

JUDGE NOT?

TO JUDGE THE WORLD 2



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Judge Not?

Judge Not?
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

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Judge Not?

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Judge Not?

Welcome to *Judge Not?*

We can't avoid exercising judgment on situations, people, issues, choices, and more. Jesus warned us to judge not, lest we also be judged. But that's not the whole story, as we shall see in this, Part 2, of our series, *To Judge the World*.

We must exercise judgment, so we want to make sure our judgment is the kind by which we'd like to be judged. We begin our work of judging the world with ourselves and the other members of the household of faith, seeking to engage the mind of Christ for mutual edification.

From there we go into our Personal Mission Field, ready to bring the *shalom* of God to the places we go and the people we see by exercising the righteous judgment of Jesus.

"Judge Not?" is Part 2 in a series entitled, *To Judge the World*. In this four-part series we will be looking at what the Bible teaches about exercising just and righteous judgment, so that we experience the promised *shalom* of God.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview. We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 As You Would Be Judged

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” Matthew 7.1, 2

Judging and judgment

We saw in Part 1 of this study, *To Judge the World*, that God has structured human society such that exercising judgment is inevitable, and exercising *just* or *sound* or *righteous* judgment is the way to *shalom*. That the rulers, judges, and elders of Old Testament Israel largely failed in their task did not mean that God scrapped His original plan for humankind.

Instead, He sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to show the way of righteous judgment, to bear the judgment of God against unrighteous sinners, and, with the Father, to send the Holy Spirit so that we might know sin, righteousness, and *judgment* (Jn. 16.8-11). And Jesus, for the continuation and expansion of that *shalom* which He achieved and bestowed on His Church (Is. 9.6, 7; Jn. 14.27), appointed pastors and elders to judge the people of God, so that all His followers might learn sound judging and exercise righteous judgment in all their doings.

Still, we must look more closely at Jesus’ words in Matthew 7.1, 2, for many people continue to stumble over this text by insisting that judging has no place in the life of faith. If we take verse 1 by itself, as an absolute, then we must agree that Christians ought not exercise judgment, especially with respect to whatever they might observe in others.

But a right understanding of Scripture requires that every verse be considered in its larger context, and in the case of Matthew 7.1, that context is verses 1-5, as well as the rest of Matthew 7 and all the other teachings of Jesus on the question of judging and judgment.

So let’s have a closer look.

Standards of judgment

Matthew 7.1, “Judge not, that you be not judged,” is not an absolute proscriptive. It’s more like a warning or a reminder that, whenever we may be inclined to make a judgment – especially where others are concerned – we should remember the general principles of judgment which Jesus exemplified and taught.

The idea of verses 1-5 is that we must take care to see clearly into the rightness or wrongness of some attribute or behavior *before* making any judgments. If this verse were an absolute proscriptive, then the world would be more filled with raving sinners than it is at present, since no parent would be able to correct a child, no teacher to assess a student, no judge to condemn a criminal, and no supervisor to evaluate a worker. In saying, “Judge not,” and in the light of what follows, Jesus is not forbidding all judgment, but calling us to think carefully about what we are about to say or do, whatever act of judging or judgment we may be considering.

Jesus explains that there are standards for exercising judgment, and that ultimately, God will perfectly and finally judge all people, based on His assessment of the judgments they have practiced throughout their lives (cf. vv. 21-28). A “narrow way” marks the path of sound judgment (vv. 13, 14), and those who walk that way, carefully attending to how they think, speak, and act, will bear the fruit characterizing those who, like Jesus, and following Him, exercise judgment according to divine criteria (vv. 15-20).

Before we judge anyone or anything, therefore, it is important that we learn the *standards* of sound judgment

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that God Himself employs, that Jesus exemplified, and that He instructs us to learn and obey. By heeding His Word and seeking Him diligently in prayer (vv. 7-12), we may discern that way of sound, just, and righteous judgment that leads to *shalom* in this life and eternal glory and *shalom* in the world to come.

Seeing clearly

If we see matters clearly, as God sees them, then we will judge all things as *He* would, and as we would want to be judged ourselves. Which is to say, we will judge with righteousness and love.

God is love, and God is holy. All His judgments are righteous and loving, especially His decision to send Jesus for our salvation. In Jesus the righteousness, love, and judgment of God come together perfectly and completely, marking the path we must walk if we would be true followers of Christ (1 Jn. 2.1-6). However Jesus judged, God judges; and we also must learn to judge this way, for He has appointed us to judge *the world*.

Thus, before we judge anyone or anything, any action or decision or choice, we must make sure that our eye is not clouded by unrighteousness or mere self-love. We must put ourselves in the place of God – where, indeed, He has seated us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2.6) – take up the mind of Christ and of His Spirit (1 Cor. 2.16; Rom. 8.5-9), and judge righteously, justly, and with love (Jn. 7.24).

Is this not how we want others to judge us? Truly? Fairly? Righteously? And with love? We cannot *not* exercise judgment; but we can judge *wrongly*, and the more we do, the more we will veer from the narrow path that finds us bearing Christ-like fruit in *all* our judging and judgment.

In this part of our study, therefore, we will examine more carefully the criteria by which we must carry out our appointed task of judging the world.

For reflection

1. How do the righteousness, love, and judgment of God come together in Jesus?
2. Why is the way of Jesus a narrow way? Can we expect to walk this way fruitfully apart from exercising sound judgment? Explain.
3. How do prayer and the Scriptures factor into learning to judge with righteous judgment?

Next steps – Transformation: Today, keep an account of all the time you have to exercise any kind of judgment whatsoever. Jot these down on a note card or in your smart phone. At the end of the day, review them before the Lord, asking Him to show you any areas of judging and judgment where you might improve.

2 Begin with Yourself

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 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? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7.3-5

Begin here

The Christian does not have to attain some formal position in order to do the work of judging the world. One need not be an elder or pastor or civil magistrate for the work of judging, to which we are called begins in our own souls. Judging the world requires neither a college degree nor a library of erudite books. Judging the world is our calling, privilege, and duty merely by virtue of our belonging to Jesus Christ.

We will not be able to judge the world for the *shalom* of God unless we maintain a careful watch over our own lives. Jesus taught that we must first clear ourselves of all obstructions, so that we “see clearly” to judge others and the world. He does not forbid us to judge; He only requires that our judgment consist of the character of love for God and neighbors. To ensure that this is the case, believers must exercise judgment over our own lives.

Judging ourselves must be a continuous activity. Paul says we should “walk circumspectly” at every moment, making sure that in all the time of our lives we’re living like those who possess the wisdom of the Lord, and not like fools (Eph. 5.15-17). If we want to edify others and lead them into the *shalom* of the Lord, then we must keep a continuous watch over ourselves in all aspects of our lives (1 Tim. 4.16).

This work of judging ourselves begins in prayer, where we yield to the Word and Spirit of God, and wait on the Lord to point out any thoughts, attitudes, or ways that are not in line with His Word (Ps. 139.23, 24). Judging ourselves continues as we walk in the Spirit, rather than in the flesh, and listen for His teaching, guiding, and conviction during the normal course of our daily lives (Gal. 5.16-23; Jn. 16.8-11). It also requires that we be willing to listen to others when they express concerns about any matters in our lives (Gal. 6.1, 2).

We need to pay careful attention to our own lives, and to exercise the kind of judgment that will keep us in the way of the Lord (Ps. 119.59, 60). What does this entail?

Focus for self-judging

In Proverbs 4.20-27, Solomon offered his son a concise catalog of what to watch out for in our lives. Only by exercising vigilance over all the areas he mentioned can we hope to escape the snares of evil, be filled with the life of God, and do and judge all things for edification and *shalom*.

First, Solomon insists that we must *give careful attention to the Word of God* and listen well to all the Spirit teaches (v. 20). We’ll need to make sure that our daily time in the Word is of sufficient length and quality to help us in gaining the mind of Christ about all matters. Where our thoughts and lives are not in line with Christ’s Word, we must take them captive and make them obedient with all diligence (2 Cor. 10.3-5). We must keep the Word in mind at all times, and discipline our hearts to love its teaching above anything else, for only thus will we be in position to enjoy life and health from the Lord (vv. 21, 22).

Next, we must examine our hearts (v. 23). The heart is the *seat of the affections* – all our loves, desires, aspirations, attitudes, and hopes. The heart is the heart of the matter in the life of faith, and if we harbor sin and impurity in our heart, we will not be fit to judge others for edification and *shalom*.

Solomon next instructs us to *watch over our words*, that they be always true, never deceitful, and never perverse

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in any way (v. 24). Paul would add that all our words must be seasoned with grace (Col. 4.6) and designed to build others up in the Lord (Eph. 4.29). We should think about what we're going to say before we say it, and spend some time at the end of the day reviewing the words we have spoken, so that we may give thanks, and confess and repent as necessary.

Finally, Solomon calls us to *pay attention to our path, our daily walk with the Lord* (vv. 25-27). We should plan to use our time wisely each day, and to focus on glorifying God in all our work (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). The time of our lives is God's time, and we need to invest our best efforts at bringing God glory in everything we do (1 Cor. 10.31). Watching over our path requires that we preview our day before the Lord in prayer, and review it at the end of the day, waiting on Him to show us any areas where we can improve the use we make of the time He gives us each day.

A continuous duty

Exercising this self-watch – judging ourselves and every aspect of our lives – is a continuous duty, like monitoring your speed while you're driving, and paying careful attention to the road.

But we will not do this *throughout* the day if we do not do it at the *beginning* and *end* of the day. As we grow in our understanding of God's Word, and of the righteous judgment His Word teaches, we will be more sensitive to whenever a speck or log has managed to lodge in our soul or life. And we will not be afraid to deal with this hindrance, confessing our sin and declaring our intention of repenting of it, because we know that God does not condemn us, but only seeks to draw us up to higher levels of life in Christ.

Solomon rejoiced in the fact that “the path of the just *is* like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4.18). When we walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light, then we know the warmth, safety, and joy of the Lord's *shalom*, and we will be in a better position to help others know that “perfect day” whenever it becomes necessary for us to exercise sound judgment in the name of the Lord.

Mastering the self-watch is one of the most important disciplines of the life of faith, as Jesus, Paul, and Solomon make clear. We will need to give careful and ongoing attention to this duty if we are going to fulfill our calling to judge the world for the *shalom* of the Lord.

For reflection

1. Do you currently practice a self-watch? Of what does it consist? Could you improve this discipline?
2. Why is it important to maintain an attitude of prayer in exercising a self-watch? Can we be effective in judging ourselves if we are not diligent in reading and studying God's Word? Explain.
3. How can believers help one another in this matter? Meditate on Hebrews 10.24. How does this obligate you in helping your fellow Christians maintain an effective self-watch?

Next steps – Preparation: Review your own practice of the self-watch and make any improvements you find necessary.

3 Righteous Judgment

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” John 7.24

Preparing for judgment

Jesus’ teaching is straightforward and unequivocal: Whenever judging or judgment is required, we must judge with righteous judgment.

No one can avoid judging and making judgments, whether in the form of approving one thing and disapproving another, choosing this over that, or deciding on matters of right and wrong or propriety and impropriety. All our actions and words, in a very real sense, are merely expressions of the judgment we make in our souls.

Christians must strive to see that all our judging and judgments are *righteous*, for so our Lord has commanded. But such judging and judgment does not come naturally to us. Knowing what we must do – and that we cannot escape or avoid what we must do – we would be unwise *not* to prepare ourselves to judge with righteous judgment.

God has made us in His image and likeness, with the works of His Law engraved on our hearts (Rom. 2.14, 15), so that we might judge with righteous judgment. But the law of sin, that lingers even in the hearts of those who believe in Jesus (Rom. 7.21-23), clouds our judgments, so that we must relearn the criteria of *righteous* judgment if we are to be prepared for this important work.

Divine resources

God has not left us alone in this task. He has called us to it, and He will do it in and through us (1 Thess. 5.24). He has given us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us and to guide us into all truth. The Spirit teaches us the holy and righteous and good Law of God, and He empowers us to carry out all that we are learning and that our salvation requires (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Phil. 2.12, 13).

Further, we have the Word of God, which is able to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17), and the example of righteous forebears and the encouragement of holy peers to guide and instruct us (Rom. 15.4; Heb. 10.24). The creation around us bears continuous witness to the glory of the Lord, and we are ever in His presence (Ps. 19.1-4; Matt. 28.20).

Most of all we have Jesus, the righteous One, exalted in glory and ruling at the right hand of the Father. By setting our minds and hearts on Him, we may be increasingly transformed into His image, and thus become more consistent in judging with righteous judgment (Col. 3.1-3; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

We have no shortage of resources to help us in fulfilling Jesus’ instructions. But it’s one thing to have those resources *available*, and quite another to make consistent and proper *use* of them.

How can we do that?

Know the Lord

Becoming like our Lord Jesus, so that He and His righteousness increase in us, is a work of the revelation and the Spirit of God. But for these to bear fruit, we must *pursue knowing the Lord diligently*:

Let us know,

Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.

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*His going forth is established as the morning;
He will come to us like the rain,
Like the latter and former rain to the earth.* Hosea 6.3

We must *pursue* knowing the Lord by seeking Him along all the avenues where He cries out with wisdom to us (Prov. 8.1-6).

Jesus speaks to us in His Word, of course; and we must be diligent to pursue Him there. We will not increase in the righteousness of Jesus apart from reading, studying, and meditating on His Word. We must “search the Scriptures daily” to discover Jesus, radiating out at us as from a mirror, delivering us from our old ways into the righteousness of His Kingdom and glory (Acts 17.9; Jms. 1.22-25). Our time in the Word must be like Jacob, wrestling the angel, as we refuse to let God go until He blesses us with His presence and power. He may wound our selfishness and weigh heavily upon us in many ways, but such pains as we may endure will only result in blessing.

But we must also learn to know that Lord as He reveals Himself in the morning of a new day, the rains that come as gifts from Him, and all the myriad other ways He is shining forth in the things He has made (Prov. 25.2). We would be fools, driving down a highway under construction, not to pay careful attention to the many signs and directions posted by the highway department to facilitate our safe journey. Similarly, we are fools not to pay attention to the many ways Jesus makes Himself known to us throughout the day. We are a work of increasing righteousness in progress, and the Lord is continually with us, showing us His wisdom, goodness, beauty, truth, and guiding us into His righteousness by the things He has made.

Hosea’s exhortation to *pursue* the Lord carries a degree of urgency and importance that we must not ignore. It is not enough to putz around in the Scriptures, merely to fulfill some sense of obligation or duty, or to give mere lip service to the revelation of God in His world. These two books of divine revelation are an inexhaustible gold mine of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Would you loll around at the entrance of a mine, rich with precious gems and metals, all promised to be ready for you to dig out and cash in each day? Nor should we do anything other than dig deeply into the Word of God – *all* the counsel of God in Scripture, including His Law – and the creation around us, to discover Jesus there (Jn. 5.39) and to learn from Him the righteousness we need for judging with righteous judgment.

God intends to judge the world in righteousness, and to employ His people for this great and awesome task (Ps. 99.4). But to fulfill this calling and to judge with righteous judgment, so that the *shalom* of God is manifest in all we do, we need to press on in knowing the Lord Jesus. The righteousness we need is from Him (Phil. 1.9), and He is making Himself known in His Word and His world. Let us make pursuing the Lord the highest priority and the most important discipline of every day.

For reflection

1. Are you putzing around in divine revelation or mining its riches daily? Explain.
2. Looking ahead to your day, where do you need to be ready to judge with righteous judgment? How should you prepare for this?
3. How can you make sure your participation in Bible study groups is preparing you to judge with righteous judgment?

Next steps – Transformation: Take stock of your pursuit of the Lord. Where can you improve to become more earnest in knowing Him?

4 Judging One Another

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? 1 Peter 4.17

A holy nation

Peter had earlier written that the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is called to be a *holy nation* (1 Pet. 2.9), and it was their being a holy nation that would make them a *special people* unto the Lord.

There are three senses in which the Church is a holy nation. First, the Church is holy because the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and in every believer in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 2.19-22; 1 Cor. 2.19). The Holy Spirit, working with the Word of God, brings the *glory of God* into the Church, grows the church into Christ-likeness, and causes the *life of Christ* to flow out from the Church in righteousness, peace, and joy (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Jn. 7.37-39; Rom. 14.17, 18).

Second, believers are a holy people because their churches are being built *on the foundation of God's Holy Word* and according to the *cornerstone which is our Lord Jesus Christ* (Eph. 2.19, 20). No church can expect to refract the holiness of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ which strays from the teaching of God's Word at any point, whether in its aims or means of ministry, or which fails to take growing in unity and maturity in Christ as its primary objective (Eph. 4.11-16). If we are conducting our worship, making disciples, or pursuing our mission in any way other than what the Scriptures teach, then we are compromising our calling to be a holy people.

Finally, the Church is a holy nation to the extent that members of the Body of Christ pursue holiness in the fear of God and hold one another accountable for holiness (cf. 2 Cor. 7.1; Gal. 6.1). It is in this sense that judging and judgment must begin with the house of God. Believers have a responsibility to help one another grow in the Lord Jesus Christ, and this includes exercising judgment not only on our own lives, but on the lives of those with whom we have been brought together as a local community of believers.

Judgment begins with the house of God when believers exercise loving and righteous judgment with one another for the sake of holiness.

A Pauline example

As difficult as it can be to judge others with righteous judgment, it can be even *more* difficult being on the receiving end of such judging. Peter should know.

Following his deliverance from Herod's prison in Acts 12, Peter apparently made his way to Antioch – probably the “another place” mentioned in Acts 12.17 – where Paul had come to join Barnabas and others in ministering to the new church there (Acts 11.25, 26).

Everything was going well in Antioch, where Gentiles were coming to faith and being incorporated into the church as part of the holy nation and special people God was calling together. Peter would have been just fine with that, since, after all, the Lord had used him to open the door of the Kingdom to Gentiles (Acts 10), and he had approved Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (Galatians 2).

But when a contingent of Judaizing theologians arrived in Antioch, Peter, not wanting to be excluded from their company, distanced himself from the Gentile believers and associated only with those who, because they were circumcised, were regarded by the Judaizers as the true believers.

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For which duplicity, Paul jumped his case publicly (Gal. 2.11-21). Peter, and Barnabas right along with him, had caved-in to people-pleasing. He should have stood firm on the Word of God, knowing that the Holy Spirit was building the holy people of Antioch into one Body, precisely as Peter had been shown in Acts 9 and 10. But Peter did not stand firm on the Word; he sidled up to the erudite and articulate theologians from Judea, compromised holiness in himself and the church, and thus invited the judgment of his faithful colleague, Paul.

Church discipline

Paul exercised against Peter the first line of church discipline that Jesus described in Matthew 18.15-18. Jesus had said that we must confront our brethren when we know them to be in sin, so that we might gain them back for holiness (v. 15). If they resist our challenge, then we must bring another believer, who also has observed the compromising behavior of our fellow church member, and together we must call him to repentance (v. 16). If that doesn't work, then we must take our brother before the elders – the judges – of our congregation, and bring formal charges against him (v. 17 – here “the church” indicates its elders). And if a brother or sister who is formally convicted of sin refuses to hear even the judges of the local community, then that member is to be put out of the Body of Christ until such time as repentance is achieved.

Paul put this practice to work in 1 Corinthians 5 by calling on the church to excommunicate a brother who was clearly practicing sin. But by 2 Corinthians 2, that brother had repented, and thus he was to be restored to the fellowship of believers.

Local churches are called to be holy communities unto the Lord, and it is the duty of every member of the local church to pursue holiness – in themselves and their congregation – in the fear of God. It is in this sense that judgment must begin in the household of faith, where in our own lives and the life of our community as a whole, we are working together to remove any planks of sin that might impede our ability to judge the world according to our calling in the Lord.

For reflection

1. What structures or protocols exist in your church to facilitate the kind of judging and judgment explained in this article?
2. Would you say that growing as a “holy nation” is a primary goal of your church? Explain.
3. If we fail to pursue holiness in the fear of God – in ourselves and our churches – will we be able to fulfill our charge to judge the world? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: Find out how your church practices church discipline, and make sure you are ready to fulfill your responsibility in this important discipline for bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

5 The End of Judging

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. Ephesians 4.29

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5.11

Let all things be done for edification. 1 Corinthians 14.26

The end in sight

The fear many people have, when they caution us against judging, is that judging others puts them down and vaunts those who judge. That's a gracious and reasonable concern, but it betrays a misunderstanding of the purpose of judgment.

If, following Jesus' instruction, we judge with *righteous* judgment, then our purpose is neither to puff ourselves or to humble or put someone else in their place. The purpose of *righteous* judgment is that righteousness might be expressed and recovered. And where righteousness thus flourishes, Christ-likeness is achieved, and His presence is known among us, with all the beauty, goodness, and truth that entails.

This is the proper end of every act of judging and judgment. We want to see Jesus, and we want others to know Jesus and be transformed increasingly into His image. Where King Jesus reigns, and His holy and righteous and good Law is observed, peace and joy obtain (Is. 9.6, 7; Rom. 14.17, 18). The *shalom* God intends for the world shines a little brighter when the proper ends of righteous judgment are achieved. We will know that we are becoming a holy people unto the Lord as we see Jesus formed in us and in our communities.

All acts of judgment must therefore be unto edification, to build ourselves and others up into Jesus Christ. Our goal in life is to know Jesus and to make Him known, and when we are judging with righteous judgment, this is precisely what happens. This makes exercising sound or righteous judgment an integral part of the process of making disciples and building the Church.

Judging and disciple-making

Paul explained the goal of disciple-making in Colossians 1. 28: "Him [Christ] we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Paul focused on this goal for the members of all the churches in his care, because he knew this to be the goal the Holy Spirit is working toward in every believer (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Moreover, Paul understood that, as believers increase in Jesus, and His Spirit fills them more and more, they overflow with the presence and power of Jesus and bring His reconciling and restoring presence to bear on the world. Jesus' objective is to fill the world with Himself (Eph. 4.8-10), and He does this by building-up individual believers and their churches into His likeness, and sending them into the world to express and exude Him in every place.

As we have seen, believers have a duty to judge one another with righteous judgment. As we carry out this responsibility, we must keep in mind that the end of all judging is Christ-likeness. We are helping to shape one another into the image of Jesus – His mind, heart, and priorities, as well as His words and deeds. We must *focus* on Jesus and measure one another only against Him. We must *look to Jesus* as we take up the work of judging and judgment, seeking His guidance, help, and grace. We must *abide in Jesus* as we work out the applications of sound judgment. And we must *give thanks and praise* to Jesus for the results, of righteousness and *shalom*, that we anticipate.

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Judging one another is thus a critical component of the work of disciple-making, for by it we work to grow increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ, laying aside everything that is contrary to Him and His ways, and putting on Jesus more and more in every aspect and facet of our lives (Eph. 4.17-24; Rom. 13.13, 14).

As believers, we are all charged with the mandate of making disciples (Matt. 28.18-20). If we are to be effective and fruitful with the disciples in our Personal Mission Field, we must learn to faithfully practice the discipline of exercising sound and righteous judgment. We'll have more to say about this in Part 3 of our study.

Judging and building the church

As it is the Lord's objective to form, not only individual believers, but entire congregations into His image and likeness (Eph. 4.11-16), we must assume that practicing righteous judgment is crucial in helping our churches realize their full potential as signs and outposts of the Kingdom of God.

To that end, we must ask some hard questions about our churches: Is our church the kind of disciple-making community such as we see in the gospels and the book of Acts? Is our worship and preaching sufficiently Christ-centered? Are we growing in unity and maturity in Jesus as a congregation? Do our shepherds carry out their work like Jesus did? In what ways is our church demonstrating the presence of Jesus in our community? Are we, like Jesus, fulfilling our calling to be signs and outposts of the Kingdom of God? To what extent do these and other similar questions shape the vision of our church?

Church membership is not a spectator sport. In all our involvement in the local church, we must work for the edification of our fellow believers, but also for the edification of the congregation as a whole. As we are able, we must, through our participation in the church, work to see Jesus, and bring the life of our congregation into line with His life. Where this requires church discipline, we must participate graciously, first, by submitting to the process as outlined in the New Testament (which is typically included in membership vows), and second, by fulfilling our part, whatever may be required, in edifying our brethren and the congregation as a whole.

Judging is thus crucial to the work of building Jesus' church, and every one who believes in Jesus must be willing and ready to fulfill this calling in the Lord.

For reflection

1. Why do we say that the end of judging is to *see* Jesus?
2. What can you do to make sure you are judging for the purpose of edification?
3. Where do you need to improve in knowing how to exercise righteous judgment?

Next steps – Transformation: Review your answer to question 3. Begin to take steps immediately to make those improvements, so that you can exercise righteous judgment to edify others and your church.

6 Mindset for Judging

For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” *But we have the mind of Christ.* 1 Corinthians 2.16

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ... 2 Corinthians 10.4, 5

Unto Christ, by Christ

Christians are called to judge the world. This does not mean that we are “judgmental” about everything, so that we can’t open our mouths without finding something to complain about, or someone to condemn. It simply means that we make decisions, choices, and judgments, and we speak and act, with a view to seeing more of Jesus in ourselves and others. Jesus is the essence of sound judgment, for in Jesus, the holiness God seeks is fulfilled in its most human expression.

All our judging and judgments, therefore, must be *unto* Christ, that His beauty, truth, goodness, grace, kindness, and transforming power may be more evident in our world. We long to see the goodness of the Lord Jesus in the land of the living (Ps. 27.13), and our work of judging the world must never stray from that focus. The more we build ourselves and others up in Jesus Christ, the more the rest of our lives – all our work and other activities – will reflect the reality of Christ in us, the hope of glory.

When we judge this way, Christ fills our world with Himself (Eph. 4.8-10), and the fragrance of Christ becomes evident in the spaces and places of our lives (2 Cor. 2.15, 16). And while this does not mean that everyone will welcome that fragrance, those who do will realize more of the presence, promise, and power of Christ’s righteous and loving rule, making all things new in their lives.

But for us to judge the world this way, to judge it *unto* Christ, we must make sure that we are judging the world *by* Christ, that is, with the mind of Christ, which is our unique possession as His followers.

The mind of Christ

The mind is that aspect of the soul which processes information. While not entirely separate from the heart – which is the seat of affections – or the conscience – the locus of our settled values and priorities – the mind acts on information by analyzing, thinking, comparing, combining, planning, and preparing decisions. The mind is thus crucial in the work of judging and judgment. And if we want to judge others *unto* Jesus Christ, then we must have Jesus Christ on the mind.

Happily, for those who believe in Jesus, this is precisely the case, as Paul explained. We have the mind of Christ. However Jesus analyzed situations, whatever processes He engaged in thinking and sorting through information, and whatever means He employed to arrive at His always just and righteous judgments, we have that same capacity.

At least, that is, in principle. We *have* the mind of Christ, but the mind of Christ is not *fully operational* in any of us. Just because we are Christians and truly love Jesus, doesn’t mean that we always in every situation think like Jesus did or judge as Jesus would. We have the mind of Christ, but having the mind of Christ and *using* the mind of Christ are two different things.

It’s for this reason that the apostles exhort us to grow in Christ, so that we might leave behind our old ways of thinking and follow Jesus in all His ways. If we are to judge the world *unto* Christ-likeness, then we must

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judge it from *increasing Christ-likeness*, in all our thoughts, affections, priorities, and ways. This is a constant struggle, and every believer must engage it faithfully and persistently.

Every thought captive

Our goal should be to make sure that every one of our thoughts is captive to the mind of Jesus Christ, that we, in effect, think Jesus' thoughts after Him about whatever we're thinking or judging. The mindset we need for judging the world is the mindset of our Lord Jesus Christ. And while that mindset is ours, we must work hard to understand its scope and proper use, and to be ready and able to *think* and *judge* with the mind of Christ.

This means spending much time reading, studying, and meditating in the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ps. 119:97-104). The words Jesus speaks to us in the Bible – *all* the Bible – are the words of *life*. Jesus Himself *is* life, as He explained to His disciples (Jn. 14.6). So in the Bible, as we see Jesus and learn about Him (Jn. 5.39), His life flows into us, and we are transformed into His image, soul and body (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The Bible illuminates every aspect of human life and interest. It speaks the life of Jesus for all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, for every person, place, and thing in our Personal Mission Field. As we read and study the Bible, we must pay careful attention to whatever it requires of us. These are the words of life. They give us the mindset of Jesus for thinking about our work, how to make good decisions, where to stand on issues of the day, how to treat the people around us, what use to make of culture, and how, in general, to make the most of every opportunity for proclaiming Jesus by word and deed.

We cannot take every thought captive to make it obedient to Jesus Christ unless we are working hard to gain a deeper, broader, more far-ranging and all-encompassing understanding of the Bible. We have to work at this every day, reading the whole counsel of God over and over (Acts 20.27), sifting the Scriptures to guide us in doing every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17), daily searching and comparing the Scriptures (Acts 17.11; 1 Cor. 2.12, 13), and replacing our worldly and finite ways of thinking about everything with the heavenly and eternal wisdom of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4.17-24).

You will not be fit to fulfill your calling to judge your world until becoming increasingly agile and consistent in taking every thought captive for Christ is your daily commitment and practice.

For reflection

1. Are your Bible reading and study practices sufficient to help you become more agile and consistent in using the mind of Christ? Explain.
2. We keep coming back to the need for being more faithful and diligent in the Scriptures if we are going to fulfill our calling to judge the world. Why is this so?
3. How can believers help one another to grow in the mind of Christ? Can we learn about the mind of Christ from Christians of other generations?

Next steps – Transformation: As you read and study the Scriptures, begin making notes whenever a passage or text speaks directly to something in your Personal Mission Field. Jot that passage down, and meditate on it until it yields some action you can take with the mind of Christ.

7 Know Your Jurisdiction

We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. 2 Corinthians 10.13

A judge's limits

One who is appointed to the work of judging recognizes that certain limits govern this work.

The scope of a local judge, for example, is not as broad – either materially or geographically – as that of a federal judge sitting in a circuit court. And the scope of judges on a circuit court is not as great as that of the justices who sit on the United States Supreme Court. Each judge is limited in the decisions he can make by the scope of authority granted to his bench. Each judge serves the public best by understanding and judging within the scope of his authority, as defined by the Constitution and other relevant statutes.

The same is true for all believers. We are tasked with the duty of judging the world, as Paul explained and as we have been considering in this series (1 Cor. 6.1, 2). The acts of judging and judgment which believers perform further the *shalom* of God, so that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit increase.

But believers are not called to judge *all* the world. It is not my responsibility, for example, to tell you how to run your business, keep your home, raise your children, or vote in the next election. These are *your* responsibilities, *your* choices, and you must *judge with righteous judgment* before the Lord in these and all the other situations of your life.

I may have opinions that speak in a general way to such topics, and I am free to voice them. And it's a good idea for me to develop such opinions, taking every thought captive for obedience to Christ, because matters pertaining to work, home and family life, and many more present themselves to me in my world.

The point is, as Paul was insisting in our text, that to each of us as believers is appointed a “sphere” in which we must exercise righteous judgment and seek the *shalom* of God. We might think of that sphere as our [Personal Mission Field](#), because it is the place to which Jesus has sent us as He was sent, to bring near the Kingdom of God and His *shalom* (Jn. 20.21).

Know your world

Jesus was sent by the Father to a particular place and time. That place can generally be identified as the land of promise God had assigned for His people – the lands of Judea and Samaria, and certain adjacent cities and provinces. Jesus was not sent to China. He was not sent to Europe. Jesus' Personal Mission Field was made up of people and cultures, and He was sent there to announce, embody, and bring near the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom would come at last with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus worked diligently and faithfully throughout His ministry to ready His Personal Mission Field for that event.

Jesus has sent every believer to the world with a similar mission. Each of us has a Personal Mission Field, which consists of places and people to whom we are appointed agents of God's *shalom*. We are the peace-bringers, showing the work of Christ in our lives and calling the world to repent of sin, receive the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom, and enter the rest and *shalom* of God. Only the Holy Spirit can make that happen, but we must understand that we have been sent like Jesus to be always preparing our world for the coming of the King and His Kingdom, whether in the here and now or the there and then.

We are called to expose and overthrow the works of sin and darkness throughout our jurisdiction (Eph. 5.8-14). We bring the light of truth, beauty, and goodness into a world where such ideals are confused, denied, or

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ignored. We work for forms of culture that edify and empower people to know and enjoy God's *shalom*. We recognize all the people we see day-in and day-out as image-bearers of God, whether or not they know or obey Him. Like Jesus, we call people by name; exemplify for them life in the Kingdom of God; stand up to lies and deceptions and expose them; confront evils, bring healing and compassion, and teach the ways of righteousness and *shalom* to all who would listen.

Our Personal Mission Field is our jurisdiction, and we are called to judge it righteously, as Jesus did His.

Judging your Personal Mission Field

Paul gives us four objectives to strive for in judging our Personal Mission Field. First, we must work to make our Personal Mission Field *a place of boasting in the Lord* (vv. 13, 15, 17). Everyone in our Personal Mission Field should know that we know, delight in, and love the Lord. They should hear us talking about Him, catch us singing or praying to Him, and not be surprised that we frequently extol His many virtues to them.

Second, we want our Personal Mission Field to be *a place of mutual benefit and edification* (v. 15). That is, we want everyone in our Personal Mission Field to flourish and realize as much of the image of God as they can in all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities. We work to build people up and to learn from them, so that they might build us up as well. Our Personal Mission Field should be a place of mutual edification, not of backbiting, ugly competition, gossiping, or indifference to others.

Third, we will do our best to make sure *everyone in our Personal Mission Field hears the Good News about Jesus* (v. 14). We will talk about Jesus to people, show by our lives the difference Jesus can make, invite people to read about Jesus or to join us in reading one of the gospels, bring them to church – whatever it takes to make sure everyone in *our* world hears or has the opportunity to hear the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Finally, we will take every opportunity to *expand our Personal Mission Field* (vv. 15, 16). We will welcome new people into our sphere and be open to adding new places and responsibilities to our dossier. Since He poured out His Spirit, Jesus has expanded His Personal Mission Field to the whole world and every generation. He encourages us to do the same.

Your Personal Mission Field is your jurisdiction for exercising righteous judgment. As you pay more careful attention to the people, situations, and places of your Personal Mission Field, you will find abundant opportunities to exercise righteous judgment and to bring the *shalom* of the Lord into your everyday life.

So we need to make sure we're up to the task, ready to judge when judgment is required. And making sure that we are ready will be the focus of Part 3 of our study.

For reflection

1. Have you mapped out your Personal Mission Field? [Watch this brief video](#), then download the worksheet and get started.
2. Of the four goals for your Personal Mission Field mentioned in this article, in which are you most consistent? In which of these do you need to improve?
3. What are the greatest obstacles you face in working your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps – Transformation: Recruit a Christian friend to be a prayer partner with you as you work your Personal Mission Field. Challenge your friend to map out his Personal Mission Field. Meet regularly to share and pray.

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For reflection or discussion

1. Why do we insist it is impossible *not* to judge? Give some examples of daily judgments you make.
2. What does a faithful and diligent self-watch look like for you?
3. What do Christians need to keep in mind as they judge one another?
4. How can we improve in the mind of Christ? What can we do to help make sure that we judge out of that mindset?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.