

Paths of judgment

Part 1

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[00:00:01] I would like us to read some scriptures together, all of them in the Corinthian Epistle, 1 Corinthians.

We will begin in chapter 5, 1 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning at verse 1.

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I, verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present, concerning him that has so done this deed. In the name of [00:01:06] our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. And in chapter 6, verse 1 again. Dear any of you having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints. Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in assembly. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? Know not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren. [00:02:04] For a brother goes to law with his brother, and that before unbelievers. Now we are in chapter 10, and verse 25.

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles that eat, asking no question for conscience's sake, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye are disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience's sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that showed it, and for conscience's sake, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. Conscience I see not thine own, but of the other. For why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? And for if I by grace be a partaker, [00:03:05] why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Then in chapter 11, and verse 29.

For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. And in chapter 14, chapter 14, and verse 29, chapter 14, verse 29.

Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

Now just before we say something on these, God helping us, I would like us to sing another [00:04:04] hymn, the hymn 181, 181.

Glory, Lord, is thine forever, ever thine, thou art the sun. Great the glory thou art given, great the glory thou hast won. Great the glory and the splendor of the holy heavenly place. Greater far the Godhead glory, shining Savior in thy face.

The hymn 181.

I'd like to just read a further verse to you in Proverbs chapter 8.

Two verses, Proverbs chapter 8.

I walk in the path of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment, that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasuries. That's wisdom speaking.

And tonight, the Lord helping me, I want us to walk in the midst of paths of judgment. [00:05:01] You may have noticed that in these portions we read in Corinthians, it brings in the thought of judgment.

And I feel that perhaps we are in the good and the enjoyment of Romans, which is surely the path of righteousness. And sometimes, of course, we bemoan the fact that we don't really, haven't entered into the inheritance of our substance and our treasuries unfilled, which we have in, say, Colossians and Ephesians.

And it's perhaps because we haven't got these exercises, we haven't had the development of these exercises of what it is to walk in the midst of paths of judgment. Now, of course, immediately everyone shies away from the word judgment. We don't like it. We seem to, somehow or other, we get all wrapped up about it, and we don't think it's a very nice subject.

But of course, judgment doesn't necessarily mean condemnation. [00:06:05] And of course, we make judgments all our life through. And of course, this is what was wrong with these Corinthians. They weren't making judgments. And I think we'll see presently how necessary it is and how beneficial it is for us to come to right judgments in certain matters. And in almost every chapter, the Apostle is exhorting, encouraging these Corinthian saints to come to a right judgment about certain things. And so we see this word, this idea of judgment, and sometimes it's not completely and thoroughly the word judgment, but it's this capacity to differentiate, to distinguish, to discern, to separate, to weigh up, to balance what is good and what is wrong and what is correct [00:07:04] and things like that.

And that's a very necessary exercise for each and every one of us. And so, it really starts, you know, I didn't read all of the references to it. I've only read probably less than half of them, I think. I didn't actually count them all, but there must be about fourteen, because often there are two in some of the chapters.

But the very first time it comes up is in writing chapter one, in verse ten, where the Apostle had prayed, you see, that you may be perfectly united in the same mind, and in the authorised version it says in the same judgment, but there it really is the word for an opinion. It's in the same opinion, but

you see an opinion is formed by making judgments about things, weighing up facts that are presented to you. And, of course, for us the facts are in the word of God, and we must come to a right opinion [00:08:09] about anything as we weigh things up in the light of the word of God. And so his desire was that they might be in the same mind and in the same opinion, and it was quite clear that they were in different opinions, because he immediately goes on to say, to upbraid them, how they were following men.

I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, Cephas, and some even claimed to be of Christ.

And, of course, this has been the case all down through the history of the Church, even to this day in dispensation there are those that claim to be followers of this man and that man, and sometimes, of course, not openly, but it's there, the followers of men.

And so how necessary it is. [00:09:01] And the answer to that, of course, is what the Apostle Paul brings out as the cross of Christ. We had to stress this, we had occasion to stress this in our reading on Wednesday evening, really what is involved in the cross of Christ. Some dear saints, I believe, don't appreciate fully what is involved in the cross of Christ. It is wonderful that at the work of the cross the Lord Jesus Christ laid the basis that our sins might be forgiven. There is very much more in the cross of Christ, and the great thing is, the end of it is that the man after the first order is finished, and has given God the basis whereby he can bring in the second man, the new man, the man Christ Jesus, and we are in him. And we must walk in the light of that and see that there is a judgment on this world. And not only on the nasty things of this world, which we readily assent to, but all this world with all its learning and its knowledge and all that it would polish up, all the veneer [00:10:01] it has, and that is finished, that is ended at the cross of Christ. And that is what Paul starts with in that great city of Corinth, a very voluptuous, wealthy city like we have today in this land where we have never had it so good. Perhaps even in the whole of Western Europe and America, this indulgence, this prosperity that has been built up, and of course people are just looking around for ways of amusing themselves, and in that way the Corinthians were of the same nature, and they either indulged their passions in one hand, or they titillated their minds because of their nearness to atoms they could import all the knowledge and learning of atoms. And so the Apostle Paul brings the cross of Christ as the end of it all, the end of division, the end of all that way of conduct, and he brings in before him the true wisdom, and in chapter 2 he said we speak wisdom among the perfect, and that of course would be another [00:11:03] reproach to them, they thought they were perfect, but they had no understanding of the wisdom of God, and he says we speak wisdom among the perfect, and if they had no understanding of it, which was evident, they were by no means perfect.

And so the Apostle in that chapter 2, he brings out how there are things that were prepared by God beforehand, and they've been revealed to us by the Spirit, and they've been revealed to us by the Spirit, and we have received the Holy Spirit, and they're communicated to us, and then you see in verse 14 he says the natural man does not receive these things, he can't know them because they are spiritually discerned, this idea of judgment comes out, the things of God are spiritually discerned, and the spiritual discerns all things, and he is discerned of no one, he is not judged of no one, he is discerned of no one, and [00:12:03] we know that only too truly, don't we? In our lives as we are given up to God, the man of the world just doesn't understand it at all, he doesn't enter into these blessed things, now we should not be superior in any way or in any false spiritual pride about it, it should bring us down very much before the Lord to be cast from him, first of all that we may be kept in humility before him with regard to it, and that we may of course go out in compassion towards the undone sons of men, and seek that they might have their eyes opened, and that they may receive the truth of

God into their hearts, but these things are spiritually discerned, we have been given a capacity, the Holy Spirit indwelling us, so that we might rightly weigh up the things of God, and that is a blessed and wonderful thing that we have this power of spiritual discernment because of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, as all that has been prepared of God and [00:13:03] revealed by the Spirit, communicated in divine words by spiritual means, and now today it is for us to enter and enjoy these things as we can do because we have been born of the Spirit, and the spiritual discerns these things, there was the natural man, the spiritual man, but in the next chapter there is the carnal man, the carnal man, the man who is living, born again, but he is still living with the things of the flesh, moving him, and controlling him, giving him his guidance, and in that way of course we are guided by the things of the flesh, if we are carnal then we will really not enjoy the things of God, and not be able to enter into them, and then of course things like wealth will become our God and get a grip on us, and we will be titillated and captivated by the knowledge and the learning and the pleasure of this world, and these things will motivate us, [00:14:04] and of course obviously affect us in our conduct, in our judgement here. And so you see, one fruit of that is seen in the fact that these dear Corinthian saints who were so carnal, they were bringing their carnal methods to assess the Apostle Paul and his service, and in chapter 4 he says there, he says it is the very smallest matter to me if I be examined by you, he said judge not anything before the time, judge not anything before the time, now of course this is one of the scriptures along with the one in Romans 12 that is often being used by certain brethren to just more or less do as they please, you see this is not saying that a servant of the Lord who feels he can go, he has been called [00:15:08] to the pathway of separation and then suddenly feels he can go on occasions and speak in the Baptist church and then turns around and says who are you to judge me for that, this is not what is at stake here, it is judging in the matter of the personal life and conduct of the servant of the Lord and the way he serves the Lord in his ministry and his manner of life, and that is of course what they were speaking against the Apostle Paul for, and one of the things of course perhaps they were attacking him for was because he didn't seem to be learning enough, they perhaps thought he should have been more erudite and clever in the way he was expounding the word and so they were bringing this thing up and the next thing up and that is why the Apostle says not to judge anything before its time [00:16:03] in these matters and they will be reserved until the coming of the Lord. So then you see another result of their carnality was where we began in chapter 5 that this terrible, awful deed had been perpetrated by one who was among their company and it was such a terrible deed in fact that it wasn't even tolerated in the world of society outside, even they wouldn't have tolerated it and so the Apostle Paul had heard about it and it seemed to be well authenticated and so as absent in body but present in spirit he had come to this judgment that the man must be put away to deliver him to Satan and he said that they should be gathered together in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ and [00:17:02] you see they were to be of one mind about this judgment, the facts were clear and plain, there was no excuse and this is a very practical matter and you know we have to own in the history of the church and even in any measure in which we sought to recover and maintain the truth how very often in matters, in various matters, even moral matters we are not always of one mind and some would seek to make excuses in various ways but there must be that one mind and come to this right judgment. They were puffed up by their knowledge and this as you see affected their judgment and they couldn't come to a right judgment about this matter but it was a very clear and plain moral failure and it must be dealt with and it shows the real sad condition they were in that they didn't mourn about it, they didn't get before [00:18:02] the Lord about it, they weren't of one mind and they weren't humbled by it. They in fact were boasting in their knowledge and perhaps boasting in their so-called broad-mindedness and how sad a condition the Apostle Paul tells them of the insidiousness of it and that it must be dealt with and so he concludes by saying we can't judge those that are without, verse 12, do not ye judge them that are within. Now of course I know today that we perhaps haven't got the full power and authority of an

assembly but in measure we can seek as a company of God's people to stand firm, stand together in one judgment about matters like this and seek the Lord's mind and be truly humbled and of course look and see why it has been allowed and what is it in our hearts and lives that has perhaps, although we've [00:19:04] not gone that way, is there anything in our own hearts and lives that has allowed a laxity to come in? Do we realise the seriousness of it, the holiness of God's house? And we should each and everyone examine ourselves and examine ourselves as a company of God's people on this life and then there will be a sentence, this judgment is in the sense of a sentence. This is the way that we think of judgment and this is the carrying out of a sentence and it must be adhered to, of course done in love, seeking that the one that is put away there will be restoration and that he will truly repent and of course wonderfully we do read in 2nd Corinthians that this one who was put away was restored.

So we come now to chapter 6, the second part that we read and here, although this wasn't [00:20:01] dealing with grave moral matters, there was all sorts of little matters were coming up and well the Apostle Paul says they were little but they were magnifying them and thinking them greater and in fact wronging one another perhaps, they were cheating one another in business perhaps and in ways like that and so rather than sort it out among themselves or seek the advice of their brethren, they were running off into the law courts and the Apostle Paul says why are you doing this, running away to the law courts? Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? How terrible it was if they were running off to law courts and yet the saints were in a coming day very soon going to judge the world, [00:21:01] this world that they were running to for a judgment. He just points out the whole incongruity of it and he said if that's the case, as you know, unable to deal with the very least matters, small matters in the light of these great matters that are going to come out in a coming day and the saints are going to be with Christ, even without the New Testament truth where it's clearly brought out that the saints will come back to reign with Christ and administer this world for him. Even in the Old Testament it was said that the Lord was going to come with his saints and in Daniel it speaks of how the saints would have a judgment. So even on that basis they should have known this, so why were they resorting to the world to sort their own personal affairs out? They were even going to judge angels. He says we [00:22:01] should judge angels and how then not matters of this life? He said can't you say those are a little esteemed in the assembly? He doesn't mean a little esteemed because of their person but a little esteemed perhaps because of their own judgment. We do know thankfully that there are those in our gatherings who mature and have a deeper and maturer judgment on personal matters, those that we can turn to. But the Apostle Paul is saying you don't even need to use these. The most ordinary humble brother who has no great powers of judgment, even he, the matters are so plain and simple, he should be able to sort them out for you. And how sad that you've got to go away, he said in verse 5, is there not a wise person among you, not even one, who shall be able to decide between his brethren? What a reproach on them and it all stems you see from the terrible carnal state that they [00:23:06] were in. In chapter 7 of course there is a matter of judgment, we'll just pass over it it's the case of the one who judges it right to remain unmarried, you'll see that in verse 37 of chapter 7, there's judgment there and of course there are cases of Paul's own judgment which you can look at. In chapter 9 in verse 3 again he says he challenges those who are judging him, that that was a wrong judgment and we've spoken how wrong that was the way they were judging his person. And then we come to chapter 10 and in chapter 10 and verse 15 he says to them, do you judge what I say? He tells them to flee from idolatry, judge what I say and then he goes on to the truth of the one body, the cup of blessing [00:24:03] which we bless and all that flows from this question of fellowship in the one body and the necessity to be faithful to it and walk in the light of it. And then from verse 23 he says all things are lawful but all are not profitable. All things are lawful but they do not edify. It's rather like running with patience the race that is set before us and getting rid of the weights. The weights are

not sin, they might be legitimate but they are weights. And so you see certain things there may be no harm in them but they're not profitable, they don't edify. And so he says put these aside. And then he deals specifically with this question, the actual facts of it we're probably well aware of, of how in the Corinthians had so many heathen temples around and the meat was offered in sacrifices to these temples and the animal was slain but thereafter it was taken down the road and [00:25:06] sold in the street markets and of course perhaps that was the way most of the meat was sold and certainly the cheapest meat and particularly the poorer saints where that was the only way they could get meat and they would eat that meat and they had no conscience about it. To them the idol was nothing and the fact that that meat had been offered to an idol meant nothing to them. They had no conscience about it. But quite clearly those who were former Jews were very sensitive about these matters and so they had a conscience about eating something which had been originally dedicated or offered to an idol. And of course although that's the actual events we know today there are many matters of question, questionable matters about which some dear saints have a conscience and we must respect [00:26:07] them. And so we must, here is a case for exercising judgment and discernment. If you're invited he says to a meal go along making no inquiry for conscience sake. But if somebody points out to you that this was offered to idols then don't eat it. Verse 20. For his sake it pointed it out and conscience sake but the conscience is not your own but that of the other brother. You must respect the brother with a weak conscience and not give him an occasion for stumbling. And the apostle says for why is my liberty judged by another's conscience? He says I don't want the fact that I'm quite free and happy to eat. I know I don't own the idol as anything but the fact that I'm quite free and happy to eat shouldn't be a means of stumbling that brother. So therefore he said I would rather please the Lord in [00:27:07] all things and not eat he said in chapter 8. He said if meat be a fall trap to my brother I would rather not eat. So here again we see this matter of judgment of discernment coming in in this chapter 10. Now in chapter 11 just in passing you might notice in verse 13 it says judge in yourselves is it common that a woman should pray to God uncovered? Judge in yourselves and of course this is something that should be sounded out very forcibly today.

Do we make a right judgment about such a matter as that? I want to mention the verse but as you read the whole portion you'll see how necessary it is that the head of every man is Christ and Christ is the head of the woman and this is God's order in creation and the [00:28:02] woman should have power in her head because of the angels. Then of course in verse 17 he moves from the general from particular cases where people might be into the matters of the assembly and particularly the Lord's Supper where there was an abuse coming in the abuse in the Lord's Supper. It wasn't that some were unworthy to eat of the Lord's Supper and were eating of it. No those who were eating were obviously worthy of eating of the Lord's Supper but some of them were partaking of it in an unworthy way and that's an important point here. It's not dealing with the unworthiness of people but the unworthy way in which they were eating the Lord's Supper. It says in verse 27, whosoever shall [00:29:12] eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty in respect of the body and of the blood of the Lord. And then verse 29 where we did read the eater and drinker eats and drinks damnation or condemnation, judgment to himself, not distinguishing the body, the Lord's body, not discerning this discernment. And you see there is a tendency for people to just drift along to the Lord's Supper, come along just thinking it will be alright but we must discern there the Lord's body in that supper. As we come together to break bread and to drink the cup in remembrance of our blessed Lord we must discern the Lord's [00:30:05] body. We must see in it that it is speaking to us that he gave himself for us. We come together to remember him in his death. He is now of course the man in the glory of God but we come together on that occasion first and foremost to remember him in his death and to discern the Lord's body. And so if we come along in a very casual attitude, come along in a way where we have not the real realisation of that, we won't enter into it. And in an extreme case

some could be coming very casually and this one coming in a condition that is very casual, an unjudged condition. And so they don't really fully appreciate and understand and value the work of the Lord Jesus and who we are coming together to [00:31:03] remember and his great work. And you see because these ones were not discerning the Lord's body it says many are weak and infirm and a good many are fallen asleep in death. The Lord had come in on them because the apostle says if we judged ourselves we were not judged. And that's the key you see. It's really discerning. It's more than condemning ourselves.

We might all do that. We are aware that we have done something wrong and we might right condemn ourselves and say oh well I have done wrong and admit it and confess it. But it's really discerning. You see it's getting into the presence of God and saying now what is it in my life? What is it in my life that has led to this condition where I have committed or perpetrated this act? You see that's what it is. It's to get into the light of God and [00:32:06] weigh it up. And in the presence of God that's what self-judgment is. I mean Job for instance he knew he had done wrong but he had to really come to the end of himself didn't he. He says I am vile. I am vile. And so we must get into the presence of God and see what it is that has given occasion, what has been the root cause of it and see what there is in our lives and it's a very very humbling experience. One has to admit just how little one does it oneself but we know that that is the line of blessing if we would enter into it more in the presence of God and weigh up in the light of the sanctuary our own hearts and lives, our own motives, our own feelings and see is there that which is for the glory of God or is that which is for the glorification of myself. A psalmist would say search for your God and see if there would be any wicked way in me. And so this is what's involved [00:33:05] in this great matter of self-judgment and if we judge ourselves thoroughly and purely and then pass the sentence on ourselves then God will not need to come in. And it says you see verse 32, but being judged we are disciplined of the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world. The Lord's discipline is that we might not be condemned with the world to clear us and you see if we don't judge ourselves God will discipline us and bring home to us what we have done and where we've gone wrong. So this is a very, very necessary matter, this matter of self-judgment. In chapter 12 of course there is another judgment that comes in, in verse 10 it speaks about the gift of discerning of spirits, discerning [00:34:07] of spirits. So there again yet another chapter we have something brought in. Of course this is not something that everybody has, it seems to be given to a few to discern spirits, to see matters that arise, teachings probably in particular and just weigh them up and see whether they really are what is true if they are from God or are they from Satan. And to weigh these up rather like in 1 Timothy chapter 4 says the spirit speaks expressly that in the last of times some shall depart from the faith giving their mind to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons. And thank God for those men he raises up with this gift to discern [00:35:01] when teachings are given what is right and what is true and what is in accordance with the will of God and what is indeed of Satan. I just mention that in passing. And of course in chapter 13 is a chapter of love and the Apostle Paul introduces it by saying a way, a more excellent way and surely that would be a judgment of us all to see that the way of love is the more excellent way. Then in chapter 14 we read verse 29 but it's worth noticing in verse 24 it says the unbeliever coming in he is convicted of all, he is judged of all. But it's a moral judgment, it's moral power in the assembly and if the assembly is in a moral condition, a true spiritual condition, when the unbeliever comes in it will be evident to him and he will realize that he is in the presence of God in the power [00:36:05] of the spirit as he sees the evident power, spiritual power in the hearts and lives of those in the company and this of course will have an effect on him that will immediately condemn him. It will be an unspoken testimony to him and surely this will be a further exercise in our hearts how true this is, how much our lives lived in the light of God, in the light of the sanctuary, that there is a moral power with us that the unbeliever when he comes in amongst the company of saints and the occasion when the word is going forth that he is brought to realize that

God is amongst us in truth. And so in this chapter 14 the verse we particularly drew your attention to was verse 29 says, let two or three prophets speak and let the others judge. Now here we come to the last occasion of this judging [00:37:03] and I think it's not the other prophets, I don't think it's just the other prophets that are to judge, I think it's the rest of the company, every believer in the company and so the prophets, two or three speak, not at once, one after the other as he says. Here of course he is bringing out the contrast to those who were speaking in tongues and if there was no interpreter there could be nothing for the benefit or the blessing of the assembly. But the prophets who would speak forth the mind of God, bring out from the scriptures of truth what God has to say to us on that particular occasion, then of course we can weigh up, we can balance, we can see what they say, is it truth, is it to benefit, is it to edification, is it something that we can value and something we can enjoy and [00:38:02] go on in the good of and meditate on. And so it's a very very necessary matter this and of course we will as we mature in the things of God get deeper and fuller capability to judge but let us always be seeking not to judge in a condemnatory way or to find fault but just to look for that which is good and for beneficial and close our minds to anything that may not be beneficial but seek to sift out that which is of profit and edification will build us up in our most holy faith and of course go home and pray it in and then of course live it out. Of course we can do that from the word of God, we can dig it up and then we can pray it in and we can live it out and tell it forth. But also when we hear ministry, particularly on these occasions, not only addresses but when we come together [00:39:04] as an assembly and the prophets speak two or three that we might have our senses exercised to discern that which is of God and weigh it up and value it and enjoy the benefit and the good of that which is a blessing to us. So I trust that you've seen the gist of what the Lord has laid in my heart and the deep exercise that flows from it. As I say you can find profit and benefit in looking over these scriptures and this great point in the Corinthians of the ways of judgment and then having got the gain and the blessing of these exercises we can then enter into the full enjoyment of the deep and blessed truths that the Lord has for us in such scriptures. I might suggest as Colossians and Ephesians that we might enjoy them because we'll be in a real self-judged condition, fit business to be used of God for the enjoyment of these blessed and wonderful truths. For his name's sake. [00:40:09] I'd like us to close by saying the hymn number 201.

Thou holy one and true, our hearts in thee confide, and in the circle of thy love as brethren we abide. Teach us that name to own whilst waiting, Lord, for thee, and holiness and sin to shun, from all untruth to flee. The hymn 201.