subject in what may seem to be contradictory statements.

**What does the Bible say about judging?**

**Verses about judging others**

*The Bible both forbids and encourages judging.*

**”Do not judge lest you be judged. (Matthew 7:1)**

**Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. (Romans 14:1)**

**Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way. (Romans 14:13)**

**Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)**

**“And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? (Luke 12:57)**

**“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (John 7:24)**

**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. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. (1 Corinthians 5:12-13)**

*How shall we deal with these seemingly contradictory statements? Some will dismiss the whole issue by affirming that the Bible is filled with contradictions and we shouldn’t bother to figure it out. But for those of us who respect the authority of Scripture, it becomes necessary to think more carefully and deeply in order to harmonize these various texts.*

**Preliminary Suggestions**

*The word “judge” has a semantic flexibility that often characterizes words in any language.*

**The Greek word “judge” as a verb may have several shades of meaning (A brief summary from Louw and Nida)**

**To select or prefer**

**To think or consider**

To reach a decision, propose  
To condemn another or hand over for punishment  
To see that justice is done to someone  
To make a decision about the actions or person of another  
*Pass judgment on or express an opinion about*  
*Criticize, find fault, condemn*

*Each passage should be considered in context where there are clear contextual indicators of the meaning of the word that define the kind of judging under consideration.*

#### Examination of the various judging texts

##### *Mt. 7:1*

The context of this verse makes it clear that Jesus was dealing with the hypocritical condemnation of the Pharisees (5:20).

Jesus in Mt. 23 revealed that the scribes and Pharisees were notorious for pretending to possess a superior righteousness by which they felt justified in criticizing and condemning others. But their lives were not consistent with this profession. They often were morally worse than the people they were criticizing. Thus Jesus illustrates the judging he has in mind:

*“And 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. (Matthew 7:3-5)*

Clearly the judging forbidden is the hypocritical kind that finds fault with others while neglecting to obey God oneself.

However note this important point: Jesus did not say one could not “take the speck out of the brother’s eye”; he said, “one must first remove the beam in his own in order to “see clearly”.

Obviously no one is above transgression and personal perfection is not a requirement in order to correct others. Jesus’ point is, we should start with ourselves and correct our own greater flaws before we attempt to help others with their faults!

##### *James 4:11-12*

It is likely that James is applying the Mt. 7 text. (One can note a number of applications of Jesus’ mountain sermon in James epistle.) Like Jesus, James forbids Christians to “speak against” or “judge” their brethren; but the context makes it clear what He has in mind. It is speech that results in speaking against and judging the law rather than being a doer of the Law!

*Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. (James 4:11)*

The thing James forbids is a person living in disobedience to what is right seeking to criticize or condemn others. By doing so, he takes on the role of God as Lawgiver and Judge rather than accepting his proper role as a doer of God's law. This prohibition of judging is similar in force to the Mt. 7 text. Don't speak against or judge others while you neglect to do what is right yourself!

*Rom. 14:1,13*

This challenging chapter, as we have recently studied, shows Christians how to deal with conscientious differences they may have. The primary stress of the context is to urge Christians to "accept one another" rather than "reject" or "condemn" one another.

The basis of acceptance is defined in 15:7:

*Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)*

Since God accepts each of us on the basis of a sincere growing faith, we should likewise accept one another on the same basis rather than condemn each other because of differing conscientious viewpoints that grow out of varying levels of spiritual maturity. However there is behavior that crosses the line from conscientious faith to rebellious unbelief. This kind of behavior abrogates the principle of justifying faith and replaces it with rebellion against known truth! It originates in the flesh rather than the Holy Spirit. Paul deals with this in the next text.

*1 Cor. 5:11-12*

In this context Paul deals with a brother who was guilty of fornication. Such a practice was not a manifestation of conscientious faith but a manifestation of fleshly living and even return to the way of life from which Christians had been saved! *But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:11)*

Note the sin catalogue that calls for "judging". It is not conscientious attempts to obey God; but instead a return to the pagan way of life one left to become a Christian. Is there any way a person can make a case for the faithful or conscientious practice of these things?

In this case, Paul point is clear. The brother who leaves the faithful teaching of Christ's law in which he has been instructed for the sinful practices of the world is to be "judged" by the church and removed from their midst socially.

*Jn. 7:24 (Lk. 12:57)*

The final texts encouraging one to judge are based on the obligation of each person to weigh truth in his mind and to decide what is right.

**In the context of John 7 the Jews had made a mistaken judgment of Jesus based on his performance of a miracle on the Sabbath. Instead of looking carefully at the evidence they made a superficial evaluation of who Jesus was. Therefore Jesus urges them, “Judge not according to appearance; but judge righteous judgment”. In the context of Lk. 12 Jesus chided the masses for being able to predict the weather, but could not see what was happening in their own culture. Instead of remaining spiritual and open to truth, they blindly followed their leaders to destruction. Jesus challenged them to “own their own initiative judge what is right”! Both these verses exhort each person to make proper judgments of truth based on the evidence God has given.**

**Conclusion: Is it wrong to judge others? The answer is “yes” and “no”.**

**We cannot avoid the obligation to evaluate the messages and the messengers who profess to speak for God. We must judge what is right according to the truth as God has revealed it.**

**In dealing with others we need to remember three things:**

**First, we ought to make judgments with personal integrity rather than hypocrisy. We must also start with ourselves and make the need corrections before we attempt to correct others. Perfection however is not a requirement in order to help others to become better.**

**Second, we should not be condemning of those who are living by faith that is commensurate with their spiritual maturity, even though we may not always agree with their viewpoints. It is presumed that differences will be erased through continued faithful study and experience in the word.**

**Third, we must clearly distinguish between a conscientious life and one rebellious against known truth. In such cases, judging the evil doer is essential to the purity of the church and the salvation of the erring brother.**