

Judgment or Discernment?

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In his book, *Letting God be Judge*, Thomas J. Sappington, a teacher/counselor, whom I met in Indonesia, addresses the issue of the power of ungodly judgments in our lives. He refers to several Bible verses:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” Matthew 7:1

“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother. For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.” Romans 14:10

“Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” James 2:4

Clearly, we are not to judge, look down or discriminate with our thoughts. Even Jesus, our role model, did not judge when he lived here on earth.

“For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.” John 12:47

Well then, who is to judge? Only God!

“There is only one Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?” James 4:12

You see, our job is to love our neighbor, not to judge our neighbor with our thoughts and evaluations. Out of the grace, mercy and forgiveness that Jesus freely offers to us, we are to humbly offer grace, mercy and forgiveness to others, and unconditionally as Jesus did. Our model in Jesus is gentleness and humility as He demonstrated by washing his disciples feet and quietly dying for us on the cross.

What is it that interferes in our ability to die to self and love others in a humble way? I believe that “Pride” is the destructive link between humble grace and judgmental superiority. Pride draws our mind from facts and analysis into comparison and assessment, and eventually into judgments and evaluations that we believe to be right. So, the issue is how we use our minds and what we choose to think and accept.

What is the definition of Judgment?

Judgment is a negative, inflexible, critical, malicious assessment or evaluation of the mind that puts another down and which often lacks balance, full truth, compassion, equality and fairness.

If we are to not judge, does that mean that we are to not use our intellectual faculties? No, in fact we are to love with all of our mind. However, we are to rely on God's wisdom and not the wisdom of the world.

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

If we are to use our minds to discern God's ways and be obedient to His will, what is this thing called discernment?

What is the definition of Discernment?

Discernment is not superficial, but rather an in depth distinguishing and selecting of what is true, appropriate and excellent and it is coupled with sympathetic understanding, compassion and justice that applies equally to all humanity.

What is the difference between Judgment and Discernment? In the mind, they both start off the same way.

- Step 1. A life experience
- Step 2. The mind uses the five senses to collect the data.
- Step 3. The thinking brain sorts out the data, analyzes the inputs and begins to interpret the experience.
- Step 4. The mind chooses between two paths:

Discernment

- objective
- looks at positives and negatives
- gracious and respectful
- mercy
- humility (honours others)
- glorifies God
- seeks truth
- forgiving

Judgment

- subjective
- focuses mainly on the negatives
- prejudiced and biased
- malice
- pride (superiority)
- glorifies self
- supports ungodly lies and deception
- unforgiving

Tom Sappington says in his book, “Judgments are often anchored by deep-level lies or deception.” As a result, he links the work of inner healing, which addresses the lies, with the work of renouncing commitments to ungodly judgments and the work of forgiveness. To help avoid ungodly judgments in the first place, he provides the following steps to guide your thinking:

- 1) Would you feel comfortable if others viewed and evaluated you in the same way that you evaluate them?
- 2) Are you giving proper attention to their strengths as well as their weaknesses?
- 3) Are you evaluating their behavior or speculating about their motives (mind reading)?



- 4) Are you seeing the person through Christ's eyes or are you looking down on them and their shortcomings?
- 5) Are you praying, hoping and believing that they can change for the better?
- 6) Are you generalizing and choosing to discriminate against a certain group?
- 7) Are you leaving judgment in God's hands?

With Christ's help and love in us, we can choose to eliminate prideful judgment and open ourselves to Godly discernment based on truth, balanced respectful thinking and an attitude of grace. May God help us in this choice.

