

Discerning Judgment

Scripture: Matthew 7:1–5

Code: B140410

This post was first published during April 2014. –ed.

Last time we discussed the necessity of [discerning leadership](#) in the church. But exercising discernment is not *only* the duty of pastors and elders. The same careful discernment Paul demanded of church leadership is also required of every Christian. The exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to “examine everything carefully” is written to the *entire church*.

The Greek text is by no means complex. The word “carefully” has been added by the translators to make the sense clear. If we translate the phrase literally, we find it simply says, “Examine everything.” But the idea conveyed by our word *carefully* is included in the Greek word translated “examine,” *dokimazō*. This is a familiar word in the New Testament. Elsewhere it is translated “analyze,” “test,” or “prove.” It refers to the process of testing something to reveal its genuineness, such as in the testing of precious metals. Paul is urging believers to scrutinize everything they hear to determine if it is genuine, to distinguish between the true and the false, to separate the good from the evil. In other words, he wants them to examine everything *critically*. “Test everything,” he is saying. “Judge everything.”

But wait just a minute. What about Matthew 7:1: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged”? Typically someone will quote that verse and suggest that it rules out any kind of critical or analytical appraisal of what others believe. Was Jesus forbidding Christians from judging what is taught in His name?

Obviously not. The spiritual discernment Paul calls for is different from the judgmental attitude Jesus forbade. In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus went on to say:

In the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, 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 7:2–5).

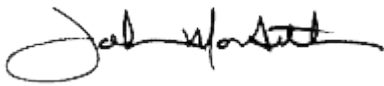
Obviously, what Jesus condemned was the hypocritical judgment of those who held others to a higher standard than they themselves were willing to live by. He was certainly not suggesting that *all* judgment is forbidden. In fact, Jesus indicated that taking a speck out of your brother’s eye is the *right* thing to do—as long as you first get the log out of your own eye.

Elsewhere in Scripture we are forbidden to judge others’ motives or attitudes. We are not “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). That is a divine prerogative. Only God can judge the heart, because only God can see it (1 Samuel 16:7). He alone knows the secrets of the heart (Psalm 44:21). He alone can weigh the motives (Proverbs 16:2). And He alone “will

judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus” (Romans 2:16). That is not our role. “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

What Scripture forbids is hypocritical judging and judging others’ thoughts and motives. But other forms of judgment are explicitly *commanded*. Throughout Scripture the people of God are urged to judge between truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil. Jesus said, “Judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, “I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say” (1 Corinthians 10:15). Clearly, God *requires* us to be discriminating when it comes to matters of sound doctrine.

As we shall see next time, our discerning judgment is also an essential part of addressing sin within the church.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from *Reckless Faith*.)

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