

Many look for happiness as the New Year begins. But we know that as each year progresses, there will be things that steal our happiness. One of those things is the way we tend to judge one another. We need to judge in the sense of discerning good from evil, right from wrong, like a doctor discerns sickness from health. But we should not act like a judge in a courtroom, sentencing a person or even attempting to carry out that sentence. The right type of judging will lead to true happiness. The wrong type of judging will prevent real happiness. Three different passages in the Bible help us to understand which judging is right and which is wrong.

I. James warns us in three ways about judging (James 4:11-12).

James had written that there is a heavenly wisdom and an earthly wisdom. Wisdom from above is pure and peaceable. Fights and quarrels arise from impure desires. They wise will control how they talk to and about one another.

1. *We disobey God when we speak evil against one another.* To speak evil against someone is to speak badly about them whether it is true or false. It is speech that destroys and tears people down rather than build them up spiritually (*Ephesians 4:29*.) To speak badly about others hurts them and robs them of true happiness. It hurts the one who hears and it corrupts the one speaking. We should even be careful about what we say to ourselves concerning others. It can poison our own thinking.
2. *When we speak evil against a brother and judge the brother, we speak evil against the law and judge the law.* Jesus summarized the law as loving God and loving our neighbor. We speak against this law when we act in a way that does not love our neighbor. To speak evil against a brother is not loving him. We show that we do not love God. We are saying that His commandments are not good or right.
3. *When we judge the law, we set ourselves up as judges above the law.* A judge does more than discern. A judge passes sentence upon someone. Many times the judge must determine motives. God as a judge not only discerns good from bad, He punishes wrong doing. When we judge in this manner we place ourselves above the law.

II. Jesus explained about judging (Matthew 7:1-6; cf. Luke 6:37-42).

1. *Jesus assumes that we will discern right from wrong, good from evil.* Jesus expects us to see the speck in the eye of a brother and help remove it.
2. *Jesus warns that we will be judged by the way we judge others.* See also Romans 2:1-3. When we say that something is wrong in others, then the same thing would be wrong in us.
3. *Jesus therefore encourages His listeners to first judge themselves.* When we think that we discern sin or wrong in someone else's life, we should look first into our own hearts and lives. Jesus implies that our own sins are usually bigger than what we see in others. He is warning His audience against a self-righteous condemnation of others. The self-righteous person sees little or no sin in themselves.

The self-righteous are like people who check if other people have cleaned their houses well but have not seen the dirt in their own houses. Because they don't clean up their own lives, no true happiness comes in to them. They keep it away from themselves. They rob others of it.

Earlier (*Matthew 5-7*) Jesus had pointed out the failure in the thinking of self-righteous people. Though they did not murder or commit adultery, they were just as bad when they hated and lusted in their hearts. They condemned others for their sinfulness, but were themselves sinning in their hearts. When they judged others, they were actually condemning themselves.

III. Paul illustrates correct and wrongful judging (Galatians 6:1-5).

The Apostle Paul had told the Galatians to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit (*Galatians 5:25*). When we live by the Spirit, we will love our neighbor. Galatians 6:1 shows one way how we do that.

1. *The Galatians were to discern when a brother had sinned.* This requires knowing what is sinful and what is not. God's Word and not our preferences defines sin. Before correcting someone, be sure that God has said in the Bible that their actions were wrong.
2. *The correcting brother should be considered "spiritual."* The "spiritual" are those who are led by the Spirit of God and who demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness. (*Cf. Galatians 5:23, 25*.) This should be true of every true Christian, though obviously some fail at times. But only those who are truly children of God have the Spirit of God. We are not naturally children of God but enemies of God. But whoever receives Jesus for who He is and what He had done, becomes a child of God (*John 1:12*) and receives the Spirit of God.
3. *Their goal was to be the restoration of the brother.* They were to "restore him gently." Correction is not for revenge or to punish. Revenge belongs to God. God has punished Jesus for our sin when He died on the cross.
4. *In the process those who restore had to watch out for themselves as well.* When restoring another, there is the danger of temptation, probably the danger of becoming proud. We may not have sinned like the other person, but we still struggle with sin and any victory we have is from God.

We need to be on guard that we do not wrongly judge. To do so reveals that our own hearts are dirty and in need of cleansing. Cleaning our houses at the start of a new year won't open the way for true happiness. But God can cleanse our hearts. He wants to make our hearts His home. By the death of Jesus He can cleanse us of all sin. Then we can have true happiness.