

## Judging Others

**Reading: Matthew 7:1-2** “...Judge not, that you be not judged...”

### **Introduction:**

The “Sermon on the Mount” (**Matthew 5-7**) covers a broad range of topics. These topics can be broadly grouped under two themes;

- How we relate to other people as we live in the world.  
*e.g. Matthew 5:1-16; 5:21-6:4; 7:1-6*
- Trust in, and obedience to, God during our life here.  
*e.g. Matthew 5:17-20; 6:5-34; 7:7-27*

One of the challenges that we all face in life is our relationship with others. Some people are easy to get along with, others can be very trying. I once heard a Christian say, “*I love the church – it’s just the people I can’t stand.*”

Now we could hide ourselves away from everybody and live like a hermit. But that would make it hard to do some of the things that God has commanded us to do. For example;

- **Matthew 5:13-16** *Being lights to the world*
- **Romans 12:6-8** *Using our talents to serve others*
- **Galatians 5:13** *Through love, serve one another*
- **Galatians 6:10** *Doing good to all men*
- **2 Timothy 2:2** *Teaching others*

To be able to do these things, we need to be out *in* the world, but not “*of the world*” (**John 17:14-18**). We are “*not to be conformed to this world*” (**Romans 12:2a**), rather, we are to “*live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age*” (**Titus 2:12**).

When it comes to our dealings with others, earlier chapters in **Matthew** covering the sermon on the mount talked about things like;

- being merciful (**5:7**)
- being reconciled to a brother instead of staying angry with him (**5:21-24**)
- doing good to those who hate you, and praying for those who persecute you (**5:44**)

Even the example prayer in **6:9-13** talks about our need to forgive others.

And so, here in **Matthew 7:1-2**, we come to another topic that involves our relationship with others – that of judging. Sometimes these verses are used to try and say that we should never judge anyone about anything – often by those who don’t like being told that they are doing something wrong.

But what do these verses really mean? In this lesson will look at what these verses do teach, and what they do not teach.

### **1) What Jesus did not mean**

One question that we can ask ourselves is this;

- “*Did Jesus mean that absolutely no judgements were to be made at all?*”,  
*i.e. that we should never make any sort of judgement about anything?*

When we look at the scriptures, we can see that some types of judgements are required as part of our Christian living (**Matthew 7:6**). In fact, some judgements

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are even commanded (**1 John 4:1**). Therefore, before looking at what Christ *did* mean when He said, “*Judge not*”, let us first look at what He didn’t mean.

a) Jesus was not referring to Civil Judgements

*i.e.* the judgements made by the courts of the land.

In **Romans 13:1-7**, we see that the institution of civil government has been set up and authorised by God<sup>1</sup>. One of their functions is exercise punishment on those who do the wrong thing (vs. **4**), and to praise those who do right (**1 Peter 2:14b**). In order to determine who has done right, and who has done wrong, some sort of judgement has to be made by the authorities.

As Christians, we are commanded to be subject to these governing authorities (**Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14**). This means that we have to respect and abide by their judgements. The only exception is where complying with the laws of the land puts us in conflict with other Biblical teachings or principles – context of **Acts 4:19**.

b) Jesus was not referring to Christian discipline

I have sometimes heard it said that it is wrong for us to say that someone else is wrong. (Note the irony here. The person making the statement is implying that it is OK for them to say that you are wrong, but it is not OK for you to say that someone else is wrong.)

The Bible clearly teaches that there can be times when judgements have to be made about the behaviour of others. One such example is found in **1 Corinthians 5:1-7**. This relates to the man who had been living with his father’s wife (vs. **1**). Paul says in verse **3** that he has already made a judgement about the man’s behaviour. He has also made another judgement. In verse **6**, he has judged that the congregation was at fault for not doing something about the situation<sup>2</sup>. It should have been obvious to them that what the man was doing was wrong (vs. **1** “...*is not even named amongst the Gentiles...*”). They should have mourned and taken action to remove the man from their midst (vs. **2**). But instead, they were puffed up (vs. **2a**), they were glorying (vs. **6a**), and that was not good.

**Note:** There can be times when doing nothing is the wrong course of action.

Further on in the same chapter, in verses **9-11**, we see that the Corinthians were not to keep company with a brother who is covetous, or is sexually immoral, *etc.* **2 Thessalonians 3:6** says that we should withdraw from those who are disorderly. In verse **14**, we are not to keep company with those who refuse to obey the teachings found in the epistles.

In order to follow these teachings, we have to make judgements about the behaviour of others;

– are they doing what is right? Or are they doing what is wrong?

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<sup>1</sup> Not every government will govern in a godly manner, e.g. **Acts 12:1-4**. But they will have to answer to God for that. Our responsibility is to submit to their laws, so long as submission to those laws do not cause us to disobey one of God’s commands or principles (**Acts 4:19-20**).

<sup>2</sup> From **2 Corinthians 2:3-4**, we can see that Paul is not being “condemning” or “judgemental” here. His motivation is out of love and concern for their spiritual welfare.

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c) Jesus was not referring to judgements about who is a false teacher

There are various warnings throughout the New Testament about false teachers – *e.g.* **Matthew 7:15**; **Acts 20:29-31**; **2 Corinthians 11:13**; **Galatians 1:6-9**; **2 Peter 2:1**; **2 John 7**; **Jude 4**.

One of the roles of faithful preachers and teachers is to ensure that we are not “*tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine*” (**Ephesians 4:11-14**). Jesus indicated in **Matthew 24:24** that potentially, even “*the elect*”, the children of God, can be deceived. Paul shows in **Galatians 1:6-9** the importance with sticking with the one Truth, because it is that one Truth, that one faith (**Ephesians 4:5**), that sets us free from the burden and guilt of sin (**John 8:32**; **Matthew 11:29**).

Therefore, in order to determine whether what is taught is right or wrong, some sort of judgement has to be made. In fact, in **1 John 4:1**, we are exhorted to “*not believe every spirit (i.e. teaching), but test the spirits, whether they are from God...*”. That is what the Bereans did (**Acts 17:11**).

In other words, there will be times when we have to make judgements about whether what is taught is in keeping with Biblical commands, approved examples, and principles.

d) Jesus was not referring to personal judgements about others

There are some judgements that we have to make about people in general. In **Matthew 7:6**, we are told “*...not to give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*”.

The reference to “*what is holy*”, I suspect, is the Word of God (**Romans 1:2b**; **2 Peter 2:21b**). In **Matthew 13:45-46**, Jesus used a parable to refer to the kingdom (the church) as a “*...pearl of great price*”.

The “*dogs*” and the “*pigs*” appear to be the type of people who will throw whatever you try to teach them about the gospel back in your face. These are the type of people who continually reject the truth; those who continually consider the gospel as “*foolishness*” (**1 Corinthians 1:18**); those who are “*...defiled and unbelieving*” (**Titus 1:15**).

Therefore, while we have an obligation to try and reach everyone we can with the gospel (**Matthew 28:19-20**), there are some people who we should not persist with (unless we see signs of change). This is what Paul did in **Acts 13:46** when the Jews refused to accept his message – he moved on and went to the Gentiles.

Following Jesus’ command in **Matthew 7:6** is going to require us to make judgements about people and their response to hearing the Word of God.

## 2) What Jesus did mean

The word “*krino*”<sup>3</sup> has various meanings, such as, *to distinguish, to try, to determine or decide* - terms that relate to the process of coming to a conclusion

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<sup>3</sup> Strong’s Concordance of the Bible, Greek word 2919

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(e.g. **Luke 12:57, 1 Corinthians 10:15**). But the term can also mean, *to damn, to condemn*. – i.e., to pronounce a sentence (e.g. **Romans 14:10**). Therefore, in order to understand what the term means in a given passage, you need to consider its context.

In parts of His teaching, Jesus is contrasting the righteousness of God with the teachings and actions of the Scribes and Pharisees. At various times in chapter 5 He says, “*You have heard it said....., but I say to you.....*”. (e.g. **Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44**).

In **Matthew 23**, we see that the Pharisees were very good at laying down the law to people, but they did very little to help them, nor did they shown much compassion or mercy (**Matthew 23:3-4, 13-15; Mark 7:9-13**). Jesus condemned them for their self-righteousness and harsh judgmental attitudes<sup>4</sup>. He told the people, “*Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven.*” (**Matthew 5:20**). In other words, while we need to do our best to keep God’s commandments (**John 14:15**), there are also other issues to keep in mind – justice, mercy, compassion. One doesn’t replace the other (**Matthew 23:23**).

And so, coming back to our text. We have seen in the first part of this lesson that the command, “*Judge not*” is not a “blanket” command, covering all situations and scenarios. God gave us the ability to “reason”, to “think things through” in order to make judgements about things (**Isaiah 1:18; Acts 17:2**).

When we do have to make judgements, Jesus tells us to, “*.... not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgement*” (**John 7:24**). In other words, there is a right way to judge, and there is a wrong way to judge. So what are some of these wrong ways?

### a) Don’t judge with biased judgement

Some of our judgements can be influenced by our background, our prejudices, or our personal preferences. How often have we criticised others for their faults, but said nothing when we see the same faults in our friends?

- we sometimes make excuses for the failings of our friends,  
*i.e.* what they do is “justified”,  
but have no such empathy for those who we don’t like.

When we do this, our judgements become inconsistent, not objective. The result is that we end up having a double standard;

- there is one standard for people we like, and,
- another standard for everyone else.

One example of this type of judgement is seen in the trial of Jesus. The Chief Priests and Rulers had already decided before the trial that Jesus was to be killed (**John 11:53**) – they were biased against Him- but they wanted to make their condemnation of Him “legitimate” by having a trial first. But notice what they did in **Matthew 27**.

- they brought in false witnesses (vs.59)
- they rejected the Truth when it was presented to them (vs.63-65)

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<sup>4</sup> Note the number of “Woes” in **Matthew 23**.

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- they accused Jesus of blasphemy, while they themselves spat in His face and beat Him (vs.65-67)

While it is easy to point the finger at others, perhaps there are times when we too are guilty of rejecting valid evidence, or mis-representing the evidence presented, in order to get the outcome that we have already decided we want. *e.g.* we don't want to believe a person's defence, or we push it aside, because we don't want them to be found innocent.

### b) Don't judge with uninformed judgement

An uninformed judgement is where we are quick to come to a conclusion without considering all of the available evidence (or possible explanations). For example, consider the following;

You are walking down the street one day, As you walk past a hotel, you see me stagger out of the hotel door, fall down onto the footpath, and there is a strong smell of beer about me. What do think? I've been drinking and have become so drunk that I can't even stand up properly?

The facts may be something completely different;

As I walked down the street, I saw a man drop his wallet as he entered the hotel. I picked up the wallet and went inside to hand it to him. On my way back out the door, I accidentally tripped on the carpet near the doorway, knocking into someone who spilled his glass of beer all over me. I lost my balance, and as I went out the door, I fell onto the footpath.

**John 7:24** "*Do not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgement*". Sometimes, there is more to the story than simply what appears on the surface – consider **Acts 2:12-13** and its context.

### c) Don't judge impossible judgements

Sometimes, we make judgements about people's motives for their actions. There can be times when a person's motives are quite evident, because they have told you why they are doing such and such a thing. But sometimes, we just don't know. We don't have the insights into other people that Jesus had (**Matthew 9:4; John 2:23-25**). We don't always know what is going on inside other people. Consider the following Biblical example from **John 12**;

Mary was anointing the feet of Jesus with some very expensive oil (vs.3). When he saw this, Judas accused Mary of "*wasting the oil on Jesus' feet, when it could have been sold and the money used to help the poor*" (vs.5).

Now Mary's motive is not specifically mentioned in the text, but from what Jesus said in verses **7-8**, what she was doing was a good and noble thing. Rather than wasting an expensive product, she was honouring her Lord and Master.

Judas, on the other hand, may have seemed to some to have had good motives for his objection, *i.e.* a concern for the poor. But notice his real motive in verse **6** – he was a thief. His objection was motivated by his desire to have the money for himself.

We need to be very careful when making judgements about the motives of others. Suppose someone who we don't necessarily like comes to us to talk

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about one of our faults. Do we automatically assume that they are only doing it to make us look bad – that they only want to “score points” against us?

Or, do we think for a moment, that they may have a genuine concern for our spiritual well-being, and have approached us out of a spirit of love?

### d) Don't make harsh and hypocritical judgements

There are some people in the world who just look for anything and everything in order to criticize others. Their manner suggests that they are not trying to correct and “build up”, but rather, to simply “tear down”. And this seems to be the type of person referred to here in **Matthew 7:3** – the “nit picker” – people who apply a harsher and stricter standard on others than they do for themselves.

Now there is nothing wrong with talking to others about their sins – in fact, we are commanded to do so (**Matthew 18:15; James 5:19-20**). But there is a place here for mercy, compassion, and humility. God does not condone our sins (**Ezekiel 18:4b**), but He does show grace, and mercy (**Ephesians 2:4-8**).

When the woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus, He did not turn a blind eye to her sin (**John 8:1-11**). It was accepted that she had sinned (verse 4). But Jesus showed compassion. He did not condemn her, but told her to “...go and sin no more.” (**John 8:11**).

I guess the key point to remember from this text is what is stated in verse 2; “*For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*”

James says in **James 2:13a**; “*For judgement is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy...*”

### Conclusion:

When we look at the sermon on the mount, we can see that the way we treat others can have an impact on how God treats us (**Matthew 6:14-15** – *forgiving*; **Matthew 7:2** – *judging*). **Matthew 7:1-2** is not saying that if we never judge anybody about anything, then God will not judge us. There will be a final judgement one day (**Hebrews 9:27**), and we will all stand before God to give an account of ourselves (**2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12**). Justice may not have always been served here on earth, but God's judgement will be righteous (**Revelation 16:7**), when all the hidden things will come to light (**1 Corinthians 4:5**).

There are valid times when we need to make judgements about others, and we need to abide by the judgements of those who rule over us (**1 Peter 2:13-17**). But when we do need to make judgements about others, remember the following passage;

**Galatians 6:7** “... *for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap...*” In other words, “*we reap what we sow*”.

How we judge others may someday come back to “bite” us.”