

The Issue of Judging

Joseph Herrin (6-20-2000)

The issue of judging, exercising discernment about the appropriateness of the behavior of a brother or sister and offering correction or warning, is a much misunderstood topic. The Bible contains both clear admonitions to judge, as well as warnings against judging. On the surface these admonitions seem to be in contradiction to one another. However, we know that God is not the author of confusion, so there has to be a proper way to view all of these scriptures in harmony with one another.

This has long been a troubling issue for me because as a minister with a prophetic gifting, God often has spoken words of correction, instruction and warning through me. On many occasions these words have not only been rejected, but they have elicited a very vitriolic response from brothers or sisters. Often my character and motives have been attacked because a member of the body did not want to hear truth or allow the Spirit of God to delve into areas of their life that they had walled off from His inspection.

Because I grew up under the influence of the strong men of guilt, condemnation, and shame I have been quick to believe that I must have been in error when the words God had me share with others were rejected. I would look for the tiniest indication that the message of God was influenced and corrupted as it passed through the vessel of my flesh. Did I err in not speaking in love? Did I not have the person's welfare in mind when I spoke to them? Did I let my own feelings of rejection add a harshness to the delivery of the word because I anticipated the message and messenger being rejected and criticized?

I am certain that at times there was some substance to these questions that arose in my mind. However, I am fully convinced that the rejection of correction and warning is most often due to the fact that in the Western world the mass of Christian believers simply do not receive these things well. There is little true discipleship in churches. Members are courted and catered to. Offending a brother is looked upon as the most grievous of offenses. There are too many competing churches to risk offending a brother or sister. It is too easy for them to pack up and go somewhere else where no one will interfere with the way they choose to live their life.

In many ways, the mass of church goers are like spoiled children. They are given everything they want with little required of them in return. As a spoiled child

itches a fit or throws a temper tantrum when told they cannot do something, or when they are corrected, so do many of the saints of God. It is largely because such an atmosphere of tolerance and appeasement has been adopted in the church that the issue of judging has come to be out of vogue and is looked down upon as unkind and uncharitable.

In my confusion, due to the harsh rejection and actual fits that some have thrown when I have spoken correction, instruction, or warning to them, I have often gone back to brothers and sisters and apologized to them for offending them. I felt that certainly I must have been in error in some way, though I could not put a finger on my error even when I sought the Lord diligently to reveal it to me. Over time, as I have seen this pattern repeated, I have come to discern that it was not due to some error on my part that caused the bitter rejection of the words I spoke, rather it was due to immaturity and an ingrained fleshliness that is rampant among the body of Christ.

I might have gone on for a considerable amount of time without resolving this issue had not the Spirit of God prompted me to look further at the issue of judging prompted by an article I read by a prophetess who spoke against judging, and the earnest query of a brother who was also trying to resolve the issue and wanted to know my opinion. When I thought of answering this brother I found that my own opinion was quite unclear and I sensed the witness of the Spirit that He would have me resolve this unsettledness at this time. This study has arisen out of this prompting of the Spirit and I hope that it will also bring clarity to other believers who are struggling with the same issue.

In beginning to look at this issue I would like to begin by mentioning some principles that I believe are scriptural in seeking to interpret scripture. Watchman Nee was a man who was peculiarly gifted in the area of teaching and whose writings have been used of the Lord in my life to bring insight on many occasions. He said the following concerning scripture interpretation: we must never allow what seems to be implied in one scripture to violate or nullify what we know is clearly taught and revealed in another passage.

In saying this, Watchman Nee was stating that scripture must be interpreted in the light of other scripture. "No scripture is of private interpretation" (II Peter 1:20). Scripture is God breathed and must be interpreted in the context of all else that God has revealed to us. Some have taken a particular scripture, that on the surface seems to espouse something, and they have built doctrines around it when there are other scriptures that are much more to the point that reveal that their interpretation could

not possibly be correct.

In some ways proper scripture interpretation resembles the game called “Mastermind.” In Mastermind a row of 5 or 6 colored pegs is hidden from the sight of the one trying to solve the puzzle. The player has 10 rows in which he attempts to place pegs of the right colors in the same order as that which is hidden from him. After each attempt he is told how many of the pegs he used were the right color and how many were in the right location in the row. Through a process of elimination he is able to get closer and closer to the right answer until he gets the pegs lined up as an exact match of that which was hidden from him.

In a similar manner, as we look at what one scripture is actually telling us, we must look at the clues given to us in other scriptures to tell us if we are erring in trying to interpret that which is before us. We start with a thought, “Is this scripture saying this?” We then compare it to what we know is told plainly in other scriptures. As we progress we may have to modify our original supposition, and sometimes we may have to wholly abandon it. Through the process we can hopefully come to discern the truth.

In Proverbs we are told “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter” (Proverbs 25:2). In all of this searching we must be sensitive to the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit.

II Corinthians 3:5-6

5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,

6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

In looking at the issue of judging I have compared scripture with scripture to arrive at some conclusions. There are so many different admonitions to not judge, as well as those that say we are to judge, that they have to be carefully weighed against one another to determine what God is speaking to us.

In looking at the issue of judging I wanted to answer the question, “What is meant by the admonitions in scripture to not judge our brother?” I will start out by looking at scriptures that tell us to judge, for an understanding of what it means to not judge cannot violate or negate clear examples of when we are to judge.

This study has been a tremendous boon to me personally and has resolved some lingering doubts I have had. I feel like the Father has clarified much as I looked at these scriptures. I pray the same will be true for you.

Admonishments to judge:

In my ‘puzzling’ out this issue of judging I began by looking at scriptures that give instructions to judge. I did this because I wanted to understand the scriptures that say not to judge and I knew they could not violate these admonitions to judge. This is therefore a good starting point. The first scripture comes from our Lord and is found in the book of John.

John 7:24

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

The words rendered as ‘judge’ in this verse are the Greek word ‘krino’ which according to Strongs’ Dictionary is interpreted “to distinguish or decide, and by implication, to try, condemn, or punish.”

The context of this verse is not specifically a command to make judgments. Rather, it is a rebuke to those who make judgments according to appearance, condemning that which God has not condemned. The Jewish leaders were condemning Jesus because He healed on the Sabbath. These are told to not judge by appearance but to judge righteously. This principle of not judging by appearance is reflected in the following prophetic passage of scripture that foretells the coming of Christ.

Isaiah 11:3-4

3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge [8199] after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove [3198] after the hearing of his ears:

4 But with righteousness shall he judge [8199] the poor, and reprove [3198] with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

(KJV)

In this passage the word ‘judge’ is Strongs’ number 8199, shaphat (shaw-fat’); meaning to judge or pronounce sentence for or against. By implication, it means to vindicate or punish, and extended out it carries the meaning ‘to govern.’

Likewise, the word 'reprove' is Strongs' number 3198, yakach (yaw-kahh'); meaning to be right or correct. In application, it means to argue, to decide, justify or convict, appoint, argue, chasten, convince, correct, dispute, judge, maintain, plead, reason (together), rebuke, and reprove.

This scripture is a prophecy of Christ, but as God's stated purpose for us is to be conformed to the image of His Son, we can by implication draw application to ourselves from this passage. Judging, pronouncing sentence, determining a person's right standing or wrong standing, or governing is not to be done by what our eyes see, according to appearance. Additionally, reproof, determining what is right or correct, putting forth an argument, making decisions, justifying, or convicting is not to be based upon what we have heard with our ears. In other words, right and wrong is not to be decided through what our physical senses report as it is weighed by our mind.

It is with righteousness that judging and reproof are to be done. What is the source of this righteousness if it does not arise from our reasoning as we evaluate that which is seen and heard?

Psalms 7:11

God is a righteous judge...

Psalms 11:7

For the LORD is righteous; He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.

God alone is the source of righteous judgment. As we behold Him we learn of His righteous judgments and we cast off our own judgments formed from what we see and hear. If we are to walk in righteousness, all of our judgments must originate with God lest we find ourselves condemning what God has not condemned and approving what God has not approved. The only acceptable judgment is that which finds its source in God. This is further revealed in the following verse.

John 5:30

"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

Jesus is not referring here to hearing with His physical ears, He is speaking of hearing from God. Jesus' judgment is in harmony with the Father's judgment. They are one and the same. Jesus merely speaks that which He hears the Father saying. This

is to be our pattern as well.

A further admonishment to judge is found in Paul's instructions to Timothy.

II Timothy 4:1-2

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge [krino] the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove [1651], rebuke [2008], exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Timothy, an elder in the body of Christ, is told to refute those in error. 'Refute' is Strong's number 1651, elegcho (el-eng'-kho); meaning "to confute, or admonish." The word 'confute' is defined as: to prove to be false or invalid; convict of error. Timothy is also told to rebuke. The word 'rebuke' is Strong's word 2008, epitimao (ep-ee-tee-mah'-o); meaning "to tax upon, i.e. censure or admonish; by implication, forbid."

In this passage we see that Paul is telling Timothy that as an elder and leader in the body of Christ he is to admonish, he is to prove that which is error to be false or invalid, he is to convict of error, he is to censure those who hold to error, and he is to forbid continuing in error.

All of these things required that Timothy had to discern the mind of the Father to know what was false and what was true. As he did so he was to apply himself diligently to keeping the body free from error and clinging to that which was right. In similar manner, Paul exhorted Titus, another elder:

Titus 2:15

These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

Paul further elaborated to Titus:

Titus 1:12-13

12 One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

13 This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith...

The word ‘reprove’ here is the same word spoken to Timothy. The word ‘severely’ comes from a Greek word meaning “to cut abruptly or peremptorily.” ‘Peremptorily’ is defined as: final, decisive, precluding discussion or hesitation. It should be noted that reproof and rebuke was not always to be given with such sharpness. This instruction was given to Titus due to the nature of the people he was ministering to. However, Paul gave Timothy this qualification on how to address those in the body he ministered to.

I Timothy 5:1-2

- 1 Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers,
- 2 the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Through the clear message of these passages we can clearly determine that the admonition to “not judge” found in some scriptures does not preclude an elder from his clear responsibility of correcting, refuting, reproofing, rebuking, censuring, etc..

Some further scriptures indicating that there is a proper place for judgment are found in Paul’s instructions to the Corinthian church. These hold a somewhat different application in that these letters were not sent just to those who were elders, but to the body in general.

I Corinthians 5:9-13

- 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;
- 10 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.
- 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be 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.
- 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?
- 13 But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

This passage indicates that the church is to discern who among the body are immoral, covetous, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, or swindlers. This discernment was to be followed with action. If the person would not repent they were to be shunned and the believer was not to even share a meal with such a one. In the same passage

Paul corrected any misconception that this judging was to apply to those outside of the church. It is not the responsibility of the church to judge those outside of the church. Paul states that God will judge these.

In verse 12 Paul asks a rhetorical question, “Do you not judge those who are within the church?” Again, the word ‘judge’ here is the Greek word *Krino* which is interpreted “to distinguish or decide, and by implication, to try, condemn, or punish.”

That which precipitated this message to the Corinthian believers was the presence of sin in the body that was being tolerated, rather than exposed, confronted and dealt with. Paul speaks of those who were coming to partake of the Lord’s supper who were getting drunk and behaving gluttonously. Additionally, he addresses the issue of a man who was partaking of all of the rights of fellowship among the body when he was in gross immorality having taken his father’s wife for himself.

Paul clearly states that such sins are not to be ignored or glanced over. The members of the body are to discern those who are walking in gross disobedience and to reprove them for their error. If they will not repent they are to be ostracized, excluded from the privileges of fellowship.

By this we can deduce that any scripture speaking against judging does not forbid the actions that Paul states here are the clear responsibility of the body of Christ; to discern that which is blatant sin and to reprove those who are in sin, refusing to associate with them if they will not repent. Paul gives further instructions to the Corinthian believers regarding judging.

I Corinthians 6:2-3, 5

2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?

5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide [*diakrino*] between his brethren...

The word ‘decide’ found in verse 5 is Strong’s’ number 1252, *diakrino* (dee-ak-ree'-no); meaning “to separate thoroughly, that is to withdraw from, or by implication to oppose.” It also means to discriminate.

Again, this passage is prompted by the disobedience of the members of the

body who were suing one another in civil courts. This body was very divisive, having different factions who claimed loyalty to different men. Some claimed they were of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas, and some of Jesus Christ. This divisiveness extended even into the arena of legal disputes and many were taking one another to court to their own shame.

Paul rebukes them for this and chides them for not being able to resolve their issues among themselves. He tells them they will judge the world and even angels. How much more should they be able to make simple judgments among themselves. In verse 5 Paul is asking them, “Can no wise man be found among you who can divide a matter and resolve it to its root issue, discriminating between right and wrong?” This was something the church should certainly handle themselves.

In this we can further deduce that any word against judging cannot be interpreted as infringing upon this obvious responsibility of the body to settle disputes among itself, even disputes that would be considered of a civil nature. The body is to police itself. They are to discern right and wrong from God’s righteous perspective and conduct their daily lives according to the dictates of what they have discerned.

Besides these clear admonitions to judge, we are also given examples of judgments being rendered.

Examples of judging in the church:

I Timothy 1:19-20

19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

We previously looked at a scripture where Paul said that it was none of his business to judge those outside of the church, so these two, Hymenaeus and Alexander, were obviously within the church. These two are accused of violating both their faith and their conscience and they have entered into blasphemy. Paul, an apostle, has therefore delivered them over to Satan. This he similarly did to the man we mentioned before who took his father’s wife to himself. It is described that turning one over to Satan is “for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit might be preserved in the day of judgment” (I Corinthians 5:5).

This then is not a judgment unto eternal damnation. The intent of the judgment is actually with the well being of the person's eternal spirit in mind. It is significant here that it is an apostle who is the instrument of this judgment. Paul was given authority over the churches who were influenced by these men. He was thereby exercising the authority granted to him. This issue of authority will be looked at later.

Gal 5:12

Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.

These strong words of Paul were elicited due to the presence of Judaisers coming into the Galatian church and putting them back under bondage to the law and causing them to abandon the teaching they had received of salvation through faith in Christ. Again, although we are not told that Paul turned such ones over to Satan or instituted any other type of discipline, he has clearly made a judgment concerning their activities and the severe nature of the punishment they deserved.

In all of these scriptures we see that Christians are taught to be discerning. Other scriptures exhort believers to examine the fruit of people's lives to know whether their teaching is of God or not. Elders, apostles and the other ministers that God gave to the body to bring her to maturity are especially given command to discern error and take steps to correct those in opposition to the truth and to the will of God. Any admonition against judging, therefore, cannot negate the validity of these activities that Christians are charged with.

One qualification upon these responsibilities is that they should be done within the scope of the authority given to a person. It would be inappropriate for a minister of one body to tend to the life of another body over which he has no authority, responsibility, or relationship. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the church at Corinth.

II Corinthians 10:8, 13-15

8 For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame...

13 But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure [metron] of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure [metron], to reach even as far as you.

14 For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ;

15 not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere [kanon], enlarged even more by you...

Paul in this passage is speaking of the authority given to Him by Christ. This authority was for the purpose of building them up, of bringing them to maturity. Paul states here that the thing he is forced to boast in is in the authority given to him. He says he will not boast beyond his measure, that is the measure of the authority granted him. He testifies that his authority extends to the Corinthian believers.

The word 'measure' here is Strongs' number 3358, metron (met'-ron); meaning "a measure ("metre"), literally or figuratively; by implication a limited portion." Paul is saying that his authority was assigned to him by Christ. He received a measure of authority that had certain limits as to its scope. The Corinthian believers fell within the scope of authority allotted to him.

Paul states that this authority correlated to the scope of his own labors. He said that he would not boast beyond his measure, in other men's labors. We know that the Corinthian church was one Paul labored in. He testified that he "planted, Apollos watered, but God brought the increase" (I Corinthians 3:6).

In verse 15 Paul uses another Greek word which is rendered 'sphere' This word is Strongs' number 2583, kanon (kan-ohn'), which has the implied meaning of a boundary, or a sphere of activity. Paul was very active in making judgments, exercising discipline, refuting, correcting, reproof, etc., in the Corinthian church. This was in keeping with the authority entrusted to him. It would have been inappropriate for him to exercise this same authority outside the sphere of responsibility entrusted to him.

Similarly, it is inappropriate for saints today to meddle in affairs outside of the scope of the authority entrusted to them. No saint is given a license to go around making judgments about things in which he has not been granted authority. A believer should always make certain that he remains within the measure [metron] and the sphere [kanon] entrusted to him by Christ.

This leads us to look at another realm of judging that is off limits. Paul spoke in Romans 14, of the error of one saint judging another over issues that the scriptures do not give clear directions in.

Romans 14:3-4, 10-13

3 Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.

4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand...

10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God."

12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

This type of judging is nothing short of meddling. There are certain issues that are described as issues of conscience in the Bible. They are not necessarily evil in themselves, but to the one who believes it is wrong, it becomes wrong to him. Those who try to enforce the dictates of their conscience upon others are becoming false judges of their brethren. It may not violate one brother's conscience to do something that another considers inappropriate Christian behavior. These are not to judge one another. They are responsible for their own lives before God. Again, this epistle is not aimed at leadership, but to the body in general. Those who are mature should not need such an admonition.

Passages that speak against judging:

Having looked at scriptures that instruct us to judge, we can now look at scriptures that speak against judging. We must keep in mind in trying to understand these latter scriptures that they cannot violate what we have already looked at, that is, admonitions to judge. A harmony must be found in our interpretation.

Romans 1:32-2:4

32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

1 Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.

3 And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

On the surface it appears that Paul is saying that all who pass judgment are condemning themselves. This is not the case, however. Paul is teaching that one brings condemnation on himself when he judges another to be in sin if he practices the same sin. The principle is again similar to the one just mentioned about sins of conscience, if you know that something is wrong then you are condemned if you do it. This is reflected in the scripture, “by the judgment you judge others, you shall be judged.”

God demonstrated this principle when the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Nathan told David a story of a rich man who by force took away the single lamb of a poor man and served it to his guest. David discerned that this man had acted wickedly and he condemned him and said he should be punished. God, having thus proved that David did discern between right and wrong, then told David through Nathan, “You are the man.” David’s sin was all the more reprehensible because he knew clearly that it was evil that he was doing.

Matthew 7:1-5

1 "Do not judge lest you be judged.

2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

3 "And 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?

4 "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?

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 brother's eye.

Again, on the surface this scripture seems to be speaking against all judgment. However, we know from the scriptures we have previously looked at that many types of judgment are not only permissible, they are mandated, and disobedience is ascribed to those who fail to exercise the types of discernment and correction spoken of. Therefore, our Lord cannot be teaching that all judgment is in error.

A closer look at the passage reveals that what is being spoken against is hypocrisy, focusing on the sins of your brother while ignoring your own sins of a greater magnitude. A warning is also given that we will receive from God the same measure that we dispense to others. If we are harsh and critical, condemning without mercy those in error, we will receive the same. If we are gentle and merciful, we will also receive mercy. Paul spoke a similar message to the Galatian believers.

Galatians 6:1

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.

As Jesus did, Paul exhorts the saints to consider that they too can be tempted and for this reason, since none of us are perfect before God, we need to exhibit an attitude of compassion and gentleness toward one another. Our goal in reproving a brother should not be condemnation, but rather restoration. This is the focus of the following verse.

II Corinthians 7:3

I do not speak to condemn you; for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.

This final passage that I will examine is perhaps a little tougher to understand than the others.

James 4:11-12

11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.

12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

The phrase “He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law” is somewhat difficult to comprehend. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia gives the following understanding of what James is actually referring to, describing it as the sin of detraction.

“The wrong thing condemned as evil-speaking seems to be essentially detraction, what is hurtful to the reputation, and it is often too lightly regarded even among Christians.”

(from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (C) 1996 by BibleSoft)

The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge correlates this passage to the following found in I Peter.

I Peter 2:1

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander...

These sources indicate that it is not correcting a brother that is being spoken against, nor is being discerning and opposing evil forbidden. What James is referring to is slandering a brother, or acting in a malicious manner toward him through bringing unjust judgments against him.

The following comments from Matthew Henry's Commentary sheds even greater light on this difficult passage and make its contents intelligible.

I. We are cautioned against the sin of evil-speaking: Speak not evil one of another, brethren, v. 11. The Greek word, katalaleite, signifies speaking any thing that may hurt or injure another; we must not speak evil things of others, though they be true, unless we be called to it, and there be some necessary occasion for them; much less must we report evil things when they are false, or, for aught we know, may be so. Our lips must be guided by the law of kindness, as well as truth and justice. This, which Solomon makes a necessary part of the character of his virtuous woman, that she openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness <Prov. 31:26>, must needs be a part of the character of every true Christian. Speak not evil one of another,

2. Because this is to judge the law: He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. The law of Moses says, Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people, <Lev. 19:16>. The law of Christ is, Judge not, that you be not judged, <Mt. 7:1>. The sum and substance of both is that men should love one another. A detracting tongue therefore condemns the law of God, and the commandment of Christ, when it is defaming its neighbour. To break God's commandments is in effect to speak evil of them, and to judge them, as if they were too strict, and laid too great a restraint upon us. The Christians to whom James wrote were apt to speak very hard things of one another, because of their differences about indifferent things (such as the observance of meats and days, as appears from Rom. 14): "Now," says the apostle, "he who

censures and condemns his brother for not agreeing with him in those things which the law of God has left indifferent thereby censures and condemns the law, as if it had done ill in leaving them indifferent. He who quarrels with his brother, and condemns him for the sake of any thing not determined in the word of God, does thereby reflect on that word of God, as if it were not a perfect rule...

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary)

The report of all of these references is that what James is discussing is not discernment and judgment, but rather slander and detraction that arises out of malice and a lack of kindness towards a brother. Such a brother becomes a judge of the law because he attempts to add things to the law, not being content with what God chose to include there. For example, such a brother may try to condemn another who observes certain days, when the scriptures do not include an injunction against doing so.

That James is referring to brothers that are treating one another maliciously is further borne out in the verses that precede this passage.

James 4:1, 2 (Amplified Bible)

1 What leads to strife (discord and feuds) and how do conflicts (quarrels and fighting) originate among you? Do they not arise from your sensual desires that are ever warring in your bodily members?

2 You are jealous and covet [what others have] and your desires go unfulfilled; [so] you become murderers. [To hate is to murder as far as your hearts are concerned]. You burn with envy and anger and are not able to obtain [the gratification, the contentment, and the happiness that you seek], so you fight and war...

It is clear that James is not speaking of the discernment and judgment that Paul admonished the church to pursue and exercise. James was addressing those who were maligning and condemning one another falsely; those who were destroying one another's reputations without a just cause. They were self-seeking and consumed with lust and envy toward one another. This is a far cry from the brother who desires to walk in humble obedience before God, and from the elder and minister who is charged with correcting those who have embraced error.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the injunctions against judging can only be understood in the light of all the scriptures taken together. Righteous judgment is never condemned, the judgment that originates with God and is made known as we observe Him. Judgment is to be exercised with the end result of restoration in mind

and with a spirit of gentleness, except in extreme cases as in Paul's instructions to Titus, remembering that we too can stumble. Additionally, judgment is to be practiced within the sphere of one's own measure of authority as granted by Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we are not to judge brothers over issues of conscience of which the scriptures remain indifferent.

It should be always held in mind that "by the measure we measure to others, it will be measured to us." If we desire mercy, we should be merciful to one another. We are not to wink at sin, but neither are we to attack a brother unmercifully. As we move into greater intimacy with the Father and observe His heart and His ways, and as we allow Him to produce holiness in our own lives, we will be better able to instruct one another in the way of holiness.

The fleshly church today does not practice the injunctions of scripture to police itself. Many believers are pandered to by the leadership of the church. Correction and warning often involve confrontation and many shy away from things that are difficult. However, it is erroneous to teach that judgment should not be practiced within the body of Christ. We are to judge, discern, reprove, rebuke, etc., within the sphere of our individual authority, but it must be done with the mind of Christ.

There are many other scriptures that have bearing upon the issue of judging. I have tried to choose ones that are representative of the whole. In looking at other Bible passages keep in mind that the interpretation of one scripture cannot violate what is clearly taught in another.

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