



WEEK ONE: IT'S COMPLICATED

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Are we to judge or not judge? It's really complicated! What *does* the Bible say about that? In the message, Mike quoted Randy Alcorn as saying that there are three ways we can sin in the area of judging. We sometimes do not judge our brother when we should, in areas of sin as revealed in Scripture. Or we judge when we shouldn't judge, on "disputable matters" or theological opinions—or we judge non-believers. Finally, when we do judge, we err when we are self-righteous, when we are not tenderhearted and trying to rescue our fellow believer from the grief and consequences of sin. Let's focus on what we are clearly called to do—and not do—as revealed in God's Word.

Where Am I Today?

- 1) Mike challenged us to be the "stronger" Christian, overlooking disputable matters. But he also said that if we *assume* we are the stronger one, we might have a haughty, judgmental attitude—and in fact be the weaker person. Where am I in my faith journey? Am I solid on the essentials, yet flexible and loving in the non-essentials? Do I cause others offense or am I the one easily offended? Do a heart check.

Into the Bible

- 2) Mike spent a lot of time teaching on Romans 14:1. So, what is a "disputable matter"? List some theological or behavioral stances that bother you—that you have questions about biblically. See if your Life Group can discuss them rationally, in a spirit of loving-kindness, based on what you see in scripture. Here are some rules:

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- a. No one will be right or wrong; so don't try to get in the last word.
 - b. Don't try to determine which opinion is that of the "weaker brother."
 - c. As much as you can, use biblical reasons for explaining what you believe and why. (The concordance in the back of your Bible will help you look up a vaguely remembered verse.)
 - d. Recognize that there may be a very personal reason for someone's beliefs. No playing cards allowed? Maybe they have lost everything to gambling. Alcohol is an absolute "no"? Maybe stronger for them than a scriptural basis is the fact that someone near to them is an alcoholic or has another addiction.
 - e. For a list of essential Cove beliefs, go to www.covechurch.org/beliefs and check out the "What We Believe" section.
- 3) Take time to **read 1 Corinthians, chapter five** as a whole letter, all in one sitting. So, whom do we judge? Are they inside the church or outside? Is it as clear-cut as that?
- 4) Mike said, "Real religion is to get this right, so when the world looks in, they want what we have. They might not understand it, but they are drawn to it." **Read Colossians 3:12-14**. What is this type of fellowship? Would this unity attract the world?

How Does This Apply?

- 5) **Read 1 Corinthians 9:19 and Philippians 2:1-5.** Have I been privately or openly judgmental of my fellow disciple, on a matter that is not essential to unity? Have they sensed my disapproval? Do I need to apologize for my obvious disdain?

- 6) It is easier to be very black and white, cut and dried, and legalistic about every little thing. Why do you think that is so? Why do we tend to become "Pharisaical" about our faith?

Digging Deeper

Read John 4:19-26. We touched on the story of "the woman at the well" a few weekends ago. But we barely discussed her religious question, which Jesus answered briefly. Instead, we discussed the fact that Jesus went straight past that question to deeper spiritual topics and her need: salvation and eternal life. But let's go back and look at this question and what we can learn from Jesus' response to it.

- 7) First, the woman poses her question right after Jesus' very convicting conversation about her five husbands and current adulterous situation. Yet she is respectful of him as she asks her question. What does that tell us about His attitude towards her?

- 8) Her question was about where and how to worship. Do you find that interesting or significant?

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9) What is the meaning of verses 21-24?

10) The woman assumes that the Messiah will explain everything. He doesn't—not plainly or completely. But there is Someone who will lead us into all truth. Who is that? How do you know (can you find the biblical reference)?