

SHOULD CHRISTIANS JUDGE?

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What the Bible Really Says About Judgment (ESV)

One of the most common misunderstandings today is the idea that Christians should never judge. People often quote Jesus: “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matt. 7:1).

But Jesus didn't forbid all judgment. He also commanded, “Do not judge by appearances, but **judge with right judgment**” (John 7:24).

The Bible condemns hypocritical, self-righteous, careless, and unfair judgment.

But the Bible also commands Christians to exercise righteous judgment and biblical discernment.

1. DIDN'T JESUS SAY, “JUDGE NOT”?

Yes. But we must read the whole passage.

In Matthew 7:1–5, Jesus condemns the hypocrite who notices the speck in another person's eye while ignoring the log in his own. His conclusion is not, “Never address the speck.” He says to first remove the log from your own eye so that you can “see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Matt. 7:5).

Jesus forbids hypocritical judgment, not righteous judgment.

The very next verse proves that discernment is necessary. Jesus said, “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs” (Matt. 7:6). We cannot obey that command without making some judgment about who the dogs and hogs are.

Jesus likewise told His disciples that if a house or town would not receive them or listen to their words, they were to “shake off the dust from your feet” and move on (Matt. 10:14).

That also requires judgment. There comes a time when we must recognize persistent rejection and stop forcing the matter.

2. DOES THE BIBLE ACTUALLY TELL CHRISTIANS TO JUDGE?

Yes.

Jesus said, “judge with right judgment” (John 7:24).

Paul wrote, “The spiritual person judges all things” (1 Cor. 2:15). He also asked, “Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?” (1 Cor. 5:12).

Paul even reminds believers that the saints will judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3).

Scripture repeatedly requires believers to distinguish truth from error, good from evil, and righteous conduct from sinful conduct.

John commands Christians to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). Paul says, “test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:21–22).

You cannot obey these commands without making judgments.

3. WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS JUDGE?

Christians should judge beliefs, teachings, conduct, and fruit by the standard of God’s Word.

Jesus warned of false prophets and said, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16).

Christians must therefore sometimes make a judgment that a teaching is false, that conduct is sinful, or even that a person’s profession of faith is contradicted by persistent ungodly fruit (Matt. 7:15–23).

We must recognize false teaching, confront sin among believers (Matt. 18:15–17), exercise church discipline when necessary (1 Cor. 5:1–13), and distinguish good from evil (Heb. 5:14).

The Old Testament teaches the same principle: “in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor” (Lev. 19:15).

The standard is not culture or our feelings, preferences, traditions, or personal dislikes. The standard is God’s Word.

4. WHAT KIND OF JUDGMENT DOES THE BIBLE FORBID?

The Bible forbids hypocritical judgment. Paul warns the person who condemns another while practicing the same sins (Rom. 2:1–3).

It forbids judgment based merely on appearances (John 7:24), malicious judgment and slander (James 4:11–12), and careless assumptions about hidden motives that God alone fully knows (1 Cor. 4:5).

The Bible also forbids condemning believers over matters where Scripture permits Christian liberty. Romans 14 warns Christians against judging one another over disputable matters such as foods and special days (Rom. 14:1–12).

Righteous judgment must therefore be biblical, fair, humble, and consistent.

5. DOES RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT MEAN TREATING PEOPLE HARSHLY?

No. Even when we judge from someone’s teaching or fruit that he or she is wrong, deceived, or perhaps even an unbeliever, we are still commanded to act like Christians toward him or her.

We are to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Jesus commanded us, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39), and taught us to treat others as we ourselves would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12). He even commanded us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44).

Biblical discernment is therefore not permission to become cruel, insulting, arrogant, or eager for confrontation.

Christians shouldn't go around looking for someone to beat over the head with a Bible. Our purpose in correcting error should be truth, repentance, restoration, and ultimately the good of the other person (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:24–26).

Sometimes love requires confrontation. Sometimes wisdom requires walking away. Neither requires hatred.

6. DOES LOVING PEOPLE MEAN WE SHOULD CONDONE SIN?

No. Christian love doesn't require us to pretend that evil is good or that sin doesn't matter. The Bible commands believers, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph. 5:11).

Christians should therefore never participate in, approve of, celebrate, or excuse what God calls sinful. Love does not mean changing God's standards so that no one feels judged.

At the same time, exposing darkness should be done as Christians—with truth, humility, patience, and love. Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). We should seek the same balance between grace and truth. Truth without love can become harshness. Love without truth can become approval of sin. Biblical love does neither of those things.

7. CONCLUSION

The Bible does **not** teach, “Never judge anybody.” It teaches us not to judge hypocritically (Matt. 7:1–5; Rom. 2:1–3), unfairly (Lev. 19:15), maliciously (James 4:11–12), or merely by appearances (John 7:24).

But it also commands us to judge rightly (John 7:24), test what we hear (1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21), recognize false teaching (Matt. 7:15–20), distinguish good from evil (Heb. 5:14), confront sin (Matt. 18:15–17), expose works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), and measure everything by God's Word (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

None of those things releases us from the commands to love our neighbor (Matt. 22:39), speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12), and pray even for those who oppose us (Matt. 5:44).

We are not called to condone sin. We are called to **judge with right judgment** (John 7:24), to **speak the truth in love** (Eph. 4:15), and to remember that the final Judge is God.

“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

For those who repent and trust in Christ, there is wonderful hope: “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).