

GLEANINGS — August 14, A.D. 2016  
The Great Taboo

Matthew 7:1 is a favorite Bible verse of those who want to justify themselves: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Jesus speaking, parallel verse Luke 6:37). Other passages warn against unrighteous judgment, public or personal. Does this mean that ALL judgment is wrong? Apparently many answer that question affirmatively.

Concluding that something is ethically wrong and expressing that conclusion is the great taboo. Sure, you can advise someone that a certain act is presently criminal. And with a smile you can express approval (another word for favorable judgment) of almost any behavior, even behaviors that once were illegal. And of course you can keep silent and bottle up your disapproval. But whatever you do, never, never express your conviction that another's beliefs or actions are to be condemned as wrong.

It is true (judged this writer) that vigilantism – usurping the role of a lawful executor of justice – is wrong. Yet the Psalmist asks God to teach him good judgment, see Psalm 119:66. In other passages, God's word commands or expects us to judge...to have a righteous estimation of human behavior.

For example Proverbs 31:9 reads, "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."

Paul includes judgment as he envisions a peaceful congregation in ancient Corinth: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10)

In the same letter Christ's servant further teaches the disciples at Corinth about the proper place of judgment in the Christian community: "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? (1 Corinthians 6:1-5)

Further on in that letter the apostle instructs them about judgment as it relates to religious teaching (a form of prophesying.) "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge." 1 Corinthians 14:29.

And the same Christ who said "judge not that you be not judged" also said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment, John 7:24." The word judge in that saying of His and the word love in another well known saying of His – "love your enemies" – have something in common. They are imperatives. They have the force of a command. Thus spoke the King of kings.

Merciless judgment? No, "...for judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment," James 2:13. Unrighteous, superficial, biased judgment? Of course not, consider Luke 18:2ff and Romans 2:1.

But no ethical discernment at all? No universal standard of right and wrong? You be the judge!