

Should We Judge Others?

Should we judge others? Many say as Christians we should not.

For instance, many Christians have fallen into the trap when it comes to adultery.

“Who are you to judge two people who love each other?”

“Who do you think you are, telling someone who they can and cannot love? You’re a sinner, too!”

“Someone’s private life is none of your business. Don’t judge them.”

What Does The Bible Say?

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. 2 For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. (Matthew 7:1–2 NLT)

When you judge others, you open yourself up for judgement.

3 “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? 4 How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye. (Matthew 7:3–4 NLT)

Get your life right first, before you try to tell others what to do.

5 Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye. (Matthew 7:5 NLT)

Once you have your house in order, then you can help someone else straighten up their home.

When we consider the concept of judging, especially as it relates to the Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells us to be discerning, not condemning.

Look at the judgments that a Christian needs to make in Matthew 7.

13 “You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. 14 But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. (Matthew 7:13–14 NLT)

15 “Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. 16 You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. 19 So

every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. 20 Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. (Matthew 7:15–20 NLT)

One last thing about this passage:

6 “Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you. (Matthew 7:6 NLT)

Some people will not take a correct rebuke.

8 So don’t bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you.

But correct the wise, and they will love you. (Proverbs 9:8 NLT)

14 If any household or town refuses to welcome you or listen to your message, shake its dust from your feet as you leave.

(Matthew 10:14 NLT)

50 Then the Jews stirred up the influential religious women and the leaders of the city, and they incited a mob against Paul and Barnabas and ran them out of town. 51 So they shook the dust from their feet as a sign of rejection and went to the town of Iconium. (Acts 13:50–51 NLT)

How Can You Obey?

As Christians, we should be living godly lives so that we can first concentrate on our own repentance of sin. Sanctification is a lifelong process of being transformed every day into the image of Christ. Without this, we have no place in helping another brother or sister.

How we are not to judge:

- 1. We are not to attempt to determine another person's motives**
- 2. We are not to judge using wrong standards**
- 3. We are not to make final determinations**

4. We are not to judge with a wrong spirit

5. We are not to judge without regard to ourselves

We are to be fruit inspectors:

1. We are to evaluate the conduct of others, things we can see

(Matthew 7:16–20)

2. We can determine character by actions (a man does what he does, because he is what he is)

3. We are to use biblical standards to evaluate others regularly

4. We are to reserve final judgments even while making judgments along the way

What are the real motives of your heart when you are making a judgement of others?

What do others see when they inspect your fruit?

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Explore:

When the Lord Jesus said, “Judge not, that you be not judged,” he did not mean what our culture means when people presume to borrow this phrase. Jesus’ command does not mean that we are never to make an exclusive theological judgment or offer a moral corrective that is based on God’s Word.

I say this first and most obviously because of the words and actions of our Lord himself. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes one theological and ethical judgment after another. If you took out all the verses in chapters 5, 6 where

Jesus says in essence, “Think this way, not that way; live this way, not that way,” you wouldn’t have many verses left. Or simply look in our text. Look at verse 5. It starts with a judgment, with Jesus’ favorite term for the person who turns God’s Law on its head—“You hypocrite” (cf. Matthew 23). Our Lord calls a spade a spade and a sinner a sinner.

Moreover, look at the next verse. In verse 6, as we shall see, Jesus commands us to discern who acts like a Christian—a “brother,” vv. 3–5—and who acts like an animal—a “dog” or a “pig.” These are not only harsh terms, but they are terms of judgment. Chapter 7, in fact, ends in verses 13–27 with us having to make one judgment after another: enter this narrow gate, not that wide one. Build your house on the rock, not on the sand. Listen to true teachers, not false ones.

Therefore, the verse “Judge not, that you be not judged” is not the end of Jesus’ discussion on judgment; rather it is just the

beginning. In 7:1–12 our Lord Jesus is not teaching us not to judge (period), but rather how to make true, wise, and (most importantly) loving judgments. He will teach us the loving art of speck-removal.

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 184.

Explore:

Christians have an obligation to exercise critical judgment! What Christ means when he says “Do not judge” is that we are to refrain from hypercritical, condemning judgment. There is a universe of difference between being discerningly critical and hypercritical. A discerning spirit is constructive. A hypercritical spirit is destructive. The person with a destructive, overcritical

spirit revels in criticism for its own sake. He expects to find fault, like the man who sat watching his preacher neighbor nail up a trellis in his backyard. The preacher, seeing him watching intently from his yard, asked, “Trying to pick up some pointers on carpentry?” To which his neighbor replied, “Nope. Just waiting to see what a preacher says when he hits his thumb.”

When a critic discovers faults in another, he feels a malignant satisfaction and always sees the worst possible motives in the other’s actions. The critical spirit is like the carrion fly that buzzes with a sickening hum of satisfaction over sores, preferring corruption to health.

One of the most prominent characteristics of this critical, fault-finding person is that he predictably focuses on things that are of little importance and treats them as matters of vital importance.

Within the church this takes bizarre forms—judging the spirituality of a young couple by observing whether they spank their children with a bare hand or an implement, judging others

by where they sit in church or the Bible version they carry or whether their theology agrees with the critic's point for point ... and so it goes! This pettiness on secondary issues is condemned in Romans 14 in the strongest of terms.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

(vv. 1–4)

Paul adds in another passage:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are

condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. (Romans 2:1)

R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 229.

Explore:

We shall be judged (v. 1). The tense of the verb judged signifies a once-for-all final judgment. If we first judge ourselves, then we are preparing for that final judgment when we face God. The Pharisees “played God” as they condemned other people; but they never considered that God would one day judge them.

We are being judged (v. 2). The parallel passage in Luke 6:37–38 is helpful here. Not only will God judge us at the end, but people are also judging us right now; and we receive from people exactly what we give. The kind of judgment, and the

measure of judgment, comes right back to us. We reap what we have sown.

We must see clearly to help others (vv. 3–5). The purpose of self-judgment is to prepare us to serve others. Christians are obligated to help each other grow in grace. When we do not judge ourselves, we not only hurt ourselves, but we also hurt those to whom we could minister. The Pharisees judged and criticized others to make themselves look good (Luke 18:9–14). But Christians should judge themselves so that they can help others look good. There is a difference!

Let's look at our Lord's illustration of this point. Jesus chose the symbol of the eye because this is one of the most sensitive areas of the human body. The picture of a man with a two-by-four stuck in his eye, trying to remove a speck of dust from another man's eye, is ridiculous indeed! If we do not honestly face up to our own sins, and confess them, we blind ourselves to ourselves;

and then we cannot see clearly enough to help others. The Pharisees saw the sins of other people, but they would not look at their own sins.

In Matthew 6:22–23, Jesus used the illustration of the eye to teach us how to have a spiritual outlook on life. We must not pass judgment on others' motives. We should examine their actions and attitudes, but we cannot judge their motives—for only God can see their hearts. It is possible for a person to do a good work with a bad motive. It is also possible to fail in a task and yet be very sincerely motivated. When we stand before Christ at the Judgment Seat, He will examine the secrets of the heart and reward us accordingly (Rom. 2:16; Col. 3:22–25).

The image of the eye teaches us another truth: We must exercise love and tenderness when we seek to help others (Eph. 4:15). I have had extensive eye examinations, and once had surgery to remove an imbedded speck of steel; and I appreciated the

tenderness of the physicians. Like eye doctors, we should minister to people we want to help with tender loving care. We can do more damage than a speck of dirt in the eye if we approach others with impatience and insensitivity.

Two extremes must be avoided in this matter of spiritual self-examination. The first is the deception of a shallow examination. Sometimes we are so sure of ourselves that we fail to examine our hearts honestly and thoroughly. A quick glance into the mirror of the Word will never reveal the true situation (James 1:22–25).

The second extreme is what I call a “perpetual autopsy.” Sometimes we get so wrapped up in self-examination that we become unbalanced. But we should not look only at ourselves, or we will become discouraged and defeated. We should look by faith to Jesus Christ and let Him forgive and restore us. Satan is

the accuser (Rev. 12:10), and he enjoys it when we accuse and condemn ourselves!

After we have judged ourselves honestly before God, and have removed those things that blind us, then we can help others and properly judge their works. But if we know there are sins in our lives, and we try to help others, we are hypocrites. In fact, it is possible for ministry to be a device to cover up sin! The Pharisees were guilty of this, and Jesus denounced them for it.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 29–30.

Explore:

Jesus' words Judge not, that you be not judged are well known but much misunderstood. To begin with, we must reject

Tolstoy's belief, based on this verse, that 'Christ totally forbids

the human institution of any law court', and that he 'could mean nothing else by those words'.¹ But Jesus' prohibition cannot possibly mean the one thing Tolstoy says it must mean, for the context does not refer to judges in courts of law but rather to the responsibility of individuals to one another.

Next, our Lord's injunction to 'judge not' cannot be understood as a command to suspend our critical faculties in relation to other people, to turn a blind eye to their faults (pretending not to notice them), to eschew all criticism and to refuse to discern between truth and error, goodness and evil. How can we be sure that Jesus was not referring to these things? Partly because it would not be honest to behave like this, but hypocritical, and we know from this and other passages his love of integrity and hatred of hypocrisy. Partly because it would contradict the nature of man whose creation in God's image includes the ability to make value-judgments. Partly also because much of Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is based on the

assumption that we will (indeed should) use our critical powers.

For example, we have repeatedly heard his call to be different

from the world around us, in that we are to develop a

righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees, to do ‘more

than others’ in the standard of love we adopt, not to be like the

hypocrites in our piety or like the heathen in our ambition. But

how can we possibly obey all this teaching unless we first

evaluate the performance of others and then ensure that ours is

different from and higher than theirs? Similarly, in Matthew 7,

this very command not to ‘judge’ others is followed almost

immediately by two further commands: to avoid giving ‘what is

holy’ to dogs or pearls to pigs (6), and to beware of false

prophets (15). It would be impossible to obey either of these

commands without using our critical judgment. For in order to

determine our behaviour towards ‘dogs’, ‘pigs’ and ‘false

prophets’ we must first be able to recognize them, and in order to

do that we must exercise some critical discernment.

If, then, Jesus was neither abolishing law courts nor forbidding criticism, what did he mean by Judge not? In a word, ‘ensoriousness’. The follower of Jesus is still a ‘critic’ in the sense of using his powers of discernment, but not a ‘judge’ in the sense of being censorious. Censoriousness is a compound sin consisting of several unpleasant ingredients. It does not mean to assess people critically, but to judge them harshly. The censorious critic is a fault-finder who is negative and destructive towards other people and enjoys actively seeking out their failings. He puts the worst possible construction on their motives, pours cold water on their schemes and is ungenerous towards their mistakes.

Worse than that, to be censorious is to set oneself up as a censor, and so to claim the competence and authority to sit in judgment upon one’s fellow men. But if I do this, I am casting both myself and my fellows in the wrong role. Since when have they been my servants, responsible to me? And since when have I been their

lord and judge? As Paul wrote to the Romans, applying the truth of Matthew 7:1 to their situation: ‘Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls’ (14:4). Paul also applied the same truth to himself when he found himself surrounded by hostile detractors: ‘It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.’ The simple but vital point which Paul is making in these verses is that man is not God. No human being is qualified to be the judge of his fellow humans, for we cannot read each other’s hearts or assess each other’s motives. To be censorious is to presume arrogantly to anticipate the day of judgment, to usurp the prerogative of the divine Judge, in fact to try to play God.

Not only are we not the judge, but we are among the judged, and shall be judged with the greater strictness ourselves if we dare to

judge others. Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. The rationale should be clear. If we pose as judges, we cannot plead ignorance of the law we claim to be able to administer. If we enjoy occupying the bench, we must not be surprised to find ourselves in the dock. As Paul put it, ‘Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you the judge are doing the very same things.’

To sum up, the command to judge not is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous. Jesus does not tell us to cease to be men (by suspending our critical powers which help to distinguish us from animals) but to renounce the presumptuous ambition to be God (by setting ourselves up as judges).

John R. W. Stott and John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 175–177.

Explore:

Some people suppose that in the parable of the foreign bodies Jesus was forbidding us to act as moral or spiritual oculists and meddle with other people's eyes, and telling us instead to mind our own business. This is not so. The fact that censoriousness and hypocrisy are forbidden us does not relieve us of brotherly responsibility towards one another. On the contrary, Jesus was later to teach that if our brother sins against us, our first duty (though usually neglected) is 'go and tell him his fault between you and him alone'. The same obligation is laid upon us here. To

be sure, in certain circumstances we are forbidden to interfere, namely when there is an even bigger foreign body in our own eye which we have not removed. But in other circumstances Jesus actually commands us to reprove and correct our brother. Once we have dealt with our own eye trouble, then we shall see clearly to deal with his. A bit of dirt in his eye is, after all, rightly called a 'foreign' body. It doesn't belong there. It is always alien, usually painful and sometimes dangerous. To leave it there, and make no attempt to remove it, would hardly be consistent with brotherly love.

Our Christian duty, then, is not to see the speck in our brother's eye while at the same time we do not notice the log in our own (3); still less to say to our brother 'Let me take the speck out of your eye' while we have not yet taken the log from our own (4); but rather this, first to take the log out of our own eye, so that then with the resulting clarity of vision we shall be able to take the speck out of our brother's eye (5). Again, it is evident that

Jesus is not condemning criticism as such, but rather the criticism of others when we exercise no comparable self-criticism; nor correction as such, but rather the correction of others when we have not first corrected ourselves.

The standard of Jesus for relationships in the Christian counter-culture is high and healthy. In all our attitudes and behavior towards others we are to play neither the judge (becoming harsh, censorious and condemning), nor the hypocrite (blaming others while excusing ourselves), but the brother, caring for others so much that we first blame and correct ourselves and then seek to be constructive in the help we give them. ‘Correct him,’ said Chrysostom, alluding to someone who has sinned, ‘but not as a foe, nor as an adversary exacting a penalty, but as a physician providing medicines,’ yes, and—even more—as a loving brother anxious to rescue and to restore. We need to be as critical of ourselves as we often are of others, and as generous to others as we always are to ourselves. Then we shall anticipate the Golden

Rule to which Jesus brings us in verse 12 and act towards others as we would like them to act towards us.

John R. W. Stott and John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 179–180.

Question 1 of 5

If you have a tattoo, share with your group why you got it and the meaning of the tattoo.

Question 2 of 5

Is it sinful for Christians to judge one another?

Question 3 of 5

Why does judging someone's motives a wrong decision?

Question 4 of 5

How can we avoid being a hypocrite when we make judgments about someone else's sin?

Question 5 of 5

How do we balance confronting people with their sin and the fact that God is THE judge?