

## Judgmentalism

Romans 14:1-13

People who know nothing about the Bible or about Jesus usually know two words that Jesus said: “Judge not...” (Mt 7:1). This is a verse that the unsaved world really likes. Jesus prohibits us from judging others. That means that we cannot criticize others for their behavior. No matter what people may do, we must keep our mouths shut and say nothing about it. This verse prohibits believers from being critical or condemning anyone.

However, what most people do not know is that Jesus says in that same context, “Judge righteous judgment” (Jn 7:24). So there must be a form of judgment that is appropriate and a form that is inappropriate.

One of the biggest criticisms against Christians is that they are judgmental. They look down at others, criticize others, and condemn others. Our world today does not like it when Christians condemn the immorality so prevalent today. Many in the world are aggressively critical of Christianity, but when we criticize or expose the evil deeds of unsaved people, we are accused of being judgmental.

What did Jesus mean by his statement, “Judge not”? Do we have the right to judge others? If we judge others, is that wrong? Are we being judgmental when we condemn the immorality in our culture or when we rebuke someone for his moral failure? Is it possible to judge appropriately?

We are continuing in our series on the Sins of the Spirit, and today we’re looking at the sin of judgmentalism. Since I’m categorizing judgmentalism as a sin, it’s obvious that there is a sinful form of judging, but there is also a righteous form of judgment. If we want to avoid the sin of judgmentalism, we must know the difference between being judgmental and exercising righteous judgment.

Let’s start with a couple...

### I. Definitions

- A. To judge: to determine, evaluate, weigh, or measure according to an objective standard

We must at times use good judgment to determine the value of something or to discern if something is right or wrong. We judge things all the time.

- 1. It’s not being judgmental to rebuke someone for flagrant disobedience to an objective standard.

2. People who say “Don’t judge me,” or “Who are you to judge?” don’t want to be held accountable to a standard. They boldly proclaim that no one has the right to judge them, i.e., to condemn them for their bad/evil behavior. They don’t believe in the absolute standard of God’s word, and they don’t want anyone to remind them of God’s judgment against them.
  3. A non-Christian, worldly person would probably say that we are being judgmental by criticizing or denouncing a person because of his evil behavior. If you say that it is wrong for a person to engage in a certain behavior, you are being judgmental. Any words of disapproval are seen as being judgmental—or even violence. We are supposed to be unconditional in our approval of all behaviors. If we disapprove, then we are being judgmental.
  4. But that’s not a biblical definition of judgmentalism.
- B. Judgmental (in the sinful sense): to be critical or faultfinding; to condemn someone based on limited knowledge; to condemn someone unjustly or without evidence; to condemn others for what one is himself doing.
1. Judgmentalism usually assumes knowledge that you may not actually have. Judgmental people feel that they have the right to condemn others because they know the bad motives and evil intentions of other people.
  2. We are being judgmental when we assume that we know why people do things when they have not told us. We are being judgmental when we condemn people unjustly or unfairly. Judgmentalism happens when we condemn people without knowing why they are doing something.
  3. When we assume that our critical opinions are correct, in spite of not knowing the facts, we are being judgmental.

## II. What do we have the right to judge?

Jesus tells us that we can and should “judge righteous judgment.” We have the right to judge/discern in many cases. God expects us to use our powers of judgment.

- A. We have the right to judge actions and attitudes.

*Matthew 7:16, 20 You will know them by their fruits. ... Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*

1. Jesus tells us that we will know a person by the kind of fruit he produces. We can look at a person's behavior and compare it to a definite standard. We can evaluate whether a person is bringing forth good fruit or bad fruit. We can be fruit inspectors.

*Mt 12:35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*

How do we know if it's good or evil? By comparison to a standard—that standard is the word of God and the character of God. God sets the standard for goodness, and anything that contradicts God's goodness is bad/evil.

We are responsible to make those judgment calls. We must love what God loves and hate what God hates. That requires righteous judgment.

2. The Bible often tells us to use our powers of discernment.

*Psalms 119:66 Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.*

*Proverbs 16:21 The wise in heart will be called discerning.*

*Philippians 1:10 . . . so that you may be able to discern what is best.*

*1 Thes 5:21 Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.*

The basic meaning of the biblical word “to discern” means “to separate, to make a distinction or to differentiate.” In order to separate or distinguish one thing from another, we must examine, test, try, judge, or prove the things in question. Thus, discernment is the ability to examine, test, try, judge, or prove something with the result of separating or distinguishing the good from the bad.

We do this all the time—e.g., grocery store, car purchase

Christians have the right to exercise their powers of discernment to judge human actions to evaluate whether they are good or evil.

B. We have the right to judge human character.

1. Words and deeds tell us much about the inner person.
2. People do what they do because they are what they are. The Bible teaches that actions spring from and reveal character.

Pr 23:7 *For as he thinketh in his heart, so [is] he ...*

Matthew 12:34 ... *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

3. We evaluate a person's behavior and then make a judgment about what kind of a person he is. We judge a person's character by his behavior and attitude. Such judgment is perfectly acceptable, and we do it all the time. Even the secular world does that—e.g., coaches often talk about the importance of high character.

**Trans:** We have the right to judge in many cases. If you don't like the word "judgment," use the word "discernment."

III. When is it wrong to judge? Is there a sinful form of judgment?

- A. It's wrong to judge when we assume that we know the motives of others.

Jas 2:4 *have you not ... become judges with evil thoughts?*

1. Most of the time, we don't really know why people are doing what they are doing. So it's a large error to assume that we know why people do what they do.
2. We are free to evaluate *what people do*, but we have no ability to judge why people do what they do. We are unable to judge the inner motivations and purposes of anyone else's heart. You really don't know why anyone does anything (unless they tell you, and they may be lying).
3. So probably the classic error of judgmentalism is condemning someone because you think you know why he is doing something, when in fact, you don't know his motives. Judgmentalism is assuming you know what is in someone else's heart and mind when you don't know that.

- B. It's wrong to judge when our judgment is prompted by a critical or faultfinding attitude/spirit.

1. We should not exercise our powers of judgment out of a desire to find fault or point out error. We're not trying to make others look bad; we're not trying to condemn others.
2. Sometimes we have to confront and rebuke people because of their sin.

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose/reprove** them.*

[ἐλέγχω]: to state that someone has done wrong, with the implication that there is adequate proof of such wrongdoing—‘to rebuke, to reproach.’<sup>1</sup>

2 Ti 4:2 ... *reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

Titus 1:13 ... *rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;*

Titus 2:15 *These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*

3. How can we rebuke, reprove, or exhort if we fail to judge what people are doing? Judgment in those cases is *not* being hyper-critical or fault-finding. It’s simply discerning right from wrong and telling the guilty person to quit doing what is sinful.
4. We don’t really need to know someone’s motive for sinful behavior to rebuke/reprove them for it. In that case, motive doesn’t usually matter. The behavior is wrong no matter what the motive is. The motive might actually be good.
5. Our goal in rebuking or reprovng is not to condemn, but that people will repent and turn back to the right direction. That’s righteous judgment.
6. Judgmentalism, on the other hand, is a critical and fault-finding attitude. Some people are naturally critical of others. They see all the faults and errors of others and not so much of themselves. What they excuse within themselves they point out as errors and sins when they see it in others.

**Quote:** Those who are critical of others in order to find something to blame, ... will bring upon themselves ... the condemnation they are so ready to mete out to others.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 435.

<sup>2</sup> James Hastings

Sometimes it is necessary to be critical of others, but the goal is never to criticize so as to make ourselves look better. Our purpose is not to find fault. It's possible to criticize someone else for his benefit—constructive criticism. It's possible to point out errors and weaknesses without being judgmental.

E.g., sports—when we give pointers or tips on how to do something.

- C. It's wrong to judge when we are guilty of the same sin or error

*Matthew 7:3–5 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

Note that Jesus does not prohibit us from removing the speck in our brother's eye. But before we do that, we have to remove the plank from our own eye. In other words, we should not complain about or criticize others for the very same things we are guilty of. Get the sin and error out of your own life before you point out the sin or error in someone else's life.

However, it is not required that you be sinlessly perfect before pointing out errors/sins in others. You just have to make sure you are not guilty of the sin you are pointing out. Don't condemn others for what you are guilty of yourself. Clean up yourself before you try to clean up someone else. If you condemn others for sins you are guilty of, you are being both hypocritical and judgmental.

- D. It's wrong to judge when our judgment is based on things the Bible is silent about.

The only proper standard for judgment and evaluation *in the moral* realm is the Word of God. If we find it necessary to criticize someone's behavior, it should be because that behavior violates the clear teaching of God's Word. Our main concern in exercising judgment is that someone has violated a clear biblical command or prohibition.

Romans 14 shows us that, on some issues of life, people will have a different point of view than we do. The issue eating food offered to idols is in view in that text. Paul says that different people are going to come to different conclusions on that issue. On such issues, as long as you believe that what you are doing is honoring to God, then you have the right to do it. E.g., food choices, celebrating holidays/feast days.

The technical term for such things is “adiaphora” – indifferent things, matters neither commanded nor forbidden; things regarding which it is not required that we do one thing or another. E.g., celebrating Xmas—neither prohibited nor required.

Each individual has his own personal walk with God, and each person is responsible and accountable to God for his own spiritual choices. We must allow for people to differ or disagree with us on issues the Bible doesn’t address—matters of indifference.

We must be very careful on the issue of judgmentalism, because we do have biblical guidelines and principles that cover most issues of life. We are not being judgmental when we point out the fact that someone is violating a biblical principle. If you confront on clear biblical values, you are not being judgmental.

But, if you have neither a clear biblical principle nor a reasonable application of that principle, then you have no right to judge. That would be a matter of indifference. E.g., food choices, holidays.

**Trans:** On matters that the Bible neither commands nor forbids, and where there is not a clear biblical principle in view, we should allow people to make their own choices.

- E. It’s wrong to judge when our judgment is based on things that are none of our business.

*John 21:22 Jesus said to [Peter], “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”*

*Proverbs 26:17 He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own Is like one who takes a dog by the ears.*

We are often prone to stick our nose into other people’s business. There are times when it is necessary to counsel, exhort and/or rebuke others. But there are many times when we simply must refuse to get involved in matters that don’t pertain to us. We must avoid taking that dog by the ears. It’s often best to stay out of it; don’t get involved.

IV. Why is judgmentalism wrong?

A. Because judgment is God's responsibility rather than ours

Rom 12:19 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but [rather] give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance [is] mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

2 Tim 4:8 ... *the Lord, the righteous judge, ...*

In most cases, we have inadequate information to properly pass judgment. We can't look into the thoughts and intents of the heart. Only God can see into our hearts. It's wrong for us to pass judgment on people's motives because we don't know them.

B. Because we are inadequate to do the job

1. We are prone to misjudgment, distortions, mistakes, and miscommunication. It's easy to misjudge situations because we think that we know what we don't actually know. It's easy to misjudge because of our own inner sinfulness. Judgment often comes from a sinful attitude.
2. What we criticize in others we are often guilty of ourselves. We should be trying to fix our own problems and failures rather than fix other people.

V. How to avoid judgmentalism – several practical steps

A. Don't assume that you know why people do what they do.

1. We can evaluate actions and even attitudes because they are in public view; everyone can see actions and attitudes, and it's obvious when they are good or bad.
2. However, we often do not know what motivates actions and attitudes. Jesus knew such inner motivations because he is God. We are not God; we often don't know why people do what they do. We should not assume we have such knowledge.
3. Maybe your intuition or feeling about an issue is right, but maybe it's wrong. Have you ever been wrong before? Have you ever jumped to the wrong conclusion?

B. Don't assume that your feelings, intuitions, or opinions are true.

1. Maybe they are true, but maybe they are false. We have to be tentative and uncertain until we have a good grasp of the facts.



2. If we don't know the facts of the case, then we must avoid forming strong opinions.
  3. If our judgments against someone are purely based on intuitions or opinions, our basis for judgment is very weak.
  4. If we hold our opinions tentatively and humbly, we won't be making strong assertions based purely on personal opinion.
- C. Don't raise preferences to the level of a biblical conviction.
1. We all have preferences, tastes, likes and dislikes, and we are entitled to prefer some things and dislike other things. We are entitled to express our opinions about things.
  2. But when we hold others accountable to our own personal set of preferences, and criticize or condemn them for failing to adopt our preferences, we are being judgmental.
  3. We have to be able to tell the difference between a personal preference and a biblical conviction. We don't want to condemn others simply because they disagree with our preferences or opinions.
- D. Avoid a fault-finding, criticizing spirit.
1. Some people are just naturally critical of everything and everyone. All they see is how others fail and come short of perfection. Whatever the topic, they point out the errors and faults.
  2. Some people do that at home within their own families. They would never be so critical of people in public; but at home, they are super critical. Nothing is ever good enough. No one ever comes up to a high enough standard. They find fault with almost everything.
  3. This can be true of perfectionists. They have to comment on any lack of perfection in anyone or anything else. I would hate to live in a household with a perfectionist who is constantly criticizing.
  4. God is perfect, but "he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Ps 103). We should show mercy and kindness like God does. We don't have to comment on every little imperfection we see in others. We all have a long set of imperfections.

- E. Recognize that the Bible does not address some issues at all and some issues not very clearly.
1. We cannot demand that people adhere to our ideas about issues that the Bible either does not address or that it is unclear about. We must hold our opinions tentatively on such issues and not demand that others endorse our opinions on those things.
  2. We must have a place for indifferent things (adiaphora). There is such a thing as Christian liberty or soul liberty. The last thing we want to do is bind someone else's conscience over an issue that is of indifference to God or has no bearing on the Christian life.
- F. Avoid a self-righteous, "holier than thou" attitude.
1. Self-righteous judgmentalism may be more sinful than that sin that you are condemning others for.  
*Luke 18:11–12 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector....*  
This man was self-righteous and unrepentant. He thought highly of himself and criticized others.
  2. We must approach people with humility and grace, not self-righteousness. When we see the faults and failures of others, our attitude should be, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."  
*Lu 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*  
Our primary concern should be dealing with our own faults and failures. Get rid of the plank in your own eye first.
- G. Seek to think the best about people; give others the benefit of the doubt.
1. When you are feeling offended or insulted, assume that the insult or offense was unintentional or not personal. Perhaps you misunderstood or you don't have all the information.
  2. We have the right to engage in judgment only when someone has violated the clear teaching of God's word. Then we have the right to express God's condemnation of that behavior. Then we can "judge righteous judgment."

3. But it could be that we have misunderstood the situation. The person that we are ready to condemn may not be guilty of the offense. We should try to think the best of people, until proven otherwise. Even when people fail, we should not enjoy pointing out their failure.
4. Only when the facts show beyond doubt that a person has violated clear biblical principles should we think about rebuking the person.
5. And we should focus on the behavior itself. It's not that we want to condemn the person; we want to rebuke the person for his sinful behavior and call him to repentance.

H. Refuse to engage in judgment if the issue is none of your business.

John 21:22 *Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."*

1. Generally speaking, there are only two reasons to get involved in other people's business—you are either part of the problem or part of the solution.
  - a) If you are part of the problem, you want to stop being part of the problem. And typically, that begins by admitting your own errors or sins.
  - b) If you are part of the solution, then it may be necessary to point out the sin/error and call for repentance. This is where we must judge righteous judgment. Confrontation and repentance often solve problems.
2. If you are *neither* part of the problem nor part of the solution, then it's usually best not to get involved and not to state your opinions about the matter. What do we call it when we talk about matters that are none of our business? Gossip.

I. Pass judgment only when you have clear biblical guidance.

1. We can be very strong, bold, and assertive when we are standing on the foundation of God's word. That's when we can exhort, reprove, and rebuke with all authority. Where God's word is clear, there is no room for compromise.

2. When we confront others because of their sins and errors, we are really only telling people what God has already said. We are not being judgmental; we are simply showing a person that his lifestyle or behavior is wrong based on God's standards. *Scripture* is condemning the behavior, not us. We are simply proclaiming what God has said and warning the person about coming judgment (i.e., admonish).

**Illus.:** Video of abortion protesters; people come up and accuse them of being hateful or judgmental. But they are merely saying what God says about that behavior. We should condemn what God condemns.

J. Judge yourself first

1Co 11:31 *For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.*

Remember what Jesus said about taking the plank out of your own eye before worrying about the speck of dust in someone else's eye. Make sure you are not guilty of the same error/fault you are pointing out in others.

K. Seek humility.

1. Ultimately, judgmentalism comes from a lack of humility. Or, we could say that it's the result of pride. Just like virtually every other sin of the spirit, judgmentalism boils down to self-centeredness. Judgmentalism tears others down in an effort to make oneself look better.
2. Humble people don't do that. Humble people don't assume they know what is going on in someone else's mind. Humble people are more concerned with their own failings than they are with the failings of others. Humble people think the best of others as much as possible.
3. The key to overcoming judgmentalism is humility. If you have a tendency toward critical, fault-finding judgmentalism, work on developing humility.

Judgmental people typically pour out their criticism and fault-finding on others. They rarely turn their hyper-critical gaze upon themselves. And that's part of the problem. The judgmental person excuses his own lack of perfection while criticizing others for their often minor failures.

If you were to take a moment to judge yourself, would you be guilty of a critical, fault-finding, self-righteous attitude? If so, the proper response is to repent of that attitude. Perhaps you need to apologize to someone for your judgmental spirit.

The solution to judgmentalism is humility. Those who recognize their own failures are slow to judge others. They are well aware of the plank in their own eye. They want to think the best of others and give them the benefit of the doubt. They are slow to condemn, and pass judgment only when the facts of the situation require it.

The ultimate solution to any of the sins of the spirit is the death of Jesus on our behalf. 1 John 2:2 “He is the propitiation for our sins...”

Jesus commands us to “judge righteous judgment.” But in doing so, we must carefully avoid the sin of judgmentalism.