

Judge Not

Below is an un-punctuated paragraph about a young man.*

He is a young man yet experienced in vice and wickedness he is never found in opposing the works of iniquity he takes delight in the downfall of his neighbours he never rejoices in the prosperity of his fellow man he is always ready to assist in destroying the peace of society he takes no pleasure in serving God he is uncommonly diligent in sowing discord among his friends and acquaintances he takes no pride in helping the work of God he has not been negligent in endeavouring to tear down the Church he makes no effort to overcome his human nature he strives hard to build up Satan's kingdom he lends no aid to the support of God's Work in the world he contributes largely to the Devil he will never go to God's kingdom he must go where he will receive his just reward.

90% of people will punctuate this paragraph as below.

He is a young man, yet experienced in vice and wickedness.
He is never found in opposing the works of iniquity.
He takes delight in the downfall of his neighbours.
He never rejoices in the prosperity of his fellow man.
He is always ready to assist in destroying the peace of society.
He takes no pleasure in serving God.
He is uncommonly diligent in sowing discord among his friends and acquaintances.
He takes no pride in helping the work of God.
He has not been negligent in endeavouring to tear down the Church.
He makes no effort to overcome his human nature.
He strives hard to build up Satan's kingdom.
He lends no aid to the support of God's Work in the world.
He contributes largely to the Devil.
He will never go to God's kingdom.
He must go where he will receive his just reward.

This paints a pretty *negative* picture of this young man, doesn't it?

For every set of circumstances, for every piece of evidence involving another individual, there is usually more than one way to interpret.

The punctuated paragraph above is one way to interpret the words.

Here's another:

He is a young man, yet experienced.
In vice and wickedness he is never found.
In opposing the works of iniquity he takes delight.
In the downfall of his neighbours he never rejoices.
In the prosperity of his fellow man he is always ready to assist.
In destroying the peace of society he takes no pleasure.
In serving God he is uncommonly diligent.
In sowing discord among his friends and acquaintances he takes no pride.
In helping the work of God he has not been negligent.
In endeavouring to tear down the Church he makes no effort.
To overcome his human nature he strives hard.
To build up Satan's kingdom he lends no aid.
To the support of God's Work in the world he contributes largely.

To the Devil he will never go.
To God's kingdom he must go where he will receive his just reward.

This little exercise is not about punctuating paragraphs – it's about how we treat other people.

And one of the ways we *mistreat* others is to jump to conclusions about them, we judge them, we label them.

And that can do great harm.

Our first impressions (judgements) of people are often negative.

That's how human nature operates.

1 Corinthians 13:4-6 [NIV] “*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*”

But “*does not delight in evil.*”

It looks for good in others, not for bad.

It is *slow* to form negative opinions about the inner character of others.

1 Notice Christ's admonition

Matthew 7:1 [NIV] “*Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*”

To judge, in this verse, means to condemn others.

In essence Christ says, “*you better watch out what conclusions you draw.*”

Matthew 7:2-5 [NIV] “*For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*”

Christ says, “*How do you want to be judged?*”

Remember the big mistakes you've made?

Do you want people to label and condemn you the rest of your life for a few mistakes?

Of course not.

So watch how you evaluate others.

Keep your eyes on your behaviour, your problems; not those of others.

2 Gossip is one of the major ways we judge others

Gossip almost always includes drawing conclusions about another person's character.

Through gossip, whether we talk or whether we listen, we judge others, criticise them.

And rarely is gossip accurate.

But even if it is right, **don't spread it!**

It hurts, it tears down.

Christ says don't do it!

3 *However, what if we do see something about someone else that doesn't seem to be quite right? What then?*

Romans 14:1-3 [NIV] *“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.”*

Don't condemn, but don't get caught up in what they are doing if you think it is wrong.

Sometimes people are involved in wrong things because of lack of right knowledge or perhaps of weakness.

These are factors we usually don't see.

Give them opportunity to grow and change.

Don't hang a label on them that they will never be able to get rid of.

Romans 14:10-13 [NIV] *“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling-block or obstacle in your brother's way.”*

Judging is a divine prerogative.

Only God and Christ can look inside the heart.

They are concerned, and they will take action.

But that is their job, not ours.

Conclusion:

Remember the two ways to punctuate the paragraph.

From the same words (the same evidence) can come two opposite conclusions: good and bad, righteous and evil.

Love thinks no evil, love is not looking for evil in others.

Watch how you evaluate.

Don't gossip about others.

Don't hang labels on others.

God is the judge, leave judging to him.

* Punctuation exercise adapted from *Junior High Ministry*, by Wayne Rise, 1987, page. 183.