

# CAN CHRISTIANS JUDGE ONE ANOTHER?

THAT it is virtually impossible to preach the truth of the gospel of Christ without condemning evil or exposing falsehood is an indisputable fact. Any preaching, therefore, that does not come in conflict with the works of error is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In any issue on which opinions of men differ from one another the reasonable thing to do in order to resolve it is to resort to an authority upon which all can safely rely. If it is a matter in a court of justice and a point of law is involved, a legal authority must be found in order to decide as to which of the divergent views is right. So too if it is a matter of the Christian faith, doctrine, or principle, we must depend on the Holy Bible for a solution.

The mistake many people make is that they are too prone to rush to conclusions on spiritual matters about which personal opinions are of no consequence. They do not care to ascertain whether the view they hold is in accord with the Word of God. It was King Solomon who said: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes..." – Proverbs 3:5-7.

The question of whether Christians can judge or criticize one another is one of those issues about which people hold different views. Only last week, a friend told a member of the God's Kingdom Society: "I like the GKS because they are preaching the truth. But they should preach their own without criticizing other churches." That apart, a certain clergyman, having received a copy of *The Weekly Sermon*, said a similar thing about the GKS but added: "The Bible says, judge not."

On this question of criticism or judgment, there is no support in the Scriptures for the view that Christians should not judge or criticize one another. Rather evidence is abundant to the contrary.

## The Text

The text often referred to by our critics is Matthew chapter 7, verse 1, where it is written: "*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*"

We agree that Jesus Christ made this statement. But the interpretation some people give to it is very wrong and misleading. Christ himself interpreted the text in verses 2, 3, 4, and 5, but many people have not the patience to read these verses, let alone understand them. He did not mean that we should not judge or criticize at all. Rather, he meant that before we judge we should make sure that we are in a position to do so in the sense that we ourselves are free from the fault for which we judge others. For if we too are guilty of what we criticize in others, they also will in return point accusing fingers at us.

In verse 2, Jesus continued: "*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*" This will happen when the person who judges another is equally guilty in that as he criticizes or treats others so too they will do to him, he being not free.

And in verses 3 and 4, Jesus- Christ threw more light on the point when he further said: "*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?*"

Some may still be in doubt as regards the intention of Christ or misconstrue the whole illustration; so he reprimanded those who always see others' faults and not theirs, and positively stated what Christians should do, as it is written: "*Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own*

*eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye"*

According to the whole tenor of his illustration, there is no justification whatsoever for the conclusion that Christ is against criticism. Contrariwise, it is clear that we can judge others for their errors provided we correct ourselves and put away our own. By this standard a thief is not qualified to criticize another person who steals, and an adulterer is not in a position to judge another person who commits fornication when he himself has not fully repented otherwise he will be regarded as a hypocrite.

In support of this principle as established by Jesus Christ, St. Paul stated that whoever condemns sin in others and does the very same thing has no defense at all but condemns himself. He declares: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judges; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" – Romans 2:1.

## **Character of Jesus**

When a thing is wrong Christians should have the boldness to say it is wrong; and when they see the truth let them say it and stand by it. This was the character of Jesus Christ when he was on earth. He criticized the Pharisees and Sadducees for their false claims and exposed their evil practices. When he crossed swords with the Sadducees on the question of resurrection, he told them bluntly: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." – Matthew 22:29.

On a certain occasion when Jesus censured the Pharisees and they took offense, his disciples asked him: "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?" Christ answered at once: "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up, Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." – Matthew 15:12-14.

It is because people fear to say the truth or to condemn what they know to be evil that the world is sinking more and more in iniquity. Many religious leaders who claim to be vicars, apostles, bishops, chief imams, and so forth connive at the evil doings of their followers, particularly the nobles among them, because of their tendencies of seeking to please men rather than being faithful to God.

The tribulation in Nigeria today has been blamed on the excesses of politicians during the civilian regime. But when, among the politicians and others, there were glaring cases of oppression, bribery and corruption, adultery, mischief-making, deliberate falsehood, drunkenness, and so on, what did their spiritual leaders do to rebuke their sins or evil deeds and warn them against the danger they were exposing the nation to, and God's judgment and punishment that could eventually follow? And since trouble erupted it is these same religious leaders who adopted an attitude of dumbness over sin that are now most vocal, in their "usual act of sanctimoniousness, in a frantic bid for prayers. Can God hear our prayers when we have not repented of our sins and are not sober? "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot bear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear..." – Isaiah 59: 14.

However, we trust that the good Lord will for His name's sake spare this Republic so that His innocent children may have a free course to serve Him in love.

The stand of the GKS for the truth and righteousness of God is admired by many people, but some envy and oppose her. However, the truth always prevails.

It was interesting to note, as reported in the *New Nigerian* of August 24, 1966, that the Anglican Archbishop C. J. Patterson "blamed religious leaders for their studied silence" over the situation in Nigeria. He was further quoted as saying in a circular letter to his fold: "We are the devil by the weakness of our divisions which prevent us from speaking unanimously."

We appreciate the Archbishop's courage for accepting blame but the excuse for their weakness

is untenable. The divisions among Christians are no justifiable ground for any servant of Christ to refrain from discharging his spiritual functions creditably; Unanimity of speaking is not all that is important but rectitude, forthrightness, and truth notwithstanding the voice of dissent.

## Teachings

We do not condemn personalities or individuals. We do not say that all those in other religious groups are devils and that those in the GKS are holy. What we criticize are the teachings and doings that we have found to be unscriptural and therefore erroneous.

For instance, some teach and make people believe in purgatory whereas Jesus Christ and his early apostles did not teach any such thing. Purgatory is not found anywhere in the Bible. There are those who teach that the soul can never die, but the Bible shows clearly that the soul can die. – Psalm 89: 48; Ezekiel 18: 4; Matthew 10: 28; Acts 3: 23, etc. Others also command their priests not to marry but the Bible says that “a bishop must be the husband of one wife”. (1 Timothy 3:1,2) Certain church groups baptize infants without scriptural authority. There are a lot more that are taught and done falsely in the name of God.

A teacher of lies is a great danger to human societies because they lead people at the instance of the devil to destruction. (Isaiah 9:16; Jeremiah 14:14; Matthew 15:14) To say that the lies of bogus preachers should not be pointed out or criticized is contrary to the will of God. It is a duty incumbent on the true servants of Christ to warn people against false prophets. The encounter of St. Paul with Bar-Jesus, a false prophet, in his days is a case in point. St. Paul called him “the child of the devil” and “an enemy of righteousness” Addressing him St. Paul said: “Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” The apostle then cursed him in the name and power of the Lord and the false prophet became blind. And when Sergius Paulus, a ruler, saw all that happened, he believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” – Read Acts 13:6-13.

If Christians must not judge one another, then those who say that the GKS is wrong for criticizing others are equally guilty for judging the GKS.

However, the truth is that there is no church organization that does not judge others; otherwise, there would have been no divisions among them. As reported in a Roman Catholic newspaper, the *INDEPENDENT* (Sept. 5-12, 1964, page 2) “Protestants of all kinds have strong doctrinal differences from Catholics and their orders are generally not recognized by the Catholic Church”. Church history is replete with incidents of atrocities committed against people because of their Christian convictions by those who purported to be the “pillar of truth” in Christendom. Why were people like John Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, and a host of others branded as heretics, and some of them condemned to the flames?

Now, after hundreds of years, the Roman Catholic Church has come out to own its faults. In October 1964, the Vatican Council voted by an overwhelming majority that Roman Catholics should ask pardon from other Christians for their share in bringing about disunity. The text of a draft decree passed by the assembly by 2,076 votes to 92, called for “conversion of heart”. The text said: “All have responsibility in one way for the sins of disunity. Roman Catholics therefore ask for pardon of God and of their brethren...” *Daily Times*, October 8, 1964, page 7).

The point we are making is that other religious bodies do judge and some overstepped their bounds to condemn souls to death. But all the GKS is doing, and that with all sincerity, is that of showing the light so that the people may find the way to Christ. We will never go to the extreme of condemning people to death. God says, “Vengeance is mine” – Romans 12:19.

## Written Judgement

The preaching of the gospel involves the pronouncing of the written judgements of God in the

Bible in condemnation of all that answer to unrighteousness. Jesus said that the words he had spoken would judge men in the last day. – John 12:48.

How can the words spoken by Christ nearly 2,000 years ago judge men in this last day? Yes, it is through the propagation of the gospel by those he has commissioned through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, to pronounce the written judgement of God is the honour of the saints in particular, and it is also the duty of the saints' companions who are partakers of their grace to rebuke sin. – Psalm 149: 7-9; Romans 10:13-15; 1 John 2:27; 1 Corinthians 6:1-3; Jude 14, 15; 1 Timothy 5:20, 22; 2 Timothy 4:1, 2; Titus 1:4-9; etc.

Whenever the written judgement is preached, being the truth, it brings to light every false way and has a piercing effect against all on the side of error. St. Paul stated: "But we are sure that the judgement of God is according to truth against them which commit such things." – Romans 2:2, see also Hebrews 4:12.

There is always a conflict between truth and falsehood. As light exposes what is hidden in darkness so too the truth uncovers or brings to view lies, hypocrisy, and all other hidden things of dishonesty. St. Paul warned the Christians to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them". He added: "But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." – Ephesians 5:11-13.

For obvious reasons, evil men and those whose teachings are questionable do not want criticism. They always oppose and persecute those preaching the truth. That was why St. Paul said that they preached "the gospel of God with much contention" – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4.

There are certain church leaders who warn their adherents not to listen to the lectures of the GKS, and some even dictate to their followers not to read the publications of others. Such is the attitude of those whose doctrines are not true.

It is those who have something to hide that fear to come to the light. Jesus said: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." – John 3:20, 21.

Any church organization that is preaching the truth will have no cause to fear judgement. The truth is quick and forceful, and it can withstand any acrid test of criticism, and triumph over everything that rises against it by the power of God. Milton, the English Puritan poet, was right when he stated, "Truth IS as 'impossible to be soiled by any outward touch as the sunbeam". Also, an erstwhile judge of the Supreme Court of the United States was once reported as saying, *"If a religious belief has substance, it can survive criticism, heated and abusive though it may be, with the aid of truth and reason alone;"* And Saint Paul in his characteristic straightforwardness wrote: "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." – 2 Corinthians 13: 8.

Criticisms aimed at correcting errors and reproofing evils are necessary for progress. "All Scripture is given by the Inspiration of God" said St. Paul, "and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for Correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." – 2 Timothy 3: 16, 17.

The only thing is that our judgment must not be malicious or based on false premises but constructive and just. Said Jesus Christ: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." – John 7: 24.

On the whole, it has been established beyond all reasonable doubt that Christians can judge or criticise one another in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

May God bless those who understand and appreciate the truth of His word when told – whether in the form of correction, reproof or rebuke, criticism or judgment, advice or instruction. Amen.