



Discernment in an Age of Deception

Defining the Believer's Biblical Call to Judge

BY BOB DEWAAAY

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (John 7:24)

Editor's note: The following is a Bible study that pastor Bob conducted by request to prepare for a live radio show on the topic. We decided that this material is important and answers questions most Christians have. Therefore we decided to publish it, knowing that its format is more of a topical Bible study than the type of literature CIC usually publishes. We hope that you find this Bible study helpful and informative.

Many times, after publishing an article that disputes the claims of someone's published work, I am asked if I had talked to the person privately. There are those who claim that debating ideas in the public arena should not happen unless there was a prior Matthew 18 process of adjudication. It is my position that Matthew 18 does not apply to the public interaction of theological ideas. In this paper, I shall examine various New Testament passages that explain what we must and must not judge.

It is not surprising that people are confused about the matter of passing judgment because some scriptures tell us we must make judgments and discern, and others warn us not to judge. We will see that Scripture provides straightforward, objective guidelines concerning making judgments and that both the commands to judge and the commands not to judge are understandable—and they are to be obeyed.

DO NOT JUDGE – MATTHEW 7

The following teaching from the Sermon on the Mount warns us not to judge:

Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Before we interpret those verses we must look at the sermon in Matthew that preceded it. The Sermon on the Mount concerns motives and sin. For example, the hypocrite prays to be “seen of men” (Matthew 6:5). Jesus' sermon contains warnings against anger (Matthew 5:22), lust (Matthew 5:28), a command to love one's enemies (Matthew 5:44) and a warning against loving money (Matthew 6:24). Jesus addresses many sin issues in a manner that would show everyone their sinfulness and need for the Gospel. Jesus said, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom

of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). This statement would have shocked Jesus' hearers because the scribes and Pharisees were fastidious in keeping the law of external rules. A righteousness greater than theirs could only be the imputed righteousness of Christ that changes the heart. Without Christ's righteousness we cannot enter the kingdom.

Given this context, what is the meaning of Matthew 7:1-5? The answer is that we are warned against judging how righteous others are in comparison to ourselves. This passage is a warning against self righteousness. As sinners, we tend to minimize or rationalize our own transgressions and magnify what we see wrong in others. Jesus warns about this because self-righteousness like that of the hypocritical Pharisees will keep a person out of the kingdom of God. It is the poor in spirit and the persecuted who will “inherit the kingdom of God” (Matthew 5:3, 10). These humbled people know they need a savior.

So does Matthew 7:1-5 teach that Christians should accept all teachers and teachings without discrimination? No. This passage concerns peoples' motivations and the degree of their internal righteousness. These matters we are not to judge. Other passages, which we will examine later, are concerned with judging the content of a person's teaching. Before we study those texts, let us examine other passages that are used to suggest that false teachers should not be corrected publicly.

GO TO YOUR BROTHER IN PRIVATE MATTHEW 18

As mentioned earlier, the admonition in Matthew 18 to go to your brother in private if he has sinned is often used to suggest that public teachings should be adjudicated privately. However, Matthew 18 does not address debate

about the orthodoxy of someone's public teaching but how to deal with one of Christ's sheep who have strayed into sin. Let us examine the passage in context.

Matthew 18 begins with the disciples discussing who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus saw a danger in their attitude that could be very harmful to the church. The rest of Matthew 18 deals with relationships in the church, particularly how the "little ones" (meaning believers not young children – **Matthew 18:6**) are treated. The problem Jesus foresees in the discussion of who is greatest, is that "little ones" (believers who may appear unimportant to those concerned about their own "greatness") would be mistreated by those whose motives are wrong. Matthew 18 contains teachings to insure that every believer is seen as important and every effort is put forth to preserve their spiritual well-being.

In this context, we read this:

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. (Matthew 18:15-17)

At issue is a "little one" who has become a straying sheep (**Matthew 18:12**). The tendency is for people who are seeking greatness in the kingdom to allow the sinner to wander off and perish rather than put forth the effort to preserve him or her. Jesus said, "Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish" (**Matthew 18:14**). As we have seen, the little ones are believers, and it is not God's will that a believer perishes. So the "lost sheep" that is rescued is a straying believer.

Given the immediate context, reproving in private someone who sins shows a willingness to take steps to keep

one of the Lord's flock from perishing. It is not specified what particular sin may be at issue, but rather what the motives of the church members (i.e., disciples of Jesus Christ) are. They are to care about the well being of the little ones who may not appear important to others, but who are important to God.

The entire process outlined in Matthew 18 is about preserving church members from perishing. If the process does not result in the person repenting, they are to be assumed to be a lost sinner (a Gentile and a tax-gatherer). Lost sinners are the subject of gospel preaching. Any true Christian who has been confronted by this process will seek repentance and restoration. Those who claim a right to sin however they see fit show no evidence of regeneration. They are not "little ones" but targets for the gospel.

So, does this passage tell us that public false teaching should never be corrected or judged without first gaining the permission of the false teacher? No. As we shall see in many other passages, false teaching cannot be allowed into the church for precisely the reason Jesus tells us to care for the flock. The spiritual well-being of His "little ones" is more important than that aspirations of those who deem themselves "greatest in the kingdom." The flock must be protected and preserved. Allowing wolves into the congregation under the guise of Matthew 18 would be a horrible abuse of the passage.

Notice that verse 16 says that two or three witnesses should confirm "every fact." This is important, because someone could falsely accuse another of sin. What is being confirmed by the witnesses is that the person in question is guilty of the sin and refuses to change. In the case of publicly broadcast and published teachings, there is no need for this process because the "facts" are already public knowledge. What is needed is to compare the teachings to Scripture, not determine if the person is committing a sin and hiding it. At issue in public teaching is the integrity of the faith once for all delivered to the saints, not sin in the local fellowship.

DO NOT PASS JUDGMENT – 1CORINTHIANS 4

Paul warns the Corinthians about wrongly passing judgment: "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God" (**1Corinthians 4:5**). This passage indicates that there are some things we will not know until God's future judgment. One of these things is mentioned in this passage: "the motives of men's hearts." We should avoid judging what we do not know. People's motives are often hidden from us, but their teachings are public information.

Consider what Paul said in Philippians:

Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)

It is not clear how Paul knew about these bad motives, but it is instructive to see his response. Because the content of their message was the true gospel, Paul rejoiced. This is in clear contrast to what he said elsewhere when the content of the message was wrong: "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (**Galatians 1:8**). It is safe to assume that an angel from heaven would be a nice person with good motives. But a false gospel is damning and still must be rejected. There are many "nice people" with damnable false

teachings.

The content of the wrong judgment that the Corinthians were making had to do with matters that cannot be known now:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1Corinthians 4:6, 7)

As shown also in 1Corinthians 1, they were in the habit of judging who was superior and aligning themselves with human personalities. Paul is telling them not to do that. Who is superior spiritually is not known, and will not be known until God passes judgment in the future. But what can be known is “what is written.” There is an objective standard for judging teaching, but not for judging motives and the relative superiority of personalities.

We have seen a consistent theme so far. We are not to judge the motives or the relative degree of righteousness of other believers. But we must judge what is taught, whether it is in accordance with the true gospel and what has been written in Scripture.

There is another matter concerning judgment that also concerns judging teachings, but most people misunderstand it. This is the section of Scripture in Matthew 7 about judging by the fruits.

YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS – MATTHEW 7

Jesus’ teaching that, “You will know them by their fruits,” is well known and often repeated. What is amazing, however, is that most of the time people come to conclusions about what this means that have nothing to do with the issues Jesus raises in Matthew 7. They often think of “fruits” as being character

qualities, popularity, or the ability to do supernatural signs. I will discuss each of these ideas and then show what Jesus did mean.

Let us examine the passage. In Matthew 7 Jesus warned about false prophets:

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. (Matthew 7:15-17)

First, **personality traits are not fruits.** On the outside, false prophets look like sheep. They are often very nice people who are kind, endearing, disarming, affable, winsome, and possess many other wonderful qualities. The false idea that these qualities are what Jesus means by “fruits” causes many people to be misled by false prophets. What they fail to realize is that the Dalai Lama has such qualities and he is hardly a Christian. Having a charming exterior is often the “sheep’s clothing.”

The number of one’s followers is not fruit. Many assume that popularity is a sign of good fruit. But the context shows something entirely different: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it” (Matthew 7:13, 14). The false religious leaders of Israel had more followers than Jesus did. This can hardly be what Jesus meant by “fruit.”

And signs and wonders are not fruits. Again we must consult the context:

So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your

name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ (Matthew 7:20-23)

People who call Jesus “Lord,” come in His name, and do works of power are false prophets if they refused to abide within God-given boundaries. This is an important concept. This is lawlessness.

The boundaries are those that God’s ordained spokespersons set. For us, they are the teachings of Christ and His apostles (See Hebrews 1:1, 2; 2:3, 4). Jesus was the prophet that Moses predicted and to whom we must listen (Deuteronomy 18:15; Mark 9:2-7; John 5:46, 47; et. al.). The book of Hebrews contains this warning: “Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:28, 29). Lawlessness disregards the terms of the covenant. Jesus has revealed the terms and boundaries of legal belief and practice under the new covenant, like Moses did under the old. John warned about this in his second epistle: “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son” (2John 1:9).

Understood in this way, false prophets are those who teach and practice lawlessness. They do not abide within the once-for-all determined boundaries of New Testament teaching. We can see this as we continue in our Matthew 7 passage:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been

founded upon the rock. And every-one who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall. (Matthew 7:24-27)

The lawless ones do not abide by the teachings of Christ. They are the false prophets. The fruits by which they are known are their teachings, not their personalities, the number of their followers, or their miracles.

To underscore how important judging teaching is, we will examine Paul's address to the elders in Jerusalem. We will see that guarding the flock is a key duty of pastors and elders.

CHURCH LEADERS AND WOLVES

Paul's address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 instructs about the duty of Christian leaders to proclaim the truth and to guard the flock against wolves. First Paul recalled his previous practice in Ephesus:

How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:20, 21)

Preaching that people should repent and believe is an important theme in Luke/Acts (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30, 31; Acts 26:17-20; et al). Paul's preaching resulted in the formation of a church in Ephesus. Elders were appointed, and these were addressed by Paul as he headed to Jerusalem. What he said to them reveals what is truly important for all churches.

And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to

you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. (Acts 20:27)

Notice, first of all, that the phrase "preaching the kingdom" is synonymously parallel with his description of his preaching in verse 21, "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." The message of the kingdom was not some message like the social gospel as some claim today, but the gospel of the kingdom is repentance and faith (see Mark 1:14, 15). These are the terms of entrance into the kingdom.

Secondly, notice that Paul claimed innocence from bloodguiltiness. This means that had he not proclaimed both the terms of entrance into the kingdom, and the whole of what God has revealed of His purposes, Paul would have imperiled their souls, failed his sacred mission, and brought guilt upon himself for failing to warn them of coming judgment (see Ezekiel 33:6). These same responsibilities apply to pastors and other church leaders today. This is so very important because the flock must be equipped to withstand the onslaught of the inevitable wolves who will arise.

These wolves are the subject of Paul's warning to the church leaders:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30)

It is important to see that the wolves come from two sources: outside and inside the church. Wolves are always inimical to the well-being of sheep. It is the responsibility of shepherds to make sure the sheep are safe from the wolves. To do this, the wolves must be identified. The way they are identified is

through their teachings. Paul described the practice of the wolves: "*speaking perverse things.*" The word "perverse" means "twisted" or "distorted." Their teachings are a distortion of the authoritative teachings of Christ and His apostles. Anyone is a wolf who purposely gives distorted teaching and refuses to repent when shown his error from the Scriptures. The elders must guard the flock against such people.

Notice what happens through the teachings of the wolves: they "*draw away the disciples after them.*" False teachers and prophets have a message that comes from themselves, not from the whole counsel of God. The reason these wolves draw disciples away after themselves is that they are the only source of this teaching. If the church is proclaiming the true terms of the covenant and the whole counsel of God, whatever "perverse" doctrine is being promoted by wolves will not be heard from the faithful pastors and elders. Perverse doctrine cannot be found through valid implications from authoritative Scripture. Therefore, if the wolves succeed in giving some of the sheep an appetite for what they are offering, the sheep will have to follow the wolves to get that appetite fed. Since this is not from God, they are being drawn away from the true sheepfold and into spiritual peril and perhaps damnation.

This is a very serious situation. In John 10 Jesus uses a sheepfold analogy to show that robbers do not go through the true door: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber*" (John 10:1). Jesus is the door of the sheep (John 10:7). Jesus has ascended bodily into heaven. His teachings as given in the New Testament delineate the boundaries of the sheepfold. The elders of the church are responsible to uphold the true words of Christ and His apostles. They are responsible to identify those robbers who will not abide in the teachings of Christ. False teachers refuse to do this job: "*He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf com-*

ing, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep" (John 10:12, 13). Jesus is the true Shepherd, and the under-shepherds (the term "pastor" is from the word "shepherd") are to feed the sheep the pure words of God and guard them from perverted words. Those who refuse to do so are hirelings.

PAUL'S WARNING COMES TRUE

Timothy became a key church leader in Ephesus where Paul had warned the elders about wolves. Paul's warning came true. We learn from the epistles to Timothy that false teachers did arise, some of them likely were elders themselves. This provides the background for Paul's admonitions in Timothy about correcting error, upholding the standard of sound doctrine, and the qualifications of true elders.

Paul specified to Timothy who the false teachers were by name:

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme. (1Timothy 1:18 – 20)

The reason false teachers are dealt with publicly is that their teaching is public. One does not need two or three witnesses or a private meeting to determine if a public teaching is Biblical or not. Everyone who heard them knows what they believe and teach. At issue is whether the teaching is Biblical. False teaching damages the church, and it cannot be tolerated. In the Greek, it says they made shipwreck "in regard to **the faith.**" The definite article indicates that it was the content of their teaching that was wrong. It was not in accordance with "the faith which was once for

all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

Paul, after giving instructions about the qualifications of elders, reminds Timothy of the key role of the church: "but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1Timothy 3:15). Elders and pastors who disregard sound doctrine cannot be tolerated. When they teach false doctrine, their conduct is unacceptable. They are responsible to make sure the church is the "pillar and support of the truth."

Paul predicts that in the later times people will give heed to "deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1Timothy 4:1). Paul urges Timothy to instruct the church about this important matter of warning against false teachings and promoting the truth: "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following" (1Timothy 4:6). Today many despise the very term doctrine and accuse those of being wrongly motivated who think it is important to correct false doctrine and espouse true doctrine. This is not at all what Paul told Timothy: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (1Timothy 4:16). Teachings have consequences--eternal consequences. If false teaching is allowed into the church, peoples' salvation is in jeopardy.

The duty of elders and pastors to protect the flock from false teaching, and to nourish the flock with sound teaching always has been foremost. But in the last days, the battle intensifies. We are living in an age of delusion and apostasy. So now, more than ever, we must confront false teaching and not allow it into the church. Paul made this admonition and prediction:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His

kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (2Timothy 4:1-4)

If people do not want to hear sound doctrine because of end time delusion, preach sound doctrine to them! The ability and willingness to do so is a requirement for elders: "[H]olding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

The duties of pastors and elders are very clear in Acts 20 and the Pastoral Epistles. They are to teach true doctrine, correct false doctrine, and protect the flock from the wolves. Sadly, those who do so today are often accused of being divisive or sinning because they have "judged" when Jesus told us not to judge. This is a category error. We are not to judge motives or relative degrees of righteousness, but we must judge public teaching.

PAUL PUBLICLY REBUKES PETER

In Galatians 2, Paul recounts an incident where he publicly corrected Peter:

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a

Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? (Galatians 2:11-14)

Paul publicly rebuked Peter for publicly denying in action what Paul knew Peter privately believed. Paul called Peter's actions, "[being] not straightforward about the truth of the gospel." Peter's actions implied that Gentile Christians were still "unclean" unless they submitted to Jewish food laws. This is a denial of what was decided at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. They had determined there to not require that the Gentiles follow the Law of Moses.

The irony is that Peter himself was the spokesman who convinced the church that this was right:

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.' (Acts 15:7-11)

Paul knew that he and Peter believed the same thing; they had both agreed to the decision of the council. There was no reason to go to Peter privately to correct his belief. Paul immediately dealt with the issue publicly, "in the presence of all." Peter's public practice negated his private confession. Being "straightforward about the gospel" means that what we preach and practice in public must be the same as the beliefs we hold privately. The New Testament calls any disjuncture between the two,

"hypocrisy."

What happens often today is that public teachers proclaim false doctrines. When confronted about this, they point to an orthodox statement of faith. But what they teach publicly is damaging to those who hear them. Whatever they may claim to believe, their public false teaching needs to be publicly confronted.

WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT JUDGE

We have seen that we are not to judge motives. We are not to judge relative degrees of personal piety. What these have in common is the factor that they are unknown. Motives are hidden. Only God knows the heart. We do not know who is more righteous or pious than whom.

We are not to accuse someone of sin without two or three witnesses. The criterion for two or three witnesses exists to keep one person from bringing false witness against another and having them wrongly come under church discipline. But if there are witnesses, the facts are considered "known" and judgment can be made. In every situation, the hope is for repentance and restoration of the individual. Paul wrote, "This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (2Corinthians 13:1). As verse 2 of this passage shows, the issue was about "those who have sinned."

There is another issue about wrong judgment. According to Romans 14 we are not to judge matters of conscience that are not universal commands. Here is what Paul wrote:

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another?

To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Later in this chapter of Romans Paul warns against judging one's brother on matters that fall under the category of Christian liberty—food and the observance of certain days (Romans 14:4-10). It would be wrong to exclude a weaker brother from fellowship because he has a more active conscience in certain areas where the Bible legitimately allows liberty. But, if that weaker brother demanded that his scruples be followed by everyone else as a condition of fellowship, he would become an illegitimate lawgiver and should be withstood and ultimately, if he remained unrepentant, expelled from fellowship.

What is wrong with illegitimate lawgivers is that they are claiming to know that someone is sinning when they are not. This is tantamount to making one's self God's lawgiver. To judge like this is to claim to know (that some certain action of another person is sin) what one does not know.

However we can judge what is true or false, sinful or righteous, based on what has been revealed in Scripture. Publicly proclaimed teachings can be judged to be false and should be publicly refuted. Paul did this. Paul told Timothy to do this. Paul gave all elders the responsibility to do this. The church must be warned about wolves when they arise, whether from inside the church or without. Likewise prophecy must be judged by the objective criteria of the Bible (1Corinthians 14:29; 1Thessalonians 5:21).

There is important action to be taken: We can and we must judge what we can know objectively, but we must not judge what we cannot know objectively. Ask yourself when you make a judgment, "can I know this with certainty"? If the answer is no, we cannot judge. If the answer is yes and the issue concerns Biblical doctrine or sin, we not only may judge; we must judge. Publicly proclaimed teaching falls into this category.

CONCLUSION

Too often people wrongly claim that if an author writes a book, or a preacher preaches a sermon, that no one is permitted to make judgments about the contents of these teachings without first asking the author's or preacher's permission. Paul did not ask Peter's permission to publicly rebuke him nor did he ask Hymenaeus' and Alexander's permission to rebuke them for teaching false doctrine. Claiming that false teachers have the right to spread their teachings throughout the body of Christ until such time that a Matthew 18 procedure is set up and implemented is a category error. Matthew 18 concerns the accusation of sin brought by one member of a congregation against another. This requires two or three witnesses if personal confrontation is ineffec-

tive.

Teachings that are published far and wide do not need two or three witnesses; everyone can see what is being taught for themselves. These teachings must be judged to be biblical or unbiblical. Those who bring false teaching should be publicly corrected. If they continue to bring false teaching and disregard the faith once for all delivered to the saints, they should be considered wolves and the flock must be guarded from them.

Today the teachings of the wolves come by way of the TV, radio, internet, books, seminars and any other media that is available. No pastor could discuss each of these specific heresies with their authors, nor is it required. What is required is that pastors and elders refute the heresies with sound doctrine, and warn the flock about their pernicious

influence. The sad truth is that very few elders or pastors are willing to do this. Many take it as a badge of honor that they correct no one, and glibly allow the wolves to devour the flock under the guise of humility and unity. If we refuse to judge false teaching, we have neglected our God-given responsibilities.

Critical Issues Commentary

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When and When Not to Judge

The following is the result of a range of meaning study I did on the Greek word *krino* and its derivatives. I started by finding every verse in the New Testament where these Greek words appeared. I then removed every instance that concerned God's action of judging because our concern is when humans are to judge or not judge. I then examined each passage in context to determine the meaning. In some cases I had to consult scholarly sources if the Biblical author's meaning was not readily apparent. I then made categories for the various meanings that I found and placed each verse in the correct category, based on the Greek word that was translated. Then I further sorted the categories by "do"; "do not" and then tangential categories that did not fit the do or do not schema. The following is the result. You can look up the verses yourself to determine if you think I correctly categorized them. The most interesting result to me is that the largest category contained passages about discerning.

~ Bob DeWaay

Do make a correct determination based on facts and/or Scripture (discern):

*Krino*_

Luke 7:43, Luke 12:57, John 7:22-24, John 7:51, John 8:15, 16, Acts 4:19, Acts 15:19, Acts 16:15, Acts 23:26, 1Corinthians 2:2, 1Corinthians 5:3, 1Corinthians 5:12, 13, 1Corinthians 7:37, 1Corinthians 10:15, 1Corinthians 11:13, 1Corinthians 11:31, 32, 2Corinthians 5:14

*Diakrino*_

Matthew 16:13, 1Corinthians 11:29, 31, 1Corinthians 14:29

Diakrasis

Hebrews 5:14

Do discern spirits:

Diakrasis

1Corinthians 12:10

Do not judge motives or relative piety:

*Krino*_

Matthew 7:1-3, 1Corinthians 4:5

*Diakrino*_

1Corinthians 4:7

Do not show partiality or prejudice (prejudge who to treat kindly):

*Krino*_

Luke 6:35-38

*Diakrino*_

James 2:4

Do not judge oneself to be unworthy of salvation by rejecting the gospel:

*Krino*_

Acts 13:46

Do not hide your own guilt by condemning others who are no different:

*Krino*_

Romans 2:1-3, Romans 2:27

Do not judge someone for that which he has been given liberty by God:

*Krino*_

Romans 14:3-5, 10, 13, 1Corinthians 10:29

Do not judge the opinions of a weaker brother

Diakrasis

Romans 14:1

Do not allow another to judge you in a matter in which you have been given liberty:

Diakrino_
1Corinthians 6:5

Krino_
Colossians 2:16

Do not insist on using one's liberty in a way that harms a weaker brother:

Diakrino_
Matthew 21:21, Mark 11:23, Romans 4:20, Jude 1:22, James 1:6

Krino_
Romans 14:22

Do not take God's place as lawgiver and then judge your brother based on your own decrees:

Diakrino_
Romans 14:23

Krino_
James 4:11, 12

Do not take a fellow Christian to court but make proper judgment within the church:

Diakrino_
Do not ask questions for conscience sake before eating meat:

Anakrino_
1Corinthians 10:25, 27

Krino_
1Corinthians 6:1-3

The Lord makes the final examination:

Anakrino_
1Corinthians 4:3, 4

When the church prophesies properly, an unbeliever will be called to account:

Anakrino_
1Corinthians 14:24

Apostles making a determination for the church:

Krino_
Acts 16:4, Acts 21:25

To be without misgivings:

Diakrino_
Acts 11:12

To examine in order to make an appraisal:

Anakrino_
Luke 23:14, Acts 12:19, Acts 17:11, Acts 24:8, Acts 28:18, 1Corinthians 2:14, 15, 1Corinthians 9:3

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