

A Light in the Valley

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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Lesser Discussed Sins: Disputing

by: Justin Brewer

A brief venture into the world of either social media or the comment section of a news article would reveal our next discussion topic: debates/disputes. In our series to this point, many of the discussed sins are easily understood and the application is clear once the sin has been understood. However, in the case of debates/disputes, a certain amount of judgment (based upon the Scriptures) must be applied to whether the debate or dispute constitutes what is condemned by God. Perhaps this topic is discussed more often by Christians than some of the others in the series, but too often the concept of “debate” is considered to be something that is entirely evil. This topic, like all others, is one that Christians need to carefully examine and seek to understand what the Scriptures teach. Are all debates and/or disagreements condemned in the Bible? What do the Scriptures teach?

In Romans 1:29 (NKJV), the Apostle Paul wrote, “...being filled with all

unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers...” In the KJV, “strife” is translated as “debate” and considering these two translations together provide modern Christians with a more accurate understanding of what Paul was addressing. In this context, debate is used in reference to a specific subcategory of debate rather than being addressed in general. How might we discern this from the context? Debate is surrounded in this passage by other sins, such as wickedness, maliciousness, deceit, and the like, which modifies that application of the word “debate” or “strife,” which means that Paul never intended it to be a blanket statement concerning all disagreements.

Not all disagreements and resulting discussions equate to what Paul condemned in Romans 1:29. Simply because two people disagree, even

vehemently, does not necessarily mean that any discussion of their two alternative perspectives should be dismissed. Unfortunately, too many Christians have fallen prey to the misconception that the discussion of opposing viewpoints will turn off any non-Christian that witnesses it, but if we look to the Bible it is clear through multiple examples that the Apostles disputed alternative viewpoints (even among those seeking to be faithful to God). However, Paul did instruct Timothy to “avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife” (2 Timothy 2:23). Likewise, Paul instructed Titus to “avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless” (Titus 3:9). Was Paul insinuating that all disputes fall under this category and should therefore be avoided? The answer is clear from the context; Paul denotes the specific type of dispute he was condemning by modifying them with the words “foolish” and “ignorant” because such only lead to strife (remember how “debate” is translated as “strife” in the NKJV and similar translations).

Return now to the example of social media and news articles; such examples show that it is easy to see what constitutes a foolish dispute. Consider this rather silly, but pointed example from a few years ago: a popular musical artist posted a photo of his truck on social media. In the comment section, many people began to argue, cuss, swear, and call each other names because of the kind of truck it was and the size of the vehicle. Is there any wisdom in such argumentation? Was there even a valid reason for a disagreement? On a more serious level, however, there are many people claiming to be Christians that arrogantly assert their expertise on all things Biblical and will debate anything, anywhere. Oftentimes, those asserting such claims will present arguments that are self-serving in many ways and will lead to unrighteous behaviors rather than godly ones.

It is clear that discerning between a foolish dispute and a disagreement that may yet yield a positive benefit can be difficult. However, the Scriptures provide Christians with a few guidelines to help with such discernment. In the context of Paul’s words to Titus, he also wrote, “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:10-11). How might this help modern Christians determine where a healthy discussion ends and a foolish dispute begins? Can a person misunderstand certain Scriptures, yet continue to work towards a clearer understanding via discussion without being divisive? Perhaps a consideration of Apollos in Acts 18:24-28 would be prudent; Apollos was zealous in his teaching, although he was incorrect. In spite of being so zealous, Apollos was clearly open to discussion

and evidence, and when Aquila and Priscilla taught him, he accepted the truth. It is clear that such is not a foolish dispute and that there was a benefit to such a discussion. The example of Apollos is important because his attitude proved his desire to be acceptable to God. Unlike the examples in Scriptures of false teachers, the teachings of Apollos would not lead to ungodliness; in other words, Apollos did not teach a doctrine that abused the grace of God and what he taught was correct at one point in time. Likewise, Christians should consider both the attitudes and the doctrines brought by those who would fall under the divisive category.

A few years ago, an individual stated that he held a position on the topic of modesty that was unheard of among Christians, which is often a good indication of the value of such a position. Based upon the twisting of a few Scriptures (reference 2 Peter 3:16), he claimed that only married women needed to be modest and that unmarried women could dress in whatever manner they deemed necessary so as to attract a mate. At that time, this man was young and unmarried; might such an argument be rather self-serving? Such an argument made it excusable for him to lust after young women and still claim it to be a Scripturally supported stance. Consider the words of Jude who wrote, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). Likewise, Jude also wrote "that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 18-19). When an individual consistently presents arguments that glorify lewd behaviors and carefully twist Scripture to fit their desires, then he is the divisive man discussed in Titus 3. Should Christians continue to discuss and debate with such an individual?

While it is often tempting to continue to debate with such individuals and believe that potential "others" will benefit from it, there is a reason that the Apostle Paul warned against such. Modern Christians should carefully consider the reasons for which Paul wrote to reject such an individual after the first and second admonition; do we consider ourselves to be better equipped than Paul to handle such discourse? If the continuation of such disputes can be excused by saying that "others might benefit from it," then could the same not have been said during Paul's time? When such a command is found in the Scriptures, then modern Christians should work towards an understanding of that command and the reasons for which it was issued by God through His inspired writers. As a final admonition, consider

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A Guide to Judging Others

by: Doy Moyer

“Jesus said not to judge others,” didn’t He? We are often reminded of this because in today’s culture, one thing is made very clear: we aren’t supposed to judge anyone! Of course, sometimes what’s missed here is that those who say this are, in fact, being highly judgmental against those whom they are rebuking. This type of irony is common. More to the point, however, is that we do need to pay attention to what Jesus actually said about this, so let’s think more about it:

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:1-6)

First, notice that Jesus did not say, “Do not judge,” as if that was the end of the matter. He warned about making certain kinds of judgments, bad judgments, not about making any judgments. To say that no judgments can ever be made is untenable and impossible to live with consistently. There is no way to deal with others without making some kind of judgments. Further, verse 6 shows that sometimes we must make judgments about casting our metaphorical pearls before swine. Jesus, then, is warning about judging unfairly, judging hypocritically, and judging hypercritically. He is warning that whatever standard of judgment we use against others will be used against us. If we are not merciful, we cannot expect mercy. If we are unwilling to give the benefit of the doubt, we cannot expect to receive that from others. If we are not willing to forgive, we cannot expect forgiveness. It is in this same context in which Jesus also made the statement, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you” (Matt. 7:12). If we judge with this in mind, our method and manner of judgment will be greatly affected.

After Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath, some were seeking to take His life. He ended His exchange by saying, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Jesus refers to “righteous judgment.” The problem, again, isn’t with making judgments per se. The problem is the kind of

judgments we make and the way we make them. How then do we properly judge? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Judge fairly. Don't just look at the outward issues (cf. also 1 Sam. 16:6-7). Jesus was misjudged because His opponents only saw the superficial aspects of who He was. Had they looked deeper, they could have known and appreciated Him as they should have. Sadly, their own prejudices blinded them to the truth. Can this happen to us? The wise man tells us, "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13). When we fail to look deeply, fail to listen, or fail to think before we pronounce, we are engaging in folly, not fairness.
2. Maintain pure motives. Make sure your own heart is right before making judgments about others. The great motive is love, and we should always seek what is best for others (Phil. 2:3-5). This includes giving the benefit of any doubt to others, for love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Since "love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Rom. 13:10), we will strive to act in a way consistent with showing proper respect toward all.
3. Show a spirit of forgiveness and mercy. Avoid the carnal "gotcha" mentality of this tabloid-frenzied world. God's people are to be kind and tenderhearted. Jesus taught, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions" (Mark 11:25). "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14-15). Can we afford to be judgmental without also having a merciful spirit? "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:2).

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

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Complaining

by: David Maxson

And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." - Numbers 21:5

What was the number one sin of Israel in the wilderness?

Complaining!

The people complained as soon as they crossed the Red Sea all the way till this story which is near the end of their pilgrimage. There are at least ten unique stories during Israel's wilderness days where we find the people complaining against God and/or Moses (Ex 16:2; 17:2; 32:1; Num 11:1; 14:2; 16:3 17:6, 28; 20:2; 21:5).

Grumbling is a problem. None of us is above the temptation to murmur or complain. We need to learn from the book of Numbers that this is a serious issue with God. He never took grumbling lightly. He sent fire to consume some, swallowed up others with the earth, and sent fiery serpents among the people, all because of complaining!

What lies at the heart of a complaining spirit?

1. *A lack of faith.* Israel usually complained because they failed to see God's ability to provide for them.
2. *A selfish heart.* This is seen in the rebellion of Korah. He and his family were jealous of the position God had given Moses.

How do you remedy a complaining spirit?

1. *Remind yourself that God is in control.* Your life may look like a wilderness with no food or water in sight, but God has not abandoned you. He will guide you home.
2. *Give thanks.* Instead of grumbling about what you don't have, turn your attention to what God has given you.

Father, forgive us of our ingratitude and lack of faith. Cultivate in us a heart of thankfulness and trust in your ability to provide.

Judging Others... (Continued from page 5)

4. Be cautious about your own problems. Don't use hypocritical, double standards. This is the point about removing the log from your own eye before trying to remove a speck from another's. Paul wrote, "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things" (Rom. 2:1). He further taught, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). We recognize that no one is flawless. However, we need to be careful about being so critical of others that we cannot see our own problems. The same standard of judgment applies to all equally.

5. Stay humble. This is the only way to see clearly. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5). The fact that we all have stumbled should keep us humble as we seek grace both for ourselves and others. Arrogant judgment is to be avoided as a sin, but humble judgment in line with God's will is to be commended.

We can avoid the erroneous judgments Jesus warned against, and instead learn to judge appropriately. Judgments should not be based on personal preference, as if such preferences are the standard for all. Rather, judgments need to be made righteously, which can only happen within the boundaries of God's standard. The measuring stick is not "me," but God and His word. The goal is always to conform ourselves to the image of our Lord and seek His glory.

Lesser Discussed... (Continued from page 3)

the words of Paul found in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." These words follow up Paul's discussion of those in Israel's past that thought themselves able to be entangled with the world and yet endure it. As Paul stated in that context, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written down for our admonition..." (1 Corinthians 10:11). Let us take to heart the words of the Apostle Paul!

Daily Bible Reading

May 2018

May 1	Amos 5	May 17	Micah 4:1-5:1
May 2	Amos 6	May 18	Micah 5:2-15
May 3	Amos 7	May 21	Micah 6
May 4	Amos 8	May 22	Micah 7
May 7	Amos 9	May 23	Nahum 1
May 8	Obadiah	May 24	Nahum 2
May 9	Jonah 1:1-9	May 25	Nahum 3
May 10	Jonah 1:10-2:10	May 28	Habakkuk 1:1-2:1
May 11	Jonah 3-4	May 29	Habakkuk 2:2-20
May 14	Micah 1	May 30	Habakkuk 3
May 15	Micah 2	May 31	Zephaniah 1
May 16	Micah 3		

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