

PRACTICAL WISDOM TO JUDGING RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

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Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.
John 7:24

Judging another human being by your thoughts or actions is natural to man. Being based in pride, men often look on others with either envy or disdain. We tend to set some men on pedestals, thinking they are the paragon of some particularly desirable attribute; or we look down our nose at them thinking we are so much better. Men have a natural tendency to glory in their wisdom, strength, or riches. Hear what Jeremiah 9 says:

23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:
24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23, 24

Most of us are familiar with, and take heed to, the warning in Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Additionally, James 4:6 says, "...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

This pride-inspired judgment of our neighbors shows up regularly in religion. I think of the hierarchical system of the Roman Catholic beast; with their popes, cardinals, bishops, arch-bishops, priests, etc., etc. And that system is not the only one. The Jewish religion has had their share of competing Rabbis. The Sunni and Shiite groups contend constantly. Every mainline religious denomination has been plagued with pride and unrighteous judging, more commonly understood as respect of persons. Independent Baptists have not been immune. We are a guilty as the others. We may not have popes and cardinals, but we have our doctors and editors and certain camps. Just open to the center page of any Baptist periodical and you will see the glorying of men in its most obvious form

The perfect Lord Jesus Christ warned us of this prideful-judgmental respect of persons when he gave us his parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Please read the following from Luke 18:

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:
10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.
11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.
12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.
13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.
14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The bad fruit of pride is manifested most easily and distastefully when a person judges a fellow brother. But there is also the human fault of judging God wrongfully – or charging God foolishly. This happens when a man complains or gives the impression that something that happened to him is “bad.”

Take a lesson from Job, after he received the hard news of his losses:

20 Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,
21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.
22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

Job 1:20-22

As believers, we ought to be careful to not judge too quickly. We generally lack all the facts to make a righteous judgment. Assumptions are made, and those assumptions are almost always based in evil thoughts. As humans, we are by nature negative and critical. It takes much effort and discipline to force ourselves to be positive and encouraging – looking for the good rather than looking for the evil.

Charity believeth and hopeth all things (1 Corinthians 13:7). With love, you have a tendency to think and believe the best of people.

Paul said, “judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness... (1 Corinthians 4:5).

You see, outside of using properly the word of God, we are not very good judges. A family gets a flat tire right before their trip, and they think it is “bad.” But do they know that short delay possibly saved them a wreck where their children were injured?

And when Brother Jones got a new job, we think it is “good,” until we learn that job exposes him to ungodly things and keeps him out of worship services.

We think of the Apostle Paul. He had a thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7), the messenger of Satan to buffet him – about which many believers today would constantly complain. Most believers would say that was bad. But God understood the benefit in Paul’s enduring the grief – it kept him usable before the Lord, and prevented him from being exalted above measure.

I think of how our brother Paul spent so much time in bonds. I should think he would have been much more “productive” if he were to travel freely about the kingdom, preaching the kingdom of God. But God is in control. Because of his incarcerations he was able to write numerous epistles. These prison epistles are a great blessing to many millions of Christians today, and have been over the centuries. What I may think is bad, can actually be good. And what I may think is good, can actually be bad.

And, I would propose to the reader that as you meditate on that thought, you will realize many things in your life that at first you thought was good turned out to be bad. And many a “perceived curse” turned out to be a blessing.

This reminds me of the comical routine by Hee-Haw's Archie Campbell, called, *That's good, That's bad*.

I have it shown here for those who are not familiar with the routine:

Script of Archie Campbell's *That's Good, That's Bad* Routine

Archie: Hey I guess you heard about my terrible misfortune.
Roy: No, what happened?
Archie: Yeah, my great uncle died.
Roy: Oh that's bad!
Archie: No, that's good!
Roy: How's come?
Archie: Well, when he died, he left me 50,000 dollars.
Roy: Oh that's good!
Archie: No, that's bad!
Roy: How come?
Archie: When the Internal Revenue got thru with it, all I had left was 25,000 dollars.
Roy: Oh that's bad
Archie: No, that's good.
Roy: How come?
Archie: Well, I bought me an airplane and learned to fly.
Roy: Well, that's good.
Archie: No, that's bad.
Roy: How come?
Archie: Well, I was flying upside down the other day and I fell outta the dern thing.
Roy: Well, that's bad.
Archie: No, that's good.
Roy: How come?
Archie: Well, when I looked down under me and there was a great big ole haystack.
Roy: Well, that's good.
Archie: No, that's bad.
Roy: How come?
Archie: Well, I got a little closer and I saw a pitchfork aimed right at me.
Roy: Well, that's bad.
Archie: No, that's good
Roy: How come?
Archie: I missed the pitchfork.
Roy: Well, that's good.
Archie: No, that's bad.
Roy: How come?
Archie: I missed the haystack, too.
Roy: Well, that's bad.
Archie: No, that's good.
Roy: How come?
Archie: Well, I bounced around a few minutes and an ambulance come and took me to a hospital.
Roy: Well, that's good.
Archie: No, that's bad.
Roy: How come?
Archie: Well, I was in the hospital there for a while and I took a turn for the nurse.

Roy: That's bad.
Archie: No, that's good.
Roy: How come?
Archie: Well, my wife came in one day and caught me kissing this nurse.
Roy: Oh that's bad
Archie: No, that's good. She said if that was the way I was gonna act I could have that pretty nurse, she was gonna pack her clothes and go back home to momma.
Roy: Oh that's good.
Archie: You're dern right that's good.

This author does not agree with Roy and Archie's final judgment, but the routine gives a pretty good illustration as to how we can think something is good when it is not, or we think it is bad and it is not.

Actually, if you love God, you have this promise:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

This verse does not say that *all things are good*, but that *all things work together for good*, to them that love God.

I heard a preacher put it this way, using an illustration of baking a cake:

Raw eggs – they do not taste that good
Raw flour – that does not taste too good
Sugar – that tastes good in small amounts
Salt – that tastes good in small amounts
Yeast – that does not taste good
Baking powder – that does not taste good
Vanilla – that tastes good in very small amounts

Individually, these things are really not desirable to eat. However, when mixed well in the right amounts and put in heat, they make a very tasty cake.

God works in the same manner in our lives. Many individual things may not be tasteful, but they are necessary and will work with the other things for good in the life of a believer who loves God. And that heat that God applies in trials “bakes in” wonderful and usable abilities in the child of God.

We must be careful to not judge too rashly or too quickly, whether the things that happen to us are good or bad. Only when we use God's word carefully and clearly can we judge righteously. And regardless of whether they appear good or bad we should remember to be thankful to God (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Read the passage in John 7:23, 24:

23 If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath

day?

24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

In this passage certain Jews condemned the Lord – to the point of being angry – that he had healed a man on the Sabbath. I am sure they thought they were right and that they had a good understanding of the word of God – but they did not.

The Saviour said clearly in verse 24: “judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”

Here is the beginning of bad judgment: Judging according to the appearance. This is most commonly seen today by the reaction of the common people to the broadcasts of the news networks. They react so easily and quickly simply based on what the video monitor says. They normally do not research all the facts. They just react and judge. What a danger this is. They get “programmed” by the “program.” Most people are so easily influenced to think according to the world.

But we must go beyond the appearance and truly judge righteously.

Think of a few examples in scripture:

- God blessed the Hebrew midwives for lying and disobeying pharaoh’s decree (Exodus 1:15-21).
- David’s response to Goliath’s challenge ended in the lad killing the giant (1 Samuel 17).
- The Lord’s temptation in the wilderness proved his impeccability (Mark 4).
- Paul’s imprisonment in Philippi ended in the jailor being saved (Acts 16).
- Paul’s thorn in the flesh prevented his exaltation above measure (2 Corinthians 12).
- The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ provided salvation for all.

Additionally, the Lord warned against “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” They look one way on the outside, but they are not as they appear. We know a tree by its fruit, but there was a fig tree that looked good, but the Lord found no fruit on it.

You do not have to live long on this earth before you realize there are many men who look good on the outside, but they are wicked on the inside (certain religious leaders, politicians, entertainers, etc.). And conversely, many a plain man has proved to be a saint, and a man of no reputation has been shown to be very wise.

Jesus said to “judge righteous judgment”

What does righteous judgment involve? It is *not* judging just because you “know the bible.” It is not judging carnally. It is being careful how you judge, first considering yourself, knowing you will be judged by the same standard. It involves judging *yourself first*, before judging others. Jesus commanded this in Matthew 7:1-5:

1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

What does righteous judgment involve? It involves judging *with mercy*. Jesus further commanded in Luke 6:36-38:

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

What does righteous judgment involve? It involves judging *knowing* you will be judged according to truth by the same rule. Paul wrote in Romans 2:1-3:

1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.

3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

Practical Wisdom on How to Judge Rightly

Here, then, are some practical lessons the New Testament gives to show us how to judge righteous judgment:

1. Judge not according to the appearance (John 7:24).

We too often judge a person by the clothes he wears, the speech he uses, or the manners he bears. It is very difficult for people to get past this. [But, certainly, a child is known by his doings (Proverbs 20:11). A good tree bears good fruit – an evil tree cannot bear good fruit.]

Consider that the prodigal, however poorly he was dressed, he was still his father's son (Luke 15:20). And Jesus, although he appeared to be a carpenter's son, he was indeed the Son of God (Matthew 13:55).

Many an evil man looked good and spoke smooth words. Many a false prophet deceived the simple. Paul said even Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

John the Baptist, though arrayed in camel's hair and leather, was said of Jesus that there was none greater among those born of women (Matthew 3:4).

It was said of the great Apostle Paul, that his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible (2 Corinthians 10:10); but who of sinners was a greater servant?

Now think of the pomp and splendor of popes and cardinals, and kings and princes. But how many of these are bearers of the True Light? They magnify themselves as Simon having the power of God by making a fair show in the flesh (Galatians 6:12); but are their hearts right with God (Acts 8:9-23)?

Yes, brethren, appearance is deceiving. And however hard it is, we must look upon a man's fruit and works (Matthew 7:16-20); not his outward appearance. Only God knows the heart (1 Samuel 16:7), but we see a man's faith by his works (James 2:18).

God is very clear as to how we are to treat people who come into our assemblies:

- 1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.
- 2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;
- 3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:
- 4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?
- 5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?
- 6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?
- 7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?
- 8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:
- 9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

James 2:1-9

Any respect to persons based on appearance makes a person a judge of evil thoughts. Any respect to persons is sin.

So, why is it certain religious figures emphasize their clothing so much, when so many men of God in the Bible wore humble clothing? Consider these examples: Elisha refused the raiment offered by Naaman (2 Kings 5). The rich man, although clothed in purple and fine linen, ended up in hell (Luke 16:22, 23). Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, died of worms surrounded by worshippers, because he gave not God the glory (Acts 12:23). Achan and all he had were stoned for his coveting gold and a Babylonian garment (Joshua 7).

Personally, I am not impressed with fancy suits, backward collars, royal robes, head gear, vestments, or with the broad phylacteries and enlarged garments (Matthew 23:5) certain religious personalities wear. I prefer the adornment of the hidden man of the heart (1 Peter 3:1-6) over holy garb. My spirituality is not worn around my neck or work on my back. I am sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise when I believed (Ephesians 1:13). I do not want man to think of me "above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me" (2 Corinthians 12:6). Neither should a believer think of men above that which is written, or be puffed up for one against another (1 Corinthians 4:6).

And a man can defend his fancy suit-wearing church saying it gives God the best, but God looks on the heart. And environments like that become hotbeds for respect of persons, and judges of evil thoughts.

Should you give God your best? Yes. But I like what one preacher said: “God does not want *your best*: He wants *your all*.”

(Now, brethren, I wear a suit and tie when it is expected, but I do not care to be identified with that style of clothing.)

And often, with the fancy religious garb comes also the special seating, the reserved tables, and the upper rooms. This soon devolves to the Nicolaitan doctrine – a respect of persons – which thing Jesus hates (Revelation 2:15).

We ought to meek and humble as our Saviour (Matthew 11:29). We ought to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). We ought not to be ashamed to bear the reproach of Christ (Hebrews 13:13). We ought to be made all things to all men so that we might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22). And what certain religious people think is a condemnation of the Lord, I think it is a most wonderful attribute:

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

Luke 15:2

2. Judge yourself first (1 Corinthians 11:28-32; Matthew 7:1-5); or, learn compassion.

Our current day Christianity would benefit immensely if God’s children would judge themselves before judging others.

Hypocrisy is alive and well in this world. We see it plainly when a person judges another of a thing of which he is even more guilty.

It is the old condemnation of not removing the beam in one’s own eye, but trying to remove a mote from his neighbor’s eye.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Matthew 7:3-5

There is even an older proverb: “Physician, heal thyself” (Luke 4:23).

Psychologists use the word *projecting* when a person, trying to lighten the guilt of a particular personal vice, points out that same fault in others. That hypocrite has a beam in his eye, while his neighbor has but a mote in his. And, instead of working to remove his own beam, he assumes he can see clearly enough to take the mote out of his neighbor’s eye.

That, my brethren, is not righteous judgment.

And once a person realizes he likely is *more* guilty than his brother, and he is *more* in debt to his master than is his brother; he will then have the necessary compassion and understanding to help his brother.

This gives the judge compassion. This makes his understanding real. And judging with compassion means you will be judged with compassion.

As we look on others less blessed, or in greater troubles; let's remember the old adage: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Or, even more accurately; "for all have sinned..." (Romans 3:13).

A believer ought to mature to the point where he can judge for himself what is evil and good in his own life (Hebrews 5:12-14). If he does not maintain a high standard for himself, he ought not to impose a higher standard on others. If he is merciful with his own sin, he ought to be merciful with the sins of others.

And since I did not "*fall off the turnip truck yesterday*," I am not impressed by certain brethren who try to project this image that they are faultless and so holy that they are God's judge. Away with that! Let me follow that man around a few days and we will see how holy he is. This holiness and sanctification pursuit is such that as one indeed cleans up his life, he finds he is even more unholy before the holy God. True holiness leads to humility and greater eschewing of evil in one's own life. Carnality leads to judging others.

The Apostle Paul, who I would say is one of the most sanctified Christians who ever lived, had this opinion of himself:

- 14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.
- 15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.
- 16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.
- 17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.
- 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.
- 19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.
- 20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.
- 21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.
- 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:
- 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
- 24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?
- 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Romans 7:14

This is the spiritual man's opinion of himself. I should like to have those judgmental Christians compare their personal testimony to Paul's. Let's see who is better.

Paul revealed a promise to believers when examining themselves for the Lord's Supper. Read 1 Corinthians 11:29-32:

- 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.
30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.
31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.
32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

What a promise: If we judge ourselves we should not be judged. That is what I want. I should rather like to be judged by me rather than by the Lord. I am glad God gave us this ability and grace.

3. Know that people who have more forgiven tend to love Jesus more.

I understand from scriptures some people need a physician more than do others. But we all need salvation through Jesus Christ. And there are some people who were so deep in sin that they *really* rejoice when they are saved and forgiven of all their sins.

Such was the case with Mary. Read what Jesus said in Luke 7:41-43

41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.
42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?
43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

Simon rightly judged when he noted the greater sinner has greater love for the Saviour. Although not shown in the passage, I believe Simon realized he had been unjust in his judgment of Mary.

I want people to love my Saviour. I know Jesus saves sinners. I know no person is too far in sin that he cannot be saved. I know my Saviour rejoices over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:6).

When we see a person with sin, we should know Jesus *can* and *will* forgive that sin. We should encourage, not judge, that person. And we will greatly bless our Lord in so doing.

With his own words, Jesus said this in John 3:17:

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

A second side to this thought is this: That if you as a believer think on how much the Saviour forgave you, and how bad you were, and how many of your sins Jesus forgave, and how compassionate the Saviour was with you; then you will have the right judgment toward other sinners. This goes along with the previous point; however, this takes that lesson to degrees.

You can't love God without loving your brother. And you show God your love for him by loving your brother. And no one can rightly love without having the love of God. And what greater way to gain love than to remember how much Jesus has forgiven you. Remember how bad you were? Remember how unlovable you were? Remember how lost and undone you were? Remember the love of Jesus and how

much he gave for you when he was crucified. Remember how much you love and appreciate him. Now, look at your brother with the heart of Jesus Christ and love him as Jesus does. Be not like the Pharisees and scribes who were ready to stone the adulteress (John 8:1-11). Rather, be like the Saviour and say, “neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.”

The well-known saying, “Hate sin, but love the sinner,” can be updated to say, “My hate for what sin does to a sinner, drives me to have compassion on the sinner.”

That, my brethren, is the way to judge rightly.

4. Do not judge after the flesh (or carnally; but, rather, judge spiritually).

Jesus said this to the Pharisees in John 8:

15 Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

16 And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.

John 8:15, 16

Judging after the flesh is a carnal, selfish, self-centered, judgment, meant for a personal agenda or gain, or with respect of persons. This is judging with the thought of one’s own benefit coming first. This type of judgment leaves God out of the equation. It is judging without spiritual discernment.

Even the least esteemed in the church ought to have spiritual judgment. Read this passage from 1 Corinthians 6:

1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?

2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?

4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

5 I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?

6 But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.

7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?

8 Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

One can also say the spiritual judgment is judging with the mind of Christ. When judging, we should use the word of God in tandem with the Spirit of God, comparing things spiritual with spiritual. It is judging with the wisdom of God.

Read what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.
10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.
11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.
12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.
13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.
16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:7-16

The book of Proverbs has much wisdom to say comparing carnal and spiritual (righteous) judgment. I have presented a few passages from that book to help the reader understand this kind of righteous judgment:

2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

Proverbs 21:2

25 There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Proverbs 16:25

17 He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.

Proverbs 18:17

1 A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

Proverbs 11:1

23 A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.

Proverbs 17:23

5 It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.

Proverbs 18:5

23 These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment.

Proverbs 24:23

Judging after the flesh (or carnal judgment) happens when one cares more for his own benefit, rather than suffering loss for the cause of what is right. Removing one's self from the equation means taking away that personal interest, and judging impartially, even though it may affect your own pocketbook or reputation.

A righteous judge in the courts of America will recuse himself from a case if there is even an appearance or hint of partiality or personal interest in a case. We say that is good. But as Christians, many times we have to make a judgment anyway. We do not have the option of recusing ourselves. But what God would require is that we disregard *our* interests, and put the word of God and his righteousness first and foremost.

Allow me to give an example of judging after the flesh that is too common in our fundamental churches:

A church has a variety of members who are related by family. One of these members commits a sin and will not repent. The pastor, after following the steps as defined by the Saviour in Matthew 18, makes the effort to provoke the sinning brother to repent; but the sinning brother will not repent. The pastor, following the Lord's commandment, tells it to the church, and the church righteously judges to separate the brother until he repents (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:7-13).

However, in the church vote to *dis-fellowship* the offending brother, a number of members who are related to the unrepentant brother vote against the separation. They chose to love a brother or sister more than Christ (Matthew 10:37). This is carnal judgment. This is judging according to the flesh. It has respect of persons. It ignores "thus saith the Lord."

We ought to choose righteous judgment irrespective of who it is being judged. We ought to have a just balance. If a family member is guilty of fornication or some other sin, the church is commanded to judge, and we ought to do that which is right and judge according to the word of God.

Too many times Christians judge after the flesh. But this is not righteous judgment.

5. Judge not according to one's own will, but according to God's will.

This is what Jesus said in John 5:30:

30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

This judgment is similar to the previous point, but this point brings in another aspect of unrighteous judgment: judging according to one's own will. In contrast, righteous judgment says we should judge according to *God's* will.

To know the will of God, one must present himself a living sacrifice, and have a transformed life, conformed to Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29), by the renewing of the mind. Paul wrote this in Romans 12:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.
2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Romans 12:1, 2

When a believer knows the will of God, revealed first by the commandments of Jesus Christ, and then by a filling and leadership of the Holy Spirit; he can judge that righteous judgment. This judgment is a judgment in accordance to the will of God.

Many times the truth of a matter is elusive, not easily discerned, and such that we can only know the right way to judge by seeking God's will.

James gave us a promise:

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.
6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.
7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.
8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James 1:5-8

Judging according to the will of God means you have received God's wisdom in the matter.

Young people should do this judgment when determining who is the right person for marriage. Rather than determining a mate based on questions like these: Is she pretty? Is he rich? Does he say nice things to me? Does she think I am great? Does he think I am pretty?

Judging according to God's will would ask questions like these: Is he saved and living a sanctified life? Do my parents approve of her? Will he make a good father and husband? Can we serve God better together? Will he be faithful to God and his wife? Will she obey her husband? Does God approve? Does my pastor approve?

Allow me to give another example. When deciding which church is right for one to serve in, rather than ask questions like these: Is the building nice? Do I like the people? Is the pastor easy to listen to? Are

their activities for the kids? Will it help my career? – a person should ask these questions based on the will of God: Is this where God wants me? Will this church provoke me to be more like Jesus Christ? Can I serve God faithfully in this church? Is this church willing to follow the word of God?

I would that all believers had this righteous judgment.

6. Using Jesus' word to Judge.

Jesus said this in John chapter 12:

48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

John 12:28

One of the most critical things a believer can do to have righteous judgment is to knowing he will be judged by Jesus' word in the last day. Consequently, it behooves the believer to follow, obey, and make preeminent the word of Jesus Christ in his live.

If we are to be judged by Jesus' word, we ought also to judge by Jesus' word. We are to follow him. We are to be conformed to his image. We are to be *like* Christ. And if he judges by his word, we ought to judge by his word.

You see, it is easy to say, I will judge "an eye for an eye." And thinking one is justified as he used the word of God. But Jesus would say, turn the other cheek.

38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.
41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Matthew 5:38-41

It is easy to say, I will follow the law in judgment; but Jesus said be merciful, loving your enemies:

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.
36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.
37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

Luke 6:35-37

As Jesus, we are not here to condemn the world. We are here to preach the salvation of Jesus Christ.

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

John 3:15-19

The time for judgment will come. And when that comes, the one who built his house on Jesus' word will stand.

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Acts 17:31

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Matthew 7:24-29

Jesus is the Word of God, and in righteousness he will smite the nations, using his word as a sword.

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Revelation 19:11-16

Esteem highly the words of our Saviour. They are perfect in judgment. With them you will not fail. Consider seriously what our Saviour said when you are judging. With them you will have righteous judgment.

7. Judge nothing before the time.

The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Corinthians:

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

This point follows the previous point in thought. When Jesus comes and judges his saints, he will judge in truth and righteousness. He is not an unjust judge. He cannot be bribed. He cannot be threatened. He cannot be deceived. He has full knowledge of all that we do, and he knows the reasons we do what we do. His word is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

What we do for vainglory, he knows. What we do for self-gain, he knows. If we do our works to be seen of men, we have our reward (Matthew 6:1-18).

Sometimes in our Christian life it is necessary to forebear judgment. We are not able to judge rightly, and it is not our place to judge; therefore, we leave it to the Lord to judge.

We cannot see inside a man's heart and know his motives for what he does. Many that are first will be last. And many that are last shall be first (Matthew 19:30).

And in reverse, we ought to live our lives knowing it is Jesus who will judge our lives. We are not judged by any man: only the Lord. And when the Lord judges us in that day, all things will be made manifest. Whether we have laid up treasures in heave of gold, silver, and precious stones; or whether we have only wood, hay, and stubble that perishes in the fire; all will be revealed (1 Corinthians 3:13).

So then, if a brother or sister does some work for the Lord which appears righteous, we ought to bid him God speed. Since we cannot know the true motives, we should in charity believe the best of him. We should encourage and bless the good fruit that come from God's children.

8. Judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block in his brother's way.

This point follows logically the previous point. As there are times to judge, and times to refrain from judging; there are times when we judge the ill-effects of judging.

These are times when judging is wrong and will hinder a brother's faith or purpose in the Lord. Our liberty in Christ has to be respected by other brethren, and each one of us is obligated to respect his brother's liberty. We do not all think the same way. We all have different backgrounds, experiences, fears, desires, and hopes. Some brethren have weak consciences; some do not. Some are easily stumbled; some are not.

Righteous judgment extends also to the point of judging whether your actions hurt or hinder a brother in Lord. Here is what our brother Paul wrote in Romans:

- 1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.
- 2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.
- 3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.
- 4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.
- 5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.
- 6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.
- 7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.
- 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.
- 9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.
- 10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
- 11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.
- 12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.
- 13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Romans 14:1-13

When it comes to liberty and matters of conscience, we are wise to tread carefully, not despising or judging a brother who happens to do things differently. We ought to judge righteously how and what we do or say affects our brother in the Lord. I should not judge him, nor should I set him at naught. I should judge *my own* actions and how he will receive them.

Some people like certain things certain ways. Other people like certain things a different way. We are all different. If a brother likes a nice, pretty house, and keeps his stuff in good condition; I ought to respect that and not judge him saying how all these things are temporal and not worthy of such care. If a man lives in a rough house (Proverbs 14:4), I ought not to judge him because of that. We cannot all afford earthly mansions.

As Paul mentioned clearly, our brother is the Lord's servant, and as such, he is accountable to the Lord. It is not my place to judge another man's servant. And for clarification, this is judgment in respect to matters of conscience, not clear-cut sin. For in matters of sin we have a responsibility to judge as a church.

Each believer will give an account of himself to God. Every believer will have to answer for all that he did wherein his brother was offended, stumbled, made to fall, or corrupted. This is a grave responsibility. The tendency of mature Christians is to respect a brother's liberty in Christ.

Be careful of what you as an individual believer define as sin. Sin is the transgression of the law, not the transgression of your particular convictions (1 John 3:4). And to preach against, enforce a judgment, or condemn a particular practice by a brother saying it is sin, when indeed it is not; you are not judging rightly.

As one man said, the definition of a liberal is a brother with *one less* conviction than you have. The definition of a legalist is a brother with *one more* conviction than you have. How foolish those definitions are.

I am a particularly narrow-minded believer. I am also a pastor. And I have standards I impose upon myself and my family, and I have different standards that I impose upon the church. Our church is made up of people with different levels of maturity. Many are newly saved, and we have to progress at a pace that they are able to receive.

We all have consciences, and each conscience allows or condemns particular things.

I do not want my children chewing gum, but I do not impose that rule on the church. What they do is their business. Likewise, I do not want my family eating poorly, doing certain things, and associating with certain groups. But our other members have their liberty and convictions.

I, personally, do not waste time putting up a Baal bush (Christmas tree), wearing a cross around my neck, wearing flashy suits, attending ball games, or worrying about whether my beard is acceptable to the church.

But some of our members *may* like the Christmas decorations (along with all the other holidays), or wear Christian jewelry, or like fancy clothes, or attending ball games, or like to be clean shaven. But it is not my place to impose my personal standards on my brethren – especially designating their “transgressing” my personal standard as sin. And if I visit their house, and they have a ball game on the TV, or if they have a Christmas decoration (or give me a gift); I shall not condemn them, judge them, or discourage them with my standard. To do so is unrighteous judgment. I have my liberty – they have theirs.

None of us lives to himself. We have to get along and build up one another, not tear down. God encourages; the devil discourages. If you say it is sin – show me chapter and verse.

In verse 19 of the same chapter, Paul said this:

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul wrote this on the same subject:

23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

24 Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

25 Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:

26 For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

27 If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.

28 But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:

29 Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?

1 Corinthians 10:23-29

So, you have liberty, but that liberty does not extend to stumbling others or to provide an occasion for the flesh (Galatians 5:13).

And, as Paul argued in verse 29, as you would not appreciate someone judging you for your liberty, you should have the same mind toward your brother. That is a good standard – do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

We are to seek our brother's edification, before our own. This is righteous judgment.

9. Do not speak evil of others.

James wrote this passage in his epistle:

11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

James 4:11, 12

This is a simple and straightforward commandment to keep a brother on the proper path to judging righteous judgment. If you control your mouth, it will help to keep the mind in check.

Notice how plain the word of God is on this subject:

1 Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,
2 To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

Titus 3:1, 2

10 But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

2 Peter 2:10

5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Acts 23:5

Plainly and simply, if you keep you refrain from evil speaking of people, you will not judge wrongly.

10. Do not judge others because you have particular traditions.

It amazes me still after many years in the ministry how many good brethren, including pastors and evangelist, tend to hold on to traditions that have no scriptural foundation.

I hope every believer knows the church is a body of baptized believers, not a building. I hope every believer knows Sunday is not a holy day; neither is Christmas, Easter, or Thanksgiving. I hope every believer knows a particular style of dress is not mandated in scripture, only modesty and such that represents our sex (for a man ought not wear women's things, and vice-versa).

The traditions in the bible *that Paul taught* ought to be observed (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6). But, too often the traditions that are in our churches tend to make of none effect the word of God (Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:13).

A Christian ought to beware lest he be spoiled by this kind of tradition. We are complete in Christ. We have no need of works to walk in fellowship with God. Please read carefully what Paul said in Colossians:

6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:
7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.
8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.
9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.
10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:
11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Colossians 2:6-17

Verse 16 instructs the believer in Christ to not react to pressure to observe certain traditions. Being free in Christ positions the believer so he is not obligated to rituals and certain ecclesiastical rules imposed by whomever. He is accepted in the beloved, not by any particular ritual.

And since that “judgment” from traditionalists is not to be yielded to; we ought to be mindful not to be the ones doing the judging. That means, just because you follow a certain tradition, do not judge another believer because he does not have the same view as you do.

This judging can become a “two-way” street, both reciprocating the judgment; but God has called us to peace. We are not all “cookie-cutter Christians.” We have diversities of gifts. We are each one different in his own particular way. Additionally, God is working on each one of us in that thing that he purposes. He is the potter, we are the clay. We shall not judge another man’s servant because he does not “cross his tee” like we do.

Therefore, in respect to religious ordinances and traditions that are not clearly mandated by our Lord’s doctrine; it behooves us to refrain from judging a brother who does not follow.

And making proselytes to your particular way may happen, but you will be judged by Jesus Christ if you imply that certain personal traditions are mandated by the Lord himself.

In teaching our church and my family, I try to make the distinction between the things that we do (as particular traditions) and the commandments of God. Over the years I find more and more how much *Roman leaven* has entered into our good fundamentalist churches. Who said pews should point one direction? Who said we should use pews at all? Who said we should have a Sunday school hour (and we do)? Who said what days are the days we assemble as a church? Who said drums are bad (and we don’t use them)? Who said we ought to use fiberglass baptisteries? Who said we need our own building? Who said offering plates are preferred over a treasury box? Who said we should use little cups for the Lord’s Supper?

Sure, I like the way we do some things. But I also know much of it has no biblical basis. And God forbid I should judge a brother because he does something differently. He answers to his Lord, not me.

11. The New Testament makes it clear when a brother or church should judge.

There are times when we are commanded to judge. And on these occasions, not only should we be faithful to judge; but we need to judge righteous judgment.

This is when the believers, with the mind *and heart* of Christ judge a sinning brother. The purpose of this judgment is not to condemn, injure, repay, or abuse. The purpose of this judgment is so the sinning brother's sin is manifest, and by this he is provoked to repent, be forgiven, and be received into fellowship. The goal is for the brother to repent, be forgiven, and be restored.

The exact process for this type of judgment in personal matters is defined by our Saviour. And, if it is followed, the church may never even become involved.

But there are some offences that *must* be judged by the church, which we shall discuss a little later.

Let's read first what our Saviour commanded in the event that brother sins against another brother:

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Matthew 18:15-22

You will see the trespass is to be kept private at first. It amazes me how many believers tell everyone else about what a brother did to offend them, but rarely do they take it up with the brother in private. Speaking evil of a brother is sin, gossip, and contrary to what the word says. Jesus commanded the right process, and it ought to be followed. This is righteous judgment.

So, if a brother offends another, the offended one talks to his brother in private. Hopefully, his brother will repent. I think this is the usual case if the offended brother handles things rightly.

Paul said this in Galatians:

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Galatians 6:1-3

The offended brother is to have a spirit of meekness and humility when confronting his brother. This will do much to provoke his brother to repent. And if he does not, the offended brother cannot be thought to be at fault, for he did not provoke his brother wrongly.

Only when the offender refuses to repent does the confrontation escalate. Next, to another private meeting with one or two witnesses; and if that does not work, then it is to be brought before the church. However, at every stage, a spirit of meekness, love, and a desire to see the brother repent is to be expressed.

At the point where the church hears the issue, this is the last phase. The church is not a creator of penance, an enforcer of discipline, or a minister of some physical punishment. The church's judgment extends to dis-fellowship only, with the hopes the brother will be ashamed and return with a spirit of repentance.

Now, for part two: The church has certain sins it *must* judge as a church. I wholeheartedly disagree with the statement I heard that, "sins done in secret are to be judged in secret, and sins done in public are to be judged publically." There is no scriptural mandate for this rule. Rather, if a sin is personal, the offended brother handles it until (and if) the church needs to be involved. And part two: If a sin is against the body (the church) it needs to be judged by the church.

And these six sins against the church are specifically called out in the New Testament. A church does not have the liberty to add to the list, or to take away from the list. The church is commanded to judge these sins among her members.

The passage in 1 Corinthians 5 supplies the list that church is obligated to judge. This judgment, again, only extends to dis-fellowship of the offending brother. Read 1 Corinthians 5:

1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Verse 11 supplies the list of offences:

- Fornication
- Covetousness
- Idolatry
- Railing
- Drunkenness
- Extortion

The church needs to judge these things to keep the leaven out. For if they tolerate a little of it, soon the whole church will be full of it. These sins are an offence to the Saviour and he requires his churches to be faithful to judge these matters. A church that will not judge these things has carnal judgment or respect of persons. But it does not have righteous judgment.

Now, I am not going to elaborate on each one of these sins. But I should like to comment a little on them. First, most of these sins are done privately. They are not usually done within the public's purview. Regardless, though, they are to be judged as soon as they are known. Sometimes, because they are done in secret only a few know. It is incumbent upon righteous believers to deal with these things, not to ignore them.

Second, the judgment is to be made against a person who is called a brother. The church's scope does not extend to the lost. One can debate whether this is limited to a church member or just any believer. From the statement, I believe it extends to any person who is called a brother, *and* who has a practice of fellowshiping with a church. So, if a church hears of a brother from another church who has been judged, they should respect that church's judgment and not fellowship with the offender. If an offender attends a particular church (but he is not a member), he should be judged still. This is because the potential for fellowship is there.

The fact of membership is not as critical as to whether the believer is interacting with other believers. As leaven, the sins mentioned have a tendency to spread and pervert judgment. For this reason any brother who is *exposed regularly* to the church ought to be judged if he is guilty.

Third, too often these things are not judged by the churches, because they are uncomfortable. But forbearing judgment on these things does no one any good – especially the offending brother. Allowing him little or no shame in the matter, or having him avoid public (i.e., church) discipline; only convinces him and others who know that there is no severe penalty for such things.

Paul instructed Timothy, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear (1 Timothy 5:20).

Fourth, this is to be done without respect for persons: whether a family member or a person of authority, the judgment should be the same.

Fifth, I have written a paper on this subject that describes in detail how this is done (see paper entitled *CHURCH DISCIPLINE* on our church website www.HistoricBaptist.org).

As a final note, the church is also expected (and commanded) to judge certain disagreements between its members. This is what the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:

- 1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?
- 2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?
- 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?
- 4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.
- 5 I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?
- 6 But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.
- 7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?
- 8 Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

So, from the foregoing, we see that any person (specifically, the least esteemed) in the church ought to be able to judge in respect to those issues over which the lost go to a worldly court. There should be no need of civil court if both parties are saved. The church should be able to judge in those matters.

Personally, I have not had to be involved of anything like this. Our members strive for unity and tend to be merciful one to another.

However, I should like to make clear that there will likely be many times a believer has to go to a worldly court when initiating or responding to a law suit where unbelievers are involved. I believe this is reasonable and to be expected. Pastors, especially, make waves in communities and tend to provoke the ungodly. The apostle Paul found himself in civil trouble more than a few times. The other apostles were brought before councils and courts and judges. However, this is different than personal matters between church members.

Lastly, on this thought, when a church member is involved in an unequivocal criminal act, I believe the church should not dismiss the cause. If it indeed is criminal, the church ought to involve the civil authorities and cooperate to the full extent of the law to prosecute the sinner.

I think of the numerous scandals involving Roman priests and boys -- scandals that the Roman bishops and popes tend to cover up. What a shame. How many are there that we don't hear about? If anything like this comes to pass in a New Testament church, the offender ought to be prosecuted with the full support of the church.

12. Jesus Christ, the Righteous Judge, will have the final word.

In Matthew 18 when reading about the church's judgment, Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This means he stands in judgment agreeing with the church. The Lord also said, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This means whatever judgment a church makes, the Lord is in agreement.

This is powerful authority that the church has. It has to be exercised carefully, lovingly, and with the right purpose. The church needs to be careful to follow the instruction of the Lord in how it judges, meaning, they ought to judge righteous judgment.

And when this current dispensation ends, Jesus Christ – the faithful witness – will judge all according to righteousness. Nothing will escape his all-seeing eyes. He will take care of all things and recompense perfect justice.

We need to remember this. Many times it seems the judgment we receive of others is unfair. We need to have the attitude of Paul when we know the judgment of others is wrong:

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:1, 2

The time will come when the truth will all be exposed. There will be no secrets:

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

The Lord is a righteous judge, and he will do the judging. Remember these verses, and be content that in the end, God will judge:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:8

30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

Hebrews 10:30

4 Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

Hebrews 13:4

17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

1 Peter 1:17

So, in conclusion, judging righteous judgment is something Jesus commanded us to do. My hope is that this study on the subject is helpful to all who read it.

May God bless you and your labor for his kingdom

The End.