# Understanding Biblical Judgment in the New Testament

**Κρίνω**

1. to make a selection, select, prefer[[1]](#footnote-1)
2. to pass judgment upon (and thereby seek to influence) the lives and actions of other people
   1. judge, pass judgment upon, express an opinion about
   2. Especially pass an unfavorable judgment upon, criticize, find fault with, condemn
3. to make a judgment based on taking various factors into account, judge, think, consider, look upon
4. to come to a conclusion after a cognitive process, reach a decision, decide, propose, intend
5. to engage in a judicial process, judge, decide, hale before a court, condemn, also hand over for judicial punishment,
   1. of a human court
   2. of the divine tribunal
      1. occupied by God or Christ
      2. occupied by those who have been divinely commissioned to judge
6. to ensure justice for someone, see to it that justice is done

Jesus prohibits His disciples from judging others. This is one of the most quoted verses by both believers and unbelievers. “Judge not lest ye be judged!” “Only God can judge me!” These are well known but little understood, especially considered how many times believers are encouraged to judge or are given positions to judge in the Scriptures. Below are some, not all or even most of the examples of judging in the New Testament. This first section compiles how Christians are not to judge. The following sections cover other usages of judging, some of which encourage Christians to judge. It is important to understand the distinctions between the different categories, as can be seen from the six different definitions for the Greek word Κρίνω listed above.

**Judgment as unauthorized condemnation, use of authority, or devaluing of another**

Matthew 7:1–5 1 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 “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? 4 “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? 5 “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.

Luke 6:37 37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

John 8:15–16 15 “You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. 16 “But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it,* but I and the Father who sent Me.

Romans 2:1–4 1 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself,* that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Romans 14:1–4, 10-13 1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. 2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only.* 3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand… 10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God.” 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.

James 2:1–4 1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

James 4:11–12 11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it.* 12 There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

These next sections describe ways in which judgment is neutral or even positive, but can also be abused.

**Judgment as thinking**

Luke 7:43 43 Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.”

**Judgment as decision, selection of a course of action**

John 7:24 24 “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

Acts 15:19 19 “Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

Romans 11:33 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

**Judgment as dominion, or position of authority**

Luke 22:28–30 28 “You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; 29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

1 Corinthians 5:3, 9-13 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church?* 13 But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

1 Corinthians 6:1–4 1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to* *constitute* the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? 4 So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?

**Judgment as Condemnation**

John 3:17–19 17 “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

## Conclusion

There are many ways the New Testament uses the concept of judge, judging, and judgment. God is the ultimate Judge, having ruling authority and upholding justice. Sometimes He appoints people to judge, or dispense judgment as His representative, such as the disciples judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

A Judge examines a case, thinks, deciphers right and wrong, decides outcomes, and determines values. We can describe these actions as judging. When we think we judge, when we try to decide which or both of the fighting children are to blame we judge, and so on. These are often positive and encouraged, while other times they are neutral, and other times they can be abused for negative purposes.

However, what is outright condemned in Scripture is to take on a role of judgment not given to you and make judgments as if you are the Judge in authority. This is possible in certain forms of thinking (sometimes it’s not your business to evaluate someone else), but is much more common in cases of decisions or evaluations, and perhaps most ruthlessly dispensed when connected with assigning value to another. To overstep the bounds of your allotted place to dispense judgment when not authorized is harshly condemned.

Obviously, there is plenty of gray area here. I leave you to your wisdom and the guidance of the Spirit to navigate the situations you run into.

1. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bdag?ref=Page.p+567&off=5831&ctx=n+by+transference%0a%E2%91%A0+~to+make+a+selection%2c) (3rd ed., p. 567). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)