



Exploring the Kingdom of God in Matthew:

Judge Not?

March 4, 2018

Text: Matt 7:1-2

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”

Matthew chapter seven continues Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. As we continue on, we will notice a shift in the teaching. Jesus already taught His disciples concerning the nature of life in the kingdom (Matt 5:3-12), the disciples impact on the world (v 13-16), the kingdom in relation to the Law (v 17-20), Jesus’ interpretation of the Old Testament (v 21-48), the development of Kingdom life in the real world: principles for spirituality in religious life (6:1-18), and everyday life (6:19-34). In the beginning of chapter seven Jesus begins discussing human relationships.

Matthew 7:1 is probably the most quoted verse in the Bible. The only verse that might be more popular is John 3:16. Sadly this verse is probably the most misunderstood among Christians and non-believers alike. If you have ever attempted to share the Gospel of the Kingdom or correct a brother or sister in the Christian faith, I am sure you have heard the comment, “stop judging me”, or “You can’t judge me”, or “Doesn’t the Bible say that you aren’t supposed to judge others?”, or “Jesus said you should love your neighbor, not judge them”, or we can go on and on... My prayer is that we will come away with a more Biblical theology of judging when we leave today.

Context is key. The Student Dictionary defines the word context as, “The parts of something written or spoken that are near a certain word or group of words and that help to explain its meaning.” For example, after a 2016 rally in Iowa, TheHill.com ran an article titled, *Trump: I could shoot people in streets and not lose support*. CNN’s version of the article was titled, *Trump: I could ‘shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose voters’*. When watching the video that contained the statement the articles were referencing in context, it was clear that Trump was using hyperbole (an exaggeration not to be taken literally). In order to arrive at the true meaning of the speaker or writer, it’s important to read or listen in context. In plain language, you can’t properly interpret scripture without considering the context. Bishop McLeod said, “Context - One of the greatest errors we can make is to take a text out of its intended context. It has been said that a text without a context is a pretext, which is an incorrect assumption or interpretation. We are commanded to be diligent in Bible study (2 Tim 2:15), and to test ALL things in light of Scripture (1 Thes 5:21). This requires proper interpretative methods. Taking a text out of its context can result in false doctrine, poor decisions, and leaving the will of God!”

If you need further reference for this point, covenant members can refer to their Covenant Life Class manual. For a little deeper study in bible interpretation, we recommend the book “How to Read The Bible for All It’s Worth”, by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stewart.

Since we have refreshed our memory about the importance of context, let’s go back and read our passage through verse six to get some better context.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 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? 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? 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. 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.”

When reading verses one and two with the context of verses three through six, it appears crystal clear that verse one cannot mean what many people think. At CRCC, we can take this one step further being that we have been going line by line through the Sermon on the Mount since July 2017. Jesus has meticulously ripped to shreds the teaching of the religious leaders during the Sermon on the Mount. What makes us as readers think He has suddenly switched his focus? Question: how can you help take the speck out of your brother’s eye if you don’t judge if there is or isn’t a speck? Or how can you determine who dogs and pigs are if you don’t judge? By interpreting this verse in light of its context we come to the conclusion that Jesus is condemning hypocritical judging.

What do the scriptures say? There are several instances in both the Old and New Testament that show that God calls His children to judge, call to question, challenge, and hold others accountable.

God is the supreme judge:

- Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen 18:25)
- God is a righteous judge... (Psalm 7:11a)
- The Heavens declare his righteousness, for God Himself is judge! (Psalm 50:6)
- He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isaiah 2:4)
- Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Tim 4:8)
- There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:12)

- For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” (Heb 10:30)
- On that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Rom 2:16)

JUDGING AND UNBELIEVERS

Christians who obey Christ’s command to make disciples will most certainly be hit with the objection, “Who are you to judge me?” or if they are fans of Tupac, “Only God can judge me!”. The Bible teaches that all have sinned (Rom 3:23). When using the law of God to bring awareness of sin, we are not simply stating our opinion; we are declaring what God says. There are some Christians that believe that it is wrong to bring awareness of sin in the life of unbelievers. My question to these brothers and sisters is, “How can one repent (which is necessary for salvation) without an awareness of sin?”

Christians sharing the Gospel and making disciples are doing one of the most loving things one can do! Imagine your son or daughter walking along like children do. No cares in the world. Singing a silly song. Eyes closed. Head tilted back. But they are headed straight towards a cliff that, if they fall, it means certain pain and loss of life. A stranger is sitting in a lawn chair sipping an ice cold freshly squeezed lemonade. What is the most loving thing this stranger can do when they see the child heading towards the cliff? What if the child’s shoulder is yanked out of socket when the stranger snatches them? What if the child’s parent is offended because they couldn’t catch the child in time? What if there was a law in place that allowed parents to send their child careening off a cliff? I’m convinced that many Christians don’t truly believe that those who die outside of Christ will suffer the wrath of God after this life. If we truly believed it, statistics would be better than the less than 2% of Christians who shared their faith in the past 12 months.

JUDGING AND FELLOW BELIEVERS

We find the same primary objection when it comes to judging believers. Christians also charge fellow Christians with being divisive. We are of one faith (Eph 4:5), and we are to strive for the unity of faith (Eph 4:13). As far as the charge of being divisive, the Apostle Paul told the Romans (Rom 16:17) that the divisive teach doctrine contrary to what they had been taught. If the fellow Christians judgment is in line with scripture, the charge of division is baseless. Is it loving to see your brother or sister in error and leave them there?

- Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Gal 6:1)
- All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, (2 Tim 3:16)
- And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, (2 Tim 2:24-25)

If we can't judge fellow believers, how can we obey verses like:

- But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler (criticize angrily or in an abusive manner), drunkard, or swindler (use deception to deprive someone of money or possessions) —not even to eat with such a one. For what have I 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 Cor 5:11-13)
- Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. (2 Thes 3:6)
- O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," **21** for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. (1 Tim 6:20)

JUDGING AND LEADERS

Scripture is clear that Christians should judge its teachers. Matthew 7:15-20 addresses this issue so I won't expound on it today.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we learn that God is concerned with the heart behind the action. The Pharisees were notoriously self-righteous, puffed with pride, hypocritical, and lacked grace. It is my hope that we think biblically regarding judging moving forward.