



“Judging Others” by Noel Heikkinen

Someone dropped me a note about a recent message. He asked a great question, which a lot of people have. This paper is a transcript of his email and my response:

“I have a question I hope you can answer for me concerning yesterday’s sermon. How do we handle the not criticizing people? Especially when you have a concern about someone or something they are doing? I have struggled with this for a long time, not knowing exactly how to handle it.

If you have some suggestions, I would appreciate it. “

I had a feeling that some people would walk away with this thought from the message, so I am very glad that you sent me a note about it.

In my message, I quoted this passage in Luke:

Luke 6:27-42

“But if you are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for the happiness of those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give what you have to anyone who asks you for it; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. Do for others as you would like them to do for you.

“Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much! And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, what good is that? Even sinners will lend to their own kind for a full return.

“Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don’t be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.

“Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will all come back on you. If you forgive others, you will be forgiven. If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you.

Then Jesus gave the following illustration: “What good is it for one blind person to lead another? The first one will fall into a ditch and pull the other down also. A student is not greater than the teacher. But the student who works hard will become like the teacher.

“And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying, “Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,” when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.”

When you read this entire passage, you see what Jesus is trying to get at. We, as Christians, should live with an entirely different attitude toward others than the world has. He talks about “turning the other cheek,” giving away your coat to someone who demands your shirt, not taking stuff back that has been stolen from you, etc. I don’t think this is a list of things that are universal statements of action. But together, they paint a picture. **And that picture is that we often hold people to a standard that we ourselves don’t keep.**

I do believe that there is a time and place for judging others. Especially when it comes to calling sin what it is: sin. There are also plenty of scriptural examples of judging bad doctrine, calling out hypocrisy when we see it in believers, even using the law as a way of showing non-Christians their need for forgiveness. Jesus said:

John 7:24 - Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

There is something to be said for appropriate judgment. What Jesus was getting at in this passage was that judgment should not be motivated by self-centered motives. Often we judge or criticize because it makes us look better and we are really trying to “one-up” the other person or group.

Here are a few ways we can know we are judging inappropriately:

Inappropriate judgment is based on outward appearance / superficial stuff.

This is what Jesus was talking about in John 7:24. Merely observing something in someone without seeking to understand it first leads to this kind of judgment. You can see that when you read the entire context of John 7.

Inappropriate judgment is about personal convictions or non-moral gray areas that the Bible isn't extremely clear on.

If you read Romans 14, you will see this. We sometimes become judge, jury, and executioner toward people on issues that God really doesn't care about. I like what James says:

James 4:11-12 Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize each other and condemn each other, then you are criticizing and condemning God's law. But you are not a judge who can decide whether the law is right or wrong. Your job is to

obey it. God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbor?

Now, like I said before, there are definitely appropriate times and places for judgment. Here are a few:

It is appropriate to judge when a Christian is unrepentant in an area of clear sin.

In Matthew 18, Jesus lays out a sobering course of judgment toward those who sin and will not repent of their sin. It starts with the person who has been sinned against confronting them and moves from there to greater numbers of people until the unrepentant Christian is removed from the church. Heavy stuff. We also see this in a few of Paul's letters.

We are to evaluate and judge doctrine that is taught.

There are tons of verses on this. Acts 4:18; Acts 17:10-11; I Corinthians 10:15; I Corinthians 14:29; Titus 1:10-16; 3:10; Hebrews 13:7; I John 4:1; Revelation 2:20-24 are a few.

It is appropriate to judge when we observe blatant hypocrisy in those who are "religious."

Jesus modeled this for us. He was even bold enough to call religious hypocrites "maggot-infested" (my translation). Here's the passage:

Matthew 23:27-36 "How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. You try to look like upright people outwardly, but inside your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

"How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed and decorate the graves of the godly people your ancestors destroyed. Then you say, 'We never would have joined them in killing the prophets.'

"In saying that, you are accusing yourselves of being the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead. Finish what they started. Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell? I will send you prophets and wise men and teachers of religious law. You will kill some by crucifixion and whip others in your synagogues, chasing them from city to city. As a result, you will become guilty of murdering all the godly people from righteous Abel to Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered in the Temple between the altar and the sanctuary. I assure you, all the accumulated judgment of the centuries will break upon the heads of this very generation."

So, I say this all to say that the whole judging thing is a bit tricky. The bottom line for me comes down to motivation. You need to step outside of yourself and see that you are not trying to

make yourself look great. If you can do that and there is a clear moral or doctrinal issue that needs to be addressed, then you can do so with a clear conscience.



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