

## Every Reason to Judge

Luke 6:37

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**Summary:** A cultural buzzword you will often hear is the word “tolerance.” In secular society, and even in some Christian denominations, tolerance is promoted as virtue. After all, didn’t Jesus tell His followers not to judge? But by thoroughly studying this text, Jesus makes clear to his disciples that godly judgment—when done correctly—is an essential quality of any successful church body.

Today, the average person on the street doesn’t know all that much about the Bible. They have a few scraps of verses tucked in here and there, a vague notion of the golden rule and the idea of “cleanliness is next to godliness”—which isn’t a verse at all.

I agree with one author who remarked that years ago, the best-known verse of Scripture in our culture was John 3:16. People knew it as well as they knew the lyrics to *Amazing Grace*. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.*” But today, he wrote, the best-known verse in our culture—and people who know virtually nothing of the Bible can quote it at the drop of a hat—is this text; “Judge not, lest you be judged.”

This verse has become the emancipation proclamation of our generation. We are free to do whatever we want so long as culture deems it allowable.

And if it’s legal, or politically correct, or sophisticated, or trendy—if it’s your thing—do it! But if someone dares to give a hint of disapproval, out comes this verse.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 1* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 232

Judge not!

You discover that someone who cares nothing about God or the Bible has had this bullet in their chamber, ready to fire at anyone who dares suggest otherwise.

Judge not, lest you be judged.

That has become a barrier made of steel; this is a self-created boundary you cannot cross in someone's life.

Now to me, the problem isn't so much that this is how the world thinks as they justify any wretched sin they want to do; what troubles me most is that this is the way the church at large has come to think.

The church dares not say anything that might offend anyone.



Has anyone ever told you not to judge them because of an opinion you had or a truth you tried to share? How did you react in that conversation?

Who are we to judge? I mean, didn't Jesus command us never to judge anyone or anything? Aren't we to unconditionally love everybody, which must then mean that we are never to judge anyone?

The most popular verse in the Bible today needs a fresh understanding. So let me invite you to take your copy of that text—it's found in the Book of Luke, we are now at chapter 6 in our exposition of this Gospel—now here at **verse 37**:

*“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.”*

## Luke 6:37

The Lord uses present imperative verbs here that literally mean, “stop judging,” “stop condemning.”

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 283

Now don't misunderstand: the Lord isn't defining someone's salvation; He's defining someone's spirit.

He's not tying salvation to works. “If you never judge or condemn anybody, God will never judge or condemn you.”

The verb here for judge means “to sit in judgment.” Jesus is talking about someone quick to condemn; someone unwilling to forgive; and this spirit, as Jesus teaches His disciples, should have nothing to do with Christianity.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 159

Now if we go to Matthew's parallel account of this sermon, he adds some context to give us more insight: Jesus is warning His disciples here.

### ***Matthew writes in chapter 7 and verse 1:***

*“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”*

*Matthew 7:1-3*

In other words, just because you're a Christian—a disciple of Christ—doesn't mean that you won't struggle with forgiveness; you won't have to battle resentment and a desire to condemn others or be vindicated when wronged. But as a Christian, Jesus is guiding us toward an attitude—a disposition—that reflects the attitude of Christ toward others and demonstrates that we really are different from the world.

Adapted from Hughes, p. 234

Now the question remains, is Jesus telling the believer to overlook everything? To ignore wrongdoing? To overlook immorality? To cover our eyes and ears and mouths and see nothing, hear nothing, and say nothing that ever judges anyone or anything?

The answer is found by examining other passages to get the fullest insight.

Let's phrase the question this way: is it ever right to judge and when is it wrong to judge?

Let me answer the first part of that question, when is it right to judge?

First:

**It is right to judge someone's behavior as immoral.**

In I Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 1 through 3, the apostle Paul writes to this church:

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, ... for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ... I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.*

*1 Corinthians 5:1-3*

Paul wrote, "I have already judged him as immoral!"

What a message for today. Isn't it ironic, in respect to mainline denominational thinking, that Paul here considered the church in Corinth—that refused to condemn immorality—not as a tolerant and loving church, but an arrogant and disobedient church?

Paul set the record straight. Instead of covering his eyes regarding sexual immorality, he judged the church in Corinth first, by calling them arrogant, in other words, they thought they had become superior to God's Word; they thought they were smarter than God; they thought they were more sophisticated than God's created design for sexual relations. So, Paul judges this church, and then he judged this man as immoral and unworthy of fellowship within the church.

Someone will say, "So are you saying that we just kick all the sinners out of the

church?” No. If we kicked all the sinners out of the church, no one would be here today.

The issue isn't really sin; the issue is unrepentant sin, immoral sinning that becomes a scandal, diluting the integrity of the church and destroying the moral testimony of the Christian.



How can we properly discern which sins in the church body require church discipline? Is there any counsel or advice that you should we seek in such matters?

So, considering this misquoted, misinterpreted “Judge not let you be judged” verse, evidently, the church is to render judgment on that which is morally right and wrong.

And the church body has been called to hold one another accountable to this biblical standard.

Do you remember the days when accountability was a community project? When a disobedient child was considered the project of the entire church, or school? Do you remember the days with school discipline was normative? How judgmental was that?

Our teachers had the right to render judgment and deliver punishment— maybe a ruler on the back of the hand or standing in the back corner or given a swat with a wooden paddle.

I remember that long stairway that went up into the elementary school library where I often went—and it wasn't to check out books.

We had a rule in my home growing up: a spanking at school would be answered by a spanking at home.

My parents had this strange perspective that the teacher was always right, and I was always wrong. How tragic is that? So, if my teacher thought I deserved one at school, they would reinforce her decision when I got home.

I remember one day standing outside the first-grade classroom with Bobby— another missionary kid—and he was always getting me into trouble. We were standing out there waiting for Miss Gallagher, our first-grade teacher, to take us up to that library where we were going to get a swat with a wooden paddle. It's been so long ago now that I can't remember what Bobby had done.

Wouldn't you know it, at that moment, my older brother came around the corner. He asked why we were standing outside the classroom. I said we were just hanging out.

And just then Miss Gallagher walks out holding the paddle and said, “Come with me boys.” All the way home on the bus, I begged my brother not to tell on me, and he said he wouldn't say a word. I felt that my life was safe in his hands. And then that night at the dinner table he suddenly announced, “Stephen has something he wants to tell you.” I couldn't believe he did that! My parents said, “You have

something to tell us?” So, I started telling them my testimony, I quoted scripture, I think I even spoke in tongues!

Judgement day arrived.

It’s one thing for a kid to be told he’s wrong, but surely, we shouldn’t meddle in the lives of adults, should we? Once you’re 18 you should be free to go!

That may be the thinking of the world, but not the church.

Later in **chapter 5**, the apostle Paul makes this statement that the average church would find appalling today—he writes in verse 11:

*But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*

*1 Corinthians 5:11*

In other words, we treat sinning unbelievers differently than we treat sinning, unrepentant believers. That’s why Jesus ate with sinners but condemned unrepentant spiritual leaders.

So, Paul is implying that believers are to exercise this ability to determine guilt, and then make a moral judgment, and then not offer any kind of fellowship, unless there is repentance.

But keep in mind: what’s our attitude in all of this by the way? Do we delight in someone’s sin? Do we gossip about their moral collapse? Do we get out a bully club and go over and let them have it?

No, Paul will write this to the Galatian believers:

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.*

*Galatians 6:1a*

More on that kind of attitude later.

So, first, it’s right to judge someone’s behavior as immoral. To look at someone and say, “No, that’s sinful; you shouldn’t do that; that’s wrong.”

Secondly,

**It is right to judge someone’s beliefs as unbiblical.**

Here’s Paul writing to the Roman church:

*I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such person do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*

*Romans 16:17-18*

They are smooth; they're appealing; they're telling you things you desire to hear. But Paul pulls off their mask and reveals that what they really want is popularity and prestige and book sales and a following, so don't be naïve.

The church today is more and more vulnerable and naïve because it is resisting more and more the idea of theological absolutes.

Let's just put doctrine on the shelf and unite in love. Don't even worry about speaking the truth in love; just speak in love and forget about the truth.

The Bible delivers a far different warning. To the Galatian church, Paul warned:

*If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

*Galatians 1:9b*

Imagine the implications of this text!

- The minister who preaches that Jesus Christ didn't literally resurrect from the grave is accursed.
- The religious leaders who deny the sufficiency of Christ's atonement are accursed.
- Church leaders who preach a gospel of salvation by grace plus works are accursed!

Even if an angel showed up and you took a selfie with him to prove it really was an angel, so what!

Supposedly, an angel showed up and delivered another gospel to Joseph Smith that required belief in his teaching as the prophet of God to arrive in the highest heaven. Supposedly an angel appeared to Mohammed and delivered a different gospel where Christ was not crucified or resurrected.

Listen, I personally don't doubt these men had real encounters with angelic beings.

I don't think Paul is exaggerating here. Even if an angel came to you, you're not to believe it simply because an angel was the messenger.

What matters is the message.

Paul understood, as he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:14:

*Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*

*2 Corinthians 11:14b*

What's that angel's message, and how does it compare to the message of the Bible?

We're to make judgments on whether what's being taught is biblical.

And by the way, there are lesser errors out there that lead believers astray, that distracts the church and destroys our testimony and the reputation of the Lord Jesus.

It might not be heresy, but it might be foolishness or sinfulness that causes the world to roll their eyes and say,

“There go those Christians again. They’re just as greedy, just as immoral, just as hungry for acclaim as we are.”

Just this week, I saw a news report of a new church in another state that is being planted and co-pastored by a husband and wife. The reason the news item startled me was the fact that he wife—the co-pastor—was an adult actress in the porn industry. As I read their announcement, I was looking for that part where she came to Christ and left that world behind her.

But instead, she defended her profession and they proudly claimed to be planting a church “by sinners for sinners.” Then she went on to complain that Christians and the church shouldn’t “judge her!”

Paul wrote to Titus about these kinds of false teachers, and he said:

*They profess to know God,  
but they deny him by their  
works. They are detestable,  
disobedient, unfit for any  
good work.*

*Titus 1:16*

Thirdly, believers are encouraged that:

**It is right to judge our own sin as unacceptable.**

Whenever the believer approaches the Lord’s Table, the apostle Paul exhorts

him to ***examine himself—1 Corinthians 11:28.***

We are to test ourselves, to make sure we are in fellowship with our Savior; make sure we’re confessing our sin and not *managing it, hiding it, justifying it, redefining it, or excusing it.*

Paul goes on to write in **verse 32** that the believer who doesn’t judge himself is heading toward the discipline of the Lord who will correct him.



**How regularly do you judge yourself?  
Why is it important that you critically view  
your own life frequently?**

With that, let’s not be so quick to judge others and at the same time refuse to judge yourself.

Finally,

**It is right to judge our culture in the light of biblical principle.**

In case anything might get left out here, Paul writes to the Corinthians this overarching principle:

*The spiritual person judges  
all things.*

*1 Corinthians 2:15a*

Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers:

*But test everything.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:21a*

Do you spend more time making judgment calls on what you eat and what you wear and what you drive and where your kids go to school, but when it comes to cultural matters, your thinking goes: “If it’s legal it’s acceptable; if it sounds good, it must be good; if it feels good it can’t be wrong; if the majority opinion says it’s right, it must be right.”

No, examine everything.

So, the Bible makes it clear that:

- It’s right to judge someone’s actions as immoral.
- It’s right to judge someone’s beliefs as unbiblical.
- It is right to judge our own sin as unacceptable.
- And it is right to judge our culture in the light of biblical principle.

So, when is judging wrong? What’s Jesus taking about here in this well-loved verse of Scripture, quoted now by false teachers and cult leaders and even porn stars, along with the average guy on the street who doesn’t want to be told he’s doing something wrong.

**So, when is it wrong to judge?**

The Bible gives us at least three occasions when judging becomes judgmental and is therefore wrong. Let me give them to you.

**It’s wrong to judge before knowing all the facts.**

This is the foundation of righteous judgment. Our own court system demands evidence; it demands witnesses.

In Jewish law, at least two witnesses had to deliver the same eye-witness account.

Nicodemus defended the Lord Jesus before the religious leaders when he delivered this virtuous standard. **John 7:51** says:

*“Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”*

*John 7:51*

This was the principle of discipline established by the Lord in Matthew 18 where witnesses were brought along to establish the facts.

In fact, one of the reasons church discipline is a slow process—in Matthew 18—is because it can take a long time to get all the facts.

Secondly,

**It’s wrong to judge someone based on subjective impressions.**

In other words, we’re wrong when we judge someone based on what we think their motives were.

Motives can’t be seen; and we can be wrong.



Paul warns against this kind of judgment in I Corinthians 4, verse 5, where he writes:

*The Lord . . . will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.*

*1 Corinthians 4:5b*

So don't jump to conclusions.



When thinking about another person's sin, what steps can you take to make sure your judgments are based on the facts and the Word of God, not your inferences and personal preferences?

We're far too quick to judge based on our impressions: how someone looked, what we think they were thinking. We make judgments based on appearance: they looked guilty to us, so they must be guilty.

***Jesus said in John 7:24:***

*"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."*

*John 7:24*

Not hidden motives; not subjective reasoning; not facial expressions. Facts.

I found it interesting to discover that when the ancient Greek courts were deliberating an important or difficult trial, they would often hold court in the dark. The judge and jury would not be able to see the person on trial; they wouldn't be able to make superficial judgments based on appearance or expression or what might be perceived as hidden thoughts or motives. Only the fact of the case would be heard.

William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew; Volume 1 (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 264

So, it's wrong to judge someone before knowing all the facts.

It's wrong to judge someone based on subjective impressions.

One more—thirdly:

**It's wrong to judge in self-righteous hypocrisy.**

And that's the text before us here in Luke's Gospel.

Do not judge like that; don't judge, condemn, refuse to forgive someone for sinning, with an attitude of the Pharisee who simply loved to find fault.

Judging was their favorite indoor sport.

They were superior, censorious, and worst of all, they were hypocritical, because they were passing judgment and then doing the very same thing.

Jesus isn't talking about godly discernment and righteous judgement that we've seen validated today in Scripture.

He's talking about self-righteous hypocrisy.

Paul referred to this in ***Romans 2:1***:

*In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.*

*Romans 2:1b*

So properly understood, Jesus here in His sermon, in Luke 6, is wanting His disciples to develop an attitude of gracious discernment!

### **So how do you grow in this kind of gracious discernment?**

There are so many things confronting the believer today: so many decisions, so many opinions, so many experts.

Well, let me close by quickly giving you four spiritual exercises that will develop the skill of gracious discernment:

#### **Hunger for godly wisdom.**

James writes that if we ask for wisdom, we will be granted it from God (James 1:5).

The verb for ask could be translated "to crave, to beg, to desire."

Do you really want it that bad?

Is something robbing your craving, your appetite for wisdom? Perhaps it's hours of gaming, or television, or sports, or news.

For the believer, the problem isn't the supply of wisdom; the problem is our lack of craving.

#### **Commit to godly decisions.**

In other words, you will not develop godly discernment when you already know that you won't follow through. God gives you the wisdom to do the right thing, but you don't want to, so commit to godly decisions.

#### **Saturate your mind with God's Word.**

I read just this past week, the average 65-year-old in America has watched 10 years of television. Ten years!

No wonder we can quote the CDC and not the ESV or the KJV; no wonder we know what's happening in Washington and on the weather channel and the latest crisis somewhere on the planet, but we do not know what God wants to do in our lives, and in His church, and in the world.

Saturate your mind with Scripture.

#### **Put into practice what you learn.**

We're not studying the Bible to get smarter but to grow spiritually, and spiritual development leads to spiritual discernment.

***The writer of Hebrews*** referred to the Word of God as solid food, and he nails this principle—get this:

*But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment*

*trained by constant practice  
to distinguish good from  
evil.*

*Hebrews 5:14*

Put into constant practice the meat of the  
Word and your powers of discernment  
will grow.

And do we ever need discernment today.

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