

THE LAW OF CHRIST:

God's Will

for

New Testament Believers

by

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RSP

Day 30

ADVICE:

JUDGE YOURSELF FIRST

You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.

You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.

Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Dt 16:18-20 NKJV).

Do not judge so that you will not be judged.

For in the way you judge, you will be judged;

and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye?

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

(Mt 7:1-5 NASB).

“Do not judge!” In modern times, this is certainly one of the most often quoted passages of Scripture. People think that somehow this teaching is a powerful shield which can defend them against the righteous criticism of others. Ironically, they think that Jesus’ words, “Do not judge,” somehow condemn those who are criticizing their sinful deeds.

Of course, this misused phrase has been lifted from its context and does not provide any real protection to the wrongdoer. It only thwarts the criticism which the wrongdoer actually needs to hear. Imagine going to a doctor and saying “Do not judge me!” The patient who walks out of the doctor’s office without hearing the doctor’s critical judgment concerning his physical health has not heard how to resolve his physical problems. Similarly, someone who walks away without hearing criticism from those who care has not heard how to resolve his spiritual problems.

Judges are necessary. No system of law can be upheld without qualified judges to enforce its ordinances. In this section of His Law, Christ is making provision for those who would judge other believers for their non-compliance with His commands.

In this passage, Jesus is advising believers not to seek the office of a judge (Mt 7:1). Jesus warns the believer that the standard of judgment he uses will be measured back on him when he is judged (Mt 7:2). Jesus describes some problems common among human judges: no one is without significant faults (Mt 7:3), and one tends to be most harsh toward others concerning the faults with which he himself is also plagued (Mt 7:4). In spite of all this, there is a need for qualified judges and proper judgment; therefore, Jesus describes the qualified judge and the proper way to judge others (Mt 7:5).

The Office of a Judge

The office of judge was instituted during the ministry of Moses. Judges were chosen from among the Israelites: “Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you” (Dt 1:13, referring to Ex 18:25-26).

The ministry of a judge is to make righteous judgment in the case before his court:

You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Dt 16:18-20 NKJV).

The ministry of a judge also includes executing the sentence of judgment which someone deserves:

According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach you, and according to the judgment which they shall tell you, you shall do: you shall not decline from the sentence which they shall show you, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and you shall put away the evil from Israel (Dt 17:11-12).

Sometimes the judge is responsible for putting the wrongdoer to death, as in the case of the idolatry at Baalpeor: “And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, ‘Slay every one the men who were joined unto [the god] Baalpeor’” (Nm 25:5).

Examples of New Testament Judgment

During His ministry on earth, Christ judged people for their sinful deeds and publicly denounced their sin. The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes were targets of Christ’s criticism. Jesus pronounced blistering judgment on these Jewish leaders for their hypocrisy and self-righteousness. For example, in just one passage of Scripture, Matthew 23, He calls them “hypocrites” (13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29), “sons of hell” (15), “blind” (16, 17, 19, 24, 26), “fools” (17, 19), “thieves” (25), “sepulchers” (27), “serpents” (33), “vipers”

(33), “damned of hell” (33), “persecutors” who are guilty of “righteous blood” (34-35).

Christ was not the only one to pronounce judgment in the New Testament. One of the most frightening examples of New Testament judgment is Peter’s examination of the intent of Ananias and Sapphira, who are both struck dead because of their premeditated lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). In another example, Peter judges Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:20-23).

Paul also judges others. He judges Elymas the sorcerer for trying to stop Sergius from becoming a believer, and calls him, “full of all deceit and all fraud, son of Satan and an enemy of righteousness” (Acts 13:10-11 NKJV). Paul judges the man in the Corinthian church because of his fornication and tells the church to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his body (1 Cor 5:3-5). Paul also judges Demas, who deserted him because of his love for this present world (2 Tim 4:10).

Believers Are Commanded to Judge

The office of judge and its execution was not just for Old Covenant believers; under the New Covenant, believers are expected to act as judges. Some aspect of judgment is mentioned almost two hundred times in the New Testament, and in a number of these instances believers are commanded to judge.

Jesus describes the proper way to judge: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (Jn 7:24). Keeping Jesus’ instructions in mind, here are some other commands directing believers to judge or not to judge specific things:

- Do not judge things that are doubtful (Rom 14:1-13).
- Judge those who cause another to stumble or fall (Rom 14:13).
- Judge and avoid those who cause offenses (Rom 16:17-18).
- Do not judge the faithfulness of another’s ministry (1 Cor 4:1-5).
- Do not judge those who are out in the world (1 Cor 5:12-13).
- Judge the sin of church members (1 Cor 6:1-6).
- Judge if what others say is scriptural truth (1 Cor 10:15; 14:29).

- Judge yourself so that God will not discipline you (1 Cor 11:31-32).
- Judge and separate from unclean things (2 Cor 6:17).
- Do not judge those who do not observe the Old Covenant Law “which [was] a shadow of things to come” (Col 2:14-17).
- Judge and avoid the ungodly who love pleasure rather than God (2 Tim 3:5-6).
- Judge every spirit “whether they are from God” or of the Antichrist (1 Jn 4:1-3).

The essence of proper judgment is to see and perceive things correctly and includes the following: examination of the evidence, reasoning of the mind, discernment to discriminate, and separation of right from wrong. The New Testament provides many examples of these actions:

- a) Examination (Lu 23:14; Acts 4:9; 12:19; 17:11; 24:8, 18; 1 Cor 2:14, 15; 4:3, 4; 9:3; 10:25, 27; 14:24).
- b) Reasoning of the mind (Acts 20:3; 1 Cor 1:10; 7:25, 40; 2 Cor 8:10; Phm 1:14; Rev 17:13, 17).
- c) Discernment to discriminate (Mt 16:3; 21:21; Mk 11:23; Acts 10:20; 11:2, 12; 15:9; Rom 4:20; 14:23; 1 Cor 4:7; 6:5; 11:29, 31; 14:29; Jam 1:6; 2:4; Jude 9, 22).
- d) Separating (“judge”) right from wrong (Mt 5:40; 7:1, 2; more than 125 other NT occurrences).

Thus, even when formal judgment is not in view, the believer is to develop and use his ability to “judge righteous judgment.”

The Dangers of Judging Others

In this specific stipulation, Jesus begins by warning of the potential dangers of judging others. One danger is that the believer’s judgment of others will bring similar judgment back on him (Mt 7:1-2). The second danger is that the believer’s judgment has the potential to expose his own hypocrisy (Mt 7:3). The third danger is that the believer can cause harm to others because of his inability to judge correctly (Mt 7:4).

The first danger is that judging others will determine the standard for the believer’s own inevitable judgment. Here, Christ

states the basic principle and then follows it with an explanation specific to those who judge. The principle, “Do not judge, that you be not judged,” is a specific application of a general principle which is frequently described in agricultural terms as “the law of sowing and reaping” (Gal 6:7).

Christ has already mentioned and applied the principle of “sowing and reaping” earlier in His Law. Christ first mentions this principle in the Beatitudes when He says, “Blessed are the merciful [compassionate], for they shall obtain mercy [compassion]” (Mt 5:7). In His Commandment of Prayer, Christ mentions this principle again, explaining that one must forgive others if he wants God to forgive him (Mt 6:14-15). Another expression of this principle in the Law of Christ is stated in the conclusion of the specific stipulations: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 7:12 NKJV).

Repeatedly throughout the Law of Christ, this principle of “sowing and reaping” is communicated, each instance emphasizing a different aspect of its application. In each instance a virtue or the lack thereof is given, but the basic principle remains the same: “What you do to others will be done to you.” Although this principle generally relates to the interaction between brothers and sisters in Christ, it should encourage believers to show compassion, mercy, and forgiveness in their every action, even to unbelievers. Here in the specific stipulations of the Law of Christ, this principle is used to warn us of the risk we take when we judge another’s observance of the New Covenant Law.

James repeats and builds on Christ’s principle concerning the judgment of others. Christ instructs His citizens: “for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Mt 7:2 NKJV). James urges his readers to understand that they are not being judged by the old standard set by the Law of Moses, but by the new standard which Christ has set in His Law of Liberty:

So speak and so do as one who will be judged by the law of Liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has

shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment (Jam 2:12-13 NKJV).

Thus, the measure of judgment the believer should expect is the measure of judgment which he has shown toward others. The uncompassionate and unmerciful will receive judgment without compassion and without mercy. On the other hand, the compassionate and merciful can rejoice without fear; because he has been merciful to others, he also will receive a measure of mercy.

First Judge Yourself, Then Others

The second danger is the possibility of exposing one's own hypocrisy. Jesus said:

Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, Let me take the speck out of your eye, and behold, the log is in your own eye? Hypocrite! (Mt 7:3-5 NASB).

Usually one's faults are grossly obvious to those around him; often one's faults are as obvious as a log would be sticking out of his eye.

Christ says, "Judge yourself first" (Mt 5:7; cf. 1 Cor 11:31-32). If a believer does not have the perception to see his own problems, or if he does not have the discernment to assess his own faults, then he is not qualified to judge others. A believer should carefully listen to the criticism of others, so that he might understand how others see him. Maybe the criticism of others can help us to recognize our own faults, and to not be a hypocrite. So that we can better serve Christ, most of us would be wise to spend more time judging ourselves and less time finding fault in others.

The story is told of a woman who day after day watches her neighbor hang her laundry out to dry. The woman cannot understand how her neighbor can do such a poor job of washing her clothes: every day the clothes are not white, but still yellow and dirty. After demeaning her neighbor's abilities for months, the woman happens to wash her own windows. The next morning she notices how clean her neighbor's laundry has become.

Correct Yourself, Then Others

The third danger is that the believer might cause harm to others because of his inability to judge correctly (Mt 7:4). Perception, the ability to see things correctly, is essential for proper judgment. A judge with defective perception is unable to see correctly and is likely to harm those he judges. Jesus uses the metaphor of a beam or a log in one's eye to describe the defective perception of an unqualified judge. Jesus advises those who would judge to "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" (Mt 7:5 NASB). However, if one cannot correct his defective perception, he should not judge others.

No one should be eager for this kind of authority; in any case, one should be careful not to overstep his authority. James reminds believers: those with greater knowledge and authority will receive a stricter judgment when they stand before Christ to give an account (Jam 3:1; cf. 2 Tim 4:2; Heb 13:17).

Jesus does not prohibit judgment; instead He instructs those who must judge others how to judge properly. He warns of the dangers inherent in this responsibility and advises believers not to take this authority lightly. Most of all, we must remember that our every action will bear fruit: what we sow, we will reap. May our every action be sown with compassion and joy, so that all our reaping will be full of compassion and joy.

Memory verses:

Do not judge so that you will not be judged.
 For in the way you judge, you will be judged;
 and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.
 Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye,
 but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?
 Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of
 your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye?
 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
 (Mt 7:1-5 NASB).