

# Just Judging

## *The Case of the Weaker Seeker*

October 3, 2021

Today we're talking about *just* judging. As in, judging *justly*.



I'm gonna do something I've *never* done. I'm gonna show you *next* Sunday's *opening* question: **Should Christians wear COVID masks?** And I'm gonna tell you where I stand, in no uncertain terms.



But before we hit *that* head on, I think we need to ramp up to it with a slightly modified version of one of my favorite sermons from my living room. So answer *this*: **Are people who get the vaccine going to hell?** Before you answer *that*, let's talk about *when* and *how* to judge *justly*, and remind ourselves of Jesus' alarming warning:



Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the *same way* you judge others, you will be judged, – Matthew 7:1-2 NIV



But as Paul writes it certainly is your job to judge those *inside* the church who are *sinning* – 1 Corinthians 5:12 NLT



There are *two types* of *judging*: **discerning**: just distinguishing right from wrong, good from bad, or healthy from unhealthy to be constructive. And **condemning**: unjust slamming and criticizing for the sake of tearing down. Guess which one those gals are doing. Judge, but don't *judge*. Because **we're called to discern, but warned not to condemn**. Know why? So you can do "your job" properly, in order to ...

Make every effort to *keep* the *unity* of the Spirit through the *bond* of *peace*. – Ephesians 4:3 NIV

Right after Jesus' says "don't judge or you'll be judged," He tells a funny story about a one-eyed sin picker, arrogantly going after a speck of threshing chaff in his fellow worker's eye, while ignoring the threshing log protruding from his own. And, Jesus concludes by saying:

You hypocrite, [lit. mask-wearer; seriously. Though, depending on the situation, could be a mask not-wearer. Either way] *first* take the log out of your own eye, and *then* you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. – Matthew 7:5 ESV



So, first things first: **get the log out of your own eye**. You see – or rather *don't see*, that – **we judge with ulterior motives that we hide even from ourselves**. One of the most sobering, kick-in-the-pants stories of the OT is when the prophet Nathan confronts King David about his sin ... by pretending he's talking about someone else.

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "... the man who did this *deserves to die!*" ... Then Nathan said to David, "You *are* the man!" [Then David said, "You didn't let me finish!"] – 2 Samuel 12:5-7 NIV

Would *you* judge *your* sins differently if someone else was committing them? Yes. Always. Everyone would. Which is why, first and foremost, **just judging requires radical self-examination**. Just to make sure we're judging *them* exactly the way we *want* to be judged at the *big* judgment. Because, **just judging seeks to bless the one being examined**. It's to actually *help* them remove the thing that's obscuring their sight, not just to stick your finger in their eye!

And when *you're* aware of your *own* faults, you'll do "your job" so much better, because you'll empathize with those you're *helping*. And you'll see how **compassion relieves what critical spirits only irritate**. The goal of "your job" is to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit". So:

Stop judging by *mere appearances*, [Jesus said] and make a *right* judgment. – John 7:24 NIV



How? Well, we not only need humility and empathy, **we need the full story**. Because there are *three* sides to *every* story: **your side**, and **their side**, and **the truth** – otherwise known as **God's side**. And *that's* the story that's *always hiding* somewhere inside the *other two stories*.



This old gal is riding in a taxi and quietly reaches up and taps the driver's shoulder and says *hey*. He *screams!* Runs the car onto the curb! Her coffee goes everywhere! He yells, "Don't ever do that!" She throws her cup at him, curses, and storms out without paying. He looks in the mirror and exhales, "You're okay. It takes *time* to shake *twenty years* driving a *hearse*." So there's **his story**: she scared him half to death! **Her story**: he scared her half to death! And the **hidden truth**: He's working through something.



Romans 2:2 tells us that "God's judgment ... is based on truth." As in **absolute. All-knowing. Evenhanded. All-loving**. Truth. Whereas, we're usually satisfied reflexively, unjustly judging with **partial truths**, and **outward appearances**, and **personal offenses**. If we don't "make every effort" to gather as much intel as we can on what they're working through, we might be in for an alarming King-David-shock when *we're* confronted by the Lord. Because, **we excuse in ourselves what we accuse in others**. And when we then condemn *them*, we simultaneously condemn *ourselves*. Show me **a cruel, critical tongue** and I'll show you **a prideful, bitter heart**.

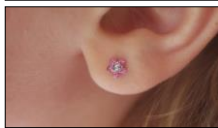


The prodigal son is a picture of a repentant sinner. The prodigal son's father is a picture of our receptive, restoring, Heavenly Father. But, the prodigal son's judgmental, condemning, brother is a picture of ... *guess who?! The bitter believer who fails to appreciate our Father's kindness*.

He answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been *slaving* for you [Oh, *that's how you see it*] and *never disobeyed your orders*. [Oh, *that's how you lie*] Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." – Luke 15:29 NIV

“I hate to break it to you son; but you don’t *have* any friends. And you’ve had nothing to *celebrate*. Know how I know? Listen to yourself. I gave you 2/3 of the estate. *Every* goat here is *yours*. Yet, you *haven’t* celebrated *anything*. But you’re mad at *me* because I *have* and I *am*.”

[So] Do you show *contempt* for the riches of His kindness, *tolerance* and *patience*, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward *repentance*? [And judging from a position of superiority?] But [if you are, then] because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, [Get ready King David!] you are storing up wrath against *yourself* for the day of God’s wrath, when His *righteous* judgment *will* be revealed. – Romans 2:4-5 NIV



So we need to get the *log* out of our eye, and *empathy* into our heart; and we need to seek and find the hidden truth of what they’re working through; and then, **if both sides are believers, we need to identify “disputable matters”**, because **we’re not allowed to judge those**. They’re off-limits! And a disputable matter (like COVID mask-wearing), is an issue that’s open to discussion and disagreement between sincere believers, who are otherwise unified in their faith and their desire to live like Jesus would. And sometimes it’s very difficult to do “our job” of *judging*, as in *discerning*, when another believer is sinning in God’s eyes. Because **unlike the Pharisees who went by one list, the Lord goes by the conscience** – which produces a customized list based on background, tradition, experience, dysfunction, and our knowledge or ignorance of Scripture.

Like, is it okay for a believer to get a tattoo? On their face? Or to get their ears pierced? I mean, *tongue*. Or go to a casino ... to *work* ... on Sundays? How about *smoking* ... a pipe ... or cigars ... or cigarettes ... or weed? What if a cult built a snake altar in Burlington, sacrificed animals on it, and then sold the meat at Fred Meyer: **Would you buy the meat?** Would that be right or wrong – good or bad? Depends on your conscience. Which is the point Paul makes regarding this specific case, in Romans 14. You had no idea Fred Meyer was that old! To complicate things, there was only *one* store. And the meat wasn’t *marked*. It was mixed in with all the rest. So what do you do?

[You] Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man’s faith [being strong in God’s Word] allows him to eat everything, [without violating his conscience] but another man, whose faith is weak, [being feeble in the Word] eats only vegetables. [To avoid violating his conscience with any potential “Fred Meyer snake-idol meat”] The man who eats everything *must not* look down on [condescend to] him who does *not*, and the man who does *not* eat everything *must not* condemn the man who *does*, for God *has* accepted him. – Romans 14:1-3 NIV

You see, the seeker who was weaker in God’s Word was violating their conscience by eating “idol meat”, because **they still believed those false gods were real**. Paul explains it to the Corinthians.

For us [in the know] there is but one God ... and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ ... But not everyone *knows* this. Some people are still *so accustomed* to idols that when *they* eat such food ... since their *conscience* is *weak*, it *is* defiled. – 1 Corinthians 8:6-7 NIV



Hmm. Which side do you think represents the mask-wearers and the not-wearers? Well keep it to yourself until next Sunday! For now, notice that both sides were unjustly judging the other. **The eaters saw the not-eaters as ignorantly cautious. And the not-eaters saw the eaters as heartlessly reckless.** And don't try to read into that for next Sunday. It's a different issue, except that both were convinced they were just doing their job of judging those inside the church.

Paul says the not-eater's "faith is weak", but he *doesn't* say it's "sin". Because, just as the *stronger* believers ate what they ate to the *glory* of God, the *weaker* seekers avoided what they avoided out of misguided *devotion* to God. And *God* was very okay with that. Which is why **the real, God-angering, sin came in the condescending and condemning over disputable matters.**

Who are you to judge someone *else's* servant? To his *own* master he stands or falls. And he *will* stand, for the Lord is able to *make* him stand. – Romans 14:3-4 NIV

Even *without* your support. Though He'd much rather *have* it. Because, "it certainly *is* your *job* to [*humbly, empathetically, compassionately*] judge those inside the church who are [*actually*] sinning" – by violating *clear* Scriptural *commands* or just their own *unclear* conscience – so that we can *lovingly* "keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace".



Because *that's* what we *do* at His Place! So just make sure you're doing your job with a humble heart, a good eye, and clear-cut Scriptural commands. Whatever the situation, **we've got to rely on God's wisdom for our timing, our approach, and our words.** And that means we've got to "make every effort" to find the hidden truth that's inside every story, because "God's judgment ... is based on truth", because **He's always working on something.**

This classy, elderly lady buys a pack of cookies and a cup of coffee at an airport, and sets it down on a seat between her and a disheveled man wearing a cross. She goes to buy a Christian magazine. And when she returns, the cookies are *open*, and *he's* chewing. She sits down, pulls the cookies beside her, sips her coffee, and reads. But he keeps reaching over and sneaking more! She tries to ignore him, but when he empties out the *last* one, she turns and glares. He breaks it in two, sheepishly smiles, and hands half to her. She slaps it out of his hand, swears, and storms off.

Now, she could've been *much less* judgmental and *much more* gracious; and later, she *really* wished she had ... when she opened her purse to get her wallet, and found the *unopened* cookies she bought at the airport! But by now she's in a taxi and can't go back to apologize. So as she's sipping her coffee and eating her *own* cookies this time, she silently prays, "Lord, help me to learn to not be so quick to judge." And the Lord whispers in her heart: "Share your cookies." So she quietly reaches up and taps the driver's shoulder and says *hey*. So there's *his* story, *her* story, and maybe the *not-so-hidden* truth: **Everybody's working through something.** So take a good look in the mirror, take the cookies out of your own purse, and just judge justly.

Oh – so are people who get the vaccine going to hell? Depends *entirely* on whether or not they've made Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior. What's the *vaccine* got to do with it?