

# **JUDGING OTHERS**

By David L. Miner

You have probably heard it said often, “God helps those who help themselves.” And since this is said so frequently by both Christians and non-Christians alike, modern Christianity has sort of developed an entire theology around this claim.

Christian Self-Help groups, ministries, and even some churches devote themselves to the belief that “God helps them who help themselves,” and we see actions and activities and recently entire belief systems consumed with helping Believers see how to help themselves, how to feel better about themselves, how to experience “all God has for us.” We are told by these people and these ministries how much God wants us to be happy here on earth so we should go around and claim the material things we want, and the “spiritual” goals we want, so that God knows what to give us to make us happy.

It would be better if these ministries and churches and church leaders would devote themselves to understanding Scripture, rather than using Scripture to promote their belief systems.

But modern Christianity has become lazy and greedy, and we often don't use biblical discernment and sound judgment any more. Instead, God and his Church has seen an entire generation of Christians become spiritually neutered because they have taken to heart certain slogans, catch-phrases, sound bites, and biblical buzzwords similar to that above. You have probably heard of “pop psychology;” I submit that we have developed an entire generation of “pop Christianity” where something that makes sense in a logical world MUST be true in the Spiritual world. This has polluted our theology and modified our thinking in unbiblical ways.

***In no way is this “pop Christianity” mindset more manifest than in the issue judging others.***

“Who are you to judge me?” has become common in our television programs and in our movies. Even Christians have adopted the mantra of “don't judge, just love” in an effort to bring more people into our churches.

Coaches are *required* to judge athletes and their weaknesses. Bosses are *required* to judge applicants in light of the company's needs, and employees in light of their actions and accomplishments. Teachers are *required* to judge students to see if they have learned enough to be promoted to the next grade.

But Christians are somehow and for some reason *forbidden* to judge others!

It is reasoned that one cannot lead without first judging and deciding who could best

assist you in leadership responsibilities. Yet we are told by secular and spiritual leaders alike that we cannot judge others. [*“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”* Matthew 7:1, NIV] So we decide we cannot turn to God for help with good judgment and discernment of others, and we are left with developing secular management techniques that allow us to help others to “rise above the crowd” so we can select without judging. As a result we often choose our spiritual associates and assistants *not* by their hearts for and walks with God, but instead by which ones manifest more strengths consistent with our needs. Instead of measuring the godly character and the wisdom of one’s heart for God, we use secular techniques to sort through some list of candidates. We seldom get inside the other person; seldom learn what makes them tick and what motivates them; seldom clearly see their strengths and their flaws. This usually means we are sooner or later disappointed with them, or they do not last long, because we never adequately and properly judged their hearts and walks in the first place. This strategy might work in a large and godless corporation, but it will never work in a Christ-centered ministry led by God’s Holy Spirit.

Last year I met a man in prison and quickly became bonded to him. He had a heart for God that truly inspired me, and he manifested this heart in circumstances that would cause most Christians to cower in the corner, intimidated into silence. As we got to know each other over the next month or so, he showed me his strong desire to help Christian men grow in their relationships with God. But he confessed the absence of any church training that would prepare him for this discipleship ministry, and because of this he had no idea how to go about ministering to others. He related an experience early in his attempts at ministry where he was trying to help another prisoner gain an insight into the character of Jesus and how to manifest that character in a world needing to see Jesus. But the man strongly objected to something said by my friend. *“You are judging me! You have no right to judge me! Jesus said for you to not judge people, and you have violated the words of Jesus!”* The man then walked away from my friend to never seek him out again.

It was clear that my friend was deeply moved by this experience, and not in a good way. And it was also clear that my friend had no idea how he was to teach and train and disciple others without judging them in some way. So my friend turned to me in his turmoil for answers about discipling others without judging. His agony made me think more about what the Bible had to say about discipleship, and especially about judging, than I had ever before considered. I wrote this essay for him but I was transferred to another facility before it was completed and I could give it to him.

I recently read in an excellent fiction novel written by an author I truly enjoy where a pediatrician at an inner city free clinic thought something like, “I am not judging anyone, and I try to not let them see my true feelings on their issues and situations.” The context of this mental comment was a full paragraph of text where the free clinic pediatrician explained to himself that teen sexual activities and teen pregnancy and single-parent inner city families all have horrible consequences, but he just the same tried to not show anything other than encouragement to his patients. He equated being outwardly positive with being non-judgmental. The comment was simply a single line in an entire book, not

given any importance at all. In fact, the comment was dismissed by the main character in the book in such a way that made it clear the character (and presumably the author) believed the comment was really no big deal; of no real significance at all.

But this fictional man was lying to himself, or else the author was lying to his readers. The doctor in the story was clearly judging, obvious because he tried to hide his true feelings. He was clearly judging, because the diseases and addictions and abuses he saw and dealt with each and every day were things he fervently prayed his children and others would *NEVER* experience. He was clearly judging the decisions and the resulting experiences of his many patients as being terrible, and with terrible consequences.

In truth, he was WAS judging them and he just didn't want the people to KNOW he was judging them.

Most of us have had a similar experience, and many of us have it regularly. We see bad actions and bad results and bad people on a frequent, maybe daily, basis. But based on the words of Jesus in the 7th chapter of Matthew and the 6th chapter of Luke, and other Scripture passages, we have become convinced that judging them is wrong and bad; that judging is somehow in itself sin. So we tell ourselves and maybe others that we are not judging anyone.

Yet we naturally judge them, and we just don't want anyone to know we are judging.

But believers have been taught that this same loathing of judgment must serve as the basis for all our dealings with both Believers and unbelievers. We have been taught that we must never let the anyone ever see any judgment of their actions, attitudes, or beliefs on our part. And this refusal to show any judgment in any way has resulted in Churches and Church Leaders opening their doors to homosexuals and alcoholics and idolaters and all sorts of people who practice what the Bible seems to condemn, while allowing these sinners, these practitioners of actions the Bible so clearly condemns, to feel comfortable in their sins to the extent that we don't call them out of their sins.

This is a good thing – it is good that we make these people feel accepted before Jesus.

*But it is not good for ANYONE that we make these people feel comfortable enough with their sins that they remain in their sins! Not good for the Kingdom of Heaven, nor for the people going to that Kingdom, nor for the people NOT going to that Kingdom.*

No one involved in the paragraph above experiences any benefit at all from a false condemnation of judging, which leads to a false tolerance of sin, which usually leads to a false comfort with sin!

On the other hand, how do we avoid allowing them to feel comfortable enough to remain in their sins unless we judge them? And how can we judge them without offending them or condemning them or offending other believers, or in some other way feeling or looking like we have failed Scripture when it seems to offer two apparently

contradictory but equally impossible concepts? *“Do not judge lest ye be judged also.”*  
[Matthew 7:1, KJV] And, *“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.”* [Mark 12:33, KJV]

It is often true that a Christian would want to communicate love and acceptance to another person who is in some kind of need but without seeming to reject them. Jesus himself showed us many times how to accept people in the midst of their sins. Yet not once in Scripture do we ever see Jesus masking his hatred for and judgment of sin. Instead, he confronted sin every day. For example, it was his frequent practice to heal someone and then challenge him or her to “Go and sin no more.” He usually did so gently and lovingly, but he did so clearly.

His meeting the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well, described in chapter 4 of the Gospel of John, is a classic example of Jesus loving and accepting the individual while judging and condemning her sin. Christ starts the conversation with an innocent request - “Will you give me something to drink?” He moves into comments of such depth that she is compelled to respond. As they engage in what is obviously a spiritual discussion, Jesus follows the social custom of the day and suggests she get her husband so he can join in, participate in their discussion. She admits she has no husband, and Jesus responds with the claim that she has had five husbands and is currently living with a man to whom she is not married. This is a clear accusation of adultery, a sin demanding death under Jewish law. Yet Jesus did this in a gentle and loving way that drew her in rather than rejecting her. And rather than making her feel rejected and condemned, she felt so positive about being confronted that she went into town and brought a group of friends to hear what Jesus had to say. The end result of this confrontation was that Jesus spent a couple days in town sharing the Gospel with the entire village.

Clearly, Jesus knew how to love and accept a person. And clearly, Jesus was not afraid of confronting sin. And just as clearly, Jesus knew how to love the sinner.

Some years ago, I was approached by a man who asked me if he could ask some questions about the Bible. I am always looking for opportunities to talk about Jesus and his biography, so I eagerly assented. He asked me if homosexuality was really the sin that so many Christians claimed. We talked about homosexuality for almost an hour, and looked at some passages from the Bible that addressed the issue. When I read to him the passage in chapter 1 of Romans, where the writer suggested that homosexual activities are “unnatural” and a “perversion,” our discussion transitioned from a friendly chat about what the Bible teaches to something quite negative. At that point, the man got very offensive, and said in an aggressive manner, “But doesn’t the Bible tell you not to judge? Aren’t you sinning by judging me? You have no right to judge me!” My quick response came without any thought on my part, which often is not a good thing. I replied in what I hoped was a gentle and accepting voice, “Please don’t misunderstand me. I am not judging you at all. I never said you were a homosexual or that you were going to Hell for it. But when it comes to homosexual activities, I don’t HAVE to judge anything. God has already judged homosexuality, and he calls it a perversion. I am only sharing with you what God has already said about the issue. And because I am only sharing with you what God has already said on the matter, if you have a problem with that, you

don't have a problem with me – you have a problem with God!" The man paused for a few seconds and then walked away without a word.

I could have been more gentle in my response, and even tried to make the man feel more comfortable with his homosexuality, but I did not. And maybe I would have had the man not been so aggressive in his claim that I was sinning by judging him. But I think I would still have made the same point.

*What God has already judged as sin is clearly sin, and I don't need to judge it at all.*

Please understand this concept. When the Word of God clearly refers to actions and attitudes as sin, I don't need to judge those actions and attitudes. All I need do is pass along **God's judgments** of those actions and activities. I am not judging those actions and activities if all I am doing is passing on God's words.

What God has already judged is judged for all eternity!

While Christians may need to be gentle and sensitive and wise when we pass on these and other passages; while we may need to learn how to "love the sinner while hating the sin;" while we may need to learn to love others the way Jesus loved them, *we need to never accept sin!*

***The trick is to love the sinner AND hate the sin!***

The ONLY alternative will result in everyone somehow accepting sin, somehow allowing everything to be seen as equally good. And that alternative will defeat godliness every time. That alternative will profane the death of Jesus more than 2,000 years ago!

KNOW THIS! You cannot pursue God without pursuing holiness. And you can't pursue holiness without rejecting sin. And you can't reject sin without first labeling it as sin. And you can't label it sin without first judging it as wrong.

*Judging is a necessary part of being a Christian.*

So why is it considered so wrong to judge someone? What makes the act of assessing the goodness or the rightness of an action or of a person, in a social or spiritual sense, unacceptable? And what passages in *God's Word* support this conclusion?

When the Bible says, "*Judge not lest you be judged,*" what does it mean?

The belief that it is wrong to judge someone often leads Christians to a verbal claim that we are NOT judging anyone. And this verbal claim that we are not judging anyone is usually an introduction to a watered-down presentation of biblical claims or biblical standards. After all, how can we present the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as God's plan for a sinful world without addressing sin? How can we speak of sin or of godliness without looking like we are suggesting that someone might be sinning or

should be more godly? This attempt at diluting the Word of God has led many to a powerless and empty presentation of God's call on all mankind to be holy and Christ-like. And any presentation of the need for atonement requires a presentation of sin!

Christians cannot have a powerful and positive impact on the believers and unbelievers around them without taking a clear and powerful stand against sin. Scripture makes that very clear. If we communicate that sin is somehow acceptable, even if for only a short time, we imply that Jesus died for nothing and we insult his sacrifice and memory.

Yet any examples of taking a stand for Christ and against sin that we see or hear about often resemble a large sign in the front yard exclaiming the world must "*Turn Or Burn!*" Almost every television show and Hollywood movie presents Biblical Christianity as stupid and obnoxious and useless and condemning and clearly something no highly-evolved human would desire to know much less hang around. But there are options... Believers can take a clear stand against sin without conforming to those offensive and inaccurate descriptions.

I submit that in our paranoid attempt to appear as non-judgmental Christians, we have instead sold out our Lord and Savior. We cannot talk about sin and the world's need for a Savior without taking a moral and spiritual stand. And many of us have drawn back from taking that stand for fear of being accused of being judgmental.

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* [Romans 3:23] is a judgment from God!

*"There is no one righteous, not even one,"* [Romans 3:10] is no casual statement!

*"You shall be holy for I am holy,"* [1 Peter 1:16] is not a recommendation!

*"...He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight,"* [Colossians 1:23] was not an optimistic dream!

*"...He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight,"* [Ephesians 1:4] was not a reference to some Plan B!

The truth is simple - God expects us to be holy and Christ-like; perhaps less so in our early years as a Christian, but definitely more so in our later years. But are we expected to be Christ-like based SOLELY on our consciences? Are other Christians expected to live and minister around us and yet keep quiet about the weaknesses and shortcomings they see in us? Does God expect our spiritual leaders to ONLY offer us encouragement and kudos? Is God's cause best served when we ignore suggestions from others that we believe are "judging" us? Can we benefit from the "iron sharpens iron" effects of being in relationship with other believers if we ONLY listen for and allow comments that we consider to be positive and non-judgmental?

Dr. Arnold Prater, a preacher and teacher with the small denomination in which I grew up, said something in a sermon I heard almost 50 years ago which has made such an

impact on me that it has stuck with me through all these years. He said, *“It is a curse for a Christian to be indistinguishable from a good moral person.”* In his sermon, Dr. Prater was teaching that believers are called to a holy and Christ-like life, and that this holy and Christ-like life is supernatural in nature and cannot be mistaken for being merely a good and moral life.

So the question must be answered, *“How does one grow into such a life, and become so Christ-like, that one cannot be mistaken for being merely a good moral person?”*

Clearly and obviously, the Holy Spirit plays a primary role in our growth and learning.

*“But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth.”* [John 16:13, NIV]

*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ...* [Philippians 1:6, KJV]

But just as clearly, Scripture declares that we Christians are to teach and instruct each other in all issues of life and godliness.

*“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* [Ephesians 4:9-13, NIV]

*“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”* [I Timothy 4:13, KJV]

*“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”* [II Timothy 2:2, NIV]

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* [III Timothy 3:16-17, KJV]

The entire concept of “iron sharpening iron” found in Proverbs 27:17 presumes and demands interaction between people where someone is judging. And all of Chapter 2 in Titus gets very specific in the details of what issues and concepts need to be taught to, and expected of, people who want to follow Jesus.

Paul himself “goes from preaching to meddling” in almost every one of his Epistles, telling this one to use his gift more and these two to cease striving and be reconciled and that one to cease certain actions. Paul even tells an entire church that they should each one be embarrassed that no one had addressed a specific sexual sin that was well-known in that particular church.

So is “judging” to be allowed only from the biblical authors? Or is it to be allowed from

the preacher? Or is it to be allowed from our Elders? Or is it to be allowed from our parents?

Is it possible to teach, train, and disciple other believers without appearing as if one is judging them?

And what does “judging” truly mean? Why does one passage seem to tell us to not judge others, and then another passage seem to call us to teach and correct and reprove each other?

It will help us answer these questions if we understand the Greek words used by the Biblical authors in the many different passages which we read and possibly use as we study and discuss the issue of judging. Where a Biblical author might use one of several Greek words, our English translators end up using only one - judge. To know which Greek word, even which tense of which Greek word, is used by the original author allows us to understand more clearly what the Bible actually teaches about judging.

In Matthew 7:1, we read the words of Jesus:

*“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* [Matthew 7:1, NIV]

We read similar prohibitions in Romans 2, but they are more complete and maybe even more condemning:

*“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So, when you, a mere man, passes judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?”* [Romans 2:1-4, NIV]

*Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?* [Romans 2:1-4, NASB]

In both passages, the Biblical authors use the same Greek word - *krino*. Gr-*krino* means to judge, to condemn, to damn; and it was used by the writers throughout the *New Testament* to indicate a situation where someone determines that an individual is destined for hell based on external actions or internal attitudes, which would lead us to simplistic and incomplete discernment. And Gr-*krino* is taken to an extreme when we Gr-*catakrino* others, when we judge against others as deserving hell.

Yes, the Bible does tell us that we should not judge others. And it means that humans do not have the insight or the authority to judge another as being bound for heaven or hell just based on external actions or perceived internal attitudes. So if we **presume** to *Gr-krino* others as destined for Hell because they act or speak in a certain way which SEEMS inconsistent with a heart for God, then we risk God using that same superficial measuring stick the next time we lie or gossip or swear or slip into any of the many unrighteous thoughts or actions that many of us commit.

Now, go back and look at the context of those two warnings - Matthew 7 and Romans 2.

In chapter 7 of Matthew, we see Jesus in the middle of the longest single discourse of his ministry, as far as we know. And who was Jesus teaching? At that point in time, we know that the public ministry of Jesus was becoming well-known and well-respected. People gathered around Jesus wherever he walked just to hear him and his teachings. In that particular situation reported in the Gospel according to Matthew, there was a crowd gathering around Jesus in town, and he wanted to spend some time teaching his disciples. So “*he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying...*” [Matthew 5:1-2, NIV] The “*Sermon on the Mount*” was a long teaching session that Jesus had intended for his disciples. Others may have overheard, and even benefited, but Jesus clearly intended the teaching for his disciples.

And in that teaching session, Jesus covered an entire series of concepts and issues, most of them related to spiritual measuring sticks. By that I mean that Jesus gave his disciples a stack of rulers that could be used to measure one’s spiritual status and spiritual growth. Some of these rulers involved specific actions, but most involved internal attitudes. And in the midst of all this, Jesus warned his disciples that they could not judge if someone is headed for hell just based on certain external actions and internal attitudes. Jesus went on to state that the simplistic and incomplete ruler they used to pronounce condemnation on others will be used on them, and he indicated that none of them or us would fare well under those criteria.

The *Sermon on the Mount* contains many different criteria that he intended his disciples to use in determining spiritual maturity, their own and others, and he expected them to use those criteria in their respective ministries. And in the midst of this teaching about measuring people’s spiritual maturity, Jesus explained that these spiritual measuring sticks COULD be used to discern spiritual maturity and spiritual growth, but COULD NOT be used to discern whether or not someone was saved or going to hell!

The disciples of Christ could not *GR-krino* anyone without running a severe risk to themselves!

We see something similar in the book of Romans. The last half of the first chapter of Romans we see Paul laying out what I call the “steps to depravity.” Paul tells us how mankind, individually and collectively, chooses to walk down a path of rejecting God. This path contains seven steps, from the slightly naughty to the severely evil. The end result of this path is a long list of sins.

*“They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these things but also approve of those who practice them.”* [Romans 1:29-32, NIV]

This is indeed a bad report card!

And these actions and attitudes, as a whole, are reflected by those without Christ, as a whole. I doubt that any given sinner is guilty of each and every item on the list. But if you list all unbelievers, and then list all the transgressions performed by all those unbelievers, you would see this list.

And Paul tells us to not JUDGE (Gr-*krino*) those who perform transgressions on the list as deserving hell! Why? Because almost all Christians are guilty of gossiping! Almost all Believers are guilty of envy, strife, deceit and many others on the list. So, Paul says, if you are going to use this list of transgressions to condemn someone to hell, then by that same criteria, you are also destined for hell, “. . .because you who pass judgment do the same things.” [Romans 2:1, NIV]

So it is clear that the Word of God commands believers to NOT proclaim anyone’s eternal destiny based on external activities and perceived internal attitudes. Christians are not to judge (Gr-*krino* - a verb) others, which would result in those others receiving judgment (Gr-*krisis* - a noun), meaning someone who is accused, condemned, and damned to Hell.

There are, however, variations on use of this word that are often translated into the English word for judge, but which really mean “to investigate or scrutinize” [Gr-*anakrino*] or “to discriminate or distinguish” [Gr-*diakrino*]. The root word and its variations are often translated into the same English word for judge, but their meanings are so clearly different. It is the root [Gr-*krino*] that we are forbidden to do. But it is the variations on that root [Gr-*anakrino* and Gr-*diakrino*] which Scripture demands that we practice, and that we practice them with wisdom.

Paul also tells us:

*We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment...* [I Corinthians 2:12-15, NIV]

Here, Paul is telling believers that we judge-scrutinize-examine-discern all things to understand their spiritual value and what we should or should not do with them.

But then Paul goes further in that same Epistle:

*It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. [I Corinthians 5:1-12, NASB]*

And here, Paul is chastising an entire church of believers because they DID NOT judge or scrutinize or evaluate the spiritual impact (“*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?*”) of a series of actions performed by a member of that local Body of Christ.

The Body of Christ, ALL CHRISTIANS, are expected by God to judge others!

*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. [Galatians 6:1, NASB]*

*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the*

*Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. [Romans 14:1-10, KJV]*

*Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. [Romans 14:1-10, NASB]*

Here we see Paul calling us to discern which believers are strong in their faith, and which ones are weak, so we can avoid offending the weak believers.

*So what ARE Christians called to do with regards to confronting sin and encouraging growth within the Body of Christ and outside the Body of Christ?*

I submit that there are three separate issues here, based on the recipient audience: believers confronting non-believers, believers confronting believers, and believers in a position of some spiritual authority confronting those under their spiritual ministry and care. And perhaps we can see a guideline or instruction in how to approach these different groups from Scripture itself. (*Imagine that!*)

In the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John, we see Jesus teaching about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

*“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. Concerning sin because the world does not know me; concerning righteousness because I go to the Father and you no longer behold me; concerning judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged.” [John 16:8-11, NIV]*

I believe that Jesus is telling us of the three primary categories into which all actions by the Holy Spirit in this world fall. This passage does not declare with certainty that the Holy Spirit does not accomplish anything else in this world, but the words Jesus uses

seem to *imply* that very assertion. This is what the Holy Spirit *DOES* in this world, and if our respective ministries are directed by the Holy Spirit, then our ministries will reflect his ministry.

In other words, Jesus is pointing out three different groups with three different needs, and shows how the Holy Spirit will meet those three separate needs. And Jesus is implying that Spirit-led believers will do the same.

Taken literally, the Holy Spirit's actions with regard to an unbelieving world [Gr-cosmos] that does not know Jesus does *not* involve telling sinners that specific sins are indeed sins. His ministry to unbelievers relates to helping them see that they do not know Jesus and need to know Jesus. The Holy Spirit deals with sinners "...concerning sin because they do not know me," according to the words of Jesus. If we take this at face value, sermons on the evils of alcohol or gambling, discussions on how pornography is sin, and presentations of WWJD are a waste of time, when directed at unbelievers. It is not their SINS that the Holy Spirit deals with, but their SINFULNESS! Seriously, if someone does not know Jesus, how in the world will they know what Jesus would do in any given circumstance? And why would they care?

As Paul clarified to us, we have a ministry of reconciliation with regards to unbelievers.

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

[II Corinthians 5:18-20, NIV]

Sinners have one need and the Holy Spirit will focus on that one need - to know Jesus. If we are living a holy and righteous life, there are unbelievers around us who are watching us and seeing their need of Jesus.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

[Hebrews 12:1, NASB]

While this passage in Hebrews seems to be discussing believers watching believers, I believe the concept applies to both believers and unbelievers watching us all the time. The witnesses around us, both believers and unbelievers, are being drawn to Christ as long as we are living in Christ.

***The Holy Spirit doesn't point unbelievers to their SINS. He points unbelievers to their SINFULNESS, and then he points them to Jesus.***

Know this - if we live like Jesus wants us to live, then the Holy Spirit is hard at work around us drawing sinful people to God.

And if our ministries point unbelievers to Jesus, we really won't need to judge (*Gr-krino*) anyone. Unbelievers will come to us and ask about God because the Holy Spirit is at work prompting them to ask. The question might be disguised; the unbeliever may not realize he or she is asking about God. But the opportunity will be there to tell him or her about God because the Holy Spirit is using our lives to draw them to God. If the Holy Spirit is not using our lives to point unbelievers to God, then it is because our lives are falling far short of what Jesus wants for us and promises to us. Your life doesn't have to be perfect for the Holy Spirit to use you, but it does have to be submitted to Him.

The second group of people that the Holy Spirit targets is believers. Here the ministry efforts are exclusively to point us to Jesus for our example of holiness and righteous living. Jesus tells us that when he goes to Heaven, "*you no longer behold me.*" When he is no longer living in front of us, we no longer have a living example of how to live. So the Holy Spirit will point us to Jesus and call us to live like Him.

Know this - the Holy Spirit does not convict believers of sin; he convicts believers of Christ's righteousness and gives us the desire to live like Him, and the power to do so.

No matter how many times we hear the saying, I can find no place in Scripture where it tells us that the Holy Spirit "convicts a believer of sin" or where he focuses Christians on sins in the believer's life. The Holy Spirit would rather point us to Christ and to Christ's righteousness than He would point us toward our sins and Satan's short but possibly important victory in our lives. We might FEEL like the Holy Spirit is pointing to our sin, but that is merely the REACTION of our conscience and our spirit when the Holy Spirit points us toward the righteousness of Christ.

***There is nothing about the Holy Spirit that points us toward Satan; He is too busy pointing us toward Jesus.***

This is not to say that God does not deal with our sin, nor can we say that the Biblical authors chose to ignore specific sins. What we can take away from this is the fact that the Holy Spirit points believers to Jesus as the means of dealing with our sins.

Perhaps we should take a clue from a winning strategy. Maybe other people would not feel that we are judging them if we are instead pointing unbelievers to Jesus and believers to his righteousness. *Ya think?*

The third audience that the Holy Spirit targets is the "prince of this world" and, by implication, his minions. And what does the Holy Spirit say to these evil forces? That they have lost the battle and are already judged and condemned by Jesus, the King of all Kings and Lord of Lords.

*“That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything...”* [Ephesians 1:19-23, NIV]

We can listen to all sorts of sermons and seminars on the issue of spiritual warfare. We can hear many exhortations to bind Satan in this and bind Satan in that. But we see a clear pattern in what Scripture teaches us - all we need to do is remind Satan and his followers that they have already lost, already been defeated by an omnipotent God and his victorious Son. When we remind Satan that he has already lost the war, the Holy Spirit takes our words, combines them with what the Holy Spirit has already told Satan, and Satan is totally defeated at THAT VERY SECOND in whatever he is trying to do. But until reminded by us that he has already lost, Satan is the Ruler of this World and will continue successfully in whatever he is attempting to accomplish. Unless and until we remind Satan that he has already lost this war, he will exercise power over us!

***Effective spiritual warfare is nothing more than reminding Satan of what is true, and the Holy Spirit is loosed to do the rest for us.***

Of course, a spiritually defeated or powerless life cannot utter effective spiritual claims. So we MUST be living like Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit for any of our efforts at spiritual warfare to be effective.

And this just might call for us to encourage and exhort other believers toward Christ. *Ya think?*

So what seems to be the Biblical teaching concerning ministering to others about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? What can we take away from John 16 where Jesus explains the ministry of the Holy Spirit after he is resurrected out of this world?

First, Christians should stop wasting time pointing out to unbelievers all their individual sins, and instead point to their need for Jesus. We do not need to judge them [Gr-*krino*] as being destined for hell based on their attitudes and actions - God's Holy Spirit has already convicted them of their sinfulness. This builds on what the Holy Spirit has already been doing, according to the words of Jesus.

Second, Christians should focus less on pointing out the individual weaknesses and sins of believers (themselves and others), and instead focus on teaching and exhorting believers (themselves and others) concerning the righteousness of Jesus. We need to show them the righteousness of Jesus by our lives and our words. This builds on what the Holy Spirit has already been doing, according to the words of Jesus.

Third, Christians can be less concerned about, and not at all fearful of, what Satan has done and is doing in this world, and simply stand firm on what we all know - Satan has lost the battle AND the war by the power of Jesus. When we stand on this truth, and

remind Satan of it while we stand, then we will see victory over Satan EVERY TIME. This builds on what the Holy Spirit has already been doing, according to the words of Jesus.

Please note that the entire range of activities by the Holy Spirit revolve around Jesus. Nothing that does not directly relate to Jesus is attempted by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the beginning and the ending of every interaction involving the Holy Spirit and people, whether believers or unbelievers. The issues may vary according to the target audience, but the message is the same: know Jesus, and then know Jesus better, and then live like Jesus is the King of Kings and you are adopted into his family as a brother or sister!

**Remember, the Holy Spirit's ministry is to:**

- **to show unbelievers their sinfulness**
- **to show believers Christ's righteousness**
- **to show Satan is defeated**

The Holy Spirit helps people

To know God

To know God better

To know God's ultimate victory