

## Transcript 141

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. On this episode we're going to be tackling a question that really has two sides to it. That's the question of judgment. When are we to judge? When are we not to judge? And how are we to judge? So joining me today is Gwen. Gwen is the associate editor for Got Questions Ministries. She oversees our CompellingTruth.org site and she's also the I guess the coordinator for all of our volunteers who help us answer all the questions we receive. And also Nelson. He is the director of video content for Got Questions Ministries. So Gwen, Nelson, thanks for joining me.

Shea Houdmann

And I know you 2 have dealt with questions along these lines quite a bit, just as I have. Let me start out by reading a couple of relevant scriptures that will really provide the basis, the guideline, for our conversation. First, I wanted to read Matthew 7. These verses really instruct us to not judge hypocritically to not judge others for something that we are personally struggling with ourselves. And then also just a few verses later, same chapter. Matthew 7 verses 15 to 20 says, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly our ravenous wolves, you will recognize them by their fruits. Our grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles.

Nelson Domingues

You can't just pull certain parts of the scripture out that you want, right? And the Bible can say many things out of context, but we need to make sure that we study and understand and read the Bible in context. And it makes a huge difference. And like the passages we just read, there are moments when we are to judge. For example, we're able and called to see when something is good and when something person, a behavior we need to use our discernment knowing scripture to to judge whether or not the behavior is correct. And the same thing comes when we listen to teachers, right? Scripture reminds us to be aware of the people that we listen to and are being that we're being taught. We need to again distinguish between true prophets and false prophets. True preachers of the word and and those who aren't preaching the word correctly.

Nelson Domingues

And so there are moments definitely when we are called to judge. And so the scriptures do not say there is never a time or a place that a Christian should judge another Christian. But there are many times where that is done out of context, and typically it's done hypocritically. We might place a higher standard on other people than we even place on ourselves. And so we're familiar with the passage where Jesus tells you know, first remove the splinter out of your own eye or the log out of your own eye before you make a comment on the speck of dust in someone else's eye. And so that those are the grounds that we have to be very careful. Use scripture to judge, but don't judge hypocritically. And we have a lot of passages that we've just listed to kind of distinguish between those things.

Gwen Sellers

And I think one other distinction is, yeah, you've pointed out using Scripture to judge, and really what we are judging most is like is a teaching or an action or behavior. I mean, we don't see other people's

hearts, and so we can't judge like oh, this person is saved or this person isn't saved or how God like feels about that person or what he's doing in their lives. So there's a place where Paul talks about this. In first Corinthians 4:3 through 5, Paul says, but with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself for I'm not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness. And will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. So when we're trying to make those like eternal judgments or the state of someone's heart, that's just not our business. But when we say this is a false teaching, or this is a behavior that goes against God, those can be good and true judgments. And yeah, they're based on God's word.

Gwen Sellers

And the one I always think for that is First John 4:1-3, beloved do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is God is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you've heard was coming and is now in the world today. So we have these very clear guidelines for this is truth. This is compatible with the word and this isn't. But that's a separate issue from like condemning a person.

Shea Houdmann

So often the do not judge, lest you be judged versus is used kind of as Nelson was talking about to like end our ability to speak into an issue that people who are engaged in clearly unbiblical, ungodly, immoral behavior will use it. So who are you to judge me or the Bible says do not judge? Keep your opinions to yourself. And that's not at all what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 7, and clearly He's talking about judging hypocritically. Don't utter a judgment on someone that you yourself are guilty of. Don't judge as Gwen saying. Don't judge a person's heart just because you can biblically condemn a person's behavior doesn't mean you can know that person's motives or know that person's heart in regards to why that behavior is taking place. So there's clearly an instruction to judge. And to be discerning to test things to test things. Test the spirit.

Shea Houdmann

But there's also the balance of not to do that hypocritically. And some people struggle with well, how can I judge anyone when I I'm not perfect? And clearly perfection is not the standard for whether we're judging something or else the Bible wouldn't be instructing us to judge. But that's a struggle I often see when people who ask questions and that they recognize their behavior is wrong and they want to say something, but they feel like you'd be hypocritical for them to say something when they themselves are starting to. So maybe help me with this. What's the, what's the balance here with we're instructed to judge, not to judge hypocritically? But how can we judge when we ourselves are guilty of maybe not the same sin but other sins?

Nelson Domingues

Well, ultimately we're we should be judging behavior. We should be judging whether something is sinful or not. We're not judging. We can't judge someone's motives and their heart. We don't know this, and

God knows the heart. We don't. And I think that's where a lot of believers fall short oftentimes when they are hyper critical of other people, oftentimes they will not just say what was done, perhaps wrong, but then they will immediately move on to you are this, or you are that. And that's judging motive and saying you did this and because you are this, not because you're a fallen sinner just like me. I think we need to remember as we look at other people's lives and things that they may be falling into, sin that they may be doing. We ourselves are not perfect. That that's right. We're not perfect ourselves, and that doesn't make us unqualified, because if that were the case, no one would be able to speak into anyone else's life because no one is perfect except for Jesus Christ himself who is sinless, blameless life. But we don't judge them on the standard of our own perfection. We judge them on the standard of God's perfection. And when we do that, we do it for a real purpose, which is to build them up. To point out sin and to steer them towards Christ. And we so we speak the truth in love. As you know, Ephesians Chapter 4, verse 15 commands us to speak truth and love.

Nelson Domingues

And so that's I think what we need to remember, even if we don't feel adequate. Perhaps a layperson sees legitimate sin in maybe a pastor. So how do they approach that? A quiet conversation with with him would be the perfect way to say hey, I've noticed these issues. I myself am not perfect. I've failed and fallen in and other things. Maybe the same thing. But I'm just letting you know, brother, that behavior according to Scripture isn't right. And how can I help you turn from that from that particular thing, from that sin? And you may be teaching someone at the moment. They may not even know their behavior is in fact genuinely sinful and just lovingly pointing out a scripture. Or how God does not like and appreciate that how it is sin might in that moment right away, convince them to repent and turn turn towards Christ.

Gwen Sellers

One of few things come to mind for me. One is so Nelson, you've been describing how it happens is kind of it's that spirit of humility and even you know like I've fallen in other areas or maybe even this area. And maybe that's why I notice that it's a struggle or sin for somebody else because I've noticed it in myself. And sometimes that can be hypocritical of oh, I really struggle with this, so now I'm hyper critical of other people who who struggle with it. And I'm going to judge them because I don't really want to deal with it myself. But sometimes it really is, you've examined yourself which the Bible calls us to do in several places and realized man like I really have a problem with pride or something. So you you notice that in other people and then can go and tell them you know this is a real struggle for me and I see you doing some of the same things that I've been convicted of, so I just wanted to let you know. But you're doing that in that spirit of humility.

Gwen Sellers

And so that brings me to Galatians 6:1. So kind of that why would we point this out to other people? And it says, brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted. So I think sometimes that hypocritical judgment comes when we're like, oh, you're doing that thing wrong and you shouldn't do it. How could you possibly? But in Galatians it's talking about be gentle and be aware of yourself. Either you know the temptation to pry, that, oh, I don't struggle with this or the temptation to fall into that

same sin with them so. So I guess to me that's how we help point out those things and other people, not hypocritically, even though knowing that we ourselves are sinners.

Nelson Domingues

Something to think about too is you know what is our motive for pointing it out, you know? Are we genuinely desiring their benefit and to build them up to edify them, to lead them to Christ? Or is it just to cut them down? And that's where our own pride comes in hand. Well, I know more than you. Clearly you're you're doing this, you know, wrongly. And so I think before we ever say anything we really need to judge our our own motives. Like why do I want to do this? And and I think that might provide that moment of stop in our hearts and in our in our tongue you know and be able to to speak rightly, then and approach that person in a spirit of humility, because we're supposed to offer grace and mercy. We're also supposed to forgive just as Christ has forgiven us when we seek his forgiveness. And we should be just like that, correcting others or gently nudging them and reminding them, showing them of that particular behavior isn't right. Even though we ourselves fail and are failing constantly. Because hopefully when you open up that dialogue in a loving way, they then will also feel able you know and invited to speak into your own life in the same way. And true person of humility would want that. They they would invite that. They would want the other person also to look introspectively into their own lives to say hey, what is it in me that you see that may not be coming as well?

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, and I think that's so true, like when our motive is really for this person and for their good. And you know when it comes to the issue of sin, when we really believe God's ways our best, I mean, you know obviously there is the importance of honoring God and just doing what's right and what he calls us too, because he's worthy of that obedience, but it's also true that God designed us and obedience to him actually brings joy. So we want to help other people out of sin because that will actually give them freedom. So when our motive really is love rather than, I'm better than you or I know more than you, the other motive that I think is important in judgment specifically when we're talking about teaching, is protecting other believers. I think of you know, pastors are called to protect the flock, and so that is protecting from false teaching. So yeah, they do need to be judging the teaching of others, and we as people who are learning, you know, need to be like the Bereans. Is that really what the Bible says? Because we want to know what's true, not just what other people say.

Shea Houdmann

I think this do not judge concept, I, I love how Scripture clarifies that we're not to judge hypocritically in that passage itself. But then elsewhere in the passages instruct us to judge. Talk about all the things that you, Gwen and Nelson have mentioned. To judge in spirit of gentleness, to judge with restoration in mind, to judge with helping a person to achieve victory in a sense let's carry our burdens together, judging in a spirit of humility and not recognizing that this is something that we either struggled with or could very well struggle with. So all those things help us to understand Jesus command, don't judge this way. Instead judge this way in these situations. And I think that's a very important distinction for us to make.

Shea Houdmann

But I didn't want to miss something in this episode, and that there's another side to this that I think we experience. We've all experienced it personally, but we also experienced it a lot at Got Questions where people are hyper judgmental. And this is when someone finds something that probably is in need of judgement but they become so aggressively judgmental that it's over the top. It's far beyond what Scripture gets to actually judging the person's heart and motives which they can't possibly know. To see someone who's made a mistake or poor teaching and then assume the absolute possible worst scenario and everything in that person's life and this is just as dangerous as the other side of the equation. So how can we? What is the best way that we can judge biblically without going to this extreme of being hyper judgmental or focusing so much on condemnation rather than restoration?

Nelson Domingues

I think we really have to look at how we approach things, again, the motive of it all. I know from my own experience, both online and as a pastor, the way I'm approached when my errors are pointed up or whatever it is or assumed errors, if it's done in the spirit of kindness, of gentleness, of mercy, of love, I am I'm open to it. Maybe it's embarrassing. Maybe. Yeah, maybe I didn't notice it was a mistake, and that doesn't always feel good, of course, but at least I don't feel attacked. I don't feel like I'm being cut down. I don't feel like my motives themselves are put on display and being declared as if I've done something wrong. I was and I am genuinely an evil person and I intended to be that way. And I'm seeking to do that and secretly handling God's word in a bad way or something like that. So I've, I've been on both sides of this where someone is correcting me gently and that makes the world of a difference.

Nelson Domingues

But especially online, for instance in the comments sections and things like that and articles the names that I've been called just in those comments sections, the insinuations, the accusations, the judgment calls, they're they're incredibly harsh, incredibly critical, and they're just painful. And it, and it feels like an attack and it's hard to respond to in an attack, because when anyone's attacked they they, they put up their defenses, they they try to hide, they try to they get away. And that's not how a brother and sister or brother or brother and sister sister, however it is should communicate at all. And so I would hope that people understand that there's a real person that you're talking to. And if you're bringing up a genuine concern, do it lovingly, and kindly. Because what if you're mean comment, you're mean accusation drove that person say out of the ministry or drove that person further into depression or further into a sin. That's not what you wanted, and I think that wouldn't please God at all. And so it takes a lot of care and love when gently reminding, correcting, even rebuking someone we ought to do that in the spirit of love, hoping that they would see the error of their way and come back to Christ.

Gwen Sellers

I think in terms of you know how do we ourselves make sure that we do that and don't get to the point where we're super judgmental about you know one thing and start condemning a person. I mean I think that really has to do with our own walk with God and our humility and teachability. And so you know which ultimately is the work of the Holy Spirit. But I'm reminded of Hebrews 4:12 through 13 says, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword piercing to the division of soul and of spirit of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no

creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. So when I'm remembering you know, ultimately I answer to God and I'm trying to follow him and represent him, then that helps me, you know, see people as people. Like these are other image bearers of God. How should I approach them? Or remember, yeah, I should love others the way God has loved me.

Gwen Sellers

So how do I restore them gently? I think one thing that's maybe a little harder on this is how do we stand up for truth? And like confidently and you know, so speak against false teaching directly without making it seem like anybody who follows that false teaching like is an idiot. Or the people that teach it are evil, and they're out to get you and they're purposely deceiving. So like I think sometimes, especially because in our culture people aren't always very good at separating this idea is wrong versus the people who follow this idea, I'm not saying anything about them, I'm just talking about the idea, and we've lost that ability a little bit. So I think there's some finesse to be able to separate the ideas and vehemently, you know, stand up for truth there from the people who might be deceived by them, or maybe even are intentionally deceiving others. Do you guys have tips for how you do that?

Shea Houdmann

For me it comes down to maybe 3 principles, and even if they give these three, probably a fourth one will come to mind. First of all, do you have the relationship with this person to speak into his or her life? Random comments from a stranger online, for most people, it's highly unlikely it's going to be something you're going to listen to because you don't know this person. They don't know you. It's really hard to want to listen to criticism from a complete stranger. So Gwen, Nelson and I in addition to being coworkers, I think we're also friends to the point that we could speak into each other's lives and have a criticism or a judgment be received. But it's complete strangers? Think twice before you seek to engage in a judging scenario because it's likely not going to be received.

Shea Houdmann

A second. It's sort of a pick your battles. Is this worth bringing up? And truly, in the grand scheme of eternity is criticizing a person or making a judgment about something they're doing in this particular station, is it really worth bringing up? Some people take it on themselves to be the judge, jury and executioner on things where ultimately that's between that person and God. And not every sin issue in someone's life, or mistake that someone's made or a false teaching, not every single one needs our input on, so we need to be more discerning with that.

Shea Houdmann

And maybe third, maybe just a focus on if our goal is restoration, can you really envision the way bringing this up have a positive outcome? Do you see bringing up an issue as I truly think this person will listen to me, it will have an impact and it will point person towards Christ and to his word. Rather than just be received as mean, or cruel, or critical, or anything like that. So kind of those are the three principles I tend to go by, and my tendency is not to say something when I should, which I know isn't a good place to be either. And for other people I know that they tend to speak into situations where it's not that's not going to end pretty so to speak, so trying to find that balance. I'm not saying this is easy, but it's not. It's not easy for me, I don't know it's easy for anyone, but you have to be discerning about

when we judge, how we judge, and in what in what spirit we judge, because if our goal is restoration, if our goal is spiritual growth, our goal is to point someone towards Christ into his word, there are multiple factors that play into whether one that judgment is necessary and whether that judgment will be affective.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think that's really helpful when you're talking about, you know like approaching an individual person, and you know Matthew 18 is is always the go to of like you go to that person first and all those kind of things. One thing that I think about when talking about you know broader stuff, especially for us. I mean, we write articles on things, including false teachings so how do we sort of warn other people or share the truth and point out falsehood without being judgy? And for me that's it comes down to being precise about what we mean and what we say. And so it's just pointing out something you know this is what's said here. This is what the Bible says. It doesn't connect. And then also not painting with a broad brush, you know we don't say oh every church is like this or everybody does this. Or using you know, like superlatives of making it sound worse than it is. So yeah, so that comes down to the precision precision thing. And yeah, and then there again just like making it clear we're talking about the idea and the teaching, not necessarily the hearts of the people involved.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, we have to be careful to have those two things separate. The person and then the behavior or the idea. Just because so and so said something doesn't mean that they themselves are something else, evil for instance, or whatever it may be. They just may be staking, mistaken in the teaching. They maybe have looked at part of scripture and not seen other relevant passages or have just think differently than you do on some topic. We think about just things that you know when every political season the way the media paints people like, say for instance Republicans and Democrats. And they say all Republicans are this way. All Democrats are this way. And that's not a fair assessment at all. There's there's a huge range of people. Millions of people in both of those camps. And to to paint every single one of them in one light just because of a, you know, perhaps the way they voted last year isn't fair to that person. We we really need to be able to address the person in a kind, loving, merciful way. But if there's a specific behavior that's there and then address the behavior.

Nelson Domingues

And what I find is always helpful is is not looking at saying, say you're doing this, you know. Your intentions are this. I, I find it a lot better to say here's what I noticed. I see this happening and in Scripture it says this. And you kind of bring that to them and let them make the assessment. Let them understand what's happening. You know versus saying what you're doing is wrong versus, say, God's word says this here. How do you think your behavior is matching with that? And that's where we can create a loving dialogue.

Nelson Domingues

Something else, I think of a lot of times is giving people just the benefit of the doubt. I think too often we are so quick at just seeing something, seeing behavior, perhaps, seeing a moment of weakness in someone and just immediately making that critical, harsh judgment on them without talking to them, without understanding the full story. Without knowing where they're coming from or how much, they in

fact know about their even their own behavior or what they're going through. Giving someone the benefit of the doubt when you approached them. And then moving on from there is a far better way than to assume you know everything, all intentions, all behaviors, all the reasons why. It just makes a huge difference I think when we approach people in that sort of way.

Shea Houdmann

And in the Internet age, Nelson, you touched on this briefly. The taking quotes out of context is huge with so many Bible teachers, you listen to a 45 minute video. You can find a 5 second snippet where by itself is really bad, but then you understand the greater context of what the person was saying. Oh, well that makes sense. So not taking things out of context in terms of in what context did this person say this? Or why was he or she teaching this saying? And what's the full story? That is huge. So many criticisms will receive at Got Questions hey, did you hear that this famous teacher said this and you go look it up and it's like yes, that was may have been the exact words that he said but if you read the full sermon, the full teaching or read the entire book, is actually saying the exact opposite of what you think he or she is saying. So that's hugely important. And even can go back to you hear that someone said something go straight to that, the source. Talk to he or she and say hey I heard, did you say this? Did you say that and if so, what was the context? Rather than just jumping to the conclusion. So yeah, that person said that and they meant it exactly how this other person is portraying it.

Shea Houdman

So those are some other pointers in terms of things that happen in the Internet with everything being recorded. Everything being in video. Everything being in writing. It's so easy to misunderstand a person's intent by what they said if you just focus on the words completely out of context. So I think that's another really good pointer for all of us in terms of how we judge. And as you said, Nelson giving other people the benefit of the doubt.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, mistakes happen and we all will make mistakes. And teachers are held to a higher standard. So for instance Got Questions Ministries, we provide answers and we teach them. We make videos and have podcasts like this and sites like Bible Ref where we explain the Bible verse by verse. It's a big responsibility to do all these different things, but while it's a big responsibility and why we may be held at a higher standard because we are teaching in that capacity in that regard, still, when people come up to us and find an error, it's not surprising that there can be an error. Many times it's just an editing error. Maybe the wrong verse was quoted by mistake, the wrong you know verse number or something like that. And so again just being merciful when people make mistakes, even even your pastor and he may have a sermon and maybe that particular sermon is off. Maybe he hadn't studied enough. Maybe it was a rough night and he wasn't able to get things done properly or or researched the passages in the way that he should. And there are a lot of things that surround that. Maybe he should have, but the idea of to go to him right away and criticize, and rebuke, and assume all sorts of different things is not the way to handle that. A loving, compassionate, caring, merciful way is the way to approach something and say, hey did you see, did you notice? Are you aware? How are you? How can I help you, you know in in these areas is is a far greater way to deal with those types of issues.

Gwen Sellers



I think one thing too, umm, so when our motives are right, yeah, people are going to receive it a lot better. And especially when we deliver it compassionately and gently, or like you've said, Nelson, you know, offer to help. Like what's what's going on? How can I help? But I think too when we ourselves are teachable I mean, especially in relationships when we've demonstrated, hey, I'm willing to be corrected, then it I feel like makes you more believable or makes it easier to palate when you correct somebody else because you're recognizing I'm not above, you know I'm not above correction here. So like I would invite the same behavior back toward me just makes it easier.

Shea Houdmann

I hope as you hear this episode, this episode of this podcast you hear us that we're by no means claiming to have this perfectly figured out. That we all struggle with the issue of judgment because the Bible does call us to make judgments about sinful behaviors, about a false teaching. The Bible also tells us to not judge hypocritically. To judge in the spirit of love, to judge with restoration in mind, to judge with in humility and with gentleness. And that's this is not easy. That's why there's so many different questions about this, so many of us struggle with the issue.

Shea Houdmann

So hope our conversation has been edifying and encouraging to you, just even see that you know we, we struggle with this as well, both judging in terms of personal relations we have, but then also making judgments and articles we write our videos we post. It's not easy to get the attitude just right. So that's our goal. That's what we strive for, but we fall short and that's what make this journey difficult. But that also gives us comfort in knowing that we all suffer from these same temptations, these same struggles. But God is faithful, and he helps us through it. And even when we judge wrongly, he can turn it around and bring about a great good from even our mistakes in this area. So, so Gwen, Nelson, thank you for joining me today for a very important but a somewhat difficult conversation and stuff that we've all three of us have experience where we failed in this area and others have failed us. So very personal topic as well. So it's been the Got Questions podcast on what the Bible talks about in terms of judgment, how to judge how not to judge. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.