

# Chapter 4

## Judging Causes Problems *We All Sin Frequently By Judging*

If I were to comment that my neighbor never mows his lawn and that his yard is always a mess, somebody may say to me, "Don't be so judgmental." Am I judging? Am I sinning? It is certainly important for us to know the answer to these questions so that we can avoid sinning, and thus creating problems for ourselves as a result. Of course there are other sins besides "judging," but this particular sin causes the most problems in our lives.

### There Exists Both "Good" And "Bad" Judging

"Judging" is not always sin. The Bible talks about **four** types of judging. **Three** types are "**good**" judging, and thus are not sin. **One** type is "**bad**" judging, which is sin.

What is confusing is that the Bible uses the same Greek word to refer to all four types, and so one must rely on the context to discern which type is being referred to in a given passage.

#### "Good" judging:

1. The judging that Jesus does. Since He is the just and righteous Judge Who has been appointed to this position, He has a right to do this.<sup>1</sup>
2. The judicial authority<sup>2</sup> that is to be exercised corporately by the Church in regard to members of the Church. Judging in this context is appropriate and ordained by God.
3. An activity that we are supposed to engage in as individual Christians. An English word that would perhaps be more appropriate for this function would be "discernment." We are

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<sup>1</sup> See **Endnote #4-1** for the definition of the word "judge."

<sup>2</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:12-13**, *For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves that wicked person."* The whole section, 1 Corinthians 5:1-6:9, concerns this issue.

Also See **Endnote #4-2** for more detail on the judging we are to do.

to use wisdom and to exercise discernment. It is not only permissible to see the negative in a situation or a person, we are encouraged to do so.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. "Bad" (sinful) judging

The fourth type of judging is the type of judging that we are not supposed to do as individual Christians. This type of judging by us is sin. When we do this type of judging, we are seeing the negative in a situation or a person, but we are also setting ourselves up as the judge, jury, and hangman.<sup>4</sup>

### The Sinful Judging Is Destructive

There are, of course, many ways we can sin. However, of all the sins that we commit, this "bad" judging is the sin that causes the most problems in our lives. When we find ourselves doing the things that we hate, the root that is causing this bad fruit is almost always a judgment.

*. . . lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled (Hebrews 12:15).*

Considering the size of the problem this sin causes, surely it must be a very serious issue.

The problem has its source in the Garden of Eden. When the serpent said, *"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:5). Adam and Eve took this bait because something inside of them wanted to be like God. Satan knew all about this sin, because this was also his big transgression.

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<sup>3</sup> See Endnote #4-2 for more detail on the judging we are to do.

<sup>4</sup> **Matthew 7:1-2**, *Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*

**Luke 6:37**, *Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

**Romans 14:4**, *Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*

**James 4:11-12**, *Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*

See Endnote #4-3 for more detail regarding judging we are not to do.

Therefore, when we judge another we are taking the place of Jesus, and of course this is a very serious transgression. Jesus is the only one who has the right to judge.<sup>5</sup> So when we judge, we are usurping God's place.<sup>6</sup> When we do this, we are violating the first Great Commandment: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind* (Matthew 22:37). There is only one God, and it isn't us! We are doing the judging because we do not trust God to take care of us and to hold others accountable when they trespass against us (and therefore wound us). We feel we must take the law into our own hands; because if we don't do it, we believe that nobody will.

All major problems in our human life have their roots in the Garden of Eden, and in the two great commandments of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> God has truly explained spiritual reality to us in such simple terms!

## Our Weakness

Why do we all judge so quickly? It is a part of our fallen nature ( I discuss this aspect of our nature in Chapter 13, "The Bad Part Of You". When we perceive that we have been wounded, we always automatically react with bitterness, judgment, and blame. For instance, picture yourself in your kitchen cutting up a carrot. The phone rings, and you lose your concentration and cut your finger instead of the carrot. What is your immediate response? Do you blame the carrot? Do you blame the dull knife? Do you blame your spouse for not sharpening the knife? Do you blame the person who called you? Or do you blame yourself, saying something like this, "You dummy. Why weren't you paying more attention to what you were doing?"

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<sup>5</sup> See Endnote #4-4 for more on the judging by Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> **James 4:11-12**, *He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*

**Romans 14:4**, *Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.*

<sup>7</sup> **Matthew 22:36-40**, *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

**Stop for a minute and think about what your response would be.**

Blaming myself was always my typical response.

Why couldn't the cut finger just be something that happened? Why did somebody or something have to be at fault? The answer is because it is our fallen nature to judge.

This is the problem. Daily we plant numerous roots of bitterness. Since life in this fallen world entails lots of wounding, we do a lot of judging. It is automatic, and we have done it before we consciously know it. Because we have planted many roots of bitterness, we are reaping much bad fruit. Tragically, as long as we walk this earth, we will never lose this tendency to automatically react to wounding with bitterness, judgment and blame. This tendency is an integral part of our fallen human nature.

In the church, there have been controversies about this tendency to sin, and what to call it. The term "flesh" is the most common term in the New Testament, but this word can be confusing.<sup>8</sup> In order to avoid entangling myself in these ages-old arguments, I am going to coin my own term for what I have just been describing. I will call this tendency our **"God-wannabe."** For details on this, see **"God-wannabe"** in the **glossary** in the back of the book.

We all judge, and we do it often. If you think you don't do it, there is one sure way to discover the truth. Ask yourself, do you do the things that you hate to do? Is there bad fruit in your life? If there is bad fruit, there are roots of bitterness in you.

Fortunately, you now have a way to clean up the mess. As often as you judge, you can forgive and be forgiven. The bad root can be pulled out as soon as it is planted.

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This tendency to respond to wounding with bitterness, judgment and blame is part of our fallen nature. The Bible describes this as "flesh" in some passages. However, the term "flesh" (Greek *sarx*) is a fuzzy word. It has a wide range of meanings, and in the Bible *sarx* is often used to describe things other than this tendency just mentioned above. (See **Chapter 13**, "The Bad Part Of You" for more details on this).

## How Can You Tell The Difference?

How can you tell if the judging you have just done is good or bad? At first glance this may seem terribly confusing. Fortunately, the Lord has provided a very simple way to tell the difference.

Suppose I live in a small town and I am thinking about going into business with a certain man. I check around and find out that this person has a reputation for being dishonest, and so I decide not to go into business with him. I have judged (discerned) as I am supposed to do.

Alternatively, suppose I live in the small town and I am thinking about going into business with a certain man. Without first checking around and discovering his reputation, I go into business with him. After the business starts I discover that he is not honest. By the time I can get myself out of the business deal it has cost me \$100,000. I am now in possession of the same information (that he isn't honest) as in the first example, but you can be sure that in this situation I have done the bad type of judging. How can I tell that I have done the bad judging? Every time I think about that "jerk" I feel like strangling him. Every time I think of him I become very angry and upset. He wounded me, and I judged him for it.

On the other hand, in the first example, I am probably not upset with the man, because I didn't judge him wrongly. After all, he didn't wound me. I am at peace.

How can I tell whether I have judged someone in the way that I am not supposed to? I feel it. I can absolutely feel the bitterness of the bitter root that has been planted in my "honeycomb."

When I realize that I have judged him in the way that I am not supposed to, I can forgive him and be forgiven by Jesus (see Chapter 5, "Forgiving Ends These Problems"). Then I no longer feel like calling him a "jerk."

## A "Splinter"

We can feel the planting of a bitter root, because there is built into us a sensitivity to wounding in our heart. A parallel to this would be when we get a splinter in our finger. There is built into us a sensitivity to physical wounding. When a splinter gets lodged in our finger, we know it is there because we feel it. When we remove the splinter, our body will know that and will tell us by a feeling of relief of the

discomfort. Likewise, when we remove the bitter root, our heart will know that and will tell us (if we are listening) by a feeling of peace in place of the bitterness.

## Denial

Most of the time we can tell whether we have judged another person by the feeling. However, there are times when we will not feel bitterness towards the one who wronged us. When a wound we have received is particularly severe, we may have built a defense to protect us from feeling the pain related to it. For instance, a girl may have been abused by her father, and yet have no sense of her rage towards him. The pain she felt at the time was too big to live with, so she cut herself off from the feeling. We call this sort of defense mechanism "denial." She truly does not even know she is angry inside. However, it will still be possible to discover there is a Bitter Root Judgment inside. In this sort of situation, because the wounding was large, there will be "bad fruit" in her life that will indicate the presence of a "bad root;" and so she can track backwards from the "bad fruit" to the "bad root."

## Perceived Wounding

I have made the statement that we always automatically respond to perceived wounding with bitterness, judgment, and blame. It doesn't matter whether the other person actually, factually, wounded us. What counts is that we feel that they did.

For instance, suppose I was abandoned by my parents when I was a small child. This is a real wounding, and has made me sensitive to abandonment. Then as an adult, suppose a friend of mine declines to go to a ballgame with me, telling me he is too tired. I feel abandoned and judge him, because it seems to me he was making an excuse. Later I find out the friend was coming down with the flu, and he really had wanted to go to the game with me.

There was no actual wound inflicted by my friend, but I wrongly perceived there was, so I judged.<sup>9</sup> My prior wounds and judgments

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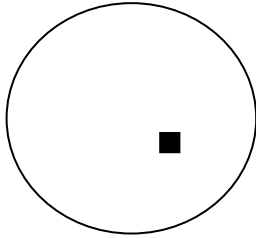
<sup>9</sup> See Endnote #4-5 for more on our tendency to respond to perceived wounds with bitterness, judgment, and blame.

make me more sensitive, and they affect how I perceive and react to other peoples' behavior.

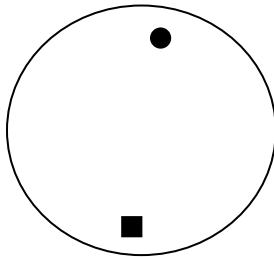
As the Lord heals these wounded areas, I will react less often, because I will perceive less wounding less often. However, this change should not be confused with my built in God-wannabe's tendency to react with bitterness, judgment and blame. I don't react less now because that tendency has gone away or is being healed. I react less because I perceive wounding less often. The next time I am actually wounded by someone, I will discover that my tendency to judge has not gone away, because I will again find myself judging.

The sequence that occurs is as follows: My friend declines my invitation. I perceive that I have been wounded (abandoned). This automatically triggers my judging, which plants a root of bitterness in my heart. I then feel abandoned, making me aware, after the fact, that the root of bitterness has been planted inside.

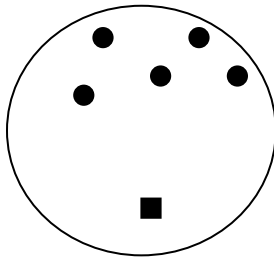
## How Judgments Plant Bitter Roots In Us:



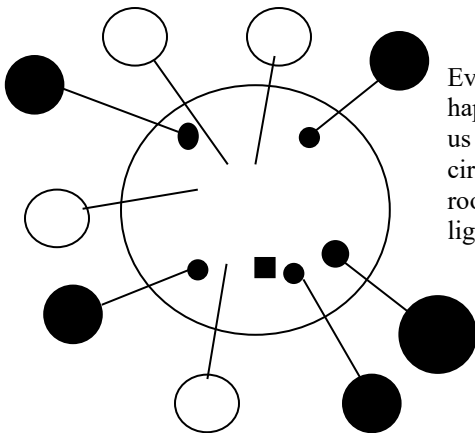
At conception we are uncluttered with darkness, except for one place (the small black square). In my diagram, this one dark place represents our tendency to automatically react to perceived wounding with bitterness, judgment, and blame (our God-wannabe).



But then, as an infant, we are hungry. We cry, but nobody responds to our need. Because of the presence of the black square (our tendency to automatically react to perceived wounding with bitterness, judgment, and blame), we judge our parents for not meeting our needs. This plants a bitter root in us (the black dot).



Later on, mommy and daddy have a fight, and shout hateful words at each other. This frightens us, and we react by judging them for this. As life goes on, simple events like these occur by the thousands, and so do our reactions. We then have many dark areas (bitter roots) in us.



Eventually, a very unfortunate thing happens. These dark (bad) roots inside of us produce bad fruit (shown as black circles outside) in our life, while the good roots inside produce good fruit (shown as light circles).



Unfortunately, the more bad roots we have, the more bad fruit we have. This is why "judging" is so damaging to us. To make matters worse, the longer a bad root grows inside us, the bigger it gets, the more entrenched it is, and the more difficult it is to eradicate. The bigger the root, the more pervasive is the bad fruit.

## It Is God's Mercy That We Feel Emotional Pain!

If we did not feel the emotional pain, we wouldn't know there is something wrong inside, and the sin would remain in us. When we die, we will go to the Great White Throne Judgment, and there all our sins will be placed before us. Scripture doesn't tell us what the negative consequences will be, but there is a strong implication that we would be better off without those sins. Since the sins that have been washed away by Jesus during our lifetime will not be there, we won't have to pay the price for them at the last judgment. Because the Lord takes the long view, including eternity, He wants to have the opportunity to forgive our sins here, in this life, before we face the Last Judgment. Of course, our unforgiven sins will not keep us out of heaven. We will still be saved, but we will suffer loss.<sup>10</sup>

We do not know when our life on earth will end. But as time goes by the end of our life draws nearer. It therefore becomes more and more urgent that we give our sins to Jesus. God therefore increases the pain, and our burdens get harder to carry until we get desperate enough to seek the cause. We need to forgive now so we won't have to pay later.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> **1 Corinthians 3:9,13-16**, *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building . . . each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Here "work" does not refer to "effort," but to the product. Your character is the product, the "building" (verse 9) the "temple" (verse 16). Underlining is mine.*

<sup>11</sup> See **Endnote #4-6** for more detail on how God views our lives.

## God Changes Us Into His Image

In Chapter 2, "Why You Are Stuck," I talked about the place of our willpower, and the fact that in Western culture our willpower has been placed upon the throne of our lives. This view is so subtle, pervasive, and automatic that it can sneak into our thinking undetected. For example, some Bible teachers try to explain that the way to walk out the Christian life is for God to strengthen our will so that we can obey. These teachers believe that our willpower is the tool to bring victory. But what God intends is for us to be changed into His image. It is a miracle. When He removes a bitter root and comes to live in that place in us, obeying Him is automatic and effortless. In fact, it is so effortless that we may not even realize that we are behaving differently. The good root produces good fruit, because it can do nothing else.

## Summary

We all automatically react to perceived wounding with bitterness, judgment, and blame. This flaw is a part of our God-wannabe (our fallen nature). We do this many times daily, and this is sin. Every time we do this we plant a bitter root which, in time, will bear bad fruit. The more that we are wounded, the more bitter roots we have planted, and the more we will be reaping bad things in our life. God's laws are operating against us. It is therefore important to realize that what is going wrong in our life is not because of what others did to us, but it is because of our bitter reaction to what they did.

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The good news is that there is a "cure" for the damage the sinning has caused. I will discuss this in the next chapter, "Forgiving Ends These Problems."