

Did Jesus Ever Judge?

A woman who had committed adultery was brought to Jesus. Her accusers were trying to trap Jesus. The sentence under the Law of Moses was stoning. What would Jesus do? He openly said that he did not judge her. (John 8)

There is a terrible misunderstanding in our culture regarding 'judgment.' The example above is often used to rebuke Christians who appeal to the Scriptures regarding the immoral behaviors and lifestyles of many in our society. Unfortunately, the passage is misused. Jesus did not justify sin just because he did not judge her.

The problem is tricky, partly because of the broad usage of the term 'judge' in the New Testament. The core meaning of the Greek term for 'judge' was: *to separate*. It was the idea of *distinguishing between* things. It could even describe the activity of *organizing* things (e.g. separating forks, knives and spoons in your silverware drawer—*judging* your silverware; a little silly, but accurate). Of course we are more accustomed to thinking in terms of legal or moral judgment, that is, distinguishing between legal and illegal, or between moral good and evil.

I think people are easily offended in our society. So, the banner cries of "Tolerance" and "You can't judge me" are used to squelch descriptions of behaviors and lifestyles described in the Bible as immoral, evil or ungodly. That's right, the Bible does make distinctions, not for the purpose of devaluing people, but for the purpose of instruction. That is the only way people will understand how to make a proper response to God in their lives. Now, consider...

For God did not send the Son (Jesus) into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

—John 3:17

For not even the Father (God) judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son (Jesus).... —John 5:22

He who rejects Me (Jesus) and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. —John 12:48

So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

—Hebrews 9:28

What does it all mean?

Jesus was first sent to deal with man's sin problem by offering Himself as a sacrifice in place of sinners. (God demands payment for sin.) Yet...

He who hears My (Jesus) word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. —John 5:24

A person who does not make a proper faith response to Jesus WILL be judged, specifically by the words of Jesus. So, when Jesus returns, He will not come "in reference to sin," that is, to deal with the sin problem of mankind. Rather, He will judge (distinguish/separate) between those who have made a proper faith response to Him and those who have not.

As for the adulterous woman that Jesus encountered (John 8); Jesus explicitly told her, "*Go and sin no more.*" So, while he did not judge (condemn) her at that moment, he most certainly *distinguished* her behavior as sinful and unacceptable to God. Then, from that point forward she had to decide whether she would follow Jesus or continue her lifestyle of sin and in the end be judged by the words of Jesus.