

## Judicial Activism: Believer's Style

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Most Christians resent the fact that the latter fifty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and even more so the first five years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, have been noted for judicial activism. From the circuit judges to the supreme court the will of the people, expressed at the ballot box, has either been ignored or completely abandoned. Those persons who sit on the bench, and who are supposed to be in the business of making their decisions based on the Constitution of the United States of America, are instead either disregarding it completely, reinterpreting what the framers had in mind or rewriting it. Some examples include the Roe v. Wade decision on abortion by the Supreme Court in 1976, the same sex marriage decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 2004, and numerous other anti-biblical decisions, such as banning the daily prayer, Bible readings and the display of the Ten Commandments in our public schools over the past 40 years.

However, we Christians need to take a closer look in the mirror before we are too swift in our criticism of the judicial wing of our government; no matter how far to the political left that wing may be. We too have become judicial activists in our own right. We make judicial decisions every day that are contrary to the will of God and we too are re-writing laws or making new laws that the Bible never contained. It's called legalism, and for just that reason. Many Evangelical Christians are in the business of writing their own laws and expect other Christians to live by them. They are asking people to follow rules that are not found in the Decalogue or the Sermon on the Mount.

Worse yet, Christians expect the unbelievers in society to live by the moral values that God has ordained for those of us who love, read, know and attempt to live by His Word. This is not, and never was, a Christian nation and God never intended it to be. Christians are referred to as strangers in whatever country they abide and we are called citizens of heaven. We are a

“holy nation.” (See I Peter 2:9) Our country was founded by Christians who were attempting to escape persecution and a government ordained religion and our fore-fathers were definitely inspired by Providence in their founding documents. However, God’s Word was revealed to God’s people, for God’s people, for the sole purpose of to enabling God’s people to know God’s will and to grow in their knowledge and obedience to Him. No other persons are able, or expected to abide by His commands.

The most recent, glaring example of “Christian judicial activism” is found in a southern pastor’s decision regarding the expulsion of any church member (Christian or non-Christian) who voted for a Democrat in the fall election of 2004. Was it not Jesus who said, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s?” That pastor should have been more concerned about the state of those member’s eternal souls (which belong to God, Ezekial 18:4) than what they did when they entered the voting booth and cast their secret ballots.

Who are we to decide that this or that person is less spiritual, too heavy, unstylish, unpolished in speech, ignorant about politics or the latest scientific discovery? Why should I be the judge of one’s devotion to God based on a lack of biblical understanding, attendance at church functions or failure to raise his or her hands during praise singing? Who am I to say that a buzz job on top with a pony tail grown off the back of the head is displeasing to God? Where does it say that I am to judge a person who wears an ear ring, a tattoo, smokes cigarettes or cigars, has wine with dinner or a beer with his hotdog at a ball game? Who has the right to judge a person’s heart for God based on the church they attend? Cannot a Roman Catholic, an Eastern Orthodox or Anglican church member be a regenerated (I.e “born again”) child of God? Do we have to be charismatic to have a gift of the Holy Spirit or be filled with His presence? Should we be critical of a believer who stays in a liberal Protestant church because of a family tradition or a desire to be light and salt in that communion?

We tend to look at people and their lifestyle from our own point of view, not God's perspective: but our's is finite, His infinite. We cannot possibly know all of the nuances that come together to make up a person's decisions about what to wear, how to style their hair, how to vote, what to eat, where to worship, what version of the Bible they chose to read, how to serve God, with whom to associate, where to work or what organization to join.

I recently read of a Christian based , long term, drug rehabilitation facility in Florida which demands that it's residents bring only a King James Bible when checking in to that center. Where does Jesus say, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but The King James Bible will never pass away?" That group's feelings about the King James Bible do not surprise me, for once my grandsons were told by members of their mother's family that the NIV versions I had engraved for them as one of their Christmas gifts were "of the devil" and they should immediately get rid of them. The biblical version one feels most comfortable with does not matter. What matters is that some version is comfortable enough that we are willing to spend a great deal of time in its study and the consistent practice of its revealed Truth.

The Bible is very clear on this matter of "spiritual/moral judicial activism" on our part, and we need to pay closer attention to God's opinion of such behavior. Thus, this review is just as much for me as it may be for anyone else who may have decided to read this article. These few passages of Scripture (certainly not exhaustive on the subject) will give us insight into the minds of Jesus, Paul, James and the author of Hebrews where judging is concerned.

The first very convicting passage is found in the gospel according to Dr. Luke and is one that is taken out of context as much as, if not more than, any other verse in that book of the Bible. That Scripture verse has nothing to do with stewardship, and yet it is used as the main text for sermons that encourage Christians to tithe, almost as much as the more appropriate ones found in Malachi 3:8-12 or II Corinthians :6-12.

*Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*  
(Luke 6: 36-38)

The context of every verse that precedes and follows the one just cited on giving is not about giving money. Its about being unmerciful, judging, condemning and not forgiving others. Still, some men enter the pulpit and erroneously use it to encouraging tithing.

Later on in that chapter, in the same context, Jesus spoke of His prudent recommendation that the accuser remove the plank from his or her own eye before judging his or her brother or sister for the speck that is noticed in theirs. (Luke 6: 41-42)

The verses in Luke find further support when one cross references to Matthew chapter 7. There one reads another caveat from our gracious Lord Jesus; *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

The word measure again appears just as it had in Dr. Luke's reference. Jesus is not talking about measuring out a scoop full of God's incomparable and infinite riches from His heavenly storehouse. Instead, Jesus is talking about God measuring out a scoop full of hot coals from His caldron of justice and His firehouse of conviction. This is not a prosperity message, it is a warning from the One who has shown us unmeritable favor, undeserving mercy and unconditional forgiveness.

Even Jesus, at His first coming, did not arrive with judgement on His mind. That was something that He would leave up to the Holy Spirit as He worked

in the hearts of men and women. In fact Jesus' own words attest to His real purpose in coming to earth two millennia ago. He said; *"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not keep my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."* (Emphasis added)

Jesus came to enlighten the spiritually dead hearts of those whom He has chosen. That enlightenment would come through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (See II Corinthians 4:6) and the truth of His Word. Jesus told Pilate that He had come to earth to "testify to the Truth" of who God is and what God is doing (John 18:37). He would leave the judgement of the unbelievers to the Holy Spirit (See John 16:7-11) and wait for Judgement Day, when each one of those unregenerated individuals will appear before God the Father. (See Revelation 20:11-15). If the infinite, personal, sovereign of the universe, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, did not see fit to judge an unbeliever, why then should any of us have the audacity to assume that we have the right to judge anyone for anything?

Leaving the words of Jesus, we now move on to the apostle Paul's take on this subject of being a judgmental Christian. The church in Galatia was the poster child of legalism. He reminded them, what they could have learned from the only Bible they had at the time, the Old Testament, that *"...God does not judge by external appearance..."* (Galatians 2:6). He was referring to the passage in I Samuel 16:7 where Samuel reminded Jesse, David's father, that *"...The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

In regard to judging an unbeliever, Paul said this, *"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.?"*

(I Corinthians 5: 12-13)

That passage refers to the orderly dismissal of a man who is a church member, who has undergone the scrutiny and intense investigation of the church leadership (I.e elder board) and has been found guilty and refused to repent of a particular sin against God. That is not a licence for you or I to judge another believer for a litany of petty differences. Unfortunately that form of church discipline has passed from the order of ecclesiastical matters during the past half century. It is the result of the influence of relativism.

The brother of Christ, wrote this in his epistle, *"There is only one Lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you\_who are you to judge your neighbor?"* (James 4: 12) One Lawgiver, and yet Christians in legalistic circles have been re-writing the Law for years. One judge, and still we Christians continue to re-invent God in our image and do the judging ourselves. Paul said that legalism has no merit in making us better Christians. (See Colossians 2: 20-23)

Finally, a look at the passage in the book of Hebrews (10: 30) finds its author reminding the Jews of a verse in their Bible (Deuteronomy 32: 36) which reads, *"The Lord will judge His people."* We will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ and be called to answer for our failures and the times when we had arrogantly judged our fellow believers. (See II Corinthians 5: 10)

Oh Dear Father, help each of us to be more Christlike in our view of others. Help us to be merciful, forgiving, gracious, uncondemning and non-judgmental. Help us, through the searching eye of the Holy Spirit, to judge our own souls and repent of any wicked way or attitude that we may harbor in our judgmental hearts. In Jesus Name and for your glory alone, Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*