

Christians Should Not Judge – Matthew 7:1

Introduction

If you want to make someone quote the Bible all you need to do is use the “S-word” and call something they are engaging in, Sin

It won’t really matter if the person typically gives any credence at all to the Bible

Say anything against their lifestyle when it violates God’s standard as we find it in Scripture and they will almost always come back at you with **Matthew 7:1** – “*Judge not*”

Really, that’s the mantra of the day as we’re all told by our culture that we must be *tolerant*

And by “tolerant” they mean we have to affirm that anything and everything that anyone says, does, or believes is right and proper

That it’s no better or worse any other words, actions, or beliefs and, really, they would actually prefer we *celebrate* it

That’s a modern re-definition as “tolerate” used to mean: **[Definition]**

To suffer to be, or to be done, without prohibition or hindrance; to allow or permit by not preventing; not to restrain; to put up with; as, to *tolerate* doubtful practices.

To be tolerant meant that a person granted others the right to be wrong and endured something they didn’t endorse but it never used to preclude criticism of the thing as long as the criticism was offered in a spirit of grace and humility

Matthew 7:1 and its parallel passage in Luke 6:37 are very popular with anyone who wants to put Christianity in a bad light because they believe they can credibly accuse Christians of the hypocrisy of going against the Bible they claim to follow

Still, it’s not just non-Christians who run to the verse as Christians are also quick to say, “Judge not” because it’s a favorite first line of defense for anyone accused of wrongdoing

It’s as if we’ve been transported back to the time of the Judges when everyone did whatever was right in their own eyes and anyone who takes the Bible seriously and repeats what it says about right and wrong is labeled “judgmental”

And Christians are accused of being rigid and unyielding in seeking to impose their views on others while oftentimes failing to live up to those same standards themselves making the charge of being hypocritically judgmental hard to deny

In light of such strong cultural condemnation who can blame the Christian who hides behind the seemingly clear injunction “Judge not” and simply decides to “live and let live”?

And why can’t a believer just say, “I wouldn’t do what you’re doing but if it works for you then I’m okay with it”?

After all, the command is right there in black and white – or red and white if you have a red letter Bible – showing that it was Jesus who issued the command that prohibits his followers from judging

But is that really what Jesus said?

Or, better yet, is that what Jesus meant?

Since we believe **2Timothy 3:16** which tells us that everything we find in the Bible is God-breathed it’s important that we understand just what Jesus was commanding when he said, “Judge not”

As we begin we will first look at some passages that seem to contradict Jesus’ command in Matthew 7:1 – passages that actually tell Christians to judge certain things and people

Then we will take a look directly at Matthew 7:1 and its surrounding context to see what exactly Jesus was forbidding

Then lastly we will consider what all of this has to say to us about judging today

I trust you have your Bible and some note-taking supplies handy so let's get started by first looking at some seemingly contradictory passages [Outline 1]

I. What about seemingly contradictory passages?

There are many passages in the Bible that tell Christians to practice discernment or to judge even if the word "judge" isn't explicitly used

1. Let's consider **1Corinthians 5** where Paul judges a man who was guilty of committing adultery with his father's wife. Clearly in verse 3 [**1Corinthians 5:3-5**] he says that he has pronounced judgment upon the man and in verses 4-5 he commands the church to do likewise and render the appropriate punishment.

Then looking down a bit further he says in verse 12 [**1Corinthians 5:12**] that believers are to judge one another.

2. Next let's look at **2Thessalonians 3:14-15** where Paul writes that those who disobey what is written in the preceding letter should be noted and shunned as an errant brother.

Clearly making that determination would require judgment and punishment was the result.

3. Now let's consider **1John 4:1-6** where believers are told to "test" or judge the spirits which means we are to judge various religions and the proclamations of preachers and teachers to see that they are true to the Word of God.

A form of judgment we know the Bereans were commended for practicing.

4. Look also with me at **John 7:24** – in this verse Jesus doesn't say not to judge at all but to "judge with right judgment".

5. And right within the immediate context of our verse in **Matthew 7:6** believers are told to discern that some people are "dogs" and some are "pigs".

Clearly we must exercise judgment to determine when sharing the treasures of God's Word would be futile based on a person's condition.

6. Then just a little further down beginning in **verse 15** we see that we are to examine and judge the fruit of those in our midst because a person's fruit will be consistent with the condition of their heart.

7. But just as telling is the immediate context of Matthew 7:1 – including the rest of the verse itself.

I want you to notice something that most people seem to miss; that isn't a period after "Judge not" it's a comma and the command continues into verse 2 with an explanation of the command following right behind it in verses 3-5.

Let's read through the paragraph together and then look at what exactly Jesus is forbidding when he says, "Judge not" [**Matthew 7:1-5**].

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

II. So, what is Jesus forbidding in Matthew 7:1?

First, Jesus is clearly forbidding **hypocritical judgment** – he even calls the one judging wrongly a hypocrite for doing so. When we point out the sin of another while committing the same sin ourselves, we condemn ourselves as we see in **Romans 2:1**.

In the example of the speck and log Jesus is pointing out how blind we can be to our own faults as we focus on and call out the faults of others.

And here we see that Jesus is actually saying that the sin of the critic is worse than the sin of the person being judged.

Now I don't want to give the wrong impression and say that we must be perfectly sinless before we can exercise judgment.

People are very prone these days to engage in what's known as "moral equivalence" as they attempt to draw comparisons between unrelated things to try to show that both sides of an argument are equally good or bad. And people who are accused of wrongdoing like to believe they are off the hook if they can find any fault in their critic. We'll talk more about this issue in just a few minutes when we consider how we should engage in judging. But along with this thought we need to remember that **we too will face judgment**.

Of course, we can fall into the never-ending cycle of judging each other but more importantly – and I believe more to the point Jesus is making – we will be judged by God and Jesus is saying that the yardstick we use to judge others is the yardstick God will use to judge us.

If that's not a sobering thought to anyone who is prone to be critical, I don't know what would be.

Second, we need to recognize that the idea here behind the word "judge" is that of engaging in harsh criticism or strong disapproval. It's **judgment that devalues and condemns someone on the basis of appearances alone**.

The illustration used of the speck in someone's eye indicates that it's a picky judgment that is looking for reasons to criticize and condemn – it indicates a mean, critical spirit that readily sees the bad in others.

It's not only hypocritical in many cases but it's also hyper-critical in that it makes mountains out of other people's molehills.

And it's a spirit that tries to judge another person's **motives** based on what we see outwardly that Jesus forbids.

I shudder to think of the times when I've come to a conclusion about someone based on their actions only to find out later that I didn't know all the facts and how, when I learned more about the situation, I had to admit my initial judgment was way off target.

As I was preparing this week I came across the story of a man who owned a manufacturing plant.

He decided to make a surprise visit to the shop to check things out and as he was walking through he saw a young man leaning up against some packing crates with his hands in his pockets.

Well, the owner walked up to him and demanded to know how much he was paid each week.

And the young man's eyes got really wide as he answered, "I get \$600 a week."

The owner pulled out his wallet and counted off six one-hundred dollar bills, gave it to the young man, and told him "Here's a week's pay. Now get out of here and don't ever come back!"

Without saying a word the young guy stuffed the money into his pocket and left quickly out the back door.

Just then the owner saw the warehouse manager watching the scene unfold and he stomped over to the manager and demanded to know just how long he had allowed such a slacker to work at the factory.

The manager answered, "He doesn't work here; he was just waiting for us to finish loading a shipment onto his truck."

Judging without all the facts can be costly and embarrassing and we rarely, if ever, have all the facts and we really don't ever know the content of anyone else's heart or for certain what their motivations are.

And to engage in harsh judgment based on superficial evidence is wrong.

So how can we judge as we are commanded to do and do it in the right way? Let's consider that next.

III. How then are we to judge?

The first thing we need to do before judging someone else is **make certain that we are standing on "judging ground"**.

What I mean by that is, we need to make certain of our own spiritual and moral condition before we tackle someone else's – to say it succinctly, **work on yourself first and others second**.

Again, we don't need to have led a sinless life before we can judge otherwise the commands to be discerning and to judge would only frustrate because no one could ever fulfill them.

What Matthew 7 does teach us is that we need to be working to clean up our own life before we judge someone else and we for sure need to make sure that we aren't presently engaging in the sin we're judging

Focusing on self first will help us see not only our brother's sin more clearly but it will help us to see ourselves and our own relationship to God and his holy standard more clearly

And when we see ourselves more clearly and recognize that we too will stand in judgment before God we should then be able to approach the errant one with tenderness and humility

Instead of coming at them with a judgmental spirit that condemns we will be more likely to come to them with the spirit we see in **Galatians 6:1** which tells us –

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

And I want you to notice that verse limits those offering the restoration of judgment to “you who are spiritual” or, in other words, “you who have removed the log from your own eye”

Second, from **Matthew 7:2** we discover that we **must be certain of the standard by which we judge**

And that's precisely what Jesus says in the latter half of **John 7:24** – when he commands his hearers to “*judge with righteous judgment*”

Let's face it, we like to set the standard for what is right and wrong and we like to criticize anyone who fails to live up to our standard when the standard we should be using is God's standard found in his Word

Try to think for a moment of some of your recent judgments of other people – it's okay, you don't have to share them out loud – just think of some of the things you thought or perhaps even said about someone else or their actions

Now, how many of those things that you judged were clear violations of something in God's Word and how many of them were some violation of your own standard?

How about that jerk that cut you off in traffic? Or that idiot who didn't see the light had turned green and just sat there? And what about that maniac that whizzed by you breaking the speed limit more than you were?

I may have just revealed that I have a problem when it comes to judging other drivers...

Each of us has things that we feel strongly about and the stronger our feelings the more we tend to look down on those who see things differently

But how many fewer instances of judging would we engage in if we limited ourselves to only what we see in the Bible?

You know, God didn't make a mistake and leave out some of the important stuff when he inspired the Bible

He wasn't under a publishing deadline or some restriction on the number of pages so that he had to hold back

And we are treading on unrighteous ground when we judge others in areas where God hasn't clearly and plainly spoken because adding to God's Word puts us at odds with God as we see in **Proverbs 30:5-6**

The only way we stand a chance of being right in our judgments is to begin with the right standard – God's standard

Third, we need to be **slow to judge**

Look along with me at **1Corinthians 4:5** where we see the apostle Paul declare –

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

All things will be judged and put to right one day and there are some things we just need to forebear in the meantime as we allow people to recognize their errors and repent or for further necessary facts to be revealed so proper judgment can be rendered

How often we make snap assessments and condemn people when just waiting a bit would have revealed information that would have resulted in a much different judgment

Consider the story of the woman who was at the airport to catch a flight

Since she knew she would be waiting for her plane she bought a book and a package of cookies to enjoy as she passed the time

She found a seat at her gate and got herself situated and had just started to get into her book when she noticed the man sitting one seat away from her was fumbling to open the package of cookies she had set on the seat between them

When he got it open he took one and began to eat it and she was both stunned and steamed at his audacity

She reached over and took one and ate and the man didn't say anything he just reached over and took another cookie

Well, the woman wasn't going to let him eat all her cookies so she took another and they went back and forth until there was one cookie left

And believe it or not, the man reached over, broke the cookie in half, and got up and walked away leaving the other half cookie behind

The woman couldn't believe his nerve and was thinking of how arrogant and rude he was to have eaten half of her cookies and he never even said so much as a thank you

Soon the announcement came to board the plane so she got up and, still thinking ugly thoughts about the man, she got to her seat, buckled up, and reached into her bag to retrieve her book only to find her bag of cookies

It never hurts us to be slow to judge matters that aren't critical to someone's immediate well-being

Fourth, and we'll end with this one – **we need to stop judging unbelievers as if they were believers**

We need to judge other believers and be judged by them – the Bible makes that clear in passages such as 1Corinthians 5 which we looked at a bit ago and Matthew 18:15-17 which deals with church discipline and others

Judgment within the church is meant to lead the errant believer to repentance and restoration

But we err when we apply that same standard to non-Christians and judge them by Christian standards

In fact, the Bible specifically forbids the practice and says that judging unbelievers is God's providence

Look with me at **1Corinthians 5:9-13** which is part of the passage about judging the man who committed adultery with his father's wife – it says:

*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. **For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”***

It's not wrong to call sin, sin – in fact doing so is part of being salt and light in the world

But consider that even if we were to successfully convince unbelievers to live by Christian standards perfectly without bringing them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, what would we have accomplished?

I suppose that would make this world a more comfortable place to live in the short term but all we really would have accomplished in the end would be to provide hell with a supply of nicer, more moral people

Our job is not to force unbelievers to adopt a Christian way of life by judging their sin

Our job is to win them for Christ and pronouncing judgment on unbelievers is a terrible evangelism strategy

Yes, God hates sin - that is an undisputed fact – but God also loves the world to the degree he sent his Son to die for the ungodly while they were still sinners

We are the Body of Christ and our job is to be about the business of continuing the work that Jesus began during his earthly ministry and as Jesus represented the Father we also show people around us what God is like

Do we really think it's better to show them a God who is stern and judgmental glaring at them disapprovingly and just waiting to punish them?

Or is it better to show them a God who, while having a righteous standard, loves them so much that he was willing to die for them in order to save them?

The early church understood that distinction and you don't see recorded in the pages of the New Testament how they criticized and scolded the pagans around them

Lovingly and kindly showing someone what God's Word says about their sin is not judging them it's simply sharing truth with them and, believe me, unbelievers know when Christians are being judgmental and they don't want anything to do with it – and who could blame them?

I doubt that any of us really wants to have much to do with people who are constantly critical of us

We need to stop expecting unbelievers to behave like believers and condemning them when they don't and instead seek to develop relationships with them so we can lovingly lead them to the truth

Conclusion

The idea that Christians shouldn't ever judge is just another one of those things that people know that just ain't so

In fact, judging properly is commanded of Christians so we are obligated to do it

But we need to judge the right things in the right way at the right time and for the right reason or we are judging wrongly

And that *is* forbidden

Judgment rightly practiced is never about critiquing someone and condemning them for their failures

It's not about tearing someone down but about seeking to build them up and restore them

And any time our judgments lead us into feelings of animosity or bitterness toward someone else and maybe even to engaging in personal attacks against them – our judgment has gone awry

God wants us to judge others the same way a true Christ-follower would judge themselves – by calling our sin what it is and by seeking to get rid of it in our lives all while dealing with ourselves with an overabundance of grace and mercy

Let's pray