

A Plea For Judges

Acts 17:10-15

Introduction

In 1820, a young man named Joseph Smith wandered out into a field and was allegedly visited by God the Father and God the Son. Eventually, he supposedly discovered golden plates that had words on them in a strange language. He claimed an angel helped him to translate them. Over the next decade, Smith continued to receive revelations, and by 1830, he had written the *Book of Mormon*.

Today, millions of Americans and millions more overseas follow that particular cult. It is a cult by the way, that is attempting to align itself with Christianity. Their beliefs are that God is a man and Jesus is the brother of Satan, and they deny the incarnation of God through Christ. These things are downplayed as they increasingly adopt evangelical terminology.

In 1886, Mary Baker Eddy, while recovering from an accident, supposedly discovered new realms of metaphysical truth. Her major work, *Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures*, defines the Christian Scientist doctrine that is basically, a repackaging of Hinduism.

In 1879, a man named Charles Russell wrote a book entitled, *Zion's Watchtower*. He left an orthodox Presbyterian background to experiment with Seventh-Day Adventism and then Christadelphianism. Finally, he founded his own cult known as the Jehovah's Witnesses, which is a cult that denies the deity of Jesus Christ and is embraced by millions of people around the world.

I could go on and on talking about spirit guides, the New Age movement, the fascination today with UFO's and the occult, the rise of Islam, now with more than 1 billion followers worldwide, and on the

inroads of Buddhism, which regards Jesus as a mere enlightened man.

None of these beliefs should surprise us. The scriptures tell us that we will do battle against the doctrines of demons. Never before has the church faced such an array of false teachers and false doctrines.

At the same time, however, the church seems to be uncertain of its response. Human rights and a global sensitivity have created in us a desire to respect other cultures, languages, and people. That is all well and good, but somehow, a respect for other religions as equally valid slipped into the mix.

Ladies and gentlemen, you most certainly should respect the Hindu, the Mormon, and the Muslim as people. But, you are not to respect the religion of Hinduism and Mormonism any more than the first century Christian was to respect Caesar worship and pagan idolatry. By the third century, Christians were being thrown to lions, because they refused to acknowledge any spiritual truth outside of biblical truth and any worship outside of biblical worship.

You might say, "But, wait a second. Aren't you being unloving by not allowing other religions their right of way?"

If there was a bottle of strychnine in your cupboard, would it be loving to label it maple syrup? If you knew that a path in the woods led to a sheer cliff, would it be loving to build a sign next to it that reads, "Out of respect for your own hiking preferences and experiences, this path may work for you." No! The most loving thing you could do for the rest of the world would be to make a sign that read, "Danger, drop off ahead."

The most loving thing I can do is tell the Mormon (atheist, Jehovah's witness, or New Ager) that he is wrong.

You might say, "Well, aren't you being judgmental? Who are you to say that one billion Muslims are wrong and millions of Mormons are lost? Doesn't the Bible say we're not suppose to judge people?"

Yes, Matthew, chapter 7, verse 1, says,

Do not judge so that you will not be judged.

That verse is one of the most misused passages in the New Testament. In Matthew, chapter 7, Jesus Christ was telling them and us, not to judge as the Pharisees judged. It had nothing to do with religious truth. The Pharisees were judging men not on the basis of their religion, but on the basis of external legalistic standards; such as, whether they washed their hands at the right times, or whether they observed the rituals of the Sabbath, etc.

The Persistent Approach of Paul

Did you know that there are several verses of scripture that actually encourage the believer to make judgments? Let me give four instances where it is not only right, but imperative for you to judge.

It is right to judge when it relates to the truth of Christ's deity

1. It is right to judge when it relates to the truth of Christ's deity.

Look at I John, chapter 4, verse 1.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits . . .

(or put the spirits to trial; that is, examine the evidence, scrutinize their teaching – why?),

. . . to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Go back to chapter 2, verses 21 through 23a of I John.

I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father . . .

The underlying similarity between Mormonism, Hinduism, Seventh Day Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, and on and on is this basic fact –

they all deny that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh and that He is indeed the revelation of God who came into the world to reveal the only pathway back to God.

Return to chapter 4 and continue to verses 2 through 3 and verse 5.

By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world. . . . They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them.

That is why we hear Jesus declaring a message not of universal salvation, but of universal judgment. In John, chapter 3, verses 17 and 18, Jesus said,

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, . . . he [the world] who does not believe has been judged already . . .

In Matthew, chapter 7, verse 13b, He said,

. . . for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many [the world] who enter through it.

We need more people willing to build signs that say, "Danger . . .".

It is right to judge when someone rebels against scripture

2. It is right to judge when someone rebels against the scripture.

I Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 1 through 5, refers to a man who was openly involved in immorality. He was a member of the church in Corinth. Paul wrote to the church and said, in verses 2b and 3a,

. . . the one who [has] done this deed [should] be removed from your midst. For I . . . have already judged him who so committed this . . .

It is right to judge our own relationship with Christ

3. It is right to judge our own relationship with Christ.

I Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 28 through 32, relates to the observance of communion, and the

word “judgment” occurs five times in just three verses.

But a man examine [judge] himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. . . . But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

Our contemporary culture is erasing repentance and self-evaluation from the life of the believer. That is too depressing, so let us focus on the power of positive thinking. The pursuit of personal holiness causes you to need to confess. That is not good for your self image.

It is right to judge every experience and teaching in the light of scripture

4. It is right to judge every experience and teaching in light of scripture.

The apostle Paul, in I Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 15, is speaking to the issue of spiritual truth versus spiritual error; the spiritual wisdom of the word in contrast to the natural wisdom of the world. He states,

. . . he who is spiritual appraise [judges] all things . . .

The spiritual man or woman puts everything to the test of scripture to see if it is indeed pure and true.

In Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12, the Bible is called the “kritikos,” which gives us the words, “critical, criticism, and criteria”. It is translated throughout the New Testament with the English word “judge”.

The word of God is the inspired criteria of truth. It is the grand decider between truth and error. We must not follow the current mode of popular ideology and religiosity of emotional sentiment instead of scripture or of human rationale instead of divine revelation.

The Biblical Focus of the Bereans

One of the most incredible examples of people doing just the opposite of current popular thought was a group of Jewish and Greek men and women who went to the scriptures in order to examine the newest thing they had heard. You find them at the next stop in our tour of the book of Acts. Turn to Acts, chapter 17, and look at verses 10 and 11a.

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness . . .

Isn't it interesting that even to this day, centuries later, you never hear of a church being named “Thessalonica Baptist Church,” “Thessalonica Methodist,” or “The Free Church of the Thessalonians”? However, you do hear of “Berean Baptist,” or of Sunday school classes called, “The Berean Class”. Why? Because the Bereans were more noble minded than the Thessalonians.

Then Luke quickly tells us three reasons why.

The Bereans received the message with great eagerness

1. First, in verse 11b,

. . . they [the Bereans] received the message with great eagerness . . .

Now that does not mean they believed it. They simply wanted to hear it. *They received the message eagerly.* The original word carries the idea of rushing forward.

You may remember that for the most part the Thessalonians did not want to hear it. In fact, they did everything they could to drown it out.

Perhaps you have discovered the same two kinds of people to whom you try to witness. One kind of person says, “I’m not interested. I don’t want to hear it!” The other kind of person says, “Just what does the Bible say? I’ve never heard that before; could you tell me more?”

The Bereans examined the message thoroughly

2. Secondly, the Bereans examined the message thoroughly, as we are told in the next phrase in verse 11b,

. . . examining the Scriptures daily . . .

The incredible thing was their loyalty and openness to the word. They examined the scriptures to see if they were supposed to change their lives. We so often go to the scriptures to try to prove we do not have to change or we ignore the scriptures because we know they demand that we do change.

Not the Bereans, however. The Bible says, “They examined the Scriptures for an hour on

Sunday morning.” No, circle that very convicting word “daily,” “They examined the Scriptures daily.”

You might ask, “Didn’t they have jobs? Didn’t they have farming to do? Didn’t they have meals to cook and children to teach? They had a synagogue in Berea; didn’t they pay the Rabbi enough to do that for them?!”

The Bereans examined the messenger objectively

3. Thirdly, the Bereans examined the messenger objectively, as recorded in the last part of verse 11b.

. . . examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

They were seeing whether Paul was telling them the truth.

But wasn’t Paul a Pharisee; a graduate of Gamaliel’s school of theology; a man with a lawyer’s logic and an orator’s passion; a man who had the power to perform signs and wonders; a man with a track record of healing and even a testimony of raising from the dead? Wasn’t Paul telling them, “God told me to tell you this . . . this is from God . . .”?

That did not matter. Did what Paul have to say match what God had said?!! That is, what God had said in black and white, Old Testament, clear cut, propositional, explicit revelation.

The word “examined” is the Greek word “anakrino,” with “krino,” meaning “judge”. They judged Paul in light of the scriptures.

You might say, “Don’t you know you’re not supposed to judge anybody?”

They were judging the apostle Paul – as well they should!

The message of Paul was radical; revolutionary. It would rip families apart; it would bring division to their city; it would stir up incredible emotional controversy in the synagogue, but that was not what mattered most. What mattered most was whether Paul’s message could be substantiated by Old Testament scripture.

If Paul’s message could be substantiated by scripture, then obedience to the word was critical. Why? Because the word was revelation from God, and to disobey the word is to disobey God; to ignore the word is to ignore God; to argue against the word is to argue against God.

Continue to verses 12 through 15.

Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.

Application – From Ancient Berea to Contemporary Believers

Let us apply this scripture and bring it from ancient Berea to contemporary believers.

True doctrine concerning spiritual matters is expounded in scripture

1. True doctrine concerning spiritual matters is expounded in scripture.

Paul wrote to Titus, in chapter 1, verse 13a,

This testimony [of scripture] is true. . . .

Jesus Christ said in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, in Revelation, chapter 22, verse 6a,

. . . These words are faithful and true . . .

Paul said in II Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16, that the word is profitable for teaching or doctrine. This tells you what to believe.

All Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching [doctrine] . . .

Doctrine is not a lot of stuffy propositions for faculty board meetings and seminary dialogue. Doctrine is the truth of scripture, lived by believers every day.

The only way to live correctly, in fact, is to think biblically. If you do not think biblically, then you will not behave biblically. Solomon wrote, in Proverbs, chapter 23, verse 7a,

As he thinks within himself [believes in his heart], so he is. . . .

In other words, you are what you believe.

Who decides what you believe? This Bible? Your peers? Your professors? Who decides?! Your answer to that question will determine how you will live.

True discernment concerning issues of life emanates from scripture

2. True discernment concerning issues of life emanates from scripture.

Paul goes on to say in II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17,

All Scripture is . . . profitable . . . so that the man of God [the believer] may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The believer may be equipped or “thoroughly furnished,” as the King James Version translates this, for every aspect of life. “Thoroughly furnished” is an original phrase that was used of a man stocking his wagon with supplies for a long journey. The only way to have discernment and wisdom over the long haul of life is to stock your wagon with the word.

Would you like to live a life of purity, integrity and sincerity?! I found it interesting this past week, as I studied the original derivatives of the Greek word “krino,” or “judge,” that the words “sincerity, purity, and integrity” are translated from a combination of two Greek words, “krino,” or “judge,” and another word “aleia,” which refers to the light of the sun.

“Sincerity, purity, and integrity” could literally be translated, “judged by the light of the sun”. In first century Greece, to test the purity of honey, you held the jar up to the sun and looked to see if any impurities were mixed together in the jar. Pure honey was declared so only after it was tested by the light of the sun.

So we today, must expose and hold up to the light of the Son of God and His revelation every doctrine, every fad, and every new idea to determine whether it is pure and right.

True development of the church is explaining scripture so that its members can explain scripture to others

3. True development of the church is explaining scripture so that its members can explain scripture to others.

Paul wrote to Timothy, in II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 2, “Timothy,”

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The implication goes on and on. In fact, according to Hebrews, chapter 5, the mark of a mature believer was not someone who got an “A+” on all the Bible quizzes, but someone who was learning the scriptures and then eventually teaching the scriptures to others – one to many; parent to child; friend to friend; small group discussion, etc.

You know what a teacher does. He, or she, sits alone at some desk or in some kitchen corner pouring over the word, examining the word, cross-referencing, underlining, outlining, memorizing, digging the truth out for themselves, dissatisfied with pre-digested truth.

I want to share the story of a Yellowstone National Park ranger who relayed how much of a problem they have with bears dying in the winter. Even though there are signs along the roads that read, “Don’t feed the bears,” tourists feed the bears. The young bears eventually learn to stay near the road and feed off the tourists. Then winter comes, and the young bears die by the road when the tourists stop coming. There are even cases where some cruel people have given bears poisoned food.

The goal of this church is not to fatten you up with pre-digested scraps, but to equip you to live a biblical life that ultimately enables you to communicate biblical truth to those who do not know the Bible. These are people who are dying because they do not know how to find the food for themselves, or people who are dying because they readily take whatever is handed to them, and it is poisoned food.

That is why we need more judges today, not fewer. We need more critical thinkers today, not fewer. We need more courage today, to speak the truth in love to a world that knows neither truth nor love, but is desperately in need of both. We have found both truth and love in the Son of God who loves us with an everlasting love and who promised that in Him, we would know the truth and the truth would set us free.

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