

Judging In The Church

Very Limited Authority

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On the first holy day, I gave you an overview of God's judgments against Israel while they were in the wilderness ["Five Major Problems in the Wilderness"]. Most of these judgments are found in the book of Numbers, which is almost like a roadmap for the church of God's pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. These judgments have application to us in two ways. The first is as a body of the people of God, even as Israel was a body; or as it is even directly called in the book of Acts, chapter 7, "the congregation in the wilderness." Therefore, it is quite evident that God was judging the collective conduct of Israel.

The second application was that even as God was judging the collective conduct, He was also judging the individual conduct of members of the group. This is clearly shown when He had separated the faithful conduct of Joshua and Caleb from the disobedient rebellion of the other ten tribes, and also when Moses lost his faith during a moment of intense anger with Israel. God judged him separately and immediately.

Today I am going to make an attempt to look at one of the more difficult subjects we face and strive to do well in glorifying God as we do so. It is also on the subject of judging, but in this case, church members judging each other. Our judging of each other is a very serious matter with God, as we are going to see. So we begin with a question: Why is it so difficult? Well, because we are clearly commanded not to judge one another, and yet the human mind is a decision-making instrument that operates largely by observation and research in order to make judgments concerning the home, work, play, and life's relationships.

Making matters more difficult is that so much of our life we have been "enslaved," (as the Bible puts it)—indeed *driven* by a self-centered mind,

antagonistic toward God and fellowman, and therefore broadly negative in attitude and critical of others while filled with egotistic pride regarding the self.

Brethren, this is not an easy combination to deal with when it comes to producing loving, peaceful relationships with one another. Human nature is highly competitive toward others, and at one and the same time, strongly defensive of the self and one's own, like one's own children.

We are going to take a brief look at I Corinthians 2:15.

I Corinthians 2:15 But he who is spiritual [meaning a converted person] judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

In this verse, Paul is not stating that the Christian person is an inexhaustible source of wisdom. In order to understand Paul is not doing that, we have to add material from other places in order to modify what it says right here. If we took it just literally the way Paul says it, it would be like the Christian person would never make a mistake in his judgments. Rather, it is a veiled reference, implying that because we have access to God, we *do* have access to an inexhaustible source of wisdom. It is also implying, because a Christian has access to the Scriptures to use as his compass for guidance, he is enabled to make accurate appraisals on a broad spectrum of human experience.

It should be clear, just from something like this, that God wants us to *learn* to accurately judge. The emphasis is on the word "learn." It does not come automatically. It is something we have to make diligent effort toward coming to do accurately.

We are going to look at God's instruction about one narrow but important area of judging. He wants us to be experienced and accurate in implementing this in our lives. Unfortunately, all too often we are too impatient and harsh in our judgment of each other.

One of the major causes of offense within the church occurs because we do not really understand one common term and how the Bible uses it. We often give these things that are said far more weight than they deserve. I say this, because very much of the time the causes of offense are nothing more than

the giving, receiving, believing, and acting upon what is nothing more than another human opinion. We hear, and we believe, and emotionally act upon them as though they were the voice of God coming from on high. Motivating this is nothing more than human pride working at its best to produce division.

Remember this: God, in His judgments and word, does not deal in terms of opinion. I am narrowing this right down to God. He deals in truth, supported by deep and clear discernment and understanding, all of which all of us greatly lack. We are just children compared to Him. He has had thousands of years of experience dealing with humans. How long have we lived? Just make a little comparison here. I am 77 years old. I am not the oldest person in this congregation, but that is a tiny amount of time. So God does not deal in opinions, but we very commonly do. He wants us to grow out of, mature away from, allowing these opinions to direct our lives.

The word "opinion" only occurs three times in the entire Bible, and all of them but one is in one ten-verse section of Job 32. You might find this interesting. All three are used by the young man Elihu as he humbly deferred to the age and experiences of the four older men by referring to *his* comments, which actually, as far as they went humanly, were spot on compared to the other four older men. Humanly, he hit the nail right on the head, and yet he had enough humility to simply say what he said was an opinion. There is a good deal to learn from that fine example.

The word "opinions" appears one time. Again, it is instructive. It appears in I Kings 18 when Elijah challenged the Israelites by saying, "How long halt you between two opinions?" That is exactly what they were. They did not really know where they stood with God at all. They just had a belief, an idea, a concept. And I take it, from the result of what happened there, that Elijah was "spot on" that these people were relying on an opinions and not truth, not the judgments of God. God does not deal in opinions. Men do. God deals absolutely in factual judgment: *His*.

Look up the word "opinion" in a good dictionary, and though it may on occasion be termed a judgment, is really nothing more than a feeling. Incidentally, these definitions came from *The Reader's Digest Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary*. This is what it said. "An opinion is a feeling, a sentiment, an impression, a view, or simply the way one feels at the

moment." It then goes on to say, "It can be nothing more than a passing thought. They are personal evaluations and/or judgments, not necessarily in the realm of fact." As we might say, "Well, it is just an idea that I had come off the top of my head." But that is the way we are. We react to something. The tongue springs into action and *boom!*—out it comes, on its way possibly to doing major offensive damage, and it was nothing more than a feeling reaction somebody had to a situation.

We have a strong inclination to deal with them far more emotionally than they deserve, both in the giving and receiving of them. This is not an overthought or just a passing thought. Pride is working in the background. All too often, our pride makes us blurt out something, because we want to be heard.

The biblical term "judgment" carries far more serious implication, because very often it has a judicial sense to it. As we continue, we are going to put together a number of scriptures I feel clearly establishes to whom judgment, in a judicial sense, is the responsibility of. This is aimed toward the church, and it is what God has ordained *for* the church, and so it is going to be the basic instruction we need to have to operate from in the making of judgments.

Let us turn to John 3:17-19. This is right after that world-famous verse—"For God so loved the world . . ." but let us go on to verse 17.

John 3:17-19 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Men made a judgment against accepting Jesus Christ for what He was and for what He was saying, and what did they do? They condemned themselves by responding to that opinion they came up with.

As we begin to lay a foundation here, let us go to John 12:46-47.

John 12:46-47 I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, **I do not judge him**; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

We can reach a bit of conclusion here, at least at this point, because I believe that these two scriptures establish that even Jesus Christ, the first time He came, did not come in a judicial sense at all. He came to preach the gospel, to die for men's sins, and provide the basis for salvation.

Let us now go to Acts 10:42-43. We are looking at our Savior and what it says about Him. Peter is speaking, and he is speaking to Cornelius's household when he had been sent there to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 10:42-43 And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

It says there that after Jesus Christ's resurrection, He sent the apostles out to preach the gospel to the world, and He commanded them to preach to the people and testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.

Now go to Acts 17:30-31. This time it is Paul speaking, and he is speaking to the people in the city of Athens.

Acts 17:30-31 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

We are now going to go to I Peter 4:4-5. I am trying to give you a look at this from several different writers of the New Testament so that you can see

it from different peoples' perspective, and you will find they are in complete agreement.

I Peter 4:4-5 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Let us put those three sections there together, and we can get something I feel is very significant. Remember, the first two verses I gave very clearly established that Jesus Christ, the first time He came, did not come to judge the world. In the next three verses I gave we see that after His resurrection the gospel was going out, and there was a significant difference. Now we see that Jesus Christ *is* appointed to be Judge and is ready to do so; and so the next time He comes, His reason for coming is going to be far different from what it was the first time around. A change in God's approach to mankind has already taken place. If you remember I Peter 4:17 we went into last time, right now that is taking place first in the church. We are being judged right now, and the One we are being judged by is Jesus Christ.

Let us go to John 8:15, as we begin to see things falling into place in regard to judgment and its place in the church of God.

John 8:15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one.

That is very plain. The first time He came, He was not here as judge in a judicial sense at all. This does not mean He was not judging. He indeed *was* judging, but He was not judging in a judicial sense—in a sense that would lead to punishment, condemnation, salvation, or whatever.

Let us reach one conclusion to this point, and here it is. We need to be measuring ourselves against the standard, and that standard is Jesus Christ. Our authority from God to judge another is quite limited. As brilliant as Jesus was, and as spiritually equipped as He was—having been given the Spirit without measure—even *He* was not appointed to judge, and was not deemed ready for God's purpose until after His death and resurrection.

How great a chance do we have of arriving at a correct judgment in comparison to the Standard? Are you beginning to see that God is filling in the details for a government that *is* going to judge? Brethren, we are nothing but learners, and from what we have just seen by these scriptures, if we can take them to be true—and I surely do—that the Father did not even consider Jesus' first time around ready to be appointed. He had to experience life as a human being, making all kinds of appraisals and evaluations that became built up in His mind (understanding what it is like to be a human being) until He had gone through that trial at the end of His life and then was resurrected. Now He was ready to judge. So where does that leave us in regard to judging our brethren or anybody else for that matter?

If Jesus is shown to have received no authority in a judicial sense, where does that leave us? Well, I will give a quick answer. It should leave us quick to listen, slow to speak, or we might be in danger of showing ourselves to really be foolish.

Let us continue in Romans 2:5-11. I am just going to pick up excerpts here from the writers of these epistles and so forth. We will be coming back to some of these verses fairly frequently, but we will be picking up different parts of them.

Romans 2:5-11 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.

I picked this up because I want you to see that Paul generally assigned judgment to God. We will go no further than that right there. Within the context of Romans 2, it is being addressed both to Israelite and Gentile peoples.

We are now going to go to II Corinthians 5:10. There will be somewhat of a difference here because of whom the epistle is directed toward.

II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, [In this area, Christ is specifically named as Judge.] that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

This is addressed to the Corinthian congregation, and so the "each one" referred to there was a member of the Corinthian church. They were being judged by Jesus Christ; and if we understand, that judgment is ongoing from the time God calls us.

Romans 14:10-12 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Again, this context focuses on a single congregation, but this time in Rome, and when we put all of these scriptures together, Jesus Christ has clearly been appointed Judge by the Father, having authority over all nations and the church; and as High Priest, He is already acting as Judge over the church. That much is already going on, and if we understand two of those verses about standing before Him, that is going on right now. We are already standing before Him and appraisals are being made of our conduct.

As far as we have gone, where is our authority to judge stated? If the authority in the scriptures is all given to Jesus Christ (and even in His case it did not begin, if we are going to take the scriptures that way, until after He died and was resurrected); and so far then, that authority for you and me is not stated. It seems that if we begin judging in a judicial sense, we have

stepped beyond the bounds of our authority and presume to put ourselves into Christ's responsibility, and that begins to be presumptuous.

Let us continue on. Let us go to one of the most familiar scriptures on this subject in Matthew 7:1. I want you to see how direct and strong the language is from our Savior.

Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged.

That is pretty straight-forward. "Judge not." Let me change that a little bit. He said, "Don't do it." That is pretty clear. Now how often should He have to give such a blunt command? We ought to understand, that if He says, "Don't do it," there is something there He wants us to avoid. He said, "Do no murder." "Do not steal." "Do not lie." That is pretty clear, is it not? He does not want us to do those things, because the danger of death lies in our doing those things. And then He says, "Do not judge." Is that any different from "Do not murder?" It is just as clear, and I think we should take it that He means what He says.

Let us go to Romans 2:1-2. We are going to begin reading a little bit earlier in the chapter than we had before. This time it is the apostle Paul who did the majority of the writing after Christ was resurrected and went off to heaven.

Romans 2:1-2 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself [uh oh!]; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

A little bit different context, but it is stating that we are inexcusable if guilty as Paul states, and that is pretty blunt too.

We are going to go back to Romans 14 again, and look at verse 13 as Paul reaches sort of a mini conclusion over the first twelve verses. He says:

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Paul did not change his mind between chapter 2 and chapter 14. That is pretty straightforward as well. So I would have to say, if the force of these commands is such; it ought to, at the very least, serve as a warning. For whatever reason they are stating it this strongly, the authors perceive judging is dangerous to the judge. Are you with me on that? The judging is dangerous to the one judging.

I believe that commands as direct as the ones we have just read are given by Christ in this manner because the potential for sinning by the judge is very high; and He does not want us to fall into any one of the several traps that open up when we move to judge a brother.

Before we go any further, let us clarify a bit more concerning opinions; and that biblically, the subject of judging has a judicial aspect to it. By judicial, I mean in the sense that the judgment we fix has a courtroom environment sense or flavor or finality when it is given or pronounced.

We are now going to add another factor to judging, and we are going to go to John 7:19-24. Here, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees.

John 7:19-24 Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?" [They must have been blind! How badly impaired was their judgment!] Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Here we find an interesting turn. The interesting turn is this, that it modifies scriptures like Matthew 7:1; Romans 2:1-2; 14:13, because Christ clearly invites us to make judgments here, but He specifies they must be righteous judgments, and there is the catch.

This episode clearly takes place at the Feast of Tabernacles, but it is reflecting back on an earlier event over which His Jewish opponents were still stewing. This began when Jesus healed the paralytic man at the Bethesda pool on the Sabbath and told him to take up his bed and walk. That was in John 5.

The problem here was that their sense of judgment, their sense of proportion of what is right and wrong and good and evil, was unbalanced. It is right here where we tend to fall into the trap; that our sense of proportion, our sense of balance, our understanding of what is right and wrong is cloudy, and so the potential for making a bad judgment is fairly high. So we make a bad judgment, and as we saw in those verses, we bring the thing back on ourselves by making a bad judgment.

In other words, the judgment that the Pharisees made proved that they were not equipped to make a righteous judgment. They deemed Jesus a sinner because He made a man completely, physically whole on the Sabbath. But at the same time they did not believe it wrong for them to break the common Sabbath law in order to circumcise a boy-child on the Sabbath because the eighth day fell on the Sabbath. So they went ahead and circumcised on the Sabbath because they believed that circumcision is a redemptive act and therefore a more important issue than keeping the Sabbath command normally. Because of this reasoning, the act of circumcision overrode the Sabbath commandment.

In this judgment, they were correct; and therefore Jesus did not correct that conclusion because it was a right one. Circumcision was the seal of making the Old Covenant with God, and therefore was exceedingly important. We do today the same thing. We make the same judgment in regard to baptism, because it, too, is a redemptive act. It overrides the normal keeping of the Sabbath, and therefore we baptize on the Sabbath. It is more important to baptize a person than it is to keep the Sabbath without baptizing. However, those Pharisees failed to judge correctly, that what Jesus did in making the

man whole was also greater than the normal Sabbath command, and was also therefore absolutely correct to do.

What we have in both Mark 2 and John 5 are occasions when two major laws were at odds with each other. The one was the weekly Sabbath; the other was either mercy, or it was the redemptive act, and so a judgment has to be made as to which is to be followed and which is to be set aside. In both cases Christ set aside the normal Sabbath conduct in favor of the greater law of mercy. Is it not merciful to heal a person? Absolutely!

Recall that in Mark 2 of the Sabbath-healing incident, it is said there by Christ that "God desires mercy and not sacrifice"—in this case the sacrifice of failing to do the merciful act because it was the Sabbath. By the time we get to John 7, the peoples' attitude toward Him was hard-headed and competitive, and it blinded them to His merciful wisdom. This combination, working in their minds, render them incapable of a righteous judgment.

Can you separate your emotions from your judgment? That is very hard, brethren, and so that intensifies the possibility of making a bad mistake like these men did. Their bad mistake led directly to Christ's crucifixion. It was one of a very serious chain of mistakes of very bad judgments these people made on the basis of their competitive attitude toward Him even though they were getting part of the answers right as they went along, but it kept them from being perfectly right.

We are beginning to see dangers involved in making judgments. It is very difficult for us to separate emotions, our psychological state and so forth, from decision-making processes that we normally go through. As this event was closing off, He charged them, and of course us, with the responsibility of making righteous judgments. This makes it clear that God is not against us making judgments per se. In fact, in one sense, this is what converted life is all about. But we have seen so far He does have concern about us making poor judgments, especially when they have a very high possibility of being nothing more than opinions based on feelings and upon sentiments, and then we act out of human nature's poor equipment on the basis of those poor judgments, and we exacerbate already budding problems.

Jesus said, "Do not judge according to appearance." That is a literal rendering of what He said. In a modern paraphrase, what Jesus has charged us with doing is, "Stop judging superficially." That is what "Do not judge according to appearance" means. "Stop judging superficially," and yet so many times in our inexperience and pride this is exactly what we do; and in Jesus' charge to us, we begin to see reasons why the commands against judging are so strong.

Perhaps one of the first questions we need to ask is, "How capable are we of making wise judgments?" Let us go back to Matthew 7 again.

Matthew 7:1-6 "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

That is pretty strong language.

I believe it is very safe to say that Jesus Christ did not expect the Christian church to be faultless. Therefore an awful lot of trudging is going to go on. So, in addition to this, the epistles, especially those of Paul, are in many cases quite corrective in their criticism of member behavior.

Let us begin here by stating that Christ is not condemning the forming of an opinion about someone. He is strongly urging us not to allow that opinion to become hardened fact in one's mind, and then using that opinion to undermine, destroy a reputation, or offend, thus causing division in the congregation.

Remember that we have already seen that we have no overall judicial authority from God to do this judging, but on the other hand, we are not unthinking zombies, but people who can reach right conclusions (as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 2) based on God's Word. Now how we use those conclusions is the bottom line in this issue. To me, the bottom line in this very strong admonition is this: Despite Jesus' strong statements, are we willing to make judgments regarding another's behavior and still take the chance of being judged to the same measure as we are judging them because the judgment is distorted?

If we are cautious, we are going to take what Christ says to heart; we do not want to receive the kind of judgment that we are handing down about the other person, but will button our lips for a while until we have more facts to really work with. So Jesus' warning here is this, that we are stepping into a mine field whenever we begin to judge our brother; and the dangers, as in a mine field, are not right on the surface, and spiritually they may be especially deadly. And judging beyond our authority is presumptive and dangerous.

On the other hand, we cannot avoid judging, because God gave us a mind for that very purpose. So when understood, we are actually commanded in these first six verses here (in verse 6 specifically) to judge, but the last thing He says is a cautionary one. The "holy" in verse 6, and the "pearls" in verse 6 are within the context of judgment, and He says, "Don't cast them before swine." So the cautionary advice is, "Be careful," because it has the potential to boomerang.

But the larger warning to us is that judging can very well be a pitfall, because the judgment is unbalanced and also because one may very solidly set oneself up as a hypocrite because he is guilty of sins greater in magnitude of damage caused than the one being accused.

Back to Romans 2 again. We are going to see the way Paul puts it here is pretty strong—a lot stronger than I have intimated before.

Romans 2:1-5 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know

that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

This context too deals with hypocrisies that are so frequently committed when accusing another, but in this context Paul makes a rather startling statement that I think needs to be brought to our attention. First, understand that Paul's statement in this context is that he declares hypocrisy is virtually certain whenever judgments are made. Did you get that? He is saying that they are virtually certain; even if the sin we have is not exactly the same one we are accusing the other of, what we are doing, we are sinning too, and it is just as bad as the one we are accusing the other person of.

With that in mind, I want you to look at the word in verse 1 translated as "inexcusable." Would you say forgiveness occurs whenever sin is excused, forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ? Yes, it is excused. It is overridden. I said to you this thing really looks strong, and it is in the subject of judging. That word "inexcusable" in verse 1 literally means "defenseless." There is no defense. That is pretty strong. No justification available. It is defenseless. So in the spiritual court of law there is no defense for the actions of a person who commits the same sin of which he accuses another.

Now look at the word "practice" in verse 2. This Greek word means "to perform repeatedly; to do exactly." Paul is inferring that these accusers he is referring to have not only committed the particular sin he is referring to, but are *continuing* to commit it. That nails the lid right on the coffin.

I want you to catch this. How can a sinner make a righteous judgment according to a righteous standard when he himself is under sin's power? You heard about that in the sermonette ["Outliers"], and under such circumstances judgment becomes warped; and that is why Paul says what he does in verse 3 where it says, "And do you think this, O man, you who judge

those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?" So a person doing such a thing is actually using himself as the standard, and all the while judging others, and brethren, that is an especially bad case of self-righteousness. The sins keep piling up. Are you beginning to see why He said, "Don't judge." It really puts the accuser in a bad, bad position.

Let us get a little balance here. God wants us to judge, but He wants us to be very cautious before allowing that judgment to come out against another person. God's righteous judgments are based on truth and therefore reality; and He relies on the facts of a given case, not on appearance. Therefore, His judgments are without distortion of any kind, and this is a far cry from very fallible human judgment.

Let me give you an example right from something we are very familiar with from Revelation 3:17.

Revelation 3:16-17 "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

This is a vivid example of how one's spiritual state perverts one's judgment. In this case, the judgment is upon oneself, and I think that one's very state is going to pervert one's judgment of others as well, at least as much or probably more because of human nature's latent power. Again, we have here another very bad case of self-righteousness.

The Laodicean may not necessarily say these things consciously, but his works shout to those of spiritual discernment that this is a person of severe spiritual poverty. The major tragedy is that he thinks he is in good standing with God, and thus he says of himself that he is wealthy, and that he has need of nothing; but in reality, Christ's judgment is that he is wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Look how far his judgments are from the truth.

Now what made his judgments so bad? His spiritual state. Because he was in such a bad spiritual state, the judgment of himself was actually perverted. With that thought in mind, how good could your judgment be of other people, because most of us with human nature tend to be very easy on ourselves. The Laodicean is that way. His judgment of himself was perverted. Interestingly, one of the things Christ says is that the Laodicean is blind, and that blindness is perverting his judgments. He has a very severe lack of spiritual truth. He is spiritually unaware, unknowing, unobservant, uncomprehending, and heedless; and yet the context shows he is judging—*actively* judging himself.

Romans 14:1-13 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Four times in those thirteen verses Paul uses the word "judge." In three of those times, he urges or directly commands us not to do so anymore. For him to do this, it seems pretty clear that judging was causing major problems in this Roman congregation. One of the things interesting in this context is that the issues the judgments were being made about did not involve anything of any major consequence doctrinally. They were things of major consequence in terms though of treating each other with respect and loving one another.

Nobody knows with absolute certainty exactly what the issues were. A lot of guesses going around, but honest researchers will tell you they do not really know, that they are speculating when they wrote. I think that God purposely left them partly hidden so that we could see how great a little spark could grow into. Whatever they were, one involved dietary things, and the other the personal esteem given one day above another. The things covered here are the kinds of subjects that some members in some groups in the past have gotten all bent out of shape over.

From my own life, when I was growing up, my family was Methodist. However, in the wider circle of my family, a portion of it was of the Pentecostal persuasion. To them, activities like card playing, dancing, going to movies, cosmetics, smoking, and reading fiction were off limits. In addition, there were disagreements over subjects like hair length (of both male and female), and modesty (most of that to the girls), but most of these items largely distinguished *them* as Christian to themselves.

Now I am going to draw something from the apostle Paul's life. It is clear in the Scriptures that Paul read Greek poetry, and there are small portions of it that are expressed in the Scriptures. If you did not know, let me inform you now that this is the way the Greeks wrote fiction. Their myths were in poetry. They did not have the same style that we have today.

However, regarding the Bible, where can one find "Thus saith the Lord" regarding those things I mentioned a few minutes ago? I mean the dancing, the smoking, and on and on. Where had God spoken authoritatively on them, thus clearly distinguishing them as "Thus saith the Lord" being against them? Undoubtedly some guidance is in the Scriptures, and some cases can be made for doing them or not doing them. I am not saying at this point

whether we are free and clear to do any of them, but they are the kind of subjects people develop strong opinions about even though the Scriptures are not all that dogmatic.

Those of you who have spent as many years as Evelyn and I did in the Worldwide Church of God know very well that Mr. Armstrong changed the doctrine regarding cosmetics at least three times. He could not get a handle on it, and the reason he could not was because the Scriptures are not all that clear, and people would come up with arguments that he could not turn aside.

I believe that what we are seeing here in Romans 14 is the same kind of thing going on that went on in the early church. That is why the advice from Paul appears here in Romans 14, and actually on into Romans 15, to do what he says to do, because these are subjects people develop strong emotional opinions about even though the Scripture is not all that dogmatic. But if Paul instructs using the "dietary" and "esteeming one day above another" illustration, there are a lot of gray areas come because of matters of personal conscience and strongly-held opinions, but not necessarily clear judgments from God.

Notice the advice. Paul begins in verse 1: "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things." I think we can safely assume that if what they did involved something of high importance, then God spoke authoritatively on them elsewhere. But I think not, and that is because of the way Paul responded to the issue. He would have said, if there were an authoritative voice here, "Have you not read what brother James said?" or, "Have you not read what Peter said?" Or, "Have you not read what Christ said to the Pharisees?" But he did not. These are subjects in which God did not give a clear, right down the middle explanation of something of "Thus saith the Lord." God left it open, and people then have the opportunity to form opinions.

Paul divides the judges into two simple categories: the strong and the weak. The Greek shows more clearly than the English translation that the strong were looking down with contempt on the weak. Do you see the way the emotion is bending the judgment? It simply says that the weak were judging the strong, and the overall context suggests that he was more concerned about the attitude of the weak than he was of the strong. Both positions

involved acts of judging, but it appears that the weak were right on the edge of being seriously offended. What were they weak in? Faith.

Verse 4 clearly establishes where the major authority clearly resides for the church, for you and me. "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." He is drawing a line. "This weak person you are contemptuous of, whatever it is, is Christ's servant, not yours. And not only that, Christ is on His throne, and He is able to make this person come to repentance if he needs to come to repentance, and He is able to make him stand."

What is he telling to those who are contemptuous? He was telling them, "Where is your faith in Christ taking care of this situation?" They were presuming to put themselves into the position of judges over these people they considered to be too dumb, too stupid, or whatever—that they should know that is the way they are not supposed to live their life. Basically, Paul said, "Leave them alone. If you are going to do anything, be kind, be generous, be helpful. Encourage them in whatever Christian steps ought to be taken."

In verse 5, he says, "Leave them alone. If they want to esteem one day above another, so what? Christ is able to correct them. If they're wrong, He'll take care of it. That's His job. He's the High Priest. He's the Teacher, and He's the one who has authority over His own servants." Verses 5-9 then show us our responsibility regardless of which group one might consider himself in, and that our responsibility is to conform ourselves to what our Master desires of us.

One commentator made a very interesting observation about the importance of this instruction we see here right in Romans 14. Do you know how the book of Romans is laid out? There are eleven full chapters on doctrine—doctrines essential to salvation. Beginning in chapter 12 is practical application of the doctrines in Christian daily life. Here is what this researcher did. He did this by comparing how many verses are spent on various things, beginning with chapter 12, verse 1. Paul used two verses to instruct us as to what to do with the doctrinal passage: be a living sacrifice. Two verses. The researcher then went on and gave six verses using them to

encourage us to be a living sacrifice. Then there is a call to love. That fills thirteen verses. He then uses seven verses on materials involving church and state (in chapter 13), and then seven more verses regarding right conduct in the light of Christ's return. Then seven verses on very general things. By this time we are in Romans chapter 14, verse 1.

Do you know how many verses Paul used on this subject of judging? 35! It does not end until Romans 15, verse 6. I thought that was keen insight as to how important judging in a congregation is. "**Don't do it,**" Paul said, because it destroys unity and it puts the accuser into a terrible position of trying to take the place of Jesus Christ in thinking that his advice is going to be the saving message this person needs, when really what is happening is that this person is being offended and weakened.

Paul's overall counsel is that both strong and weak should make every effort to accommodate the conscience-sensitivities of the other. In other words, bending over backward not to offend, or insisting in word or deed that your way is the right way and that the other person is going straight to hell.

Let me give you a summary of what I just gave you.

Number 1: Recognize Christ's authority over us individually and personally. He is our Master.

Number 2: Recognize Christ's authority appointed by God as Judge over the church and the world.

Number 3: Recognize that even as a man, Christ did not have judicial authority. Neither do we. We are permitted to judge *carefully*, but that judgment is not to be carried to condemnation.

One of the reasons for this is given in I Timothy 3:6 where Paul said to Timothy, "Do not appoint a novice, lest he fall under the snare of Satan the Devil." What was it that got to Satan? It was pride in his own judgments. So to a person who is given some particular office or whatever within the church, the counsel is, "You had better be able to restrain yourself so as not to misuse the office and the authority that comes with it."

I Timothy 3:6 Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

Let us close this thing off in I Corinthians 8 in which Paul made so many judgments, and it is another one of those places where he gives us pretty good insight into what we need to do. It is general advice. It is good advice.

I Corinthians 8:1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

Do you think the strong in Romans 14 were not puffed up by the knowledge they felt that they had, and that they were contemptuously looking down on the weak who were just about losing the grip on their faith? They—the strong—were puffed up. They had fallen into the snare of the Devil.

I Corinthians 8:2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

I Corinthians 8:7-13 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? [and thus defile his conscience] And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

You can see the restraint that was in Paul to avoid using even the office of an apostle, in that he was very careful not to just throw things around willy-nilly and cause people unnecessary harm. My counsel is here, let us be very

careful. There is nothing wrong with making a judgment, but maybe the best thing to do is keep it inside you, and at the right time maybe you can talk with that person, not to condemn him, but just simply to say, "Hey, I would like to understand about this. Tell me about it."