

## **FRUIT INSPECTORS VERSUS THE FINAL JUDGE**

Unbelievers do not generally know much of anything about the Bible, but it is amazing how many seem to know the “Judge not” of Matthew 7:1 and quote it whenever they are confronted with moral compromise. They like to wiggle their finger and say, “Judge not!” without any consideration at all for the CONTEXT!

### **Matthew 7:1 (NKJV)**

“Judge not, that you be not judged.

*“People tell me judge not lest ye be judged. I always tell them, twist not scripture lest ye be like satan.” – **Paul Washer***

There is a CONTEXT to what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7:1. He is not saying do not judge at all as if we should just throw all discernment and critical thinking to the wind. Even in this immediate context what Jesus says about not casting your pearls before swine requires discernment and making judgment calls (cf. Mt. 7:6).

In context what Jesus is condemning is a certain kind of judgment – namely EGOTISTICAL/HYPOCRITICAL judgment! In Matthew 7:5 Jesus plainly says the issue is HYPOCRISY! The overall context of this Sermon on the Mount has the hypocritical religious practices of the Pharisees in view (cf. Matt. 5:20). As a category, the Jewish religious leaders were very self-righteous and hypocritical (cf. Lk. 18:9-12).

HYPOCRITICAL judgment is rooted in PRIDE, and this is what Jesus was addressing. There is a wrong kind of judging and there is a right kind of judging. In context here Jesus is addressing the WRONG KIND!

A comprehensive “judge not” does away with all discernment and all accountability. No wonder the devil and his crowd love an unqualified “judge not”. But that is not what Jesus was saying. Oftentimes what the world calls “judging” is just speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Now to be sure we need to make sure it is accurate, and that it is properly shared in love, but the fact is the TRUTH hurts and those who are unrepentant don’t appreciate the TRUTH no matter how lovingly it is shared. Sadly, the world often thinks any call to repentance is a sinful form of “judging”.

When Jesus says, “Judge not, that you be not judged” realize that He is speaking to Christians and their attitude in judging other people. We are not to be like the self-righteous-hypocritical-egotistical Pharisees. Our whole attitude is to be different. When Jesus says, “Judge not” it more literally is

“stop judging”. Even God’s people can have a tendency to sinfully judge. We too still have the flesh (the old sin nature) and this is one way it rears its ugly head.

What Jesus is addressing is what we commonly call a “CRITICAL SPIRIT”.

A "critical spirit" has everything to do with the "spirit" of things! As believers in Christ, we are to be DISCERNING and in the right sense that means we are "critical". We are critical of error! We are to love the LORD and hate evil (cf. Ps. 97:10). We are to be "critical thinkers". We are to test (judge) all things and hold fast to what is good (cf. 1 Thess. 5:21). We are to earnestly contend for the faith (cf. Jude 3-4). Thus, the one "who is spiritual judges all things" (1 Cor. 2:15). And yet in our evaluation of all things we are not to develop a sinfully "critical spirit".

It’s all about “the spirit of things” and the motives behind what is happening. A sinful "critical spirit" HYPOCRITICALLY nitpicks people apart. A sinful critical spirit in PRIDE gives self a pass but sees the faults of others in a magnified way.

The Holy Spirit is not a "CRITICAL SPIRIT" but He does CONVICT! He convicts but He also comforts! There is a difference between "constructive criticism" which is shared in love as it genuinely seeks the other person’s highest good, and that of a "critical spirit" that is self-oriented and aims to tear down the other person in the name of exalting self. A good question is this: “Are you part of the demolition crew or the construction crew?” Sinful judging seeks to tear down the other person to make SELF look good!

A critical spirit is egotistical instead of humble. It is uncaring instead of loving. It is self-oriented instead of other-centered. It is legalistically-oriented instead of GRACE-oriented. It’s in this sense that Jesus says, “Judge not”.

And note it carefully, Jesus said, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” We will be judged for sinful judging. We are to be discerning. We are to be fruit inspectors, but it is good to remind ourselves that we are not the FINAL JUDGE. In the end, God ALONE is the final JUDGE! While we “judge” with a small “j” God ALONE is the “JUDGE” with a capital “J”.

Judging can quickly turn into the role of “playing God” and that is sinful. It is egotistical. It is hypocritical because none of us are good enough to function in God’s role! We are to be discerning but DON’T PLAY GOD! God alone knows the ultimate motives of people and He ALONE is qualified to be the FINAL JUDGE!

The HOLY SPIRIT is to be our guide not a CRITICAL SPIRIT.

**Romans 14:10–13 (NKJV)**

10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.”

12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.

**1 Corinthians 4:5 (NKJV)**

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.

In the same chapter where Jesus says, “Judge not” (Mt. 7:1) He also says, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine” (Mt. 7:6) which requires “judging” in the sense of discernment and evaluation. And then a few verses later Jesus says, “by their fruits you will know them” (Mt. 7:20).

So yes, we as God’s people are not to sinfully judge, but we are to correctly judge in the sense of biblical and godly discernment which involves exhorting and bringing conviction to bear on those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). We are not THE Judge, but we are to be wise fruit inspectors.