

1st John study, wk 12 (1st John 2:1)
Jesus, our Advocate, and a study on judges

We are looking more deeply into 1st John 2 this week. So, let's look at verse 1: **“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”**

So, God is using John to write this letter to his readers that they might not sin. But, if they/we do sin, we have an Advocate. The word advocate in the Greek is *‘paraklētos’* which means intercessor, comforter. This person is the Jesus, as the verse continues. Those who have submitted to Him are washed in His blood, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and now have Jesus as their defense attorney before God's Throne.

So, last week, we started to look briefly at why we need an advocate, a defender, intercessor. This week, I would like to look at this from a different angle - His call for us to follow in His footsteps, learning to judge with righteous judgment. I believe that this brief study will do 2 things for us: 1) only give us more confidence in how to be His ambassadors here on Earth, and 2) help us to see a perspective on what Christ does for us, and from that perspective learn how we can become more pure, more effective, bolder servants of Jesus Christ here, and gain a position of more responsibility in eternity. Those who learn this principle here and allow Him to train them to be a faithful righteous leader here, will have a place of authority in God's eternal Kingdom. I want to look at just a few of the verses on these subjects in this week's study. So, let's get started.

First, let's look briefly at a simple analogy. When learning math, we want to learn it the right way. When we do the math the right way, we get right answers. When we do make the wrong way, we get wrong answers. Same with life - when we do the right things the right way, we grow in obedience and reap His blessing. And when we choose to do the wrong things, or the right things with a wrong heart-attitude, then we will find ourselves in a mess, and (hopefully) learn from the consequences for our choices, and learn not to do that again. That's the process of all of our growth. And, as I'm sure we all know, it's nicer and easier to learn from other people's examples of what to do and/or not do. So, let's look at some verses in the Old Testament.

The process of decisions and consequences is a regular part of life, and the Bible describes it in numerous places. One of those passages is in the book of Judges. Let's look at Judges 17:6 first. **“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”** Those were some sad days. All of man's selfishness, pride and self-centered perspectives leading everyone do what was right in their own eyes. That phrase is repeated twice in the book of Judges - **“... everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”** Sounds like America, doesn't it? That is all of our heart's desires. Jeremiah 17:9 puts it this way: **“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; who can know it?”** So, what is the solution? How does God stop people from doing what is right in their own eyes? Consequences. Just as real as physical gravity, are the laws of spiritual 'gravity'. Everything we do immediately initiates a consequence. When we do what is right, a good consequence is initiated. And, visa versa, when we do what we know is wrong, we initiate a proper bad consequence. The process of learning through right and wrong by consequences can take a very long time for us to grow to maturity. So, how do we learn more quickly? When God raises up a (or many) righteous judge(s) to correct, rebuke, exhort, instruct people in God's ways, and obedience to Him. In the book of Judges, we see a pattern that is very much like our lives in our day, and I think we will see that as we look at it.

When the people of Israel were obeying God and seeking Him, they were experiencing His blessing. Then (when there was no righteous spiritual leader to keep them on that path) they would become comfortable and rebel against God, and do what was right in their own eyes. Their choosing to do what they selfishly wanted to do would initiate a bad consequence - trouble carefully arranged by God to

teach them. In the people of Israel's case, those troubles ranged from roaming thieves stealing from them to them being conquered by an evil, ruthless neighboring country. After a while of experiencing the consequences, the people would turn back to God and plead with Him to send them someone to deliver them from their trouble - most of them seemed to be sort-of 'fox-hole' prayers: 'God if You get me out of this, I'll...' We've all been there, and done that. ☺ But, despite their selfish reason(s) for crying out to Him, when the people cried out to Him, He would raise up a deliverer, who would also (to some extent) remind/admonish the people to fear the Lord, depart from evil, and obey Him. And then as long as they were obeying God, they would experience His blessing and safety. Proverbs 16:7 says: **"When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."** That spiritual principle is available to everyone who abides in the fear of the Lord. But, then when the people would rebel against God again, they would again initiate an appropriate bad consequence... and so, the cycle went, and still goes today.

In Ezekiel, God says this: **"So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one."** (Ezekiel 22:30) In this country, we are blessed to have some godly leaders, but we too have a major shortage of them. So, what is God's remedy? He wants to raise up more righteous leaders - more preachers of righteousness who study His Word, grow in faithfulness, and boldly proclaim His truth to all who will listen - reasoning with them, pleading with them to repent. And bold leaders who fear Him and deal effectively and decisively with the evildoers, so the rest may fear and turn back to Him. (Acts 5:1-14, 1st Timothy 5:20)

So, let's look at the pattern in the book of Judges briefly.

Judges 2:10-**"When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers... They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths."**

Today the idols have different names: football, basketball, money, fame, power, immorality, pleasures... and the list goes on and on. Anything that consumes some of our passion and distracts us from God's focus in our lives (i.e. 'our time' 'God's time') is an idol. It varies from person to person, and that is why the apostle John stated at the end of 1st John to flee idols - because it is so easy to serve an idol, rather than the One true and holy Creator and Judge.

Judges 2:14, 16-19 - **"And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way."**

No doubt, the people of Israel were a hard bunch to lead. It took bold leadership to lead them, and a passionate drive for holiness and the fear of the Lord in the leader that would motivate him/her to

boldly rebuke, exhort, correct, instruct those who were rebellious, so that, they could all continue to enjoy God's blessing and keep growing closer to Him.

So, who did God use? Well, let's look and see just a few of the judges God chose, so that we can see what type(s) of people He chose, and how He used them, so that we can learn to grow to be leaders that God can use like that.

Joshua

The first judge mentioned in Judges. God said this of him: **“So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.”** (Judges 2:7) Joshua obviously had a good testimony, having served with Moses and then God setting up Joshua to take Moses' place. But despite the qualities we highly respect about Joshua, he also had his faults too. Under Joshua's leadership, the people of Israel did not completely wipe out all of the enemy nations. Joshua 16:10 says: **“And they did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day and have become forced laborers.”** There are 6 other verses that talk about other groups that the people of Israel did not drive out of the land, as God had told them too. So, Joshua wasn't perfect, but in His Word, God honored him highly as being a faithful servant to do what God had him do.

There are 15 other judges mentioned in the book of Judges. We don't have time to look at all of them today, so let's just look a few more.

Othniel

“When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim.” (Judges 3:9-10) Obviously, another respectable man of God. The nephew of Caleb - the bold servant of God. God considered Othniel a faithful enough servant that God granted to him boldness and power of God.

Deborah

“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment... So the land had rest for forty years.” (Judges 4:4-5) Obviously, a dear woman of God. I found it interesting that there was a specific palm tree that the people of Israel knew as the “palm tree of Deborah”. That little detail tells us that God used her to mediate and exhort, rebuke, instruct, and correct problems with His wisdom and blessing. God even used her to help an un-confident Israeli general defeat an enemy army. I notice that God used her to rule over a nation, and as they heeded her call to walk in the fear of the Lord, they had rest for 40 years.

Gideon

“Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!” (Judges 6:11-12) A name we recognize. He stands out to us, because the we recognize the inward doubts he had, and can sympathize with him and his situation. Many of us have probably used his way of asking God to confirm a decision for us, following His example. Yet, despite his doubts, God used him to deliver his nation in a mighty way. God also used him to destroy one of the most-prized idols in his area. Though, after the mighty victory, Gideon set up an ephod that

the people worshipped as an idol. Even still, God counts him as a faithful servant. But, a couple of his choices negatively his family and the people of Israel.

Samson

“And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.... So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.” (Judges 13:3, 24-25) God mightily used Samson, though his wrong choices added pain and misery to his life and his family’s lives, and eventually cost him his own life. Yet, even at the end of his life, God still used Samson to further deliver Israel from the enemies, when he repented and cried out to the Lord.

Samuel

“And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places. But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the LORD.” (1st Samuel 7:15-17) This is just another of the dear men of God. Perfect? No. Faithful? Yes! God corrected Samuel here and there, but his testimony still challenges us today. One sad note with Samuel is that he didn’t teach his sons, and that they rebelled against the Lord and become corrupt judges that the people of Israel later rejected. Yet despite that sad note, God used him to rule over Israel for many years, and God used him to anoint the David as future king, whom God called a man after His own heart.

David

The beloved King David (also a prophet) made some huge wrong choices that greatly affected his descendants. But God called David “**a man after His own heart**”. (1st Samuel 13:14) Why? Because God somehow overlooked his wrong choices? No. So, why did God say that of David? Because David’s pattern was to walk with a clear conscience before God, keeping himself in the fear of the Lord, with a tender heart. And even after God confronted David of his unrepentant sins, David repented and again sought the Lord, growing to walk in His ways.

These are just a few examples. Throughout God’s Word, there are many examples of leaders God used as His righteous judges. After the judges, then God used the kings and the prophets. When Jesus came, He used the disciples/apostles, and it is a fascinating study to see who He personally picked to be His closest companions, despite their flaws and distracting personal motivations. And even today, He uses His prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers to explaining God’s doctrine, rebuking, correcting, and instructing the followers of Christ in what it means to be a genuine follower of Christ, and how to effectively grow daily.

Hebrews 11 lists only a few of those examples. Hebrews 11:32-12:1 sum it up this way: “**And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."

So, even today, God is seeking those who will accept His call to be godly leaders in a rebellious and adulterous culture, to walk in the fear of the Lord and proclaim His Word. The next series of verses, from the New Testament, show that God is looking for righteous judges to stand in the gap, even still today.

Matthew 18:15-20 - **"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."**

>> **Conclusion:** God's command is to everyone in the church. He is looking for those who would stand on His Word and lead and judge with righteous judgment. Notice the wording is not specific to church leaders of any type. His command/call is to everyone. And He welcomes and will train all who agree and heed His call.

Matthew 7:3-5 - **"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."**

>> **Conclusion:** Jesus is teaching us to keep ourselves pure so we that can help our brother. The context is Jesus wanting us to help our brethren to be pure, but to make sure that we aren't doing it hypocritically, and just judging and condemning others while trying to hide our unrepentant rebellion against Him.

1st Corinthians 6:1-7 - **"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?..."**

>> **Conclusion:** God is using the apostle Paul to admonish the Corinthians (and us) to live in a way that we can have pure lives that enable us to rightly judge the things that happen around us and to warn/correct those we see are wrong.

2nd Corinthians 5:20 - **"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."**

>> **Conclusion:** God has committed His leadership here on earth, for now, to people. Those who heed His call, He will train and use here, and will reward in Heaven, and place in a position of eternal leadership, as described in Luke 19: **"And He said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were**

faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.” (Luke 19:17, part of the ‘Parable of the Minas’)

1st Corinthians 11:31 - **“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.”**

>> Conclusion: Emphasizing that we need to keep ourselves pure. Only those who are in Christ and have the Holy Spirit and study His Word regularly can accurately judge themselves to maintain a pure conscience. To know if you are a genuine follower of Christ, thoughtfully answer this simple question: ‘Are you serving the One True, Holy God who created or you, or the god you created?’ If you and I genuinely serve the One True Creator, then it will be natural for us to passionately desire to please Him and grow in holiness. If we do not have that drive to continue growing, we need to double-check how genuine our commitment was, or if we only pray and follow God to get our selfish earthly wants from Him. **“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?”** (2nd Corin. 13:5)

John 7:24 **“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”**

>> Conclusion: We all naturally only look at surface level, at ourselves and others. But, Jesus is pointing out that this perspective is wrong, and we need to change how we view things. And, again, this is Jesus speaking not to just the spiritual leadership, but to all who will listen to and heed His call to be godly leaders and who are faithful to Him. We all need to keep growing in honesty before God, and not trying to hide our rebellious heart-attitudes, but to get in the pattern of confessing and forsaking them, as we learn more about God’s amazing purity and holiness.

2nd Timothy 3:16 **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

>> Conclusion: The four (main) categories of how God uses His Word to work in our hearts and how He uses His righteous leaders to encourage/challenge others.

1st Timothy 4:6, 12, 15-16 - **“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”**

>> Conclusion: The books of 1st Timothy were written by Paul to his son in the faith, training him how to be a godly leader. Yet, what was his leadership position? The letter of 2nd Timothy explains further.

2nd Timothy 4:2 - **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching... But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”**

>> Conclusion: Notice, the only position Timothy had was as an evangelist, and the apostle Paul had him as the spiritual leader there. In today’s culture, a lot of credibility is given to those who have a degree of some sort, but that’s not God’s requirement. God uses any and all who carefully study His Word and tell others what they are learning, and how God is teaching and refining them.

Hebrews 5:12-14 - **“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”**

>> Conclusion: Again, God is speaking to us, challenging all who will take this and put it into practice to grow to become godly leaders, and godly teachers. He is also pointing out that at a certain point, every

single one of us ought to be able to rightly divide His Word of truth. The question is: Are we growing in that direction or do we prefer our laziness, and have not genuinely committed to following Christ? It's a question we need to prayerfully think about.

And in 1st John 2:12-14, God uses the apostle John to describe 3 different categories of maturity: 1) spiritual children, 2) spiritual young men, and 3) spiritual fathers.

"I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him [who is] from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one."

>> Conclusion: God wants us to keep growing regularly in maturity, in our understanding of His truth, putting it into practice in our lives, so that we can grow to maturity, become spiritual fathers and mothers.

Titus 2:1-8 - **"But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself [to be] a pattern of good works; in doctrine [showing] integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you."**

>> Conclusion: This is an even more clear passage showing how God is looking for godly leaders of every age, men and women.

2nd Timothy 2:20-22 - **"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [rebellion against God], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."**

>> Conclusion: God is challenging us all to become more pure vessels that are more fit for our Master's use. The more pure we are, the more He can use us - plain and simple.

So, as you can see, God's call to spiritual leadership is for everyone. Though it comes with higher challenges, and a higher walk is required of those who commit. James 3:1-2 - **"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body."**

>> Conclusion: Notice, God didn't have James say 'let not any of your become teachers...', but **"Let not many of you..."** James is not discouraging people from become teachers and godly leaders, rather warning them not to take the calling and responsibility lightly. If we agree to let God train us to become godly teachers, we must continue to take that call, training, and His truth seriously the rest of our lives. Hebrews 13:17 tells of how godly leaders must (and do) watch over the people God puts in their prayerful care. **"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."** Godly leaders watch over people souls by praying for them that they will learn to abhor what is evil and cling to what is good, and teaching them regularly how God's Word applies to our lives, so that they might present those who have been trusted to their care, as under-shepherds, spotless and blameless when we see Jesus and are examined.

So, God challenges us to aim higher, so that He can use us more. Question is, ***Are we in?*** I pray that God will keep teaching and training all of us to be bold, godly leaders who lead, teach, and judge with righteousness and godly fear, teaching all who will listen to us that they must surrender their lives to Jesus Christ, submit to Him, and learn daily what it means to follow and obey Him and Him alone, with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength.

Let's keep growing in hunger and thirst for God's Amazing Word, and letting Him teach us through trials and tribulations to daily be growing genuine followers of Jesus Christ!

a servant/life-slave of Jesus, SH