

Judge Not

1) What is the common understanding of Jesus' command to "Judge Not"?

- A) One of Jesus' most quoted teachings is "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt 7:1; Luke 6:37). The common understanding of this command is that we are not allowed to say that what another person does is wrong. Consider the following:
- (1) On May 19, 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle delivered a family-values speech at the Commonwealth Club of California. In the speech he chided Murphy Brown—the fictional 40-something, divorced news anchor played by Candice Bergen on a CBS sitcom—for her decision to have a child outside of marriage. "Bearing babies irresponsibly is simply wrong," he said. "It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice." Reaction was swift—Quayle was ridiculed, called "judgmental," and labeled a bigot.¹
 - (2) Stryper, a Christian metal band, was formed in Orange County, California by brothers Michael and Robert Sweet and guitarist Oz Fox. During one of Stryper's concert tours, they hired the secular group White Lion as the opening act. During some of the concerts, White Lion used filthy, vulgar profanity on stage. At one concert they even threw pornographic magazines into the audience. In an interview Michael Sweet was asked, "How did you guys deal with that when it happened?" Michael replied, "We felt we couldn't judge any other group. If we told them, hey, you can't do this and you can't do that, we would be judging them."²

2) Does the Bible agree with this understanding of Jesus' command?

- A) The Bible commands us both to judge others and not to judge others. This had led to much confusion and misunderstanding regarding this topic. Clearly there is a kind of judging that is right and proper and a kind of judging that is wrong and sinful. Which kind is which?
- B) Dealing with this particular topic is a good way of introducing some important principles of biblical interpretation:
- (1) *Balance Scripture with Scripture.* Another way of saying this is that the truth about something is the whole truth (the entirety of what God has said). The Bible often addresses issues in different places and from differing points of view. It is imperative that we seek out everything God has said about a certain subject before we come to a conclusion.

¹ Isabell Sawhill (2012, May 25). "20 years later, it turns out Dan Quayle was right about Murphy Brown and unmarried moms." *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

² Michael Sweet, Online interview at <http://www.michaelsweet.com>. Article no longer available.

- (2) *Scripture never contradicts itself.* Whenever we read passages of Scripture that seem to contradict each other (e.g. Romans 4:2 and James 2:21), we must seek to understand the distinctive message of each passage as well as the balance that exists between them.

3) What kind of judging does the Bible prohibit us from doing?

A) We must not judge others hypocritically.

- (1) “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 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? 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? 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” (Matt 7:1-5).
- (2) “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things” (Rom 2:1).

B) We must not judge others by our own standard of right and wrong.

- (1) “Jesus answered them, ‘I did one work, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:21-24).

C) We must not judge others without regard for their weaknesses.

- (1) “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 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” (Rom 14:1-4).

D) We must not judge others concerning matters that do not involve right and wrong.

- (1) “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:16-17).
- (2) “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” (Rom 14:5-6).

4) What kind of judging does the Bible require us to do?

A) We are commanded to judge between right and wrong.

- (1) “But test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess 5:21–22).
- (2) “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:14).
- (3) “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph 5:11).

B) We are commanded to judge if someone is a genuine Christian.

- (1) “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt 7:15–20).
- (2) “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. ‘Purge the evil person from among you’” (1 Cor 5:9–13).

C) We are commanded to judge whether a believer has committed a sin.

- (1) “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt 18:15–17).
- (2) “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” (Gal 6:1).
- (3) “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (1 Tim 5:19–20).

(4) “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (2 Thess 3:6, 14–15).

D) We are commanded to judge disputes between fellow believers.

(1) “When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!” (1 Cor 6:1–3).

5) How should I respond when someone plays the “judge not” card?

A) Affirm the fact that Christians are commanded to judge between right and wrong (Eph 5:11; 1 Thess 5:21–22).

B) Explain what Jesus really meant: we must not judge by our own standard of right and wrong, and we must not judge hypocritically (Matt 7).

C) Confront them with the truth of God’s word. If they insist on arguing, remind them of what John said: “Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” (1 John 2:4–6).