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Are Christians Not Supposed to Judge?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about a response to the claim that Christians are not supposed to judge, what John 7:24 means when it says we are to “judge with righteous judgment,” and advice about how to choose between a few different ministry job offers.

* Can you give a response to the claim that Christians are not supposed to judge and touch on what John 7:24 says about “judging with righteous judgment”?

* Do you have any advice about how to choose between a few different ministry job offers?

Transcript

(upbeat music) (bell dings) - I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Cocle, and you're listening to "Stant Je" reasons, #STRSQPodcast. - And I'm Greg Cocle.

I'm here with Amy Hall, and you're listening to "Stant Je" and "STR Ask Podcast." - All right, Greg. (laughs) All right, let's start with the question from Mike Daniel. - All right, Mike.

- Can you touch on judgment, righteous judgment, how Christians are to judge, and how to respond when others throw John 8:7, among others, such as remove the plank from your own eye? Can you give a response to, we are not to judge and speak to John 7:24 about judging righteously? - Wow, okay, so there's a lot here. 7:24 simply says, do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment, okay? And of course, we have a rule, and the rule is never read a Bible verse. So I'm not gonna follow that rule in this passage right now, not the John 7, because I don't wanna exegete the whole passage.

I wanna talk more about a larger issue, and what appears to be the opposing passage on the next page in John 8, where Jesus says to the woman, regarding the woman caught in adultery, let he who is without sin cast the first stone, okay? Now, I think in the tactics book, and I'm not sure the chapter, but I talk about, I think it's just the facts about

chapter, but where I talk about just the facts of scripture, as a variation of that tactic, and I talk about judgment, it turns out that there are multiple kinds of judgments in the scripture, that is judgment may be referring to different things, judgment that individuals are involved with, not even God's judgment here, just the judgment, and it turns out that some judgments are prohibited, and other judgments are commanded, okay? And the kind that's prohibitive, prohibited, is same Matthew chapter seven, the first couple verses, judge not two words, that's where people land, and they don't go any further. You're judging me, you're judging my sexual life, you're judging my religious views, you're judging this, judge not, Jesus said judge not. Well, there's more to that passage, and when you look more, here is where we never read a Bible verses, really critical.

Jesus is complaining about, or prohibiting a hypocritical, condescending judgment, in which the person doing the judgment is more guilty, of the kind of thing he's judging another by, and that's why Jesus says, remove the moat, the log, out of somebody else's eye, before you start picking at this, I'm sorry, remove the log out of your own eye, before you start picking at the speck and somebody else's eye. It's interesting what he says next, once you remove the moat out of your aisle, you will be able to get the speck out of somebody else's eye. You will have clarity of thought to do this more accurately, so he's not condemning all forms of judgment.

He's saying there's a kind of judgment that's hypocritical, and keeps you from judging properly and accurately. In fact, in the next verse he says, don't throw what is holy to dogs, and don't throw, let's see, pearls before swine. Well, that requires a judgment.

You have to assess what's holy, and then you also have to judge and assess those, the circumstances, which you're offering that. Are these metaphorically here, swine or dogs, or are these people that are gonna receive it well? So there's all kinds of judgments that are required even to follow that terse command that the section begins with, judge not, okay? Context is really important. So scripturally, just broadly, that scripture does not condemn judgment.

It condemns certain types of judgment, and it requires others. Here's John 7, do not judge according to appearance. That would be a mistake.

But judge with righteous judgment. So don't judge, but judge is right there in one verse, okay? So Jesus is making a distinction. You can go back to John 7, verse 24, and unpack that more with regards to the context.

I just wanted you to notice the contrast that's there. And what happens is, of course, part of Christianity, essential to the Christian enterprise in evangelism is the good news, and the good news isn't good without the bad news, and the bad news requires of necessity, making an assessment of sin that others do. That's a judgment.

You cannot communicate the gospel without communicating a judgment. And the

gospels with Jesus and John the Baptist, they're thick with judgments against people who are being judged righteously by the speaker. Most cases, it's Jesus.

So this whole issue of judgment is nuanced, is what I'm saying. Let's look at all the verses, and then draw a balanced understanding of what the New Testament teaches on the nature of us as people judging others as people. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter five, we don't judge people outside of the church in a certain fashion.

We judge people inside the church. Let the judgment begin here. You say you're a Christian and you're sleeping around.

Forget about that. That's wrong. This is all Paul.

1 Corinthians chapter eight, or five, brother. So this whole issue of judgment is nuanced and ought to be in a biblical fashion. And all you have to do is go back to the passages where these things are stated.

And you'll be able to put together an understanding of judgment that is biblically nuanced. And that's kind of what I tried to do in the tactics book in that chapter. Now, I do want to say something about John eight.

And this is the woman caught in adultery. This is a very unique circumstance. And the unique circumstance is that the Jews are not looking for Jesus' advice.

The Jews are looking to trap Jesus. They're trying to create a circumstance in which it looks like Jesus is disagreeing with Moses. So Moses is the main player with them.

Jesus is the new kid on the block. If they can get Jesus to disagree with Moses, they know they've got a case against Jesus. So what they do is they contrive an entrapment where a woman is caught in adultery in the very act.

Really? Yep, we caught her in the very act. How'd you do that? And where's the guy? Because it's wrong for woman and man in that circumstance. What happened is, it's obvious when you read it, they contrived with another man to trap the woman in adultery.

Then they grabbed the woman and they get rid of the guy and they bring the woman before Jesus. Now, is she guilty of adultery? Sure, it seems to be obvious. They have all those witnesses that know that.

And then they put the woman before Jesus and they say, "Moses says this." What do you say? Okay, now that puts him in a tough spot. So what he does is he says, cryptically, that he is without sin, cast the first stone. Now, he is not giving a technique for dealing with crime.

Because if that were the case, no criminal could ever be prosecuted. What he realizes is

what's going on. And so he says, "Okay, let he is without sin, cast the first stone." 'Cause that's what the law required.

Stoning. And then he starts writing on the ground. Now, we don't know what he's writing, it doesn't say.

But I saw a film depicting this and the way it characterized it is that he started writing the sins, the serious sins of some of the accusers, which it very well could have been the case because the more he wrote, the he who is without sin cast the first stone, then writing, the longer he wrote, the more he wrote, the more people exited the scene. Pretty soon Jesus looks up and guess what? All of the accusers who are the witnesses to the crime are gone. And so Jesus asked the woman, "Where are your accusers?" They're all gone.

Then he says, "Neither do I accuse you or condemn you." Okay, now what's really important here is, why doesn't Jesus condemn her? Because according to the law, to bring that condemnation, you have to be a witness to the crime. The witnesses are gone, therefore there cannot be any adjudication of the crime. Jesus wasn't a witness to it.

He isn't saying that her sexual behavior was right. In fact, what he tells her personally is go and send no more. She was caught doing something she shouldn't have done, but the Pharisees didn't care about her moral character.

They cared about trapping Jesus. And Jesus brilliantly was able to sidestep that. And so he sustained, he foiled the trap, but he sustained the law.

That's why even though this is probably not canonical passage, this isn't in the earliest manuscripts. I believe it really happened, even though it wasn't in the earliest manuscripts. It was in the oral tradition that got inserted in the gospels.

It's in different places and different manuscripts, but it ended up kind of permanently here in John, end of seven, I guess, the beginning of John eight or whatever. But it was a brilliant way of dealing with the problem. But notice that Jesus isn't giving a formula for dealing with sin, let he is without sin cast the first stone.

This is where never read a Bible verse as a principle is really, really important. When you see the entire narrative, you see what's going on, then you draw different conclusions about why Jesus said the things that he said. It's interesting though that these verses in my Bible are on the same, I'm open, John seven, this is on my left, 724, do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment, John eight, the next page over, and he says, let he is without sin cast the first stone.

By the way, and I'm not saying this is true of Mike, but many times when these passages are brought up, these are people who have no understanding of what's going on textually and they don't care. They're trying to cherry pick a line that they think you

throw in a Christian and because the Christian is not familiar with what's going on, they get caught in a bind here. Okay, the Bible says, do not judge and it says judge.

Do not judge unrighteously number of examples, judge, righteously number of examples. This stray line that he is without sin cast the first stone, it was for that circumstance to foil that circumstance. Jesus judged this woman not according to the Mosaic law, but according to God's morality, go and sin no more.

- This just highlights the need for Christians to know their Bibles because so many questions, like you said, Greg, the challenge is coming from someone who doesn't know the Bible, who's picking out certain verses or words. - Presumably, Mike has been in this.
- Yeah, I mean, well, just in general, I see this coming from people who aren't Christians a lot.

So if we as Christians are constantly reading our Bibles, something like this will jump out at us immediately and we'll be able to say, but there's these other verses that say this and then you can put them together. But if you all you know is the verse that they're handing you, it's a lot harder to know how to go after it or how to understand it or whether there are other parts that nuance this passage. This is why it's so important to be reading through your Bible and I know I harp on this a lot, but it's just so important as a apologist.

There's nothing more important we can do than to know our Bibles inside and out. When something like this comes long, not only do you immediately recognize that it doesn't fit with what you've read, but you can go directly to the places that will explain those passages more clearly. - All right, Greg, we're gonna get to a second question this episode.

- Okay. - All right, this one comes from Trent Blake. - Trent? - Trent.

- Okay, I'll let you know. - For a second there, I thought maybe you knew him, the way you responded, I wasn't sure. Okay, all right, hey, Greg and Amy, I'm just about finished with Bible college and have a few ministry job offers, senior associate youth pastor jobs.

Do you have any advice about how to choose between them? What considerations should I be thinking through? - Well, the first one is the job descriptions of each option, okay? Obviously being a senior pastor, that role requires a certain something, certain fulfillment of particular responsibilities, particular gifts, senior pastors are the one that preach every Sunday, okay? Characteristically. Youth leaders, they're spending time with youth, okay? Now, I could be a senior pastor much better than I could be a youth leader. I just know my own disposition, okay? And so realizing, I could work with one group of people or another group of people, and I look at my own dispositions, I say, I don't wanna work with this group, I wanna work with this group, okay? Now, I would never be a senior pastor because there are other concerns regarding making the same kind of assessment

I'm making here.

I look at my skills, I look at my capabilities, I look at the job description, broadly written, the kinds of things that will be required of me on a regular basis to fulfill this obligation. Do I have the gifting or the training? The gifting would be something innate, and the training would be the kinds of things that are done to refine the gift. So I have a gift of teaching, that's a spiritual gift, but I also have training to help me to teach better, and to teach more accurately.

So do I have the gifting and the natural, and the background and the bonafides, if you will, the kinds of things that taken as a whole are going to allow me to be effective at fulfilling those responsibilities, okay? I actually hinted at something a few moments ago that I probably should say explicitly. I said, is there any of these options that you like more than any other one, okay? And there is nothing wrong with that question. In fact, your desires, what you like are hints as to the kind of personal profile that you have that you bring to the project.

If you don't like high schoolers, why would you wanna work with them? Well, God's calling me. No, you're going in the wrong direction. I don't think that's the way it works, and apparently neither does Trent, that's why he's asking them.

I think the right questions here. You, God distributes ministry by gifting, not by calling. There's no biblical basis for the idea that you get called into different ministry responsibilities, the way that most people characterize calling.

Okay, I could say I have a broad calling, to do thus and so, but most people are not Trent in this case, but most people think about, well, there is an indication that I have that God is telling me to do this particular kind of thing, okay? That isn't the way biblically God distributes gifts. Does anybody get called? Yeah, Paul was called. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Go, I'll show you how much you will suffer for my namesake.

I mean, that was literally God called. But for the rest of us, that is the way it works. Ministry is distributed by gifting, 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter, what, three or whatever it is.

So you have these different passages that help to guide us there, but it requires an assessment of our particular capabilities, native and spiritual and combination, and the kind of training we've had to help those capabilities be more effective. Those are the kinds of things that I'd be looking at, okay? What's, that's the biggest one here. If these are options, what are the job descriptions? What are the things that best fits your temperament, your capabilities, your gifting, your skills, okay? Another one, I don't know if you're married Trent or not, but if you're married and have kids, let's say, and you have an opportunity to be a senior pastor in two different locations, one down the block and another one across the country.

Well, you can see how the down the block or across the country, or geographic differences that could make a big difference in your choice, because then you have to ask the question whether going across the country, that option is going to justify the uprooting of your family and the relationships that you have. So these are the kinds of questions that you ought to be asking when it comes to this kind of decision. But you're not asking them in a vacuum, obviously, that's, you're following that advice by asking us, but there are other people in your life, Trent, that you should be drawing from as well.

If somebody is telling you, well, what is God saying? Well, you're talking to the wrong person because I don't think that is the way this decision gets made biblically speaking. There's confusion on that. But if they say, what is God telling you, we say, well, what I'm interested in finding out is what you think, what is your wisdom on this issue? And so bounce this whole question off a bunch of people that know you and that know your circumstances.

And then you'll have a body of responses, which would include things that Amy and I say that you can put together to make your decision. And the abundance of counselors, there's victory. It says in Proverbs.

That's what we're talking about here. - So I have a couple more ideas for you, Trent. I'm guessing since you're just finishing with Bible culture, probably younger.

So if you're getting an offer for a senior pastor position, I'm guessing it's probably a smaller church, maybe. I'm not sure about that. But if it is a smaller church, it'll probably involve a lot more aspects to your role than maybe an a larger church where you're an associate pastor or whatever.

But I think as a senior pastor, you'll get a lot more chance to learn by doing. Whereas if you're an associate pastor, you can learn by mentoring and training by the senior pastor.
- Being mentored and trained by the senior pastor.

- Yeah. - So, yes, sorry, I worded that very strangely. So you might wanna consider which of those will work better with my personality and my gifts.

Would I rather grow and learn by doing? Or would I rather grow and learn by watching and being mentored? And of course, that also depends on the senior pastor. What is the disposition of the senior pastor? Is he somebody who would mentor you? Is he somebody who wants to encourage you and raise you up or is he somebody who wants all of the attention on himself and will prevent you from serving in some way? You might need to talk to the congregants about that sort of question because you might not be able to tell that just from the senior pastor. - Or the staff members.

- Right. So those are something that can be my-- - It can't be confidence. - Next, I think, what are the characteristics of the church? Think about how the church does music, how

the church, their philosophy of ministry, what kind of programs do they have.

Are these things that, again, match your gifts and your style and what you care about? Those are also things to keep in mind. And then finally, which church lacks the skills that you have? Because again, you're part of the body and you're stepping in to help them. Now, one thing I think the mistake we might make is, well, I really like apologetics, so I wanna go to a church where they're all about apologetics.

Okay, well, maybe, but maybe you should be taking your skill to a place that doesn't have it because as that part of the body, they need you there. So that's something to keep in mind. Where do they need your skills? Where you gonna learn? What kind of style works best with you in learning? Hopefully some of these things will be helpful.

I've never gone through this, but I think you should consider yourself very fortunate to have a few ministry offers. A long time ago, you got the perfect job. So you will never be leaving and you will never die.

This is a promise we made you sign a paper that said, I will not die before focal dies. Well, Trent, I have friends who would love to have ministry offers, so you are so blessed to have some to choose from. And just keep in mind, you make your best decision and then you rest in God's sovereignty.

It may not go smoothly, but that doesn't mean you made the wrong decision. It won't go smoothly. You're right, it won't go smoothly.

Okay, if you're working at a church, incidentally, you mentioned something that just slipped by me, but I'll throw in my two cents on this. It is better if you're a neophyte to be an associate, not a fahead. In other words, start as a learner, a learning from somebody else, not taking on the whole responsibility for a church if you've never pastored before.

It's better to work under somebody than to go right to the, there's lots of reasons for this we don't have time to get into, I'm just simply saying that I would cast my vote in that direction for you. - Or at the very least, if you're going to step into that situation, make sure you have some kind of a support system amongst pastors in the area, 'cause that's another possibility. If it's, especially maybe an area that has more churches, and there's actually probably most places have pastors, associations and things.

So that could help too, but that is definitely something to keep in mind, Greg. All right, I think that's it for me. - We got it.

(laughs) - All the best here, Trent, and we hope it works out for you, and thank you Mike for your question also. We look forward to hearing from you with your question on Twitter with #STRAsk or through our website. This is Amy Hall and Greg Kolkle for "Stand to Reason." (bell dings)

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