

# ***Did Jesus Really Say That?***

## **7. “Me First”**

December 6, 2020

So what do you think? This is a pastoral robe; I got it when ordained, but I’ve never worn it at a Crossroads worship service. In fact, I only wear it when it’s required at denominational gatherings. One reason of the many reasons I don’t wear this is that it looks like a judge’s robe.

A lot of people already feel uncomfortable about walking into a church for the first time because they assume that they will be judged, and I doubt dressing like this would help them relax. I’m not their judge, so I don’t want to look like one. But I thought I’d wear this robe today because Jesus had some things to say about judging others.

Today’s message is part of our series called “Did Jesus *Really* Say That?” We’re working our way section by section through Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount – which was the greatest sermon ever. If you have a Bible or an app please turn to Matthew 7.

It is ironic that many pre-Christians view the Church as judgmental, because in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said,

**Matthew 7:1 “Do not judge...”**

“Judge not” might be the most frequently quoted Bible verse by those who say they are not believers. Maybe that is because **tolerance** is one of the highest values in our culture today. 3 out of 5 Americans say there is no such thing as absolute moral truth.<sup>1</sup> If there is no absolute moral truth, then no one can say that anything is absolutely right or wrong ...what’s wrong for one person might be right for the next person. And if that is so, then how can we judge anyone for doing anything?

But I have not yet met anyone who functions without a sense of right and wrong – even those who say there is no absolute moral truth. All people draw a line somewhere and say, “That’s wrong.” When it comes to murder, I don’t know anyone who says, “Well, who am I to tell my friend not to murder his neighbor? It might not be right for me, but he has to live his own truth.” I don’t know anyone who says that about child sexual abuse, or embezzlement, either. We might not agree *where* to draw the line, but we all draw lines.

When Jesus said, “Do not judge,” he was not denying the reality of a right and wrong. All of Jesus’ teaching would be meaningless if we are not to distinguish between what is God-honoring and what is not. For example, in Chapter 5, Jesus said he didn’t come to abolish God’s law but to fulfill it. So he’s not throwing out moral truth.

And in 7:15, just a few verses after he says “Do not judge,” Jesus teaches us to discern the difference between what is right in God’s sight and what is not. So, when Jesus says, “Judge not,” he is not saying, “Do whatever you feel like doing! You do you!”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://disrn.com/news/barna-58-of-americans-reject-moral-absolutes-46-of-evangelical-christians-agree>

No, look at Jesus' teachings and you will see that he warns us not to *judge*, but he encourages us to *discern*. To discern is to *perceive* whether an action or attitude is right or wrong. To judge is describes *a way of responding* when we think someone went against what God commands. Jesus teaches us to discern but warns us not to judge.

So, what does Jesus mean by judge? To judge is to condemn a person. When we judge people, we declare that they should be rejected because of what they have done.

To judge a person is to view them with contempt -- we decide they are not worthy of respect or dignity; that they should no longer be loved. When someone is judged "guilty" in a court, they are often taken away to jail; removed from sight removed from society.

When we judge others morally, we often do the same thing. The Amish call it "shunning" – that is social rejection for someone who stepped out of line. The community has nothing to do with the shunned person.

A contemporary example of shunning and judging is "Cancel Culture." One of the sad realities of the internet is when anyone says or does something that others deem to be out of line, they are immediately judged to be a terrible person who can never be redeemed. They are unfollowed, blocked, and flamed on social media. They are excluded from social events. Some even lose their jobs. A celebrity makes an unpopular statement and people post: "I'm done with him." A company spokesperson makes a social statement that rubs some people the wrong way, and they declare, "I will never buy their product again." Sadly, it even happens in families; one person takes a position the family objects to, and they stop speaking and no longer include them.

But Jesus did not shun people, even when they crossed moral lines. Some religious leaders criticized him for associating with outcasts – people who were cancelled by others – people like tax collectors who got rich by extorting their neighbors, or prostitutes. Jesus didn't cancel people.

Jesus doesn't just tell us not to judge – he tells us *why* we shouldn't do it. Do not judge others because...our judgment will backfire.

**v. 1 Do not judge, or you too will be judged.**

I remember seeing a car blow by me on the highway, way over the speed limit. Then several miles down the road I saw that car pulled over by the police. I thought to myself, "Good -- they caught that guy before he caused an accident."

Then one day I was zooming along over the speed limit, and I was hoping the police wouldn't pull me over. Of course, I always have a very good reason for going over the speed limit. Of course. But I had to admit that I was in no position to feel smug when someone got a speeding ticket.

A few years ago Linda and I were in the car when a car screamed past us. I said, "Either that guy is crazy, or his wife is having a baby and he needs to get to the hospital right now." So now, when someone blasts past us, we turn to each other and say, "they must be having a baby."

Jesus tells us “Do not judge, or you will be judged.” By whom?

First, by God. When we judge others, we invite God – the only true judge – to judge us in the same manner. And none of us should be anxious to be judged by a perfectly holy God. After all, we all have sinned-- we’ve each fallen short of God’s standards. We have given the spiritual prosecutor plenty of material to work with.

It is easy to feel superior when we see someone sin in a way that we haven’t. But before we judge them as worthy of punishment and cast them out of our social circle, we need to remember that we open a file on ourselves when we do that.

Secondly, when we judge others, we will be judged by ourselves. Pastor Scott Sauls observes that the people who act with the most contempt toward others tend to be the people who feel the most contempt toward themselves. Those who tell themselves. “Stupid!” after every mistake. Those who feel like nothing they do is quite good enough. Self-contempt always overflows to others... shaming and talking down about them.

Jesus says that if we judge others, we will be judged – by God, and by ourselves. And that is no way to live. Judging other people will backfire on us.

Jesus also told us not to judge because our judgment is inaccurate. In verse 3 Jesus gave his listeners an unforgettable image:

*“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?”*

Jesus’ first listeners probably chuckled at that word picture. I went to the eye doctor recently – and she used her instrument to look into my eyes. If she had a plank sticking out of her own, I don’t think she could have done that!

And yet, Jesus says that is just what we do when we try judge someone else. We don’t judge people accurately, starting with ourselves. We think we are clear-eyed, but Jesus says we’ve got a plank in the eye.

Maybe you have heard that 8 of 10 of men think they’re above-average drivers. However, 90% of accidents are caused by human error. Statistically, only 5/10 can be above average drivers. But we don’t evaluate ourselves very accurately.

Why not judge others? Because there is a good chance we will judge wrongly. First of all, all we have to judge others by is external appearances – which can be notoriously off-base. Only God sees the heart, we’re not qualified to judge someone. We’re not given the necessary equipment. Anytime we are assuming we know someone else’s motivations we are on thin ice.

Stephen Covey tells a famous story about being on a subway and seeing a man with kids get on. The kids were loud and obnoxious, disturbing everyone in the car while

the father just sat there staring into space. Covey was rather indignant and said to him, “Sir, your kids are disturbing everyone. Can’t you control them?” The man snapped out of his daze and said, “Oh, I’m sorry. We’ve just come from the hospital where my wife died – I guess they don’t know what to do with their emotions right now.”

Covey felt 2 inches tall. He had judged the man to be terrible father and the kids to be brats, when in fact they were just in terrible pain.

We don’t get it right when we judge because we can’t see people for who they really are. We think we do, but we don’t.

And the more time we spend on our phones, the more we are groomed to judge others. If you haven’t seen the documentary, “The Social Dilemma” I encourage you to check it out. It shows how much of the anger, suspicion, and name-calling in our culture today is fueled by the algorithms in our phones that show us inaccurate pictures of others and of reality. We need to mistrust our judgments of others.

Another reason not to judge: We can’t love and judge at the same time. Love is the primary value in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all your being, and the second is like it: love others.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to love our enemies, honor others and stay faithful to our spouses from the heart, pray to forgive our enemies. We can’t do that for people while we are judging them. Judging is not part of the Kingdom of God because this doesn’t happen in heaven.

“God’s people should be known for how sincerely they love one another, not how severely they judge one another.”<sup>2</sup> But we’re not always known that way. There is a reason that pre-Christians often think of Christians as judgmental. And I have seen Christians judge each other more in 2020 than I have ever seen in my lifetime.

We’ve judged others over their response to COVID-19 – pretending to know the state of another person’s faith. We have divided over political differences – canceling one another and breaking fellowship.

This is not how to live out in love. People who love one another can live with differences. People who have contempt for others can’t. When we are tempted to judge someone – ask ourselves, how would I treat this person if I wanted them to know I love them?

Years ago, I was concerned about a potential issue I saw in one of my son’s lives. So I called him up and arranged lunch. As we talked and connected, I broached the subject saying, “I see this --- and it doesn’t look healthy to me.” It turns out that there was more to the story that I didn’t see, and we left each other with a hug after a good heart-to-heart.

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<sup>2</sup> Christ-Centered Exposition “Exalting Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount” by Daniel Akin

When I had that concern, what if I had skipped spending time with him, and instead just talked about him to others and then blasted him on Facebook? I would never dream of doing something like that to someone I love.

After warning us about judging, Jesus reminded us,

*v. 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

There are a lot of reasons a Christ-followers can't judge condemn others and hold them in contempt. So, let's take off our judge robes and resign from the bench. When I notice someone else's sin, what should I do instead of judging? Jesus was very clear about this:

*v. 5 -- You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

To correct someone else is like a guy whose house is on fire complaining is like a guy complaining to his neighbor that her grass is too long while his own house is on fire – it may be true that her grass is too long, but he has a lot more urgent matters to attend to in his own life.

So as soon as the judgmental thought arises in us, our reaction is to say, "ME FIRST." I'm not ready to speak to someone else's flaws until I name my own.

***THEN** you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

So, Jesus says there does come a time to speak to someone we care about regarding a way they are straying off the path. But as we do, we speak as a fellow struggler.

*Galatians 6:1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.*

Let's be known as those who refuse to cancel each other; let's live out the values of the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, we get rid of the judge's robe and take up the servant's towel. That is what happens when God is in charge.

***John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

And the very next verse reminds us:

***John 3:17** "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."*

Crossroads Church exists to reach our region with the good news of Jesus – to make disciples who make disciples. We don't do that by judging each other, we do that by loving and serving one another.

