

Righteous or Unrighteous Judgment

by Harry Osborne

Have you noticed that many who condemn publicly criticizing one advance their cause by publicly criticize those who do so? Politicians do it repeatedly. Does something about that strike you as a little inconsistent? It reminded me of listening to the terrorists who repeatedly try to justify the killing of innocent people in another country to protest the killing of innocent people in their country. Simply stated, the problem is that some people live by one rule, but judge others by a more stringent rule than that imposed upon themselves. The Bible speaks of such a practice and clearly condemns it. Notice this warning given by the apostle Paul in Romans 2:1-3:

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

In this context, the hypocrisy of the Jews is being examined by Paul. The Jews would have shouted, "Amen" to the charges of sin Paul laid at the Gentiles' feet in the first chapter. However, while they looked down their noses in disgust at the sinfulness of the Gentile world, the Jews were guilty of the same sins.

The Jews saw themselves as justified in their superior feelings because the law of Moses had been given to them. Even though they did not obey that law, they were proud of the fact that God had given it to them. Thus, Paul reminds them that **hearing** the law does not make one justified in the sight of God, but rather **doing** the law. The apostle sums up the state of such a people in this way:

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written. For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision (Romans 2:17-25).

Clearly, God condemned the Jews' practice of judging the Gentiles by the standard of the law while refusing to live by that standard. Such hypocrisy has always caused the name of God to be blasphemed by those whose only view of the truth is through the lives of those professing to believe in God. They do not see the consistency of truth due to the hypocrisy of professed believers.

Jesus on Judging

It is the height of absurdity for us to condemn the wrong done by another when we are doing the same thing. Pointing our finger at another's wrong will not excuse us from God's judgment of

our own wrong actions. Jesus had much the same thing to say about this in Matthew 7:3-5 in these words:

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

The picture Jesus brings to our mind with this teaching is one in which each of us can readily see the absurdity. None of us want a doctor with a 2X4 coming out of his eye to try removing a speck from our own eye. We would tell him to get his own eye problem fixed first. In the same way, if we are going to show the wrong in another's actions, we must first correct our own.

This is the point Jesus makes in the previous two verses as well when He says, "*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you*" (Matthew 7:1-2). Jesus is not saying that we are absolutely forbidden from showing another of his wrong. He is instructing us to avoid hypocritical judgment by condemning one while we are just as guilty – if not more so. In the same chapter, Jesus commands us to judge some to be false prophets by examining their lives (vs. 15-20). Such would not be possible if all judging is wrong.

Applying the Principle

It does the cause of Christ no small amount of harm when people with foul mouths and ungodly conduct take it upon themselves to instruct their fellow citizens about morality. The point may be true, but it is coming from the wrong source. Such actions make it appear that people who stand for Bible values are just a bunch of hypocrites.

The cause of Christ has suffered from a number of preachers who have taught the truth about various subjects, but failed to live them from day to day. Some have spoken in livid opposition to fornication and adultery only to practice such in their own lives. Some have proclaimed the truth regarding the need for personal honesty and integrity only to leave town with a load of unpaid debts to local merchants who came to view the church as a gathering of thieves. Such men need to correct their own lives before preaching to others.

The church of our Lord has been dealt untold damage by those who defend it as the one true church purchased by the blood of Christ, but manifest a half-hearted service as members of that body. When an outsider sees one of the brethren going about their normal routine on Saturday and Monday, but "unable" to go to services on Sunday, they know how much that member really values the church. When people in the world see Christians claim to follow only the Bible, yet know very little of it by heart, those worldly people will not be favorably impressed towards the truth. When a member of the church joins a group like the Masonic Lodge, alien sinners know that member does not really believe in only one way of salvation since Masonry teaches another. Righteous judgment demands that we actually live by the rule we claim to follow.

Conclusion

When we contrast the actions of Paul and Peter in Galatians 2:11-14, we see the difference between right and wrong judging. Peter acted through hypocrisy on this occasion and stood condemned. Paul rightly rebuked him for such hypocrisy. Paul could effectively do this because he was not acting with the same hypocrisy as was Peter. Other cases in the New Testament show

the same thing. We must oppose evil in the actions of others (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). We must oppose the error taught by others and even name the false teacher (2 Timothy 2:16-18). However, we must be careful not to judge them while we are guilty of the same thing. This demands that we be constantly involved in self-examination (2 Corinthians 13:5). It demands that each *"be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15).