

CHRISTIANS – ON JUDGING OTHERS

(CP Mt 7:1-2; Lu 6:37). A great many Christians interpret what Jesus says here to mean that Christians are not to make any sort of a judgement at all. But that is not what Jesus is teaching. He is admonishing Christians not to judge others self-righteously or hypocritically (CP Mt 7:3-5; Lu 6:41-42). Christians are not to find fault in others while blinded to their own (CP Jn 8:1-11; Ro 2:1-5). Both Jesus and Paul teach here that being blinded to one's own faults results in an attitude of superiority and causes hardness toward the fault of others. In Jn 8:1-11 Jesus exposes the evil hearts of the Pharisees who were quite prepared to put to death one found sinning publicly, yet they themselves were all sinning privately. In Ro 2:1-5 Paul declares that there is a Pharisee in the heart of every Christian who esteems their own morality above others (CP Ga 6:1-3).

Paul teaches here that when Christians judge, they must judge only as *fellow sinners*. To think that they are anything other than that, or that they are exempt from the faults they see in others, is to judge self-righteously and hypocritically which is strictly forbidden (CP 1Cor 4:1-7; Jas 4:11-12). Christians are not to criticise or condemn other Christians. No Christian is above criticism and God will judge them all. This is a rebuke to self-appointed judges in the church.

Christians are not to condone what the fallen brother did in Ga 6:1-3, or condemn him for it. Although the *fault* he was *overtaken in* was a sex sin – *fault* here refers to a moral failure – they are not to think of themselves as morally superior, but are to minister to him in a spirit of gentleness and love, being acutely aware of their own shortcomings, lest they too fall into sin (CP Ac 20:35; Ro 12:3; 2Cor 3:5; Eph 4:2). *Bearing one another's burden* in Ga 6:2 means helping the fallen brother come back to his place in God (CP Ro 15:1). In doing this Christians fulfil God's law of love for one another – *the law of Christ* (CP Ga 5:13-14; 6:2 with Jn 13:34-35; Ro 13:8-10 and Jas 2:8).

Not only must Christians not criticise or condemn other Christians or judge them in an unrighteous manner, but they must also not judge another's holiness by their own personal convictions (CP Ro 14:1-13). Paul admonishes Christians here, both weak and strong in the faith not to judge each other. All are servants of God and each is personally responsible to Him for what they do aside from what is specifically forbidden. The point Paul makes here is that Christians are not to impose their personal convictions concerning non-essential scruples upon each other. Strong Christians are not to be contemptuous of the weak for their lack of freedom, and the weak are not to condemn the strong for what they believe is a misuse of freedom. Whoever judges another like this puts themselves above God and is in grave danger of forfeiting their salvation (CP Isa 33:22; Mt 7:1-5; Jas 4:11-12). Only Jesus has the authority to judge, and every Christian is personally responsible to Him for what they allow themselves to do aside from what is forbidden to all. Christians must all follow the dictates of their own conscience in matters not

specifically commanded or forbidden in Scripture (CP Ro 2:14-16; 1Cor 4:3-5; 2Cor 1:12; 1Jn 3:20-21).

No one will fall who conscientiously follows God in the light of the knowledge they have received. Christians can fellowship with each other in spite of differences of opinion if they do not despise or criticise each other because of those differences. The strong are to bear with the weak and be tolerant of their doubtful practices. They must live in unity with each other (CP Ro 15:1-7 with 1Cor 13:1-7 and Ga 5:22-23). The *infirmities of the flesh* Paul refers to in Ro 15:1 are the non-essential scruples and doubtful practices of weak Christians in Ro 14:1-13. Strong and enlightened Christians must bear with the failings of weaker and less enlightened Christians until they too become strong in faith and knowledge. In V2 in Ro 15, Paul enjoins the strong to sacrificially order their lives to help the weak and build up their faith (CP Ac 20:35; 1Cor 8:9-13; 9:19-22; 10:23-24, 32-33; 2Cor 13:9; 1Th 5:14). None of this is to be construed as moral indifference however. Christians are obligated to guard the moral purity and doctrinal integrity of the church (CP 1Cor 5:1-8; Col 1:28; Tit 2:11-15; 3:10-11; 2Jn 7-11).

Jesus is the only one capable of judging Christians because He is the only one who paid the supreme sacrifice for their salvation. Therefore, no Christian should presume to criticise or condemn another for whom Christ also died (CP Ro 14:10-12). *Setting at naught* other Christians means despising them, holding them in contempt. This does not mean that Christians have to be in total agreement with one another's beliefs or teachings, or that they must like what others do, but they must not criticise or despise them because of it. Christians had better be looking at their own works rather than judge another's, because one day each and every one of them will stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give account of themselves to God for everything every one of them did as Christians on earth. Their every thought, their every word, their every deed, their secret acts, their character, their motives, their attitudes, their work and their ministry will all be revealed – made manifest at that time (CP Ecc 12:14; Ro 14:10-13; 1Cor 3:11-15; 4:5; 2Cor 5:10; Eph 6:1-9; Col 3:16 – 4:1; Jas 1:2-4, 12 19, 21; 2:1-4, 9; 1Pe 1:3-7, 17; Rev 22:7, 11-12).

There is no punishment involved at the Judgement Seat of Christ, only rewards or loss of rewards. It is not to be confused with the Great White Throne Judgement. The Judgement Seat of Christ is for Christians who are already in heaven, whereas the Great White Throne Judgement is for sinners, prior to being cast into the lake of fire (CP Rev 20:11-15).

None of this is teaching that Christians cannot exercise discernment regarding spiritual things. Christians can also examine, convince and reprove those in the world of their evil ways. This in no way is judging sinners, but simply witnessing to them the gospel of light. Neither does it mean that Christians cannot judge false teaching and who false teachers are in the church. It is obligatory upon them to do this (CP 1Cor 2:15; 14:29 with Mt 7:15-20; 1Th 5:21; 1Jn 4:1; Rev 2:1-2).

Neither does it mean that Christians cannot make value judgements with respect to sin in other Christians (CP 1Cor 5:1-5, 9-13). The fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers (foul tongued abusers), drunkards and extortioners here are professing Christians and Paul warns other Christians against fellowshiping with them. They are to be put out of the church – excommunicated – so that God can deal with them outside the church. Christian judgements

are limited to those inside the church. God judges those outside the church (CP V12-13). Christians must always remember that the same measure of judgement with which they judge others will be measured back to them, doubled (CP Lu 6:36-38). The word *again* in V38 means *repetitive* – it is repeated. Christians will receive double judgement for how they judge, just as they will be doubly blessed in return for what they give.