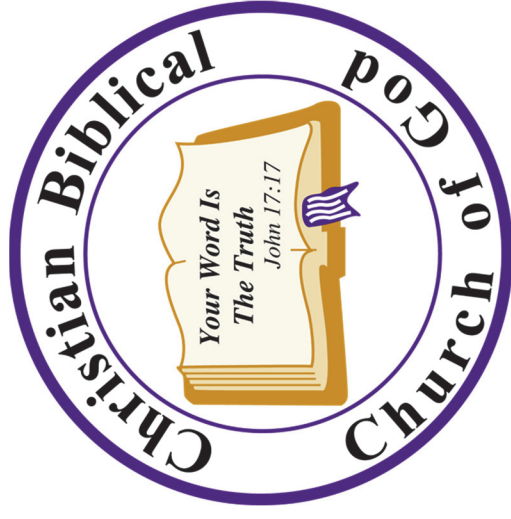


# *Judge Righteous Judgment*



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*by  
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***Judge Righteous Judgment***

*“It is joy to the righteous to do justice ...”*—Proverbs 21

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us and continue to use us. We will uphold the integrity and confidence of the Church of God. As a result, God will bless His people with peace, unity, joy and success.

“The king **establishes** the land by JUSTICE” (Prov. 29:4).  
“*It is* joy to the righteous to do justice” (Prov. 21: 15).

Remember, Jesus Christ said, “**JUDGE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT**” (John 7:24).

## God as Supreme Judge

Many people believe that because “God is love,” He will not execute judgment. The Scriptures, however, reveal just the opposite—that “God is judge” (Psa. 75:7). As *the* Supreme Judge, He alone judges *all* nations as well as *all* individuals. “For He comes to judge the earth; He shall judge the world with righteousness and the people with His truth” (Psa. 96:13). The apostle Paul emphasized that **God is Judge of all**: “But you have come to Mount Zion, and to *the* city of *the* living God, heavenly Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels; *To the* joyous festival gathering; and to *the* church of *the* firstborn, registered *in the book of life* in heaven; and to **God, *the* Judge of all**; and to *the* spirits of the just who have been perfected” (Heb. 12:22-23).

Christians look forward to the time when Christ will judge the entire world at His second coming. David was inspired to prophesy about Jesus’ second coming and His role as Judge. “Our God shall come, and He shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, so that **He may judge His people**: ‘Gather My saints unto Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.’ **And the heavens shall declare His righteousness, FOR GOD HIMSELF IS JUDGE**” (Psa. 50:3-6).

It is vital for Christians to understand not only that God *is* Judge, but to understand just *how* He judges and what forms the *basis* for His judgments.

God is Judge of all the earth because, as God, “His way is perfect” (Psa. 18:30)—thus His laws, by which He makes His judgments, are perfect. As David wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect” (Psa. 19:7). While God is the “high and lofty One Who inhabits eternity, Whose name *is* Holy” (Isa. 57:15), God also **dwells “in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness”** (Jer. 4:2). God’s truth, judgment and righteousness all go hand-in-hand—they are inseparable.

Truth, judgment and righteousness are actually expressions of God’s love—and are thus the *substance* of righteous judgment. This—His love—is why God is Judge. When we come before God in prayer, we need to realize that our prayers

are going *directly* to God the Father—with Jesus Christ at His right hand as our intercessor—and that He listens, in loving, righteous judgment.

The fact is, God says that He *loves* judgment (Isa. 61:8). He also says, in Psalm 11:7, that He **“loves righteousness.”** Everything that God does is *righteous*—for the “Lord is righteous in all His ways, and loving in all His works” (Psa. 145:17). David also declared, **“the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether”** (Psa. 19:9). When we put all these Scriptures together, we can clearly see that God judges *righteous* judgment.

### ***God Judges Nations Today***

When God executes judgment upon a nation, He applies His righteous laws and commandments as the “standard of measurement.” In the book of Jeremiah, God told the prophet:

“If at any time I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck it up and to pull it down, and to destroy *it*; if that nation, against whom I have spoken, will turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them.

“And if at any time I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build it and to plant *it*; if it does evil in My sight, that it not obey My voice, then I will repent of the good with which I said I would do them good” (Jer. 18:7-10).

These verses reveal a very important principle that many people do not understand—that God holds every nation accountable to obey the Ten Commandments in the letter of the law. If this were not the case, then there would be no judgment executed—because “where no law is, *there is* no transgression” (Rom. 4: 15). When God judges, He demonstrates His righteousness in that He is not a respecter of persons—or of nations (Rom. 2: 1-16).

The account of people of Nineveh—who repented because of Jonah’s warning—is an excellent example of God’s righteous judgment. Because Nineveh repented, God reversed His judgment of evil against the city.

Jonah 3:4-10: “And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, ‘Yet forty days and

Moses in judging Israel, He had to give each one of them a portion of the same spirit He had given to Moses. “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people, and officers over them .... And I will take of the Spirit which *is* upon you, and will put *it* upon them’ ” (Num. 11:16-17).

This also applies to the ministry of the New Testament Church. Paul admonished Timothy, “For this reason, I admonish you to stir up the gift of God that is in you by the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of sound-mindedness” (II Tim. 1:6-7).

God says we are to “be filled with *the* Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). We must be filled with the Spirit of God, just as were the Apostles. “And when they had prayed ... they were all filled with *the* HOLY SPIRIT ...” (Acts 4:31). If we are filled with the Spirit of God, we will be able to develop and exercise the quality of righteous judgment.

God wants us today to be able to say, like Micah, “But truly I AM FULL of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of JUDGMENT, and of might...” (Micah 3:8). When we have God’s Spirit and use it as God directs, He will give us the quality of righteous judgment. This is why Paul wrote, “However, the one who is spiritual discerns all things .... But we have *the* mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:15-16). This is the most basic criteria of all—we *must* have God’s Spirit, THE MIND OF CHRIST and BE FILLED WITH THE LOVE OF GOD! “Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in CHRIST JESUS” (Phil. 2:5).

Then we will truly be able to “judge *righteous* judgment.”

### **CONCLUSION**

We have seen how important righteous judgment is to God, and to all of God’s people. The spirit of righteous judgment is a *character* quality of God and His Son Jesus Christ. In this age of complexity and turmoil, as never before, we need this same character quality. God’s Church is to stand firm in truth and righteousness. By being *filled* with the Spirit of God and the mind of Christ, each one of us, as children of God, can avoid the common pitfalls and human errors in exercising godly judgment. When we apply these keys of righteous judgment, God will bless

from before your eyes and give *them* to your neighbor. And he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did *it* secretly, BUT I WILL DO THIS THING BEFORE ALL ISRAEL AND BEFORE THE SUN.’ ”

“And David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The LORD also has put away your sin; YOU SHALL NOT DIE [THIS IS GOD’S MERCY BECAUSE OF REPENTANCE]. Only, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, this child born to you shall surely die’ ” (II Sam. 12:7-14).

In this account, it is clear that God’s mercy did not negate His judgment—which remained the same, even though David fasted many days to try and persuade God to change His mind. God was clearly very merciful to David—but God’s judgment remained to insure that David would learn the lesson and would never again take advantage of the blessings God had given to him as King of Israel. When we read the Psalms that David wrote after this incident, we can see that it was God’s judgment that really made David appreciate God’s mercy. This is what made David seek God with all his heart, and love Him with his whole being.

Judgment should tempered with proper mercy—but, at the same time, mercy should never replace judgment.

### 17) You Must be Filled With God’s Spirit and Have the Mind of Christ

We will end where we began. Being filled with God’s Holy Spirit is the most important ingredient and factor in having the spirit of righteous judgment. The real ability to judge comes from God—and through His Spirit we receive the love and grace of God.

God’s Spirit is personified as “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8—which clearly shows how God’s Spirit leads in judgment. “Counsel and sound wisdom *are* mine; I *am* understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign and princes decree justice. Princes rule by me, and nobles, and all the judges of the earth ... I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of THE PATHS OF JUSTICE” (Prov. 8:14-16, 20).

When God set up the council of seventy elders to assist

Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ And the people of Nineveh believed God. And they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them, for word came to the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne. And he laid aside his robe from him, and covered himself *with* sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his great ones, saying, ‘Do not let man or beast, herd or flock taste anything; do not let them feed, nor drink water. But let man and animal be covered *with* sackcloth, and cry mightily to God. And let them each one turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may repent, and He may have pity and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we do not perish.’ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. And God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do to them, and He did not do it.”

On the other hand, if there is *no* repentance—even after a warning message has been *given—then* God executes judgment. A good example of God’s judgment being rendered would be the case of Sodom and Gomorrah—in which the people refused to repent, undoubtedly after being repeatedly warned by righteous Lot.

In Genesis 18, when God was ready to execute His judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded with God because he feared that his righteous nephew, Lot, might be destroyed with the wicked. Notice how Abraham addressed God. “Shall not the **Judge of all the earth** do right?” (Gen. 18:25). God will *always* do that which is right. Because God is a God of love, truth and righteousness, He spared Lot and his daughters from the judgment He reigned down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, which consumed them in fire and brimstone. There was yet one further judgment executed—against Lot’s wife. The angel that delivered Lot and his family gave an explicit warning that no one was to look back as they were leaving Sodom. But Lot’s wife looked back—and was thus judged and turned into a pillar of salt.

We have clearly seen that **God is the Judge**—of individuals as well as nations—and that His judgments are always an expression of His perfect, righteous laws and His holy commandments. God always judges lovingly, in truth and holiness. Next, we will see that God expects His people to learn to make *righteous* judgments, decisions and choices.

## Created to Make Personal Choices— a Matter of Life and Death

The reality is, life involves choices—and our daily lives are filled with discernment, decisions and judgments. In fact, we could not function without exercising judgment. We must choose or decide (and a choice or decision is really a judgment) when to get up, when to go to work, what clothes to wear, what food to buy and eat, what we read, what we view on television. We have to make decisions, or *judgments*, as to where we will live, who we will marry, who we will have as friends. We have to make many financial judgments that involve buying or renting a home, purchasing furnishings for the home, buying a car, paying our bills. And of great importance in financial matters, we are to determine our increase and render to God the things that belong to God—and the things of Caesar that belong to Caesar.

In matters dealing with our family, we are always making judgments in our husband/wife relationship—and in rearing children, we are always confronted with decisions and judgments (especially when settling disputes between children).

When it comes to our relationship with God, we must *choose* to love God—which is a decision or judgment—with all the heart, all the soul, all the mind and all of our strength. We must *choose* to pray, and when to pray and what to pray. We must *choose* to study, as well as what to study and how to study. We must prove all things—which, again, is a decision or judgment—and hold fast that which is good.

In the final analysis, God created our minds for the very purpose of choosing—for making decisions and judgments. That is the very essence of life and death—of why God has given us free moral agency! Our choices and judgments are our *own*, and will demonstrate our willingness to love and obey God.

God has given us free moral agency—He has set before us life or death—and *compels* us to choose! The spiritual Word of God is *living*, and we will live or die by our choices. Notice what God commanded Israel. ‘Behold, I have set before you this day LIFE AND GOOD, AND DEATH AND EVIL, in that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, and His statutes and His

## 16) The All-Important Element of Mercy in Judgment

Judgment and mercy go hand-in-hand—and mercy should always play a part in any judgment rendered. Mercy, of course, requires evidence of a right attitude and real repentance. And while mercy may soften judgment, mercy never negates judgment.

After giving instructions on settling disputes in Matthew 18:15-20, Peter asked Jesus about forgiving the one who had caused the offence. “Then Peter came to Him *and* said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you until seven times, but until seventy times seven’ “(verses 21-22).

Why did Jesus express it that way? Because—for the one who has caused offence—a *lack* of mercy can destroy the heart and quench the desire to change. The misuse of mercy can defeat the purpose of judgment—by encouraging license to do evil on the one hand, or by causing rigid oppression on the other. God’s mercy endures forever. Remember, however, that even at the edge of the Lake of Fire, the wicked will weep and gnash their teeth and plead for mercy—but God’s judgment will stand.

The account of David and his sin with Bathsheba is often used to show how merciful God is towards sinners. This is true—and God *was* merciful to David after he repented. But God’s mercy was only *one aspect* of His judgment in this incident—for David still paid a heavy price for his sin. Let’s look at the account and see how judgment *with* mercy was applied by God.

“And Nathan said to David, ‘You *are* the man [who is guilty]! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if that *was* too little, I would have given to you such and such *things* besides. Why have you despised the word of the LORD to do evil in His sight? You have stricken Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to *be* your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore, the SWORD SHALL NEVER DEPART FROM YOUR HOUSE because you have despised Me.’ ... Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives



will need to be resolved as well. Never do what is expedient, just because of the pressure of the moment. A wise man once said, “On important matters and decisions—SLEEP ON IT!” This is very good advice and will help you think through the long-term effects of any decision. The Scriptures say, “Where *there is no vision, the people perish*” (Prov. 29:18). So it is with judgment. There must be vision to see the long-term effects—or the people perish.

#### **14) Always Make Your Decisions and Judgments Specific and Clear**

Ambiguity and uncertainty cause confusion. Whenever a decision or judgment is made, make sure it is *specific* and *clear* so that everything is completely understood. This is why God has given us the Ten Commandments and not the “Ten Suggestions.” He wants us to clearly know and understand His will.

#### **15) The Element of Timing in a Judgment**

The timing for implementing a judgment is very important—and can impact its overall effect. Waiting too long in making a judgment, for example, can be very hard on the individuals involved. This is especially true when dealing with difficult problems. In fact, people have been known to suffer from various health problems, emotional breakdowns or attitudes of total discouragement—all because judgments were too slow in being rendered.

God’s word says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick ... but there is *that* which is destroyed for lack of judgment [or slowness in coming to a judgment]” (Prov. 13:12, 23).

It takes wisdom and discernment to know when a decision should be implemented. Procrastination, however, almost always causes frustration—and everyone gets nervous while waiting for something to happen. Conversely, hastily made judgments also cause grief and harm. A proper sense of timing is crucial.

“A wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment.... Because to every purpose there is time and judgment...” (Eccl. 8:5-6). Correct timing is a key element in the implementation of any decision or judgment.

judgments so that you may live and multiply. And the LORD your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it” (Deut. 30:15-16).

For the children of Israel, God’s long-term blessings in the land depended upon their continuing to choose to love God and His ways. For us today, however, the outcome is far greater than physical blessings. We are to inherit the kingdom of God for all eternity, not just the physical land of Israel. God wants us to **choose life and His ways** through Jesus Christ. If we *judge* God’s way to be the way to eternal life and good, and choose to love God, then He will bless us with His love and grace now—and ultimately we will inherit eternal life and the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, if we choose to turn away from God and reject His way, and *judge* our own ways as better, then God will bring upon us evil and death—that is, His *judgment*! “But if your heart turn away so that you will not hear but shall be drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I denounce to you this day that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong *your* days on the land where you pass over Jordan to go to possess it” (verses 17-18).

#### **Heaven and Earth Are God’s Witnesses**

The choices that God has set before us are so profound and compelling that He made heaven and earth His “witnesses.” God said, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life*, that both you and your seed may live, that you may love the LORD your God, *and may obey His voice, and may cleave to Him; for He is your life and the length of your days, so that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob—to give it to them*” (Deut. 30:19-20).

Again, the spiritual inheritance of eternal life is so much more important! Jesus said that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be in the kingdom of God. In contrast, those who made the *decision—judgment—not to love and obey God* would not be in the kingdom of God. Jesus made that very clear. “And He shall say, ‘I tell you, I do not know you *or* where you are from. Depart from Me, all *you* workers of unrighteousness.’ There shall be

weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see **Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves are cast out**" (Luke 13:27-27).

God has set these choices before us—life and good, or death and evil. We must choose! We must make decisions and judgments—upon which depend our very eternal lives. God, in turn, judges us by our own choices. The apostle Peter confirms this: "For the time *has come for* judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it first *begins* with us, what *will be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous are saved with much difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and *the sinner*?" (I Pet. 4:17-18).

The apostle Paul wrote of God's judgment upon those who *reject* Him, as well as upon those who *seek* Him. "[Do] you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and long suffering, not knowing that the graciousness of God leads you to repentance? But you, according to your own hardness and unrepentant heart, are storing up wrath for yourself against *the day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment*, Who will render to each one according to his own works: On the one hand, to those who with patient endurance in good works are seeking glory and honor and immortality—eternal life.

"On the other hand, to those who are contentious and who disobey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish—upon every soul of man who works out evil, both of *the Jew* first, and of *the Greek*; but glory and honor and peace to everyone who works good, both to *the Jew* first, and to *the Greek*, because there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned within *the law* shall be judged by *the law*, (because the hearers of the law *are* not just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified)" (Rom. 2:4-13).

All are subject to God's righteous judgment. And, indeed, our individual choices are a matter of eternal *life—or* eternal *death*.

### 11) Educate Yourself on God's Laws, Statues and Judgments

In order to render judgments based on God's laws, you must thoroughly know God's laws, statues and judgments. This takes continual study. "Diligently *study* to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who does not *need to be* ashamed, **RIGHTLY** dividing the Word of the truth" (II Tim. 2:15). This takes time, effort and being yielded to God.

We need to follow God's admonition to Joshua when he was about to lead the children of Israel into the promised land. God commanded him and said, "Only be strong and very courageous so that you may observe to do according to all the law which My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night, so that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it, for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success" (Joshua 1:7-8).

This is the attitude necessary to develop righteous judgment—a quality of mind that is based on truth and righteousness. It is a gift from God that can only come by the continual, deep, prayerful study of God's word—Old Testament and New Testament alike. To learn to exercise righteous judgment, educate yourself on God's laws, statues and judgments—and fill your mind with the words of Jesus Christ.

### 12) In Difficult Cases, Seek Counsel

"In the multitude of wise counselors *there is safety*" (Prov. 11:14). "Without counsel purposes are frustrated, but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (Prov. 15:22). With proper counsel, you can be assured that you have God's perspective on a difficult case.

### 13) Think of the Long Term Effects

When making a decision or judgment, think of the effects over the long term. Consider the end. Make sure the decision or judgment will not cause more problems in the long run, which

along with the majority if they are wrong. “You shall not follow a multitude [the majority] to do evil. ... Neither shall you be partial to a poor man in his cause [just because he is poor or downtrodden]” (Ex. 23:2-3). “You shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty,” and “there is no respect of persons with God” (Lev. 19:15 and Rom. 2:11).

Remember, this is the Church of God—not the church of any man. Not showing partiality is essential when considering men for ordination as deacons or elders. Whenever we allow favoritism to influence us to any degree, we begin to play politics and look to men—and thus begin to fail in looking to God. As we have all too often seen, the Church of God then becomes a church of men. Ultimately, if we reject God by showing partiality and playing politics, then we will be rejected *by* God.

#### **9) Never Accept a Gift**

No one, especially a minister, should ever accept anything that could be considered a gift or a service from anyone who could possibly sway your judgment. Never allow yourself to get into a position where you become *obligated* to any man or woman in any way personally. This could come in the form of loans, gifts, food, clothing, meals, work or services. “And you shall take no bribe, for the bribe blinds the wise and perverts the words of the righteous” (Ex. 23:8). Notice that the taking of gifts does not blind the eyes of the foolish, but the eyes of the wise—and perverts the words of the righteous, not the unrighteous. Each baptized member, deacon, overseer and minister is personally responsible before God to uphold the integrity and confidence of His Church.

#### **10) Always be Totally Fair and Impartial**

Many of the previous points cover different aspects of being totally *fair* and *impartial*. If all of the preceding nine points are carried out correctly, your judgment will be totally fair and impartial. This point, however, is mentioned as a separate category for *emphasis* and thoroughness in the overall concept of judging righteous judgment.

### **To Judge, or Not to Judge?**

Many churches teach that Christians are not to make judgments. Often, certain Scriptures are quoted in an attempt to prove their point—Matthew 7:1 being one of the most used: “Judge not, lest you be judged” (or, better rendered, “Do not condemn *others*, so that you yourself will not be condemned”). This teaching is then extended to mean that we are not to judge anyone or anything. But are Christians really to be *without* discernment and judgment? If such is the case, how can we *discern* and choose between right and wrong, good and evil, righteousness and sin, or life and death? As we will see, there are times when we *should* make judgments, and there are times when we *should not* make judgments.

**When Not to Judge.** The Scriptures make it clear that we are *not* to make judgments when an issue is none of our business, or is not within the realm of our authority. If we judge out of place, we too often become judgmental, critical and condemning. More often than not, we judge the *heart* of the one in question without knowing the circumstances and facts. Such judging and condemning is but opinionated self-righteousness—because those who do so actually believe that they know the thoughts of the one they are judging and condemning. But *only God* truly knows the thoughts of a person. Therefore, when we judge another person’s heart, we are sitting in the seat of God and taking a prerogative that alone belongs to Him. Remember, only God knows the heart and understands the innermost thoughts.

This is why the apostle Paul wrote that in such circumstances we are *not* to judge one another. This is especially true if it is a matter of personal conscience based on the Word of God. In the church at Rome, for example, vegetarians were at odds with meat eaters, and drinkers of wine were at odds with non-drinkers. Each party was judging and condemning the other. Notice what Paul wrote: “Now then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Because it is written, “‘For as I live,’ says *the* Lord, ‘every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’” So then, each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore, we should no longer judge one another, but judge this instead: Do not put an

occasion of stumbling or a cause of offense before your brother” (Rom. 14:10-13).

Paul makes it clear that in these *personal* matters of conscience before God, the brother or sister involved is judged by God and *not by* other men—including those of the local congregation. It is foolish to cause strife and contention over lesser, physical matters. Too often, people who judge and criticize others mistakenly consider such personal choices to be equal to serious doctrinal matters. (It’s as if they are trying to kill a fly with a 105mm Howitzer canon. When they finally kill the fly, they’ve blown up the house and everyone else as well.)

Because they never seem to get the point, some continue on with their self-righteous judgmental attitudes—destroying lives and congregations. This was exactly the case in the congregation in Rome. Typically, the person who has chosen (as a matter of conscience) to eat or not to eat, or to drink or not to drink, is not the one who has the *real* problem. Rather, it is the one causing the strife and contention. This kind of hypercritical, judgmental, opinionated, self-righteous attitude can destroy lives. But God wants us to edify and “build up” each other—not tear down and destroy each other. The one who is opinionated and condemning sows the seeds of discord among the brethren, which God says He hates (Prov. 6: 19).

Notice what Paul wrote about these matters of personal conscience: “But if, because of meat [food], your brother is offended, you are no longer walking according to love. With your meat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let your good be evil spoken of. **For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking; rather, it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**, because the one who serves Christ in these things *is* well pleasing to God and acceptable among men. **So then, we should pursue the things of peace and the things that edify one another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of meat [food]”** (Rom. 14:15-20).

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, “Do not condemn *others*, so that you yourself will not be condemned; for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured again to you. Now why do you look at the sliver that *is* in your brother’s eye, but you do not perceive the beam in your *own* eye? Or how will

judgment” (John 7:24). We can all be happy that Christ will always look at the heart and the intent—and always judge righteous judgment.

The apostle Paul was inspired to write, “Are you looking at things according to their appearance?” (II Cor. 10:7). Outward appearances and circumstances are important in coming to a decision, but we should always look *deeper*. For example, losing one’s temper could simply be a bad habit, or it could be caused by a long-standing frustration. To counsel a person on how to overcome a “bad temper” would not be entirely adequate—since the problem of a deep-seated frustration is what really needs to be addressed. When you go beyond circumstances and the outward appearance, you can not only avoid giving superficial advice, but you will be able to get to the heart of the problem and judge righteous judgment.

### **7) Discern the Attitudes and Motives of Those Involved**

This comes with experience in dealing with people. It is true that “the heart is deceitful above all things.” Therefore, when people come for advice, it may well be possible that some do not even understand their own attitude. This quality of discernment comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:10), so that the brethren of God’s Church can be properly served and helped.

It is especially critical to sense and understand the *attitude* or *spirit* of those who might come with information about the sins and faults of others. Of course, the one bearing such alleged sins and faults should *not* be received—but be advised to go to the person alone and settle the matter. In many instances such a person could be a self-righteous talebearer trying to stir up trouble. This is why Jesus Christ gave us the vital instructions of Matthew 18.

### **8) Never be a “Respecter of Persons”**

It does not matter who the person is, what his position is, how much money he makes, or who his relatives are—*never* show partiality. Whether you like or dislike a person also has absolutely no bearing on any judgment. Do not show favoritism to a minority just because they are in the minority—and do not go

asking the hard questions, you might never get the information needed for a proper judgment or decision.

**4) Always be Open Minded and Hear All Aspects of a Situation**

This is closely tied to “getting all the facts,” and is just as essential. You must always listen to all aspects of the situation with an *open mind*. This is the only way you can ever be fair and just in your decisions and judgments. Remember, people will always be inclined to put themselves in the best light possible. Thus, the two “sides of the story” will seldom agree—but, by listening to *both* sides and sifting through all the chaff, you will be able to come to the truth of the matter. Then you will be able to make a right and proper decision or judgment. Never make a one-sided decision, and do not assume that the one who comes *first* is necessarily right in the matter. You must always be open-minded and listen to both sides. “The one who is first in his own cause *seems* just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out” (Prov. 18:17). If you make a decision or judgment based on only one side of the story, eventually you will hear from the other party. Then it will be discovered that your decision was unjust.

**5) Never Render a Judgment Without Hearing the Entire Matter**

Similar to the two previous points, this means, “don’t jump the gun”—but take the time to hear the whole story. “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it *is* folly and shame to him” (Prov. 18:13). “*He who is* hasty of spirit exalts folly” (Prov. 14:29). Answering a matter before you hear it fully is the *impulse* that wells up inside your mind, urging you to make a decision or judgment right *now*. But wait—hear every matter in its entirety.

**6) Never Look Only at Circumstances and Outward Appearance**

Being human, it is all too easy to render a judgment based only on appearance and circumstances. However, Jesus Christ said, “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous

you say to your brother, ‘Allow *me* to remove the sliver from your eye’; and behold, the beam *is* in your *own* eye? *You* hypocrite, first cast out the beam from your *own* eye, and then you shall see clearly to remove the sliver from your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:1-5). These verses are quite clear in their *instruction*—*never* be judgmental or condemning.

When anyone is judgmental, they are actually attempting to judge the heart and motives of another—but only God can truly know a person’s heart and motives. It is a complete misapplication of the Word of God for anyone to assume to render personal, hypocritical, condemning judgment of another (which, in reality, is done only to exalt the self). This kind of “judging” usually comes in the form of gossip, because the one doing the judging would not dare bring it face-to-face to the accused.

In Romans 2, Paul leaves no doubt that God will judge those who condemn and criticize others in order to exalt themselves. This is especially true if the one who is judging another is committing the same sins. “Therefore you are without excuse, O man, everyone who judges *another*; for in that in which you judge the other, you are condemning your own self; for you who judge *another* are doing the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth upon those who commit such things. Now do you think yourself, O man, whoever is judging those who commit such things, and you are practicing them *yourself*; that you shall escape the judgment of God?” (Rom. 2:1-3). No! God is a righteous Judge and will render to everyone according to his or her works!

The apostle James also wrote about the self-righteous condemnation of others. “Brethren, do not talk against one another. The one who talks against a brother, and judges his brother, is speaking against *the* law, and is judging the law. But if you judge *the* law, you are not a doer of *the* law; rather, *you are* a judge. *But* there is *only* one Lawgiver, Who has power to save and to destroy. Who are you that you presume to judge another?” (James 4:11-12).

James makes it absolutely clear that when anyone takes this kind of stance and attitude toward another, he or she is actually judging God. This was Job’s sin. He was critical and judgmental of everyone else—even judging and condemning God

in order to maintain his own self-righteousness. “And the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, ‘Gird up your loins like a man. I will demand you, and you [in answer will] declare unto Me. **Will you even annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me so that you may be righteous?’” (Job 40:6-8).**

Job had an ideological mask, which was his own self-deception. He actually believed that he was more righteous than anyone else—so righteous, in fact, that even God could not find fault with him. By judging and condemning others, as well as God, Job made himself the center of the universe and exalted himself to the highest heavens. This is why God had to personally confront Job. “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, ‘Who *is* this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man; for I will demand of you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare it, if you have understanding! Who has determined its measurements, if you know? Or who has stretched the line upon it? On what are the foundations fastened to? Or who laid its cornerstone,... Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set up their dominion on the earth? Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that floods of waters may cover you? Can you send lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, ‘Here we *are*?’ Who has put wisdom in the inward parts? Or who has given understanding to the mind?’” (Job 38:1-6, 33-36).

God continued talking with Job, “Deck yourself now with majesty and excellency, and array yourself with glory and beauty [the spiritual glory and beauty which God has]. Cast abroad the rage of your wrath; and behold everyone that is proud, and abase him. Look on everyone *who is* proud, *and* bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together; *and* bind their faces in darkness. Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you” (Job 40:10-14).

Before Job could see himself clearly, God had to remove the giant beam out of Job’s eye. Once that was done, Job saw himself clearly and repented. Notice: “And Job answered the LORD and said, ‘I know that You can do all things, and *that* no thought can be withheld from You. *You asked*, ‘Who *is* he [referring to himself] who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore have I spoken that which I did not understand; *things*

Hand-in-hand with knowing yourself is getting sin out of your life. Since the ability to make sound judgments depends directly on the your level of righteousness, you need to constantly be on guard against sin—and actively be putting sin out of your life through the grace and love of God by the blood of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to live in sin and make righteous judgments. Notice this proverb: “A divine sentence *is* in the lips of the king; his mouth should not transgress in judgment.... *It is* an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for the throne *is* established by righteousness” (Prov. 16:10, 12).

God shows that in order to help others, we must get sin out of our lives. “For with what judgment you mete out, it shall be measured judged; and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured again to you. Now why do you look at the sliver that *is* in your brother’s eye, but you do not perceive the beam in your *own* eye? Or how will you say to your brother, ‘Allow *me* to remove the sliver from your eye’; and behold, the beam *is* in your *own* eye? *You* hypocrite, first cast out the beam from your *own* eye, and then you shall see clearly to remove the sliver from your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:2-5). Know your strengths and weakness, and get sin out of your life—and thus grow in your ability to make righteous judgments.

### **3) In Every Case, Hear ALL the Facts**

This is one of the most vital requirements in coming to a decision or judgment. Without all the facts, it is impossible to come to a righteous decision. In some cases, it takes a lot of hard work to be complete and thorough and to get all the facts. This is especially necessary when determining doctrinal matters, or trying to understand problems in a divorce and remarriage situation. Make sure no critical facts are missing, dismissed or overlooked. One missing fact can entirely change a judgment or decision. When getting all the facts, check them out carefully to make sure they are true. This will require deep and serious questioning on the part of the one making the decision or judgment. If necessary, you may need to ask the “un-askable” questions, but do so tactfully and thoughtfully. Pierce through to the heart of the matter and get *all* the facts. Never consider any question too embarrassing or too personal—because if you avoid

LORD than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3). “A king who sits in the THRONE OF JUDGMENT scatters away all evil with his eyes” (Prov. 20:8). “*It is JOY to the righteous to do justice*” (Prov. 21:15).

Justice and judgment bring great joy and peace of mind to the brethren of God’s Church. Righteous judgment rids the Church of sin and unrighteousness—so that confidence, peace and unity are strengthened. Therefore, it becomes *imperative* for each of us to learn how to develop, maintain and exercise proper judgment—regardless of our status in the Church. Below are some of the *qualities* needed in order to exercise righteous judgment.

**1) Remember, the Judgment is God’s—Not Yours**

“Take heed what you do, for you do not judge for man, but for the LORD ...” (II Chron. 19:6). Every decision and judgment must be based on God’s law and the principles found in the Bible. This is the absolute foundation of righteous judgment.

**2) Know Yourself—and Get Sin Out of Your Life**

Before you can fairly and objectively judge others, you must be able to accurately and realistically judge *yourself before* God. Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses is a matter of spiritual maturity—and honesty on your part. “Now if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged [by God]” (I Cor. 11:31).

You must *know yourself* so you can avoid (as much as possible) the mistake of “reading yourself” into any judgment. If you have certain weaknesses, you must take steps to be certain that your weaknesses do not cause you to render a poor decision or judgment. For example, if you tend to be somewhat dominating, you must be careful to avoid forcing your personal will into a decision. Remember that God is molding those He has called into the image of Jesus Christ, not in the image of any other human being. Whatever judgments need to be made, they must be made in harmony with God’s plan and purpose—to help each Christian become conformed to the character of God and the image of Jesus Christ.

too wonderful for me, yea, which I did not know [because his eyes were blinded because of the beam of self-righteousness]. Hear, I beseech You, and I will speak; *You said*, ‘I will ask of you, and you will declare to Me,’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; **BUT NOW MY EYE SEES YOU**. Therefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes’” (Job 42:1-6).

Job had to learn that it was the height of vanity and self-righteousness to judge God and condemn others—all in order to exalt himself. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “Do not condemn *others*, so that you yourself will not be condemned; for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured again to you” (Matt. 7:1-2).

Now that we have seen when *not* to judge, we need to understand that there are times when we *are* to judge. In fact, if we do not *practice* righteous judgment as a way of life, then we will be held accountable for our *lack* of judgment.

**When Are You to Judge?**

There is a time and a right way to judge. In fact, if you read Matthew 7:1-5 carefully, you will see that Jesus also gave instructions for making a *right* judgment. He said, “[First] cast out the beam from your *own* eye, and then you shall see clearly to remove the sliver from your brother’s eye” (verse 5). We are to get the beam out of our own eye *first*. Only then we can make a *right* judgment and help another with his or her problem—without being hypocritical or judgmental. Jesus wants us to learn to make righteous judgments. But we can only do so if we judge ourselves first, and get rid of any judgmental, self-righteous, condemning attitudes.

The apostle Paul understood this very clearly. He shows how Jesus’ instructions were to be carried out when exercising godly judgment in helping others. ‘Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in some offense, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted’ (Gal. 6:1).

Jesus Christ said, “Judge not according to appearance, but **judge righteous judgment**” (John 7:24). The biggest mistake people make is that they only go by the outward appearance,

which is superficial at best. This is why the Scriptures give us specific instructions on how to resolve problems—in other words, to **judge righteous judgment**.

**First, pray about it:** If there is a problem between you and another brother or sister in Christ, you are to first pray about it. Perhaps you perceive that the other person is involved in a sin. The apostle John wrote, “And this is the confidence that we have toward Him: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we may ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him. If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *that is* not unto death, he shall ask, and He will give him life for those who do not sin unto death” (1 John 5:14-16).

In praying for the other person, we need to ask God to help him or her to see the problem, or sin, and for the person to personally repent and make the correction. This way, with God’s help, the individual makes the right judgment and the problem is solved without you (or anyone else) getting involved. This process may take some time, because God will work patiently with the individual to lead him or her to repentance. This should always be done first. But if it becomes evident that the problem is not being resolved (and perhaps may be getting worse), then Christ instructs us to go, alone, to the individual.

**Second, go to the person privately:** If after a period of time the situation persists, then you have the responsibility to go to your brother or sister in private and discuss the matter. But first, “cast the beam out of your own eye” and consider your own weaknesses and faults so that the problem may be resolved in the spirit of *love* and in the bond of *peace*. Jesus said, “So then, if your brother sins against you, **go and show him his fault between you and him alone**. If he is willing to hear you, you have gained your brother” (Matt. 18:15). God expects us to resolve problems, if possible, on a one-to-one basis—in an attitude of love and humility. This is how love *covers* a multitude of sins, so that the matter is not spread any further. But if the problem cannot be resolved on this one-to-one level, then Christ gave these further instructions.

**Third, take one or two others to help resolve the problem:** “But if he will not listen, take with you one or two others, so that in *the* mouth of two or three witnesses every word

Without realizing and understanding this tendency, one could come across as oppressive. “A ruler lacking understanding is also a GREAT OPPRESSOR ...” (Prov. 28:16). Coloring every decision with our own ideas only serves the *self*, not others.

## 12) Applying an Over-Generalized Solution

Great “pronouncements” and “lofty solutions” tend to only skim the surface of a problem. And while an overall “general solution” *can* apply in some cases, judgments with specific solutions are usually needed.

One may give a sweeping generalization such as, “You need to overcome.” But such a statement does not tell the person *what* to overcome, *how* to overcome or *why* to overcome. Similarly, advice such as, “You need to pray more” or “You need to study more” are too general to be helpful (although such advice may be true). Such over-generalized “solutions”—lacking in specific direction and detail—are virtually useless. Rather, solutions should be given that are tailored to the individual’s actual needs.

These twelve common pitfalls and human errors clearly demonstrate how easily one can be *hindered* in “judging righteous judgment.” Now we need to look at the positive side—of *how* we are to exercise righteous judgment.

## Seventeen Keys to Righteous Judgment

To render a fair, righteous, and loving judgment is one of the most *pleasing* things to God that we, as Christians, can do. It is, in fact, the essence—the heart and core—of *how* we are learning to become kings and priests under Christ in the coming Kingdom of God. As members of God’s Church, we must *now* be diligently learning how to exercise righteous judgment—in all areas of our personal lives and in our dealings with others.

Righteous, godly judgment edifies and builds up the Church. It establishes and sustains the Church, providing stability and strength in times of trouble. Many proverbs demonstrate the importance of righteous judgment. For example: “The king establishes the land by justice” (Prov. 29:4). “To do RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE is more PLEASING to the



### 10) Doing What is Expedient

At times, the pressures for an “immediate” resolution to a situation seem so great that we fail to consider the long-term consequences. Instead of really solving the problem, an *expedient* judgment only tends to contribute to a more long-term (and in some case, a more serious) problem. For example, it might be expedient at the moment to demand that people have “good attitudes” and “love each other.” However, if deep-rooted and long-entrenched problems are not resolved, then nothing is really accomplished. Such expediency only serves to further compound the situation.

It might be *expedient* to make a public example of someone’s sins. Ministers have been known to do this from the pulpit—all will “hear and fear.” But the message in the long run is, “Don’t ever go to *that* minister with any problem, because you will get blasted from the pulpit.” The long-term consequence is that such a congregation will be full of fear, error and sin.

Again, Proverbs says, “Do you see a man hasty in his words? *There is more hope for a fool than for him*” (Prov. 29:20). Doing what is *expedient* in order to relieve the immediate pressure to make a decision—when the long-term consequences have not been fully considered—can be quite foolish and even dangerous.

### 11) Getting One’s Personal Vanity Involved

Vanity is an extension of the self—and involves coloring everything (and everyone) with our own ideas and personal points of view. In our own human “self-centeredness,” we tend to picture ourselves as ideal and desirable—and have a strong tendency to want “remake” others in our own image. When dealing with others, we ‘too often make decisions and judgments that reflect the self—involving our own personal likes and dislikes, etc. Rather, our judgments should *help* others to mold their character after the image of God and Christ. Remember: “Every man at his best state is altogether vanity .... Surely every man walks about in a vain show” (Psa. 39:5-6). Vanity is elusive, because “all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes ...” (Prov. 16:2).

may be established” (Matt. 18:16). If it reaches this level, the problem is obviously more serious. However, with the proper attitude of love and humility, ninety-nine percent of all problems can still be resolved at this level—if we *practice righteous judgment*. This is the responsibility of the brethren among themselves. It is not the responsibility of the ministry to arbitrate such disputes. God expects each of us to personally exercise righteous judgment and resolve our own personal problems. But sometimes the problems are so great that the first three steps do not work—in which case Christ gives us the final step.

**Fourth, take it to the church:** “And if he fails to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17). This does *not* mean that the problem should be taken to the ministry—but that the matter is to be taken before the local congregation, in a special meeting, where the entire congregation is involved in making any needed decisions. The minister is involved—and he would undoubtedly moderate such a meeting—but the *congregation is* to judge the matter, not the minister. They are to judge *righteous* judgment. If the problem is not resolved, the congregation also has the responsibility of disfellowshipping the person. “But if he also fails to listen to the church, let him be to you as the heathen and the tax collector” (verse 17).

The decision is bound in heaven: The entire procedure that Jesus gave in Matthew 18:15-17 is of vital importance—so much so that Christ added that whatever is agreed to is thus bound in heaven (or loosed in heaven depending on the decision). This includes the face-to-face meeting of the two individuals, or the bringing in of two or three witnesses, or the congregational decision. Notice: “Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on the earth will have already been bound in heaven; and whatever you shall loose on the earth will have already been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you on earth shall agree concerning any matter that they wish to request, it shall be done for them by My Father, Who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:18-19).

This is exactly what the apostle Paul instructed the congregation in Corinth to carry out in regard to the man who was committing incest with his stepmother. He was very emphatic in his instructions: “*It is commonly reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—allowing one to have his own father’s wife.*”

You are puffed up and did not grieve instead, so that he who did this deed might be taken out of your midst. For I indeed, being absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged *concerning* him who has so *shamelessly* committed this *evil deed* as if I were present: In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, WHEN YOU ARE GATHERED TOGETHER, and my spirit, together with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

### **The Saints Are to Judge Righteous Judgment**

One of the great failings of the church in Corinth was their *lack* of godly judgment, and Paul lamented about this weakness because it caused so many problems. For example, brethren were taking each other before the legal system of the world—because the congregation had not learned to exercise righteous judgment in such matters. Paul strongly corrected them: “Does anyone among you who has a matter against another dare to go to a *court of law* before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Don’t you know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you unworthy of the most trivial of judgments?”

“Don’t you know that we shall judge angels? *How much more* then *the things* of this life? So then, if you have judgments *concerning the things* of this life, *why* do you appoint *as judges* those who have no standing in the church? Now I say *this* to your shame. *Is it* because there is not a wise *man* among you, not even one, who is able to decide between his brothers? Instead, brother goes to a *court of law* with brother, and this before unbelievers. Now therefore, there is altogether an utter fault among you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? Instead, you are doing wrong and defrauding, and you are doing these things to *your brethren*” (1 Cor. 6: 1-8).

### **When Christ Returns, He Will Give Judgment to the Saints**

Paul makes it clear that Christians are to learn to judge *righteous* judgment. We are to judge as instructed by Christ. But

### **8) Looking at Outward Circumstances and Physical Appearance**

It is often said that *first* impressions are the most lasting ones. First impressions, however, are usually *wrong*—because it is very easy to misjudge someone based on appearance. Whole TV programs—such as “Perry Mason” and “Matlock”—are based on this factor, where evidence is presented that *appears* to almost completely incriminate one party. The truth, however, always turns out very different than outward circumstances would indicate.

When you first meet someone, he or she might have a furrowed, worried look on his or her face. One could jump to the conclusion that the person was in a bad attitude or was in disagreement with what was being said. This might not be the case. The individual might be in pain—or simply in deep thought, drinking in every word that is said. Later, at another time, their countenance might be entirely different. Thus, if we look on the outward appearance, we are more likely than not to make a wrong judgment. This is why Christ said, “Judge not according to appearance” (John 7:24).

### **9) Not Knowing the Intentions of the Parties Involved**

Sometimes a person will come seeking counsel or a judgment on a particular matter, and give a “reason” that is not the *real* reason at all. Sometimes this is done to gain personal favor over someone else, as is often the case with husband and wife problems. Usually, the hidden motive is to exalt the *self* by putting another person down—to make oneself appear in a better light by focusing on someone else’s problems. Sometimes this is done in an attempt to gain greater leverage over a spouse—or to exalt oneself over others in the Church, etc.

In Acts 5, we see an example of “ulterior motives.” The outward intentions of Ananias and Sapphira were ostensibly to give money to the Church—to appear to be doing good. In reality, however, they were attempting to *hide* their sin—for they had been stealing from the very money they had promised to give.

**C) Excusing the minority.** It is all too easy to help the underdog, just because he is down and out—often while overlooking the fact that there are *reasons* for his or her condition. A faulty judgment that excuses the minority—at the expense of truly dealing with the problem—only serves to perpetuate the problem. In the United States, excusing the minority is often expressed by showing sympathy to the criminal—by being overly concerned for his rights and welfare—while at the same time totally neglecting the rights of the law-abiding citizen. The Word of God instructs us, “*It is not good to favor the person of the wicked, nor to overthrow the righteous in judgment*” (Prov. 18:5). “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the just, even both of them are an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 17:15).

**6) Allowing Gifts to Blind the Eyes**

Bribery and the taking of gifts *blind* the eyes and pervert justice. “And you shall take no bribe, for the bribe blinds the wise and perverts the words of the righteous” (Ex. 23:8). “A wicked *man* takes a bribe out of the bosom to pervert the ways of justice” (Prov. 17:23). “And a bribe corrupts the mind” (Eccl. 7:7). The sons of Samuel took bribes and gifts, perverting judgment. Their actions caused the people of Israel to reject the system of judges and to demand a king—which further removed them from God. Today, it is quite common to hear that a person in authority—a judge, policeman or minister—has taken gifts or money to make a certain decision.

Accepting gifts or presents from *certain people* can also become a form of “taking bribes” if it sets the stage for future favoritism. Complacency and contemptuousness can set in—and the one giving the gifts can always “call in the favor,” attempting to sway judgment.

**7) Rendering a Judgment Before Really Hearing the Matter**

Similar to points one and two above, this is the case of the “know-it-all.” Proverbs expresses it this way: “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (Prov. 18:13). Even the naive would quickly notice this attitude and decline to come to such a person for judgment.

more importantly, Paul makes it clear that the saints will judge the world, as well as judge angels. This is the very reason that we need to learn *now* how to exercise righteous judgment.

When Jesus Christ returns, He is going to judge the world—but He will give judgment *to* the saints. In fact, the apostles will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. “And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you who have followed Me: in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ ” (Matt. 19:28).

The apostle John wrote in Revelation 20 concerning the time of the Millennium when judgment is to be given to the saints. “And I saw thrones; and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given to them [this is when we will judge the world]; and *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and those who did not worship the beast, or his image, and did not receive the mark in their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years ... Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power. But they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4-6).

Isaiah prophesied of Christ’s reign as King of the world during the Millennium. “And it shall come to pass, in the last days the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. And He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He shall JUDGE among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:2-4).

Again, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ would establish His government *with* judgment. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase

of His government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and over His kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Isa. 9:6-7).

Jesus Christ is the righteous Judge! When He rules the world and the saints with Him, it will be with *righteous* judgment. Of Christ, Isaiah also wrote: “And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stump of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, and the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. And He shall not judge according to the sight of His eyes, nor after the hearing of His ears. But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth. And He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins” (Isa. 11:1-5).

These verses reveal the *spiritual qualities* of righteous judgment. Notice: “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, and the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.” These are the spiritual qualities we need to develop through the Holy Spirit of God—to have the very mind of Christ.

### How to Develop Righteous Judgment

To truly understand judgment, we must clearly understand the *term*. “Judgment”—as exercised according to the principles of God’s Word—may be thus defined: “A judgment is a decision or a conclusion based on the spiritual intent of God’s laws, statutes and judgments where the will of God may or may not be specifically stated.” When official judgments are required, the one who is making such judgments must be qualified—according to the standards God has set forth—to clarify, decide, and resolve a controversy.

Issuing a judgment can be a crucial matter, at times having far-reaching and lasting consequences. Christ said, “Judge righteous judgment.” Righteous, godly judgment is really the very

### 4) Failing to Get ALL of the Facts

Incomplete information can be very damaging. For example: What if a man who has had a “divorce and remarriage” situation in his own personal life was seen with a woman—wearing make-up and a sensuous, short skirt. She was seen going into his house, alone with him, staying all night. One could conclude, “He must be having an affair with the woman. He must be committing adultery.” On the surface, it looks like that *could* be the case. The facts given were true—BUT, were they *all* of the facts? The essential missing information is this: The woman was, in fact, his real wife—the one he is bound to in the sight of God. She came for a two-week visit, possibly considering reconciliation. This one fact completely changes the story. How many lives have been destroyed because judgment was rendered without *all* the facts?

Failing to “get all the facts” also includes *overlooking* certain facts, *minimizing* certain facts, or *over-emphasizing* other facts—and in general, failing to discern what is truth, and what is fiction.

### 5) Being a “Respecter of Persons”—Showing Partiality

“To have respect of persons in judgment is not good” (Prov. 24:23). Showing partiality falls into three categories:

**A) Liking or not liking the individual.** “Because he is my friend, I will overlook sin in his or her life and give him or her the benefit of doubt.” Favoritism is fatal to judgment. The other side of the coin is *not* liking the person—where the inclination is to be critical and condemning and overlook the person’s good points.

**B) Following the majority**—whether right or wrong. This is the whole basis of politics. However, the Bible shows that the *majority* is generally wrong. For example: Just because most people cheat, does not make cheating right; just because most people lie, does not make a “little” lie okay. Saul is a prime example of “following the majority”—when he listened to those who reasoned that it would be “a good thing” to spare the Amalekite’s cattle and sheep (I Sam. 15). In their eyes, *their* judgment was deemed better than God’s righteous judgment.

The Scriptures are quite clear on this matter. Proverbs 26:12 says, “Do you see a man wise in his own conceit? *There is more hope for a fool than him.*”

## **2) Being One-Sided—Unwilling to Listen to Every Aspect of a Situation**

Many times those who render judgments listen to only one *side* of a story—and then make up their mind. For whatever reason, they fail to hear the *other* side of the story. However, to be one-sided is a gross sin when trying to come to a godly decision or judgment. More than once it has been said (by those in authority) to the accused: “You cannot say anything to justify yourself, even if I am totally wrong—because what I have heard from others convinces me that I am totally right.” A proper judgment or evaluation of a situation can never be rendered when it is one-sided.

## **3) Believing that “He Who Comes First is Just”**

This is closely related to the first two points—and if the first two pitfalls and errors are present as well, the chances of exercising *poor* judgment are greatly increased. This pitfall is most common in churches with rigid, hierarchical government structures—where, if one can reach the minister or boss *first*, he or she will likely get his or her own way in a dispute. Such a situation often exists in families, between parents and children. As well, this principle is often violated in the media, where the one who gets to the media *first sounds* “right and just.”

This is particularly damaging when a “gossip” is taken into confidence and their word is listened to as the “gospel truth.” But notice: “The one who is first in his own cause *seems* just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out” (Prov. 18:17). Anyone coming with a cause will seem just because “every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes” (Prov. 21:2). The one who comes *first* will nearly always minimize his own faults and sins and maximize his own good points. Then he will over-emphasize the other person’s faults and sins, and tend to overlook his or her good points.

first extension of *love*. The Bible states, “God is love.” It also says, “God is Judge,” and that “all will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Righteous judgment can only be based on LOVE FOR GOD and LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR. It is impossible to have love without judgment—or to have judgment without love! This is the basic and absolute foundation for judging *righteous* judgment.

## ***The System of Judges Under the Old Covenant***

God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt because He loved them. “For you *are* an holy people to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a special people to Himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love upon you nor choose you because you were more in number than any people, for you *were* the fewest of all people:

“But because the LORD LOVED you and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you out of the house of bondage from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore, know that the LORD your God, He *is* God, the faithful God Who keeps covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations ... You shall therefore keep the commandments and the statutes and the judgments ... To keep and practice them, *then* the LORD your God shall keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you ...” (Deut. 7:6-13).

God’s calling of the children of Israel was of itself an act of love. In turn, He commanded that they love Him and obey His commandments and judgments. To insure the smooth and proper functioning of God’s government, God gave the children of Israel a system of judges. It was through this system of judges that God would govern and judge His people. This clearly shows how love and judgment go hand-in-hand.

## ***Basic Qualifications for a Judge***

The basic qualifications for judges were established at the

commencement of the system of judges under Moses: “And you shall choose out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness. And place them over the people to be leaders of thousands, and leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties and leaders of tens. And let them judge *for* the people at all times. And it shall be, every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they shall judge” (Ex. 18:21-22). Those who would judge had to be men of ability, loving God and the truth above everything and everyone else. Later—when God gave his laws, commandments, statutes and judgments—He commanded the people to obey Him and to abide by decisions “as the judges *determine*” (Ex. 21:22). The judges were to apply God’s laws, commandments, statutes and judgments as the very basis for their judgments.

Through Moses, God commanded the judges to “Hear *the causes* between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the stranger with him. You shall not respect persons in judgment. You shall hear the small as well as the great. You shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment *is* God’s ...” (Deut. 1:16-17).

In the New Testament, these same basic character requirements for judging are expanded and amplified for Church leaders and ministers (see I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9). This will be covered later, showing that the *character* of the individual is the key in making judgments.

### *How the System Worked*

The small matters were to be brought to the lower judges. If the matter could not be resolved, it would be brought to the higher judges. If a decision still could not be reached, the final judgment went into the hands of the leading judge and the priest. The instructions from God are as follows: “If a matter *is* too hard for you in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, *being* matters of strife within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God shall choose. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and ask. And they shall declare to you the sentence of judgment. And you shall do according to the sentence which they declare to you

sin multiplied among the people. In every case, the leader’s ability to make proper judgments was reduced in direct proportion to the degree of their sin—leading, eventually, to the loss of their kingdom.

It is exactly the same for us today—in our personal lives as well as in our churches and fellowship groups. Congregations can be established by righteous judgments, or destroyed because of improper judgments—which usually are the result of rejecting God’s word, personal sins, the allowance of sin in the congregation, or a lack of wisdom in general.

These situations need not exist. We must *learn* how to make righteous judgments—but first, we need to look at common pitfalls and errors in judgment.

## **Twelve Common Pitfalls and Errors in Judgment**

Those who have the responsibility of rendering judgments must always be aware of, and guard against, certain errors that could cloud their judgment. When any major, basic error occurs, righteous judgment becomes impossible. Instead, the judgment becomes a “man’s judgment” based on human reasoning—and not God’s judgment based on His Word. Here are several common pitfalls and human errors that sometimes affect judgment.

### **1) Being Opinionated and Having a Closed Mind**

This is so EASY to do, because everyone has opinions and his or her own way of looking at things. Anyone who refuses (or is unable) to set aside personal opinion, automatically begins to close the door to righteous judgment. This common pitfall of being “opinionated” is reflected in the following typical statements: “The Communists are the cause of all our troubles.” “I don’t care what the Bible says, I’m going to heaven.” “I know this person is always a troublemaker.” Or, “I won’t listen until you get rid of your bad attitude.” Perhaps the one who is charged with making judgments could go so far as to say, “I am always right because I am God’s minister or deacon, or head of house. If you don’t agree with me, you disagree with God.” Or, as so many have heard from ministers, “I’ll put you out of the Church!”

flame burns up the chaff; their root shall be like rottenness, and their blossom shall go up like dust because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore, the anger of the LORD is kindled against His people, and He has stretched out His hand [of correction] against them, and has stricken them ..." (verses 24-25).

Isaiah also shows that even in such a sinful condition, God is willing to save those who will turn to Him in repentance. "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is His ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have come between you and your God, and your sins have hid *His* face from you, that He will not hear, for your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness. **None calls for justice**, nor does anyone PLEAD FOR TRUTH; they trust in vanity and speak lies. They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity.... Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction *are* in their paths. They have not known the WAY OF PEACE, and *there* is no justice in their ways.... Therefore justice is far from us; nor does righteousness overtake us.... And justice is driven backward, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has fallen in the street, and uprightness cannot enter. Yea, truth fails; and he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey [for persecution, and is accounted mad]. And the LORD saw, and it was evil in His eyes that *there was NO JUSTICE*" (Isa. 59:1-15).

This passage describes the condition of many nations and peoples of the world today. Sadly, this condition also exists in too many Christian-professing churches. Still more tragic, such a depraved condition also exists in some of the churches of God.

We need to realize that there is an *absolute* law and living principle which is constantly in effect: "The king [leader or ruler] establishes the land by justice, but he who takes bribes tears it down" (Prov. 29:4). "A king [leader or ruler] who faithfully judges the poor, his throne shall be established forever" (verse 14).

These two proverbs largely summarize the reigns of all the kings and judges of Israel. Whenever a king or judge was righteous and executed righteous judgments, God blessed the king or the judge, as well as the land and the people. However, when the king or judge began to live in sin, they were cursed and

from that place which the LORD shall choose. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they tell you. According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach you and according to the judgment which they shall tell you, you shall do. You shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall show you, to the right hand or to the left. And the man that acts presumptuously and will not hearken to the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or to the judge, even that man shall die. And you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously" (Deut. 17:8-13).

The system under the Old Covenant was *dual*—*both* civil and religious. The civil part of the government included statutes and judgments with which to govern the people. Laws were also given to regulate the official worship of God—primarily revolving around the first four of the Ten Commandments. However, both the civil and the religious laws functioned hand-in-hand without contradiction—because they were all based on God's perfect spiritual laws.

In difficult matters of judgment, the High Priest held the final appeal to God. In such cases God would make His judgment known through the "breastplate of judgment" and the "casting of lots" (Ex. 28:15, 30; Num. 27:21). In Joshua, chapter 7, we find an account showing how God worked through the High Priest to make known His judgment concerning Achan.

God made the decisions of the judges absolute, binding the people to obey—which was essential for the smooth functioning of God's government in Israel. But whenever a breakdown in the system occurred, trouble would soon arise. If the people were not willing to obey the judges' decisions, then every man would be compelled to do what was "right in his own eyes." Anarchy and rebellion would result—which is exactly what is recorded in the book of Judges: "Every man did *what was* right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

### **God's Word—the Vital Key to Righteous Judgment**

The most important factor in any system of judging is the *righteousness* of the one who has been placed in the position of authority for the specific purpose of making binding decisions.

This was true when the nation of Israel was under the leadership of judges, as well as when God finally allowed Israel to be under kings. It is vital that *all* such judging be based on God's **WORD**, for God is to be the true Authority in any judgment. The requirements and commands for such judging certainly apply to the Church today—for God has given specific commands, instructions and warnings for those responsible for rendering judgments. When followed, these instructions and commands assure that righteous, godly judgment will be administered.

### *Commands and Instructions for Judges*

The individual character of each judge is a vital factor in his ability to make proper judgments. We have seen in Exodus 18 that the FEAR of GOD and the LOVE of THE TRUTH are basic qualifications. Of great importance is impartiality: “Hear *the causes* ... judge righteously between a man .... You shall not respect persons in judgment” (Deut. 1:16-17). This is a basic character quality of God Himself, as He shows NO partiality! All must be treated fairly and given the same chance and opportunity. Not “respecting persons” is the very foundation of salvation! This character quality must be in every Christian today, so we can make wise and just decisions. This is why God has given instructions for those who are in the role of judge. Notice: “You shall hear the small as well as the great ....” Every case must be heard, every question answered, and all details considered. The attitude of the individual, whether good or bad, does not bind or release anyone from making a godly decision or giving a righteous answer. **JUDGES ARE BOUND BY GOD TO HANDLE EVERY MATTER, WHETHER SMALL OR GREAT, TO HEAR EVERYONE WHETHER HE IS KNOWN OR UNKNOWN, LIKED OR DISLIKED, OF LOW ESTATE OR HIGH ESTATE.** “You shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment *is* God’s!” (verse 17).

Christ told the apostles the same thing. “And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ....” Christ gave the Church and the ministry the authority to make binding judgments based on the laws of God. “And whatever you may bind on the earth will have already been bound in heaven; and whatever you may loose on the earth will have already been loosed in heaven”

judgments. Perhaps Solomon degenerated more than any other man in the record of the Bible—having received special blessings from God, only to become a sex-monger and a worshipper of demonic foreign gods. This destroyed his capacity as king. “For it came to pass when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. And his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God as *was* the heart of David his father.... And **Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD** and did not *go* fully after the LORD .... And the Lord *was* angry with Solomon because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel Who had appeared to him twice ...” (1 Kings 11:4, 6, 9).

Another example of how sin destroys judgment involves the sons of Samuel. Samuel was righteous and judged Israel with *righteous* judgments. But his sons were evil and took bribes. “And it came to pass when Samuel was old, he made his sons judges over Israel .... Yet his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and **PERVERTED JUDGMENT**” (1 Sam. 8:1, 3). In such cases, one’s *understanding* and *ability* to make proper and righteous judgments is reduced in direct proportion to the degree of sin involved. In the final analysis, “Evil men do not understand justice” (Prov. 28:5).

God shows us that when sin grows and multiplies throughout the land—and the majority of the population is living in a state of sin—the land soon becomes filled with wickedness and corruption. When a society becomes thus filled with sin and iniquity, few indeed have the understanding needed to render righteous judgments. Everything is turned upside down, with no discernment between right and wrong: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa. 5:20-21).

“Woe unto *them that are* mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!” (verses 22-23).

When any nation, or people, or group, or church—or individual—reaches this point, God must execute His judgment against them. “Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the



### *The System of Judges Restored Under Jehoshaphat*

After some time, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, restored the system of judges. He understood that judgment was, in fact, rendered *for* God—and not for men. “And he set judges in the land, in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. And he said to the judges, ‘Take heed what you do, for you do not judge for man, but for the LORD Who *is* with you when you render judgment. And now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Be careful and act wisely, for *there is* no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of a bribe’ ” (II Chron. 19:5-7). Those judging must always remember, “You judge not for man but for the Lord!”

As we have seen, when Christ returns His throne will be established through judgment and justice. “And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. And He shall not judge according to the sight of His eyes, nor after the hearing of His ears. But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and shall reprove with equity for the meek of the earth” (Isa. 11:2-4).

Because Christ is the Son of God, the Father has given all judgment into His hands. “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son ... I have no power to do anything of Myself; but as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father, Who sent Me” (John 5:22, 30). Jesus also said, “For judgment I have come into this world ...” (John 9:39). The Scriptures reveal that **God the Father is the source of all true, righteous judgment.**

### **Sin Destroys Judgment**

The story of Solomon is a prime example—from which we can learn—that sin destroys one’s ability to make righteous judgments. Solomon started out with all the blessings of God, including the special blessing of an abundance of godly wisdom and judgment. However, because he gave himself over to sin, he gradually lost his wisdom and the ability to make righteous

(Matt. 16:19). God commands every minister and overseer, as well as all the Church, to remember that such judgments **ARE OF GOD, and not man! ALL JUDGEMENTS MUST BE BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD!** Every judgment must be righteous, fair, just, loving and merciful!

One of the reasons Christ rejected the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers was because they ignored the righteous judgments of God. They made their own judgments, based on their traditions instead of God’s laws. Jesus condemned them because they overlooked the weightier matters of their responsibilities: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, but you have abandoned the more important *matters* of the law—judgment, and mercy and faith. These [judgment, mercy and faith] *you* were obligated to do, and not to leave the others undone” (Matt. 23:23).

The scribes and Pharisee had degenerated to such a state because they did not have the love of God. Jesus said, “I do not receive glory from men; but I have known you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves” (John 5:41-42). Thus, their judgments were hypocritical, because they were not based on God’s Word and His love. In His condemnation of the Pharisees, Jesus revealed that they were void of true judgment and love. Notice: “But woe to you, Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every herb, but you pass over the judgment and the love of God” (Luke 11:42). We should also take this as a *warning*—so we will not fall into the same trap and snare of neglect and injustice as did the scribes and Pharisees.

### *Additional Commands for Judges*

God also commands that judges “shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert judgment; you shall not respect persons, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. You shall follow that which is altogether just...” (Deut. 16:18-20).

“**You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment.** You shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty, *but YOU SHALL JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR IN RIGHTEOUSNESS*” (Lev. 19:15). “If there is a controversy

between men, and they come to judgment, and they have been judged, and the righteous one is declared righteous, and the wrong doer declared guilty” (Deut. 25:1). These laws and commands for the judge were given to insure that God’s people would be judged righteously and justly at all times.

### **True Judgment Comes From God**

It is essential that the one who is judging look to God’s judgments and laws as the absolute basis for rendering decisions. Looking to circumstances and outward appearances are, of and by themselves, not enough.

When he was sent to select David as the king to replace Saul, God told Samuel not to look on the outward appearance. “And it came to pass as they came in, he [Samuel] saw Eliab and said, ‘Surely the LORD’S anointed *is* before the LORD.’ ” First impressions, based on feelings and outward appearances, are usually *not* correct.

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his face, nor on his height because I have refused him, for *the LORD* does not see as a man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart’ ” (1 Sam. 16:6-7). God was looking on David’s heart—not on the outward appearance of the flesh.

Christ revealed that this was a particular fault of the Pharisees, who judged according to outward appearances or “according to the flesh” (John 8:15)—the very opposite of what they should have done. He went on to explain that He never judged a matter or person after the flesh. “I judge no one. Yet if I do judge, My judgment is true, for I am not alone [in my judgment]; but I and the Father Who sent Me [are one]” (verses 15-16). Christ further emphasized, “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

God’s living Word is the *foundation* for making sound judgments. Apart from God’s Word, one renders carnal, human judgments based on outward appearances and circumstances. Notice: “For the Word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of both soul and spirit, *and* of both *the* joints and *the* marrow, and *is* able to discern *the* thoughts and intents of *the* heart. And there

is not a created thing that is not manifest in His sight; but all things *are* naked and laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:12-13).

It is only from God’s Word that we receive the knowledge, wisdom and understanding needed to make righteous judgments. We will be confronted at times with situations that are not clearly defined in God’s Word. But, with the Spirit of God—combined with the knowledge, wisdom and understanding which God’s Word gives—we can make righteous judgments.

Solomon is a good example. When he was made king, he perceived that he needed wisdom and judgment *from God* in order to rightly govern and judge the people of Israel. God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, “ ‘Ask what I shall give you!’ ‘And now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of David my father. And I *am* a little child; I do not know *how* to go out or come in! And Your servant *is* in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a numerous people who cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Now therefore, give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil, for who is able to judge this, Your great people?’ And the word was good in the eyes of the LORD that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life and have not asked for riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies; but have asked for yourself understanding to judge justly, behold, I have done according to your words. Lo, I have given you a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like you before you and after you none shall arise like you’ ” (1 Kings 3:5, 7-12).

Thus, Solomon became the wisest man to ever live. However, he turned away from God in his old age, because of his foreign wives, and went after other gods. As a result, Solomon became so *lacking in judgment* that God divided the kingdom—separating the ten northern tribes and leaving only the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi with Jerusalem. Thus, God executed His righteous judgment against Solomon—because God, remember, is not a “respector of persons.”