

A Commentary of Church and Judgment

Is Judgment Wrong?

It seems like more and more people catch themselves between a rock and a hard place – the rock being the Church and that hard place being their head. It is in one sense displaced sentiment toward Christianity as a whole juxtaposed with a misrepresented understanding of a church and its role. That is one way to say people tend to blame ‘the Church’, or even God in place of human nature. An accusation frequently described as “the Church hurt me”, or shouted, “You have no right to judge me”, is often followed with a departure from church fellowship, or worse, loathing the Church in its entirety. Notwithstanding, this inadvertent justification not only exposes a desire to remove human responsibility by personifying the Church to bare the brunt of human conduct, it ignores cause and effect all together; it exemplifies a black and white generalization of the global church by placing all churches under one roof as equal partakers in judgment. Even so the misinterpreted Biblical aphorism ‘do not cast judgment’ is more so in linear apposition to ‘do not cast condemnation’ holding a soteriological or spiritual connotation; a confusion radical secularized society adopts full-heartedly. Are we not to ever draw conclusions again? I believe the answer goes without saying.

The use of the word judgment pertains to the context of one's soul, the human heart, if you will, and for that matter, “Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) It is not our prerogative to determine or delineate another's salvation, especially to communicate condemnation as if it were a matter of fact – to question such is only natural, but to proclaim with absolute certainty the knowledge of another's salvation, or lack thereof, is not only beyond folly, but outright irreverence for sovereignty by assuming the knowledge that only God intends to know. And I suppose, if one were such an expert on the matter, God could come over for a bit of advice, you know, as a good show of solidarity – I'm almost positive neither preference or favoritism would interfere at all! We are not called to condemn for many reasons, and for one point I wish to highlight in particular: We do not know for certain. We are given the capacity to identify and judge situations where in a particular moment the individual at large may not exhibit Christian-like (even anti-Christian) behaviour that correspond to what Jesus Christ emphasized as salvation signifiers of a true conversion (Matthew 7:15-23), yet needless to say, time, in its totality, has yet to unfold to reveal such information concerning condemnation, which renders such chatter nothing more than a bald-faced lie. Since when did an assumption from unfamiliar faces become certain fact? As C.S. Lewis dryly noted, “When a man who accepts the Christian doctrine lives unworthily of it, it is much clearer to say he is a bad Christian than to say he is not a Christian.” And I do not believe public shaming, especially nowadays, has done any one any good whatsoever, quite contrary. (Matthew 18:15-19) In light of a sinner, one must be conscientious, not belittling. That ‘judgment call’ applies when help and guidance necessities manifestation, that grace and mercy may abound freely – something many modern churches forget all too often. In terms of salvation, a ‘potential is’ is still not an ‘actual is’, and we ought to treat it as such. Just because someone may not be on the right path now, does not mean they will forever follow the wrong path. Inasmuch the Church must not only represent, but also be that illuminating standard for those lost yet in search for that righteous path.

Now, it is not difficult to become upset by one's deliberate abuse of freedom of expression: ignorant gossip, arrogant allegation, finger pointing, mockery, ridicule and the like, those intentions are aimed to hurt. After all, we can all recount the compassion of Jesus Christ against such conduct, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8:7) Finalizing His point with, "Neither do I *condemn* you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11) [emphasis added]. Lest we forget that Christ himself came for sinners, and the "Church" is a place where sinners of all sorts, and yes hypocrites, go for help, to seek refuge, as a means to cast out sinful thought and behaviour, or at least with the intent to fix something wrong. Failing to do so is in part a freewill decision, not God's initial intent.

Are we to condemn the Church as it were for such judgment? – To follow a fool by his folly? After all, the saying goes, "do not judge" – which leads me to think that by identifying the problem as "The Church" it justifies the action to leave and cast judgment because the Church is not a single person, but the symbol of a collective group or culture. So judgment pertains to the atmosphere, or the "vibe" as it were. As if no one outside the Church has ever caused pain, sorrow, shame, deceit, strife or the like? That is of course no excuse for ridicule, mockery or such, but it does aid the urge to self-victimize and socially reduce the Church as mean, evil bigotry. Parting from the Church (not necessarily a church) for "earthly affairs" tacitly affirms the power other people have over the individual at large. In some instances it presupposes popular opinion is worth more than God's. One ought to consider the minister of a church who is the victim of ridicule as well, often altruistic without any advantageous incentive, and yet does not waiver attendance. Judgment against Christianity for its judgment enunciates that presupposition that the Church upholds a genuine moral standard, one that, unfortunately, many Christians engulfed in the culture dare not attempt to compare with honest representation. This is indeed the issue.

Having said all that, of course I am generalizing people that blame the Church, as I cannot account for every situation at hand. It is a generalization though for this one point that exceeds the relative circumstances, and that is people cannot lump the Church with the people's actions (the pastor, priest or minister on the other hand, is a different matter all together, as he or she is quite literally the ambassador of a single church's theology) and consequently, that more so means God. More than often people accuse the Church as such never to look in the mirror. Nevertheless, I expect more from the Church than I do of the world, that is from a culture of people who disbelieve in the actuality of moral law; yet in and of itself, for the most part, unwittingly suggest otherwise by presupposing that judgment can in its very nature be wrong – by what standard can that be so? – Did evolution suggest as much? – It must have been selected! If we loose all judgment, who is to say judgment is wrong?

There is a string of folk who may find it easy to condemn the Church for its hypocrisy, all the while they wave their signs and proclaim the good news of moral relativism of which embrace hypocrisy in the many faces of *dualism*. And it is unfortunate to say, that when a church pushes a person out of what should be a place of refuge, humility, sincerity and love, these people find themselves in a new church, where the city replaces the sanctuary and the moral principles are guided by the absence of judgment, no standard besides what is felt socially acceptable among popular opinions. Human nature, inside and outside the Church, is still human nature. It is trust that you will not often find if there is no reason for it being there, or perhaps it is better if I ask, how can you trust one's judgment who chooses to disbelieve in

truth? And inasmuch, who do you think loves you more: the one willing to tell you the truth even if it upsets you both or the one who is only around when you agree with his or her opinion? Judgment is not the problem; it is how sin distorts it. In Christ and through Christ alone, love exists in the presence of judgment, not in the absence of it.

To add some evangelical context, the Church is not only for us to become morally stable, it is to give back to God what He rightfully deserves: Our obedience, allegiance and loyalty through love. And one day, God will judge us for it. For keener ears, let it be said, a lack of full submission is the issue at hand, betwixt head and heart. For those in the Church, does it not seem wiser to offer a helping hand rather than to point out the problem and offer no practical or prayerful solution? If the Christian sense of reality is indeed true, as we believe it to be, then we must allow room for self-realization and the conviction for self-misdirection, however difficult, to encourage the recognition of the magnitude for transgression and the cause-and-effect for sin. Prior to God's forgiveness and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that recognition of being a sinner judges the self quite tenaciously. Lodging itself in a state of vulnerability without constraint amid full-throttled honesty, as we all ought to remember. Identifying another's sin is one thing, extending the Solution is a whole other story – quite literally. Perhaps, hopefully sooner than later, people will stop going to church and start being the Church. A resolve we all ought to pray for!

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