

Is Christianity Judgmental? #1

Matthew 7:1-6; John 7:24

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It is a response you have probably heard when someone does not like what you have said to them about a sin or error: “You have no right to judge me”; or “That’s enough! You are not my judge.” Or perhaps the ultimate response to end a discussion, “The Bible says, “Judge not lest ye be judged.” Well, it is certainly true that Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount (from our text today), “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

As is always the case, we should know what Jesus said, but even more importantly we should know what He meant by what He said. It is usually those who do not care to know what Jesus meant by what He said that so quickly use a verse like that to bring an end to a discussion.

Let us today come to God’s Word ready not only to read and hear the words of the text, but ready to understand what the words mean and to receive His Word as faithful and true. The main points from our text are: (1) The Command to Stop Judging (Matthew 7:1a); (2) Three Reasons to Stop Judging (Matthew 7:1b-5); (3) A Command That Requires Judging (Matthew 7:6). We will only have time today to cover the first main point. We will continue the last two main points in the next sermon.

I. The Command to Stop Judging (Matthew 7:1a).

A. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been emphasizing the hypocrisy that characterized the Pharisees in their practice of the Law (Matthew 5), in their exercise of religion (Matthew 6:1-18), and in their use of their treasure (Matthew 6:19-34).

1. The Pharisees were hypocrites (actors) because their concern was only with the outward (with what people could see and thought of them) rather than with the inward (what God could see and thought of them). If our religion begins and ends with that which is outward, we will be like those described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

2. Jesus makes clear that true religion must begin inwardly by way of a new heart—the old heart will not do; a new life—the old life will not do; new faith, love, and obedience—the old will not do.

3. As we now press on in this sermon of sermons to hear what Jesus teaches about judging others, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees is yet before the mind of the Lord as we see in Matthew 7:5.

B. This is a command, not a suggestion: “Judge not.” The Greek present tense gives the sense of “stop judging” (which assumes that we are judging, but we must stop doing so). Jesus puts His finger on another sin into which we so often fall: sinfully judging others (Matthew 6:19,25).

1. Is Jesus forbidding us from forming any judgment about sin, error, tyranny, and false religion? Of course not, for that is what Jesus has been doing throughout the Sermon on the Mount (teaching us how to judge between what is false and what is true, what is hypocrisy and what is faithful, what is man-centered religion and what is God-centered religion). Consider Matthew 5:20,27-28; Matthew 6:2; Matthew 7:6,15. Moreover, throughout Scripture God judges between what is right and what is wrong so that we might make like judgments ourselves in walking in the light as He is in the light. One of the chief blessings that Jesus administers in His kingdom (now and in the future) is that He judges (Psalm 72:2; Psalm 96:13; Isaiah 2:4). Jesus will finally on that last day judge all mankind (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who want a non-judgmental Christianity do not want the Christianity of the Bible. The God of the Bible judges and so does Jesus. And as we shall see, true Christians likewise necessarily must judge as to what is right and what is wrong.

2. Jesus is not forbidding all judging on our parts, but is forbidding sinful judging—John 7:24. Again, Jesus commands, “Stop judging” (as in Matthew 7:1), but He adds a very important qualification:

“Stop judging according to the appearance.” Stop judging according to what you merely see and perceive to be right (according to your own man-made standards like not healing on the Sabbath). That’s how the Pharisees were judging, and Jesus commands, “Stop doing it!” But in contrast Jesus then gives the proper ground for all judging: “But judge righteous judgment.” Righteous judgment consists of the following three marks.

a. First, righteous judgment is judging according to the infallible righteous standard of God’s Law (Isaiah 8:20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17—we are even to stop judging according to our mere conscience—God is lord of the conscience). Jesus makes clear that there is sinful judging and there is righteous judging (we are to understand Matthew 7:1 by what Jesus says in John 7:24—comparing Scripture with Scripture). So when we call that which is contrary to God’s Word sin, error, heresy, immoral, tyranny, that is not the sinful judging that Jesus here forbids. What standard do you use in your judgments of what is right or wrong? The majority, the conscience, experts, or Scripture?

b. Second, righteous judgment is not only judging from the right standard (God’s Law), but is also judging from the right motive—love for God and for our neighbor.

(1) If we judge from a spirit of anger, hatred, bitterness, or revenge, we are not judging righteously as Jesus commanded. What motivates the judgment from within is just as important as the outward judgment that we make. To judge those who are living in sin/error out of hatred for them is sinful judgment. That is simply a critical spirit, not the fruit of the Spirit. To lash out in judging the sin of a spouse because you have been offended is sinful judging (even if you are right). We must judge the sin of others out of love for God and love for that person’s soul and life. We do not want to see them judged by God. We want to see them repent and seek God’s forgiveness. That is our motive, but that will not happen through our bitterness and anger, but only through our love to please God and our love to help sinners like ourselves. We must speak the truth, but we must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and we must do so in meekness (Galatians 6:1).

(2) Likewise, we are not judging with righteous judgment when we gossip about the sin of others (gossip may be the truth, but it is a sin when it is not out of love for God and our neighbor). How often we share our judgment about the sin of others not out of love to see the one we have judged come to repentance. It is usually out of self-righteousness to put others down and to exalt ourselves. Even when we share with someone the sin or error of others in order to protect him/her from that sin or error, it should be with a view to ask for prayer to see that erring person repent and come to Christ or be restored to Christ. How much silence would there be in so many of our conversations if we did not have others to gossip about? And when you seek counsel from others about the sin or error of another, it must not be to condemn but to help, not to judge but to restore. Hide the name if possible. Your counselor should be one who will tell you what God says from His Word and not what you want to hear from the counselor.

(3) If there is not the love and mercy of God in our judgment we will bring God’s judgment upon ourselves (James 2:13). Our purpose in righteous judgment is not to condemn others (that’s God’s place alone). Our purpose in righteous judgment is to use God’s Law so as to send sinners to the mercy seat of Christ. What motivates you in your judgments? The love of self or the love of God and others?

c. Third, righteous judgment is not only judging from the right standard (God’s Law), and not only judging from the right motive (love for God and for our neighbor), but judging with the right goal (the glory of God).

(1) When judging others (even when it is according to God’s Word) is to make ourselves look good, righteous, and holy (rather than to exalt God’s glory), we once again are judging sinfully (1 Corinthians 10:31). If our judging is a self-centered or self-righteous judging, then we are hypocrites (like the Pharisees) and more concerned to be seen and heard than for God to be honored. Who are you seeking to please in your judgments? Yourself or God?

(2) When we forget that God is the one and final lawgiver and judge, we will act as though we are the supreme judge (James 4:11-12). Many times our judgment of others is based upon faulty or incomplete information. Sometimes our judgment of others is based upon our own personal experience rather without truly understanding what others are facing (which can bias our judgment). When we forget that God is the one and final Judge, we have usurped God's rightful place upon His throne and seated ourselves there instead. Now that is very dangerous indeed. Only God has the right to judge finally and supremely. God alone is the judge of the earth (Psalm 94:2; Isaiah 33:22). As glorified saints we will judge the wicked of the world and wicked angels, but not in a final sense, merely in a confirming sense that God's judgment is good and righteous (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). We will merely vindicate God's righteous judgment rather than issue our own independent judgment.

C. May God humble us where we stand in need of His correction in not judging with righteous judgment, but rather judging sinfully and usurping His throne of judgment.

1. If the papal Antichrist should be condemned by us because he has usurped the place of Christ in the Church, let us not so easily dismiss the many ways we have usurped the place of Christ in the Church by way of our sinful judging of others. We may not place the sin of unrighteous judgment very high on the list of temptations and sins that we face, but the Lord puts it very high on that list; for it usurps His place of authority and treats others with a self-righteous contempt rather than with the love of Christ.

2. Moreover, sinful judging will most certainly damage and destroy the peace, purity, and unity of Christ's Church; and that is very important to Jesus our King (Romans 14:10).

3. This may have become a sinful habit into which you have fallen day by day, but like any other sin, Jesus died to set you free from the guilt, condemnation, and power of that sin. You may be assured that God's grace is sufficient for you in this matter of sinful judging. But you must first understand your sin, repent of it, seek Christ's forgiveness, and endeavor daily new obedience. Jesus commands us all in so many words, "Stop judging by merely what you see and hear, but rather start judging with righteous judgment: by His commandments, out of love for God and your neighbor, and to the glory of God." Amen.

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