

Should Christians Never Judge?

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Note: The following essay has been drawn from the first, and especially the second, edition of my e-book, [What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love](#). The focus is on the common misreading of the Bible, God's Word, especially Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." As is common in misunderstanding and misquoting people, too many don't read far enough or listen to all the other is saying. That failure is especially tragic when it occurs when the Lord is speaking. The discussion below applies not only to LGBTQ+ issues but to all other aspects of life where it is important, indeed vital, to know how to discern between right and wrong and then to speak the truth in love to obey and honor God and for others' benefit. In order to do so, we need God's help; here's an essential part of what he has told us in his Word about making judgments.

Judgment is what scholars call a major motif (subject or theme) in the Bible, and it's also an especially important concept outside the Scriptures. The judgment of which the Bible speaks is both on the vertical plane, primarily with regard to God's judgment, and on the horizontal plane, involving the judgments God wills his people to make. Thus, it is also a vital concern as well in the New Testament.¹ As we briefly consider this subject, we'll see in the representative and related texts examined that the issue is not whether to judge or not to judge *but how* that judgment is to be done according to God's Word and will; it is clear that the church's judging is to be done in love since God cares, and therefore we care, for the spiritual, physical, emotional, and social well-being of the people involved.

You may hear people accuse you of judging or being judgmental, which, should be pointed out, is also making a judgment. Many like to quote out of context Jesus' statement, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." (Matthew 7:1) People who sling this statement at Christians often do so with the hope that they can slide under that quote to free themselves from wrongdoing and the attendant guilt by eliminating or at least silencing a source of discomfort. When these people issue this misapplication of Jesus' words, ask them, "Have you read what Jesus went on to say in Matthew 7 and other related passages of God's Word on this subject?"

See, e.g., John 7:24, where Jesus also said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." The original Greek verb the Lord used when he said we should judge with this kind of judgment is *κρίνατε* (*krinate*), which is in the second person plural, active voice, and in the imperative mood, thus a command. Jesus' followers are not to ignore wrongdoing but are required to make a righteous judgment, admonishment (e.g., Acts 20:31; Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12,14; 2 Thessalonians 3:15), for the ultimate good of the person doing wrong, so he or she can make the necessary changes (e.g., seeking the forgiveness of God and any other(s) offended) and changing his or her behavior going forward. These judgments are focused on the unbiblical behavior—not the personality—of the person needing corrective feedback by "speaking the truth in love," (Ephesians 4:15) as modeled by our Lord and Savior himself.

¹ *Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary, The – Zeta-Kappa*. WORDSearch.

Pertaining to corrective feedback, or admonishment, humans tend to avoid it or deny it and turn the judgment back upon the one offering the feedback and admonishment. At the root of such denial is the universal unwillingness to admit responsibility for wrong behavior. We see such behavior all the way back to the beginning with Adam and Eve. Their first sin was disobedience (Genesis 3:6), and the second, immediately following, was denial of wrongdoing accompanied by blaming others. After Adam and Eve sinned, God first called Adam, the one he placed in charge as head of the human race, to give account of what he had done. How did Adam respond to God? To try to avoid responsibility, he right away shifted the blame to two others: Eve and even God himself! “The woman you put here with me—she gave me....” (3:12) The text says then that the LORD God called Eve to account, and what did she do? She immediately tried to shift the blame to the serpent (Satan). (3:13)

And the blame game continues to this day, including blaming those—who out of love and obedience to God’s Word are admonishing harmful behavior—for being judgmental, as it will until Christ Jesus returns in his second coming when the final judgment will occur. It is important to keep this reality in mind in order to avoid putting off necessary admonishment when God has told the church to do it, for the sake of the individuals involved, for the sake of the church, for others, and for accomplishing God’s purposes. See the above Scriptures and the references to the historic Biblical and ecclesiastical practice of church discipline.

The judgment always contrasts the person’s behavior with God’s Word, never with the admonisher’s and/or others’ opinion. That is, the standard of judgment is a criterion reference (vertical: God and his Word, cf., e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:9), not a norm reference (horizontal: human, cf., e.g., 1 Peter 1:17).

Also, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write that “The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment.” (1 Corinthians 2:15) We are called by God to correctly discern right from wrong and to address the latter, everywhere and especially in the church. Making this kind of judgment is an act of caring, love, that tries to help someone else stop and avoid doing something that is counterproductive and/or dangerous to his or her well-being and that of others. This type of judging is another way we speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15)²

Conversely ask, “How is it loving to see someone harming him or herself—and another or others—and say nothing?” This is why the Bible teaches us to “admonish one another,” for the good of others. (Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12,14; 2 Thessalonians 3:15; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Romans 15:14; Acts 20:31)

See also, e.g., Luke 6:37 and its context. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” As we see in this verse, especially in the light of the following, esp. vs. 43-46, Jesus is not talking about the vital importance of discerning, including pointing out, right from wrong and other Scriptural teaching such as the need to admonish one another (e.g., Leviticus 19:17; Colossians 3:16) and church

² For more, see this brief (3:45) video clip at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3_sTNxNZf0. (Accessed 02/09/2022)

discipline (e.g., Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The judging Jesus condemns is, as Lewis Foster writes in his note on this Luke 6 passage in *The NIV Study Bible*, the “unjust and hypocritical judging of others.”³

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

⁴⁶ “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:43-46; cf. Matthew 7:15-23)

To begin with, we distinguish between alerting a fellow member of the church about the contrast between what he or she is doing and God’s Word, **not** between what he or she is doing and my opinion on the subject. Thus, the issue at this point is sin and not personal preference. To say nothing when admonishment is needed is not only unbiblical but also to actually share in another’s guilt (e.g., Leviticus 19:17b), i.e., to be an enabler in wrongdoing. In Matthew 18:15 Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” The Greek word rightly translated sin in the NIV is ἁμαρτάνω (*hamartanō*), which means sin.⁴

This word is sometimes rendered in modern versions of the Bible as “does something wrong” (e.g., New Jerusalem Bible and God’s Word Translation), “wrongs you” (e.g., J.B. Phillips New Testament), or “hurts you” (e.g., The Message), which are less than desirable English terms that do not necessarily convey Jesus’ teaching that sin is involved. Maybe I think someone has done something wrong to me, but my opinion doesn’t make it wrong; it could only seem that way to me, in which case how do I know whether or not I ought to confront this person? Just because I feel hurt, and proclaim that I’m “offended,” or “that’s offensive,” doesn’t mean the other person has sinned. Maybe I’m taking the matter too personally. Jesus is *not* saying that every time I’m offended when someone does something I ought to go chase him or her down and have it out. Again, I am not the standard, which, as we’ll see, is what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7.

Further, to see someone doing something wrong, that is factually harmful, and say nothing, is also wrong and makes the one saying nothing culpable. It is also unloving. For example, when a confused child thinks he or she was “born in the wrong body” and wants to begin identifying and dressing as the opposite sex; taking puberty blockers and other hormones that have irreversible, lifelong, and life-damaging effects; and even considering life-destroying surgical interventions, which many deeply regret, to say nothing is to contribute to their self-destruction. It is a form of enabling harmful behavior. If only someone had stepped up and explained what they were considering doing was wrong and why, speaking the truth in love while doing so, many, many lives could have been spared from unwise, foolish, and destructive decisions.

³ Lewis Foster, Luke, *The NIV Study Bible*, General Editor, Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), p. 1550. For more on Jesus’ condemnation of hypocrisy, cf. Matthew 23.

⁴ *Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary*, The – Alpha-Gamma, WORDSearch.

As we see throughout my e-book on homosexuality, God’s Word is clear that we must love one another (e.g., John 13:34-35; 15:12,17), including always speaking the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) Doing so sometimes means, to use David Augsburger’s (*op cit.*) insightful term, “care-fronting,” lovingly talking with someone about his or her behavior that is harmful, rather than saying nothing and enabling that person to harm him or herself and others.

Another aspect of life involving such care-fronting, *due to having made a loving judgment*, occurs in the caring that all Christians, not just pastors, should do to help people who are engaging in destructive behavior. One outstanding example of such pastoral care is reported by John Stonestreet and Kasey Leander in a brief review of apologist Alisa Childers’ book, *Live Your Truth and Other Lies: Exposing Popular Deceptions That Make Us Anxious, Exhausted, and Self-Obsessed*. Here is a key point:

The point of these verses [in Matthew 7 and John 7:24], she concludes, is not to prevent moral discernment, but to help believers instead judge “carefully, rightly, humbly, and without hypocrisy.” Childers then [offers a powerful illustration](#) from her time with ZOEgirl, when her struggle with body image eventually led to a secret eating disorder of binging and purging.

On some tour in some town somewhere, I shared a hotel room with one of my bandmates. She is a sweetheart—gentle, deeply intelligent, and thoughtful. ... She was also a natural peacemaker, and confrontation did not come easily to her. So when she worked up every last bit of courage to ask me what I was doing in the bathroom, it surprised me. And it also made me angry. To put it lightly, the conversation didn’t go well. I not so politely invited her to stop “judging” me and back all the way off. That didn’t stop her. ...

Looking back, am I thankful that my bandmate “judged” me? That she dared confront me about the self-harm I was guilty of? Absolutely! She was the catalyst that first brought the darkness into the light. To this day my eyes mist with tears when I think about how much she loved me to do such a difficult thing.

Childers’ example not only calls Christians to do similarly difficult but right things, it reveals the consequences of relativism when lived in the real world. What begins as a desire to not judge others turns into the narcissistic demand that no one, under any circumstances, judge *us*. But that also renders healing and forgiveness impossible. After all, with no way to say that we’ve been wronged, neither is there means or reason to forgive those

who harm us. Any culture that rejects objective morality lacks any way to counter evil.⁵

Notice several very important aspects of what Childers' friend did, and their outcome. First, pertaining to how she "care-fronted" Childers: she raised a question, "What were you doing in the bathroom?" Human learning research explains why raising questions in such situations are powerful and effective means of making a point and having it received, rather than making propositional statements that are typically rejected out-of-hand.⁶ Second, love kept her friend from being deterred by Childers' hostile rejection of her attempt to help. Third, the time factor: learning and behavior change usually do not occur immediately. Yet the question raised in love, with the matter obvious to both, and with the Holy Spirit's use of that question and the ongoing expression of love in which it was asked, was transformative, with the result that Childers views the care-fronting of her friend with tears of joy and appreciation yet today.

But sin is a "horse of a different color" and is the crux of what Jesus meant. Sin has a standard other than my feelings and opinion about the matter. When the other person has actually sinned, that is, violated a commandment in God's Word that negatively affects me, then I am to go to that person and privately talk with him or her about what he or she did and in a loving manner (e.g., John 13:34-35 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7) try to resolve the matter while at the same time preserving our relationship.

We need to prepare ourselves in order to explain to those who accuse us of judging others how they are misunderstanding Jesus' statement in the first verse of Matthew 7 about judgment in the Bible. This often-used criticism of those of us who oppose someone's viewpoint, e.g., the homosexual agenda, misinterprets and misapplies this Biblical text and in many other places ignores or misuses Biblical hermeneutics, the grammatical and literary principles of interpretation (< Greek, ἐρμηνεύω [hermēneuō], "to interpret").

We also need to help fellow Christians, including clergy and other church leaders to speak rightly on this matter. For example, while we can agree and strongly affirm Roman Catholic Pope Francis in his insistence that the church cannot be "swayed by passing fads or popular opinion," and that marriage is between a man and a woman and should last until one dies, we must disagree with his next statement (if what he is reported as saying is true, which we must keep in mind is frequently not the case in today's flawed journalism) that the church doesn't judge and that the church is a mother who doesn't point fingers or judge her children.⁷ That statement conflicts with the Bible's teaching as will now be seen more fully.

⁵ John Stonestreet and Kasey Leander, "Things Jesus Really Didn't Say: Author's book reclaims truth from the empty slogans that dominate our culture and our thinking." <https://www.breakpoint.org/dont-judge-and-other-things-jesus-really-didnt-say/>, Breakpoint, Colson Center, August 17, 2023. (Accessed 08/17/23)

⁶ Several articles on my Websites (my general Website: <https://fromacorntoak12.com/> and my academic Website: <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>) explain some of that research, e.g., "[Curriculum Development and Lesson Planning: For Teachers & for Teachers of Teachers](#)," and "[Teaching-Learning Methods for Ministry in the Church](#)."

⁷ "Pope asserts marriage is forever at start of family meeting," *Reporter-Herald*, Associated Press, October 5, 2015, p. 7A.

Matthew 7:1 ff.

What is Jesus actually saying in Matthew 7:1 ff.? The context (v. 5) clearly communicates that he is condemning the practice of some who hold themselves up as the standard of right and wrong on a particular matter and who act hypocritically. He is not condemning the practice of anyone using God's Word as the standard for discerning right from wrong, which discernment is in fact a judgment call.

In many places throughout the Bible, God's people are told to distinguish between good and bad deeds and between people who do what is right and those who do what is wrong and to act in such ways as to be separate from the bad deeds and from people who commit to doing wrong; i.e., to be holy, uncommon and separate, to God. Notice within the same passage, Jesus tells us to watch out for, and how to identify, the false prophets. That's making a judgment. (Matthew 7:15-20) See also 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (where here as well as elsewhere we are told to make judgments within the church); 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Philippians 3:2; 1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22; and 1 Timothy 5:20, which, the context (5:19) indicates, applies to church leaders.

Regarding speaking the truth in love about such issues as LGBTQ+, the application of Matthew 7 is not to commit the hypocritical or self-righteous judging Jesus was condemning. Note verse five which establishes the context of the passage. *The Bible teaches God's people to make judgments about what is right and wrong to do; however, the standard of judgment for those who believe in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ is not our own opinions but the Word of God.* In Matthew 7, Christ tells us to "Watch out for false prophets," which discernment requires us to make a judgment, based on such people's deeds, the observable and measurable actions that contrast with the commands of God in the Bible. Jesus informs us that "by their fruit you will recognize them." (v. 20)

So what is Jesus saying when he tells us in Matthew 7:1 to not judge lest we be judged? He is saying do not judge using your own standard, and do not do it hypocritically. We thus need to use God's standard in our judging, not engage in immoral or other unbiblical behavior, and live consistently in that manner ourselves. But read on; there's more in God's Word on this important matter.

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Consider a few other Scripture passages that clarify the matter of judging, such as 1 Corinthians 5:12 where the Apostle Paul admonishes the church ("you" is plural in the original Greek) to *judge* (same Greek word that Jesus used) the behavior of their fellow congregants that it conforms to God's will as he reveals it in his Word. The apostle wrote to Timothy saying that "All Scripture is God-breathed [inspired] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16 TNIV) Such rebuking and correcting involves making a judgment according to observable and measurable behavior that is objectively in contrast to God's written Word.

In addition, Paul explained to the church at Corinth, and by extension to the church through all the ages, what we must also remember: the spiritual person making Scriptural judgments with the guidance of the Holy Spirit who dwells within him or her individually (1 Corinthians 6:19) and within the church (1 Corinthians 3:16) is not subject to any human judgment by people who neither regard nor are guided by the Holy Spirit. Paul is saying they are not qualified to judge you.⁸ So just do what God tells you to do in his Word and don't allow the criticism of others to cause you to worry, cave, cower, dissuade, and divert you from your calling to proclaim his Word.

Further, there is no text in the Bible that supports silence on the matter of homosexuality or any other wrongdoing contrary to the Scriptures. Rather, many passages state that God's people must speak up when they see especially a member of the covenant community engaging in behavior that is condemned in God's Word. For example, "You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin, you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself." (Leviticus 19:17 NRSV) Notice that God's Word here stands in 180° contrast to Western society's concept of hate, which responds to reproof with the comment, "That's hateful!" What God is saying in Leviticus 19:17 is that it is hateful to not reprove someone when he or she is acting contrary to God's will. Half a century ago, a similar concept was taught even in secular society; it was called "tough love."

Why? The answer becomes clear when we broaden our perspective to see God in the picture, where he always is. God, who reveals himself in the Bible, shows that while he is all love (1 John 4:8), he is also not only holy but also holy, holy, holy (Revelation 4:8), the Hebrew way of saying most holy; i.e., he is separated from sin and evil which, near term and long term (including eternal), harms people who bear his image and whom he loves and desires to be in his kingdom. To not reprove someone's sin is to interfere with his or her relationship with God. Moreover, to fail to reprove is to bring guilt upon oneself for facilitating that person's getting into trouble with God, which is not at all loving, not at all speaking the truth in love. Here, as in many other pages of the Bible where immorality is judged, we clearly see love, not at all hate.

Jesus said, "Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive." (Luke 17:3) Paul added, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently." (Galatians 6:1; cf., James 5:19-20; Leviticus 5:1)

The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, also said that we should "admonish one another with all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16) and "admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak,

⁸ W. Harold Mare in his commentary on 1Corinthians 2:14-15 in the *NIV Study Bible New International Version*, Kenneth Barker General Editor (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), p. 1737. "The non-Christian is basically dominated by the merely physical, worldly or natural life. Because he does not possess the Holy Spirit, he is not equipped to receive appreciatively truth that comes from the Spirit. Such a person needs the new birth...One who does not have the Spirit is not qualified to judge the spiritual person. Thus believers are not rightfully subject to the opinions of unbelievers." As Leon Morris explains, "It is God who gives the final verdict...Paul is insisting that the man whose equipment is only of this world, the man who has not received the Holy Spirit of God, has not the ability to make an estimate of things spiritual." *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), p. 60.

be patient with everyone.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14 NASB, NRSV)⁹ Admonishment involves making a judgment, but for Christians it always is to be done by “speaking the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15)

In 1 Corinthians 5:1, the first two words, one of the ways the Greek indicates emphasis, are the adverb, *holōs* (commonly), and the accompanying verb, *akouetai* (is being reported), meaning this was no rumor; it was public knowledge. Thus, Paul admonished the church in Corinth to excommunicate the man to discipline and to teach, but notice the rationale: he was publicly committing an ongoing grievous sin [in the Greek of verse one, *porneia* (sexual immorality)], which should have filled the congregation with grief, since they are holy to God (cf. Ephesians 5:3, “among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality [*porneia*], or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people”). Putting the man outside the church would expose him to the buffets of Satan so that he could come to his senses, repent, be restored, and live righteously for Christ.¹⁰ When the Corinthian church was not only condoning but being proud of this incestuous behavior (5:2), the sinner (wrongly) concluded the church was affirming what he was doing, since silence is typically interpreted as tacit approval. He was receiving no corrective feedback from the congregation, or in Biblical terms no admonition, and thus saw no need to change his behavior, behavior that would destroy him forever.

Moreover, others in the congregation and in the surrounding community were receiving the wrong message: that this behavior must be acceptable; Paul says in effect, “No way! Put him outside of the protections of the covenant community and let Satan’s abuse of him give him a wake-up call that will help him come to his senses and make the changes he has to make, ‘so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.’” (5:5) Such a “tough love” discipline also sends a strong message to the church, and all surrounding the church who are aware of the matter, that this sinfully aberrant behavior is unacceptable to God and his people. This discipline protects the whole church from the moral corruption and compromise of its holiness, calling, and effectiveness that mitigates accomplishing God’s redemptive purposes for his creation in and through the body of Christ. Without this message being sent, people in and outside the church, reading between the lines, hear another message and think: “Mmm, if ole Joe is doing it, and nobody is saying anything, it must be OK.”

Recall the principle Jesus used when referring to the catalytic effect of leaven: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” (Luke 12:1 NASB) Paul made the same point to the Corinthians:

⁹ See also Acts 20:31; 27:9 (NASB); Romans 15:14 (NASB, KJV); 1 Corinthians 4:14 (NASB, NRSV); 1 Thessalonians 5:12 (KJV; NRSV).

¹⁰ In order for such restoration to occur, it is important for some time to elapse before full reinstatement so the church can be sure that the repentance (*metanoēō*), involving not only sorrow for, but a mental, emotional, and behavioral rejection of, the sin has occurred. That repentance, Biblically, involves a complete 180° turning away from the sin that now characterizes the person’s lifestyle, and that he or she is consistently living accordingly. Track record tells; it offers evidence that the repentance is genuine and that professed change does exist. As even in the secular world, words need verification. Your church also may have other established Biblical guidelines for reinstatement that should be followed.

- ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*?
- ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.
- ⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
- ⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;
- ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.
- ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.
- ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*?
- ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (1 Corinthians 5:6-13 NASB)

We must note that the word Paul uses in verses nine and eleven that is translated “immoral” is *pornos*, the same word as we discussed above that includes all kinds of sexual relations outside of marriage. God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman, and the Bible is clear that remains his will. The church must remember who it is and what it has been called to do. As one pastor observed, “The church cannot win anyone to Christ if it lives its life in the gutter.”

Thus, we see in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 and 9-13 clear teaching that an unrepentant sinner should not be welcomed into the church’s full membership. Even the old secular proverb recognizes that “one bad apple spoils the barrel.”

The Reformer John Calvin explains Paul’s statement in 5:9 (that the Corinthians should “not associate with sexually immoral people”) as meaning “what he had already enjoined upon them — that they should refrain from intercourse with the wicked. For the word rendered *to keep company with*, means to be on terms of familiarity with any one, and to be in habits of close intimacy with him.”¹¹

In the Greek the verbs are clearly in the second person plural, whereby Paul calls upon the church to judge someone within it who grievously disobeys God in a flagrantly public manner, thus corrupting the church that allows such behavior by a member as well. (Cf. Leviticus 19:16b-17b) Lenski explains,

When Paul speaks of himself (singular) in the first question he does so only in order to exemplify. Therefore he now adds “you” (plural), the Corinthians. “Do not you judge those within whereas those without God judges?” That is, indeed,

¹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 1 Corinthians, Vol. 1, Chapter 5, WORDSearch.

the true state of affairs. “Those within” are all those who profess the name of Christ with us and call themselves our brethren. We ourselves belong to those within. And all of us are judged by our brethren, namely as to whether we really belong within or not, whether we really are the brethren we profess to be.

In his question Paul merely states the fact that we do thus judge each other; yet this fact implies our right to judge thus. The evidence on which we judge is that of lip and life, word or profession and actual conduct. Christians never have the right to judge a member's heart. *Herzensrichterei* is interference with God's prerogative. If either the profession of the lips or the evident conduct of the life violates the faith, and if all efforts of the church which has applied the law and the gospel have failed, the sinner must be judged as no longer belonging within. Thus to judge those within, to determine who rightly belongs within and who does not, is our only business. It is ours in the nature of the case since no true congregation could be organized or could continue to exist without this judging.¹²

Lenski correctly interprets and applies this passage in 1 Corinthians 5. Do you see the love in this passage and in Paul? This judgment is not primarily punitive; it is caring: caring for the individual involved, caring for the church, and caring for God and his redemptive purposes in and for the world. God has chosen to make his main means of redeeming his creation to be through the church, and for the church to be useful for him it must be holy to him. (Isaiah 41:24; Jeremiah 2:5) Sexual immorality of any kind is not holy.

We need one another to help us stay holy. We must be open to and even inviting of corrective feedback, yes loving judgment, when needed.

In fact that feedback, the truth in love, is comforting. It is very comforting to know that my brothers and sisters in Christ care for my well-being and are walking along with me, watching me, and helping me stay on track, the one Jesus mentioned—a narrow road that leads to life—the one that only few find. (Matthew 7:14) To know that if I step out of line they'll gently and lovingly with compassion, nudge me back on the right path is a comforting and reassuring sense of well-being, well-being that is physically, emotionally, relationally, and especially spiritually healthy. Doing so shows that they love and care about me. And I also need to be prepared to do the same for them in accord with these Scriptural guidelines.

In verse 12, the Greek verb Paul uses for the judging of what we Christians do as members of the church is *krinō*, which means, depending on the context, judge, separate, distinguish, decide between, approve, give judgment, condemn, punish.¹³ Here, in this passage it means to judge in the sense of contrasting the behavior of those in, not those outside, the church with God's Word and distinguishing what is acceptable to God and in accord with his will, and what is disobedient

¹² *Lenski New Testament Commentary – The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 231. WORDSearch.

¹³ *Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary, The – Zeta-Kappa*. WORDSearch.

to God's Word and will. Lenski continues, contrasting the concept of judgment pertaining to those outside ("without") the church.

13) The situation is entirely different regarding those without. We certainly do not need to judge those that are without, for they do not even attempt to come in. God will attend to them, and it is our business to leave them in God's hands. When Paul says in 6:2 "that the saints shall judge the world" he by no means forgets that he has just written that we have no business to judge those without. He is here speaking of disciplinary judging. The world or those without are not subject to the discipline of the church and to judging connected with discipline. It is God alone who disciplines the world with judgments.¹⁴

One of the Greek verbs usually translated "encourage" in the New Testament is παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*), which also means exhort and call for (Acts 28:20). See such passages as 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9 (in which the word "refuting" translates *antilegontas* which means "speak against," "contradict," and "refute" (NIV—Do any of those acts not involve making a judgment?); 2:6,15 (where Paul also says to *elenche*, which means to refute, convict, reprove [NIV]—How can you do that without making a judgment?), to cite just a few.

We should also take note that *parakaleō* and *elenche* in Titus 2:15, and *parakaleō* in Titus 2:6 are commands (clearly, they are in the imperative mood—a command—in the Greek); God is saying this is not an option for us. Does that therefore mean those who don't want us to make any judgments in the church are committing heresy? What do they do with 2 Timothy 3:16?

Since we live by grace and all need it, I'm willing to say that this heresy of most is unreflective, i.e., insufficiently thought through, and unintentional though sometimes cowardly, but none the less culpable. Heresy by any other name does not smell sweet. Relatedly but on another matter, do you hear Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "You're Israel's teacher and do you not understand these things?" (John 3:10) Having said that though, let us urge them to be more careful in their thinking, teaching, and accusing, for what they are saying is wrong and misleading, whatever their motivation. Let us also remind them to be courageous, because Christ Jesus has overcome the world (Greek: νενίκηκα [*nenikēka*], "I have conquered" John 16:33), and he has told us he will be with us always. (Joshua 1:5; Matthew 28:20) Also, we encourage one another when we come together and when we model courage. (Cf., e.g., Acts 28:15; Philippians 1:14)

Of course Paul teaches us how to make the judgments we are supposed to do: by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and gently (Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:25). I know some in the church historically, and I myself, have at times struggled to keep speaking the truth and loving in balance. But I've also found that when I've had to confront people (or better "care-fronting" them as David Augsburger so well urges¹⁵), maintaining this balance is effective, and the other

¹⁴ Lenski *New Testament Commentary – The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 231. WORDSearch.

¹⁵ David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Confront* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981), p. 10.

persons involved are typically appreciative. In fact people watch us and want us to speak up in such a way when warranted. *There is considerable comfort in knowing brothers and sisters in the Lord are watching over me and are unwilling to let me go too far out of line without speaking to me.* One way to facilitate this feedback is suggested in Appendix E of my e-book, [*What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love.*](#)

Further, the noun form of this verb (*parakaleō*) is *paraklētos*, occurring only in the Bible in the Gospel by John and in his first letter, and is the word Jesus uses for the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom he and the Father will send. (John 14:16; 15:26) But is the Holy Spirit just a comforter? In John 14-16, which I refer to as the Holy Spirit's job description, Jesus says that one aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit is to "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment..." (16:8-11) Is that comfort? In many ways, Yes! It's better we find out now that we have changes we need to make, while we can still implement them.

For just a few ways consider that for believers it is a great comfort knowing that God is at work in the world in his plan of redeeming his creation; nothing is spinning out of control, as many wrongly perceive. Also, for those the Holy Spirit does convict of guilt and sin and for whom he gives the new birth that issues forth in saving faith, that results in a huge comfort! Just ask new believers in Christ who readily say what a great comfort it is to be freed from the world's ways in which they were trapped until freed by the Lord. Certainly the righteousness in Jesus' work and going to the Father, and taking us with him, is indeed comforting, especially as seen in regard to the eternal implications of what Christ Jesus has accomplished.

1 Corinthians 11:27-34

The Apostle Paul also informs us that the failure to attend to the right administration of the sacrament of holy communion has serious, even deadly, outcomes. After admonishing the church in Corinth as to how they were eating and drinking the Lord's Supper in very unworthy ways, he said this to them:

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³²When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

³³So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. ³⁴If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.
(1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

So, here again, we are to make judgments. We are to judge what behavior is appropriate for us and what is inappropriate. Furthermore, since we are to watch out for our brothers

and sisters in the Lord, we should admonish them when they are sinning (not when they do something I don't like, i.e., when it is only a matter of personal opinion), so they, and we (Leviticus 19:17), won't need to experience a much more serious judgment.

The more I think about this topic, the more I wonder if there isn't a correlation between the proclivity of many in the church to only hear what makes them feel good¹⁶ (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3) together with the drum beating about not making judgments **and** the noticeable lessening of maturity in Christ (contrasted with many in the past, our forebears who knew and applied the Scriptures and historic Christian systematic theology so well). Do you older readers remember these great saints ever talking so much about how we shouldn't judge? I don't have such a recollection. I know they sometimes overstepped and spoke too harshly, but I surely do miss their solid wisdom, knowledge of God's Word, discernment, and admonition.

That said, we must keep in mind, as acknowledged above, that all people sin and fall short of the glory of God, and we will be held accountable for such deeds. This proclivity of human nature to sin, and since even the regenerated, reborn, human nature has remnants of the old sinful nature still hanging on, we do sometimes sin. (Romans 7) This is why we need to nurture our faith and constantly seek to mature in Christ-likeness. If a Christian sins and judges someone wrongly, he or she should repent and ask forgiveness of the other person and of God and then redouble his or her effort to not recommit that sin. (James 5:16; 1 John 2:5-6)

Yet as we have also seen above, it is disingenuous, mistaken, and misleading of fellow Christians and others to accuse the church of making judgments it has been commanded by God to do. The church must be discerning at all times, especially in this age; we need to help one another to stay on the narrow road that leads to life so that none of us veers off onto the broad road that leads to destruction. (Matthew 7:13-14) Is that in itself not making a judgment? And, is it not truly a caring expression of love for that brother or sister in Christ to do so?

Furthermore, can you see the love in such speaking of the truth, a love that brings great comfort and assurance? Owen Strachan can, and he observantly points out what occurs when churches lose sight of God's Word and the connection between truth and love.

Tragically, some professing evangelicals believe that their affirmation of sin is loving. It is no such thing. The worst position in the world is one in which you sit unchallenged in your depravity, with no one to call you to repentance. City Church and other congregations are laying down the true gospel and preaching a Jesus whose death makes no offense, presents no rebuke, effects no transformation. It leaves no mark and causes no scandal. This is an affirmation-only gospel.¹⁷

¹⁶ See the insightful article, "Pleasure: The Greatest Idol of Our Time," by Calvin Theological Seminary Professor of Philosophical Theology, John Cooper, in the Fall 2014 issue of the *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum*, pp. 3-6, which is available at <http://www.calvinseminary.edu/wp-content/uploads/forums/Forum%2010-14.pdf>. (Accessed 02/11/2015) Cooper offers an informative analysis of our contemporary U. S. culture with profound theological implications and applications.

¹⁷ Owen Strachan, "City Church and the Affirmation-only Gospel," March 18, 2015, <http://cbmw.org/public-square/city-church-and-the-affirmation-only-gospel/> (Accessed 4/20/15)

Speaking this truth in love is part of the caring God's people do for one another. We need to hear the truth so we stay on the narrow way, but we need to hear it in love, especially when it comes in the form of corrective feedback, so we can overcome the pain of admonition and be motivated to make the necessary changes.

Thus, speaking the truth in love helps the recipient. It also helps the giver. Most of us who have to speak up and tell someone something he or she doesn't want to hear don't really want to do it. We hope someone else will tell the person. We put it off. We try to think of reasons why maybe we don't need to say something, at least not now. We know how the other person is likely to receive what we have to say. Remember Proverbs 18:16. "A gift opens the way for the giver...." Your love, including speaking in kindness and gentleness, is a great gift! A gift we all need. And it does facilitate receptivity, especially when preceded with prayer.

Romans 14:1-15:13

Someone may quote these verses from Romans 14 and try to use them to stop you from making appropriate judgments.

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (v. 1)

"Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (v. 4)

"You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (v. 10)

"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." (v. 13)

If this is all we read of this chapter and of the rest of the Bible, we'd never want to object to anything anyone does! Yet, that is not the case in this chapter or, as we've seen on the preceding pages, elsewhere in God's Word.

Well then, how do we accurately interpret these verses? Beginning with the hermeneutical principle of context, we need to consider carefully what subject Paul is addressing in this passage. Lenksi has stated it well.

Justification by faith enables the Christian to take the correct view of all adiaphora. It leads him to treat the overscrupulous and thus weak brother with helpful forbearance; and it leads the weak brother to refrain from judging harshly the well-informed stronger brother. Through this effect justification by faith

creates harmony and unity among believers. The value of this section for all time is thus apparent.¹⁸

Lenski correctly indicates that Paul is addressing the subject of the “disputable matters” (v. 1) whereby true believers in and followers of Jesus Christ may hold to differing interpretations concerning specific passages of the Bible that do not pertain to the core requirements regarding salvation and redemption or other aspects of God’s Word and will. Thus, texts such as Romans 10:9 would not be a “disputable matter.” In the fields of Biblical studies, theology, and liturgics the *adiaphora* (< Greek, *adiaphoros*, indifferent) refer to those texts, subjects, rites and ceremonies that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word and therefore may be done or not as individually desired. Therefore, believers may differ in their understanding of God’s will pertaining to the issue at hand.

As we see in the very first verse of the chapter, Paul is speaking precisely about such adiaphoric matters. “Accept those whose faith is weak without quarreling over disputable matters.” (Romans 14:1 TNIV) Disputable matters are not commanded one way or the other by God. At the same time, many moral matters are specifically commanded by God that they should not be done, e.g., homosexuality—we are told very clearly not to do it—as we see in the Bible texts identified and explained in Chapter One of [*What Is God’s Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love.*](#)

Verses 4, 10, and 13 above command us to not judge someone in the disputable matters. He or she is free to make those decisions in accord with his or her walk with the Lord (v. 2 and *passim*). The “someone else” in verse four is God; we are not to judge one of his servants on disputable matters.

It should also be noted that pro-homosexual writers argue that the “disputable matters” in Romans 14 also pertain to Scriptures (specifically the first and fourth [or in some traditions the third] of the 10 Commandments). They thus try to put the commandments such as in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; and Romans 1:26-27 on the same level as “disputable matters.” A commandment from God is not disputable; it is nonnegotiable.

Further, a closer look at the Romans 14 text, shows that the people to whom Paul was referring knew what the text meant; the point of difference is with how they were living out the texts. That is, we here have another instance where we see the importance in hermeneutics to discern the difference between principle and application of principle. For example, the differences in applying the principle of the Sabbath commandment is what Paul is referring to in verse five.

Therefore, the pro-homosexual activist appeal to the “disputable matters” referred to in Romans 14 is invalid. This chapter provides no Biblical basis for a church to permit its members to practice homosexuality.

¹⁸ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, WORDSearch, p. 811.

Review and Summary of the Judging to Be Done in the Church

1. As human beings who are sinful and fall short of the glory of God, whose regenerated (reborn) nature still has remnants of sin attached that incline us to disobey God, we need each other in the church to help us stay on the right path in order to serve God most effectively and model such behavior for others. (Romans 3:23; 2 Timothy 3:16)
2. The judging we are to do involves sin, not simply disagreement with someone doing something we don't like. (Matthew 18:15; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Romans 14:1 ff.)
3. The standard of judgment is God's Word, the Bible; the standard is not oneself, i.e., his or her opinion and/or desire. The judging we are to do involves the application of God's Word to all of us in the church, including ourselves; there is no room in the Bible for hypocrisy. We must "practice what we preach." (Matthew 7:1-20; 23)
4. We are called to make judgments in the sense of discerning what is acceptable behavior in accord with God's Word and addressing the matter with those who are behaving contrary to God's Word. (Leviticus 19:16b-17b; Matthew 7:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Philippians 3:2; Colossians 3:16; 1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22; 1 John 4:1)
5. Love is the main motive for judging, and the judging we are called to do must always be done in love for the accomplishment of God's redemptive purposes including maturity in Christ. It is done to help not to hurt. It involves compassionate caring for fellow believers, keeping in mind that we, too, are sinners, and our judging is not done with an attitude of superiority. (1 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 4:11-16)
6. The judgment in the church of documented and unrepentant sinful behavior that has become public knowledge (not rumor), involving church discipline, is done by the official board of the congregation, and where necessary by higher judicatories within the denominational structure. It is always done in love with the goal of saving the person. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)
7. It is disingenuous, mistaken, and misleading of fellow Christians to accuse the church of making judgments it has been commanded by God to do.
8. If a Christian sins and judges someone wrongly, he or she should repent and ask forgiveness of the other person and of God and then redouble his or her effort to not recommit that sin. (James 5:16; 1 John 2:5-6)
9. Knowing brothers and sisters in Christ are looking out for us and will speak up if we step off the right path is a very comforting and reassuring sense of being cared for and loved, by them, and by God who has called us to do such caring for one another.
10. Christians are not to judge the world, those outside the church. God judges the world. (1 Corinthians 5:9-13, esp. v. 13)

Caring Judgments Outside as Well as Inside the Church

We've been reflecting on how observing certain behavior in the light of God's Word, we are able to recognize it as displeasing to God, counterproductive to the well-being of the person doing those acts, and harmful to others as well. Such physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually negative, harmful, and dangerous behavior if not admonished is exacerbated and becomes destructive. One of the reasons God commands us not to do certain acts is because he knows such behavior ruins and even destroys the lives of people who bear his image and whom he loves.¹⁹

Take a moment to think of the myriad of problems people experience, either in what you've observed in your life and those around you, and what you've read in advice columns and other sources. A common thread connects virtually all their problems: disobedience to God's will, engaging in behavior he has commanded in his Word not to do. A letter advice columnist Amy Dickinson received is illustrative.

DEAR AMY I love my friend "Charlene," but she is the very definition of high maintenance.

She drinks way too much—every day—and sleeps with strangers she meets in bars. The problem then becomes that she thinks she is in a relationship with them, and is then crushed when things don't work out.

She is extremely sexual and is very vulnerable. She is desperate for an authentic and loving relationship but men have used, abused, and taken advantage of her. She ignores every piece of advice I give her but then she expects me to be a shoulder to cry on when her life falls apart.

I try to be supportive and non-judgmental because she really is a beautiful person. She has been there for me through some tough times, but this friendship has become draining.

She wants me to drink with her, but I won't, because she has a problem.

She is in counseling but constantly uses me to vent and cry to. I love her dearly, but I don't want to be that listening ear anymore. It's exhausting but I feel guilty and terrible for feeling this way. —*Bad Friend*²⁰

¹⁹ For other reasons, see my PowerPoint program, [*Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity.*](#)

²⁰ <https://www.denverpost.com/2022/08/04/ask-amy-high-maintenance-friend-is-a-drama-drain/> (Published and Accessed 08/04/2022; Accessed 08/18/2023) If you access this column and read her answer, you will observe that some of what she advises is not in accord with this essay.

Sadly, by not living in accord with God’s Word and will, “Charlene” is destroying herself. The sexual sins she is committing are harming her in many ways,²¹ including, but not limited to guilt, loss of self-worth, and depression. To cope with these and other devastating dimensions of her destruction, she has addicted herself to several means of escape, including alcohol, aberrant sex, and the affirmation of a “friend,” who knows she is not doing well, even “bad” by her own admission.

“Bad Friend” has failed “Charlene” by choosing to follow the culture’s canard to be “non-judgmental,” the very opposite of what “Charlene” needs. By refusing to recognize the sin and evil in her friend’s sexual activity and make the judgement that this sexual behavior is wrong, not right, “Bad Friend” is enabling, aiding and abetting, facilitating, “Charlene’s” self-destruction.

“Charlene” needs to hear in loving and caring words from a trusted real friend that what she is doing is against the will of God who truly loves her, created her in his image that she bears, and has provided redemption for her in Jesus Christ, who alone can restore, cleanse, purify, and free her from her addiction to these counterproductive behaviors. The true friend can then lead and support “Charlene’s” way out of evil and to the Way (John 14:6) to recovery and a new life in Jesus Christ. “Charlene” may or may not do so at once. She may decline and/or reject the life-saving admonishment, misperceived as another wound even though given in love. “Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy [including a “Bad Friend”] *are* deceitful.” (Proverbs 27:6 KJV) And definitely not helpful; indeed, they are just the opposite!

“Bad Friend” can become a real and most helpful friend by making this true judgment, “speaking the truth in love,” and gently and supportively raising the questions “Charlene” needs to carefully consider and act upon, beginning right away. She could be a catalyst for Christ, a channel through whom the powerful working of the Holy Spirit can facilitate “Charlene’s” regeneration and sanctification in Christ and the new and eternal life in and with the Lord. Remembering that “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...” (James 1:17), she can have the wonderful blessing that comes with the realization the triune God has worked through her to heal “Charlene.”

Both “Charlene” and her friend can become transformed. Functioning in these ways, the friend herself will receive renewed strength, overcome feeling drained, and become highly encouraged, knowing she is leading her friend to the Lord and the all-powerful help he alone can give. If any further human assistance is needed, “Charlene” should see a Christian pastor who faithfully proclaims God’s Word and who can recognize whether “Charlene” needs another counselor, one who is a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and who will offer counsel in accord with God’s will. All these true friends will with God’s help provide the ongoing support “Charlene” needs to live the new life to the fullest that Jesus came to provide. (John 10:10)

²¹ See both sections of the Special Focus Program—“[Why Are Sexual Sins So Significant?](#)”—in addition to related information throughout the free e-book, [What Is God’s Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love](#), for an explanation of why sexual sins are so devastating.