
Words of Truth

The Error Behind The Saying Of “Only God Can Judge”

By: Brian A. Yeager

An apostate church of Christ in Oregon had an interdenominational service with dancing, an art show, etc. The local preacher at another congregation pointed out the errors of such an arrangement. A woman, in response, said: “who’s to say that’s wrong and who knows who might be converted by coming together and socializing?” She went on to say this: “We can’t be the judge, jury and executioner---that’s God’s job since only he knows the heart.” While we shall address the core errors of those statements soon, let me quickly establish that God is the one who says we should not assemble with those in religious error (Psalms 26:4-5, Psalms 101:3, Psalms 119:104, Proverbs 29:27, Jeremiah 15:17, Romans 16:17-18, Ephesians 5:11, II Corinthians 6:14-18, I Timothy 1:3-7, Jude 3, and II John 9-11). If someone were “converted” to this so-called “church of Christ” through comprising the truth, they would be born out of error not truth. That does not make one a Christian (John 8:32 and Romans 6:17).

The above is just one account, of many, wherein I have heard people ignore and excuse sin by saying only God can judge. Generally, those “liberal” types that say such things are very judgmental against those of us who preach the truth (Galatians 4:16), but when it comes to error they are quick to let it alone (II Corinthians 11:4 and Revelation 2:14-20). In fact, it is most often the false teachers who are well spoken of (Luke 6:26). The question is, are those people correct? Should we ignore sin, false doctrine, erring congregations, etc. because only God can judge? The answer to that, as we’ll see in this study, is a clear NO! We must judge and expose those in error that refuse to repent.

The Lord Is The Judge (Hebrews 10:30), But You Must Judge Too!

Let me begin this section of our study by establishing right away that no man or woman can take the place of God condemning someone to Hell (James 4:11-12). Having said that, it is abundantly clear that we are both right to and even commanded to rightfully judge others. Notice the following Scriptures that show us that this is our inescapable duty as Christians: *“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment... Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them... It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit,*

have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed... Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error... I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (John 7:24, Matthew 7:15-20, I Corinthians 5:1-3, I John 4:1-6, and Revelation 2:2).

This article could be done right here, but I know some people want more food for thought. So, we shall add some more meat to the bone here. Consider this, if a Christian is not supposed to judge, how would you ever teach anyone anything? If you teach someone to be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38), haven't you judged them as a sinner? If you approach a brother in error, as commanded (James 5:19-20), haven't you judged him? If you give to someone that has a need (Ephesians 4:28), haven't you judged them as needy? You have to judge to live a Christ-like life. However, even after considering these points, people will say things like, “you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.”

The “Non-Judgmental” Mindset Of Teaching Is Wrong!

People do all sorts of Scripture twisting to soften the truth (cf. II Peter 3:15-17). People will say you cannot judge by perverting Matthew 7:1, because they ignore that the context is condemning hypocritical judgment (Matthew 7:1-5). People will say the church is “autonomous” [self-governing], but they ignore that when a congregation teaches error other congregations should get involved (Acts 15:1-36). Amongst all of these twists though, a common heard mindset is that you cannot teach in a judgmental way.

God demands that His word be taught in a way that reproves, rebukes, and exhorts the hearer (II Timothy 4:2). If you soften the message of the Gospel, making it honey, it is no longer the sharp sword that God's word really is (Hebrews 4:12). We are supposed to rebuke openly (Proverbs 27:5 and I Timothy 5:20; cf. Galatians 2:11-17). If you desire to see people be sound in the faith such is to be accomplished by rebuking them sharply (Titus 1:13). When you read how Jesus treated the erring, do you see Him softening the truth (Matthew 16:21-23, Matthew 17:16-20, Matthew 23:1-36, Luke 24:13-27, and John 2:13-17)?

Conclusion

It is the message of the Gospel which we must teach. The results are not up to us (Luke 8:5-15). There is NEVER a SCRIPTURAL reason to soften the truth. Just like anything else, if you dilute the truth it is no longer the Gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-12). If you change the message, the ultimate Judge will hold you accountable (Revelation 22:18-19). Only God can condemn. Still, we have judgments we must render as well (i.e. I Corinthians 10:15).