

# Who Are You to Judge Others?

by Shane Idleman

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*Shane Idleman explores the biblical understanding of judgment, emphasizing the need for righteous discernment and humility in addressing moral issues within the church and society.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 7:1, John 7:24, Romans 14:4, 1 Corinthians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 4:11, James 4:11

**Topics:** "Judging Others", "Discerning Righteousness"

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## Description

Shane Idleman addresses the common misrepresentation of the Bible verse 'Judge not, that you be not judged' by highlighting the importance of understanding the true context and meaning of judging in Scripture. He emphasizes the need to discern between personal opinions and scriptural truths, urging believers to apply the entirety of God's Word rather than picking and choosing. Idleman explains the difference between judging as a judge in a court of law and judging according to God's principles, emphasizing the responsibility to call into question behaviors that contradict God's standards. He also discusses the diversity of gifts within the church and the importance of respecting different callings, whether it involves confronting sin or showing love and compassion.

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## Transcript

A few years ago, a news report featured a famous athlete who was considering running for political office. As soon as the news correspondent asked about abortion and gay-marriage, the potential candidate became visibly upset. He criticized Christians and ended the interview saying, "Doesn't the Bible say 'judge not'; who are you to tell people what they can, and cannot do?"

Unfortunately, misrepresentation of this Scripture is common among the media and other groups who often misquote Jesus' words from Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged." Ironically, few reference another scripture that also deals with judging, John 7:24. Here Jesus encourages His followers to "judge with righteous judgment." At first, these two scriptures may seem contradictory, but when we look at the context and the true meaning of "judge," we clearly see that there is no contradiction. This misrepresentation of "judging" is an attempt to conform scripture to support opinions, when, in fact, moral values are designed to conform to scriptural truths. Personal opinions vary--truth does not.

We tend to pick and choose certain Scriptures as if they were choices on a menu. But we can't choose those we like and discard the rest. I liken it to someone skimming through the pages of my first book, What Works When "Diets" Don't, and reading: "Eat whatever foods you choose." In it's entirety, it actually reads,

"If you follow these guidelines, stay within these ranges, and avoid these foods, you can eat whatever foods you choose." Reading and following fragments of information can be misleading. If we apply only what we choose, we can easily miss what we need.

Judging within the context of Matthew 7:1 refers to the type of judgment that a judge would render in a court of law, such as in Romans 14:4, "Who are you to judge another's servant?" A judge hears the evidence and pronounces a judgment. We are in no position to do this--we don't have all the facts. God tells us to leave justice to Him because He is the judge. In John 7:24, however, Christians are to judge or "call into question" those things that clearly contradict God's principles. In 1 Corinthians 2:15, the apostle Paul said that those who are spiritual should judge and discern all things.

The famous reformer, John Calvin, commenting on this topic, said, "These words of Christ do not contain an absolute prohibition from judging, but are intended to cure a disease--criticism." Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but the conscience of the state." Serving as the conscience of the people has been one of the primary functions of the church since its conception. Scripturally, we are commanded to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, truth and error, light and darkness. We are to judge according to the truth.

Regarding moral issues that destroy lives and dishonor God, we are to judge ("call into question") behaviors, choices, and lifestyles that lead people in a dangerous direction, especially if these issues are to become social policy and legally sanctioned.

On another note, within the church itself we are to judge, but this is often misunderstood, and we can easily become "wrongfully" judgmental. Failure to recognize diverse gifts may explain why. For instance, many Christians have different ministries, but all fall under the umbrella of Christian service. Within each of us, God creates varying desires, talents, and levels of interests. If God has called a man to preach His Word, that will be his passion. If God has called a Christian to pursue politics, that will be his or her passion. God established the concept of government; therefore, He desires godly leaders who govern according to His standards. If God has called a Christian to concentrate primarily on feeding the poor, that will be his or her passion. If God has called a Christian to the mission field in Africa, that will be his or her passion, and so on.

Problems arise when we fail to respect different gifts. For example, those who believe that Christians should not mention controversial topics contradict the most basic of principles. From time to time, God clearly calls us to do just that--to confront, rebuke, and challenge. I encourage you to read Jesus' words to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, to the religious leaders of His day, and to the cities that did not repent.

Those who have been called to preach, much like the prophets of old, will confront compromise, condemn social digression, and powerfully denounce sin in the hope of reconciling man to God--they speak the truth in love. This is why the prophets were primarily statesmen, reformers, authors, and preachers. They ruffled feathers. However, people called to the position of pastor/teacher often have a shepherd's heart...love, compassion, and kindness are marks of their ministry. In a sense, one is called to break the heart, the other to mend it; one concentrates on repentance the other restoration. We should not judge those with different callings, but instead, thank God for them.

As believers, we are called to make judgments about our culture and judgments about others...to help, encourage, and redirect if necessary. However, the first judgment must begin in the mirror. Ironically, I've

noticed that those highly educated in biblical doctrine can often be the most critical, cynical, and negative. An attitude of constant criticism is not a positive character trait--it often reveals an inner drive to exalt oneself. Jesus encourages us to err on the side of grace, not judgment. It takes humble, broken people to admit that they need to remove things from their own lives before critiquing and instructing others. Begin here.

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