Errors Heard from Those Who Have Left the Church

the wages of which is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23)

Are We to Judge?

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Every false teacher and every one whose behavior is sinful tries to hide behind Matthew 7:1-4, actually behind a partial quotation and a misapplication of these verses. When these verses are cited by these workers of evil, usually all that is stated is: “Judge not.” In short, they say that any sort of criticism is contrary to God’s Word because Christ here condemned all judging. The only thing wrong with this is that it is totally self-contradictory and totally false.

First, as with many false doctrines it is self-contradictory. Here stand the false teachers and the impenitent sinners stating that all criticism is sinful, and yet they seem not to realize that they are self-condemned by the very principle that they advocate. They criticize and condemn those who would criticize or condemn them. They violate the very principle that they advocate. This is not unusual. Those who violate God’s Word try desperately to avoid the condemnation of that Word by seeing a different application and interpretation of that Word when it comes to themselves. Paraphrasing Peter in 2 Peter 3:16, these false teachers and sinful “wrest” this Scripture and others to their own destruction.

Second, neither the text before us, its context, or any other Scripture teaches what they want. The Lord does not condemn all judging either here or elsewhere in Scripture. It should be obvious from the text itself that Jesus here has a special kind of judgment under consideration which He condemns. Jesus describes this judgment as coming from someone who is in a worse condition than the one he condemns. Using the terminology found in the New King James Version, the one condemned has a "speck" in his eye while the one who is doing the condemning has a "plank" in his own eye. The Lord condemns the person who is unconcerned about his own sin while being more than eager to point out and condemn the sin in others. The Lord here condemns the judging done by the hypocrite and the double standard of hypocrisy. The self-righteous hypocrite is wrong because he magnifies the sin of others while ignoring the glaring sins of his own life.

Notice the verse which follows our text: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Mat. 7:5). In this statement, Jesus makes it clear that He is not condemning all judging for in this verse He tells us what we must do regarding the sin we observe in the lives of those around us. Jesus says that we must first deal with our own sin, and then we will be able to see clearly enough to help others rid themselves of sin. The lesson before us is: sin must be dealt with in our own lives before we can help others deal with their sins. Do not ignore our own sins and then concentrate on the sin of others. The same standard, God's Word, applies to all.

In Romans 2:1, Paul calls attention to this same sin among the Jews which Jesus identified and condemned in Matthew 7. "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."

Further, Paul admonishes the "spiritual" who see a brother overtaken and overcome in sin to look to themselves when trying to bring the sinner back to faithfulness (Gal. 6:1). Sin in the lives of others should not be ignored. The presence of sin unrepented of brings death (Rom. 5:12). Recognizing sin and its consequence is necessary to obey the instructions of Galatians 6:1. In other words, judging is required to obey this passage. Yet again, those that obey this command are cautioned not to overlook their own sin and/or ignore it, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

Looking again at Matthew 7, notice that Jesus in this very context rather than condemning all judgment required judgment of those who would obey Him. For example, He commands, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Mat. 7:6). Jesus is not talking here about literal dogs and swine. The pearls to which He refers are not literal. He is teaching us that we need to discern (i.e., distinguish, or judge, between those who will recognize the worth of the Word of God and those who will reject it, abuse it, and try to destroy it). To obey this command we must be able to judge others so we can tell who are the "dogs" and "swine."

Jesus also warns us about false prophets in this same chapter of Matthew. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15). We must, therefore, be able to discern who these false teachers are. Jesus tells us how to make this judgment when He said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Mat. 7:16). In this passage judgment is far from condemned; it is absolutely necessary!

As we expand our view of God's Word to include the remote context of Matthew 7:1-4 we observe that judging is again required. Those who would have us believe that Jesus condemned all judgment would have Jesus contradicting Himself. In John

7:24 Jesus states, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” Note that in the latter part of this statement Jesus said, “judge righteous judgment.” Righteous judgment is commanded. It is therefore not optional. If we obey Christ, we will judge righteous judgment. The judgment Jesus requires of us is not according to outward appearance; things are not always how they appear. The judgment Jesus requires is righteous; that is, according to God’s Holy Word, the Divine Standard of right and wrong. “All thy commandments are righteousness” (Psa. 119:172).

Jesus commended the Ephesian church for their ability to make judgments regarding who were and who were not apostles. He said of them, “thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Rev. 2:2). Jesus would not have commended them for what He previously had condemned. When Peter sinned, Paul rebuked him to his face (Gal. 2:11-14). This behavior on the part of Paul was the right thing for him to do. Nevertheless for this to be done necessitated judgment, the ability to know that what Peter had done was wrong. Peter’s behavior was sinful, and Paul rightly condemned it. In his discussion with the Corinthian church regarding the fornicator in their midst, Paul poses the question: “Do not ye judge them that are within?” (1 Cor. 5:21). According to the way this question is stated the correct answer is: “Yes, we are to judge those that are within the church.” The inspired solution for the sin in the congregation at Corinth required judging. Judgment was necessary to discern the sin and the sinner so they could be dealt with appropriately.

The truth is that Jesus does not condemn all judging in Matthew 7, or elsewhere. What is condemned is hypocritical, self-righteous judging that overlooks sin in one’s own life and concentrates on the sin of others. When the Word of God is obeyed and taught, sin will be reproved and rebuked and the way of righteousness will be commended. “Preach the word; be

instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Righteous judgment is necessary to recognize and expose sin and to recognize and obey the Truth. Try as some might to protect their sinful practices and doctrines by twisting the meaning of God's Word, one day we will all stand before God in judgment. All will be held accountable for their behavior according to the standard of God's Word (John 12:48). It behooves us all to begin now making the right application of that Word to our lives. When sin occurs in our lives we need to deal with it in the way that God tells us in His Word. When others care enough about us that they condemn the sin that exists in our lives, we should be grateful and apply the remedy demanded by God's Word so we might be saved. Rather than looking for a way to avoid what God has said, we need to be willing to turn from our sin and obey God to have the forgiveness that He offers. Condemning those who would help us identify sin in our lives so we might remove it is foolish indeed. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes. 5:21). However, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, Even they both are abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15). Someone has well written, "Refusing to warn a person about his sin is just as unloving as refusing to warn him about a serious disease he may have. A person who does not warn a friend about his sin cannot claim love as his motive." "When one runs to Matthew 7:1-5 to protect the false teacher and impenitent sinner in the body of Christ, he either does not understand the passage or he deliberately perverts it" (Dub McClish, The Edifier, June 14, 1984).

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