

# Rise Up And Build

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*"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18*

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## **“Judge Not”**

In modern times it seems that one of the worst things a person can do is to openly take issue with the religious doctrines which others believe and practice. On the surface, it should be evident that if two people teach opposing doctrines, then at least **one** of them **has** to be wrong. However, if either of the two says the other is teaching false doctrine, then he had better brace himself for the severe criticism which is bound to follow. The fact that every point made is amply documented with Scriptures, correctly applied, makes little difference. For some reason, it is simply “not nice” to take issue with the religious beliefs of others. Usually the person who does speak out against the errors of others is rebuked by well-meaning people who interject, saying, “**But the Bible says, ‘Judge Not.’**”

To be sure, it is possible to misrepresent another person’s character, beliefs, and practice. It is possible to “*preach Christ even from envy and strife*” and not from a heart possessing “*good will*” (Phil. 1:15). It is possible to “*preach Christ from selfish ambitions*” (Phil. 1:16) with the desire to hurt someone else who also preaches the truth. Doubtlessly, there are some who speak “*the truth,*” but not “*in love*” (Eph. 4:15). It may well be that many have been “*ready to give an answer*” to all who inquired of their “*hope,*” but whose “*answer*” has not been given “*in meekness and fear*” (I Peter 3:15). The fact that one knows the truth on a given subject is no justification for acting contrary to the truth — even when he is using the truth to resist the efforts of those whose doctrine is contrary to the truth.”

However, it is possible to **profess** a love for the truth without actually possessing a hatred of error. The “sweet singer of Israel” penned these words: “*Therefore I love your commandments more than gold, yea than fine gold! Therefore all your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way*” (Psa. 119:127,128). The heavenly Father said to the Son, “*You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness...*” (Heb. 1:9). It is a psychological impossibility for one who genuinely

loves the truth to be emotionally unmoved when he hears error espoused and truth assailed. It was not in keeping with the righteous nature of Jesus Christ to ignore the unrighteous efforts of those who sought to turn His Father's "house" into "a den of thieves" (Matt.21:12,13). The apostle Paul in Athens, initially intended to wait for Silas and Timothy to join him. However, "*his spirit was stirred within him when he saw that the city was given to idols*" (Acts 17:14-16). He **had** to speak out against the errors he witnessed. It is simply impossible to find a love for truth and an indifference toward error in the same heart. One may as well search for fried snowballs!

The attributes which Deity possesses are possessed to the infinite degree. There is no love greater than God's love. No mercy greater than His mercy, no grace greater than the grace of God. By the same token, His attributes of justice, severity, and wrath are also possessed to the infinite degree. To illustrate this point, I candidly state that my love for sinful humanity is too limited for me to voluntarily make the supreme sacrifice which God made when He sent His Son to die in my stead (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:21). By the same token, my sense of justice is too limited (even if I had the power) for me to destroy the whole human race, with the exception of eight souls (Gen. 6:7)! Indeed, the Father, being Deity, is infinite in all His attributes. But even as the Father is Deity, so is Jesus! Hence, He said to Philip, "*He that has seen Me has seen the Father..*" (John 14:9).

Viewed in this light, it is easy to see why Jesus was the most controversial Person to ever set foot on the earth. He **loved sinners**, but He **hated sin**! He loved people in error, but He could not tolerate their error. As we would say, He "called a spade a spade!" Or in Bible language, He called fools "*fools*" (Matt. 22:17,19). He called hypocrites "hypocrites" (Matt. 23:15,17). His criticism of some religious people on one occasion was so severe that His disciples went to Him and reminded Him that He had "*offended*" the Pharisees (Matt. 15:12). Rest assured, Jesus, the greatest Preacher on earth (both past and present) was not crucified because of His popularity!

But what does all this have to do with the title of this article, "**Judge Not?**" Everything! It was **Jesus** Who said "*judge not*" (Matt. 7:1). It was also Jesus Who judged some people's doctrine to be false. It was Jesus Who judged some people to be "*fools,*" "*hypocrites,*" and a "*generation of viper*" (Matthew 23). However, Jesus never sinned (I Peter 2:22). Hence, we know that He never Personally acted contrary to those spiritual principles which He bound on others. Not even in the realm of judging!

Could it be that some have stopped reading too soon, and have made it appear that Jesus taught what He really did not teach? Absolutely! Please note that Jesus said: "*Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you*" (Matt. 7:1,2). He then illustrated what He meant by describing the almost comical situation of a man with a plank in his own eye trying to remove a speck from his brother's eye (vs. 3-5). Perhaps a modern parallel to this would be that of the late Osama Ben Ladin trying to rebuke your mother for being unmerciful! A man who squanders million\$ has no business rebuking another for wasting pennies. Hypocritical, censorious judgment, whereby another's minor faults are magnified and condemned, while one's own major faults are minimized and condoned, is the judgment which Jesus taught against. If

judging per se' is condemned, then **you** have probably already condemned yourself! In what way? In that you have likely formed a judgment about this article — whether it is good, bad, mediocre, tolerable, or just plain lousy. If you have so much as complimented another person's appearance you have rendered a judgment.

Later in this same chapter (Matt. 7:15) Jesus cautioned, saying, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*" To attach "*false*" to "*prophets*" is to render a judgment. However, if a man's prophecies do not come to pass (cf. Deut. 18:20-22), he is a false prophet, and it is not wrong to judge him for what his works prove him to be. We judge people like we judge trees — "*by their fruits*" (Matt. 7:20). Jesus did not issue a blanket prohibition against judging. But He did caution us to "**judge with righteous judgment**" (John 7:24).

Let us develop such a love for truth that we will always welcome any honest investigation of our own beliefs. Truth has nothing to fear from an honest investigation. If such investigation reveals error on our part, let us thank the investigator and make the needed changes. After all, "***the truth shall make you free***" (John 8:32). If the beliefs of those whom we love are shown to be erroneous, let us not condemn the one who focused the spotlight of truth upon the error. Instead, let us study all the harder so that we might be able to teach our loved ones "*the way of God more perfectly*" (cf. Acts 18:26). We close with these sobering words of wisdom, "*He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just **both** of them alike are an abomination to the Lord*" (Prov. 17:15).

\*\*\* -- B. Witherington