

# **Condemnation and Consequences: Not Synonyms**

It is my opinion that cultural changes over the last forty or more years have caused even some in Christ's Church to shy away from the concepts of correction, discipline, and recognition of consequences for our actions. Somehow, the idea has taken hold that a believer can not criticize or be criticized, since "there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus."

I hold that this outlook is unscriptural and a misuse of Romans 8:1. One need look no further than the story of Ananias and Sapphira to see that the actions of believers can result in negative consequences from God Himself. Other passages clearly spell-out proper methods of Church discipline and accountability from one believer to another.

Join me in exploring this issue. This is a journey whose destination is to "rightly divide the Word of Truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We must study The Word for find the truth it contains, not to justify our own predisposition.

## **What is Condemnation?**

Romans 8:1 says.....

- With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. (The Message)
- There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (KJV)
- So there is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus. (TLB)

The King James version of this version reminds us of the first essential element to understanding this verse. It is the word "therefore". It is a word that points us backwards into the text. It reminds us that this verse has a context.

What is that context? The Message translation calls it the "fateful dilemma". This dilemma is discussed in Romans chapter 7, where Paul laments that there is a conflict between intention and action. It is the place where the new nature in Christ and the old nature of sin collide.

The answer to this dilemma is The Good News that Paul preached to his last day. In our life before Christ, we were indeed condemned by The Law because of our sin. We lived in a "low-lying black cloud" (The Message), knowing in our hearts the weight of the price of sin. The ultimate fruit of that condemnation would be borne on a terrible day. We will face that judgment where God will command us to depart from Him forever; an everlasting fate that cannot be altered.

But, for those in Christ, that cloud is removed, the condemnation is no more. The price for our sins has been paid and the terrible wage that we had earned is no longer ours because of Christ. It is dissonance of the soul turned to a song of peace and stillness, knowing that we will not ever again face such a destiny.

It is only by eisegesis, the pouring of meaning INTO this passage, that one could conclude that this passage is talking about anything else.

## What Condemnation is Not

If you want to believe that Romans 8:1 means that you no longer have to face consequences and correction, there are some issues with which to reckon.

First of all, Christians still have a judgment to face. Look at this comment.

“Similarly, when Paul asserted that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), he did not preclude the fact that he and all other people would one day stand before the judgment seat of God. On the contrary, later in this letter he reminded his readers that "we will all stand before God's judgment seat...and each of us will give an account of himself to God" (14:10,12). It was not the avoidance of judgment but the certainty of the verdict that Paul spoke about with such assurance, because of his relationship with Christ.”

(from Biblical Theology of the New Testament, © 1994 by Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved.)

Is this judgment condemnation? No, certainly not. Will we have to give an account to God for our actions? Yes, most certainly. This points out that that our actions, even after we are saved, do have consequences that are not addressed by the saving grace we have in Christ.

There is still more.

“Because the Corinthians had been indifferent to correcting this injustice, God intervened in discipline. As Paul explained, "that is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). But even this intervention was a testimony to salvation's assurance since, as Paul said, "when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world" (v. 32). In this case, the severity of the discipline led to death ("a number of you have fallen asleep"). But the ultimate consequence was salvation, not condemnation. “

(from Biblical Theology of the New Testament, © 1994 by Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved.)

All this is to make the point that being in Christ does not mean that we elude being compared to a standard. When we fall short of that standard however, we will face consequences. We will NOT face eternal separation from God. That fate is condemnation and we do not face it, as Paul states so well in Romans 8.

Ananias and Sapphira were mentioned earlier. Let's look at that story in Acts 5:1-11.

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in

and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. (NIV)

So what happened here? Well, in summary:

- Ananias and Sapphira sold their land.
- Ananias and Sapphira misrepresented its price.
- A flesh and blood person pointed this out to them.
- They paid for their sin with their lives, but not with their souls.

If you believe that Romans 8:1 says that there is not correction or accountability for your actions because you are in Christ, you have to explain away what happened in this passage. Even if you try to diminish the fact of Peter's humanity by saying he was inspired by God, please note that the basis of Peter's words was God's Word and not a unique or unknown revelation. As believers, we ALL have access to God's Word and can be aware of God's standards.

This story illustrates where a person, using the standard of God's Word, points-out the deviation between the actions of a believer and the standards of God's Word. That is NOT condemnation; it is teaching, discipline, and correction. The believers faced certain consequences pronounced by God, but it did not include the "condemnation" in Romans 8:1.

Are Christians accountable to no one but God? Does any other believer have "the right" to show us where our actions don't line-up with God's Word? Or do we all have to keep our distance because we've all made mistakes, aren't perfect, can't see the whole picture, and therefore can't correct anyone else?

## **Accountability**

Whether in the Church or in the world, it is not difficult to find someone with the outlook that says "you can't criticize what I do! The Bible says we are not to judge others. Besides, you aren't so perfect your self, so leave me alone....."

But does the Bible really say we aren't to judge others? Is it really true that truth can be made invalid because of the person that carries the message? Let's explore this subject.

The major foundation for this outlook is drawn from the first part of Matthew chapter seven, which reads:

<sup>1</sup>"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

<sup>3</sup>"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

As can be common, isolating this text from its context can lead to erroneous conclusions. There is also another passage that, if taken in isolation, would appear to reinforce this outlook. In John chapter eight, you will find:

<sup>2</sup>At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup>and said to

Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup>In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup>They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup>Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

<sup>9</sup>At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

Let's first look at the passage in Matthew chapter seven. An examination of the context of this passage shows Jesus is addressing His disciples. The imperative in verses one through two seems clear enough. In verse three, Jesus presents the reasoning behind the imperative. The issue He is addressing is not simply judging or even judging others, but judging hypocritically. Look closely at verse five. Note that Jesus prescribes a cure for the issue....first fix your hypocrisy! Remove that which obstructs your vision and impairs your judgment then you can see to help someone else. Why would there be an instruction to remove an impairment from your judgment if you you weren't supposed to make judgments?

In the larger context, this conclusion is far more consistent over the entire Bible than isolating the text and stating that we are not to judge.

Let's look at another imperative from Jesus, John 7:24, in which Jesus simply commands "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." If you take the commandment in Matthew 7:1 to mean that you are not to judge, a conflict is created with this command in John seven. But if you take the entire passage as a teaching against improper, hypocritical judgment, then the passages speak in harmony.

There is still more.

<sup>19</sup>My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, <sup>20</sup>remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20 (NIV)

This cannot be possible without someone shining the light of scripture on the error of another believer's ways. Note that James is addressing "My brothers"....Christians.

<sup>12</sup>See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup>But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:12-13 (NIV)

Encouragement is personal intervention in the life of another, guiding, correcting, and reinforcing actions and decisions in one's life. Also note the tone of this passage is an imperative.

We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. Colossians 1:28

<sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:16-17

To “teach and admonish” means to instruct and correct. You do not correct that which is right, but that which is in error. Instruction is the passing of knowledge to another. So, we are instructed to teach and admonish, as we “...let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”.

Note the word “admonish”. Just what is that?

According to Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary:

1. To warn or notify of a fault; to reprove gently or kindly, but seriously; to exhort.
2. To counsel against wrong practices; to caution or advise; to warn against danger or an offense.

The meaning is pretty clear, isn't it? So, if you apply this understanding to Colossians 3:16, we are indeed instructed to notify each other of a fault. Notice, it is not limited to a small group of people. The instructions are given to the church at large and we are to admonish each other.

Let me share some perspective I learned about this. Pastor Chip Ingram is pastor of Venture Church in Los Gatos. In one of his recent *Living on the Edge* radio programs, he discussed speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and presented these thoughts:

1. Judging is when I see something in your life that disagrees with my opinion.
2. Admonishing is when I see something in your life that doesn't agree with scripture. The discussion is based on scriptural truth and Christian love.
3. Admonition is God's antibiotic in the Body of Christ.
4. Part of God's plan is that someone will see in your life what you don't, and that they will, in His love, point it out to you.
5. You will never be a mature Christian if you can't hear God speak through other people.
6. The test of love is wanting what's best for someone so bad that you are willing to risk the relationship.

These simple comments show just how important to the Body of Christ and our relationship with each other that admonishing one another really is.

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Is scripture just meant for Timothy to use in teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training for righteousness? No. This guidance is meant for the “man of God”. This is not something that only applies to Timothy, but to all believers.

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:14

Notice that it is a mark of spiritual maturity to be able to judge and distinguish good from evil. If Jesus had intend for us to not judge, then it would not be considered a mark of maturity.

<sup>3</sup>So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. <sup>4</sup>If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." Luke 17:3-4

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Galatians 6:1

<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:14-16

I believe these last three passages get to the heart of the entire matter of our accountability to other believers. We are to take the initiative to correct each other. For that matter, the word "rebuke" carries the idea of initiating a strong correction.

BUT, the purpose and goal is repentance and forgiveness, not the simple venting of disapproval and harsh judgment. It is to be done in a spirit of gentleness, readiness to forgive, and remembering that the one carrying the message can be in the same position (and not necessarily any better or worse from a moral or experience perspective). Note that this possibility DOES NOT keep you from carrying this message but it is supposed to keep you humble and gentle in its delivery.

There is one last loose end that needs attention; the passage from John eight.

The entire situation detailed in this passage is about the Jewish leaders trying to trap Jesus and accuse Him of breaking the Law. In this case, the Law says that if a couple is caught in Adultery, both the man and the woman are to be put to death. (Leviticus 20:10) The Law also requires that a conviction (and the resulting penalty, by implication) requires at least two witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15)

Jesus knew their reason for bringing this woman was not to perform a lawful act. If that was their intent, they would have followed the entire law by bringing both parties involved and witnesses as specified. Since that was not done, AND THEY KNEW IT, no one was willing to execute the provisions of the law. Jesus also knew the requirements of that law and refused to judge her since he was not a witness and there were no witnesses left, as required by the Law. Jesus comment about who can throw the first stone was an admonishment that no one was in the position to condemn this woman because the requirements of the Law had not been fulfilled. It was not a statement that they were disqualified to execute judgment because they were not perfect.

Furthermore, there are many commands in scripture where consequences of punishment are detailed with no condition for the qualifications of those who are to administer punishment. Consider 1 Corinthians chapter five. Paul explicitly states:

<sup>12</sup>What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? **Are you not to judge those inside?** <sup>13</sup>God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

Paul's comment is made to the entire church. Not it's leadership. Not those who are perfect, but the entire church has the authority to judge the immoral brother's actions as sin and apply the necessary punishment. Paul also asks a question in a way that the answer is presumed: "Are you not to judge those on the inside [of the church]?" It is Paul's understanding that the church

has the authority and right to correct and punish those in the body. Again notice that no conditions are set on who is qualified to do so.

The conclusion is then, that the lack of perfection is not a condition to be able to administer correction or punishment.

## **Are We Teachable and Correctable?**

The bed-rock principle in this exploration is that hypocrisy disqualifies one from bearing a word of correction and guidance, not what we think of that person or what we think of their “qualifications” to do so.

Consider:

- Regardless of what we think of the bearer of our exhortation, if the message brought is of God and based on scripture, it is Gods own Word and Truth, which stands on the character of God and His Authority. The character and authority of the message bearer has no impact on the truth of the matter. God gives us no excuse for rejecting His commands and teaching just because we think the bearer is somehow unqualified to utter them to us. Only pride would think that.
- The teaching of Jesus in Matthew seven also warns us that the same standard that we use in our judgment will be used to judge us. That makes it all the more important that we use God's Word and use it properly (2 Timothy 2:15). Thus when we use scripture as our standard for how we as believers should live and behave, then we are NOT using our own standard for judgment. Rather, we are using God's standard. What grounds do we have for rejecting such a standard? The answer to that is simply that we have no grounds to reject it.

It bears repeating that the heart and attitude of the one bringing the word of correction has to be right. Galatians 6:1 and Ephesians 4:15 make it clear that these actions are to be done in love and gentleness, ready to extend forgiveness. It is not to be done for the purpose to tearing down someone or building ourselves at their expense.

At the same time, those of us in the Body who may be receiving such correction have responsibilities as well. Scripture has much to say about our attitude toward correction.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Proverbs 1:7

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid. Proverbs 12:1

The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. Proverbs 12:15

Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding. Proverbs 23:23

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. Proverbs 9:9

Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear. Proverbs 25:12

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up..." Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Leviticus 19:17

Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear. Proverbs 25:12

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage -- with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

2 Timothy 4:2-3

The clear conclusion is that not only are we to administer Godly correction and discipline each other, it is good and wise for us to accept Godly correction and discipline.

## **Judgment**

It was briefly discussed earlier that the standard that we use to judge is the same standard that will be used to judge us. This is why it is so important to know God's Word and covet the Spirit's leadership before we say anything to anyone. But, we still have to come to a conclusion that something needs to be said. To do that, we have to use our Spirit disciplined minds to look at a situation and judge accordingly.

At the most basic level, we have to use judgment to know what is right and wrong according to scripture and apply it to our lives. This is possible because God has given us the ability to make judgments. Without such judgment, how could we discern right from wrong to embrace one and reject the other?

Secondly, we have been given the charge to use and apply that judgment.

<sup>54</sup>He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. <sup>55</sup>And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. <sup>56</sup>Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? <sup>57</sup>"Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? Luke 12:54-57

Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment. John 7:24

<sup>15</sup>"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. <sup>16</sup>By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>20</sup>Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Matthew 7:15-20

In case the use of the last passage seems a bit obscure, simply ask how would you recognize the fruit of the tree unless you were using judgment?



Paul teaches in Hebrews 5:11-14 that the ability to judge and discern is a mark of the mature;

<sup>11</sup>We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! <sup>13</sup>Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

It is clear that it is our duty to exercise judgment of good and evil, and that applies to the actions of others. Consider the consequences in our lives and that of Christ's Church if we did not exercise our judgment in looking for false doctrine and teachers. What if we ignore these directives because of an errant conclusion that we have no right to judge?

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves" Matthew 7:15

"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" Eph. 5:11

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. " 2 Thess. 3:6

"I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them." Rom. 16:17

## **Conclusion**

The teachings of scripture on judgment, accountability, and correction are nothing new. They are solid doctrine, with its roots deep in scripture and the history of the Church.

What is new is the unwillingness of believers to care and watch-over each other, even when it is difficult and personally risky to do so. Our culture emphasizes being inoffensive and we don't want to face potential social rejection nor have to hear someone tell us we are doing something wrong.

But if we as believers are going to be people of God's Word, then we cannot ignore its teaching nor bend it to suit our preconceived desires.

Scripture is clear about this. We are accountable to each other. We are to correct each other, without hypocrisy, with love and gentleness. It is a mark of spiritual maturity to not only be able to exercise spiritual judgment, but value Godly correction when it comes our way.