

Judging According to the Bible¹

By
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To Judge or Not To Judge

To judge or not to judge, that is the question we face today. According to Webster's dictionary, to judge simply means to "form an opinion...to form an estimate or evaluation ". An opinion can be good or bad and the term 'to judge' is most often used in the latter sense.² To judge, therefore, is to believe that someone or something is wrong, evil or mistaken. It is to condemn or rebuke as opposed to condone and praise.

Taking 'to judge' in this sense, the answer to our question by many is a resounding and emphatic 'No'. In fact, the one unpardonable sin in today's culture is not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit but the 'sin' of judging others. People will overlook or agree with the most evil beliefs and practices, yet they will not tolerate, even for a moment, the practice of condemning error or sin. In the name of love, we are told to embrace all sorts of lifestyles, religions, practices and ideas. You may choose not to believe in or embrace a particular lifestyle, such as homosexuality. Narrow-minded views are barely tolerable, but you certainly must not be vocal about them. Don't you dare criticize someone else's belief, religion or practice! For that would be arrogant, unloving, judgmental and cruel.

Tragically, in this particular area the culture has transformed the church instead of the other way around. Even Christians are telling other Christians to not judge one another or the world. I once received in the mail from a church a letter and a prayer cloth (a small piece of ribbon with Acts 19:11-12 inscribed on it). The letter informed me that this cloth had been

¹ This article originally appeared in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 21 (2002): 62-69. It has been slightly revised.

² Webster's: "To form an estimate or evaluation of; *esp.*: to form a negative opinion about".

"prayed over by prayer warriors" and that they were "believing God for His anointing to reside with this prayer cloth". I was encouraged to extend my faith and use this prayer cloth as a point of faith to believe for my healing or deliverance, or for that of a loved one. They suggested that it could be placed in someone's vehicle, under a mattress or in the opening of a wall of a building.

Like Paul when he encountered the numerous idols in Athens, my spirit was provoked within me. So I decided to write an article for the local newspaper examining the practice of prayer cloths in light of Scripture. The article did not hold back as it concluded that the use of prayer cloths was unbiblical and even superstitious.

Needless to say, there were some people who were quite displeased with what I had written. One emotionally charged letter told me emphatically to "Judge Not", and to learn to love and appreciate my fellow man. After all, the people who sent these prayer cloths worked hard preparing them and are trying to reach people for Jesus.

What should we think of this 'no judging' viewpoint? How should we respond to people who tell us not to judge? According to this view, we can't respond at all, except to praise it, because then we would be judging! But on the other hand, if we did respond critically, no one could condemn us for then they would be judging us. Consider the following scenario:

Bill was a friendly, tolerant sort, willing to talk with me about Christianity until the question of homosexuality came up. My apparent lack of tolerance made him uncomfortable, and he said so.

"That's what bugs me about Christians," he said. "You seem nice at first but then you start getting judgmental."

"What's wrong with that?" I asked. It was a leading question.

"It's not right to judge other people."

"If it's wrong to judge people, Bill, then why-are you judging me?"

This question stopped him in his tracks. He'd been impaled on his own principle, and he knew it.

"You're right," he admitted. "I was judging you. Kind of hard to avoid it." He paused a moment, scratched his head, and regrouped.

"How about this? It's okay to judge people, as long as you don't force your morality on them," he said, thinking he was on safer ground. "That's where you cross the line."

"Okay, Bill, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Is that your morality?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you pushing your morality on me?"³

The belief that all critical evaluation is wrong is clearly incoherent and irrational. For one must denounce in order to hold such a belief. One may respond by saying that we are free to condemn those who are intolerant of others. But why this one exception? Why not others? Furthermore, if this is true, then such a position is beyond all criticism yet is free to criticize all that disagree with it. This is the epitome of arrogance! It amounts to deifying those who hold this view. They are right and everyone else is wrong; end of discussion!

The act of 'judging' is something we cannot avoid. We will tip our hats in deference to some things while censuring others. Forming opinions both positive and negative is something we all do. Even someone, who accepts all viewpoints, including being 'intolerant' is guilty of judging. For such a view implies that it is wrong not to accept this 'intolerant' position. So it is not a matter of whether or not we judge but rather how we will judge. Only the naïve or the arrogant hypocrite will say that it is wrong to judge.

Regardless of the logical problems with the 'no judging' policy, we should reject it ultimately because the Bible commands us to evaluate both positively and negatively. The Apostle John wrote, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits, whether they are of God, (1 John 4:1; see also 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Cor. 14:29; Matt. 7:15ff)". The reason God wants us to test the 'spirits' is because "many false prophets have gone out into the world" who are trying

³ Retrieved from the Internet: www.lutheransforlife.org/living/winter/getting_judgmental.htm.

to deceive us and to lead us away from the truth, (Matt. 24:5; 2 Thess. 2:1-3; Gal. 1:6ff). Once we have judged, we are to "hold fast what is good" and reject what is sinful, (1 Thess. 5:21; Gal. 1:9). The Ephesian Church tested those who called themselves apostles, found them to be liars and thoroughly rejected them. For this reason Jesus highly commended them, (Rev. 2:2).

If someone sins against you or has fallen into sin you are to confront him in order to restore him. You are to rebuke him (Lev. 19:17) by telling him his fault (Matt. 18:15), in a spirit of gentleness, (Gal. 6:1). One cannot do this apart from critically evaluating another's beliefs and/or actions and being vocal concerning them.

Not only individuals, but the elders of the church are at times called upon to judge as they administer church discipline, (Matt. 18:17-20). Paul commands us to withdraw "from every brother who walks disorderly" and not according to the Scriptures, (2 Thess. 3:6; see also 1 Cor. 5). How can one do this apart from a discerning, critical assessment of others?

Jesus engaged in the practice of denouncing others. He condemned the Pharisees' teaching (Matt. 5-7) and practice (Matt. 23:1-36). On two separate occasions he severely rebuked Peter and Herod, calling the former 'Satan' (Mark 8:33), and the latter a 'fox', (Luke 13:32). When Jesus entered the Temple he angrily condemned the moneychangers by overturning their tables and driving them out with a whip!

The many biblical precepts and examples of saints examining the world around them should not surprise us. From the very beginning man was given the task to exercise dominion over the creation, (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15, 19-29; Ps. 8:6-9). God created man in his own image, equipping him with the necessary tools and abilities, (i.e. reason, eyes, ears, hands, etc.) so that

he might be able to evaluate his environment, whether it be naming the animals or abstaining from the forbidden fruit.⁴ In short, to judge is human.

If the act of judging is a part of our nature, unavoidable and truly biblical, why are so many people adverse to it?

Reasons People Are Adverse to Judging

1. *The Bible tells us not to judge.* Though the Bible is quite clear in advocating the practice of judging, there are some texts that appear to teach the opposite. Consider the following passages: Matt. 7:1, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." James 4:12, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?" Rom. 14:4, "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." 1 Cor. 4:4, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes." As we shall see these passages deal with how we are to evaluate and condemn sinful practices in our judging.⁵

⁴ The reason Adam fell was not because he considered the value of the fruit of the forbidden tree but that he did so incorrectly. He failed to judge Satan's lies in light of God's word. Instead, Adam sought to become like God in determining good and evil. (He failed to keep principle #5, see herein)

⁵ Some people also refer to John 8:2-11. As I do not address this passage later, I will briefly do so here. A woman accused of adultery is brought before Jesus to which he responds, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." These words are often interpreted to mean that no sinner has the right to judge another sinner. Thus, one must be sinless in order to judge. Since no one is sinless, no one has the right to judge another. It is quite possible that this passage is not part of the original manuscripts and thus not inspired. Even if it is part of the original, the above interpretation cannot be correct because Jesus then would be contradicting Himself, (Matt. 18:15ff), as well as the Apostle Paul, (Rom. 13). One possible interpretation is that the words "without sin" refer to one who is not guilty of what he is judging. In this particular case, it would refer to one who is not guilty of adultery. This interpretation seems to be supported by Deut. 19:15 which says, "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits..." Moreover, in a capital offense the witnesses had to be the ones to cast the first stone, (Deut. 17:7). Judging by the response of the woman's accusers, they were either guilty of adultery or not witnesses to the crime.

2. *Judging others is unloving and cruel.* He who dares to reprove another person is often labeled unkind. Criticism puts a person down and lowers his self-esteem.

Far from being unloving and cruel, rebuke can be an expression of love. Prov. 27:5-6 says, "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." And Prov. 28:23, "He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue."

Ironically, it is he who refuses to rebuke one in sin that is heartless. King David's refusal to properly confront and deal with the sins of his sons (1 Kings 1:6), contributed to their demise. Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar and was not appropriately rebuked. Thus, Absalom took justice into his own hands and killed his half-brother Amnon. David again did not handle the situation correctly and as a result, Absalom, his own son, sought to kill him and take over his throne.

If a family member or friend is living in sin and thus on the road to hell, you are unkind if you do not judge them by warning them of the danger. If your mother was about to walk on a dangerous bridge, would you not say something? Likewise, if your friend was engaged in a homosexual lifestyle, would you not tell him that "no homosexual or sodomite will inherit the kingdom of God, (1 Cor. 6:9-10)."

3. *Love is the only thing that counts!* For many people today it is axiomatic that love is the only thing that really counts in life. It doesn't really matter what you believe or do, as long as you love Jesus and other people. Denominational distinctives based upon differences in theological beliefs and practices are insignificant in terms of your calling as a Christian. We are told that it doesn't matter whether you are a Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian or Roman Catholic. Consequently, we should not critically appraise another's beliefs and practices.

The viewpoint described above, though very pious sounding can and often does result in disastrous consequences. It seems right because, like all good heresies, it captures an aspect of the truth. But as one pastor has written, "When a half truth is presented as the whole truth, it becomes an untruth."⁶

Christians must be full of zeal, passion and love for Jesus, fellow Christians and unbelievers. The whole law of God is summarized in two love commandments, (Matt. 22:37-40). Jesus rebuked the Ephesian church because they had forsaken their first love, (Rev. 2:4). Furthermore, He told the Laodiceans that He would spit them out for their lack of zeal and passion, (Rev. 3:15). It is not surprising then that the Apostle Paul wrote that it is good to be zealous, (Gal. 4:18).

Nevertheless, love and zeal by themselves will not enable you to live a life pleasing to God. They are necessary but insufficient. Knowledge and wisdom must accompany your love and passion for God. In other words, doctrine and theology are indispensable.

If your heart and mind are not filled with the knowledge and wisdom of the Scriptures then your love and zeal will inevitably be misguided. For you will not know how to love God and your neighbor properly. You will not know what to say and do for them.

Lack of knowledge cannot be replaced by more love. More love will only get you into more trouble. As Proverbs 19:2 says, "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way." Men are notorious for being zealous to get where they are going yet not willing to stop and ask for directions. Accordingly, they never arrive at their destination, (at least not until they stop and ask for help!).

⁶ Chantry, Walter J. *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1970), pg. 17.

Likewise, you can really want to lead someone to Christ or meet some other need, but if you do not know the gospel or how to meet their need, all the zeal in the world will not help you. To put it simply, good intentions are not good enough!

This was the problem for the Jews. Paul testified that they had a zeal for God. But their zeal was not according to knowledge, (Rom. 10:2). Consequently, they sought salvation in the wrong place causing them to take others with them on the broad road to hell, (Rom. 10:3; Matt. 23:13). The Judaizers (i.e. Christian Pharisees) had the same problem. They were full of zeal and concern for the Galatian Christians but, as Paul says, for no good, (Gal. 4:17). They taught a false gospel (Gal. 1:6-7), thereby leading the Galatians astray. The Galatians were so bewitched (Gal. 3:1) by their love and concern (Gal. 4:17) that they were turning their backs upon the gospel, Christ and Paul, (Gal. 1:6, 4:16), therewith endangering themselves, (Gal. 5:2-4).

Therefore, good doctrine and knowledge are essential in order to direct our zeal and inform our love. Since this is true, it is necessary to evaluate them even as it is necessary to judge an unloving spirit.

4. *Judging is divisive.* As the former objection sacrificed truth at the altar of love, so does this one but at the altar of unity. However, the Bible forbids us from choosing one over the other. We are commanded to be united (Eph. 4:3), to remain steadfast in the truth, (Gal. 5:1), and to depart from all those who do not believe and practice the truth, (2 Thess. 3:14). Unity is based upon the truth for the purpose of defending the truth, (Phil. 1:27). Therefore, judging is necessary in order to be united biblically!

5. *Only the arrogant and proud judge others.* It is certainly possible to be arrogant and proud in our judging. We do this when we evaluate with an improper attitude and/or with the wrong standard. Nonetheless, an improper manner and standard does not prohibit the proper

practice of judging. Jesus was “meek and lowly in heart.” Moses was the “meekest of men.” Yet, both Jesus and Moses judged what they saw and heard.

6. *Truth is relative.* People have bought into the belief that truth is relative: "What is true for you, is not necessarily true for me!" "Different strokes for different folks!" Hence, we can't judge one another.

This objection is self-refuting. If all truth is relative then the truth "all truth is relative" itself is relative and not absolutely true. Also, this objection fails to make the distinction between truth and beliefs. Beliefs vary from person to person but not truth. Objective truth is found in the Scriptures, (John 17:17). Therefore, we can test a person's subjective belief of the truth against the objective standard of truth.

7. *“It is in everyone’s best interests that we not judge one another.”* Sometimes people condemn the practice of judging as if to ensure that they themselves will not be judged. Others dislike having to confront so much that they excuse themselves from having to do it by saying we should never rebuke one another.

8. *Many people judge others incorrectly.* Many people do not evaluate biblically. In other words, they sin in their judging. Instead of condemning the sinful manner of judging, people have condemned the practice altogether. However, we must not forget that the abuse of something does not negate its use.

How should we then judge? How can we judge without being judgmental?

Biblical Principles for Judging

Principle #1: Judge others knowing that God has and will judge you. Since we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we all have come under the condemnation of God,

(Rom. 3:9-19). Yet, even in the midst of our rebellion and hatred, our Divine Judge loved us by sending His Son to die for us so that through His blood we might be saved from His wrath, (Rom. 5:8-9).

Understanding that God has been merciful to us despite the fact that He has judged us and found us wanting needs to inform our appraisal of others. Experiencing God's grace in our lives should make us sensitive in dealing with fellow sinners, (Matt. 18:23-35). "Mercy triumphs over judgment, (James 2:13)!"

It is also important to keep in mind that there is day coming when God will judge every thought, word and deed. And "nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account, (Heb. 4:13)."

This very sobering thought should temper your judgments, especially in light of Jesus' warning: ""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, (Matt. 7:1-2; see also James 2:12-13; Ps. 18:25-27)." William Hendriksen comments, "The standard of judgment that you apply to others will be applied to you. If you judge without mercy, you will be judged without mercy. Similarly, if you judge kindly, you will be judged and treated kindly."⁷

Principle #2: Judge All Things. As a Christian, you are to evaluate everything in terms of a biblical worldview, (2 Cor. 10:5). Thus, in one sense you will assess every idea, practice, doctrine, lifestyle, law and philosophy that comes your way.

You must not believe and agree with everything you see and hear. Solomon wisely informed us that "a simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps, (Prov. 14:15)." Furthermore, you should not tolerate and accept everything you see and hear. Paul commands us to hold on to the good and avoid every kind of evil, (1 Thess. 5:21-22).

Christians are not to be sponges, retaining the good, the bad and the ugly, but filters that remove all unwanted materials. Therefore what we see on television, hear on the radio, read in the newspaper and experience at home and work, needs to be evaluated and an opinion formed. We need to discriminate between right and wrong, good and evil, wise and unwise, and good, better and best, (Phil. 1:9; Heb. 5:14).

Principle #3: Keep Many of Your Judgments to Yourself. You must not always vocalize your opinions. Although you test all things, you don't always have to share the results. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent, (Eccl. 3:7). Prov. 12:23 says, "A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly, (see also Prov. 29:11)." And Prov. 17:28, "Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue."

Here are a few questions you might want to ask yourself before you publicly judge another person and/or viewpoint. First, is it my place and/or responsibility to do so? You may visit a church and conclude that the sermon is incorrect but that does not mean you should publicly rebuke the pastor while shaking his hand at the door. "It is a mark of intolerable self-conceit to be continually offering unsolicited opinions."⁸

Second, what is my motive and goal for vocalizing my views? Am I sharing my judgments in love with the purpose of "building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen, (Eph. 4:29)"? Or is my goal to humiliate and hurt? Is it to show off my knowledge and insight? Is it to make myself look better morally speaking, (see Luke 18:9-14)?

Third, if I speak, will I be throwing my pearls to swine, (Matt. 7:6)? There is no need to share your opinions with those who are unwilling to listen and consider what you have to say. Prov. 9:7-8 states, "Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man

⁷ Hendriksen, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 357.

incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you."

Fourth, is what I have to say a public or private matter? There are times when we need to publicly rebuke (Gal. 2:11; 1 Tim. 5:20), and times when we need to hold our tongue until we can do so in private, (Matt. 18:15).

Fifth, is it an appropriate time to speak? Prov. 25:11 says, "A word spoken at the appropriate time is like apples of gold in settings of silver". When you speak is just as important as what and how you speak. Abigail wisely waited until her husband was sober before she confronted him, (1 Sam. 25:36). Though Job's friends misjudged him, they at least had the compassion to grieve with him a whole week before they uttered a word, (Job 2:13).

Finally, am I being overly critical?⁹ It is important that you do not address every mistake or sin. What would life be like if your spouse confronted you every time you did something that was wrong? It would be utterly miserable to say the least! You would be wise, therefore, to ask yourself if you chastise your spouse, children or friends more than you commend them. A loving person is one who overlooks a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8; Prov. 10:12; 17:9) and who is quick to recognize and acknowledge the good, (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 13:6-7; 2 Tim. 1:5-6; Rev. 2:2-3).

Principle #4: Be fair or evenhanded in your judgments. Make sure that you use the same standard of judgment for all. As sinners we tend to favor the rich, famous, friends and especially ourselves. For this reason, the Bible repeatedly warns us against showing partiality, (Deut. 1:17; 16:19; Ex. 23:3; Lev. 19:5; Job 32:21-22; Psa. 82:2; Prov. 24:23; 1 Tim. 5:21).

⁸ Plumer, William. *The Law of God*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, reprint 1996), 542. Elsewhere he writes, "Advice is often the best charity; yet 'to advise much is a sign that we need advice'".

⁹ Communication researchers assert that unless our positive speech outweighs our negative speech by a seven-to-one ratio, people will tend to be put off by us. Wayne Mack, *Your Family God's Way*, pg. 152.

Principle #5: the standard or rule you are to use in judging is the Bible. There is only one Law-giver and Judge, who is God, (James 4:12). He alone is the determiner of right and wrong. Therefore, His law as it is revealed to us in the Bible is the standard we must use in our evaluating. We do not have the right to condemn someone on the basis of our own personal standards of morality. When we do so, God says to us, "But you-who are you to judge your neighbor, (James 4:12)?" and "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls, (Rom. 14:4)."

Principle #6: judge yourself before you judge others. The blind cannot lead the blind, (Luke 6:39). If we are guilty of sin, we must first confess our sin. As Jesus says, "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, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye, (Matt. 7:3-5)."

Principle #7: be sure you have all the facts properly interpreted before you make a judgment. If you decide a matter by mere appearances without hearing all the facts and/or considering them carefully, you will most likely not make a right assessment.¹⁰ As Prov. 29:20 says, "Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

A proper assessment of a particular situation requires at least four things. First, you need to gather the facts. Prov. 18:13, "He who answers before listening-that is his folly and his

¹⁰ Sometimes we do correctly evaluate a situation by mere appearances. For example, you tell your young son not to play with the neighbor anymore today. Yet a few hours later you see him walking back from the neighbor's house. Immediately, you conclude that he disobeyed and so you proceed to chastise him. Now you happen to be right, your son had disobeyed you. Yet he is offended (rightly so, I might add) at your rebuke! Why? Because you had no justification for your judgment. You assumed or rather guessed that he was playing with his neighbor. He may have been merely returning a toy. Furthermore, you thought the worse of him, which is contrary to biblical love, (1 Cor. 13). Of course, you rationalize your sin by saying that you were right in your evaluation but that is not satisfactory to God or to your son. You have no right to judge something you do not know (see principle #9). Nor can you judge until you have first judged yourself (see principle #6).

shame." This point needs to be stressed because we are so prone to rush into judgment even when there is only a hint of wrongdoing; this is especially true when the accused is notorious.

Second, you need to gather *all* the facts. Prov. 18:17, "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." As you gather all the facts, it is important that you do so with a loving attitude. That means you will come asking and not accusing. For love always gives the benefit of the doubt, (1 Cor. 13:5-6).

Third, you need to carefully think about the facts you have gathered. The Pharisees quickly condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath day. If they had only taken the time to reflect on the issue, they would have come to a right assessment and avoided Christ's rebuke, (John 7:21-24). Prov. 15:28, "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil."

Fourth, you need to love God and your neighbor, (Phil. 1:9-11). If you are not genuinely concerned for the glory of God and the welfare of your neighbor, then you will not interpret the facts properly. Hatred is so powerful that it can cause you (even sub-consciously) to reject or twist overwhelmingly clear evidence, (e.g. Rom. 1:18ff).¹¹ As John Stott has written, "Hatred distorts our perspective. We do not first misjudge people and then hate them as a result; our view of them is already jaundiced by our hatred. It is love which sees straight, thinks clearly and makes us balanced in our outlook, judgments and conduct. Cf. John 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35."¹²

Since man by nature hates both God and his neighbor he will often distort the facts, misquote, misrepresent and engage in fallacious reasoning. He is unable to see the truth (including his own bias and prejudice) because he walks in darkness and "the darkness has

¹¹ The sin of man pleasing also perverts one's perspective, just in an opposition direction, namely flattery, (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4-9).

¹² Stott, John. *The Letters of John, Rev. Ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 100.

blinded his eyes, (1 John 2:11)." Consequently, salvation by Christ is our only hope. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing, including making right judgments.

Principle #8: judge in a spirit of gentleness, (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25). You may have all the facts correct and even make a right assessment; but if you do so with a self-righteous, proud spirit, you stand condemned before God. The Pharisees were harsh and severe toward others (Matt. 23:4), looking down upon them in judgment because of their "holier than thou" attitude, (Luke 18:9). If you are to correct someone, you must do so in humility and with much tenderness.

This principle is not always easy to put into practice since we all wrestle with the sin of pride. It can thus be helpful, before we correct someone, to meditate upon a few things so that our pride is put in check. First, remember that you are sinner who stumbles and will one day need to be corrected. Second, remember that it is only by the grace of God that you know the truth and that the one you are correcting will see his fault or error.¹³ Third, review your own past. My former seminary professor would tell us that when we begin to think that we are good preachers, to go and listen to our old sermons to receive a dose of humility! Think of how you have grown in your Christian life and how God has gently and patiently led you into His truth, and you will learn to be tender hearted.

Principle #9: do not judge something you do not know. For the most part, a person's motive is something you can't know for only the Lord knows the heart. The Corinthians

¹³ If we really remember and believe this, then why do we still want to "wring the person's neck" when he fails to see the obvious? Though we may profess to be Calvinists, we become Pelagians (or at best Arminians) in practice when we confront with an impatient, harsh, and proud spirit. Note carefully 2 Tim. 2:24-26. As the Puritans spoke of 'practical atheists', so must we speak of 'practical arminians'. John Newton has written, "Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. If, indeed, they who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts, then we might with less inconsistency be offended at their obstinacy: but if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is, not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who

condemned Paul's motives to which he replied, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes, (I Cor. 4:4-5)."

This is not to say that you can never judge motives. After all, the biblical distinction between murder and manslaughter is determined by intent and motivation, which can be discerned by one's outward actions. The point is that we need to be careful, and make sure that our judgments are true and based upon facts that we know. "The rule is, obtain correct views, if you can, and express them modestly, but clearly; but if there is room for rational doubt be not positive. If you know a thing, say so; if you know it not, say so."¹⁴

Conclusion

Judging is an inevitable and biblical practice. Christ has provided a number of principles in His word to equip us for this good work, which you must use. The importance of applying these biblical principles cannot be overstated. It is better for you to refrain from judging than to do so improperly. Remember the words of our Lord Jesus, "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, (Matt. 7:1-2)."

oppose. 'If peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.'" "On Controversy", *New Horizons*, Vol. 23, No. 9 (October, 2002), pg. 9.

¹⁴ Plumer, William. *Law of God*. pg. 558.