

BEYOND TODAY

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Assess, judge, or condemn: Which should a Christian do?

There is a great difference between these three actions. We should be careful to follow Christ's instructions on how to handle each of them.

Back in the 1950s when I was at primary school our teacher used to read us monologues by Stanley Holloway. One of them was titled "Brown Boots." It concerned a man going to his mother's funeral in brown boots. At that time black was the appropriate dress for a funeral. Criticised by his relatives for not showing respect to his mother, they were unaware that he only had two pairs of boots, one black, and one brown. He had given his black boots away to his friend who had no boots at all. Family members condemned him because of their prejudice and because they didn't have all the facts. (This monologue is available on the Internet.)

Criticising, accusing and condemning are traits we should avoid. The Scriptures reveal what our attitude should be towards others who do not think or do the same as us. For this we have our prime example, Jesus Christ.

Not everyone judged in this age

In the book of John, Christ indicated that He had not come to judge the world at that time but rather to provide a means by which all of mankind, everyone who has ever lived and those yet to live, can be saved. He stated: "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for *I did*

not come to judge the world but to save the world" (John 12: 46-47, emphasis added).

The present state of the world shows that Christ did not save the world when he lived as a man 2000 years ago. Therefore the time when Christ saves the world must still be in the future, and this will happen when He returns.

John 6:44 states that no one can come to Christ unless God the Father calls him or her and opens a mind to understand what the scriptures say. Whilst not everyone is being called at this time, the intention of God the Father

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and Jesus Christ is to save as many as are willing. But not now. The apostle Peter informs us that at present the only humans being judged are those who have been called and have committed themselves to God's ways (1 Peter 4:17). Others will be judged later (Revelation 20:11-15).

After choosing His twelve apostles, Jesus explained how one called by God should live. One attribute He mentioned was, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged.

Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6: 37). This is repeated in Matthew 7:1-5, where He reveals one reason why we are not fit to judge others. No one is perfect and if we feel a need to judge, then it must be that we first judge ourselves. By the time we have done this, we would realise we are not suitable judges of others.

The apostle Paul also points this out in Romans 3:23 and 5:12 with the statement that “all have sinned.” In other words, if we condemn another for breaking God’s law, we are hypocrites (Matthew 7:5).

Evaluation and assessment

Is this then saying that we shouldn’t judge between right and wrong? Far from it. We need to evaluate opinions, thoughts and actions so that we can apply or avoid



Weighing right and wrong is a duty of Christians. Whilst we need to assess or judge if an action or behaviour would be pleasing to God, it is not for us to condemn the actions of others.

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them in our own lives. The word translated “judge” has the sense of distinguishing and weighing the information, whereas the word translated “condemn” means to pronounce guilty. We overstep the mark when we condemn another, especially if we are judging by our own beliefs or opinions and not the word of God (Romans 14:10).

The book of Proverbs has much to say about avoiding those who would lead us into sin (e.g. Proverbs 14:7; 22:24). However, when looking at other individuals we need to consider the young man criticised in “Brown Boots” and how he was condemned by those who didn’t have all the facts. We cannot know what is going on in another person’s life or heart, even if that person is in the faith and God is working with him or her.

If a person isn’t called by God, he or she will not understand God’s requirements for salvation. Their minds

have not been opened to the truth and instead will be pursuing a way of life that most of mankind has followed since Creation – they did, and will do, what is right in their own sight. It isn’t for us to condemn them, although we can assess if their actions are not those that God has commanded of His followers and thereby avoid participating in their sins.

A person in authority may need to take action to protect others based on such a judgement, as we read in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Even should this occur, it is still not for us to condemn the sinner. Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6-8).

If we need to address a matter of personal wrongdoing, offense or misunderstanding with another, we should follow the instructions in Matthew 18:15-17. Our attitude in this process should be one of humility. Above all it should not be seen as an opportunity to accuse, browbeat or try to force our own views on another.

An empathic approach

So what should our approach be to other individuals? Should it not be one of empathy when things are obviously wrong in their lives? At times Jesus did come down harshly on the religious leaders for teaching traditions of men and leading the people astray, yet He generally showed compassion towards those who had sinned.

When the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus they were testing Him so that they could have something for which they might accuse Him. What Christ wrote on the ground we are not told, but it caused the scribes and Pharisees to leave the scene one by one until only the woman and Jesus remained. He asked her where her accusers were and whether any had condemned her. As they had all gone, He told her that He didn’t condemn her and that she was to go away and sin no more (John 8:1-11).

Jesus has the same approach with us. Once we have learned God’s ways, we are to “sin no more” but until we have God’s spirit in full measure we will make mistakes. Our attitude must be one of wanting to live by the laws of God. With this attitude we will practise living the way that Christ lived. At His return, He will give eternal life to those who are keeping His commandments and doing those things that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:22).

Thus, we need to judge or assess if we, or another, is breaking God’s law. This is important to avoid being drawn into a sinful situation. We have to make choices that are right in God’s eyes. However, we should not be condemning of others. Only God can rightly judge a human heart.

David Payne

Satanic strategies designed to destroy faith

The devil aims to destroy God's Church and God's people. Once aware of his stratagems, we will be better prepared to successfully defend against his attacks and endure until the end.

In *The Art of War*, the sixth century BC Chinese military general, strategist, and philosopher Sun Tzu wrote the following, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

The lesson is that if you know the strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies of both yourself and your enemy, then you can predict the outcome of every battle. Our enemy is Satan, the adversary, who uses a variety of tactics to attack our faith.

Basics of faith

Britannica.com defines faith as a strong belief in something or someone. In the New Testament, the Greek word translated into faith is *pistis*. It means persuasion or credence, moral conviction of religious truth, assurance, belief, and fidelity.

The writer of Hebrews explains: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith comes from hearing the Word of God, then putting that learning into practice with obedient action (Romans 10:17; 2:13). It is built up gradually, as we learn to obey and trust God. In a world currently governed by Satan, building faith is not a successive, straight-line activity. We don't simply add one unit of faith every day. It's more like two steps forward, one step back. Satan is always seeking ways to weaken our faith.

A crisis of confidence

Doubt can prove devastating. Dictionary.com defines it thus: To call into question the truth, to be uncertain, to lack confidence in. Its root cause is unbelief which starts as uncertainty and a questioning of God's truth. This plants the seeds of doubt, which, if not properly handled, develops into unbelief. Satan knows that we can't have

faith in God if we are questioning Him, or are uncertain about His Word, or if we lack confidence in His promises.

Matthew chapter 14 records that after Jesus had miraculously fed over 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, He sent the disciples into a boat while He prayed alone. A storm blew up and they were struggling against the wind and waves. When they saw Jesus walking on the sea, Peter asked to go to Him on the water. He set off doing what should have been impossible (verses 27-29). Then, instead of keeping his eyes and mind on Christ, he looked around, started to doubt and began to sink. He

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cried out for help, "And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'" (verse 30-31).

Uncertainty is part of everyday life. It is our response to this uncertainty that is important. Does it cause us to disbelieve God's promises, protection, or providence? Or do we view it as a way to show our Heavenly Father that we trust Him. We also need to be certain what God has promised or we may end up relying on our own perspectives and assumptions and be disappointed.

We build our faith in God little by little by trusting God in the small things so that we slowly increase our confidence in God to see us through the big storms in life.

We are so prone to forget God's benefits that some Christian bloggers recommend keeping a prayer journal to record how God has answered prayers. That way we can look back and review all our loving Heavenly Father has done for us.

Constant fretting

Occasional worry is a normal part of life. Dictionary.com defines worry as uneasiness or anxiety. However, when worry gets out of control, it can be categorised as anxiety, the more serious degrees of which can severely interfere with life. Worry tends to be limited to the mind, but anxiety can affect both mind and body.

With respect to our spiritual life, worry and anxiety can stem from a lack of trust. In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated: “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25). He explained how His Father feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, and affirms that He will do the same for His children if they seek Him (verses 26-34).

Jesus’ main point is that we are to prioritise spiritual matters and not to fret or be anxious about physical be-



longings. God is much more concerned with our relationship with Him, our place in the body of Christ, and our character. The more we worry about the temporal aspects of life, the less we focus on our eternal destiny.

The apostle Paul records: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). Ask God for that peace so that you can focus on the positive aspects of life.

The challenge of fearfulness

Fear can be defined as a distressing emotion aroused

by impending danger, evil, or pain, whether the threat is real or imagined. It is a vital response for survival from physical danger, but irrational fear or phobias can cause an individual to feel a disproportionate amount of fear relative to the actual danger.

God has promised that He won't let humanity destroy itself. Christ will bring His Kingdom to the earth in time to save it (Matthew 24:21-22).

The root cause of fear is lack of hope. Matthew's gospel records: “Now when He [Jesus] got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marvelled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” (Matthew 8:23-27).

If we fear death, it may be we are unsure of our standing with God, and need to get our spiritual house in order. That would provide full confidence and hope in the resurrection. Acts chapter 7 records the martyrdom of Stephen, who didn't fear death because he was assured of the hope of the resurrection and the Kingdom of God.

Fear is the natural progression from doubt and worry. When worry and anxiety control our lives, then we begin to focus on ourselves and our problems instead of putting our faith, trust, confidence and hope in God.

The main way to defend against fear stemming from extrinsic factors is to put our hope in God's Word. Events that we have no control over such as wars can only paralyse us with fear if we don't have hope in God's plan for mankind. Christ affirmed: “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:22).

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Enemy number four

The final enemy of faith is human reasoning, which is looking at the world and issues from a purely physical perspective, attempting to apply solutions apart from God. This is what the majority of the world does, throwing physical solutions at spiritual problems. More and more governments, politicians and news organisations

induce fear so that they can offer solutions based on human reasoning.

The cause of a reliance on human reasoning is ultimately pride. In general, there is an inverse relation between human reasoning and our faith in God. The

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less we put our faith in God, the more we tend to rely on our own ideas and opinions. Conversely, the more faith we have, the less we take foolish actions in attempts to solve our own problems. There are many examples in the Bible of people taking matters into their own hands, and though things generally worked out in the end, they or their descendants suffered consequences.

In contrast, King David waited for God to give him the kingdom of Israel in His time and did not try to take it from King Saul (1 Samuel 24:1-10). To defend against human reasoning we need to put our full trust in our Heavenly Father, even when it may seem as though it is not the right thing to do in the situation. We must put our hope in God's law, and His timing of intervention in our lives.

General tips to counter Satan's influence

1. We must never be in a situation where we are breaking God's commandments to try to solve our problems.

2. We must always recognise that we do not have all the answers and not become wise in our own eyes (Proverbs 1:5-6). We have more information and resources available to us today, yet we still struggle with the same problems.

Let the Bible Answer...

Does the Bible have anything to say about watching films with horror, violent, or sexually explicit content?

Some principles are found in Philippians 4:8 and Colossians 3:1-2.

3. Consider others as more important than yourself (Philippians 2:3). Humble leaders look to serve rather than be served. Being humble doesn't mean thinking less of yourself, but thinking about yourself less. The attitude of a humble leader is "it is not about you."

4. View yourself as a steward. A steward understands that everything they have is on loan and can be taken away in an instant.

When trouble comes

Satan can use disasters and crises in our lives to try to drive us to doubt, worry and fear, then to encourage us to solve the issues by human reasoning. Our need is to trust God even when what He commands doesn't make sense to our intuition or reasoning, or seems to be taking too long. Patience is a virtue that is often hard to learn and harder to practise.

To study the subject of faith in greater detail, please request or download our study guide *You Can Have Living Faith*. You may also find useful our booklet *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*

Mark Mirigian

Q & A (Continued from page 7)

tion period, since the Book of Life is opened – meaning an opportunity is available to receive God's Spirit and have one's name written into this book. The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:3 of those "who laboured with me in the gospel . . . and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."

Christ will carry out the central role of what this final festival depicts, that of lovingly and mercifully offering the multitudes of the uninformed and the deceived an opportunity for conversion and salvation and then rewarding them according to the life they live.

Ezekiel 37 describes the rebellious House of Israel being called from their graves, given life and being returned to their own land to learn what they should have learned in the first place. God will make His Spirit available to them at that time (verses 13-14).

During Christ's ministry, He explained that other nations, even Sodom and Gomorrah, would be resurrected with the Israelites and learn with them (Luke 11:31-32).

To study further, please request or download our study aids *Why Were You Born?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Repentance

An ongoing process

Sin is a serious offence against God. It cost His Son's life to atone for the faults of the world. It can take a lifetime to recognise our deceitful human nature and to learn to control it.

Repentance is a transformation of the mind, a turning from our ways to God's. In this turnaround God's will becomes the focus of our lives.

However, our character is not immediately changed when we are baptised and receive God's Spirit through the laying on of the elder's hands. At this point, assuming true repentance and sincere commitment to Him, God grants a tiny portion of His Holy Spirit to join with our human spirit in a process equating to begetting.

Baptism symbolises a number of spiritual aspects, including washing away our past sins and the death of the old person, who rises out of the baptismal pool to live a new life in Christ. God's Spirit then being joined with our human spirit literally makes us the begotten children of our Heavenly Father (Romans 8:16-17).

As we grow in the likeness of Christ, we take on more and more of His divine nature. At one time, Jesus was God's only begotten Son (John 1:14). When resurrected, He became the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18). Firstborn implies others of the same kind to be born of God. When Christ returns, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:1-2).

A superficial start

Our initial repentance can be quite shallow. We may see some things we have done that are wrong and we are sorry about those. At this stage, however, we don't see sin as God sees it. It is so awful to Him that He refuses to live with wickedness or evil. It cost the life of His Son Jesus Christ to make atonement available for the sins of the world. The Old Testament tells us that ". . . the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). Thus Christ's blood was poured out for us, causing His death (Isaiah 53:12).

In His mercy, God looks on the heart and accepts our level of repentance, knowing He can lead us to a deeper repentance, when we start to see ourselves as we really are.

A lifelong struggle

Paul, writing to the saints at Colosse, gives them a list

of wrong attitudes and behaviours they are to "put off" and a further list of righteous traits they are to "put on" (Colossians 3:1-14). Similar lists appear elsewhere in Paul's writings.

Yet, Paul also struggled with his human nature. He lamented his inability to more closely follow the righteous example of Christ in keeping God's law (Romans 7:7-23). In conclusion, he cried, "O wretched man that

In order for us to remain unspotted from the world, repentance must be an ongoing process.

I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" He answered his own question with "I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (verses 24 and 25).

For us to remain unspotted from the world, as is mentioned in James 1:27, repentance must be an ongoing process. Christ explained to Peter at His last Passover meal, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean" (John 13:10). We don't need to be baptised again every time we slip up during our Christian walk, but we must repent - metaphorically to "wash our feet" (1 John 1:5-10). Christ and the Father are always ready to forgive the truly repentant, who are striving to follow Them and to maintain a relationship with Them.

Failure to repent of these slip-ups can lead to even a converted Christian eventually sliding back into the behaviour patterns of the world. Thoughts that should be cast out of the mind can find a foothold and gradually dull the sensitivity to the word of God. That is a dangerous path, which, unless caught early, can lead one back into the ways of the world.

There is joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7, 10). It is likely joy also occurs when God's begotten children seek a deeper repentance from Him.

Michael Hurst



Q How do you reach the conclusion that the “scapegoat” of Leviticus 16 represents Satan and not Jesus Christ (who carried all our sins)?
Question from the UK via the Internet

A The high priest was to deal with two goats, one representing the Lord and the other, often called the “scapegoat,” would represent something else. He cast lots to determine which would represent the Lord (Leviticus 16:8).

The Lord’s goat was sacrificed as a sin offering. It clearly stood for Jesus Christ, the ultimate sin offering who was slain for the sins of the whole world.

Many think both goats represented the Lord. However, Leviticus 16:8 reads: “One lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat” – or for “Azazel” as the untranslated Hebrew word appears in some Bibles. Clearly, only one goat represented the Lord.

Leviticus 16:10 reads: “But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat [or Azazel] shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.”

Unlike the goat for the Lord, this goat was not to be killed. Instead the high priest was to “lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:21-22, New International Version).

This sending away into the desert is part of the reason for translating Azazel as scapegoat, or goat that escapes. However, many scholars identify Azazel as the name of a demon inhabiting the wilderness. It stands to reason that Azazel is one in stark contrast to the Lord – indeed, the

ultimate enemy, Satan the devil.

Christ bore our sins to the cross in order to pay the ransom price for them through His own blood. The resurrected Christ was portrayed by the high priest presenting the slain goat’s blood before God). In contrast, Satan bears the blame for sin as he was the first to lead mankind astray in the Garden of Eden, and continues to deceive humanity today (2 Corinthians 11:3). He is the tempter (Matthew 4:3) – enticing the world into sin.

The high priest placing sins on the live goat and having it driven away parallels the future of Satan and his demons at Christ’s return. They will be removed at the outset of Jesus’ reign over the nations, as John describes in Revelation 20:1-3.

If the live goat represented the resurrected Christ, this would imply that the sins Christ bore on the cross are placed back onto Him after His resurrection. Clearly this is not what happened. In addition, we see that the Azazel goat was to be driven from the camp of Israel, not to dwell with humanity again. This banishment fits with Satan’s future. Yet it is the exact opposite of the role of Jesus Christ, who has promised to be with His people forever.

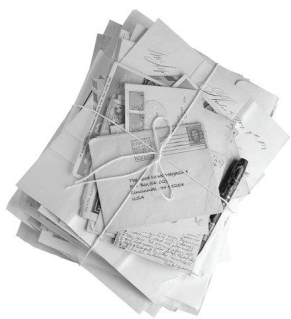
Q Your literature states that the Eighth Day festival looks forward to a time when everyone who has not understood God’s calling will be called.
 Whilst it sounds very appealing, I really would like to see how this is supported in other parts of the Bible.

Question from the UK via the Internet

A During Christ’s 1,000-year reign, all of mankind will be offered God’s Spirit. Beyond that, the Bible reveals there will come a future time when Christ will offer it to those who rise up in a resurrection of the dead from all past ages. In Revelation 20, we read what happens after the Millennium (pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles) is completed: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:11-12).

This period is also called the White Throne Judgment, and it is Jesus Christ who has been appointed to judge all of mankind (John 5:26-27; Romans 14:10). This does not mean immediate condemnation, but an evalua-

(Continued on page 5)



Letters From Our Readers

Nothing impossible for God

In the British and European Supplement page 1 [January February 2023 issue] you asked “What if . . . we all kept the Ten Commandments?” It would end the problems we cause with our violent ways, but our abuse of the planet has probably gone too far and we are left with a problem that is unsolvable.

What can we hope for now?
Reader in Durham

Editor’s comment: Such a problem cannot be solved by humankind, but Christ has promised to intervene before the earth is destroyed (Matthew 24:21-22). Many scriptures depict His millennial reign on earth. These reveal a time of restoration (Acts 3:21), of waters being healed, including the Dead Sea, (Ezekiel 47:8-9; Zechariah 14:8), of gardens being planted (Amos 9:13-15), the recovery of deserts (Isaiah 35:1-7) and the natures of animals being changed (Isaiah 11:6-9).

To study further, please read “The Feast of Tabernacles: Jesus Christ Reigns Over All the Earth” in our study guide God’s Holy Day Plan.

Spiritually rewarding

Thank you for the truths you bring in this magazine. They are so vital in a time when the truth is lacking in this world and lies are preferred.

Reader in Barrow-in-Furness

I enjoy your magazines so much and I am starting to understand more of the Bible through them. I am learning so much from them.

Reader in Ireland

I learn something new in every issue. Certainly food for thought.
Reader in Wigan

Beyond Today really blesses me and others I share it with. Thank you for your continued dedication to bring the Gospel to others.

Reader in Brighton

I appreciate your explanations of various details from the Bible. Your magazines give me great support in these troubled times.

Reader in Cheltenham

Thank you for the past issues of *Beyond Today*, which has given valuable teaching and increased my knowledge and understanding of God’s love, promises and faithfulness. I now understand the amazing plan and purpose our heavenly Father has for my life and for the lives of others.

Reader in Sunderland

Booklet topics

I am enjoying all the material you have sent me so far. Could you please send some information on the Trinity as I am still a bit confused about this.

Reader in Norwich

Editor’s comment: A copy of our study guide Is God a Trinity? has been sent to you.

Helpful Q&As

I find the articles in the *Supplement* very helpful. The Q&As are excellent and they often answer questions I too would have asked. Many thanks to all your team.

Reader in Belfast

How this work is supported

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