



“Judge Not Lest Ye Be Judged” Matthew 7:1-12

Improper Judgment

7:1 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.”

This is one of the most abused verses in American Christianity. It is often quoted to justify the habitual practice of sin and the rigorous individualism that exists in America.

Does this verse imply that we are never to make judgments about another person? It cannot mean this for in the larger context of this very passage Jesus commands the hearer to view some people as “pigs” and “dogs” (v.6) and to watch out for false prophets (v.15).

God alone is the judge and rewarder of each one’s actions

The verses that follow qualify the standard of judging that should be avoided.

7:2 “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”

A repeated condemnation of the Pharisees is that they did not show mercy to those to which they were to be shepherds:

Mt 12:7 If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. (see also 9:13)

Mt 23:4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them

Mt 23:13 You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

In addition, Jesus alludes to this principle in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Mt 18:22-35). The king’s former merciful attitude changed toward the servant who failed to show mercy to a fellow servant. The parable concludes:

Mt 18:35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

An illustration of proper self-appraisal

7:3-5 “Why do you look at 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,’ and behold, the log is 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.

The simple point is that we should be humble (a having right understanding of ourselves) and generous (having a loving view of others).

The word “hypocrite” in the gospels is used exclusively to condemn the self-righteousness of the Pharisees.¹ In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus condemns the hypocrisy of the Pharisee’s religious rituals (Giving, Prayer, Fasting) that were done for the “eyes of men.”

Jesus challenges the Pharisees to examine their own hearts and warns them to consider that they too need mercy from God. On two separate occasions Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6: “I desire mercy more than sacrifice” and instructs the Pharisees to go and learn what this means (Mt 9:13; 12:7). They were critical of Jesus’ ministry and were constantly looking for a way to condemn him. This type of fault-finding is dangerous to one who himself has many faults. This very measure will in turn be used to judge the fault-finder.

Proper Judgment

Although self-righteous fault-finding is condemned, Jesus is not endorsing complete lack of judgment.

7:6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

“The command to *Judge not* is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous. Jesus does not tell us to cease to be men but to renounce the presumptuous ambition to be God” (John Stott).

Areas that we *ARE* to judge

False prophets/Blind Guides

Mt 7:15 “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

¹ See use “hypocrite” in the gospels: Mt 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51; Mk 7:6; Lk 6:42; 12:56; 13:15 (Matthew 14x; Mark 1x; Luke 3x)

Mt 15:14 “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

Sinful actions

Gal 6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Generosity motivated by Love

7:7-12 7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 “Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! 12 “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This parabolic passage can best be summed in the final statement found in verse 12: “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you”

We often refer to this as the “Golden Rule” but it is simply a foreshadowing of the second greatest commandment to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39).

This, of course, is following the example of God himself who, motivated by love, is generous with his good gifts.

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Application:

Be Generous in our evaluation of others

Men are called to different standards

Every man is called to a unique level of commitment to the kingdom. Each individual is uniquely gifted by the discretion of the Holy Spirit. The twelve were called to a rigorous pursuit of the ideals of the Kingdom. They were to give up their livelihood (4:19-20). They were given the keys to the Kingdom (16:19). Upon their shoulders the church would be established (16:18 cf. Eph 2:20). What they bound on earth would be bound in heaven (16:19). Each of them

would be called upon to suffer greatly for the name of Christ and most would suffer a martyr's death (10:17-23).

One mistake is often made when we judge others according to the standard to which God has called us. But is our standard the one to which all men are called?

Jesus called the rich young man to sell all his belongings and give to the poor (19:21) but he did not require this of other men. Even within the church we see a divine diversity of calling. God does not call the one who has the gift of service to function as a teacher (1Cor 12:7-11) and God does not gift all teachers with the same measure of grace (Rom 12:4-8). Even in giving, each one is to give freely according to his means, not by compulsion, for God wants each to give cheerfully (2Cor 9:8).

Men possess unique convictions

In matters of conscience, what one considers a freedom might be considered a sin to another (Rom 14; 1Cor 8). It is best not to judge others in these matters but act in accordance with the generous love God has displayed toward us.

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.