

#28 “Judge with Righteous Judgment”

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In a day and age of tolerance, there is pressure to turn a blind eye to evil deeds. Greater still, there is a pull from society to not even call evil “evil” or good “good.” Some will even rebuke Christians who do point out evil on the grounds that the Bible says that we shouldn’t judge. We are told to stop judging people and to be more accepting. Society thus wants us to stop differentiating right from wrong and acceptable from unacceptable. They would have us remove all standards of discernment, and they refuse to recognize that Christ will judge them once and for all after they die. Judgment is a reality of the way the world has been designed. We cannot escape from it, and as Christians we have a calling to exercise righteous judgment.

Matthew 7:1 says, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.” Jesus here is not forbidding judgment of any kind. His point is to show that some people judge from a self-righteous, condemning, and hypocritical stance. They point out slivers in the eyes of others not because they care but because they get some cheap thrill from faultfinding as if it makes them feel better about themselves. Some are so self-righteous that they are even blind to their own hypocrisy, being unable to see the log in their own eyes. Jesus is condemning self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and an inability to judge ourselves rightly, which we must do (1 Corinthians 11:29). In no way does Matthew 7:1 forbid discernment. In fact, later in Matthew 7 Christ explains that we can discern true believers from false teachers based upon their fruit. Christ’s intention is not to forbid judgment that evaluates between right and wrong, moral and immoral. What Jesus is saying is not to usurp the place of God, Who alone can cast into hell (Luke 12:5).

God sees all, and He will judge sin righteously. Our job is to let God be God and to love and share the gospel with those whom we have discerned through righteous judgment to not be acting righteously. This is the point of John 7:24 which says, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” Righteous judgment sees sin for what it is, and it is not afraid to point it out. But this judgment becomes unrighteous when it stems from “holier-than-thou” motives or when it seeks to condemn rather than to restore. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.” Righteous judgment recognizes that some people are spiritual and some are not, being carnal and mired in sin. If someone who is spiritual finds a brother or sister in sin, they are to restore them in a spirit of gentleness. Clearly this requires discernment and an understanding of right and wrong. Yet it need not cross into unrighteous condemning judgment. A spirit of gentleness and being intentional about seeking restoration are essential to righteous judgment. When we see a fellow Christian sin, we need to confront the sin (after we have dealt with our own hearts) but humbly, graciously, and with an understanding that we are not above the potential to do the very same thing.

Unrighteous, self-righteous judgment is ugly and repulsive to a world desperately in need of Christ. If Christ judged as these folks judge, He would have never come to earth and died for us. But He loved us even while we were yet sinners and died for us (Romans 5:8). The mentality and focus of the Christian ought to be to save sinners and restore believers, not to judge and condemn, though we definitely need to exercise discernment. When Christianity deteriorates into keeping records of wrongs and looking over one another's shoulders in suspicion and even with a hope of catching another in sin, we have fallen far from Christ's call.

In a day and age where judgment has been itself condemned, we need to judge righteously. There is a shortage of discernment in a time that demands an abundance. For the sake of the lost, for our brothers and sisters struggling with sin, for our own spiritual well-being, and for the glory of Christ, let us judge righteously and love unconditionally.