

Don't Judge Me!

“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.” John 7:24 (NIV)

The words, “Don’t Judge Me!” are flying through the air so often that people are weary of telling anyone of wrongdoing. It is quite disturbing as Christians are repeating the phrase at equal rates as the world. I believe the phrase has caught on like wildfire because our adversary is fanning the flames. Another reason for this misuse is confusion between the terms “judge” and “rebuke.” The Bible clearly instructs us not to judge, but it does tell us to sharply rebuke. According to Oxford Dictionary® to judge means to form an opinion about, to act as judge or to conclude. However, to rebuke means to express sharp disapproval; to scold or reprimand.



When people say, “Don’t judge me!” it is often in response to a correction rather than judgment. Many churches today do not teach about sin and holiness; thus, most people respond to a rebuke as an offense rather than in repentance. We are the church of Christ and as such we are to be salt and light. That requires not only living a life of obedience to God, but informing others when they are in error of God’s truth. Salt purifies and a sharp rebuke is like salt rubbed into a wound. It stings. Thus, if one is rebuked it should turn him or her from sin and lead to repentance.

Listen to what Titus 1:13 (NIV) says, *“This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.” Here is the key, “Rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.”*

The book of Proverbs has much to say about rebuking. It tells us if we rebuke a wise man he will love us; and if a man of discernment is rebuked he will be impressed by it. Proverbs also tells us that he who rebukes a man will gain more favor in the end than the one with a flattering tongue.

Christians should be prepared in season and out of season, correcting, rebuking and encouraging with patience according to 2 Timothy 4:2. And if a brother (or sister) sins, rebuke him and if he repents, forgive him. You see, a rebuke acknowledges the sin and urges the sinner to discontinue and change direction. Yet, judging is like pointing a finger of condemnation saying, “Look how bad you are!”

Isaiah speaks about Christ when he says, *“He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.”* Isaiah 11:3 (NIV) Are we not called to be Christ like? Scripture tells us that if we judge others we will be judged also; and in the same measure.

James offers insight in this story, *“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also come in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here is a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? James 2:2-4 (NIV)* How often do we behave the same way? If we remember that we ourselves will be judged by God perhaps we will be more loving. Mercy and love triumph over judgment. Loving our neighbors is second in rank after loving God. It is important. When we judge others by gender, ethnicity, education, economic status and the like, we are in disobedience. When we judge our neighbors, we disobey God's Word. And if we fail to rebuke our neighbors, we share in their sin. Again, this is disobedience. If we love our neighbor, we should not be weary of giving or receiving correction for if received it is life.

Let me be clear, today under limited circumstances we are called to judge; and judgment refers to those in the church according to scripture. *“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.” 1 Corinthians 5:12 (NIV)* We are allowed to judge when there is a dispute in the church. Someone who is wise enough to judge between the disputers should make a judgment. Another area of judgment is concerning sin. We are instructed in 1 Corinthians to judge a fellow believer who continues in sin after being caught and warned. In other words, ask the believer to leave the church because sin will spread if allowed. Later, when Christ comes on earth to reign, we, the church will judge the world. Scripture tells us that we will also judge angels. Until then we have to love others and pray for discernment so we ourselves are not found in disobedience.

“Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.” 1 Corinthians 4:5 (NIV) We do not know what is in men's hearts, but God does. We cannot see what is done in the dark, but all things are laid bare before the Lord. His judgment is just and it is right. So let us not sit in judgment of our neighbor, but encourage and rebuke as needed for we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

My prayer is that you will have the wisdom to overlook an offense and to heed correction. I pray that God will give you discernment and love that overflows so others can see Christ in you. All to the glory of Jesus name. Amen.

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