



**To Judge  
or  
Not to Judge**

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This article may be used for the Glory of God

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## Introduction

We often hear “don’t judge”, but what does that really mean? The Bible also tells us to judge and discern good and evil. To get a proper understanding of when to judge, how to judge and when not to judge, we must look at the relevant passages in context and look at the definitions of the words that are used. Just as the word “judge” has a wide range of meaning in the English language, there is also a range of meanings in the original languages. There are several words that are used in the original languages that are translated “judge” or similar. It would be good to keep the words of James in mind:

**For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one *point*, has become guilty of all.** (James 2:10). This makes everyone a sinner and condemned since everyone has failed at least once. (Ro 5:12-14). Because of this, the only way that we can be justified is by accepting the payment for our sins by Jesus Christ by faith alone.

## Definitions

### Old Testament Hebrew

In order to better understand judging, we need to look at the words that are used and what their meaning is. The two main Hebrew words that are used are:

H4941 מִשְׁפָּט mishpâṭ

From H8199; properly a *verdict* (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a *sentence* or formal decree (human or (particularly) divine *law*, individual or collectively), including the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty; abstractly *justice*, including a particular *right*, or *privilege* (statutory or customary), or even a *style*: - + adversary, ceremony, charge, X crime, custom, desert, determination, discretion, disposing, due, fashion, form, to be judged, judgment, just (-ice, -ly), (manner of) law (-ful), manner, measure, (due) order, ordinance, right, sentence, usest, X worthy, + wrong.<sup>1</sup>

H8199 שָׁפַט shâphaṭ

A primitive root; to *judge*, that is, pronounce *sentence* (for or against); by implication to *vindicate* or *punish*; by extension to *govern*; passively to *litigate* (literally or figuratively): - + avenge, X that condemn, contend, defend, execute (judgment), (be a) judge (-ment), X needs, plead, reason, rule.<sup>2</sup>

The primary meaning relates to judging according to the law. This involves determining right and wrong and handing down a judgement. This judging is done by someone who has the authority to do it, especially and ultimately, God. Ruling and judging go hand in hand. Judging protects the oppressed, weak or innocent and can provide deliverance. God is the lawgiver.

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<sup>1</sup> (Strong 1890)

<sup>2</sup> (Strong 1890)

## New Testament Greek

A number of words are translated judge, judging or similar in the Greek:

G2917 Κρίμα krima

From G2919; a *decision* (the function or the effect, for or against [“crime”]): - avenge, condemned, condemnation, damnation, + go to law, judgment.<sup>3</sup>

G2919 Κρίνω krinō

Properly to *distinguish*, that is, *decide* (mentally or judicially); by implication to *try, condemn, punish*: - avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, go to (sue at the) law, ordain, call in question, sentence to, think.<sup>4</sup>

G2920 Κρίσις krisis

(Subjectively or objectively, for or against); by extension a *tribunal*; by implication *justice* (specifically divine *law*): - accusation, condemnation, damnation, judgment.<sup>5</sup>

G2923 Κριτής kritēs

From G2919; a *judge* (generally or specifically): - judge.<sup>6</sup>

G1252 Διακρίνω diakrinō

From G1223 and G2919; to *separate thoroughly*, that is, (literally and reflexively) to *withdraw* from, or (by implication) *oppose*; figuratively to *discriminate* (by implication *decide*), or (reflexively) *hesitate*: - contend, make (to) differ (-ence), discern, doubt, judge, be partial, stagger, waver.<sup>7</sup>

G1348 Δικαστής dikastēs

From a derivative of G1349; a *judger*: - judge.<sup>8</sup>

There is a wider range of meanings in total from the Greek words that are used. The meanings of the words range from selecting or having an opinion, to judging according to the law. When a particular passage is looked at, the definition for the Greek word that is used needs to be looked at in a Lexicon and the context considered. For the most part in the New Testament, the usage is quite similar to the Old Testament meaning. The person, or group, that has authority decides or judges based on the law, whether that be the law of God or a law of the land.

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<sup>3</sup> (Strong 1890)

<sup>4</sup> (Strong 1890)

<sup>5</sup> (Strong 1890)

<sup>6</sup> (Strong 1890)

<sup>7</sup> (Strong 1890)

<sup>8</sup> (Strong 1890)

## Discernment

There is a difference between discerning and judging. For example, in Hebrews we read:

**But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.** (Hebrews 5:14). Also, 1 Th 5:20-21, 1 Ki 3:9, Mat 7:15-20, 1 Co 5:1-12, 1 Ti 1:19-20, 2 Th 3:6, Pro 14:7, Ro 12:3, 15:14, 16:17, 1 Ti 6:3-11, 2 Ti 3:1-9, 2 Jn 1:7-11).

Discerning right and wrong is something that we need to do, starting with ourselves. We need to examine ourselves (1 Co 11:26-32). The reference point for discernment is always the Word of God.

## God is the ultimate judge

God is the ultimate judge in that He instituted all laws and authorities. (Ro 13:1)

## Governmental judging

Because God has appointed rulers and authorities to govern people, they have the authority to judge. Because they are appointed by God, people must obey them. (Mat 23:2-3, Ro 13:1-2, Tit 3:1, 1 Pe 2:13-15)

## Church judging

### Passages related to not judging

Matthew 7:1-5, Luke 6:37

As part of the “Sermon on the Mount”, Jesus says: **“Do not judge (G2919), so that you will not be judged (G2919). “For in the way you judge (G2919), you will be judged (G2919); and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”** (Matthew 7:1-2) He continues on to call them hypocrites in that those who are judging were doing worse than those that they were judging. (Mat 7:3-5). The judging here refers to a condemnation of the person. (Lk 6:37). Jesus illustrates this in Luke 18:9-14, where the self-righteous Pharisee looked down on the “sinner” (tax collector) that asked for mercy. Jesus says that the “sinner was justified, but the self-righteous was not.

### Romans

There are a number of places in Romans that relate to judging. The whole message of the letter to the Romans needs to be considered as we look at these verses.

- No one is righteous. (Ro 3:9-18, To 3:23, Ro 5:12, Ro 11:32)
- No one is justified through the law. (Ro 3:20, Ro 3:28)
- Righteousness is by faith. (Ro 1:16-17, 3:22, 3:26-30, 4:9-16, 5:1-2)
- Christ died for us to pay the penalty of sin. (Ro 4:25, Ro 5:1-21)
- Even though believers still do wrong, it is no longer the believer doing it, but sin indwelling the person. Therefore, there is no condemnation for those that are saved by

faith in Jesus. Since God does not condemn believers, neither should other believers. (Ro 7:14-8:11)

- Believers are to love and serve. (Ro 12:1-21, 13:9-10)
- Believers are to make “sound judgements”. (Ro 12:3)
- Believers are to accept one another. (Ro 15:7)
- The believers, those being full of goodness and knowledge, are able to admonish one another. (Ro 15:14)
- God is the judge. (Ro 2:16, Ro 3:6, Ro 3:19, Ro 8:33-34, Ro 14:10-12)

The two main sections in Romans that deal with judging are in Ro 2:1-5 and 14:1 – 15:7. In the first case, the focus is on those that are self-righteous, looking down and condemning others, all the while not realizing that they are also condemned and needing the grace and mercy of God themselves since there is “no one who is righteous”. In the second case, one group of people was looking down on, and condemning another for either being “weak” or for approving things that they considered wrong. This applies to those types of things such as food, special days or other things which are inherently neither right or wrong and are a matter of conscience. See also Col 2:16. This of course does not apply to the doctrines of the faith. He states “[Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.](#)” (Romans 16:17). In other letters, Paul and other writers are also quite clear that the true doctrines need to be preserved and false doctrines corrected. (Gal 1:6-8, Eph 4:14, Col 2:8, Col 2:18-23, 1 Tim 1:3-10, 1 Tim 4:1-7, 1 Tim 4:13-16, 1 Tim 6:3-5, 1 Tim 6:20-21, 2 Tim 2:14-16, 2 Tim 3:13-4:3, Tit 1:9-14, Tit 2:1, Tit 3:9-11, Heb 13:9, 2 Pe 1:20-2:1, 2 Jn 1:6-11, Jud 1:4-16)

John 7:24

Here, Jesus is teaching at the temple. He is being accused of doing wrong by healing on the Sabbath. His basic teaching is that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, just as a baby is circumcised on the Sabbath, so He healed on the Sabbath. This is why He said: “[Do not judge \(G2919\) by the outward appearance, but judge \(G2919\) with righteous judgment \(G2920\).](#)” (John 7:24). The Jews had the “tradition of the elders” where they made up their own rules. It would appear that healing a person was considered work to them and superseded the greater law of loving your neighbor and doing good. More on this in the next section.

James

James talks about judging a couple of times. One of the themes in James is materialism, pride, envy and overall worldliness among the believers. In the first instance, some believers were treating rich people better than those that were poor. In doing so, they “made distinctions and became judges with evil motives”. (Jas 2:1-4). Note that this comes after Jas 1:9-10, where he is already setting the stage for the divisions based on affluence or lack thereof. The point that he makes is: [If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the Law as violators.](#) (James 2:8-9) Here, those who are

judging based on material possessions or being partial in any way, are themselves being convicted by the Law.

In the second instance, we read: [Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. The one who speaks against a brother or sister, or judges \(G2919\) his brother or sister, speaks against the law and judges \(G2919\) the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge \(G2923\) of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge \(G2923\), the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you, judging \(G2919\) your neighbor? \(James 4:10-12\).](#) James writes about speaking earlier already. In Jas 1:19, they are to be slow to speak and slow to anger. In Jas 1:26, bridling the tongue is the subject. In Jas 3:1-10, he focuses on the destructive power of the tongue and then relates it to “bitter Jealousy and selfish ambition”. (Jas 3:14). He continues on by condemning their materialism and focus on worldly passions. (Jas 3:15-4:5). James also writes against their arrogance and boasting. (Jas 4:13-5:5). He re-iterates the point in Jas 5:9: [Do not complain, brothers and sisters, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.](#) (James 5:9)

Passages related to judging

Judging if it is right to help people

In the passage in John that was already discussed, Jesus tells them to “judge with righteous judgment.” (Jn 7:24). This related to Jesus healing on the Sabbath. The Jews were putting “keeping the Sabbath” according to their rules above the more important laws concerning loving your neighbor and doing good. Jesus discussed this more in Mat 12:10-13, Lk 6:6-10 and Mk 3:1-5. The “righteous judgement” then relates to obeying the “golden rule” [“Treat people the same way you want them to treat you.](#) (Luke 6:31). Jesus summed up the whole law by saying:

[And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ “This is the great and foremost commandment. “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ “Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets.”](#) (Matthew 22:37-40).

Therefore, not doing good in helping someone on the Sabbath breaks the greatest commandments. Judging correctly then is judging traditions and rules on the basis of the two greatest commandments and Scripture in general.

Judging sin in the church

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians deals with this subject in detail. There was a situation in which a man was lying with his father’s wife. It would appear that the Corinthians were arrogant in that they thought that they were being really spiritual by accepting this kind of immoral behavior. (1 Co 5:1-13) Paul says that he has already judged the offender. (1 Co 5:3). The church is to expel him from the congregation for the purpose of reconciliation and to prevent the spread of wickedness in the church. They were to not only expel him from their church meeting, but not to interact with

him socially either. (1 Co 5:4-7, 5:12-13). A related passage is in Mat 18:15-17, where Jesus gives instruction on the handling of sin, again for the purpose of reconciliation. In this passage, Jesus also tells them to refrain from interacting with them socially if they do not repent. (2 Th 3:6,14-15, Ro 16:17, 2 Ti 3:5, 1 Ti 5:19-20).

Paul lists a number of offenses that would qualify for expulsion:

- Sexually immoral
- Greedy
- Idolator
- Verbally abusive
- Habitually drunk
- Swindler

There are two main reasons for church discipline.

1. To encourage the believer to repent and be reconciled to God and the church. (1 Co 5:5)
2. To prevent the spread of sin in the church. (1 Co 5:6)

In the Corinthian situation, we see the both were accomplished. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians we read about the sinner that repented and that the church as a whole obeyed Paul's command. It would appear that there were some who did not as is implied by:

[Sufficient for such a person is this punishment which was imposed by the majority](#), (2 Corinthians 2:6).

If we look at the original situation, where they thought that they were so loving and spiritual by accepting sin in their midst, it would appear that a minority of the congregation did not approve of the discipline and did not obey Paul.

A second situation that arose in Corinth was the lawsuits among believers because believers were treating each other in a sinful way. (1 Co 6:1-11). The believers were not to go to law against each other, but rather appoint someone from within the congregation to act as a judge (G1252) for their dispute.

There is also a requirement for two or three witnesses, both in Mat 18:16 and 1 Ti 5:19.

[Encouraging one another](#)

Believers are to continue to meet and encourage one another. (Heb 10:24-26). In verse 26 we see the purpose of encouraging one another is to avoid sin. In relationships, believers can share and encourage one another to love and good deeds, while keeping each other accountable and turning away from sin.



## Judging those outside the church

Scripture is quite clear that believers have no business judging those outside the church. God will judge them. (1 Co 5:12-13)

## Judging false doctrines

Keeping the church free of false doctrines falls primarily to the leadership as they should be the ones that know the Scriptures best. Every believer must also participate in the discernment of false doctrines and participate in maintaining the true doctrine in the church. Scripture is the standard by which everything is to be judged. (Mat 7:15-20, 12:33, 24:11, 24:24, Lk 6:44, Act 20:28-31, Ro 16:17, Eph 4:14, Gal 1:6-9, Col 2:8, 2:18, 1 Ti 1:3-10, 4:1-7, 4:13-16, 6:3-11, 6:20-21, 2 Ti 2:14-16, 3:1-9, 4:3, Tit 1:9-11, 2:1, 3:9-11, 2 Pe 2:1-3 Heb 13:9, 2 Pe 1:20-2:1, 2 Jn 1:6-11, Jud 1:4-16)

## Judging prophecies

As Paul addresses the Corinthians regarding speaking in tongues and prophesying, he commands them to do it in an orderly way. When a prophecy is made, the others are to pass judgement. (1 Co 14:29). The first standard that a prophecy is to be judged against is the Word of God. In addition, others are to discern with their own spiritual gifts and understanding, if the prophecy is true and applicable. In the Old Testament, anyone that would lead others astray and away from God suffered severe consequences. (Deu 13:1-14). A good test for a prophecy is: does it draw us towards God, His Word, toward one another and encourage us not to sin.

## Conclusion

Judging others in terms of salvation is condemned by Scripture. Looking down on those that have other opinions (that are not doctrinal in nature) and being partial to those that are considered better in terms of worldly stature is not allowed. Speaking against believers is also condemned.

Judging is for those to whom it has been given, whether that be God, as the ultimate judge, governmental officials or church officials.

On the other hand, discerning truth, confronting false doctrines and keeping the church pure is a responsibility for everyone. Confronting sin and, if necessary, disciplining an individual is always to be for the purpose of reconciliation and repentance to bring the person into a right relationship with God. This protects both the individuals in the church as well as the whole church from falling into sin and being violated by those that are sinning.

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