

Who Are You to Judge Me?// Who Am I to Judge You?

A Citizen's Judgment: In Today's Culture

Popular magazines and news sources often make year-end lists of what's in and what's out. They usually include things related to current cultural phenomena. For example, *The Washington Post* cited that “binge watching” of whole T.V. series has been declared out and “fast forwarding” is in. For history buffs, it seems JFK and the neverending conspiracy theories are out and all things World War I are back in style. For those who are fitness conscious, boot camps are out and sweat-working is in.¹ I would add one more pair to the list—judging is most decidedly out and tolerance is definitely in.

Our culture has hijacked the concept of judging. Judging of almost any kind is branded with labels of discrimination, hate language, and intolerance. But, judging isn't always negative. It's not putting someone down in order to pull oneself up. A judge doesn't always pass a sentence of condemnation; she can also assess standards and make evaluations.

In Matthew 6:8, Jesus commands the kingdom citizen, “Do not be like them,” meaning, “Do not mimic behaviors or live like the non-Christian world.” This was not a new thought; God exhorted the Jews in Leviticus 18:3, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes.” God has always desired for his people to be set apart, but set apart doesn't have to mean separation. Being salt and light means living out our faith in the trenches, so to speak, and we need godly discernment more than ever to do this well.

Biblical judging involves discernment by one who has been trained with constant practice in the Word (Hebrews 5:14). As believers, we also have the mind of Christ and his Spirit to shape, mold, and guide us. Even with all of these spiritual resources, most of us would agree that sorting out sin is still not a simple task. In fact, it's akin to the command to love our enemy—easier said than done. So, how do we figure out a way to evaluate and make judgments when necessary, but to do so without sinning ourselves? I would like to suggest a simple framework of three guidelines to help us engage our culture with grace and truth: lead with love, seek correction not condemnation, and always be guided by God's Word.

Lead with Love

The church has long struggled with finding the line between truth and love as it engages the world, which has always considered the gospel and God's truth to be utter foolishness. But truth and love are not at opposite ends of the spectrum. The truth of the

gospel is condemning to those who reject it and it also is life and freedom for those who embrace it. Love heals and builds bridges, but it doesn't just condone or bypass sin. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? May it never be. Christ's law of love must shape us and lead us.

When asked the greatest commandment, Jesus said we are to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbor as ourself. He also gave a new command to his followers to love one another as he had loved them (John 13:34,35). And looking at the way Jesus loved is very important. Jesus was the embodiment of love and truth lived out. He never compromised or accommodated sin—he extended mercy and grace and forgiveness, but was clear about “go and sin no more.” The key is to love God first and then to love others *as Jesus loved*.

Correction, not Condemnation

Whether we are engaging an individual or the broader cultural conversation, our heart attitude as we judge sin must be one of correction, not condemnation. This doesn't mean that we condone sin in any way. But our role is to offer a redemptive perspective and restoration. We want to point people to the Deliverer, not destroy them. Appropriate judging must be done for the good of the person. It's not about putting oneself on a higher moral ground. In fact, Galatians 6:1 tempers this, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

Guided by God's Word

In the days before instant communication, error used to find its way into the body of Christ as a slow trickle from lofty, liberal academia. Today, bloggers and pop-Christian culture writers are the ones who most often shape our views. Some uphold God's Word, but many elevate their own experience over theology and their own reasoning over God's revelation. Through humor, edginess, and talented writing, they draw us in and become our go-to source for truth. When faith and culture collide, many of us may click on links from social media and read Christian bloggers to inform our opinions instead of searching God's Word. Reading these isn't wrong and they often help us take a pulse on various views within the Christian culture. But God's Word transcends every time period and every culture. Scripture doesn't progress with the times—its unchanging nature is our standard of what is right and good and true. Our discernment must be guided by God's Word.

Within this framework there is much overlap. We now understand that our love includes speaking the truth and that our correction must be guided as much by God's Word as by love. However, many of us tend to fall toward one end of the spectrum of either grace or truth: loving a person but hesitating to speak the truth, or defending the truth at the expense of relationship. But neither extreme is what we are called to. Remember at the end of Matthew chapter 5, Jesus instead exhorts us to be perfect like our heavenly Father, meaning that we are to be growing in our maturity as a Christ follower. As you consider where you fall on the spectrum of grace and truth, ask the Lord to help you mature and grow towards Christ-likeness.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does Jesus love? What does it look like for us to love like Jesus loves?
2. When talking about sin in our culture and even within the Christian community, how do we correct and restore without being preachy or judgmental?
3. Where have you seen a person's life experience cause her to discount Scripture? Why is this dangerous? Have you ever done this? If so, in what way?
4. Where do you land on the spectrum of offering grace and truth?

Taken from:

Living It Up: A Study of the Sermon on the Mount