

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

January 5, 2020 - January 11, 2020

Sermon Series: You Be the Judge

Week One: "You Be the Judge"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Almighty God, look upon my life and cause all darkness and doubt to vanish beneath Your gaze. Look upon my ministry and banish all barriers to effectiveness and faithfulness. Fill my life and ministry with Your Holy Spirit to the end that I may this day be led into paths of fruitful service. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

Holding people to a certain standard always runs us afoul with grace. However, there are standards, and it is fair to be the judge of others, if done correctly. Who we are to judge, and about what, are the keys.

Sunday Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (A group member should read the passage aloud)

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

What kind of people did Paul's first letter tell the church to avoid? (Verse 9)

Which people does Paul say he was NOT referring to? (Verse 10)

What would avoiding those people require? (Verse 10)

Who are the people Paul WAS referring to? (Verse 11)

What kinds of behaviors are these people participating in? (Verse 11)

Who does Paul care about judging? (Verse 12)

Who judges the people Paul is not concerned about judging? (Verse 13)

What does Paul recommend doing with the ones judged within the church, and found guilty? (Verse 13)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged.

How do you feel about Paul's instruction to disassociate from other church members who do not meet a standard of behavior?

How can we follow Paul's advice, and yet still win people back to Christ?

What kind of discernment is necessary to respond to others' behavior in a Christ-like manner?

How do we differentiate among the need for simply an encouraging word, a gentle reprimand, or a strong rebuke?

Can you think of a situation where someone in the church has been proud of something you thought was wrong?

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

Read also: 1 Corinthians 5:1-8; Matthew 7:1-5; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

It helps to read the Scripture from 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 with the additional context provided by verses one through eight. Within the Corinthian church, there was a male member who was sleeping with his father's current wife. As if that wasn't bad enough, the church is proud of the fact! Such a judgment is almost impossible for us to fathom – but we must recognize that our perspectives have been formed by two thousand years of Judeo-Christian heritage! In Corinth, in the first century, the popular attitude among men was: "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children." Part of the problem Paul addresses in Corinth is that what the Judeo-Christian culture deemed to be sexual immorality had long been part of the Corinthian lifestyle. It is not completely clear if the church Paul addresses is proud *in spite of the fact* that this behavior is occurring, or *because* this behavior is occurring. We can't be 100% sure if they are *tolerating* the behavior, or if they see the behavior as an expression of their freedom from the law in Christ to be proud of.

Moving back to our current passage, it is clear that in dealing with this issue of the man sleeping with his father's wife, Paul is concerned that the Corinthians have misunderstood something he wrote to them about in an earlier letter. The issue at hand is Paul's instruction not to "associate" with "sexually immoral people." The Greek word translated "sexually immoral person" (" pornos") was used within Judeo-Christian culture in Paul's day for any person involved in extramarital sin or aberration, whether that was prostitution, adultery (defined as any man sleeping with another man's wife whether the first man himself was married or not), or homosexual activity – all of which was prevalent in the Greek

culture. The word translated “associate with” means to “mingle with” – simply to be in a social setting with someone. How might a misunderstanding have arisen from what sounds like a clear directive from Paul? Since pride and arrogance on the part of the church are at work, it seems reasonable to assume someone (or many “someones”) in the church may have said, in response to Paul’s letter, “What can he possibly mean? Are we not even to go to the marketplace? How can we possibly live in Corinth and not rub shoulders with people who do those things? And didn’t he teach us we were free from all those Jewish laws?” Since Paul had many detractors in the early church, it is also highly probable that a leader in the Corinthian congregation might have simply said, “Paul’s wrong – this is OK.”

Paul’s perspective comes out clearly – Christians can associate (or, “mingle”) freely with those outside the church, regardless of their behaviors, precisely *because* it is God who judges outsiders. It truly WOULD imply isolating themselves from the world to avoid them completely. The church has no business judging those living outside its own standards, but the church is not to *isolate* itself from those same people. *Within* the church, however, there is to be strict accountability and discipline, because the church, in its free association with those outside the church, will be in constant danger of being influenced to conform to its character, rather than to fulfill its calling to conform to the character of Christ. When such conformity to the world, rather than conformity to Christ, is observed within the church, the failure must be dealt with, or the church’s witness to the world is compromised. In this case, isolating one’s self from the “contamination” IS what is called for!

We should all note that, often, the opposite perspectives prevail in the church. Church members judge and condemn what they perceive as immoral behavior on the part of outsiders, but tolerate on the inside many of the sins Paul specifically calls out (not only sexual transgression, but greed, slander, drunkenness, and swindling), because, after all, “we’re all sinners.” Small wonder the vast majority of outsiders accuse the church of hypocrisy.

Finally, it is important to note the distinction between what Paul is talking about here and the “judging” forbidden by Jesus in Matthew 7:1-5, or even by Paul himself earlier in his letter, in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. Jesus, in Matthew, is talking about the situation where a person with a beam in his eye criticizes another person with a tiny speck. We will look at this passage more in depth next week, but for now, recognize that personal criticism, especially when hypocritical, is never allowed among Christians. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, Paul is talking specifically about final judgment, judgment that takes place when Christ returns – a judgment regarding our eternal destinies. Christians must never prejudge the final salvation of another person – that is God’s prerogative.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

Do you “associate” freely with the outside, non-churched, world? Why or why not?

If so, do you judge them? What does this lesson have to say about that?

How different is the behavior of your church friends from that of people you know outside the church? What does that imply?

What would a practical application of Paul's teaching look like in the church today?

What would be the best setting for such a practice of accountability?

Who is in a position to know when a church member is conforming more to the world than to Christ?
Pastors or other Christian friends?

Would you be able, or willing, to confront even a close Christian friend with concerns about their behavior?

Small groups that meet specifically for the purpose of accountability, or one-on-one accountability partnerships, are powerful ways to help Christians stay the course. Such relationships are most successful when small (no more than two to five members) and gender-specific. If you feel led, discuss within your group if any are interested in forming an accountability group or partnership. Or, if you would like more information on forming an accountability group, contact Pastor Greg Finfrock at gfinfrock@livingwordumc.org or by calling the church office at 636-821-2800.

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy and loving God, help us to avoid judging when we shouldn't, and to have the courage to judge when we should. Help us to form deeply trusting Christian relationships, so that we can grow to be the people You have called us to be. We thank You for Your mercy and Your grace when we fail, but also for Your Spirit, that enables us to succeed. In the name of Christ, Amen.