

Judging Others

You've no doubt heard someone say, "*Who are you to judge me?*" Or, if you're a Christian, you might have had someone say to you, "*The Bible says you're not to judge anyone else!*" Are people right for saying these things? The big question is, "*What is God's expectation for us with regards to judging people?*" Thankfully, the Bible gives clarity.

James 4:12, "***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?***"

- Here, there is a type of judging that is limited to God alone. James describes God as the Lawgiver and Judge. God is the One who creates life and holds authority over all His creation. Thus, God alone can pronounce judgment upon His creation. This is His roll alone. God can rightly accuse someone of rejecting Him and He can justly pronounce condemnation upon them. God alone is fit to judge with this type of judgement.
- Too often though, people wrongly pronounce condemnation on others, saying things like, "*You're going to hell!*" This is the type of judging that people cannot make, as we are not able to know a person's heart or mind. God, who knows all things, can rightly judge us all. However, there is a type of judging that God not only expects us to make, but commands us to make.

John 7:24 says, "***Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.***"

- Here, there are two commands to keep. First, we are commanded ***not to judge*** according to appearance. Have you ever looked at someone and assumed you knew their character based on how they looked? We've all made this mistake! You've heard the expression, "*Don't judge a book by its cover.*" It's wrong to assume we can know what's on the inside simply by looking at the outside. Jesus regularly condemned the Pharisees (a sect of religious leaders in Jesus' day) of being hypocrites because they sought distinction and praise by outward observances of rites and ceremonial piety such as washings, fastings, prayers, and charity, but inwardly they were without faith and virtue. In the same way, one might look at a person who appears to be rough-edged, perhaps covered in prison tattoos, and falsely assume that he's a person of low-character, while all the while Jesus has transformed that person into a man of righteousness.
- Secondly, this verse gives a command ***to judge!*** We are to judge with righteous judgment. This is the type of judgment that doesn't take into consideration the appearance, but evaluates the character of an individual; attitude, behavior, and words. The Bible is full of instructions about setting up proper barriers when dealing with people of low character. For example, Psalm 1:1 says, "***How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!***" How can a person follow this verse unless he makes a judgment call about the character of others? If I'm going to avoid the counsel of the wicked, I must first judge a person to be wicked. I do not judge someone as wicked by looking at his appearance, and I don't pronounce condemnation and say, "*You're going to hell!*" However, I do evaluate his character, and if I discern that he has wicked intentions, then I'm to set up boundaries about the type of friendship that I can have with him.

Biblical Advice

When you see sinful behavior in someone, you are right to recognize it as sin, and judge it as wrong. If you have a relationship with that person, the Bible gives practical advice about how to approach that person. Matthew 18:15 says, "***If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.***" This is the kind of helpfulness that righteous judgment produces. I see a brother in sin, I judge him as being in the wrong, and I lovingly pull him aside and correct him privately. People have done this with me when I've been in sin, and as uncomfortable as it can be to be corrected, it's part of spiritual maturity.

If you attempt to correct someone, and they challenge your position on their behavior, be prepared to show them in the Bible where it says their behavior is sinful. It's important to let them know that you are not declaring their choices as sinful, but the Word of God is calling that choice a sin. The key is speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Let the Sin You Tolerate the Least Be Your Own

Matthew 7:1-5, ***“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 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.”***

Here's another great passage that talks about inappropriate versus appropriate judging. It starts by saying “*do not judge.*” This does not mean to avoid all types of judgment. The type of judgment that's in view here is the type that is rash, harsh, unloving, or the type of judgmental person that always finds fault in everyone. Jesus accuses this type of person as being too busy-bodied, and doesn't attend to their own sin. If you want to be helpful, first address the sin in your own life before you seek to judge the sin in someone else. Jesus uses a hyperbole here, by saying that one can have a log in his own eye. A hyperbole is an exaggerated statement that points to a reality. Too often our sin is glaringly obvious, but we avoid it because we're too busy being nitpicky about the tiny things about others.