

# **LESSON 40 - DO JUDGE BELIEVERS CORRECTLY**

## **When And How Should You Judge Other Believers?**

**By Brian S. Holmes**

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**T**he Bible says a lot about personal judgment. Everyone will be judged by Jesus one day for every action and word (Acts 10:42; Matthew 25, 12:36; 2 Corinthians 5:10). In a previous lesson we looked at biblical warnings about *judging wrongly*. These include: failure to use God's Word to rightly judge good deeds that glorify God from evil deeds that don't; judging others while being a hypocrite; judging unbelievers instead of ourselves first and then other believers; and judging in harsh, prideful slanderous ways that tear down, rather than gentle, loving, admonishing ways that build up. *When and how should you judge other believers?* You should judge to: 1) Pursue unity, truth, and godliness in the Body, 2) Pursue reconciliation in love, 3) Judge correctly as led by the Spirit.

**1. Pursue Unity, Truth, and Godliness in the Body.** Ephesians 4 describes the Church (all born again Christians) as one united spiritual body. Verses 4-6 say, "*There is one body and one Spirit... one hope... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.*" Jesus equips the entire Body to serve one another so that, verses 12-13, "*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.*" Verse 15 says we need to speak "*the truth in love*" to one another so that we will no longer be spiritual infants, following every new type of teaching or cunning scheme, but grow into maturity, becoming like Jesus, our head. When harm is done to one part of the body, leading it into error or ungodliness, it hurts the rest and stunts our maturity. While you do play a role in exposing lies and sin to deliver truth and pursue righteousness, never forget your first priority is to do this *in love*. Verse 16 says the Body of Christ "*builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*" Verses 22-24 say, "*Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires... put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*" Pursue this for yourself first so as not to be a hypocrite and to be capable of helping your brother remove the speck from their eye (see Matthew 7:1-6). *How* you judge others, and the *way* you share your concerns, must *also* be righteous, loving, and unifying. Be motivated by a desire to build up in others these qualities too. There are times when we must judge and remove an unrepentant sinner from church fellowship to spare the rest of the church from their ungodly influence. See 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 for an example of this. But if we're more concerned with exposing the error of one, than we are in pursuing health, wholeness, and unity for the whole Body, then we're also sinning.

**2. Pursue Reconciliation In Love.** When another believer sins you might be tempted to rebuke their behavior without concern for their wellbeing. Or to feel "righteous" and talk about them with others but it's always gossip/slander. You must rise above this. Don't sin and lower yourself to the same level! Just

because they're sinning does not make it okay for you to sin as you sit in judgment of them! Ephesians 4:2-3 says, *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* Verses 29-32 say, *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* When another believer sins, your objective should be to help them get right with God and seek reconciliation with unity in love. They may be unwilling to admit their error or repent but you must still pursue righteousness and unity to the best of your ability. In Matthew 18:15-18 Jesus said, *"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."* Paul advised and demonstrated how to excommunicate someone in 1 Corinthians 6:1-11. What should our posture be towards believers *trying* but still struggling with sin? We're to be loving, patient, compassionate, and forgiving. Matthew 18:21-22 says, *"Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven (or seventy times seven) times.'"*

**3. Judge Correctly As Led By The Holy Spirit.** Jesus was often wrongly judged by religious leaders. In John 7:24 He told them, *"Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."* They had misunderstood God's Law, the truth about how God's and Satan's spiritual kingdoms influence our lives, and how best to be godly. They assumed that what they believed, and the way they saw things was right. When led by our flesh, instead of the Spirit, we often make the same arrogant error. When you're trying to judge if a believer's beliefs or actions is harming the unity, truth, or godliness in the Body remember this: There's a difference between what is *always* wicked and sinful—because God's Word is very clear about it—and what is subjective, open to different interpretations/opinions, and a matter of a person's conscience. Believers *do* have liberty in Christ. God has graciously left many areas of practical living open so we may follow our own consciences as led by the Holy Spirit. Relax and accept this! Do not judge other believers for things you personally find unacceptable and choose not to do, but they find acceptable and do unto the glory of God. See examples and guidelines regarding this in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 and Romans 14. Out of love for others, seek the good of others more than yourself, and do not exercise your liberty in a way that would lead someone else with a weaker conscience into sin. Romans 14:12, 13, and 19 say, *"So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister... Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."* In all of these ways use correct judgment to build up the Body of Christ.

Let's pray. Holy Spirit, make me like Jesus, and pursue unity, truth, godliness, and reconciliation in love. Help me judge correctly, always forgive, and seek the good of others first. In Jesus' name. Amen.