

**Romans 14:4-8 ESV (Pg. 553)** Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. **5** One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. **6** The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. **7** For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. **8** For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

- I. There's a lot of confusion in the church (and in a culture that constantly criticizes the church) on the topic of judging others. Christians are generally accused of being highly judgmental towards others. But is this true? And are there times we should judge, even strictly? If so, what are the parameters of that judgement?
  - A. Today, whenever a Christian calls a behavior, choice, attitude, political position, or worldview of another into question, they're immediately countered with the words of Jesus himself. **Matthew 7:1 ESV** "Judge not, that you be not judged."
    1. The inference is that all judgement carries with it a degree of hypocrisy. No one is perfect, so none of us can equitably judge another human being.
    2. How can the over-eater judge the smoker? If our own sins disqualify us from equitably assessing another, maybe we should just "live and let live". But Christ said more to his church than simply, "do not judge each other..."
  - B. **Matthew 7:2 ESV** "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. **3** Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **4** Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? **5** 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." Christ is speaking of judging others by the standard of ourselves.
    1. It is sin to assume that there is some sort of moral superiority that is inherent to myself, and to only see flaws in my neighbor. It is a sin to use that false view of myself to size up everyone else. This is what Christ was addressing.
    2. Henry C. Potter was an episcopal bishop of New York in the late 1800's. Once, when he was sailing across the Atlantic, he felt leery of the man who had been assigned to share a semi-private cabin with him by the ship.
      - a) He made his way to the ship's purser's desk to ask if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe, since he had deemed his cabin mate to be untrustworthy, judging him by his appearance.
      - b) The purser gladly accepted the items, but told the bishop that the other man had just left, expressing the same concerns about the bishop!
  - C. Judging others by the standard of ourselves is the highest folly. My condescension toward any other person only leaves me vulnerable to their searching eyes. Jesus is saying that everyone will be judged by the same standard, and that standard is more concrete than each other's public persona.
- II. In another place, however, Christ says, **John 7:24 ESV** "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." This seems to indicate that there is a

legitimate time and method for judging situations and even other people. What is the right way to judge? What standard do we use for making judgements of others?

- A. First it's important to know that "judging" is synonymous with thinking, assessing, and deciding, and that all of us do it, all day every day. You may prefer SUV's to Prius's, winter to summer, tacos to pizza, rock music to opera.
  - 1. But we are also constantly judging others - this one is more extraverted than that one, this one has more confidence, that one seems more spiritual or worldly, honest or dishonest, wise or foolish, selfish or giving, etc.
    - a) Without some level of sound judgement, job interviews would be a randomized nightmare! Who could pick a spouse without judging?
    - b) While some of our judgements can be routine and even self-protective devices, they can also be expressions of our fallen, sinful nature. There are several criterion upon which we shouldn't judge another human being
  - 2. We've already mentioned that we should never judge based on a perception of greater spiritual worth, or holiness. This is always an illusion, and can lead to self-delusion about why we have the grace we have come to enjoy.
- B. This isn't to say some aren't more spiritually mature than others, but that maturity is a gift of grace through Christ at work, and never rooted in ourselves.
  - 1. Believers should be all about helping others to grow in grace, and never about mocking other's shortcomings or celebrating their sins or failures.
  - 2. **Galatians 6:1 ESV** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.
- C. Human standards are way too subjective. We cannot rely on them
  - 1. The day after Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address in 1865, the Chicago Times said, "The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dish-watery utterances of a man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as President of the United States." The speech has become almost as important to the Declaration of Independence to most Americans. Perhaps it was the press that was a little short-sighted?
  - 2. 6-year-old Thomas Edison was sent home with a note from his teacher suggesting that he be removed from school because he was "too stupid to learn". Edison went on to patent 1,093 inventions, still a record! Michael Jordan was cut from his High School basketball team as a sophomore and yet went on to be the greatest player the game has ever seen.
- III. If we don't judge others by a human standard, how do we judge when necessary? The standard of me is unreliable. What is a more solid basis for assessing situations and people? Only the Bible. It never changes like human opinion. **Matthew 24:35 ESV** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
  - A. Paul says the Word of God is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. You cannot reprove or correct what you do not judge. So when you judge, it must be by the standard of scripture, and not your life.
    - 1. The Word that is profitable for reproof and correction cuts both ways. If you are wielding the Bible as a weapon against others, and yet not submitting to its correction yourself; it is a grave hypocrisy and sin to speak up at all.

2. "If a preacher is not first preaching to himself, better that he falls on the steps of the pulpit and breaks his neck than preaches that sermon." -Calvin
- B. Nevertheless, Paul always tied the work of preaching and rebuking (judging) together. **2 Timothy 4:2 ESV** *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*
  1. He tells Titus that elders of the church should be able to "give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it". After clearly summarizing the gospel in chapter 2 of Titus, he says: "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you".
  2. But if you think that the pressure of this rests only the elders, Paul places the weight of judgement on all of us when he says to the entire Corinthian congregation, **1 Corinthians 5:12 ESV** *For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom **you are to judge**? 13 God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."*
- C. When you combine the gentleness Paul spoke of in Galatians with the commitment to holding each other accountable to what God has said in the church, it makes for peace, not factions, divisions and hypocrisy. Every one is being held accountable to the same standard, and no one is above the Bible.
- D. We should also remember that we will all one day be judged by the standard of the Word of a perfect Judge, who will always get it right and apologize to no one. **John 12:48 ESV** *The one who rejects me and does not **receive my words** has a judge; **the word that I have spoken will judge him** on the last day.*
  1. People may resist and resent being held accountable to God's Word at their church, and they may fly the coop to the next place where they feel they are safe; but they won't escape answering to God for what he has declared.
  2. We must only judge by God's Word and we must always submit to judgement from God's Word. It is painful at times, but it's the pathway to true peace, and fellowship with God and others. It protects the church as well.
- IV. But some will use the Bible to judge others strictly, using weaponized verses, yet ignoring their own sin; so that their use of God's Word becomes not only hypocritical, but oppressive and divisive. It's not enough to be armed with a verse and a mission. There is an attitude that should accompany right judgement. That is what our text this morning spoke about. What should we remember in judgement?
  - A. It began with an indictment against self-appointed spiritual cops: **"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand."**
    1. First, you must understand that the context is disputed matters; things that don't have a biblical warrant one way or the other, but things that people are quick to judge others on, based on either their traditions or preferences.
      - a) This included things like the day of worship. Jewish believers said Saturday, because God said "Remember the Sabbath". Gentile believers might say Sunday, because that was the day of Christ's resurrection. Paul says this is a matter of conscience, not law - so don't make it a law!
      - b) Paul also mentions how some believers understood that an idol was a mere thing, devoid of true power; so they would buy meat at the temples

that had been sacrificed to idols, with no concern for any power behind it. Other believers understood that idols, though wood and stone, represented demonic powers and wanted no association with them. Paul says neither is right or wrong, but each are obligated to their conscience.

2. Paul's larger point was that no one could be another Christian's master in issues not addressed by Scriptures. The Lord was the master of all. He can hold his children accountable, and even cause them to stand in the final day. When scriptures are clear, God's people must speak up. If they are vague or silent, Christians must be left to their own judgement and conscience.
- B. "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God." Paul makes it clear that if the the person in a gray area is motivated by honoring the Lord that we are to leave them alone, and allow God to convict them if he deems it to be necessary.
1. C.H. Spurgeon had a scandalous pleasure in his lifetime. It caused quite a stir in the press of his day. The world's most famous preacher loved to smoke cigars and would do so daily. People wrote to him and confronted him in the streets to tell him what a reproach he was to the gospel.
  2. "I intend to smoke a good cigar to the glory of God before I go to bed to-night. Why, a man may think it a sin to have his boots blacked. Well, then, let him give it up, and have them whitewashed. I wish to say that I'm not ashamed of anything whatever that I do, and I don't feel that smoking makes me ashamed, and therefore I mean to smoke to the glory of God."
    - a) Many strongly disagreed with Spurgeon's position, but he wouldn't allow them to accuse him of sin if the Bible did not. The Victorian press or the religiously elite of London were not Spurgeon's master, only God was.
    - b) "If anybody can show me in the Bible the command, 'Thou shalt not smoke,' I am ready to keep it; but I haven't found it yet. I find ten commandments, and it's as much as I can do to keep them; and I've no desire to make them into eleven or twelve."
  3. We may not care about particular days of the week, or eating meat offered to idols - those things don't have any impact on us culturally anymore. You may not care about cigar smoking, but is there a gray area that bothers you when you see another believer engaging in it? Is it what they eat or drink? The way they spend their time or money? Places they tend to go? Their mode of worship, or interpretation of specific passages?
    - a) These things can all be sin. Certainly drunkenness is always a sin. We are told constantly in scripture to handle our money wisely. There are places we should not go. There are ways to worship that can be unbiblical and there are right principles attached to the interpretation of scripture.
    - b) But without clear Biblical warrant, we can only gently discuss our perspectives with our brothers and sisters (and let them do the same with us), while allowing the Holy Spirit to do the convicting if it is necessary. Also remember that there are certainly weak spots in your life as well!

- C. “For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” There are certainly times when we are to speak up, even when we are to judge sinful behavior, based not on the reflection of our own morality code, preferences or traditions, but on the Word of God.
1. But ultimately we must realize that if we have been bought with the blood of Christ, our lives are not our own. We are subject to his will, expressed in his Word. We are subject to each other in mutual love and service.
  2. His Lordship of our lives extends to our death. He knows the number of our days, because he has written them all in his book, so we can reserve judgement to him in these obscure issues. We should spend our time loving, serving, and teaching in patience and truth for the benefit of each other. We should spend our days centering ourselves in the will and pleasure of God.
- D. There is tremendous freedom in knowing that none of us has it all figured out, and we do not belong to another as his or her servant, but together we are servants of God. We must rejoice in the fact that we are the Lord’s and constantly and sacrificially conform our lives to whatever pleases Him most.
- E. Prayer for repentance, clarity, patience and grace.
- V. **Benediction: Romans 15:5-6 ESV** May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- VI. Prayer for Paul and Narcis