

Acceptable Judgment

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Introduction

In our previous sermon about “Sinful Judgment”, we spoke about the story of Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50. Our objective was to learn the **3-way method** of discovering yourself by understanding the behavior of each of these two characters. The 3-way method includes:

1. Avoid having the form of godliness or a false/fake Godliness
2. Understand that sin has made us all debtors, owing a debt we can never pay
3. Appreciate God’s willingness to forgive you at all times

We also talked about something called the **4-5-6 method** of avoiding sinful judgment. This includes learning about 4 different types of sinful judgment, 5 dangers of judgment and 6 ways of treating it.

In this sermon, I want to talk to you about “Acceptable Judgment”. To get started, let me refer you to the Scripture in Luke 5:1-11, where we read what the Lord said to St. Peter:

✠ “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (**Luke 5:4**)

Some people may think that the Lord judged St. Peter in a wrong way, as if St. Peter, a fisherman and expert in fishing, doesn’t know where and how to fish. However, knowing and trusting that Jesus is Lord, should make us accept His commandments without questioning and just trusting in Him as St. Peter did:

✠ “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net” (**Luke 5:5**)

St. Peter didn’t go and tell the Lord that you are judging me and this is wrong. Instead, he believed in Him and trusted every word the Lord said. As a result, St. Peter got the reward:

✠ “And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking” (**Luke 5:6**)

So, from this story we should learn that every judgment and teaching that we hear is not wrong. Some people misunderstand the verse:

✠ “Judge not, that you be not judged” (**Matthew 7:1**)

They think that this verse applies to anything and everything. Sometimes even the most important things that touch our life and our faith are not properly assessed as a result of a misunderstanding of this verse. Therefore, as we discussed earlier the **3-way method**, then the **4-**

5-6 method, I would like to present a **7-way method** to understand acceptable judgment. This is concluded from answering the following 7 questions:

1. Is it ok to judge?
2. If it is ok to judge, what does the above verse mean (**Matthew 7:1**)?
3. When can we judge?
4. Is raising our children and warning them about bad company considered judging?
5. Can the teaching of the church against other churches or other beliefs be considered judgment?
6. Can warning a friend be considered judgment?
7. What are the conditions of acceptable judgment?

So, let us answer these questions in some details.

Question 1 and 2: Is it OK to judge and what does the above verse mean (Matthew 7:1)?

To answer these questions, we must have the right understanding of God's commandments, meaning we must continue reading the Book of **Matthew, Chapter 7**. It says:

† “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” (**Matthew 7:1-6**)

From the Scripture above, few questions arise:

1. How can you obey God's commandment and at the same time you do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine?
2. How can you tell what/who are the dogs and swine?
3. What do holy and pearls mean?

The answer to this questions is that you must judge people if they cause troubles and speak loudly (like Dog's barking) to hide the truth about God (Who is holy) and impose on people wrong and defiled things like inappropriate media, by putting the good teaching of God (pearls) into the mud (like the swine).

We must identify those people and avoid them because the Bible teaches us:

† “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (**Psalm 1:1**)

How would you know that these people are ungodly to avoid walking in their counsel, or sinners to avoid standing in their path, or scornful to avoid sitting in their seats? The answer is: you must judge their actions and stay away from them. Otherwise, you would lose the blessing.

To confirm this understanding of the verse, please listen to what St. Paul said:

✠ “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

Questions 3 and 4: When can we judge? Is raising our children and warning them about bad company considered judging?

To answer these questions, we must understand that judging could be something natural where we can differentiate between right and wrong, good and evil. For example, if you hear your children cursing or swearing, or see them hurting other people by their words or actions, you would be upset and it would be completely unacceptable. You would feel bad because you know in your heart that you taught them to say and do the right thing. This agrees with the Bible teaching:

✠ “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:18-20)

Children are your fruits, by which people can tell if you are a good tree or not. Also, we all must work hard in teaching and warning our children lest we all end up being “cut down and thrown into the fire”. So, what do we do? Don’t worry about the children’s misunderstanding of the verse “Judge not” when they use it to justify their wrong behavior. Tell them, here is what the Lord said:

✠ “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit” (Matthew 12:33)

Also, judging is a responsibility that is placed not only the shoulders of all parents but also on the stewards of God, the clergy. Do you remember the story of Eli the priest? His children, who were also priests, were corrupt and committed adultery outside the gates of the temple. When Eli heard it, he spoke to them about it but was not strong enough to stop them:

✠ “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord...Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So he said to them: Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord’s people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him? Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them” (1 Samuel 2:12-25)

The children did not listen, Eli did not force God's teaching making God very angry imposing the following punishment:

† “Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever” (1 Samuel 3:11-14)

And it happened that Eli and his children died for not obeying the Lord (1 Samuel 4).

Question 5: Can the teaching of the church against other churches or other beliefs considered judgment?

To answer this question, imagine if the church did not stand against the heretics and those who come up with wrong teachings, we could have been denying God and His divinity like the Arians or the Nestorians, etc. This is something we should watch for and not fall into the wrong understanding of the Verse “Judge Not”. St. John the Beloved, who spoke about love more than anyone else, tells us something very important us:

† “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 10-11)

† “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1)

Didn't the Lord warn us against false prophets?

† “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15)

Therefore, we must be very strong and follow this important commandment:

† “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21)

Watch out not to keep sides with friends, especially when it comes to doctrine. Eutechus was a friend of St. Cyril the Great, but when he spread wrong teaching, St. Cyril and all the church stood firmly against him. Therefore, it is important to warn friends; as discussed below.

Question 6: Can warning a friend considered judgment?

First, let us put these commandments before our eyes:

† “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20)

† “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 17: 15)

Hearing these warnings can and should encourage us to warn everyone, friend or not. If you really care about the eternity of your friends, you must warn them. Don't let the devil fill your mind that this is judgment. It is not; as a matter of fact, it is godly love. Please listen to what St. James said:

- † “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20)

Question 7: What are the conditions of acceptable judgment?

To avoid falling into sinful judgment that we talked about earlier, you need to know the conditions for acceptable judgment to be able to make the right judgment. These are:

1. It must come from a person of authority

That means priests, parents, servants and anyone who has an authority over others. The following verses explain why the priest must warn his people, not only those who commit sins but also the righteous:

- † “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul” (Ezekiel 3:17-21, 33:7-9)

The same applies to parents, where they must warn and discipline their children:

- † “Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction” (Proverbs 19:18)
- † “Correct your son, and he will give you rest. Yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Proverbs 29:17)
- † “He who disciplines his son will profit by him, and will boast of him among acquaintances...Discipline your son and make his yoke heavy, so that you may not be offended by his shamelessness” (Sirach 30:2,13)

Some children play smart when they want to play with some friends, which parents do not approve of, or want to visit or sleep over at their house. They tell their parents, “Do not judge. The Lord said so”. We should answer back that it is our responsibility before God to discipline

you and make you aware of the ungodly, the sinners and the scornful; as it is written in **Psalm 1:1**.

2. It must be based on knowledge

As we talked earlier about the verses in Matthew 7, having a plank in our eyes make us blind not able to see anything. Sadly, we only think that we see the speck in our brother's eye. Therefore, we must first remove the plank to be able to see and know the truth about the person or the thing that we are judging.

Remember the story of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord said to Abraham something very important for us to know:

† “I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know” (**Genesis 18:21**)

God knows everything, but here He is teaching us to seek knowledge before judgment, as He taught us about Baptism and prayers, etc. Also, it was said about the Lord:

† “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (**Jeremiah 17:10**)

† “All the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works” (**Revelation 2:23**)

If God searches the heart and tests the mind, shouldn't we do the same before judging others.

3. It must be right and fair

Let me share with you a couple of verses that clearly explain this point:

† “You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous” (**Deuteronomy 16:19**)

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

So, be fair and do not please a friend or even a family member on the expense of judging others.

4. It must be in things that are clearly evident

As St. Paul taught us:

† “Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later” (**1 Timothy 5:24**)

But what happened if things are not so clearly evident? Wait for the Lord to clarify it and do not make a hasty judgment as the Lord commanded us through St. Paul saying:

† “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Corinthians 4:5)

5. It should not be to humans who commit the same sins that I do

This is very clear from what the Lord said to those who wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery:

† “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (John 8:7)

Now this would clearly explain what was said in Matthew 7, that we must first remove the plank from our eyes to be able to see first and then remove the speck from our brother’s eye. St. Paul also commented on this issue to the Galatians and said:

† “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1-2)

In conclusion, to avoid judgment from any one, judge yourself first as St. Paul said:

† “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Corinthians 11:31)