

We Have Been Appointed as Judges

1 Corinthians 5:9-16

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

Paul asks a rhetorical question in our passage today that is the focus of our entire sermon. He asks a couple of them actually, but the one we are going to focus on is at the end of v. 12. **Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?** That one simple question goes against the grain for the majority of those in our country who call themselves Christians. It doesn't sit right. It doesn't even sound right. It would honestly make more sense to us if he said, “Don't you know that you're not supposed to judge those inside the church?” And it should strike us that his question is the exact opposite of that! The rhetorical question Paul poses is the exact opposite of the question we would expect him to pose.

But in that rhetorical question, Paul is assuming the Corinthians know they have been appointed as judges. He assumes they know they are supposed to serve as judges for those inside the church. The uncomfortable bit is that Paul would assume the same thing about us, today, in Christ Community. He's asking us today, “Is it not your brothers and sisters that you are to judge?” He says clearly, also in v. 12, the body of Christ is not to judge outsiders, but rather to judge those among us in the body. I think it's safe to say we get that one backwards too. We do judge the world. The church has actually earned the reputation of being judgmental to the world. We sometimes glory and honor in that. I don't think there is any question, given a proper judgment according to God's law, we are much more adept, or at least much more vocal, at judging the world outside than we are our brothers and sisters. Paul's argument in our text today is clear. We have it backwards.

Let's think through this slowly. **And let's start with the claim that we have been appointed as judges – the very title of the sermon today. Does the Bible really say that?** Paul refers to us as judges here in this passage, but does the Bible as a whole really affirm our role as judges in the kingdom of God? It does, and in a few places quite explicitly.

First, in Daniel 7:27. **And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.** The word judge is not used here, but Daniel is painting the picture of the world in which we will judge. The kingdom, the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to us, His children. Certainly, if we will be granted the entire kingdom, we will have the authority to judge in that kingdom.

Then, Matthew 19:28. **Jesus said to [his disciples], “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.** Judging. There's the word. The disciples will sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. Now granted, this is not all God's children. This is only the 12 disciples. But the principle of judging is there. It's being fleshed out in Scripture.

Revelation 3:21. **The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.** Here we have sitting on the throne, but we don't have the concept of judging directly stated. We saw in Matthew that sitting on the throne entailed the idea of judging. These 2 concepts are often put together in our world, and it is not at all a stretch to see this passage as conveying we will sit with Jesus on His throne and judge with Him. It's not explicit, but the concept is there.

And then, 1 Corinthians 6:2-3. We should pay special attention to this one because it is in direct context with our passage today. In fact, it is the next argument Paul will make in this letter. **Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!** Jackpot! You can't be more explicit than that. We, the saints, will judge the world. We are to judge angels! Not what we typically think of when heaven comes to mind. But a clear picture of judging nonetheless. And just 2 verses after our passage today. When Paul says we are to judge those inside the church in 5:12, he knows he is going to connect it with the saints judging the world and angels in the next verses.

It's as if he's saying, if you are going to judge the world one day, you better get practicing with this trivial cases within the body. Your judging of those inside the body is practice. So tighten it up. Time is running out. Since you're going to have to judge the world, you better start paying more attention to the things I've given you to judge now. Brothers and sisters, we have been appointed as judges. We are to judge each other now. We will one day judge the world and angels. We can't run away from that. In God's Kingdom, as mind-blowing as it is, we have been given the task of judging along with Christ.

To that, many would say, what about Matthew 7:1? **Judge not, that you be not judged.** That's a valid question. And I have 2 answers to that question, both in the form of a question. If the Bible says explicitly that we are and will be judges, why do we try to negate that argument by pulling out Matthew 7:1. The Word of God is not shy in calling us judges. Paul explicitly states in our text today that we are to judge one another. We know that the Bible does not contradict itself. So simply pulling out a verse that says "judge not" can not allow us claim we are not judges. Instead, we ought to say, apparently there is a sense in which we are to judge and a sense in which we are not to judge. Paul is telling us the sense in which we are to judge, and we will get to that a little later in the sermon. Jesus is telling us the sense in which we are not to judge.

And he does that in Matthew 7:2. **For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.** We are not to judge because we ourselves will be judged by our own judgment. It's as if Jesus is saying, "be careful with your judging, because that same judgment will come back on you." It is not fair at all to read Jesus' words as a blanket statement forbidding all judgment on the part of His children. Rather, it is a caution. If you're going to judge someone, be careful, because whatever standard you use to judge them is going to come back on you. I think Jesus would affirm this follow up statement – "But if you're willing to submit yourself to the same standard with which you judge others, then judging your brothers and sisters would be a very loving thing!"

Now hear me, I do not want to give the impression of casually putting words in Jesus' mouth. But Jesus reveals Himself in the Bible. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God! Jesus is the Word. The Word of God reveals Him. Paul's words in our text today reveal Him. And they reveal that we are to judge the brothers and sisters with whom we are in covenant together. Jesus absolutely agrees with us rightly judging one another. There is certainly a school of thought that separates the words of Paul from the words of Jesus, but your elders at Christ Community do no such thing – that is a dangerous and dark road that leads to death, a road we will not lead you down.

All that means, we are judges. We are meant to judge one another, lovingly, according to God's standards, not our own. I think that's a shift in our thinking. God's Word is clear, but it is not a word that is often spoken or emphasized in churches. We need to be obedient to it. And Paul gives us some specifics as to how.

Who are we supposed to judge? V. 12-13. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. Paul speaks it very clearly and bluntly. We judge those inside the church. God judges those outside. We cannot expect those outside the church to

hold to or be obedient to God's law. They don't live under the Lord's rule. We don't expect people living in Canada to hold to or be obedient to the laws of the United States. We ourselves don't concern ourselves with the laws of China or Brazil or France. They don't apply to us. We have not been submitted to their rule in our lives. We cannot use the law of America to judge someone from another country. It isn't applicable.

Now, clearly, this analogy is not perfect. All of us, from every country in the world, whether we know it or not, are under God's law. We are accountable to it. Which is precisely why God will judge them. But, for now, on earth there is the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. We, within His kingdom, represent the goodness of His laws to the world by living by them, and judging one another in them. Those who do not choose to live under those laws are not to be judged by those laws – for now.

Even more specifically, we are to judge those within our covenant body of believers. We do not judge those in other churches who say they are members of God's family. We don't know their lives. They haven't given us insight into their lives like that. They haven't joined together in community with us like that. Paul is not speaking of those people here. He is talking about those within our local body that we have affirmed in baptism and invited to take the Lord's Supper with us.

That being said, this really does change the way we look at and think about our government officials, or that unbelieving boss who we work for, or that family member who is outside the kingdom of God. We pray for them, sacrificially love them, give up our lives for them. We do not judge them. We understand they are living precisely according to the kingdom they are living in. We know that is destructive to them. So we pray earnestly, and love them at great sacrifice to ourselves, that they would come to know the beauty of God's kingdom, that they would come to love His law as we have. What good does it do pointing a finger at them and calling them wrong? What good is it to judge them according to a standard they have not submitted to? Pray. Love. Give up your life. Hope that God moves on their hearts and brings them into the kingdom. Then we can judge them.

Paul reiterates this in v. 11 when he says we are to judge those who bear "the name of brother" but are unrepentant in their sin. He even lists some specific sins both in v. 10-11. I don't believe that list to be exhaustive, but important nonetheless. We will touch on that in a moment.

How are we to judge them though? V. 11. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler —not even to eat with such a one. Above all, we are judging their heart. We are not judging their actions. All of us sin. But the measure of a member of the kingdom of God is the repentant heart. And this is evident by the fact that we aren't supposed to stop associating with sinners who don't claim Christ. Rather, it's the appearance of a repentant heart that is not genuine. It's feigning repentance while still wanting to be in the family of God. This is the first thing Paul is saying about judging those within the body. We are judging their heart as repentant or not repentant. We are not judging their sin. All of us have that, and none of us could stand up under any level of judgement about our sin.

In addition, Paul gives 2 very specific exhortations about the manner in which we judge them.

1. Do not associate with them. This phrase could literally be translated do not "mix indiscriminately with" them. Meaning, do not randomly, haphazardly associate with them. You be in control of your associations with them. Be purposeful in it. It doesn't mean if we see them out in town we have to run away from them or not talk with them. It doesn't mean we avoid them at all costs. But it does mean we are purposeful in our interactions with them, not casually hanging out as if nothing is wrong.

Paul actually has to correct a misunderstanding the Corinthians had about this. In v. 9-10 he says **I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the**

world. He's very clearly not saying to stop associating with sinners. Which means, there is less danger in associating with the openly lost than there is in associating with unrepentant professors of Christ! Let me say that again. It is more dangerous to associate with someone who claims to be a Christian but does not exhibit a repentant heart than it is to associate with someone who openly defies God and lives in sin. Again, an example of our how logic doesn't always follow the gospel.

2. Paul's additional exhortation is not even to eat with such a one. Fellowship around food is a very important part of human interaction. And cutting that off sends a message. "I can't fellowship with you in that way right now. You are not taking sin seriously, but it is deadly serious. And to help you with that, I'm going to be intentional about my interactions with you as a reminder of the seriousness of sin.

Our intentional decision to not associate with them, to not eat with them, to be very intentional about limiting interaction with them is all to be a reminder. Sin is serious. You aren't taking it seriously. If I were to interact with you like normal, it would minimize the seriousness of your sin. And I love you too much for that. Given God's exhortation for us to do this, we can absolutely trust that if we follow this instruction humbly, God will make sure this message is understood clearly by the unrepentant friend we are not eating with.

One final question. Why do we judge them? What is the end goal? Our text today doesn't address this directly, but the Bible does, and we always need to keep the end goal in mind. Paul gives the Thessalonian Christians a similar exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15. **If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.** Again, Paul is asking them to not associate with someone and he lists 2 very specific reasons why.

First, to make him ashamed. Notice the contrast with v. 14 of Chapter 4. There we saw Paul say "I do not write these things to make you ashamed." Paul was NOT trying to shame them. There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. The Son of God bore all of our shame, leaving none remaining. Within the body, we are not to shame one another. But this situation is different. One who claims Christ but exhibits an unrepentant heart is showing themselves NOT to be in the body. And that changes things. Now there IS an intention of shaming them. We desire this person to feel the shame of their sin. And their unrepentant heart is evidence they are not in the family of God. If they are not in the family of God, there is condemnation for them. Shame is still present. And they need to feel it. In hopes that they will turn from their sin and see Christ remove all of their shame. In not associating with them, not eating with them, it is a goal of ours for them to feel shame.

Second, to warn him. We are not regarding him as an enemy, but rather loving them by warning them. We aren't not associating with them because we are being vindictive. We aren't returning evil for evil or showing them who's boss. We are gently providing a warning. Your sin is serious. It leads to death. Your refusal to repent of it reveals that you are not in the kingdom of God – that you are still under the penalty of your sin. Nothing is more tragic. Nothing is more terrifying. Nothing is more worthy of a warning.

When not associating with someone, even to the point of not eating with them, begins to feel heavy and unwarranted, remember the weight of sin. Outside of the forgiveness of Christ, there is deep shame that we must feel. And there is a coming penalty for sin that we must be warned about! The salvation that can come as a result of the shame and the warning is more than worth the discomfort and awkwardness of not associating with or eating with them. That's the Word of God.

One final word on our role as judges. It does not promote legalism. In fact, it is the very anecdote for legalism. If we do not serve as judges, we will fall into legalism. Here's what I mean. We are judges now only because we know that God's judgment will ultimately fall on everyone. My only hope in that is a repentant heart. I have no hope in obeying the law. Only in humbling myself, repenting of sin, and trusting in Christ.

When our proper judgement within the body is rightly directed at those things, we are avoiding legalism. God judges based on the law of love. Anything less than that in our lives will be judged, including our legalistic tendencies. If we do not take the judgement of God seriously, and understand exactly what it is that He will judge, we will attempt to live out what we think He is going to judge – and that will lead to legalism. But when we judge each other in the way God will judge us – through the lens of Christ and repentance, legalism is removed.

It is a lie that has been told over and over again in churches that this sort of judging one another will lead to legalism. That simply isn't true. To the contrary, it is our best method at fighting legalism. We judge each other as God does, judging the repentant heart. That is a continual reminder that legalism is hopeless. It is a continual word within the body that there is no hope in legalism. It is a continual emphasis on the repentant heart.

Additional ideas

Parent and child authority – how that relates to church member and disciplined church member

Look next to you – you are that person's judge. Are you judging how they dress? Modestly?