

JUDGE NOT!

As we come to Matthew 7, it is important to realize that the backdrop for what Jesus is saying is seen in Matthew. 5:20.

Matthew 5:20 (NKJV)

20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is presenting a contrast between godly righteous living borne out of true repentance and faith, with that of the self-righteousness borne out of external legalism as seen in the lives of the scribes and Pharisees.

Keep that in mind as we come to this section on “judging” as seen in Matthew 7:1-6.

Matthew 7:1 (NKJV)

1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.

Unbelievers do not generally know much of anything about the Bible, but it is amazing how many seem to know this verse 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.

“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. He is not saying do not judge at all. Even in this immediate context, Jesus goes on to say in Matt. 7:6, “***Do not give what is holy to dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine***”. That requires discernment, or, if you will, making a judgment call.

And then again, just a few verses after that, Jesus says in Matt. 7:15 and on, “***Beware of false prophets...by their fruits you will know them.***” (Mt. 7:15-20). That again requires a form of judgment.

As we consider the context, what Jesus is condemning is a certain kind of judgment – namely EGOTISTICAL/HYPOCRITICAL judgment! Remember the Pharisees. They were all self-righteous and hypocritical (cf. Lk. 18:9-14).

This kind of HYPOCRITICAL judgment rooted in PRIDE is what Jesus is 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!

John 7:24 (NKJV)

24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

1 Corinthians 2:15 (NKJV)

15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NKJV)

21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

A blanket “judge not” does away with discernment and all accountability. No wonder the devil and his crowd love an unqualified “judge not”. But that is not what Jesus is saying. Oftentimes, what the world calls “judging” is just speaking the truth in love. Now, to be sure we need to make sure it is in love, but the fact is the TRUTH hurts, and those 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”. But here is the real problem.

1 Corinthians 2:14–15 (NKJV)

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

The difference is the Holy Spirit. Believers think differently because they have spiritual discernment - because they have the Spirit. The world doesn’t have the Spirit, and therefore, they don’t understand the difference between sinful judging and godly discernment.

When Jesus says, “***Judge not, that you be not judged,***” realize that He is speaking to Christians and their attitude in judging other people. They are not to be like the self-righteous, hypocritical, and 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 constantly 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 (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”.

As I say, it's all about “the spirit of things” and the motives behind what is happening. A sinful “critical spirit” HYPOCRITICALLY nit-picks 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. As we often say, “**Are you part of the demolition crew or the construction crew?**” Sinful judging seeks to tear down the other person to make oneself 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. Keep that in mind.

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”.

In the area of debatable things, Paul addresses the issue of “judging” in Romans 14.

Romans 14:4 (NKJV)

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:10 (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.

One time, I had a brother “judge” my motives. He thought sure he knew I had some evil intent, but on the matter he was concerned about, he was completely wrong. My thinking was in a completely different direction than what he thought. It is always dangerous to play God! It is sinful! We don't ultimately know everything that is going on in another person's heart. We don't ultimately know all their motives – but God does!

Judging can quickly turn into the role of “playing God,” and that is sinful. It is egotistical. It is hypocritical because none of us is good enough to function in God's role! We are to be discerning, but DON'T PLAY GOD!

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.

God ALONE is the rightful JUDGE who will make the final call on everyone. We are to leave the final judgment with Him.

“We must not pass judgment on others' motives. We should examine their actions and attitudes, but we cannot judge their motives – for only God can see their hearts. It is possible for a person to do a good work with a bad motive. It is also possible to fail in a task and yet be very sincerely motivated.” – Warren Wiersbe