

To Judge or Not to Judge

By Katherine A. Hazelrigg

Christians have been known to say, “It’s not my place to judge So-and-So.” At one time, I would have agreed with that assessment. Yet, the more I read, studied, and searched the Scriptures, I found answers to life’s most perplexing questions, and one of them was the precept of judging. When the Master’s words “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*” (Yoch. 7:24) came to life within me, certain questions formed in my mind. What does it mean to judge? Is there a proper way to judge? Whom and what are to be judged? The Scriptures give us key information to help us discern the harmony of judging.

All of us have opinions on just about everything under the heavens, and some sort of judgment call helped us formulate those opinions. According to Webster’s New Riverside Dictionary, Revised Edition, one definition of the verb “to judge” is “to form an evaluation of.” The Scriptures present the definition of this verb from another perspective. The Master’s cousin Yochanan the Immerser admonished the religious rulers of their time to “*bear, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance*” (Mat. 3:18). In modern language that could be re-stated, “Back up your words with appropriate action.” Yahshua used trees and their fruit as examples to make His point (Mat. 7:16-19). He summed up the discourse with “*So then, by their fruits you shall know them*” (Mat. 7:20). He was calling the people to judge false prophets, but this same principle applies to recognizing Believers and unbelievers. This is important when we consider that Rav Sha’ul (Paul) warns us “*Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers....*” (2 Cor. 6:14). He spends the rest of the chapter comparing the characteristics of Believers and unbelievers. In his letter to the Galatians Sha’ul expounds on this by identifying the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The context is that unbelievers are governed by the works of the flesh, while Believers’ lives exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...” (Gal. 5:22-23 KJV). Judgment is required to identify each group.

Scripture tells us that on the grand scale of things “*...we shall all stand before the judgment seat of the Messiah,*” Rom. 14:10. Yet there are matters, issues, and circumstances every day that call for some sort of judgment. This is supported by the profound statement made by the preacher of Ecclesiastes where he says, “*For every matter there is an appointed time, even a time for every pursuit under the heavens*” (Eccl. 3:1). In the next seven verses the preacher outlines many such matters affecting all mankind. We might safely add that there is a time to judge and a way to judge that is in harmony with Yahweh’s will and in accordance with His word.

Unbelievers and immature Believers judge according to appearances as their carnal senses are affected. By contrast, mature Believers follow the wisdom of Shelomoh (Solomon), who recognized that without special dispensation from Yahweh he would not be able to pass righteous judgment (1 Kings 3:5-14). Believers of Yahshua the Messiah have His Spirit dwelling in them (us), giving us the ability and dispensation to judge all things that are appropriate. We don’t do so according to how our carnal senses are affected, but according to how the Work of the Spirit “*...guides (us) into all truth...*” (Yoch. 16:13).

If we stop and consider the course of operation, the devil uses the same tactics today that he used on Yahshua in the wilderness. Many preachers and teachers of the Word say that the devil knows the Scriptures. Considering the evidence recorded of how Satan quoted Scripture to Yahshua in the wilderness (Mat. 4:5-7), I believe Satan knows the Scriptures well enough to be able to pervert their usage – add a little here, take out a little there. He uses this method to full advantage wherever he can, and we must be discerning to recognize the hand he deals. One might wonder why he would not want us to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about judging. It is really very simple; he knows that he is really the one being judged when we judge

the actions of his human agents. So long as Satan can keep people in darkness he has the upper hand. The less Yahweh's people judge righteously the more power he maintains.

The most common verse Satan perverts is "*Judge not that ye be not judged.*" (Mat. 7:1). What he doesn't want us to see is that there's more to that story. Verse two expounds on the premise of verse one by adding, "*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged. And with the same measure you use, it shall be measured to you.*" Satan uses intimidation and the fear of having our past thrown back at us to keep us from judging. So often in the Scriptures Yahshua gives us examples of how various principles apply in daily living, and this matter is no different. Mattithyahu (Matthew) records the words of Yahshua thus:

(Mat 7:3-5 NRSV) "*Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? {4} Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? {5} You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.*"

In essence, Yahshua is saying, "check yourself before you check someone else." Once we have checked ourselves for any sinfulness and remove the obstacles of sin out of our own lives, then we can help others to see the bondage they are in and help them remove the same obstacles from their lives.

It is through Rav Sha'ul that the Spirit teaches us more about whom and on what we are to judge. In his letter to the Galatians, Rav Sha'ul says that "*If a man is overtaken in some trespass, you, the Spiritual ones, set such a one straight in the spirit of meekness, looking at yourself lest you be tried, too.*" (Gal. 6:10). We must look elsewhere in Scripture to find the identity of the man mentioned in the passage:

"For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are inside? But Yahweh judges those who are outside..." (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

It is not unbelievers we are to judge, except to determine what fruit they bear. The ones we are to judge are Believers. Another passage supports this premise:

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one.(1 Cor. 5:11).

If we apply the plank-and-splinter or speck-and-log principle, we will examine ourselves first in any of these trespasses before we judge any brother or sister. Remember the words of Yahshua, "*... with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*" (Mat. 7:2). The Master even tells us how to approach someone who trespasses against us on a personal level:

"And if your brother sins against you, go and reprove him, between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not hear, take with you one or two more, anat 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, say it to the Assembly. And if the offender refuses to hear the Assembly, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax collector."(Mat. 18:15-17).

In Yahshua's day, gentiles and tax collectors were considered the lowest of the low in Jewish society. Still, we do see that there is a proper way to approach judging that is done decently and in order. Let us remember also to judge in a loving manner and not to be cruel or malicious. The fruit of the Spirit must control how we judge others.

We must also acknowledge that there are a few things we are not to judge each other on. Rav Sha'ul named them in his letter to the Colossians:

“Let no one therefore judge you in eating or in drinking, or in respect of a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths – which are shadows of what is to come – but the body of the Messiah.” (Col. 2:16-17).

It is the Body of the Messiah, the Assembly, that gives rulings on all these matters. Rav Sha’ul alludes to these matters in his first letter to the Believers in Corinth when He wrote, *“So do not judge any at all before the time, until the Master comes, who shall bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the thoughts of the hearts. And then each one’s praise shall come from Yahweh.”* (1 Cor. 4:5).

The motives behind why some Believers are Torah-observant should not be judged. Only Yahweh knows why He directs certain people to observe the dietary laws, keep the true Sabbath, observe the Appointed times of Leviticus 23, etc. The reason for this shall be revealed at the appointed time when the Messiah returns. In the meantime, let us accept one another in these matters and trust that Yahweh is in complete control. In other matters defined in the Scriptures, let us not allow fear and intimidation to keep us from judging those things that we should. If we all work together to shed light in the darkness, the devil loses ground, loses souls to the Messiah, and cannot condemn the brethren for their trespasses. For every sin acknowledged, confessed, and forgiven, there is freedom, love, and harmony in the Assembly. There is also acceptance, mercy, and grace from the Father. To judge or not to judge; that is the question. Let the answer be, “Show me how.” ~

Note: Katherine has completed college Bible courses and will graduate soon with a bachelor of arts degree in theology and Bible. She aspires to be a chaplain in a women’s prison, ministering to female inmates. Let’s keep her in our prayers, please. ~
