

THE OTHER SIDE OF “JUDGING”

I'm sure you have heard someone say, “Oh, well it's not up to me to judge,” or you've heard someone warn another off with, “You can't judge me.” In fact, most of us have heard it so much that it creeps into our own vocabulary if we're not careful. In Luke 6:37, Jesus said, *“Do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.”*

If we separate the above text out of the passage and make it stand alone, it seems very clear, very plain, and extremely difficult to do – as well as contradictory to other Biblical admonitions. This passage plainly says, “Do not judge...” while John 7:24, just as plainly says, “...judge with righteous judgement.” How shall we resolve this seeming contradiction?

The fact is that neither this passage, nor any other Bible passage was ever intended to be separated from the text and made to stand alone. We twist meanings when we do so. To “judge” something is to make a decision concerning that thing. We must make decisions daily concerning all sorts of things, including other people. John 7:24 is a warning to not be fooled by appearances, but instead, to use God's measure to make decisions. Our text in Luke 6:37 is not a blanket condemnation of decision making – it is in the context of what we call the “beatitudes.” These are attitudes of life and make us more Christ-like and lead us to not have an attitude of condemnation and finger pointing. He stresses mercy and pardon as attitudes to develop.

Consider, if you will, the other side of “don't judge!” as a command. If we cannot “judge” (i.e. decide) when someone is doing wrong, then we likewise cannot judge when they are doing right. How about that? We can't know what is right and wrong! We stand at a grave and someone says, “We can't judge that person.” If they're saying, “We can't send them to heaven or hell,” then they're absolutely right and such doesn't even need to be said. It is obvious that God is the final judge. But, if they're saying, “we can't know what their fate will be,” I'm asking, “Why not?” Can we not understand God's promises? Can we not know if we're living by the Spirit or not? Don't we know when one dies if he died as a child of God or not? Do you see my point? When we make rules that forbid decisions on wickedness, those same rules forbid us from making decisions on righteousness. If we can't know what's wrong, we can't know what's right either.

The truth is, we cannot judge, or make decisions concerning another's heart. But, we can use God's measure to make decisions concerning the actions of ourselves or another. Luke 6:43-45 teaches that every tree is known by its fruit. God has not called you to judge hearts, but He certainly expects you to inspect fruit. You and I CAN be assured of our own salvation because we CAN know what is right and wrong. God has told us that much. There certainly may be secret sins in a person's life that God alone will deal with, but between our fruit showing what kind of tree we are and our mouth “speaking out of what fills the heart,” we are usually pretty open books to the world and to ourselves if we'll admit it.

Don't let an attitude of criticism, nitpicking, mote finding, negativism take root in your heart. But, be aware that you ARE able to decide between right and wrong, in self and others and judge righteous judgement as God expects you to.

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