

Judge Not!

Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged. Matthew 7:1, 2

Taking the liberty to judge others is a frequent and horribly destructive practice among Christians. By it we discourage many in their Christian life and keep multitudes out of the Kingdom of God altogether, and it has terrible consequences for those who do it.

The word "judge" in Matthew 7:1 is the Greek, *Krino*. It means, "To divide, separate, pass judgment on, sentence, or condemn."

Certainly we must judge acts of sin, as sin. Church leaders are responsible to deal with sin, especially that which affects the life of the church. But we may not judge hearts! You might say there's a fine line here. No its not! Let's consider two forbidden areas.

The first is the judgment of motives. Why people do the things they do. More than once God has hit me upside the head and told me that people weren't doing things for the reasons I thought they were.

Sometimes we experience pain in relationships where people really do want the right thing, but they go about it in the wrong way. They are not out to get us as much as we think they are. Instead, we have become the object of their ill informed and misguided effort to serve God and to achieve what they truly believe is right. They can be both sincere, and wrong! This concept has eased some serious issues for me along the way! I could take you to the bend in the road where God spoke it to me late one night in 1979.

We might be tempted to judge why someone goes or doesn't go to the altar. "She just wants to look spiritual" or, "He's just too stubborn." Or why people send, or don't send their kids to a certain school. Or why they put rings or studs in strange places. Or why she left. Or why someone stopped coming to church. Or why folks do or don't do any one of a million things they do or don't do.

The second area is when we judge another's relationship with God.

There's the guy who made a sincere commitment to Christ – but soon afterwards saw the pastor fall into immorality. He is now profoundly turned off by the institution. He reads his Bible regularly at home and mixes freely with Christians at school events but won't get close to "church." Not even to a small group. Any chance he is saved?

And how about my high school buddy who was turned off by the legalistic church he grew up in? He smokes some and doesn't go to church, but he regularly watches Christian programs on TV. Any hope?

What of people who are not healed when they are prayed for; those who have ongoing financial needs; and the multitudes with seemingly insurmountable problems of every description? Our pious, "Alls you have to do is trust God" just doesn't cut it for them.

These are the people we pounce on with *krino*. They feel our separation and condemnation and many are held back in their walk with God because of it.

Listen, we don't know why people are the way they are. Their emotional, verbal, sexual or other abuses are hidden to us. We don't know if their father affirmed them into adulthood, or withheld that affirmation. We don't know of their betrayal by Christians or their experiences with congregational conflict or lifeless churches that drove them away. All we know is that they don't meet our criteria. We cut them off at the knees and then criticize them again for not being able to walk. The price of our judgment can hardly be tallied. The tears we cause would fill an ocean.

One reason we bring judgment upon ourselves by judging others is that it is too often our own hypocrisy that keeps them away. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:3, we worry about the speck in someone else's eye when we have a log in our own. Fat preachers should exercise a lot of humility in preaching against the sins of others. People are not turned off by God as much as they are by the church. We are an offense to them, yet we judge them! How can it be?!

Another reason this is so serious is that we have withheld from them the mercy that we so depend upon ourselves, every moment of our life. It is the sowing and reaping concept. Consider James 2:13 and tremble!

Thirdly, love and mercy draw us toward persons with deep need, but judging separates us from them. God wants to reach them through us but we have condemned them to continue as they are. You can be sure He holds us accountable.

Finally, judging others makes us feel more spiritual and helps us excuse needs in our own hearts. It is often said and is probably true, that we are the harshest toward others in the area of our own greatest weakness. Seeing it in them stirs up fear for what it is doing or could do in us. We try to appease our conscience and tame our own tiger by declaring such a thing "awful" – in *them*. We further condemn ourselves by judging them rather than humbly dealing with our own need.

Heaven will include many desperately imperfect people who truly loved God but never quite "got the victory" in one way or another. (Aaaah – actually, that describes every one of us, pious assertions contrariwise notwithstanding!) In fact, some of them are probably more worthy than the religious hypocrites who kept them marginalized in their walk with God and distanced from the church. And there is something appealing about the fact that they are often more "real" than some other Christians.

Ours is not to judge the heart and motives of another. We are to actively love, forgive, encourage and nurture the weak. Like Jesus did, and does today – to those who extend mercy to others.

Consider also: I Corinthians 4:5 and Galatians 6:1-3.

Born in 1940, Ken Stoltzfus has worked as a pilot, ordained Christian minister, businessman, missionary to Africa and writer. This is #1 in his series "Snippets from the Good Book", and is one of many short articles that can be found at www.John2031.com Bible quotations are from the New Living Translation, © 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers.

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