

Judging

“Judge” in its various parts of speech appears more than 200 times in the New Testament. In almost every case, the same word, with different endings for nouns and a number of verb tenses, is used. If one English definition is used for all occasions, the Bible is made to contradict itself.

- **A warning against hypocrisy** (Matthew 7:1) “Judge not that you be not judged.” Some have drawn the ridiculous conclusion that, if I simply refrain from judging anyone, I will surely go to heaven because God will not judge me. This context of judge is “condemn.”
- **A warning against being a stumbling block** (Romans 14:13) “Let us not judge one another.” Paul is cautioning Christians not to be so harsh that a brother is caused to revert to paganism. Paul does not condemn trying to show someone that an idea or practice is wrong, but to do it humbly and lovingly, so as not to destroy faith. This context of judge is “condemn.”
- **A reminder of our responsibility to identify “justification by rationalization” among Christians** (1 Corinthians 5:12) “For what do I have to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?” Paul insisted that the Corinthians Christians judge one another, but not the world. The context is “point out inconsistencies.”
- **A reminder to be consistent** (John 7:24) “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” The context is “interpret.”

The meaning of “judge” depends heavily on the context. The fact that the word may be used in several ways is illustrated by passages in which a play on words is used to contrast the different meanings.

- **A reminder that God’s opinion is the only one that matters** (1 Corinthians 2:15) The context is a play on words between “understands” and “condemned.”
- **A reminder that Christians have the tools to judge well** (1 Corinthians 6:2) Paul required that Christians judge. The context is a play on words between “choosing the best answer for others” and “being the standard to which others are compared.”

Judgment may or may not imply a negative result.

- “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.” (Romans 14:11, 2 Corinthians 5:10) The context includes Christians who will be judged favorably.
- “But a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27)
- “We may have boldness in the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17)