

Sermon 18: 1 Corinthians 5:12-13: To Judge or Not to Judge?

OUTLINE

Judging outsiders
Judging insiders

INTRODUCTION

'Don't judge!' This is the golden rule of our relativist age. In an age that believes that ultimate truth claims must give way to personal truth; in an age that says that objective truth cannot be known, only subjective truth—where we speak of truths rather than truth; Christianity is seen as public enemy number one because it claims to speak with God's voice as it declares the truth of the Bible. How often have we heard the accusation that Christianity is judgmental, just this last week I heard that accusation that this truth telling in matters of things like homosexuality makes us those who create a hell on earth for those who would merely want to be free to love who they want to love. We are cast as enemies of love who are not just wrong but dangerous and harmful. Today we want to consider this matter of good judgement versus judgmentalism.

We are continuing to consider Paul's statements around church discipline. Paul completely out of step with the spirit of our age has called upon the Corinthian church to fulfill their duty to love those who call themselves Christian and apply church discipline for God's glory; the preservation of the purity of the church; and for the saving of the sinner's soul. 1 Cor. 5:12-13, 'For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." Paul has indicated to us that the church has a peculiar authority, given by God, to enact a handing over to satan which results in a real spiritual state of affliction which will be God's means to bring a confessed Christian in impenitent sin to repentance. Paul in this context calls upon us to judge those inside but not those outside. This raises for us the whole question of judging. We are going to take an opportunity today to open this up a little bit and explore the ways we should and should not judge. This is an important matter to address because of the criticism we face from the world about being judgmental; but also because judgmentalism is a natural sin that we easily fall into. So today we are veering away from our exposition to delve a little deeper into this matter.

We will be following Paul in the way he outlines the areas of judging. We have two points and we will be looking at judging outsiders and judging insiders. We want to look at these statements in light of the other statements about judging in the bible.

Judging outsiders

Paul tells us in v12 that it is not the job of the church to judge outsiders, and v13 follows this up with the truth that God is the one who will judge unbelievers. But then we have some other statements in scripture, 1 Cor. 2:15, 'The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.' John 7:24, 'Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.' So are we to judge or are we not to judge? It is clear that Paul is using the word judge here in a technical sense to talk about the church's jurisdiction to apply disciplinary measures. The church does not have this role within society. Our role is one of

preaching the gospel in relation to society not trying to set up ourselves as policemen who regulate the lives of unbelievers. So we are not to judge in this way, but what about what the world calls judging, when we are talking about the fact that we are sinners who have broken God's law, that we need to repent and trust in Christ as our sinbearer? We have to insist that not judging in this fashion is not to be confused with our responsibility to talk about sin when we are preaching the gospel. I think we can all tell the difference between telling hard truths that people don't want to hear but we have been commanded to speak, and they need to hear; and judgmentalism.

The classic proof text for talking about the sorts of judgmentalism we are to avoid is Matt. 7:1-6, "'Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ 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? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ 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. "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.' Here again is another prohibition to not judge, perhaps one of the most abused verses in the context of this topic. Jesus is talking to an audience that was very religious, first century Judaism; and into an environment that was very legalistic where many laws had been added to the law of God burdening the people of God with all sorts of things God did not require. This led to an attitude of self-righteousness and hypocrisy where those who kept these man made rules looked down their noses at those who did not. Jesus is speaking in the Sermon on the Mount, and the main concern of the sermon on the mount is to show what true religion is in comparison to the hypocritical religion of the day. It is in this context that Jesus gives His prohibition. Although the language may sound universal that we are not to judge in all times and all places, Jesus is prohibiting judgmentalism not all forms of judging.

The prohibition is not denying that law courts can no longer judge legal cases, or that Jesus is invalidating the judiciary. The prohibition is not denying the proper place for church discipline as Paul has been instructing us. Jesus is not saying that parents can no longer apply parental discipline. Nor is Jesus asking us to put away all discretion and discernment where we test all things and hold fast to what is true. The bible is full of commands to be wise and discerning where our critical faculties are engaged to the glory of God without being critical. Heb. 5:14 describes those who are mature as 'those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.' Sinclair Ferguson gives an excellent definition of the discernment we are all called to exercise, 'True discernment means not only distinguishing the right from the wrong; it means distinguishing the primary from the secondary, the essential from the indifferent, and the permanent from the transient. And, yes, it means distinguishing between the good and the better, and even between the better and the best.'¹ The truth is that we are making judgments all the time, Jesus is not forbidding judging in these senses, but judgmentalism. Jesus Himself calls us to judge but in a proper way in John 7:24, 'Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.'

¹ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/discernment-thinking-gods-thoughts>

We should all avoid judgmentalism. This includes harsh judgment, where we are heavy handed in minor matters like the Pharisees were when it came to things like handwashing. This includes quick judgments where we make superficial judgments based on things like appearance; sex; or the group someone belongs to. This includes hypocritical judgments where we speak against a sin we are committing ourselves; or like the Pharisees where we strain out gnats and swallow camels, where we have sin in different areas. The Pharisees may not have been guilty of outward sexual immorality but were guilty of encouraging no fault divorce and racism. We should avoid making final judgments, in other words judgments that are like God's judgment on Judgment Day. We can decide a person is unsavable; where we do not extend grace to them; offer no forgiveness even if they have repented; and deny any possibility of change.

There is a deep irony that we need to point out here. Judgmentalism is not only the sin of the religious but the irreligious. Judgmentalism is a sin that every human heart is prone to. Just think about our culture today. Can we identify any harsh judgements where there have been heavy handed attitudes and punishment for minor matters, think about some of the attitudes around face masks. Is our age guilty of rash judgments where they right you off simply because you are an older white male; or a Christian; or a boomer? Can we think of any hypocritical judgements where they say they are standing up for minorities but are fighting for the right to abort? Is there an atmosphere of judgement with no forgiveness? What about white guilt, can it ever be removed? What about the unforgiving nature of cancel culture which is willing to assassinate a person's name? The irony is that those who say that Christians should not judge are themselves guilty of judging.

This is an evangelistic opportunity for us. Not to gloat and smile with glee that they are hypocrites, but to point out the universal problem that we all have. Jesus tells us in Matt. 7:1-2 that by the measure we use we will all be judged. All judgmental people will have to face God one day. Now Jesus is not saying that if you avoid making any judgments you won't have to appear before God on judgement day. No, He is saying that the Law which we all have on our hearts which so often informs our criticisms of other people will be the law we will be judged by. I love the picture Francis Schaeffer uses here. He says, imagine that you have a tape recorder tied around your neck, and it only records one thing. Any time you make a judgment about another person's behavior. Bad parenting, selfish driving, greedy eating, lavish spending, cruel teasing, sexual immorality, and so on. Every time you uttered a criticism of anyone's behavior. Then imagine on judgement day that you are only judged by the measure you used. Even if you are not judged by every law of God but only the measure you used, you will fall short of the glory of God and be liable for judgment. Perhaps you are here today thinking that Christians are all hypocrites and judgmental and are using this as an excuse to reject Christianity. Well let me bring this home to you. God says that you will be judged, you who are judgmental. Your sins will one day be exposed, and then what? You can say you are sinless but God will lay all things bare on the final day and expose us for sinners worthy of judgment. There is only one way that God has given whereby we can escape judgement. It is through the judgement that we deserve falling upon Jesus Christ, by another taking our crimes upon Himself and paying for them in full.

In v3-5 Jesus instructs us on how to put away hypocritical judgmentalism, '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? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck

out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ 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.' We begin by recognizing our sin first. This means seeing sin for what it is as against God, as seeing ourselves as judgment worthy and no less a sinner than anyone else. And because you cannot see another's heart but you can see your own, your own sins will always look like logs compared to another's speck. We have to stop pretending we are somehow better than others, we have to stop pretending that more law and legislation is what will cure another's sinfulness. The only way we can take the log out of our own eye is to accept that we are sinners who need to be saved by grace through Christ because none of us can save ourselves by being good people. Once we have done that, then we can help others. Friends, this is every Christian. Every Christian has seen the log in their own eye recognizing their sinfulness, they have gone to God and trusted in Christ to have their sin dealt with first, and now they are in a position not as a sinless person but as a saved sinner to help others with their sins. Jesus is not against us helping others with their sin but He is against the judgmentalism that is so natural to our hearts.

So coming back to Paul's statement about not judging outsiders, God will finally judge them. Let it be clear that this does not mean that we don't talk about sin, that we do not preach the gospel, that we do not warn people about the danger of not turning to Christ. We do and must. But we do so as saved sinners not self-righteous hypocrites. As those who have been humbled by a clear sight of our own sin and unworthiness we can humbly speak the truth without pretending we are somehow sinless. This humility is the only way we should preach the gospel.

Let me lean into this posture of humility in our gospel witness. We are living in a very politicized age; society is in a tailspin; the once held traditional Christian beliefs and practices have been jettisoned and things are spinning out of control. Marriage, parenting, education, business, healthcare, you name it, everything is under pressure and suffering from the loss of these Christian values. Many Christians are angry or anxious and they want to fight fire with fire. They want to put pressure on the government to make changes. In the midst of this emotional moment many are becoming radicalized and politicized and I am hearing rumblings about the church fulfilling its prophetic calling. Many want the church to mobilize its influence and throw its weight about in the political arena; they want to hear pastors denouncing the sins of the society from the pulpit in the same tones that Christianity is being denounced in society. Many want a more politically engaged church that is willing to get angry at injustice; to flex some muscle in resistance movements; they want news platforms and media personalities that will comment on every move the other side makes exposing their agenda in a constant laying bare of the damage that is happening. They want a Christian commentary of society's evils that is able to compete with the 24 hour news we are inundated with from other perspectives. We are witnessing a massive shift and a major temptation to politicize the church, or to make it sound more biblical, to see the church fulfill its prophetic function. We have to be very careful not to turn the church into a protest group that relies upon the weapons that the world is using to sway the masses. Our job is to preach the gospel, and in people getting saved change will come to society. Perhaps God is judging the Western world and He does not want to turn the tide of society and restore it to a Christian majority. This does not affect our job. We do not fight fire with fire for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God. When we declare the truth, the Spirit blesses it and minds and hearts are

changed and enemies of God's kingdom are saved. We are not to go and preach the gospel in strident tones seeking to match the rhetoric and the strategies of those groups that are trying to win votes. Humbly, in dependence upon God, faithfully, boldly, being willing to suffer for the truth if necessary we must continue to take the gospel forward. If we allow ourselves to become politicized we will stop preaching the gospel. Here is how you know you have been politicized. The next time you have the opportunity to talk to someone who identifies as transgender ask yourself what is my priority? Am I more concerned to correct their ideology and denounce the damage that their view is causing in society; or am I concerned for the salvation of their soul. We should be concerned for the truth and seek to bring all people to a correct understanding of God's truth. And engaging in ideological discussions could be a great place to begin exposing the error of sin and the need for Christ. But what is gripping your heart right now, and how is it shaping how you preach to a lost world? Are you more concerned about the downturn in society and want to fix everything by refuting every lie, or are you more concerned about that soul getting saved?

Judging insiders

The second element of what we want to deal with is that statement by Paul in 1 Cor. 5:12, 'Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?' we have looked at the prohibition of judging outsiders and we have had to balance that against other biblical statements about legitimate judging and our responsibility to preach the gospel. We have seen that we must have a certain humility in any of our talking about sin. So as we come to this statement we have the opposite challenge. Here we are being permission, not the commandment to judge those inside the church; what are the necessary balancing biblical ideas that should inform how we hold this truth?

Paul is calling for the judgement of church discipline against impenitent sin in the lives of the confessed believer. Paul is not giving permission for a pharisaism; or judgmentalism; or being a busybody; or going on a witchhunt in the church. Judgementalism is as much a sin outside the church as it is in the church. A major point I want to make as we look at this whole matter of church discipline is that we have to have the right attitude as we embrace this fearful responsibility. To give Christians permission to judge is like handing someone a shotgun. It is a tool that can be used for self-defense; but it is also something that can do great harm. We need to add the other things the Bible tells us about judging insiders to this command. We are told that we are to judge and test teaching to see if it is false teaching, 1 John 4:1, 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.' We are not to be gullible but discerning. Like the Bereans we are to test all things against God's word. In Matt. 7:15-20 Jesus warns us to test false teachers by their fruit. This is a good and proper way of judging.

The Roman church was a church that had several divisions and a problem with Christians being judgmental towards one another over differences of opinion on secondary matters. Rom. 14:3-4, 'Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.' 14:10, 'Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.' 14:13, 'Therefore let us not pass

judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.' Paul encourages us to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us and not have a suspicious and prejudicial approach to our brothers and sisters in Christ. He tells us that we are to recognize that Jesus is the Lord of the conscience and that we are not to take over the role of conscience in their lives trying to get everyone to agree with our opinion. Paul encourages us to guard ourselves against those attitudes where we quickly write people off who disagree with us; where we don't apply a gospel lens but denounce people as non-believers because they do not hold to our finer points on theology.

The overall point that I want to make is this one. We must be serious about sin in the church and embrace our duty to bear one another's burdens in this regard. We do so with humility knowing how sinful and prone to wander we all are. We must guard ourselves and not allow any of the legalism that is in every one of our hearts an opportunity lest the devil take advantage of the situation. We have established that we are not to be judgmental to outsiders, but we are to still preach the gospel in a humble way. And that we are to judge those inside the church but likewise with gentleness and humility. Let me end with an illustration and a verse. Two men visiting an adulterer illustration. Gal. 6:1-2, 'Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.'