

SHOULD CHRISTIANS JUDGE?

Let's be honest, absolutely no one likes to be judged. It's always offensive. Why? Because it implies that we think someone has said or done something wrong, and the hardest thing for a person to do is to admit he is wrong. That is why the proverb says, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes..." (Prov. 21:2). This is basic human nature. So why would we ever judge? The answer is that the Bible tells Christians that one of their major responsibilities is to judge.

In Revelation 20:4-6 we see recorded by the apostle John a vision of people sitting on thrones as kings and priests. The New Testament makes it plain that these people are the saints throughout the church age (I Pet. 2:5,9). They are the restored "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). Notice, in addition to being kings and priests, Christians have "been given authority to judge" (*NIV*). Yes, God, the supreme Judge, has given authority to His people to judge, albeit in a limited way.

Long ago the prophet Isaiah prophesied concerning the restoration of Israel, saying, "I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. And afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Isa. 1:26). The Bible uses the metaphor "Jerusalem above" and "heavenly Jerusalem" (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22) to describe the collective saints as a city, whose citizens are judges.

Who were the "judges as at the first"? We must go back to the story in Exodus 18 where it says, "Moses sat to judge the people" (v13). There were so many people lined up to talk to Moses that his father-in-law, Jethro, told him he was wearing out both himself and the people, and that he needed to delegate by appointing more judges. Heeding Jethro's counsel, Moses selected judges of 1000's, 100's, 50's, and 10's to judge the people. Moses was judging disputes between people and determining who was right and wrong based upon the laws of God (v16,20). And so in turn did all the lesser judges. All judging should be based upon the laws of God, His mind and will.

The qualifications for these judges was critical: "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (v21). Those qualifications remain today for all Christian judges. In addition, God set a standard for judgment when He said, "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty, but in righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (Lev. 19:15). That is why Jesus told the Jews, "judge with righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24).

One of the best definitions of judgment is found in I Kings 3:9, where King Solomon asked God, saying, "Therefore give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil..." All Christians should ask God for discernment in order to distinguish between sin and righteousness, right and wrong. We live in a world that largely does not know what is right or wrong. Moral relativism so permeates society's thinking so that nothing is wrong anymore.

It seems today that people are constantly accusing, saying, "Don't judge me!" Or those who wish to judge preface their judgment with, "I'm not judging, but..." A "good" and "kind" person does not judge, so what are Christians, who are given the authority to judge, to do? We can begin by understanding just who and when to judge, which in biblical terms means discerning between right and wrong.

The apostle Paul made things a lot easier when he said Christians do not have the responsibility to judge those outside the faith. He wrote, "For what have I to do with judging those who are

outside?...But those who are outside God judges...” (I Cor. 5:12,13). Christians need not, and should not, go around judging non-believers. As stated earlier, it is always offensive, and therefore sets a bad example and a stumbling block before those whom God may call later.

Like charity, judgment should start close to home, by judging oneself first. Paul wrote, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (I Cor. 11:31). This precept is brought out by Jesus in his well-known admonition, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Mtt. 7:1), and the context in which he said it. It is unfortunate that many simply take Jesus’ words as a blanket statement, out of context, as being against all judging ever. But let’s notice how Jesus framed his statement,

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye” (v3-7).

It is clear that any judge needs to look at himself first. Further, Paul wrote, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). So all judging should begin with self-examination.

I was taught years ago that whenever I thought I should say something concerning a fault, I should ask myself three questions first. 1. Does it **need** to be said? After all, it may just be a “speck” not worth mentioning. 2. Does it need to be said **now**? Timing can mean everything. 3. Does it need to be said by **me**? Maybe I have a “plank” in my eye. Am I spiritually minded enough? Can I be gentle? There can be a host of reasons why someone else might be better equipped to judge than I.

A Christian should never judge another’s heart or try to discern motives. Only God can do that. That is why Jesus was so tough on the Pharisees of his day. He could read their thoughts (Mt. 9:3,4; 12:25), something we could never do.

So far we have learned **who** should judge—Christians—and who should **not** be judged—non-believers. We have learned that judgment means discerning between right and wrong based on God’s law. Also, there are plenty of cautions surrounding judging. In fact, some Christians, because of the cautions or for other reasons, simply refuse to judge anything at all. This can be catastrophic to a congregation!

One such congregation was the one in Corinth, to which Paul wrote,

“It is actually reported that there is sexual morality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles [non-believers]—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from you. For I indeed...have already judged...him who has done this deed” (I Cor. 5:1-3).

Paul had to judge the individual himself because the people had refused to judge him themselves. Why would they choose to do that? Paul said it was because they were “puffed up.” He said this in the context of leaven (v6-8), which puffs up bread. The Bible uses leaven to represent sin in all its forms (Lk. 12:1; Mtt. 16:6-12; Mk. 8:15), and in this case the Corinthian brethren were filled with the leaven of pride. They were “glorying” in how good and kind they were for being so tolerant and inclusive. Sound familiar?

I have lived to see a world gone mad, filled with sin—spiritual leaven. People are puffed up with the leaven of pride over so-called social issues. If we are pro-life (meaning anti-abortion), we are accused of misogyny. If we believe homosexuality is a sin, we are accused of being haters. If we believe transgender people are mentally ill and potentially dangerous, we are accused of being intolerant. The world is puffed up with pride over these issues, they are “glorying” over how good and kind they are. They believe that because they are inclusive and tolerant of these sins that they are better people than those who don’t.

With the world in such a state, what is a Christian to do? Let God do the judging. He will bring the world to account in His own time. Meanwhile, Christian congregations must fight against the Corinthian attitude toward sin. They must judge righteous judgment. They must not let sin, disguised as social issues, linger in the congregation once discovered. Sexual immorality and perversion should be identified for what it is—sin/leaven—and be excised before “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

The world today would accuse Paul of being a hater because he was not tolerant of sin. Notice what he continued to write,

“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person” (I Cor. 5:11).

In verse 8 Paul wrote, “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” He was referencing the Old Testament Feast of Unleavened Bread” (Lev. 23:6). Christians should observe this feast in the spirit every day by not tolerating the leaven of sin in their lives or their congregations.

Congregations which allow spiritual leavening to remain are being ripped apart. Men and women with the gift of teaching must teach the flock how to judge between sin and righteousness. But they themselves must first know what sin is. Christians must not be swallowed up by the world’s tolerance for sin, which is a clever Satanic counterfeit disguised as the godly attributes of goodness, kindness, tolerance, and inclusiveness.

Christians have the authority and responsibility to judge between sin and righteousness. We must have the discernment to distinguish between the two. We must reject the world’s brand of neo-Corinthianism. So let us all keep the feast!