

# Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

One of the greatest challenges we face in meeting our spiritual obligations before God involves our relationship with other members in the church. While we are required to be firmly rooted in an unchanging doctrine, unyielding and tenacious in its defense, we are simultaneously required to be caring, compassionate, longsuffering, and forgiving to each individual God has placed within the body. It is difficult to be hard in the one sense, resisting false doctrine and heresy, and also be longsuffering and forgiving of personal weakness at the same time. Often the biggest problem is knowing the difference in these situations, not confusing the two. In this sense, God requires us to judge circumstances and use His wisdom through the Holy Spirit to react properly. Unfortunately, it is very easy to judge incorrectly and react emotionally to a situation. If we are not very careful, we can find ourselves judging one another in issues of human weakness, thinking it proper to express "righteous indignation" as if it were a case of deliberate heresy. Likely, we are confronted much more with our brothers' personal weaknesses than issues of doctrinal heresy. In such cases of weakness we are forbidden to judge one another, for God has reserved judgment to Himself. He said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2). Notice also this instruction, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). It should be clear God has drawn a distinct line and forbids us to make personal judgments concerning others.

## **What Is the Human Tendency?**

By nature human beings do not leave judgment to the Creator. Each one demands the right to exercise his or her own presumed prerogative in judging one another. Even the called are fighting that inclination as long as they live in the flesh. Human beings will judge others openly for many reasons. We also make judgments in heart, even if we do not voice them publicly. In fact, judgment occurs first in the heart before it is ever

expressed. Let us look at some of the fundamental reasons human beings openly engage in judging one another.

**Jealousy or envy:** "Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matt. 12:22-24). The Pharisees reacted out of jealousy for the admiration the people gave to Jesus. They desired acclaim from the masses and hated anyone who infringed upon their own personal glory. They were judging Christ out of envy for His power and growing popularity.

**Retaliation for some offense, whether real or imagined:** "And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. . . . And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai" (Est. 3:2, 5-6). Haman judged Mordecai to have deliberately offended him by disobeying the king's command. He wanted retribution based upon a false judgment and sought public vengeance against the Jews. Anytime we lash out in words because we feel hurt by someone, we are also making a personal judgment and seeking to extract restitution by influencing others to side with us.

**To gain some position or status by slander, as Korah did toward Moses:** "And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3). Korah wanted his own share of prominence and authority and accused Moses falsely in an attempt to turn public opinion against him. He judged Moses by accusing him of arrogantly elevating himself above the people without authority. In fact, Korah was the one guilty of that charge. Anytime we feel someone else stands in the way of having things we want, we may also be tempted to make such a judgment. By nature this is the way our minds work.

**To hide or disguise one's own spiritual deficiencies:** "And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? . . . So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin

among you, let him first cast a stone at her. . . . And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" (John 8:3–5, 7, 9). The scribes and Pharisees were exposed as hypocrites for judging this woman while being equally guilty before God. It is always much easier for us to focus on the faults of others than to battle our own weaknesses. When we face problems in our own lives that are difficult to master, it is tempting to focus instead on others, to make us feel better by comparison.

Even if we do not make judgments openly in conversation with others, judgments we make in our own hearts have the same affect. It steers our focus away from personal mastery and toward self-justification. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:11). By nature, if we think we are doing better spiritually than someone else, we are tempted to relax and stop pushing for greater mastery in our own lives. Human beings falsely assume they have the wisdom and capacity to judge correctly, thinking God would judge the same way. But whether vocalized or not, we are prohibited from making such judgments.

### **Why Are We Commanded Not to Judge?**

God alone has the wisdom to judge men. "He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah" (Psa. 50:4–6). Notice the description of God's unmatched wisdom; "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: . . . Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 32:17, 19).

Even if we had that same wisdom—the capacity to judge wisely—it would not be enough. No matter how brilliant the judge, that judge cannot make a proper judgment without hearing all of the evidence in a case and weighing the facts. Therefore it takes both wisdom *and* knowledge of the circumstances to draw a proper conclusion in any matter. Even if we have acquired great spiritual wisdom, God has not given us the facts necessary to read hearts and minds of others called. He has intentionally structured His dealings with the chosen to make judgment by one another impossible. By design He has created many variables which complicate the picture and prevent us from making accurate judgments.

## What Are the Variables in God's Dealings With Each Chosen Vessel?

God has placed us on a training ground to prove who will love His perfect truth more than anything else. He is testing each one of us to determine our worthiness for an eternal crown. That testing ground in this life can be compared to a foot race. God has called thousands in these last days to run that race, but the rules are totally different than any race we have ever witnessed. What makes this race unique?

Each one of us is called at a different time. This is equivalent to a race where each runner begins to run at the sound of a different starting gun, all fired at different times throughout the race. The body is now composed of many who were called early in this century, those who were called in various decades since the initial revelation, and those who are being called even now for the very first time. "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive" (Matt. 20:1-7).

Each one of us was given different gifts at and before the time of our calling. In this race, some runners are good sprinters, some are good hurdlers, and still some are long distance specialists. Rather than running in different races devoted to a particular specialty, all of these runners are on the track at the same time. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (I Cor. 12:7-11). God has also given each one a different level of ability to start. "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey" (Matt. 25:14-15). This means from the beginning of the race the runners do not have equal abilities or opportunities. God has started each one with different degrees of blessings and talents.

Each one begins with different and varying weaknesses to be overcome. This is like starting each runner at different distances from the finish line. One is placed on the track with a certain distance to run, and another is placed much farther behind for his start. Each one is running to achieve the same finish, or perfection. How is this fair? Regardless of how far each of us is short of that perfection, it involves sin. Since none of us will reach that finish while in the flesh, each of us is guilty to some degree no matter how close we are to the finish. Since God counts all sin to be equal in penalty, the one who may be technically closer to the finish, or spiritually mature, is still not approved of God by being ahead of someone else on the track. Both are still short of the goal and therefore equally guilty of sin. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, each of us is still deficient in some way and not qualified to judge any other. "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye" (Luke 6:41-42).

The last important factor that makes this race so different is that success is not measured by reaching the finish line first, or even reaching it at all. If we were required to reach perfection in this flesh to receive a reward, we would all fail miserably. And if it were a typical race, only one person could be the winner. God offers salvation and reward to as many of the chosen as may qualify, so there will be many winners. And winning is not dependent upon being ahead of someone else when time is called. God is looking for improvement and progress from each of us. This means our race has nothing to do with anyone else's race. We will each be judged in that day by how much we did with what we were given, based upon where we were started on the track by God. The one who achieves the most is the one who improves the most—but it is only improvement if it is in relationship to that responsibility given, a responsibility known only by God.

All of these variables put together are equivalent to a race in which many runners are on the track simultaneously, but who all began running at a different time, from a different starting point, with different gifts and weaknesses to contend with, and with a goal of going as far as possible toward a finish line that cannot be truly reached at this time. Is it any wonder God tells us not to judge one another? What human being can tell where each one stands in his race before God? Any one of us can see runners ahead and behind us at any given time, but we have absolutely no way to tell how well each one is progressing under his or her own variables that God has given. God did not just tell us not to judge to test our obedience, He did so because He has made sure there is no possible way for us to judge accurately, even if we did have the wisdom. God is the only

one who knows the key to each of our races and can wisely and accurately judge how well we are progressing.

### **What Is the Difference in the Reward Offered to Each Servant?**

"So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20:8-16). Even though the offices given will be different, the reward of all will be sonship in God's kingdom, with all of the benefits of that kingdom, regardless of the length of time each one was given to work in this life. Unlike the races of this world with only one winner, our spiritual race is not against one another. For as many can demonstrate that undying love for God's truth, and exercise unwavering faith in Him, these will all receive that reward.

### **What Standard Is Used to Judge Those Called in the First and Eleventh Hours?**

Whatever standard God is using to judge His people, it must be something that can be achieved by both those called early and also those called very late. Otherwise, has not God put those called late at a great disadvantage? If the standard is to achieve a particular spiritual plateau that requires years of overcoming, then how can it be fair for God to call anyone in the eleventh hour when they do not have the required time? Since we know God is just, the standard He is using must be something that does not put these eleventh hour disciples at a disadvantage. What is that standard?

**Belief in the doctrine and its origin as revelation:** "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3).

**Recognition of the servant through whom that revelation came:** "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15).

**Knowing where that doctrine is being preserved today:** "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you" (II Thes. 3:5-7).

**Faith strong enough to trust God in the face of trials, and when faith is weak, refusing to justify that weakness, but calling on God to strengthen us:** "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer" (II Thes. 1:5).

Every one of these requirements can be met by those called in the eleventh hour. Even the faith to trust God implicitly in the face of great trial? Even this requirement. Did not we as a body receive great blessings in the early years of this century because many had faith like that of a little child? Ironically, it could be that those newer to the faith, that now have that first love, may even have an advantage. Notice that the standards listed above do not include achieving a specific spiritual plateau. Regardless of where each one of us now stands in that process of overcoming, if we are each being honest before God, not defending the flesh, but working to crucify the self, we can each have that proper relationship with God required for salvation. This is why God offers the same reward to those who worked only one hour in the field, along with those who laboured all day. He is trying each of us to prove whether we will have the character to obey Him for all eternity. If He is calling some in the eleventh hour, it must be that He can confidently judge the character of those individuals within that limited time. Therefore, there is no way for any of us to judge accurately someone else by the level of overcoming achieved personally.

## If We Are Not to Judge, What Are We to Do Instead?

Instead of focusing on the spiritual status of those around us, God has instructed us to put on the nature of Jesus Christ. It is a full time job just to learn to emulate His perfect character in the following ways.

**Show mercy at all times:** "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Col. 3:12).

**Create peace:** "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9). "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jas. 3:17-18).

**Bear the burdens of the weak:** "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13).

## What Are the Penalties/Rewards for Compliance?

If we hear and obey His instruction not to judge one another, God promises to show us incredible mercy. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2). If instead we insist on drawing conclusions about others in our minds, it will be hard to keep those opinions from manifesting themselves in the way we act and react to our brethren. We then risk offending one of God's chosen, even unintentionally. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). Why would we even want to take the chance in judging? We have absolutely nothing to gain by evaluating the faults of others. As we have seen above, our personal salvation will be determined by the progress of our own individual overcoming, without regard to the actions of any others. Even if we feel sure we have the wisdom to judge, that ability gives us no *points* toward salvation. Mercy and longsuffering will. With the chance of offending one of God's sheep by forming opinions in our minds, we take great and unnecessary risk unto ourselves. We have everything to lose and nothing to gain in making judgments. The prize we seek of eternal salvation in God's perfect family is much too valuable to entertain any unnecessary risks. As well, the opportunity to assure God's compassionate mercy upon us by showing mercy

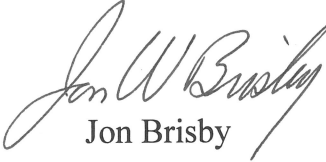


to others is incredibly comforting. Those of us who recognize the need for God's mercy in our own lives will relish this promise.

Finally brethren, let us take comfort in the promises God has made, and recognize our duty to leave judgment to our Creator; the only Being with both perfect wisdom and comprehensive knowledge to judge each one of us fairly. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (I Cor. 4:5).

With love and earnest desire for each of you as the priceless children of God,

Your humble brother in Christ,



Jon Brisby