

The Worst Sin In Our Society

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

Looking at our modern culture, we may believe the world has no standards. That is not true. Our culture does have rules. ... or at least one rule. We must never violate this rule or we will be castigated with names like Pharisee, legalist, hate-monger, callused, uncompassionate, unloving, unfeeling... Violating this rule is the worst sin in our society. Is it murder? abortion? homosexuality? fornication? child abuse? No. The standard is tolerance. The rule is never, ever judge anyone. The worst sin in our society is being judgmental. The people around us will go to almost any length so we will never, ever accidentally think they are judgmental of anyone. Allow me to illustrate with a story a sister once told me. Her conversation with a friend had turned to two female acquaintances. The friend, who is a religious person, asked, "Are they lesbians?" And then, lest our sister believe he had committed society's worst sin he followed up with, "Not that there would be anything wrong if they were? I was just wondering." You see, even to this man, who is religious and claims to serve God, it would be far worse to be judgmental than to be homosexual. Is being judgmental the worst sin that exists? Should we judge at all? If so, when? And what are the Bible guidelines for tolerance.

Discussion:

- I. The new most well-known verse.
 - A. The most well-known verse in the Bible used to be **John 3:16**. However, I believe **Matthew 7:1** is giving it a run for its money. "Judge not, that you be not judged" (ESV).
 - B. The worldly, the falsely religious and even many change agents among our brethren have latched on to this verse with a vengeance. Whatever we do or say, we must not ever do anything that is deemed judging. This, however, misunderstands the verse in its context.
 - C. Jesus was not precluding any and all manner of judgment. After all, in **John 7:24** Jesus actually commanded us to judge, but to do so with right judgment. Jesus' point in the Sermon on the Mount was not to remove anything that could ever be described as judging. Rather, He was commenting on our overall motivation as we dealt with others, even great sinners. That is, our goal is not to judge people but to save them. We are not happy to claim that someone is lost, we are saddened and want to get the gospel to them that they may be saved. If we are more interested in judging the lost than saving them, then God will be more interested in judging us than saving us.
 - D. Thus, **Matthew 7:1ff** actually demonstrates judgment. How? If we are going to save the lost, then we have to make a judgment regarding who is lost and who is saved.
- II. The Bible on judging and tolerance.
 - A. From the above, we realize we must take care when it comes to judgment and tolerance. We must consider what are the Biblical guidelines for them. When and where does the Bible allow for or command judgment or tolerance. First, let us understand some definitions from **Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language**.
 1. Judge: "... -- *v.t.* **5.** to pass legal judgment on; pass sentence on (a person): ... **7.** to form a judgment or opinion of or upon; decide upon critically ... **8.** to decide or decree judicially or authoritatively ... **9.** to infer, think, or hold as an opinion ..."
 2. Tolerance: "*n.* **1.** a fair and objective attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, etc. differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry. **2.** a fair and objective attitude toward opinions and practices which differ from one's own. **3.** interest in and concern for ideas, opinions, practices etc. foreign to one's own; a liberal, undogmatic viewpoint. **4.** the act or capacity of enduring; endurance ..."
 3. These definitions demonstrate to us some things about judging and tolerance. We must be careful to know what definition we mean when we say the word. For instance, can any Christian, in an absolute sense, decide or decree judicially or authoritatively who will go to heaven and who will go to hell? Absolutely not. Jesus said He had all authority (**Matthew 28:18**). Does any Christian pass sentence on anyone else, casting them into hell or allowing them into heaven? Of course not, Jesus is that judge (**John 5:22; Romans 2:5-6, 16; Hebrews 9:27**). However, are there times when we form opinions about someone, about

their actions and about their eternal destiny? Are there times when we infer, think or hold something as an opinion? Of course there are. But what are the guidelines?

B. The Bible guidelines for judging.

1. **John 7:24** demonstrates we are to make judgments. In fact, Jesus commands judgment. But He commands it to be righteous, in contrast with the unrighteous judgment of the people who judged Him to have a demon. Their judgment was based on their misunderstanding of the Law and the work of Jesus. Keep this in mind, Jesus doesn't tell them they should never pass judgment, believe someone is wrong, sinning, lost or even, in this case, having a demon. Rather He says the judgment is to be righteous.
2. According to **Colossians 2:16** we must not judge or allow others to judge based on the Old Covenant Law which was a shadow of the substance under the New Covenant. The laws of the Old Covenant are not bound on us. The substance belongs to Christ and His New Covenant. The implication is our judgments are to be formed based on Christ's gospel. That is where the substance is. By the way, Jesus, having the ultimate judicial authority, will pass sentencing upon us for eternity based on this gospel (**Romans 2:16**).
3. Having read **John 7:24**, we know Jesus did not, in **Luke 6:36-38**, teach we must never ever judge anyone to be sinning or wrong. Rather, His point was we must be limited to what God has decreed. We must not set up standards of judgment higher than God's law. This is the essence of **Romans 14:3**. Others may do things we would not do and it may even have religious implications in our minds, but if it is not God's decreed standard, we must not despise those who abstain from lawful practices or judge those who are involved in them. Rather, we must live in harmony with them.
4. In **Acts 16:15**, we see Lydia's request of Paul and his companions to lodge in her household while in Thyatira. Notice her words, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord ..." She recognized that we must base our decisions of association on judging whether or not others are faithful to the Lord. We have the right and the responsibility to form these opinions about people. Governed by the above principles. We must have an opinion about who is and who is not faithful to the Lord. We must have an opinion or judgment about who is lost and who is saved. Our opinion is not God's standard. We may make mistakes. The fact that we believe a person to be saved, doesn't mean they are. The fact that we believe they are lost, doesn't mean they will go to hell. Jesus' will give us our eternal sentence. But nevertheless, we as individuals and as congregations must form these opinions. Our actions and associations will depend on these judgments. This includes making judgment about who will be a part of our fellowship in this congregation
5. Finally, our judgment must never be hypocritical. **Romans 2:1** demonstrates when we are committing the same sin and judge another, we judge ourselves. The point here is not that we must not make judgments about sins in others. The point is we must be honest with ourselves, cleaning up our own house before trying to clean up others'. The point is not, if I have ever sinned I cannot have a judgment about someone else. Then none of us could ever follow the teachings we have already discussed. The issue is realizing that every law which applies to others, whom we judge, applies to us as well, no matter our race, gender, socio-economic background, education, etc.

C. Bible guidelines on tolerance. These guidelines on judging bring us to three major conclusions about tolerance in our modern world.

1. Insofar as tolerance means to have a fair and objective attitude toward those who disagree with us and their divergent opinions, we must be tolerant of all people and all things. Since our judgment is to be based on truth and righteousness, not based on prejudiced and preconceived notions (**John 7:24**), we must consider fairly and objectively all viewpoints and opinions. This is, of course, governed by the gospel, the Word of God. Thus, in tolerance we may consider fairly and objectively someone's opinion and doctrine and yet still judge it to be wrong and the teacher in error. However, we have still shown Bible based tolerance.
2. Insofar as tolerance means the capacity of enduring, putting up with and allowing something to co-exist with us, Paul teaches us to be tolerant of all manner of evil in the world. That is the point of **I Corinthians 5:9-11**. Do not misunderstand me. Our duty is to teach people and persuade them to leave immorality, false teaching and sin. But, from those who do not

obey God's glorious gospel, we tolerate and endure much sin and immorality. We recognize that we cannot force anyone to do anything they do not want to do. We cannot make people believe what they do not want to believe. We cannot make people submit to that which they do not want to submit. We cannot make people obey what they do not want to obey. We do not take up arms to destroy all those who rebel against God. We tolerate their co-existence with us. We do business with them. We associate with them. We recognize they are not a part of the community of believers, but we do not keep them from their own sins. We are tolerant, enduring even, at times, their intolerance for us.

3. Finally, we must never tolerate unrepentant sin in the church. Remember **I Corinthians 5:7-13**. We must keep out the old leaven of sin and wickedness. We must not tolerate immorality, false teaching and rebellion against God in any way. We must follow the plan of God to keep sin out of the church as outlined in **Matthew 18:15-17**. We, when we see a brother sin, are to restore him by going to him and reproving him. If he listens, you have won your brother and the sin is removed. If not, then take two or three to confirm every fact. If he listens, you have won your brother and the sin is removed. If not, then take it to the church. If he listens, you have won your brother and the sin is removed. If not, then he is to be as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer to you. As Paul in **I Corinthians 5:11** said, we are not to associate with him, not even to eat with him. We must not tolerate unrepentant sin from our brethren. We must not tolerate sin to be called righteousness, the lost to be thought saved or the false to be deemed true. For this, the world will castigate us. For this, we will be called unloving, legalistic and Pharisaical. The world will believe we have committed the most heinous of sins. But by so doing, we will be true to our Lord.

Conclusion:

Though the world's standard is tolerance and her rule is never, ever judge others (except, of course, those who judge others), God has commanded us at times to be intolerant. He has commanded us to judge. But let us strive to be fair and objective in our judgment. Let us not be swayed by prejudice and preconception, but only by God's Word. And in God's Word, let us be bold to proclaim His truth, without fear or wavering.