

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

TO JUDGE THE WORLD 3



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Righteous Judgment

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Righteous Judgment

Contents

Welcome to <i>Righteous Judgment</i>	4
1 Judge Diligently	5
2 Judge Discreetly	7
3 Judge Prayerfully	9
4 Judge Generously	11
5 Judge Lawfully	13
6 Judge Faithfully	15
7 Judge Joyously	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

Righteous Judgment

Welcome to *Righteous Judgment*

Jesus instructed us to judge with righteous judgment. But what does that mean? It means to judge as He Himself would judge, and to do so consistently, faithfully, and joyously.

We can't avoid acts of judging and judgment, so we must learn to judge as Jesus would. Only then can we make the most of the opportunities for the *shalom* of the Lord.

We'll need to pray and study and stay alert. We can bring the peace and joy of the Lord into our world by our everyday acts of judging and judgment. But that won't just happen; we'll have to work hard and practice consistently to learn how to judge according to righteous judgment.

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 Judge Diligently

Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." John 7.21-24

Misjudgment

Jesus was continually misjudged by the people of His day, especially those who should have known better.

In our text, Jesus upbraided the people who challenged Him because they were not *diligent* in considering Him. They marveled at the work He did healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5). But they choked on the fact that He did that work on the Sabbath. No one was supposed to work on the Sabbath, or to cause anyone else to work on the Sabbath. In the mind of the religious leaders of His day, Jesus had broken the Sabbath by *doing* a work, and He had broken it by causing another man to *do a work as well*, by telling him to take up his bed and carry it.

Jesus rebuked His opponents for a failure of judgment. First, they failed to consider the full teaching of God's Law. He explained to them that works of mercy are *always* appropriate on the Sabbath, just as Moses taught. Second, the religious leaders failed to *care* about the man who was healed. Rather than rejoice with him, they charged him with Sabbath-breaking, leaving him, in one sense, worse off than before he was healed.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees' failure of diligence in judging was to instruct them not to judge superficially or in accord with their own convenience or interests ("according to appearance"), but to "judge with righteous judgment." We will unpack His instruction in more detail in Part 3 of our series, *To Judge the World*.

Judge with care

Every day we make judgments of various kinds. We plan, make choices, offer opinions, endorse or question the behavior of others, express our views on issues of the day, and follow certain protocols, procedures, and practices. All these entail acts of judging and judgment. Most of these are small; we would not consider them to be earth-shattering or life-changing. Just routine, small stuff.

But we would be wrong. For each small act of judgment contributes to a foundation and scaffolding for life that is either stable and unshaking, or tentative and infirm.

We need to make sure we are judging with righteous judgment, and judging righteously means, first of all, judging *diligently*. The Pharisees Jesus rebuked did not judge diligently, but merely casually, without any real care or conscientiousness, but merely in defense of their own views and practices.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines one who is diligent as "having or showing care and conscientiousness in one's work or duties." We are judging with righteous judgment when we judge with *care*, and when our acts of judging are done *conscientiously*.

Judging with care entails three things. First, we take care to *make sure we are well prepared* to judge with righteous judgment. We read the Scriptures to discern the mind of Christ, and work hard to bring all our thoughts into submission to His. We take care to anticipate opportunities for judging and judgment that may lie ahead of us, and we prepare ourselves to judge as Jesus would.

Second, we take care to make sure that our acts of judgment are *edifying for ourselves and others*. We want God's

Righteous Judgment

shalom to issue from our choices, decisions, and opinions, so we have to think carefully about the impact of our judgments and the likely outcomes for ourselves and those around us. That is, we care whether our judging and judgments are helpful, edifying, and beneficial, as Jesus cared about that man at the Bethesda pool.

Finally, we take care to *ensure that our acts of judgment are honoring to God*. Do they express His holy and righteous and good Law? Do they implement His just and holy ways? Do they embody His truth? Do they point others to Him?

Obviously, taking care to judge righteously requires that we think carefully, pray faithfully, and judge conscientiously in all our acts of judgment.

Judge conscientiously

Diligence in judging and judgment also requires that we judge *conscientiously*. This also entails three things: attention, initiation, and thoroughness. Here we can be brief.

If we're going to be diligent in judging righteously, then we need to "walk circumspectly," as Paul put it (Eph. 5.15), *paying attention* to what's going on around us and what we're about to say or do at any moment. God gives us the time of our lives as an arena within which to know, enjoy, and serve Him, so that His *shalom* might flourish and His glory be known. We can exercise this kind of judging and judgment in every area of our lives, but we must be *mindful* of our time and *pay close attention* to everything we are doing with the time God allots us.

Second, when opportunities for exercising righteous judgment arise, we must not wait around to be asked. We must *take the initiative*, expressing our views or making decisions with care to ensure that love for God and neighbors are the objective. Jesus took the initiative to embody and proclaim God's Kingdom; He didn't wait around for people to ask His views or seek His help. He was always on the go, always prepared, always paying attention to His surroundings, and always initiating grace and truth toward the people around Him.

Finally, being conscientious in judgment means we must judge *thoroughly*. We need to see our acts of judgment through to the end, doing whatever we must to ensure that the full weight of divine truth flows into every situation, bathing and shaping and finishing our acts of judging and judgment with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

We must judge, and we must make sure to judge righteously. This means, in the first instance, being *diligent* in all our acts of judging and judgment to judge carefully and conscientiously, that the judgment of Jesus and the *shalom* of God may be achieved.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to be *diligent* in judging with righteous judgment?
2. Do you agree that all our daily, small acts of judging and judgment matter? Explain.
3. Review this article. How can you improve in judging *diligently* – conscientiously and with care – in all your judging and judgments?

Next steps – Transformation: Identify one way to show more care in judging, and one way to improve conscientiousness in your acts of judgment. Pray about these, then make sure to practice them diligently throughout the day.

2 Judge Discreetly

Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” Luke 12.13, 14

Mind your own business

We must be diligent in the work of judging and judgment, caring enough to judge righteously, and doing so conscientiously, making the most of every opportunity for expressing God’s truth and pursuing His *shalom*.

At the same time, we need to keep in mind that not everything is our business. The apostle Paul urges us to increase in love for our neighbor, which is the proper motivation for sound and righteous judgment. At the same time, he counsels us to “mind your own business” lest we overstep the bounds of our duty toward our neighbors and compromise our walk with the Lord (1 Thess. 4.9-12).

Jesus is the model of righteous judgment for us as it relates to judging discreetly. Asked to intervene in a family matter, Jesus rebuked His appellant, indicating that it was not His calling to take up such matters. Elders and judges existed in Israel to handle such affairs. His calling lay elsewhere.

We judge discreetly when we distinguish those matters which fall within the purview of our judgment from those that do not, and take care in our judging not to overstep our bounds. Thus, we exercise *discretion* in judging and judgment, so that we avoid causing unnecessary offense to others. By doing our best to avoid giving offense, we abide within the bounds of judging where God can be glorified (1 Cor. 10.31, 32).

How can we know?

Walking the line between diligence and discretion in judging can be tricky. On the one hand, we want to make the most of every opportunity for exercising righteous judgment, taking the initiative as often as possible. On the other hand, we don’t want to interfere with the lawful and reasonable responsibilities of others, lest we be seen to be meddlesome busybodies or fools (Prov. 26.17).

How can we know when a situation requiring righteous judgment is not *our* responsibility? Here are a couple of guidelines to follow.

First, make sure you *know your jurisdiction*. Your duty for judging with righteous judgment lies only within the purview of the places and people to whom God sends you each day. Of course, your sphere of influence includes larger, occasional matters of judgment – such as voting or responding to an emergency – that don’t typically show up in your Personal Mission Field. Our focus here is on those everyday situations requiring righteous judgment, and how we can judge discreetly, following Jesus and Paul.

Paul was careful not to transgress into others’ spheres of influence (2 Cor. 10.13). Part of being diligent in exercising righteous judgment is taking *care* that we do not overstep the bounds of our appointed sphere. We are called to seek the Kingdom and glory of God within the relationships, roles, and responsibilities that fall to us. The more we review our Personal Mission Field in prayer, and the more careful and attentive we are to pursue our calling in love for God and neighbors, the easier it will be to discern when matters requiring righteous judgment are someone else’s business, rather than ours.

Second, we must at all times *recognize the authority and responsibility of others* for exercising judgment. This is obvious in matters of criminal justice. Courts and judges are appointed to render verdicts and issue judgments and sentences. We may not take the law into our own hands.

Righteous Judgment

We must, however, encourage everyone in our sphere of influence – since *all* of us are responsible and bear certain authority – to take *God's Law* in hand and learn to judge with righteous judgment.

Judgment belongs to the Lord

The progress and prosperity of the Kingdom of God do not ultimately hang on our work of judging and judgment. Salvation belongs to the Lord, and He alone is the righteous Judge. We must do our best to be diligent and discreet in exercising righteous judgment, but at the end of the day, we rest in the Lord and His mighty power. We may have failed to intervene in some situation, or we may have overstepped the bounds of our legitimate concern, and thus have compromised discretion in judgment.

We must rest all our acts of judging and judgment in the Lord's hand, considering, undertaking, and reviewing them in prayer, and committing all needs for righteous judgment into the hands of the Lord.

As we seek the Lord in prayer concerning our calling to judge the world, He can help us to judge diligently and discreetly, and thus bring His *shalom* into the everyday situations of our lives, and at the same time, glorify Himself at the same time.

For reflection

1. What do we mean by exercising *diligence* in judging with righteous judgment?
2. Can you think of a situation requiring righteous judgment that is *beyond* your responsibility or concern? Though you might not intervene here, how can you use prayer to address the situation?
3. What can you do to sharpen your focus on your proper jurisdiction for judging righteously – your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps – Preparation: Be sure to begin and end your day in prayer, keeping a primary focus on your Personal Mission Field, and to prayerfully consider all acts of judging and judgment before undertaking to judge. How can you remember to do that?

3 Judge Prayerfully

*Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90.16, 17*

Indispensable

Next to the Word of God, prayer is the most important resource you can bring to bear on the work of judging and judgment.

We need the mind of Christ to judge with righteous judgment. We must be able to see and evaluate situations as He would, and to discern courses of action which can lead to the *shalom* of God. We grow in the mind of Christ as we commune with Him, praying without ceasing and about everything (1 Thess. 5.17; Phil. 4.6, 7). We will be more likely to think Jesus' thoughts after Him if we bring all the situations of our life to Him, waiting on Him in prayer to direct our thoughts, choices, and actions.

The more this is our practice in situations where we have time to think about judging with righteous judgment, the more we will improve in such judgment whenever we have to judge quickly. The mind of Christ in us grows by feeding and exercise. Feed your mind with the Word of Jesus Christ, and then exercise your thoughts *into* Christ concerning how you should judge in any situation. Doing so consistently will shape your thinking in the way of Christ-likeness, so that you can think Jesus' thoughts after Him whatever comes before you.

We need to work harder at prayer, and especially with a focus on the many acts of judging and judgment we must perform each day. Our text offers sound advice for making good use of prayer for judging according to righteous judgment.

Keep the goal in mind

The goal of our lives as Christians is to glorify God, to speak and act in a way that the hope that is within us – even our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 1.27) – fills and overflows from within us (Jn. 7.37-39), to be observed and experienced by others (1 Pet. 3.15).

As Jesus is shaping our minds, He will also shape our lives, so that He increases in all our words and deeds and we, and our selfish interests and ways, will decrease (Jn. 3.30). We want God's glory to "appear" and His "beauty" to be upon us in all we do. Those two words in our text are expressions of adornment, splendor, and delight. Our lives are adorned with Jesus when He is evident in us, and as He fills the spaces of our lives with Himself (Eph. 4.7-10). Our goal must be to live so that Christ is manifested in us at all times. Likewise, in all our judging and judgment we want Christ to be seen and His righteousness and *shalom* to obtain.

But this will be difficult to achieve unless we devote time to seeking Jesus and meditating on Him in prayer. Thus, quite apart from anything else we do in prayer, we need to set our minds on Christ, exalted in glory (Col. 3.1-3), and carefully consider and absorb as much as we can of the Biblical teaching about His radiance, beauty, majesty, splendor and might. We need to see Jesus as He is before we will know how to think and judge as He does.

You can increase in the beauty and glory of the Lord by adding meditation to your prayers, in which you silently contemplate images and descriptions of Jesus, or other ways that He reveals Himself in His Word.

Righteous Judgment

Singing to the Lord can also enhance your vision of Jesus, especially if you choose hymns that focus emphatically on Him, such as “More about Jesus” or “Jesus Shall Reign” or “My Jesus, I Love Thee.”

Work hard to see the glory and beauty of God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6), and the Holy Spirit will use those times to shape you more into His image (2 Cor. 3.12-18), so that in your mind, heart, conscience, words, and deeds – in all your acts of judging and judgment – the righteousness of Jesus will be known.

Pray specifically

The second guideline from our text relates to our daily work. Work is simply the exertion of energy toward some tangible outcome. All our work as believers is Kingdom work (Matt. 6.33). The work Jesus has given us to do includes, but is greater than, the job at which we work. Just as you approach the daily tasks of your job, previewing and preparing for them in specific detail, so you must do with *all* the work you’ve been given to do, and this includes all your work of judging and judgment in your Personal Mission Field.

In the morning, as you begin your day, lay before the Lord everything and everyone you expect to engage in your Personal Mission Field that day. Seek wisdom, and the filling and fruit of the Spirit, for specific people and tasks. Ask the Lord to guard you against any temptation to walk in the flesh rather than in the Spirit (Gal. 5.16-23). Pray for people by name, and according to your understanding of their need for mercy and grace from the Lord. Pray about meetings, projects, events, duties – everything you will face that day. Set your heart and mind on the Lord concerning all these things.

Then, as you go through the day, keep the conversation going. Thank the Lord for His presence and blessings. Ask Him for mercy and grace to help in your time of need (Heb. 4.16). Pray in the midst of things. Pray as you move on to other things. Pray about everything, with supplication and thanksgiving, and the mind of Christ will inform all your acts of judging, and the *shalom* of God will guard your heart and mind, and spread out to the people around you like rivers of living water (Phil. 4.6, 7).

Do not take prayer lightly. Prayer is hard work. None of us prays as well as we should, so we all need to work harder at this most characteristic of all Christian disciplines. Coupled with growing in your understanding of God’s Word, growing in your vision of Jesus and your ability to bathe everything in your life in prayer will fit you well for judging according to righteous judgment. You will be more likely to judge diligently and discreetly when you judge prayerfully.

For reflection

1. How does your present practice of prayer help you in judging with righteous judgment?
2. Focusing on Jesus, on seeing Him and delighting in Him in prayer, is one of the most important aspects of a healthy prayer life. Why?
3. What can you do to bring more prayer, more consistently, into all aspects of your daily life? How will doing so help you to judge with righteous judgment?

Next steps – Transformation: Memorize Psalm 90.16, 17 and use it to guide your daily preparations in prayer. When you’ve done so for a week, share your experience with a Christian friend.

4 Judge Generously

“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. . . . Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7.1, 2, 12

Desirable judgment

You and I are not the only people who are daily involved in the work of judging and judgment. Everyone else is as well.

And that inevitably means that some of the judgments others make will have to do with us. The people around us will make judgments about us – about our work, our appearance, the way we treat them, our opinions and views, and much else beside. We can’t stop people from judging us, any more than they can stop us from judging them. We’re trying to make sure that all our judging and judgments are *righteous* judgments, done with diligence, discretion, prayer, and more.

And isn’t this the way *we* want to be judged as well? We don’t want people misunderstanding or misrepresenting us to others, or making decisions about us based on false perceptions, wrong assumptions, or untrue notions. We want to be judged fairly; we want to be judged *generously*, given the benefit of the doubt, and treated with respect and love.

And so we must learn to judge generously as well. And this is yet another aspect of what it means to judge according to righteous judgment; this is the way Jesus would judge. We want others to look upon us with the mind of Christ – understanding, patient, gracious, edifying, and forgiving. And since this is how we want others to judge us, then we must judge them this way as well.

But can we be more specific? What is it like to judge others *generously*?

Serving others

Paul has some advice for us here, in particular regarding when our judging and judgments involve another person. First, we need to make sure that our judgments are rendered with the intention of *-serving others*, rather than *vaunting ourselves*: “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom. 12.3). We ought to think of ourselves as servants of Christ and others and stewards of the grace of God (1 Cor. 4.1). We will be more likely to realize the Lord’s *shalom* if our judgments are rendered out of a heart of grace and service.

The judgments we render – the opinions we express, the criticisms we offer, the course corrections we suggest – must never be intended as put-downs. Our objective, as we have seen, is to build others up *in Christ* by judging them with *the mind of Christ*. And this is how we want to be judged ourselves. Any comments or suggestions directed toward me, that I recognize as intended to help or edify me, I am much more likely to receive than if they are meant only to criticize or condemn.

Remember, as Paul reminds us, the Lord Himself stands as Judge over all our acts of judging and judgment (Rom. 12.4). He is looking to see whether our acts of judgment reflect what He Himself would do. To the extent they do, we can expect Him to be in them with us. But if our acts of judgment are merely self-serving, we can expect the Lord to oppose us, even to the point of bringing discipline against us for straying from His righteous path (Heb. 12.3-11).

Righteous Judgment

Better than ourselves

Second, in judging others generously we must try to see them as better than ourselves, and thus as deserving respect, dignity, honor, and address appropriate to one who ranks above us: “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself*” (Phil. 2.3). Imagine the two of you as members of a royal court or invited guests at the party of a distinguished person. Imagine yourself as lowlier – in rank or preference or social status – than your friend. It’s hard to do, I know, but this is exactly what Paul commends, because this is what Jesus did. Jesus “made Himself of no reputation” (v. 7) as He came to judge the sins of the world.

Like Jesus, esteeming others better than ourselves may involve suffering – denial, rejection, mocking, scorn, or worse. Part of what it means to regard others as better than ourselves is to be willing to have our observations, opinions, or suggestions rejected outright, even with anger and scorn. It is not our place in judging others to make them agree with us, only to hear us; and for others to hear us when we have something difficult to say, they’re going to have to believe that we have their best interests in mind and we esteem them highly, even better than ourselves.

Jesus, Who practiced such judgment with expert skill and powerful effects, can give us the grace we require in our times of need, so that we can judge others generously, as we ourselves would like to be judged (Heb. 4.16).

Judge actions, not motives

Finally, we judge others generously when we focus on actions, not motives. We cannot know what others may have been thinking, or what their intentions were in something they might have done or said: “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?” (1 Cor. 2.11) We can only observe and render judgments on people’s actions, for this is all we can see.

We would not want someone to presume to know our thoughts, desires, or motivations in any situation. We would want them to think highly of us, give us the benefit of the doubt as to what we were trying to accomplish, and even consider that all our motives are devoted to Christ, His Kingdom, and His righteousness. And if we sense this is the case, we will be more open to hearing them regarding some particular word or deed concerning which they have made a judgment. As this is how we would like to be treated, we are judging others generously when we do the same, focusing on observable behaviors rather than presumed motives and intents.

Making judgments can be difficult at times, especially when those judgments involve others. But if we can concentrate on judging generously, we will fulfill the righteous requirements of judgment and be more likely to receive a fruitful hearing, than if we fail in humility or service, or if we presume on others in areas beyond our ken.

For reflection

1. How might you be able to tell when someone was judging you generously in a manner? What would you hear in that person’s voice? See in that person’s countenance?
2. We will be more effective in edifying others when we approach them as servants. Explain.
3. How can we keep our egos out of the way in our acts of judging and judgment?

Next steps – Preparation: As we have seen in this series, prayer is the place where we must prepare ourselves for the acts of judging and judgment that we will perform during the day. How can you use your prayers to prepare to judge generously?

5 Judge Lawfully

Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Romans 7.12 (my translation)

Bad news for those who neglect God's Law

I have bad news for believers who, whether by intention or neglect, ignore the Law of God and are led in their ethics by New Testament principles only: Sooner or later you're going to run into an apostle for whom the Law of God is central to his ethical teaching.

At that point you will have to make a judgment: Either you will judge the apostle mistaken, and reinterpret his teaching to fit your preferred view; or you will accept the apostle's teaching and find yourself at odds with him.

The first option is the path of a [hermeneutics of convenience](#). Reading Scripture this way, you do not allow the Bible to speak for itself; instead, you qualify, reinterpret, overlook, or deny the straightforward apostolic text, and insist on the rightness of your own view, pointing to the spirit of the age as your support. This path leads to increasing compromise of God's Word with the temper of the times.

The second path leads to a good bit of hemming and hawing and hedging as you try to hold off having to embrace the Law of God while, at the same time, endorsing the apostles who do. This path leads to the debilitation of the soul, because by choosing this route, you quench the Spirit's work of teaching and equipping you to live by the Law of God (Ezek. 36.26, 27), and limp along in your faith with a truncated view of God's Word.

Either way, by neglecting the Law of God you forfeit the ability to judge with righteous judgment. And that means that your judging and judgment will not be in line with the instruction of Christ, and you will be left to drift on the stormy seas of unbelief and disobedience.

And besides, if you neglect the Law of God, your prayers will not find favor with the Lord (Prov. 28.9).

I told you it was bad news.

Jesus, too

The apostles Paul, Peter, James, and John frequently appealed to the Law of God to argue ethical points and equip their readers to exercise righteous judgment. Paul insisted that the Law of God is *righteous*; therefore, we should expect it to provide plenty of insight to guide us in all our judging and judgment. The Kingdom of God, Paul explained, *is* righteousness – the fruit of righteous judgment borne out in all areas of life, culture and society – and that righteousness leads to *shalom* and joy (Rom. 14.17, 18).

And seeking the Kingdom, Jesus insisted, is the believer's highest priority in life (Matt. 6.33).

Jesus taught that we should aspire to greatness in His Kingdom, and greatness in the Kingdom comes, in part, He explained, from learning, obeying, and teaching the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19). If we are to judge others with the same love we want to be judged by ourselves, we will need to give much attention to the Law of God. For as Jesus explained, the Law of God, together with the prophets who were chief advocates of that Law, provides the true path of love for God and neighbors, and therefore, by extension, of righteous judgment.

What then shall we do?

Righteous Judgment

Delighting in God's Law

Obviously, we want to get to a place in our walk with the Lord and our work in our Personal Mission Field where we're no longer *neglecting* the Law of God, but actively *delighting in* and *obeying it* (Psalm 119:9-16). Not *unto* salvation, mind you, but *because we are saved*. Here is not the place for an exhaustive argument on the central importance of the Law of God in the life of a New Testament believer (for that, [click here](#)). Instead, assuming that Jesus and the apostles had it right about the Law, let's consider some things we can do to improve our understanding, love for, and use of the Law of God in judging with righteous judgment.

First, use Psalm 119 as part of your daily prayers. Pray one section of the psalm each day. Let the psalmist guide you in how to think about the Law. Meditate on his obvious wonder and delight in the commandments, statutes, and precepts of God. Pray along with the psalmist for greater insight to the Law, so that you will be eager to learn and obey the Law as the psalmist leads.

Second, memorize the Ten Commandments. These are the foundation of God's Law, upon which all the other statutes and precepts of God's Law are erected to show us how to apply the Law in particular situations.

Third, read the book of Deuteronomy regularly, perhaps half a chapter in the morning, and the other half at night. It's very likely that the book of Deuteronomy is the book of the Law Israel's kings were required to copy, read, and obey (Deut. 17:18-20). By meditating on the Law of God day and night, you will be more likely to increase in your ability to judge according to righteous judgment (Ps. 1).

Finally, as you meditate on the Law in the morning, think about the day ahead and the people and situations you are likely to encounter. Ask the Lord to show you any ways your reading might inform or guide your life and judging. You should do this for all your reading of God's Word, but in particular for the Law of God. In the evening, let your reading of the Law shine light on the day past, to help you learn from any mistakes or celebrate any victories.

Get to know God's Law. Discover its beauty, glory, and practical wisdom. Submit to and obey it, and you will come to love it as Jesus and the apostles did, and as all do who desire to see God's *shalom* come to light through their work of judging and judgment.

For reflection

1. Do you think you need to spend more time learning the Law of God? Explain.
2. Can we grow in the righteousness of Jesus Christ apart from the holy and righteous and good Law of God? Explain.
3. What are some of the obvious challenges we face in trying to give the Law of God more priority of place in our calling to judge the world?

Next steps – Transformation: Begin practicing the suggestions outlined in this article. Take what you are learning about God's Law into your daily work of judging and judgment.

6 Judge Faithfully

*God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.
How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked?* Psalm 82.1, 2

*Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,
But such as keep the law contend with them.* Proverbs 28.4

No vacuum

Christians are called to judge the world (1 Cor. 6.2). Not to condemn it, but to make choices and decisions, select courses of action, and engage practices that bring the *shalom* of God into the world. From the beginning of creation, God's intention has been that His goodness should fill the earth (Gen. 1.31; Ps. 27.13), and the way He has designed for this to happen is through the good works His people do as Jesus fills them and overflows into all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities (Eph. 2.10; Jn. 7.37-39; Eph. 4.7-10).

But this does not occur in a vacuum. Spiritual forces of wickedness are continuously active in the world, sowing lies, spreading deceit, and inciting people to evil. Wherever the goodness of God is not present and increasing, wickedness and evil will make progress (Eph. 5.15-17). Despite Jesus' victory on the cross and His resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, the days in which we live are evil. While the attribution of the famous saying is debated, its truth lines up well with Paul's teaching: The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

Or to do the wrong or *unjust* thing, as the case may be.

Put in terms of our texts, wherever believers fail to exercise righteous judgment, there evil will gain a foothold and increase. If we hesitate to judge righteously, or judge unjustly rather than righteously, we are adding to the flourishing of evil rather than the progress of God's *shalom*.

We must not take lightly our calling to judge the world. If we withdraw, hesitate, or turn away in situations where righteous judgment is required, or if we judge any way other than by the righteousness of Christ, we give place to the devil and his wicked schemes. By judging faithfully, as often as is necessary, we resist the devil and send him fleeing; and we gain precious ground for the progress of Christ's rule of righteousness, *shalom*, and joy (Jms. 4.7; Rom. 14.17, 18).

And when we bear in mind that all aspects of our lives are continuously watched over by our heavenly Father, this makes judging faithfully a most important duty.

Praise and partiality to wickedness?

As our texts make clear, to fail in exercising righteous judgment is to praise the wicked and give way to their schemes. Psalm 82 should be understood as God calling the rulers of His people together to rebuke them for their failures in exercising sound judgment. Jesus cited this psalm against those who opposed Him, clearly suggesting that they were failing in their duty to judge with righteous judgment, and so were opening themselves to the judgment of God (cf. Jn. 10.34-38).

We who are called to rule our lives according to the righteous judgment of the Lord must understand that God does not sit quietly by while we veer from or avoid the path of righteousness (Heb. 12.3-11). We must judge faithfully whenever judging and judgment is required.

Righteous Judgment

Proverbs 28.4 applies to any believe who, by neglecting the Law of God, hampers his ability to judge with righteous judgment. Whether we fail or falter in judgment, the effect is the same: We miss an opportunity to make the most of our time for bringing goodness and *shalom* into the world, and we praise and show partiality to wickedness instead.

Contend with wickedness

Judging with righteous judgment is a struggle. In situations requiring righteous judgment, we contend with wickedness – not the frightening, violent, projectile-vomiting kind of wickedness, so often depicted in pop culture. But the wickedness that allows sin to continue, put-downs to go unopposed, cut corners to remain cut, lies and half-truths to prevail, fit and timely words of edification to be left unspoken, opportunities for kindness or beauty or civility to slip by, and the pall of wickedness to remain in place.

We must prepare ourselves for this struggle in all the ways we have discussed in this study and more. But preparation is not enough; we must be ready and committed to faithfulness in judging and judgment, so that when the opportunity arises to fulfill our calling, we will step into it confidently, with grace and truth.

Is there a risk? Of course. There's always a risk when you take a stand for righteousness. But even when our judgments are opposed, resented, contradicted, or ignored, still, we will have made the effort to stand for righteousness, and God will see. The righteous judgments we make concerning our own lives and choices will contribute to our becoming more like Christ. When we must judge situations or people that come within our purview, at the very least, we make a stand for whatever is right, true, and Christ-like.

We go wrong when we balk at exercising righteous judgment, or when our judgments are other than what Christ Himself would proffer. But we cannot go wrong by judging faithfully, preparing ourselves in study and prayer, and acting graciously and obediently when opportunities for judging and judgment come our way.

For reflection

1. What do we mean by saying that we do not practice judging and judgment in a vacuum?
2. What can you do to make sure your acts of judging and judgment will be according to righteousness?
3. How can you overcome the temptation *not* to judge when righteous judgment is required?

Next steps – Preparation: Make sure you begin each day thinking about the people and situations ahead and devoting yourself in prayer to judge with righteous judgment at every opportunity.

7 Judge Joyously

*We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness,
In the midst of Your temple.
According to Your name, O God,
So is Your praise to the ends of the earth;
Your right hand is full of righteousness.
Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah be glad,
Because of Your judgments.* Psalm 48.9-11

Reluctant to judge?

It is instructive that this passage begins in lovingkindness, moves into praise and righteousness, and ends in gladness and rejoicing, and all because of the judgments of God.

Even though judging and judgment are unavoidable, many Christians will balk at the prospect. We don't think we're qualified. We've convinced ourselves that nobody cares what we think and nothing we might do will change a situation. We say we shouldn't make such a big deal out of everything; not everything matters, after all. So we fail to speak a word of kindness when the opportunity arises. Or we hesitate to offer an opinion on some issue or practice. Or we make frivolous, unfruitful choices in how we use our time, simply because they're more convenient or less risky. We hesitate to do a good work or speak a true word because we lack confidence or boldness, and we don't want to upset anyone.

Rather than judge with righteousness at every opportunity, we give place to the evil of the times by judging not at all. Thus, we fail to usher in the *shalom* of God.

Our text encourages us to think better about our calling to judge the world. The judgments of God issue from His lovingkindness. Because He loves the world, He makes sure that His true and righteous judgments are operating throughout it (Ps. 19.9; 105.7). The judgments of God are grounded in Himself and His Law of liberty (Jms. 2.12), freeing us from sin and evil into life as God intends. The judgments of God bring praise to Him because they inject the eternal and righteous God into the lives and situations of people in real, albeit small ways. By the judgments of God, righteousness confronts our present evil age, and the gladness and rejoicing God knows within Himself are introduced to the world.

So when we fail in our calling to judge the world, for whatever reason, we deprive ourselves of the gladness of the Lord, and the people and situations of our lives are deprived of His joy.

The joy of God's judgment

We do not often link the ideas of judgment and joy. *Judgment* invokes ideas of displeasure, disappointment, condemnation, resentment, and the like. As long as this is our view of judging and judgment, it's no wonder we're not more active and consistent in judging the world.

But the judgment of God is the means whereby His Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. Through His judgment against His own Son, our sins are forgiven and a sure way into the presence of God has been provided. In His presence are fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11).

When the Holy Spirit comes to save us, He judges our sins and sinfulness, leading us to confess our sins, repent, and believe the Good News of forgiveness and joy in Jesus.

Righteous Judgment

And when we judge with righteous judgment, out of loving hearts seeking the *shalom* of God, we open ourselves to the joy of the Lord and offer the benefits of His Kingdom – righteousness, peace, and *joy* – to the world.

The judgments of God are in all the earth, so that all the earth might know His *shalom* and enter into the joy of Jesus' reign. When we judge with righteous judgment, no matter how great or small the situation, we engage the joy of the Lord and become joy-bringers to our world.

Rejoice in judging and judgment

But let's be clear about this much: The joy that comes from judging with righteous judgment comes neither from our work of judging and judgment nor from the consequences that issue therefrom. Joy is not grounded in temporal circumstances, whether those we create by our acts of judging or those that ensue from the choices, decisions, and courses of action we take.

Joy is in the Lord, and the joy we know in this life comes from being *in the joy of the Lord* because we are in Him and His will when we judge with righteous judgment. The reality of that joy, that overriding sense of wellbeing that nothing can alter or disturb, is to be found only in the Lord, in His presence, by our acts of righteous judgment nestled in the joy that inheres in Him alone. Joy in judging comes from the Lord, and whether our acts of judging and judgment work out as we'd hoped or bring us into disfavor with our present, sinful age, we can know joy.

Let lovingkindness guide your acts of judging and judgment, so that when you judge, judge joyously. Seek the *shalom* of God, that He may be praised and that His gladness and rejoicing may flourish in every aspect of your life. Follow the righteousness of Jesus in your everyday choices, decisions, words, and deeds. *Judge with righteous judgment*, and you will know the joy that comes from being in and with the Lord of joy.

For reflection

1. What is joy? How does joy differ from happiness? Why does joy *not* come from temporal circumstances?
2. Our acts of judging and judgment offer the joy of the Lord to the world. Does that mean the world will always receive it? Explain.
3. Joy is found only in the Lord. How do our acts of righteous judgment bring us into that joy?

Next steps – Transformation: Are you finding that you're becoming more conscious of and conscientious about judging with righteous judgment? Why or why not?

Righteous Judgment

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to judge with righteous judgment?
2. What can keep us from judging with righteous judgment? How can we overcome these hindrances?
3. What is the joy of the Lord? How do you experience it? On what does it depend? Why should we expect our acts of judging and judgment to be joyful?
4. If we fail to judge the world – to judge *our* world – where does that leave the world?
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.