

## What does the Bible say about judging?

Consider some NT statements that discuss the matter of judging others:

- *“Do not judge lest you be judged. (Matthew 7:1)*
- *Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. (Romans 14:1) Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way. (Romans 14:13)*
- *Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)*
- *“And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? (Luke 12:57)*
- *“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (John 7:24)*
- *For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. (1 Corinthians 5:12-13)*

How shall we deal with these seemingly contradictory statements? Some will dismiss the whole issue by affirming that the Bible is filled with contradictions and we shouldn’t bother to figure it out. But for those of us who respect the authority of Scripture, it becomes necessary to think more carefully and deeply in order to harmonize these various texts.



## Preliminary Suggestions

The word “judge” has a semantic range in Greek similar to its usage in English. Louw and Nida’s lexicon suggests several shade of meaning for the Greek verb “krino”:

- To select or prefer
- To think or consider
- To reach a decision, propose
- To condemn another or hand over for punishment
- To see that justice is done to someone
- To make a decision about the actions or person of another; thus to:
  - Pass judgment on or express an opinion about
  - Criticize, find fault, condemn

Due to these various meanings, each passage should be considered in context where there are clear contextual indicators of the meaning of the word that define the kind of judging under consideration.

### “Do not judge...” (Mt. 7:1)

In the general context of this verse Jesus was discussing the pseudo-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). Matthew chapter 23 reveals that the scribes and Pharisees were notorious for pretending to possess a superior righteousness by which they felt justified in criticizing and condemning others. However, their lives were not consistent with this profession. They often were morally worse than the people they were criticizing. Thus Jesus illustrates the judging he has in mind:

*“And 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. (Matthew 7:3-5)*

Clearly the judging forbidden is the hypocritical kind that finds fault with others while neglecting to obey God oneself. However note this important point: Jesus did not say one could not “take the speck out of the brother’s eye”; instead He said, one must first remove the beam in his own eye in order to “see clearly” to remove the speck in another’s eye. Obviously no one is above transgression, and personal perfection is not a requirement in order to correct others. Jesus’ point is, we should start with ourselves and correct our own greater flaws before we attempt to help others with their faults!

### “Do not speak against a brother...” (James 4:11-12)

Like Jesus, James forbids Christians to “speak against” or “judge” their brethren; but the context makes it clear what he has in mind. It is speech that results in speaking against and judging the law rather than being a doer of the Law!

*Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. (James 4:11)*

The thing James forbids is a person living in disobedience to what is right seeking to criticize or condemn others. By doing so, he takes on the role of God as Lawgiver and Judge rather than accepting his proper role as a doer of God’s law. Thus, this prohibition of judging is similar in force to the Mt. 7 text. Don’t speak against or judge others while you neglect to do what is right yourself!

### “Do not judge one another...” (Romans 14:1,13)

This challenging chapter shows Christians how to deal with conscientious differences they may have. The primary stress of the context is to urge Christians to “accept one another” (Rom. 15:7) rather than “reject” or “condemn” one another. The basis of acceptance is defined in 15:7:

*Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)*

Since God accepts each of us on the basis of a sincere growing faith, we should likewise accept one another on the same basis rather than condemn each other because of differing conscientious viewpoints that grow out of varying levels of spiritual maturity.

However there is behavior that crosses the line from conscientious faith to rebellious unbelief. This kind of behavior abrogates the principle of justifying faith and replaces it with rebellion against known truth! It originates in the flesh rather than the Holy Spirit. Paul deals with this in the next text.

### “Do you not judge those who are within the church?” (1 Cor. 5:11-12)

In this context Paul deals with a brother who was guilty of fornication. Such a practice was not a manifestation of conscientious faith but a manifestation of fleshly living and even a return to the way of life from which Christians had been saved!

*But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:11)*

Note carefully the sin catalogue that calls for “judging”. The actions calling for judgment do not involve conscientious attempts to obey God, but instead a return to the pagan way of life one had left to become a Christian, the practice of manifest works of the flesh. There is no way that a person can make a case for the faithful or conscientious practice of these things! In this case, Paul’s point is clear. The brother who leaves the faithful teaching of Christ’s law in which he has been instructed for the sinful practices of the world is to be “judged” by the church and removed from their midst socially.

**“Judge righteous judgment” (Jn. 7:24)  
“Judge what is right...” (Lk. 12:57)**

The final texts encouraging one to judge are based on the obligation of each person to weigh truth in his mind and to decide what is right. In the context of John 7 the Jews had made a mistaken judgment of Jesus based on His performance of a miracle on the Sabbath. Instead of looking carefully at the evidence, they made a superficial evaluation of who Jesus was. Therefore Jesus urges them, *“Judge not according to appearance; but judge righteous judgment”*.

Similarly, in the context of Lk. 12 Jesus chided the masses for being able to predict the weather, but not seeing what was happening in their own culture. Instead of remaining spiritual and open to truth, they blindly followed their leaders to destruction. Jesus challenged them to *“own their own initiative judge what is right”*! Both these verses exhort each person to make proper judgments of truth based on the evidence God has given.

### Conclusions

Is it wrong to judge others? The answer is “yes” and “no”. Consider the following summary of what we have learned:

- 1) We cannot avoid the obligation to evaluate the messages and the messengers who profess to speak for God. We must judge what is right according to the truth as God has revealed it.
- 2) We ought to make judgments with personal integrity rather than hypocrisy. We must also start with ourselves and make the need corrections before we attempt to correct others. Perfection however is not a requirement in order to help others to become better.
- 3) We should not be condemning of those who are living by faith that is commensurate with their spiritual maturity, even though we may not always agree with their viewpoints. It is presumed that differences will be erased through continued faithful study and experience in the word.
- 4) We must clearly distinguish between a conscientious life and one rebellious against known truth. In such cases, judging the evil doer is essential to the purity of the church and the salvation of the erring brother.

Let us all make a sincere attempt to obey the Lord’s command both to judge and not to judge. Let us pray for discernment that we may know how to respond to those around us with love and with the interest of their souls always at heart.

**This tract is a brief digest of a sermon delivered by Johnny Felker. If you would like a cassette tape of the full sermon, we will be glad to make a copy for you.**



*Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)*

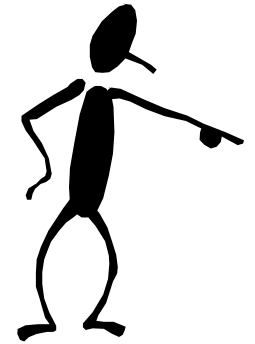
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**Perry Heights Church of Christ  
423 Donelson Pike  
Nashville, TN 37214  
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## Is It Wrong To Judge Others?



Almost every day we hear people talk in religious discussions about judging others. People will say things like, “The Bible says not to judge” or “I can’t judge them”. Ironically people can get pretty “judgmental” about others who are judging. What do the Scriptures teach on this important subject?