

# To Judge or Not To Judge

## The Difference Between Judgment & Discernment

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:1-6

**Sermon Series:** Matthew

**Topic:** Judgment, Discernment

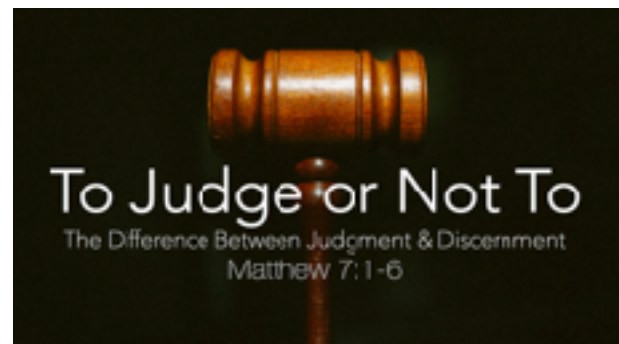
### Introduction

This morning we come to the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. We will consider the first six verses, which invites the question, To Judge or Not To.

#### **Matthew 7:1-6 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> "Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

<sup>6</sup> "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.



Chapter six opened with Jesus stating a principle (that there is a kind of righteous living which God rewards and a kind that he does not). Jesus then illustrated and expounded that principle in what followed. Thus, Jesus called the people of the kingdom of God to live so as to receive the reward and not to live in a way that God will not reward. Thus, when they give alms, or pray, or fast, they ought to do so to serve and please God, not people (6:2-18). In so doing, they will be storing up treasures in heaven (6:19-23). For it is impossible to serve two masters (6:24). It is infinitely better to serve God rather than any other god (i.e. wealth, money, possessions). Serving stuff leads to a life of stress, while serving God will result in receiving promised provision (6:25-34).

## Summary

Now, Jesus picks up another topic that flows from serving God. If one serves God, then one won't pretend to be God. Serving God calls for understanding the difference between judgment and discernment.

## Judge Not

As we have seen him do many times before, Jesus states a principle and then illustrates it and expounds it. Here at the beginning of chapter seven, he does the same. He states the principle in verse one.

**Matthew 7:1 (ESV)** "Judge not, that you be not judged."

## The One Bible Verse Everyone Knows

This might be one of the most well known Bible verses today. It used to be that the most popular and well known Bible verse was John 3:16. You could find it at professional football games behind the end zone, at the World Series behind home plate, and even on the cheeks of some players (such as Tim Tebow). However, today no one knows John 3:16, but almost everyone can quote Matthew 7:1, even if they have no idea where it's found in the Bible, who said it, or what immediately follows it. People who neither know God nor respect the Bible quote this verse with an apparent understanding that it carries authority and ought to be obeyed. They do so in order to justify the authority of self and to establish religious pluralism and some even do so to justify their own sin and rebellion against God. People will happily use the Bible when it serves selfish purposes. Satan is an excellent example of this.

## Literal Interpretation

Astonishingly, the very people who so often claim that the Bible cannot be taken literally are the very same people who wield this verse with determined dogmatism demanding that this very is literally true and must be obeyed in every instance. It appears that so many people hear this verse and presume that Jesus is forbidding all judgement and that no one can make any judgments about other whatsoever.

## What is Jesus Teaching?

But what exactly is Jesus teaching? Is he literally forbidding all kinds of judging and the making of judgments? Is this what Jesus is teaching? If it is, then Jesus immediately contradicts himself and stands in contradiction to what the apostles later taught.

## You Hypocrite

In verse five, Jesus says, "**You hypocrite...**" Making that determination requires some kind of judgment. Consider how many times Jesus called the scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees, "You

hypocrites.” In the gospel of Matthew alone he does so at least thirteen times.<sup>1</sup> In all these instances *Jesus is making some kind of judgement*.

### Jesus on Judging Dogs & Pigs

Just a few sentences later Jesus commands *judgment concerning what is holy and unholy* and how such things relate to *dogs and pigs*.

**Matthew 7:6 (ESV)** “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”

If Jesus in verse one is prohibiting all judgement, then why five sentences later is he commanding it? Determining who qualifies as a ‘dog’ or a ‘pig’ is a call for some kind of judgment. If Jesus is commanding his followers not to waste what is holy on those who are “dog’s and pigs,” then he certainly is commanding us to make a judgment at several levels. First, we must judge what is holy and what is not. Second, we must judge who qualifies as a dog or a pig and who does not. Third, it must be judged whether or not to give what is holy to someone or not. In either case, this *is a call for some kind of judgment*.

### Jesus on Judging False & True Prophets

Furthermore, just a few verses later, Jesus commands *judgment between true and false prophets* and examining the fruit of each of their lives.

**Matthew 7:15-20 (ESV)** “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

If, in Matthew 7:1, Jesus is literally forbidding all judgment, then here he has contradicted himself again by commanding *judgment between true and false prophets* who look like sheep, but truly are “ravenous wolves.” This is a powerful image and teaching. Jesus is not saying these are misguided and mistaken miscreants, but rather intentional and malicious, *ravenous wolves* seeking people to devour. *This is serious and calls for serious judgment*.

This is a call to judge the difference between *good and bad fruit*, healthy produce and diseased produce, a good tree and a bad tree. You must judge which is which, because he commands a completely different response for each of them. A good tree is to be cultivated and its fruit consumed, but the fruit of a bad tree is to be avoided and the tree cut down and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29, 51.

thrown into the fire. Wolves are to be shut out while sheep are to be kept in. *All of this is a call for judgment.*

### Jesus on Unrepentant Church Members

Later, **Matthew 18:15-20**, Jesus commands a process for dealing with sin between members of the church. When one church member sins against another, Jesus instructs first a private conversation. If that does not bring repentance and reconciliation, then there is to be a larger conversation. If that does not yield repentance, then the whole church is called into the conversation. If the one who has sinned still refuses to repent after this, then he is to be removed from the membership of the church. *All of this is a call for judgment.*

### Paul on Unrepentant Church Members

The apostle Paul affirmed the exact same principle in his first letter to the Corinthians (5:1-13). In that instance there was a church member who was living in sexual relationship with his step-mother. Paul concluded,

“Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For what do I have to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.” **1 Corinthians 5:2, 12-13**

There person who calls himself or herself a Christian is expected by God and the church to live according to Christ’s standard of holiness. This includes all aspects of life, including your sex life. The church is not to allow its members to continue to live in any unrepentant sin, including unrepentant sexual sin. The one who does not repent is to be put out of the church (after the steps that Jesus commanded in Matthew 18 fail to bring about repentance). *This is a call for judgment.*

### Jesus is Not Forbidding All Kinds of Judgment

So when Jesus says, “Judge not, that you be not judged,” he is not forbidding all kinds of judgment. Just as we learned that when Jesus said, “When you pray, go into your room” (Mt. 6:6), he was not forbidding all public prayer (for he immediately instructed us to pray “Our Father...”<sup>2</sup> thus, presuming a public context), so here, in Matthew seven, he is not forbidding all kinds of judgment. So what exactly does he mean?

### The Definition of ‘Judge’

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:9.

To answer this, we must seek a definition. What does the word 'judge' mean? The word (*krinō κρίνω*) means "to come to a conclusion... to decide, to make up one's mind"<sup>3</sup> or "to judge a person to be guilty and liable to punishment—to judge as guilty, to condemn."<sup>4</sup>

Let's assume that Jesus is not so unintelligent as to blatantly and unknowingly contradict himself in making this command not to judge. Thus, what he is forbidding is a determined decision or a settled conclusion that a person is unforgivably guilty and finally worthy of condemnation.

### Not Prohibiting Government Service

Jesus is not here making an argument that no Christian can serve as a judge in a court of law. Jesus submitted himself to Pilate's decision. He did not cry foul while Pilate was judging him and the apostle Paul affirms (Romans 13) that God himself has instituted governing authorities to make judgments that keep the peace and punish evildoers.

Thus, what Jesus is prohibiting is the kind of judging that finally determines that this or that person is an irredeemable reprobate worthy of nothing but the final judgment of God. Jesus is warning us not to play God. God, not humans, is the one to make final judgments about the condition of a human soul or the worthy of value of a person. Don't pretend to pronounce final judgment on someone, because only God is qualified and able to do that.

### Nor Prohibiting Discernment

Jesus is not prohibiting **discernment**. Jesus is not talking about discerning the spiritual condition or personality of a person or whether or not a person is a good fit to hire to work in a particular position in your company, or whether or not this person is a suitable babysitter for your children or whether or not this or that church is rightly handling the word of God, or whether or not this or that person is a trustworthy person for handling your retirement account. We must make those kinds of decisions every day. Jesus himself commands such judgments.

"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." John 7:24

What Jesus is forbidding is judging someone in a way that you fail to apply to yourself. If you are to have just standards of judgment, then they must be applied to yourself before you apply them to others.

### How Not to Judge

Jesus gives a warning in the next verse to help guard against wrong judgment.

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<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 358.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 555.

**Matthew 7:2 (ESV)** "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."

Be very careful how you judge someone, because when you stand before God, he will judge you by the very same standard by which you have judged others. If you find yourself strong on judgment and a strict standard of enforcement of rules and regulations, then God will one day judge you by same measurement that you have assessed against others. Since he knows your heart, he is even able to apply to you the standard of judgement you've levied against others even if you have never spoken a word. God knows our hearts. Are you willing to subject yourself to the standards that you hold out for other people?

## Problems with Perceiving

Jesus reveals that we have problems in our judging because we have problems in our perceiving.

**Matthew 7:3-4 (ESV)** "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?"

How easy we see the faults in others, but how difficult it is to see our own. Why is it that I can quickly pick out your problems, but I'm slow to acknowledge my own? Why are we so eager to be used by God in sanctifying others, but so slow to be rid of our own sin? Jesus here reveals a fundamental flaw in each of our sinful human nature. We are blind to our own sin, but acutely aware of the sins of others. Therefore, do not judge others.

## Judging Rightly

This does not mean that we are never to make judgements. No.

**Matthew 7:5 (ESV)** You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

We are called to judge rightly. The first step to right judging is to apply your rule to yourself. Non-hypocritical judgment is judging that first applies the standard of judgment to yourself before applying it to others. If you want to help others clean up their lives, then first clean up your own. If you want to help someone see clearly, then first you need to clean your own eyes. If I want to help you clean your computer screen, then I first need to make sure that my own glasses have no smudges.

## Conclusion

Serving God does not mean never pointing out another's sin. Serving God means first dealing with your own sin. Obeying Jesus does not mean never making a judgment about what is or is

not sin. Jesus calls us to do this every day. Obeying Jesus means first judging your own heart before you ever do so to someone else's. Jesus is not prohibiting *all* kinds of judgment.

He is prohibiting the applying of judgments to others that you refuse to first apply to yourself. He is not prohibiting discernment, but rather determinative judgments of condemnation about the worth or value of another person. That's God's place, not ours. Final judgment is God's alone, through Jesus.

This is a call for confession. This is a call for serious reflection on sin. This is a call to self analysis. This is a call to discerning others, but judging yourself. Paul writes, "*If we judged ourselves truly, then we would not be judged*"<sup>5</sup> [by God]. If we judged ourselves rightly, then we would be aware of our sins. We would then realize our great need of a savior. Then we would think of Jesus, who was condemned on the cross, even though he had no sin in himself. This is why he can save sinners. Because he died, though he was not a sinner. He bore the condemnation of sinners on behalf of sinners so that sinners could be free from the sin that easily entangles us. Freedom from the final judgment of condemnation by God comes only through faith in death and resurrection of Jesus. Freedom from continual entanglement in sin comes today through the powerful resurrected Jesus who reigns today from the right hand of God.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:31.