

Week 17 – To Judge or Not To Judge – Matthew 7:1-6

Scripture Reading: Romans 2:1-5

Introduction

One of the greatest paradoxes of our age is found in the area of passing judgment on each other

While demanding tolerance of any and all opinions or lifestyles many people are, rather ironically, revealed to be very judgmental whenever someone else's opinion or lifestyle differs from what they believe to be proper

If you don't believe me try posting an opinion online about abortion or homosexuality or transgenderism or politics or religion – particularly Christianity – or any other controversial topic and see what happens

Actually, try posting about any topic and someone will likely make it controversial before long

Covid-19 has plainly given society another means of judging as many deem a person to be either compassionate and caring or selfish and insensitive simply on the basis of whether they wear a piece of cloth in front of their face

Conversely, others say a person is being logical and exercising their freedom if they don't wear a mask and that those who choose to wear one are showing themselves to be easily manipulated and subservient by doing so

And let's not even go down the path of differing political opinions and the judgments that come from that arena

With apology to Shakespeare [**hamlet**], the question we face as we come to Matthew 7:1-6 is "to judge or not to judge"

As we approach these verses we will first consider **the common misunderstanding** about what Jesus is teaching here

Then we will look at **the clarity context provides** to our understanding of Jesus' command

And then lastly we will look at **what judgment Jesus condemns** in these verses

Let me encourage you to join me in your Bible in Matthew 7 so you can follow along as I read verses 1-6 [Matthew 7:1-6]

"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.

"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."

Let's begin by looking the common misunderstanding many people get from this passage

I. The Common Misunderstanding

The reality is, no one likes to be judged negatively or criticized

And when criticism is leveled many people – even those who don't usually quote the Bible – will look to Matthew 7:1 as a means of self-defense claiming that since Jesus said "Judge not" any negative sentiment against them is wrong

But do we really think that Jesus meant that his followers are never to make any kind of determination about anything?

Really, since we only tend to worry about negative assessments, did Jesus really mean that his followers are never to make a moral judgment about anything and that, if we see others doing wrong, we would be wrong to point it out?

There are those, both inside and outside the church, who believe that Jesus' words here prohibit any and all critical judgment by Christians and that we are commanded to be accepting of any behavior, lifestyle, or teaching

And in quoting Matthew 7:1 they indicate that they believe that Christ-followers should be, as D.A. **Carson** put it, "amorphous, undiscerning blobs who never under any circumstance whatsoever hold any opinions about right and wrong"

Sadly, many churches have determined that Jesus expects his followers to suspend the use of their critical faculties and to adopt a sort of softly pious, all-accepting, all-affirming blindness to anything and everything that goes on
Even if the activity blatantly goes against a clear teaching of Scripture

I'd be among the first to admit that what Jesus says here is a hard saying because he does say the words "judge not"
Taken by themselves, Jesus' command, "judge not" certainly seems to preclude making negative assessments about others

But we don't have to read those words in isolation

In fact, to be proper students of the Bible we are compelled to read them in context – both in the immediate passage and within the context of the Bible as a whole

And when we do that we will see that context brings clarity

II. The Clarity of Context

We believe that the Bible was written by real people who intended to clearly communicate to a real audience and we believe the authors use common language in the normal way in order to be understood – they didn't speak in code

We also believe in the plenary inspiration of the Bible which means we believe the Bible is God's breathed-out Word not just in its message but also in the specific words used to communicate that message

Therefore, the first thing we should consider is the context of the language used

A. The context of language

The specific word translated for us as "judge" is used 10 times in 9 different verses of the New Testament and some form of the word is used in 98 different verses

And the word can have various shades of meaning depending on its context like to discern or to render a verdict in a judicial sense, but in this case the context argues that the verse means, "Do not be judgmental"

That is to say, do not adopt a critical spirit or a condemning attitude

Look with me at **Luke 6:37** where we also see that idea of condemnation attached to the judgment being exercised
Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;

Even Jesus refrained from engaging in being judgmental and condemning people while on the earth as we see him say in **John 8:1** – *You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one* – and he means that in the sense of eternally condemning them because the time has not yet come for that judgment

And Paul writes in **1Corinthians 4:5** that believers should refrain from pronouncing judgment on the basis of insufficient evidence – Frankly, we don't know enough to make a definitive judgment about anyone's spiritual condition

Each of those instances uses the exact same Greek word so the context of language reveals that Jesus is commanding us, as his followers, "Do not be judgmental"

That's a quite different thing than saying one should not exercise discernment or make any kind of judgments whatsoever

And we have to come to the conclusion that Jesus cannot possibly be prohibiting his followers from making any and all judgments when we look at the wider context of the whole New Testament

B. The wide context

Let's look at a few passages together where we will see that making judgments is not only permitted but commanded

In **1Corinthians 5:3** Paul announces that he has already passed judgment on a member of the church of Corinth who was involved in sexual immorality and he calls for him to be disciplined by the church in verse 5 [**1Corinthians 5:5**]

Then in **Galatians 1:8-9** Paul addresses those who preach a false gospel and calls for them to be cursed

In **Philippians 3:2** Paul uses strong language to warn against false teachers

John also teaches believers to “*test the spirits to see if they are from God*” in **1John 4:1**

Obviously, each of those passages requires a person to make some sort of judgment or to exercise discernment concerning the actions of someone else

Then, in **Luke 12:57**, we see Jesus teach that there is wisdom in judging a judicial matter for yourself and settling the matter out of court to avoid a potentially harsh judgment

Then look at **1Corinthians 5:12** where we see Paul say that the church as a whole is to judge those who are members of the church – meaning they are to judge their behavior in order to either correct or encourage them on the biblical path

And in the Gospel of **John 7:24** we actually see Jesus command his followers to make right judgments when he says –
Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

Those are seven examples from the wider context of the New Testament that show that Jesus cannot be prohibiting all manner of judgment by believers

But we don’t even really need to go to the wider context because the immediate context also shows that some judgment is necessary

C. The immediate context

Look again at verse 6 [**Matthew 7:6**] where Jesus commands –

“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”

It’s pretty obvious that following this command will require some kind of judgment in order to determine who the “dogs” are and who the “pigs” are

Otherwise, there would no way to know who we should refrain from giving what is holy and who we should not cast our pearls before – we aren’t to pre-judge but only respond to their reaction to the gospel

Then if you jump down beyond our passage a bit to **Matthew 7:15** we see that the followers of Christ are to recognize who is a false prophet and in **Matthew 7:20** we see that we can do so by looking at their fruit

That too requires a judgment so Jesus cannot be prohibiting all judging by his followers

Still, he teaches that his followers should not be judgmental so let’s take a look at the kind of judgment Jesus condemns

III. The Judgment Jesus Condemns

There are two specific kinds of judgment that Jesus prohibits in addition to generally having a judgmental spirit – one we see in the passage before us and one we see in the parallel to this passage found in Luke’s gospel

Let’s consider the first one as we see it in Jesus’ example from verses 3-5 [**Matthew 7:3-5**]

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.

That’s a familiar passage and most of us have heard sermons about the comedic imagery of a person with a log or a large beam in their eye trying to remove a speck of sawdust from someone else’s eye

But the point Jesus is making is that we are not to make hypocritical judgments

A. Hypocritical judgment

Jesus plainly uses the imagery of a speck and a log to illustrate some sin or fault in each of the people

And he says that it’s wrong for a person to focus on a small fault in someone else while ignoring a large fault in himself

That much is obvious but what isn’t quite so obvious is that Jesus doesn’t say to ignore a fault in someone else

God's standard of justice isn't negated and one isn't allowed to harbor a small sin or fault simply because someone else is guilty of a larger one

The speck of sawdust requires removal – its removal simply must be accomplished by someone who doesn't have a log in their eye because that person would be acting hypocritically

Sadly, this happens all the time in the church as believers tend to behave like crabs in a bucket

It's been said that you can put a bunch of crabs in a bucket without a lid and never have to worry about any of them escaping because, as soon as one starts to reach the rim, the others will pull him back down as they likewise attempt to escape

We can be masters at deflection and pointing out the faults of others – while claiming our intention is only to help them of course – can certainly take the focus off our own sins or allow us to minimize our thereby making us feel better

Then, it's entirely possible for us to become so accustomed to our own sin that we become **unintentionally desensitized** to it even while we remain very sensitive to the sins of others

King David is a supreme example of that condition as we read in 2Samuel 12

You know the story – King David stole another man's wife and had a sexual affair with her by which she became pregnant

That led to David arranging to have her husband killed in battle making him guilty of both adultery and murder

Nathan the prophet confronted King David by telling him the story of a rich man who stole the beloved lamb of a poor man and had it killed so he could serve it to his guests simply because he didn't want to use one of his own sheep

King David readily saw the injustice of the rich man's actions and he called for the rich man to be harshly punished

He was totally unaware of the irony of his pronouncement of judgment against the rich man until Nathan said to him, "You are the man"

That's a prime example of ignoring a log in your eye while focusing on the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye

The second type of judgment that Jesus prohibits is harsh judgment

B. Harsh judgment

We see that when we look at the parallel to this passage found in the gospel of Luke in **Luke 6:36-38**

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

Verse 36 says *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"*

Couple that with what we find in **Matthew 7:2** which tells us we will be judged according to how we have judged others and we begin to see how Jesus teaches us to judge one another

Look at that verse again – *For with the same judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you*

It's possible that Jesus could be saying that the standard we use to judge others will be the standard others use to judge us

That's actually a true statement in many cases as the person who has a critical spirit often receives criticism in return

And a typical response to criticism is to say, "Oh yeah? Well you did such and such!" as we engage in moral equivalency

But I think that what Jesus really means is that God will use the same standard to judge us as we use to judge others

Look again at **Romans 2:1-2** – *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.*

Consider the idea of two measures by which we might assess those around us – the measure of pure justice and the measure of mercy

That's what some rabbis were teaching in Jesus' day and may well be what Jesus was referring to in verse 2

But let's say we have those two measures and we deal with infractions by those measures

And let's say you encounter someone who you know has told a lie

Measuring him by the measure of justice alone you would rightly be critical in condemning him because he is a liar

But then God would use that measure on you

Are you certain that you have been perfectly truthful? Are you confident that you have never altered the facts of an account even just a little in order to make yourself look better when telling it?

Are you absolutely certain that you would pass the test if you were measured according to the standard of honesty that you held the other person to?

We could use any example of a sin or a shortcoming but his point is the same

Would you be content to have the standard God applies to you to be the same as you use when you assess others?

Or does that thought give you pause?

I'm reminded of the story of a young bachelor who was having difficulty finding a suitable mate because every time he brought a girl home to meet his parents, his mother would find fault with her and criticized her mercilessly

The young man was at his wit's end when a friend offered this advice, "Find someone like your mother and she will surely approve of her."

The plan was brilliant so the young man set about looking for a girl just like mom; and he found her.

She looked like mom, talked like mom, even walked like mom; and he took her home to meet his folks.

The next day he saw the friend who had given him the suggestion and the friend asked how things had gone.

The young man replied, "You were absolutely right. My mom loved her. But my dad couldn't stand her."

With the measure you use you will be measured

Of course, Jesus isn't saying that we should overlook obvious sin – like I said earlier, the sawdust in someone's eye must be dealt with – but only the person who has removed the log from his own eye is qualified to conduct the operation

And even then we must approach the matter as Paul instructs us in **Galatians 6:1**; with gentleness and care

We exclude ourselves from God's mercy when we act toward others in an arrogant and condemning manner because when we do so we show that we clearly understand the measure of justice so we condemn ourselves if we do the same as what we are condemning in others

However, when we recognize our own tendency to fail we will be more aware of God's mercy and forgiveness toward us and we will be much more likely to reflect God's character by judging rightly and showing mercy

Blessed are the merciful, for they [and they alone] shall receive mercy – **Matthew 5:7**

I want to go back just a bit and make a point just so we're all clear

Looking again at verse 6 [**Matthew 7:6**] we see Jesus tell his followers to be discerning, to make judgments about other people – otherwise, what he commands makes no sense

It would be impossible to obey what he commands here without making a judgment

Dogs in Jesus' day weren't the pets we know today; they were vicious, dirty scavengers that roamed wild in packs and were quite dangerous; attacking and tearing to shreds whatever they could

And Jesus tells his followers to make note of those who despise and savagely attack that which is holy

There are people in the world who literally despise anything that has to do with Jesus and the Word of God and they will rip the truth of the gospel to shreds whenever they encounter it

Jesus isn't talking about people who are simply unreceptive or resistant – he is talking about those who are openly hostile to the message and even to the messenger as they attack the Christian lifestyle

And he says we should not bother with them

Likewise, he likens others to pigs that don't recognize the value of the message of the gospel and simply trample on it and drag it through muck and filth

The imagery here is not so much of an attack as it is a lack of reverence and appreciation that causes them to fail to honor it so that they trample it underfoot not necessarily through malice but because of apathy and neglect

Look with me quickly at **Matthew 10:11-15** when Jesus sent the twelve out to minister – he instructed them to go only to the Jewish villages and he said –

And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

Now, we need to be sure that we understand that Jesus isn't saying we are to pre-judge who will receive or reject the gospel – only God knows the content of each human heart

But he is saying that, when we have presented the message of the Bible without discrimination and it is rejected firmly with force or even with open hostility, we should move on

Conclusion

The bottom line is this:

Do not allow anyone to misuse God's Word to shame or bully you into never making judgments

Clearly, Jesus expects his followers to be discerning to make judgments

But, like so many other things we see in Scripture, we have to do it in the right way, according to the right standard, and with the right attitude

In order to make certain that you are judging rightly

Check your motives – honestly assess why you are rendering the judgment – being judgmental is often both an offensive and a defensive tactic that makes us feel better and look better by tearing others down and making our sins seem okay in comparison to theirs

Examine your own life and walk with the Lord – deal with your own sins and failures before presuming to look at others

Consider the standard you are applying – are you comfortable with God applying the exact same standard to you?

Judge in the spirit of love and humility – be as gentle and kind in your judgments as you would want others to be to you

Another really good principle to remember is this:

Remember, while some things are clearly right and wrong, others are simply preferences – be sure you know which is which and treat them accordingly

Finally, never forget that God is the ultimate judge and everyone will one day give an account to him righteous justice is assured in the end – so always strive to treat others as God, in Christ, has treated us

Let's pray