

“Is It Wrong to Judge Others?”

What is one of the most well-known and beloved passages of scripture in the Bible today? It used to be **John 3:16**, but I don't think that's the case anymore. There is a passage that more people today can quote than perhaps any other. In fact, many of the irreligious always seem to have this passage on the tips of their tongues in case they ever become involved in a discussion over the moral or doctrinal controversies of our time. I'm talking about the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Not only do many people know this passage by heart, but it is also one of the few scriptures they believe *can* and *should* be taken literally, and applied dogmatically.

Matthew 7:1-5 “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

It seems as though Jesus is telling us to mind our own business, keep our thoughts to ourselves, and don't dare speak disapprovingly of someone else's choices, beliefs or lifestyle. But is that really what Jesus is saying? Is it wrong to judge the beliefs and behavior of other people, because if you speak up and speak out and say that something is wrong or sinful, someone will always say, *But Jesus said not to judge!* But that is not what this verse is saying. Today, we're going to turn to the word of God for the answer to the question: Is it wrong to judge others?

The new religion in our world today is the religion of *tolerance*. At least, that is the claim. In fact, the only sin that we're really allowed to call a sin today is the act of calling something a sin. Tolerance is actually not a bad thing, but a good thing. What is tolerance? I'm afraid we have a false concept of it today. The dictionary definition is *to recognize and respect other's beliefs and practices without sharing them; to bear up or put up with someone or something not liked*.

Well, I'm glad that we're not forced to believe or renounce something, aren't you? I'm glad that someone else cannot come along and forcibly constrain me to believe and practice something against my will. I'm glad I have that freedom, and I'm glad that you have that freedom, too, regardless of what you do or don't believe. I'm thankful that we don't live in a theocracy. I'm thankful that the government doesn't tell us what we must believe, what we can and cannot preach, or how we must or must not worship. I'm glad that that's left up to my conscience to dictate in accordance with what I believe the word of God to teach.

Now, I believe that there is one way to heaven. I believe that the Bible teaches that. I believe that there is one truth to be believed, and that's what is contained in this holy book, the Bible. Anything contrary to that is wrong. Now, that's what I believe, and I don't mind anyone knowing that's what I believe. But now, if you don't believe that, you certainly have the civil freedom to reject that. You may disagree, and I may believe that you're in error and you may believe that I am wrong. That doesn't mean that both of us are right, and it also doesn't mean that I would deny you the civil and legal freedom to believe what

you choose to believe. You see, that's tolerance. We can live in a civilized society together despite our disagreements.

But, today, we have embraced a NEW form of tolerance that says, *You can't say I'm wrong*. You can't say that something is wrong because you disagree with it. You can't say or even believe, with any amount of conviction, that any given lifestyle is sinful, because that, we're told, is being intolerant. Well, is that what Jesus was teaching when He said, "*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*?" Is it hateful and Pharisaic to adjudicate and judge spiritual and moral issues? It would seem that that is what Jesus was saying, IF we simply take this verse of the chapter at face value. But what He said extends far beyond the first verse. It was part of a larger context.

Three basic rules of correct Bible interpretation are as follows:

1. Understand the meaning of the words originally used. Understand what the words chosen by the speakers in the Bible and understand what those who wrote their words down meant.
2. Examine the surrounding context.
3. The *rule of harmony*. That is, all truths run in parallel lines, and if one supposed truth contradicts another supposed truth, then that tells us that at least one of these supposed truths is NOT the truth. To put it another way, if I interpret a verse of scripture in a way that contradicts what other verses say, then I have misinterpreted the scriptures, because the truth does not contradict itself.

Well, let's apply those three rules here. First of all, what does the word *judge* mean, when Jesus used it? The word that Jesus used that is translated *judge* was the Greek word *krino*. Now, that word has various shades of meaning and it's used in different contexts throughout the New Testament. Overall, it simply means *to separate or select or determine*. But, it has various applications. For example, it can mean *to condemn someone*, such as when Jesus used it in this passage.

John 12:48 "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

The word is also used that way in **Acts 13:27** and **Romans 2:27**. But it can also mean *to govern or administrate*. Jesus used the word this way in this passage:

Matthew 19:28 "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Then again, the word *judge* can simply mean *to form an opinion or analyze a matter*. For example, in this passage, when Jesus told the parable of the two debtors.

Luke 7:40-43 "And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."

So, the basic definition of the word is the same but it can be used in different ways. Now, in this case (**Luke 7**), Jesus called upon Simon to make a judgment, then He commended him for making the *right* judgment. That alone should tell us that it is not always wrong to judge, depending on how the word is used and the circumstance surrounding the judgment.

Secondly, in order to understand what Jesus was saying in our text passage (**Matthew 7**), we have to look at the context, which we will do in just a moment. Thirdly, if we properly understand Jesus' prohibition on judging, it cannot contradict other things that Jesus and His apostles said about judging; we have to harmonize all of these passages.

Here is where many people get off track. They get all mixed up about what Jesus was saying in **Matthew 7**. Notice carefully: Jesus could not have been saying that it is wrong for Christians to judge the behavior and beliefs of other people because besides this one verse where Jesus forbids one kind of judging, we can read numerous passages where the Bible actually commands Christians to judge in other ways. You don't have to read very far—just five verses down.

Matthew 7:6 "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

Wouldn't that require some kind of judgment or discernment? Wouldn't we have to look at the other person, and by their words or their behavior, make some kind of evaluation or spiritual determination about them? But, the post-modernist in effect says that there is no such thing as a dog. There is no such thing as a hog, because we all supposedly have a right to our own version of truth. So there would be no such thing as a dog or swine, as Jesus refers to them. Unless, of course, it is a person who denies the tenets of post-modernism; then they might be worse than a pig or a dog.

Read on just a little farther.

Matthew 7:15-16 "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

Let's think about that. How could we ever identify and beware of a false prophet, if we are never to judge the beliefs and conduct of another person? You see, it just doesn't make any sense. The apostle John would later warn in this way:

I John 4:1 "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

We could never do what the Bible commands us to do if Jesus was saying in **Mathew 7:1** that it is wrong to distinguish truth from error and righteousness from sin.

In even plainer language, the apostle Paul rebuked the worldly church at Corinth because they were harboring a man in their congregation who was guilty of fornication, and not just fornication--this man was actually living in an incestuous type of relationship. He had his father's wife, the Bible says. Here's a man who is openly living in sin, and the church is essentially turning a blind eye, acting as though nothing was wrong. They were just overlooking this man's sin. That's the way most people today believe that a church should operate. They believe it's terrible

that any church would call a person a sinner. They think that it's reprehensible that any church would refuse fellowship to someone because of their sinful lifestyle. Haven't you heard people say, *But, we're ALL sinners. Or, Who are WE to judge someone else?* Or, they'll shake their finger and say, *Ah, ah, Jesus said, "Judge not."* I dare say there are many people who rarely, if ever, open a Bible and read it, but who can readily quote **Matthew 7:1**, and who are not even aware that this teaching in **I Corinthians 5** is even in the Bible. Paul told the church how to deal with this man who was living in this illicit lifestyle. He was unrepentant; he refused to give up his sin. Look what Paul told them.

I Corinthians 5:9-13 "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Without refers to someone not in the kingdom, but out in the world; *within* refers to someone in the kingdom, the church. Paul tells them to put that person away from the church. This is a pretty pointed passage of scripture. Paul is talking about accountability and the exercise of church discipline. He is saying that the people of the world are already lost, because they're outside of Christ. So, it's not up to the church to pass some kind of judgment on them; they're already judged by the fact that they're outside of Christ. But, the church had a responsibility toward this man, for his sake AND for theirs. Paul says that they were to withdraw from him. They were to refuse to eat with him until he repented of his sin. He said that it was up to the church to judge this man's behavior. It was up to the church to take corrective action, and it was not an option that the church *could* exercise, but it was a process that Paul *commanded* them to exercise. It was to be done in order to try to save this man from his error and wickedness, while at the same time protecting the church from his weakening, leavening influence. Paul tells them to pass judgment upon this man.

Now, if Jesus was condemning ALL forms of judgment in our text, then what do we do with **I Corinthians 5**? What do we say about Paul's command to preachers in this passage:

II Timothy 4:2 "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

Paul said that we are to *reprove* sin and *rebuke* sin. Well, how could we do that if we don't discern between good and evil? How could we do that if we did not in some manner of speaking pass some form of judgment?

You see, **Matthew 7:1** has been used as a refuge for all kinds of sin, immorality and digression from the truth in an attempt to keep preachers and others from condemning error. But that simply CANNOT be what Jesus was saying if the Bible is true. And if a person says the Bible is NOT true, then what are they doing quoting **Matthew 7:1** anyway? What makes that verse true and everything else false?

There IS such a thing as *righteous judgment*. That's the difference. Jesus told the Jews this, about judging:

John 7:24 "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

Here, Jesus commands them to judge. Then He tells them to do so according to righteousness. What does that mean? It means to adjudicate the matter using truth, using the word of God. Not my opinion or my philosophy, not make a careless and rash judgment, but to very carefully apply the truth and make a logical and righteous judgment.

When the Bible says that something is wrong, it's wrong. Not because you or I say it's wrong; because the Bible says it's wrong. And the Bible very plainly condemns immorality. The Bible condemns adultery. The Bible condemns fornication. The Bible condemns homosexuality. The Bible condemns stealing, lying, covetousness, idolatry...the Bible describes all of these things as *works of the flesh*. The Bible does not mince words. The apostle Paul enumerated all of those sins and others.

Galatians 5:19-21 "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Now, that's what the Bible says. That's God's transcendent and eternal truth. That's not what I say; that's what the word of God says. Therefore, when we take the word of God and apply it to a given situation, in essence that's not our judgment. Rather it's simply pointing to God's judgment in the matter. What God has already revealed in His word.

So, what kind of judging was Jesus forbidding in **Matthew 7:1**? Obviously, some kind of judgment was prohibited. "*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*" What could He have been talking about? The context plainly shows what kind of judgment He was condemning. Again, an important rule of proper Bible interpretation is to look at the surrounding verses, instead of isolating the passage. So, what did Jesus go on to say in the passage?

Matthew 7:2-5 "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Clearly, Jesus is talking here about hypocrisy. People who are busy examining and analyzing and looking for the faults in other people. These are hypercritical people with no concern over their own faults. He's talking about gross hypocrisy at that. He's not saying that one must be flawless or perfect before he can sincerely warn someone else about their sin; that's not what He's saying at all. He's talking about people who are puffed up with self-righteous pride, who will pick and parse to discern some minute fault in the life of someone else, while they themselves have some glaring sin protruding from their own lives. Jesus

is saying that the judgment that you apply to someone else is going to apply to you, so you had best beware.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, said that the disobedient Jews were no better off than the heathen Gentiles. **Romans 1** is a lengthy dissertation by Paul, showing the immorality and Godlessness of the Gentiles, the pagans. Anybody with any spiritual sense who reads that passage would recoil at the horrible way Paul describes these people. That's what the Jews did, as well. They looked down their noses at the Gentiles, considering them as dogs or subhuman. But Paul issued a stinging rebuke to these self-righteous Jews:

Romans 2:3 "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

You see, the Jews did the same thing the Gentiles did; they were guilty of the very same sins. But they didn't see themselves as sinners, simply because they were Jews. That changed everything in their eyes because they had the blood of Abraham coursing through their veins.

Romans 2:21-22 "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?"

Now, I want to ask you something: Was Paul saying that there is nothing wrong with stealing? Of course he wasn't. Was Paul saying, *Oh, it's fine to commit adultery*? No, he wasn't saying that. Paul condemned adultery. We already noted that in the letter to Corinth, he told those brethren how to deal with the man who was guilty of sexual immorality. Paul is not saying that it's fine to commit adultery. Was he saying that no one should ever criticize another person for participating in idolatry? No, he wrote to the Corinthians about that as well, and condemned them for trying to eat at the table of the Lord and sit at the table of demons also (**I Corinthians 10**). He is saying, *Make sure you're not the one who needs to be corrected first*.

Friend, it's not wrong for a Christian to judge. In fact, you wouldn't be my friend if you saw me on the road to hell, and you didn't care enough to warn me of where I was headed. That's the worst kind of hatred that I can think of. If you knew that I was living in such a way, with no regard for God's truth, in violation of His law, and that I was going to be lost, and you didn't care enough to warn me about that, you don't love me. I wouldn't love you, if I refused to warn you of condemnation. But make sure you're doing it because you care. Make sure that you're leading me to heaven, not just pointing the way while you yourself walk the road to hell. That's what Jesus was telling us in **Matthew 7**. He was speaking about people, who themselves were on the road to hell while they were pointing to other people, the road to heaven. Jesus says to get yourself on the right road. You lead people to heaven. Get the beam out of your own eye before you go trying to find the little speck that is in their eye.

Don't judge hypocritically, with an unholy motive, out of pride, self-righteousness or a feeling of self-sufficiency or superiority. Judge *righteous* judgment. Let the word of God be the standard. Love the souls of men. Desire for the souls of men to be right with God, and to be saved. Judge righteous judgment, and thus, lead your fellow man down the road that leads to eternal life. It's not wrong to judge; it's wrong to judge unrighteous, hypocritical judgment. But Jesus told us to be sure that we judge righteously.

