

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 47**

#### **Things Christians Must Judge**

**[Matthew 7:1]**

*Maurice Barratt*

In the last issue we examined the things Jesus tells us we should not judge. Now we must look at the other side, for many scriptures in the New Testament tell us that we should — in fact we must — judge certain things, for our own spiritual welfare and that of others. In John 7.24 Jesus says to the Pharisees, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement.” There are many ways in which a Christian should practice righteous judgement. I want to bring out six things that we as Christians must judge.

In the last issue we noted that judgement has two aspects. Firstly, judging means assessing or weighing up the evidence, and secondly it means taking action, pronouncing a verdict or sentence. The things we should judge must be looked at in the same light.

#### **1. We must judge sin in the Church.**

There is nothing in scripture to suggest that we should judge the sins of unbelievers, but sin amongst Christians is a different matter. We are not to turn a blind eye to sin in the church; quite the opposite, we are to deal with it. When there was an instance in Corinth of a man committing fornication with his father’s wife (step-mother), Paul stepped in quickly and ruthlessly. “I verily” he says, “as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already” (1 Corinthians 5.3). Paul had already assessed the situation and made his judgement, and he instructed them how to take action and carry out the sentence: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5.4,5).

Paul took drastic action, and this wasn’t a unique instance: in 1 Timothy 1.20 he writes of how he had performed the same judgement on Hymenaeus and Alexander.

The judgement is nothing personal; Paul was not judging the motives or heart of the person involved, only the sin. We do not know why a person does what they do, what may have driven them to it, and we cannot judge that. All we know is that the sin is there and it is corrupting the church; and it must not be allowed to. To give someone over into the hands of Satan is drastic action indeed, and woe betide the Christian who does it without much thought and prayer. But it is nevertheless legitimate Christian judgement.

## **2. We must judge legal disputes between Christians.**

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul reproveth the Corinthian Christians for taking legal disputes to the world. “Do ye not know” he says, “that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (v. 2) Any disputes between Christians should be judged by Christians. If two Christian brothers or sisters cannot resolve the matter between themselves, they should let a leading member of their church arbitrate for them, never go to a worldly court. If we cannot judge little matters between Christians now, how are we going to cope with judging the world in the future, or judging angels (v. 3)? In the same manner, Jesus says that if we are faithful in small things, we will be entrusted with great things in the future. So if we want to be entrusted with judging the world and angels in the future, we should be preparing ourselves — positively training ourselves in judgement, assessment and discernment. It was shameful to Paul that there was no-one in the Corinthian church who was wise enough to be able to judge between brethren (v. 5).

## **3. We must judge hypocrisy in the Church.**

We have seen that the Sermon on the Mount deals with exposing two things, hypocrisy and covetousness, and that the one is the result of the other. Hypocrisy is a fruit, the result of a covetous heart. We may not judge anyone’s heart, but when we see the fruit of hypocrisy, we can and should judge that.

In Luke 11.37 we read how a Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner objected to the fact that Jesus didn’t wash his hands before eating. But Jesus rebuked the Pharisee and exposed his hypocrisy, because he knew that the Pharisees were nitpickers, so obsessed with the minute details of the law that they became blind to the major, essential aspects of the law: judgement, mercy and faith. The Pharisee’s double standards were the outward fruit of their inwardly covetous hearts. The heart always betrays itself in the end. John exposes hypocrisy in the same way when he says that if we say we love God and yet hate our brother, we are liars. The double standard is the result of a wrong heart and a wrong motive, and although we cannot judge hearts and motives, we can and must judge the fruit when it appears.

## **4. We must judge prophecy and teaching.**

During his exhortation to the Corinthians, Paul appeals to them “I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say” (1 Corinthians 10.15). He encourages them to judge his words: to assess and weigh up what he says and to act accordingly. Speaking later about prophecy, he tells them, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge” (1 Corinthians 14.29). Prophecy means more than foretelling the future; in its wider sense it is applied to every “telling forth” of God’s word in teaching or preaching. Every Christian should judge the prophecies and the teaching they hear. John exhorts: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4.1). Again, we are told here to judge the prophecy, not the prophet. We don’t judge the heart of a man or woman, but we are to judge the words that they speak in the name of the Lord.

## **5. We must judge false prophets.**

In this case, we are to judge the prophet and not just the prophecy. “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7.15). Jesus is not referring to Christians who sometimes act and speak “in the flesh”; nor is he referring to “prophets” of other religions like Mohammed or Buddha. When Peter warns about “false prophets” and “false teachers” in 2 Peter 2, he explains that they are backslidden Christians: they have “forsaken the right way” (v. 15); “having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome”, and “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (v. 20). They are people who have known the light and have exchanged it for darkness.

False prophets are genuinely prophets: that is, they have a spiritual gift, and what they say comes to pass (this is the test of a prophet in Deuteronomy 18.22), but this test does not determine whether the prophet is a true or false prophet, that is to say, whether he is a godly or ungodly prophet, used by God or by the devil. The test of a true or false prophet is by the fruit in that prophet’s life. As in the case of judging hypocrisy, we can and must judge fruit when it appears; it’s obvious enough, Jesus says (“Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?”), and we should be astute enough to know and judge the difference; we should be those who “by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5.14).

This should be a sobering warning to us: If we cannot discern false prophets in these last days, how are we going to know what teaching to accept and what to refuse? Because in these days of deception, there is surely going to be plenty that we should judge, assess, and refuse to have anything to do with.

## **6. We must judge ourselves.**

In his instructions to the Corinthians regarding the breaking of bread, Paul explains at some length the importance of judging ourselves. He says that because they had not examined, assessed and judged themselves, many of them were weak and sick, and some had even died. Paul explains: “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11.31,32). There are three possibilities here: we can either “judge ourselves”, or be “chastened by the Lord”, or be “condemned with the world”. These are three stages. Let me illustrate: if one of my children took something he shouldn’t have done from me, but then confessed it to me, I would be wrong to smack him, because he’s judged himself. But if he didn’t confess, and I found out that he’d stolen, I’d have to smack him or “chasten” him. If I didn’t smack him, I would be letting him get away with it, and fifteen years down the line, he could be “condemned with the world”, up before the magistrates for robbery because I had not dealt with the problem at the beginning. It’s the same with God: if we judge ourselves, then God doesn’t have to chasten us; but if God has to chasten and correct us, it’s because he loves us, and at least we will be spared being condemned with the world. Those who “despise the chastening of the Lord” (Hebrews 12.5) and won’t take his rebuke, have only one alternative: they have to be classed along with the world and judged with it.

## 7. Spiritual Discernment

There is one more way in which Christians can judge: by the gift of spiritual discernment. Discerning of spirits is one of the most important gifts of the Spirit, and perhaps the most neglected. Spiritual discernment is vital to the Christian life. Applied at the right time, it could save many a marriage from break up, or many a church from a damaging split. We cannot judge the hearts and motives of people, but with the gift of discernment, hearts can be revealed and exposed when it is necessary. Peter told Ananias and Sapphira that they had lied to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5.3). He couldn't have known that himself, and it would have been presumptuous of him to say so of himself. It was the gift of discernment. Similarly when Peter said to Simon the Sorcerer, "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8.23), that was the gift of discernment in operation. And when Paul was followed by a woman who proclaimed "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation" (Acts 16.17), after several days, Paul rebuked a spirit inside her, commanding it to come out. That was discerning of spirits in operation. The woman was only saying good things; Paul could not have known that anything was amiss from himself. And very possibly the Holy Spirit did not reveal to Paul that there was a problem until several days had passed. Otherwise, he would presumably have dealt with it straight away and not allowed himself to be followed by someone possessed by an evil spirit.

Discerning of spirits is a valuable gift to the Church. But we must not play at it. We cannot pretend or try to have the gift of discernment. That is dangerous presumption; it causes untold damage to others, it brings reproach on God's name, and it brings us under God's judgement because we have presumed to speak in his name out of our own hearts.

We must judge what we are told to judge, but we must keep our judgements strictly within the appointed limits.

### **Experiences From Life**

*by Joanna Barratt*

#### **EXCEPTIONS TO EVERY RULE**

In my last article entitled "Walk A Mile First" I said that although God sees people fall into sin He gives them much space to repent. If His longsuffering pays off and individuals see their folly and turn from their wickedness He is always ready and willing to forgive and reinstate. If God gives people time, without passing judgement upon them immediately, who are we to jump to conclusions and presume? We must never judge people's motives for doing things.

On the other hand the bible clearly tells us that we should judge those who are of the household of faith. In 1 Cor. 6:1-7 Paul is criticising the church because they can't deal with problems themselves, but have to go before an ungodly legal court of law. I have been in many churches and listened to many people who have aired their grievances about this or that. May I say, this is what pastors,

elders and the wise members of the church ought to be dealing with, not the visiting ministers who come in from outside. The church, we are told, is a family. When my children have problems amongst themselves I have made it very clear that they are not to take the law into their own hands by beating one another up - in this instance the stronger not the more righteous, will win the argument. No, I have told them that they must come to me or their father when they can't sort their problems out peacefully. We then make our own judgements and stop their fight.

Many a church split has occurred because matters have not been addressed, people do not generally like confrontations and would sooner "leave things with God". Well, God will use all circumstances to bring about His ultimate goals, but surely that is not the best. Why on earth would God put somebody in a position of authority if He didn't expect them to exercise that authority. When God first called out a people for Himself he set judges, not kings, over them. When anyone had a grievance or problem that they could not solve, they sought counsel from the judges. Moses, who was the first judge, needed help to deal with the people's disputes because so many of them had problems they couldn't handle. This was the order God instituted because He knew the heart of man, that they are unable to see the wood because of all the trees, and that emotional involvement blinds them from seeing what others, who are unemotionally uninvolved, can see clearly.

I am very grateful for some of the judges I have had in my life. I remember when I was 16 years old going through a particularly hard time after I had left home. I was experiencing awful problems trying to sleep because of recurring nightmares of things in my childhood. One evening, after a music rehearsal, the leader asked why I looked so haggard, was I ill? I fobbed him off saying that I couldn't sleep at night, but he persisted and wanted to know why. Eventually I shared my nightmares with him expecting sympathy and understanding, but he could see far more clearly than I and discerned immediately that I had a terrible problem with unforgiveness. He told me that as a Christian I should get rid of it. I was angry, of course, because I had justifiable reasons for feeling as I did. But he told me straight that Christians don't have any rights at all, we gave them up when Jesus bought us with His own blood. We are expected to unconditionally forgive others as Christ unconditionally forgave us. Hard to swallow? Yes! I wrestled with his judgement for weeks, but eventually gave up the fight because I knew he was right. He was the best friend I ever had because he wouldn't let me lie to myself. Oh that we would be more concerned for our brothers and sisters in the church. We willingly listen to their tales of woe, but do any of us judge the fact that too often they are in the gall of bitterness, and exhort them as Paul did to "take wrong" and "suffer yourselves to be defrauded" (1 Cor. 6:7). Surely, this is our testimony, that we are different from the world, and have different codes of conduct.

A Christian married woman who had been crippled for many years spoke about the awful way her husband, who was also a Christian, had treated her during their married life. She had warned him that one day the Lord would do something terrible to him so that he would never be brutish to her again. Sure enough something happened to him and he ended up in hospital. His wife visited him and reminded him of her warning that the Lord would do something to get even with him, and was convinced that this was indeed the Lords' doing. He looked at her crippled body and asked why she had suffered so much with her own health, inferring that maybe this was her reward for being a rebellious Christian wife!

It is so easy to look on the situations of others and judge, but what about the things that happen in our own lives. I am convinced that in many cases we are weak and sickly because we haven't judged ourselves (1 Cor.11:30). I remember back to a time when I was living on my own in a flat and fell prey to many temptations. I knew I was living a double life, I attended the church faithfully, and fulfilled all my duties. But when I wasn't in church I was out on the town trying out the world. My conscience troubled me badly but I had been seduced by all that was on offer. I remember having a vision of myself being caught in a spiders web. The spider, which was 10 times bigger than myself was just waiting until all my struggling to free myself tired me out, then he would strike me and sap all the spiritual life from me. I knew that God was warning me of what would happen but I was helpless already and couldn't get out of the web myself. I asked God for help. I was immediately struck ill - I firmly believe by God. After a week of being ill God began to work in my life and brought a whole set of circumstances into my life which made me ask for a pastoral visit for someone who was at my flat, but hoofed off before he came. This person's visit had left me shaking with fear, and as I reiterated the events of the evening to the pastor the Lord gave him a vision - all about me! OK the vision was obscure to anyone else, but I knew exactly what the Lord was saying. My life changed from that moment onwards and I never looked back.

If God hadn't struck me down with the sickness I would never have been still enough to hear Him speak. I thank God I was only ill for one week, many people are sick for years because they won't soften up before God and get rid of the things that are causing themselves, their families, their churches, pain and suffering. A few years ago, a dear and Godly friend was taken to hospital after he had been found to have cancer. When the consultant came to visit him in his hospital bed he found my friend in tears. Thinking he was afraid he asked my friend what troubled him. My friend told him to mind his own business because it didn't concern him. He was tormented inside as he realised that God had had to go to these lengths to get his attention.

God speaks to us many times in the day. If we respond, all well and good, but if we choose to ignore what God is saying there comes a time when He stops speaking because He knows He is not getting through. He then hands us over to our reprobate mind and we eventually reap what we have sown. As Christians we should examine our lives, our circumstances, our spiritual condition to see what we are reaping. If you are enjoying the sweet communion and blessing which comes from a close, healthy relationship with the Lord, all well and good, but if we are not then look back over our lives, be honest before the Lord, ask Him to expose what we have been blinded to, learn to judge our actions and motives. Ask why circumstances and situations which are adverse have come into our lives, because when we are judged down here we are chastened of the Lord so that we are not condemned with the world.

There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. We only have to read the book of Job to realise that God deals with people in His own way, for His own purposes. But when Job looked at his life, and indeed when his friends examined him, they could find no sin. And the bible emphatically states that in all the circumstances that happened to Job he sinned not with his mouth nor spoke foolishly, and the bible does say that he that is perfect in word is a perfect man. If you can honestly pass this test, then you too can place yourself in the same category as Job of being an exception to the rule, but if not .....