

"Judge Not That Ye Be Not Judged"

Matthew 7:1

This command, like all other parts of the Holy Scriptures, can be easily misapplied if we do not study its meaning carefully. Jesus not only taught the law of God, but also exemplified the way it should be obeyed, so he not only issued the command but was very careful to observe it as well. He told the Pharisees:

"Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man" (John 8:15).

It may seem to us as we read the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees that he judged them when he told them that they would die in their sins, that they were from beneath and from this world, that they were not true children of Abraham, that they were children of the adversary and not children of God; but believing that the words of Jesus were both true and inspired, we are forced to accept the fact that he was not judging the Pharisees when he told them of their sins and fatal error in rejecting him.

When Jesus was teaching in the Temple, the Pharisees tried to get him to pronounce judgment against an adulterous woman. If he had done so and had ordered the woman to be stoned, he would have assumed the role of a judge. Jesus did not come as a judge but as a Savior (John 12:47), so he did not condemn her, but he did command her to *sin no more*. The Pharisees not only overlooked mercy and forgiveness—they overlooked the divine source of Jesus, so they judged him, as well as others, after the flesh.

The example and lesson for us in the words and deeds of the Master relating to judging is this: *we are not to sentence anyone to death or any other penalty, or inflict any penalty on anyone*. We are rather to be kind to the evil as well as the good. This restriction from judging is often erroneously applied to stop brethren and sisters from speaking out against the misdeeds of evil doers. Here it is necessary to call attention to the fact that there is more than one meaning conveyed by the word 'judge.' While Jesus judged no man, in the day of his mortality, in the sense of *penalizing, condemning, or sentencing* them, he judged in the sense of discerning. In John 5:30 he said,

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."

What a wonderful explanation is contained in the Master's words, if we can grasp it! *The fact that he sought to do his Father's will rather than his own, according to Jesus, made his judgment just*. Let us pause for a moment to consider how it would. If he sought to do his own will, he undoubtedly would want to inflict some penalty upon his adversaries, or work against them in some way, but in his fervent zeal to do his Father's will, he would hold all such impulses in restraint. His judgment would not therefore be malignant or harmful. Instead, *it would be his discernment between good and evil produced by examining the words and deeds of others in respect to the righteous will of God*. Selfishness would not enter into it at all.

Although there may appear to be a contradiction of terms when we find Jesus saying in one place that he didn't judge, and in another place that he did judge, it is all very understandable when we take into account that *he judged in the sense of reaching a decision but not in the sense of sentencing or penalizing anyone*. The vast difference between these two is this: one merely calls attention to the fact someone is sinning, whereas the other punishes him for it.

To call attention to someone's sin is a kindness both to the sinner and to others who might be made to fall because of that sin, besides being a duty toward God. For example, Jesus said that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He vigorously denounced the misdeeds of many of his contemporaries which made them hate him, but *he did it for their benefit if they could have only realized it*. He beheld the city of Jerusalem and wept over it as he meditated upon the awful judgment or punishment, that would soon befall it because it had unjustly judged him and the prophets, and would not listen to his reproof.

Knowing as we do that Jesus was perfect, that he was the sinner's friend, that he was the Son of God and spoke the words of inspiration— we readily perceive the necessity for *his* reproofs and the responsibility of those to whom he spoke to mend their ways. But when a brother of *our time* points out the misdeeds of others, a cry goes up that "Jesus forbids us to judge one another," that "We must cast out the beam from our own eye before attempting to cast out the mote out of our brother's eye," and that "We should put away all strife and envy and live in peace."

What the people who raise this cry do not seem to realize is that *there is nothing in these Scripture quotations which should keep us from speaking out against another brother's misconduct*. If, as Jesus, we seek not to please ourselves but God, we will not reprove in the spirit of envy or hatred but will faithfully object to deeds and teachings which are not in conformity with the divinely inspired and revealed Word of God.

For a moment let us see where it would lead us if we took the position that we dare not reprove a brother or disfellowship him when unfaithful. Some take the position that when Paul said—

"But let a man examine **himself** . . ."

—that it is "none of our business" what kind of a life someone else leads; that we should confine our examination to ourselves and not speak about others' sins.

If this is truly the meaning of the Scripture, then to be consistent we would have to stand ready to break bread with anyone who will break bread with us, regardless of what he believes or what he does. Some might not see the ridiculousness of such a stand as they practically teach this, although many would not go quite that far. It would mean that we would be totally helpless to preserve the purity of the Truth because a brother could depart as far as he wished from any or all of the Truth, and we would be prohibited from reproofing him or disfellowshipping him.

Interpreting the Scriptures to teach that we may not judge whether the brother is sound or unsound, we would not even be in a position to fortify our own minds

against his pernicious teachings, and so the Christadelphian body would soon sink to the level of the churches of the world. Our statement of faith would become a meaningless claim to sound doctrine and conduct, since we could not enforce it. Our claim to be the same as the pioneer brethren would have to be dropped, since they were so careful to contend earnestly for sound doctrine and conduct.

While this sad state of affairs is bound to develop where no restraint is placed upon those who would corrupt the way of God, many feel that it is not our place to try to correct it. Of course they know that Jesus sharply rebuked the Pharisees for their faults, but they reason that Jesus, being perfect, had a right to do so where we have not. Jesus' words are quoted to support this view—

"He that is **without sin** among you, let **him** first cast a stone."

Plausible though this argument may sound, it is based upon a misapplication of Scripture texts. The stones that the Pharisees were asking Jesus' permission to throw were real stones. Jesus not only prevented the Pharisees from stoning the accused woman but did not cast a stone at her himself. As Isaiah prophesied (53:9)

"And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; **because he had done no violence**, neither was any deceit in his mouth."

Jesus could and did find fault with people, but **he cast no stones**. If we dare not find fault as he did, how is he our example or pattern to follow? What point would there be in Jesus' warning against the danger of copying the works of the Pharisees if we are not supposed to do what he did either but only follow his commandments? In Matt. 23:1-3 we read,

"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

Of himself, Jesus said—

"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

And Paul said,

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

So, brethren and sisters, there is no distinction to be drawn between Christ's commands and example in relation to judging. We must be careful to observe *both*. For us to object to someone's sins, is not to cast stones. It is our *duty*, and the duty of every brother and sister in the Truth. Jesus said in Luke 17:3—

"Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him."

Paul writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:20) says—

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

And when writing to Titus, he said—

"For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said –

"The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.

"This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:10-13).

In a manner, Paul was judging the Cretians; not judging them in the sense of penalizing or condemning them, but judging that their works were so bad that they needed to reform to *avoid* being judged, or condemned at the appearing of Christ. We have to harmonize the apostles' actions with their commands also that we should not judge. James wrote (4:11)—

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11).

Since we have already found that criticisms of our brother's sins are both proper and necessary, what are we to make of James' words? Or Paul's words in Rom. 14:10,12?

When Paul spoke against judging in Rom. 14, he was speaking against *requiring the observance of unnecessary things and condemning someone for not doing those things*. When James spoke against judging in James 4, he was pointing out the sin of speaking against a brother who is faithfully performing his service in the Truth. To speak evil of a man who is obeying the law of his God is to speak evil of that law and to judge that law.

Judging righteous judgment requires caution to avoid reproving anyone for doing righteousness, while at the same time reproving those who commit wickedness. Once we *err as to what is right and wrong in a given situation*, our judgment of what should be done about it will automatically become affected as well as our own attitude toward those who have dealt with the situation. When we cast out *this* beam out of our eye, our vision improves so that we can see clearly to deal with the minor defects we were so concerned about on the part of those who have been judging the matter rightly all along.

When Paul spoke to Felix, he reasoned of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," which made Felix tremble. The reason why Felix trembled was undoubtedly because of the punishment that would come upon him for his lack of righteousness and temperance. Paul was trying to save him from this fate, trying to *save him from being judged*, not judging him.

All of us are to be judged in the sense of having to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive according to what we have done whether it be good or bad, as Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 5:10. So Jesus' warning against being judged in Matt. 7:1, must relate to the *danger of punishment*. Punishments are many times referred to as judgments in the Scriptures as the following passages illustrate—Prov. 17:1, Eze. 14:21, 2 Pet. 2:3, and Rev. 17:1. The punishment of the wicked is no doubt called their "judgment" because it is the destiny which God judges they deserve.

Although Jesus said that he judged no man, we understand his remarks to refer to the days of his humiliation, because God has appointed him to be Judge of the whole earth—John 5:22, Acts 10:42, 2 Tim. 4:1. Even so, Jesus explained that it was his *word* that would judge a man in the last day—John 12:48. It is by his word that we must determine what course we must take and whom we should fellowship today. As we, in obedience to his word, guard against deception, worldly entanglements and the relaxation of any of his commands, we must separate from those who have gone astray, and from all who are joined to them.

Some observe that Paul remained in fellowship with the large congregations of his day in spite of the fact that many faults existed among them, both doctrinally and morally. This is true, up to a point, in the formative days of the ecclesias, but he warned them night and day with tears to amend their ways. He also gave orders for the brethren to refuse the company of any who would not obey his word. In 2 Thes, 3:14, he said,

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."

In writing to the Corinthians, he warned them about fellowshiping a certain brother who had sinned. This warning was heeded as we learn from his second epistle, and the brother was withdrawn from. The fact that the ecclesias were willing to listen to Paul and to *separate from transgressors*, left him under no obligation to depart from them.

But if they had upheld the man, excused his action, and brought counter charges against Paul rather than deal with the man, Paul would have had no alternative but to withdraw from the whole ecclesia. We are all familiar with the messages to the seven churches of Asia, and how the Spirit *praised* those who would not tolerate false teachers, or evil workers regardless of their claims; but *rebuked* those who had not done anything about them to the extent of threatening to remove their lightstand out of its place.

These facts, when carefully weighed and considered, make it evident that if we are to be among that group to whom the judgments of the future age are to be committed, we must *judge* righteous judgment now without *inflicting* judgments.

In the matter of rearing children, it is understood that a righteous desire to bring the children into conformity with the divine will sometimes requires us to chasten them. Since a man is divinely given the duty of ruling his family, and commanded to chasten his son while there is hope (I Tim. 3:5, Prov. 19:18), such chastening falls in a different category from infliction of vengeance on brethren and

sisters. Even though we might have a good motive in punishing brethren for their own benefit, we dare not do so for we are not permitted to rule over one another (Matt. 20:25).

In disciplining children, however, there is the danger of doing so *for our own convenience and revengeful pleasure*. Let us endeavor to direct them in the ways of the Lord and only chasten them with this motive to prevent them from being condemned with the wicked.

God is now pouring out His judgments upon the world and holds still greater judgments in store in the near future. Let us therefore heed the words of Christ in Luke 21:36—

"Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

—D.S.

Taken from November 1955 Berean