

‘All Greek To Me’ : Judged – Or Condemned?

κρίνω *krinō* *kree'-nō*. Properly to *distinguish*, that is, *decide* (mentally or judicially); by implication to *try*, *condemn*, *punish*. There seems to be an element of critical assessment built into this word, which is the commonest word translated ‘judge’ in the New Testament.

διακρίνω *diakrinō* *dee-ak-ree'-nō*. Literally, to *distinguish through*, and therefore to discriminate or discern. Also (confusingly) usually translated as ‘judge’.

κατακρίνω *katakrinō* *kat-ak-ree'-nō*. To *judge against*, that is, *sentence*: - condemn, damn.

κρίμα *krima* *kree'-mah*. A *decision* (the function or the effect, for or against [“crime”]).

καταδικάζω *katadikazō* *kat-ad-ik-ad'-zō*. To *give judgment against*.

δοκιμάζω *dokimazō* *dok-im-ad'-zo* To *test* (literally or figuratively); by implication to *approve*: - allow, discern, examine, (ap-) prove, try.

One of the sayings of Jesus that is remembered by many – whether Christian believers or not – is in **Matthew 7:1-2**: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.” He used the word *krinō*. In our modern use of English, the expression ‘non-judgmental’ most likely has its origins in these words of Jesus, but the modern meaning carries much more of an air of condemnation than his words originally did.¹

Yes, the word *krinō* can mean ‘judge’ in a legal sense, but its core meaning is one of critically distinguishing and assessing the true situation, which is of course what any court of law endeavours to do. Only after the true facts have been assessed and verified can a judge justly ‘pass sentence’ (*katakrinō*) on the action that has been assessed to be a ‘crime’ (*krima*) and should therefore be condemned. Jesus was not going that far in this instruction; he simply told us not to go around critically assessing people, and his next words underline that by telling us that people will measure us in the same way that we measure them!² In **Luke 6:37**, he actually adds a separate instruction not to condemn (*katadikazō*), showing us that judgment and condemnation are not the same thing.

So, are there any circumstances in which we are called upon to exercise this distinguishing kind of critical ‘judgment’? Perhaps surprisingly, yes! Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 11:27-34** about the need for us to ‘judge’ ourselves as we take – or even consider taking – the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. This passage suffers from translation that seems to confuse different types of ‘judgment’: critical assessment (*krinō*), discernment (*diakrinō*) and condemnation (*katakrinō*):–

*“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine (**dokimazō**) himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment (**krima**) to himself if he does not judge (**diakrinō**) the body*

¹ See also **Mark 4:24, Luke 6:37-38**.

² Short measure and unjust weights are roundly condemned in several Bible passages. Dishonest traders might have one set of weights and measures for buying and another set for selling, in order to cheat both their suppliers and their customers. See **Leviticus 19:35-36, Deuteronomy 25:13-15, Proverbs 11:1, 20:23, Ezekiel 45:10, Micah 6:11**.

*rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged (**diakrinō**) ourselves rightly, we would not be judged (**krinō**). But when we are judged (**krinō**), we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned (**katakrinō**) along with the world. So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment (**krima**). The remaining matters I will arrange when I come."*

Paul is quite emphatic here, and he was evidently concerned enough about the issue that he felt he couldn't leave it until his next visit to Corinth. Despite that emphasis, this passage is very rarely spoken about. I cannot remember ever hearing anyone share about it, and that may have been at least partly because of the confusion of these different words all being translated as 'judgment'. But it is a serious point, especially **v.30**: "*For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep* (i.e. are dead)".

We don't tend to think of taking the bread and wine as a potentially dangerous activity, but here Paul describes the possibility of similar results as experienced by Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5**. They basically lied to the Holy Spirit or, as Peter put it, "*. . . agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test*", and paid for it with their lives! These were believers, not just 'hangers-on', and it seems that they genuinely wanted to put money at the disposal of the apostles there in Jerusalem. They could have quite legitimately held back some of the cash for themselves, as Peter told Ananias very clearly. Their problem was that they had pretended to give all the proceeds of sale of their property and had "*not lied to men but to God*."

So how could taking the bread and wine land us in the same predicament? Let me quote from an old commentary on this passage by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown (1871): "If we do not partake of the sacramental symbol of the Lord's death worthily, we share in the guilt of that death. (Compare "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh," Heb. 6:6). *Unworthiness in the person*, is not what ought to exclude any, but *unworthily communicating*: However unworthy we be, if we examine ourselves so as to find that we penitently believe in Christ's Gospel, we may worthily communicate." We need to understand that by 'communicate' he means 'take the bread and wine', but his clarity on 'worthiness' is refreshing.

If we follow Paul's direction and examine ourselves before taking the bread and wine, it would be very easy for us to write ourselves off as being unworthy. None of us is guiltless and we could find many reasons why we might be 'unworthy' to take part. But it is not our own unworthiness in ourselves that could disqualify us, but rather if we find that we do not 'penitently believe in Christ's Gospel'. In fact, an awareness of our personal unworthiness and the tremendous grace and mercy which the Lord extends to us – as so graphically portrayed in the bread and wine – will most likely enhance our appreciation and make our participation more meaningful. As we follow the direction to examine ourselves, we find that the Holy Spirit himself takes over the process, convicting us where we are at fault and reassuring us of our acceptance and cleansing when we have followed that conviction and 'come clean' with our Father by confessing to our failure and receiving his forgiveness.

The danger actually lies in taking the bread and wine without an up-to-date appreciation and experience of the grace of God to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul very clearly says that as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we **proclaim** the Lord's death until he comes. We are proclaiming that his death is effective for us, here and now. Not simply a recognition that Jesus gave his life all those years ago to redeem me, but a statement that now, today, as I take the bread and wine, I am 'in the good' of that sacrifice; that by his grace I am

currently forgiven, that there is no unconfessed sin in my life, nothing that contradicts the newness of life that he has bought for me.

Do we begin to see the vital necessity to examine ourselves? If we don't do it, and if we are living with a currently broken relationship with our Father, then taking the bread and wine is **proclaiming a lie**, stating that we are in right relationship with God whilst actually the opposite is the real situation. We find ourselves in a very similar position to Ananias and Sapphira!

Equally, if we **do** examine ourselves and find that there is an issue in our lives – some word or action that we need to repent of, or perhaps a broken relationship with someone – we can put it right with the Lord, possibly in just a few moments, and so be able to take the bread and wine 'worthily', taking hold of the power of the blood of Christ to 'cleanse us from all unrighteousness' when we have confessed our failure (**1 John 1:9**). However, if there is an issue which needs to be put right with another believer, we may need to hold off taking part until we have been able to see that relationship properly restored. The Lord Jesus was very clear about this in **Matthew 18:15-17** and especially **Matthew 5:23-24**. If we just 'crash on' and take the bread and wine regardless, we will be on very perilous ground. Paul's warning is real.

Hopefully however, the process of examining ourselves will have the effect of confirming that there is no 'cloud' between us and our Father and we shall be refreshed in our appreciation of what he has done for us in the death of the Lord Jesus. Our taking of the bread and wine will be a celebration of thankfulness and real joy, and we shall be able to celebrate in fellowship with the others who are taking part, knowing that each one of us has been through that same 'checking' process with our Father, and so we can express our oneness together as we take the 'one cup' and the 'one bread'. We share together as equals, each a recipient of the grace and mercy extended to us through the death of our Lord.

There is much more here for the believer, but just for a moment let us consider the position of someone who may not be a believer but who is in the meeting with us and wants to take the bread and wine with us. It is not for us to try to work out whether someone is a true believer or not – a very real case of 'do not judge'! We really must not try to make a critical assessment of their standing before God; we may have a pretty shrewd idea based on things they may have said, but in the end there is only One who knows who are his (**2 Timothy 2:19**).

We can't say to them, "you're not a true believer in Jesus so you can't take the bread and wine", so how can we make sure that they don't endanger themselves by 'eating and drinking judgment (*krima*)' to themselves as Paul describes in **1 Corinthians 11:29**?

The key is whether or not anyone who takes part is 'discerning (*diakrinō*) the body rightly', and we can protect both well-meaning visitors **and** our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord by rediscovering an old practice from many years ago. It was quaintly called 'fencing the table' and was practised by many different evangelical denominations and groups, in various different ways.

In its simplest and most effective form, it makes two essential points very clear:–

1) That taking the bread and wine is only for those who are 'in Christ' – who have been born again and have received new life through personal faith in Jesus. This may be hard for 'churchgoers' to accept if, for example, they have been allowed or even encouraged to take part in 'communion services' in other places, without any such stipulation being made.

2) That even those who are truly born again should not take part if they have any unresolved issues with the Lord. The obvious ones are unconfessed sin or broken relationships where they have not done everything that they can to restore them. Anything that has clouded their relationship with the Father.

That second condition may seem a bit harsh, but think about it: By taking the bread and wine, I am saying that I am 'in the good' of what Jesus accomplished for me on the cross, that (in the words of the hymn) 'his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood availed for me'. In other words, whatever wrong I may have done in the past, it has been confessed and forgiven and my relationship with my heavenly Father is clear and open.¹ If that is NOT the case, then my taking the bread and wine is acting out a lie.

This is the context in which we are called upon to 'judge' (*krinō* – critically assess) **ourselves**, NOT other people. But, by giving everyone a 'reminder' of our individual need to do so, we are doing all that we can to prevent anyone from bringing themselves into condemnation, with the resulting possibility of weakness, sickness – or even death.

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As I hinted earlier, there **is** a lot more for the believer in taking the bread and wine and I have written about it elsewhere,² but perhaps it would be good to just touch on the greatness of the truth here, maybe enough to whet our appetite for more . . .

In no way do I want to diminish the amazing power and release of the forgiveness that is ours through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross all those years ago. That is the foundation of our relationship with our Father God, and we shall never cease to need to know the reality of that forgiveness, until the day when we shall meet Jesus, when "we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is" (**1 John 3:2**). But there is more, much more . . .

In the simplest terms, Jesus did not simply take our place by giving himself as the perfect and complete sacrifice, paying the penalty for our misdeeds and failures. Yes, he did that, but he also took it further: He took us with him, not only in his death but also in his resurrection, ascension and glorification at the right hand of the Father. As a result, we can begin to take hold of the spiritual and practical realities:–

- 1) of our own personal release from the controlling power of failure and evil in our lives,
- 2) real liberty from laws and expectations placed on us by man or religion,
- 3) discovering the reality of the Holy Spirit changing us from the inside,
- 4) finding the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit working through us as Jesus promised.

Taking the bread and wine declares that we are joined to Jesus; it states clearly where we stand in our redeemed relationship with God as our Father.

A precious starting point for ongoing exploration . . .

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¹ See **1 John 1:5-10**

² See [No Mere Remembrance](#) from justonecandle.uk