Judging versus Discerning

Jesus commands, "Do not judge others so that you will not be judged" (Matt. 7:1 NAU). However, Paul commands, "It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, 'You must remove the evil person from among you'" (1 Cor. 5:12-13). How can we reconcile these seemingly incompatible commands?

I. **Definitions**

   A. "Judging" is used in these two passages in two different ways. In the first text, Christ refers to acting negatively.

   B. However, Paul's judgment of the Corinthians is a positive action. One might even call this judging a use of "discernment."

II. **Contrasts between Making a Judgment and Showing Discernment**

Issues	*Judging*	*Discerning*
Scripture	Matt. 7:1; Isa. 11:3b	1 Cor. 5:12-13; Isa. 11:3a
Context	Takes things out of context	Sees an issue in context
Research	Does not do the hard research	Checks out the facts
Perspective	Negative: knows only the problem	Positive: knows what needs to change
Prayer	Prays rarely or wrongly about it	Prays for God to be glorified
Hypocrisy	Has little self-evaluation (Matt. 7:3-5)	Extends grace (Gal. 6:1b)
Shows	Concern only for self	Cares for others
Style	Critical spirit	Constructive spirit
Motivation	Prideful exaltation of self	Humbly exalts God (Rom. 12:3)
Source	Empowered by self	Empowered by the Spirit
Standard	Oneself or others strong in that area	God's perspective or God's Word
Emotions	Reactive	Evaluative
Objects	Judging unbelievers is improper (1 Cor. 5:12a, 13a)	Judging believers (positively) is mandated (1 Cor. 5:12b, 13b)
Procedure	Talks publicly to others about the problem person	Talks privately to the problem person (Matt. 18:15)

III. **Application**

   Think of the last questionable comment you made about someone else. Now, circle or tick either the second or the third column above on each line to see if you were judging or discerning that person. What does God want you to do about this now?