

RESOURCES FOR BIBLICAL LIVING

JUDGMENTS

RASH OR RIGHTEOUS



LOU PRIOLO

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Lou Priolo, series editor

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P U B L I S H I N G

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WHAT IN THE WORLD is a rash judgment? No, it is definitely *not* the diagnosis made by a dermatologist. A rash judgment is jumping to hasty and unfounded negative conclusions about another’s character without having sufficient biblical cause. Although making *rash* or *snap judgments* (superficial, nondiscriminating, and presumptuous) is something we all have done, some people are especially prone to making them—not only about others, but also about God and the circumstances he has sovereignly decreed would come into their lives. If you are one of those people, this booklet may provide just the practical help and hope for which you’ve been waiting.

At best, a rash judgment is a violation of 1 Corinthians 13:7 (not believing the best about others) and thus is an uncharitable attitude. At worst, it is a violation of the ninth commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16).

The historic Heidelberg Catechism asks and answers the following question:

What is required in the ninth commandment?

That I bear false witness against no man; wrest no one’s words; be no backbiter or slanderer; *do not judge, or join in condemning any man rashly or unheard*; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the Devil, unless I would bring down upon myself the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judicial and all other dealings, I love the truth, speak it uprightly, and confess it; and that as much as I am able, I *defend and promote the honor and reputation of my neighbor*. (emphasis added)¹

1. G. I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1993), 201.

Judging rashly often involves making judgments about someone according to appearance rather than according to biblical principles. Jesus said in John 7:24, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” On this occasion, it seemed to some who judged “according to appearance” that Jesus had broken the Sabbath laws. But according to righteous judgment, he had not. I have taken the liberty to paraphrase J. C. Ryle’s thoughts on this passage.

Nothing is so common as to judge too favorably or too unfavorably from merely looking at the outward appearance of things. We are apt to form hasty opinions of others, either for good or evil, on very insufficient grounds. We pronounce some men to be good and others to be bad, some to be godly and others to be ungodly, without anything but appearance to aid our decision. We should do well to remember our blindness, and to keep in mind this text. The bad are not always so bad, nor the good so good as they appear. A potsherd may be covered over with gold and look bright outside. A nugget of gold may be covered with dirt and look like worthless rubbish. One man’s work may look good at first, and yet turn out by and by to have been done from the basest motives. Another man’s work may look very questionable at first, and yet at last may prove Christlike and truly godly. May the Lord deliver us from rashly “judging by appearances”!²

Jesus tells you not to make superficial judgments. He expects you to get below the surface and apply the Scriptures correctly to each circumstance. As we’ll see in a moment, if you can’t see below the surface, perhaps you ought to suspend your judgment until you can. Maybe it’s not your place to make a judgment at all.

As Christians, we must be careful to make judgments on proven facts, not on superficial appearances. That’s what Jesus

2. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: For Family and Private Use* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1878), 26 (author’s paraphrase).

did. Speaking of Christ, Isaiah prophesied, “He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth” (Isa. 11:3–4).

But doesn’t the Bible forbid us to judge? Actually, it says,

Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. (Matt. 7:1–5)

This is probably one of the most familiar but misunderstood and misapplied passages in the Bible. Many believe this verse forbids making judgments of *any* kind. But that is clearly not the case. Look at the very next verse. “Do not give what is holy to *dogs*, and do not throw your pearls before *swine*, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matt. 7:6).

It takes a fair amount of discrimination when ministering the Word of God. In order to obey this command, you must evaluate or *judge* others, *discriminating* between *professing Christians* and *unbelievers*. Why do such judgments have to be made about different kinds of people? Because the “natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor. 2:14). To try to remove the speck (reprove and counsel from Scripture) from those who do not have the ability to appreciate God’s Word could result in disaster.

Now let’s jump down to Matthew 7:15.

Beware of the *false prophets*, who come to you in *sheep’s clothing*, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. *You will know them by*