

Context Matters – Lesson 3 – Matthew 7:1

Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.”

I. Judge Not? (The Clarity of Scripture)

a. This is where verse-by-verse can be dangerous.

- “Μὴ κρίνετε” – “Judge not.”

- o “See! We are not to pass judgement.”

- BDAG: judge, pass judgment upon, express an opinion about “See that’s it! Christians must not judge!”

- Greek professor: “Congratulations. You now know enough Greek to be dangerous.”

- o James 3:1 “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

- o Teachers are judged harder. We must be careful when we wield the sword.

- o If we take a closer look at BDAG we see that there is a difference between the sense of κρίνετε: one is to express an opinion about, and there is another where it means “to come to a conclusion after a cognitive process,” another where it means “to make a judgement based on taking various factors into an account, and the last one, • (The second “judged” in this verse falls under the meaning, “to engage in a judicial process in the divine court.”)

- A proper understanding of this verse is going to depend heavily on a deeper usage of this verse → but take heart! There is a shortcut, which is revealed in – you guessed it – CONTEXT. b. This is the beauty of Scripture, and what we call the doctrine of perspicuity. That’s a fancy word for the doctrine of the “clarity of Scripture.” i. Contribution of the Reformation: “God's Word is freely accessible to every reader or hearer of ordinary intelligence, without requiring any special education. Of course, one must understand the language God's Word is presented in, and not be so preoccupied by contrary thoughts so as to prevent understanding. As a result of this, no one needs to wait for any clergy, and pope, scholar, or ecumenical council to explain the real meaning of any part of the Bible.”

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- ii. The Bible: ▪ Can be understood by people of even low natural intelligence: Psalm 119:130 “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”
- Can be understood by children: 2 Tim 3:15 “From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ▪ Is sufficiently clear that everyone can obey its commands. Deut 30 “This commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it it?” But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it...to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statues, and His judgements.”
- iii. This is not to say that there are not hard things to understand, or that all parts of the Bible are equally as straightforward. iv. This is also not to say that Bible teachers are not an important and meaningful part of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to teach the Church through exposition, explanation, interpretation, and application. v. But it does mean that the message of the Bible is inherently understandable – that the Author of Truth has clearly communicated His truth for His people in a comprehensible form. c. But here’s an important aspect of the doctrine of the Clarity of Scripture: An understanding depends on the reader or hearer not being so preoccupied by contrary thoughts as to prevent understanding. i. Martin Luther: ““But, if many things still remain abstruse to many, this does not arise from obscurity in the Scriptures, but from [our] own blindness or want [i.e. lack] of understanding, who do not go the way to see the all-perfect clearness of the truth... Let, therefore, wretched men cease to impute, with blasphemous perverseness, the darkness and obscurity of their own heart to the all-clear scriptures of God.”
- ii. 2 Pet 3:16 “His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”
- iii. John 8:43 “Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires.”

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iv. 2 Cor 4:3 “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

- Believers have a responsibility, as those who approach the Holy Scriptures with unveiled faces, not to seek to put the veil back on.
- 2 Cor 3:14-18 “For to this day, when the Jews read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”
- We then, as those who are being transformed into the image of Christ, have a responsibility to approach the Scripture with the proper respect and openness. That is crucial to our understanding and to our growth.
- As we consider Matthew 7:1 we must recognize that it is a verse that unbelievers will dance and sing to. And many Christians will join in, too. It’s so tempting to fall into the trap of deceit when it comes to this verse, for so many reasons:
 - o Do you hate confrontation? “Judge not” and you never have to have that hard conversation with your brother, sister, friend, mother, father, co-worker, or spouse!
 - o Are you cherishing a particular darkness in your own heart, enjoying some secret actions? Tell that person who’s trying to encourage you out of sin to “Judge not.” They probably don’t know enough Bible to push past that countermeasure (we’re going to fix that this morning).

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o Baptist preacher JD Greer notes that ‘Judge not’ is one of the most popular verses in our culture because it seems to fit in with two of our cultures most basic assumptions: that 1) Religion is private and 2) morality is relative, which means you can’t really tell anybody what they believe is wrong.”

d. But we, as Bible-believing Christians (is there really another kind??) believe in being skeptical of what society says and want to know what the Bible says. And not just have a verse, not just have a verse picked up and blasted out of context, but to really know and believe the truth. e. And we believe, as Protestants, in the Clarity of Scripture. While the ministry of pastors and teachers is present, crucial, and Spirit-led, your learning of the Scripture and certainly belief in it does not depend on me – because context will help where a solid knowledge of Greek may be absent. What, then, is the context? How can we know that when Jesus says “Judge not,” He doesn’t mean judge not?? What does it really mean?

II. The Context

a. The solution is to start with context. Let’s read the passage instead of stopping on the first verse:

b. Here’s how I know that Jesus can’t mean we are never to judge:

i. In verse 5, he says we need to be able to “take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

Matt 7:1-6 “Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 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? 4 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? 5 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. 6 “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.

ii. In verse 6, Jesus says that there are some kinds of people that are like dogs and pigs, and we need to handle them in certain different ways. Judging is obviously going to be the necessary and crucial tool to find out who the dogs and pigs are.

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c. And that's just for immediate context; The Bible has many verses elsewhere. i. Eph 5:11 "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." ▪ That command is a far cry from turn away and pretend those unfruitful works of darkness didn't happen, respecting their privacy and deliberately leaving them alone about it. ii. 1 Cor 5:12 "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." ▪ It is clear in that verse that God has handed down a means, ministry, and therefore responsibility for believers to work in the management of God's household, which at times may involve judgement of fellow believers. iii. If that makes you tremble, it should. It is no light duty. But Paul charges us further in 1 Cor 6 not to shy away from it: "2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!" God has designated us to the task, and therefore will equip us for it."

iv. [I didn't want to preach this today.] But if it's in the Bible, if it's a verse commonly taken out of context, this is my duty and my responsibility, to rightly divide the Word of Truth and teach you to do the same. If we are to judge, then how do we do it right? Because my sinful heart is going to want to fall off one side of that razor-edged sword if it doesn't fall off the other, first.

III. Judging Rightly

- ❖ Proposal 1: Jesus is giving us a legitimate warning not to judge improperly.
 - o Mt 7:1: "Judge not, that you be not judged."
 - There is a sense in which judging others is going to come back to you through other people in your life. No doubt.
 - Puritan commentator Matthew Henry points out: "if we presume to judge others, we may expect to be ourselves judged. He who usurps the bench, shall be called to the bar; he shall be judged of men; commonly none are more censured, than those who are most censorious; every one will have a stone to

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throw at them...and no mercy shall be shown to the reputation of those that show no mercy to the reputation of others.”

- But Jesus really has in view that the court of heaven will evaluate you and judge you back. Remember that the Greek of this text places an understanding of “that you be not judged” under the definition of “to engage in a judicial process, either of a human court or the divine court.”

- Rom 14:10 “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God”

- Matt 6:14-15 “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

- o We may get away with a certain measure of hypocrisy and even hypocritical judgements on earth, but our Father in Heaven sees all and will deal accordingly. This is the warning of Jesus in verse 1.

- ❖ Proposal 2: This warning is against being ignorant of our own position.

- o Matt 7:3 “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.”

- Note that again, Jesus does not say that we are unqualified to criticize or judge others because we ourselves have fallen into that position before. He says, if I may use the vernacular, “that we must check ourselves before we wreck ourselves.” ▪ This requires being honest with ourselves about our own position. I might go so far as to say, that seeing the moral failures of another may well be a God-given opportunity to awaken our own consciences about our own personal sin.

- Above all, we need to realize that there is no sin we are above.

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• 1 Cor 10:6 “Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.”

o English theologian John Owen “The seed of every sin is in every heart.”

• Gal 6:1 “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.” o Judging others puts on us a greater temptation to commit the very sin they would speak against. I have seen it too many times.

❖ Proposal 3: This warning is not against condemning or criticizing a person’s actions, belief, or even political position, but against dismissing them as a person.

o Remember BDAG’s definition and what Christ is ordering us against: do not “judge, pass judgment upon, express an opinion about” as opposed to the definitions that involve coming to a conclusion after a cognitive process or making judgement based on taking various factors into an account.

o This is why I believe “Judge not” means “don’t dismiss someone as a person” and render an opinion about someone with the strength of the judgement of heaven.

▪ Rom 14:1-4 “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment [note the parallelism] on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls...10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God”

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▪ I see here the kind of judgement that despises someone and wishes he could condemn them while holding the keys to death and hell, or at least, harm. We must never do that, because this is a kind of self-righteous hate, and the kind that Christ was rebuking the Pharisees over.

Baptist preacher J.D. Greer offers seven signs that you've fallen into the trap of wrongly judging others:

- ❖ You are more angry at someone else's sin than you are embarrassed by your own.
- ❖ You fail to forgive.
- ❖ You cut off those who disagree with you.
- ❖ You gossip
- ❖ You refuse to receive criticism
- ❖ You refuse to correct someone's position
- ❖ You write someone off as hopeless.

▪ Contrast these things with the Church father Chrysostom's admonishment to lovingly help a brother through kind and accurate judgement: "Correct him, but not as a foe, nor as an adversary exacting a penalty, but as a physician providing medicines"

The Bible is medicine for the sinner's soul, and when we are called to help administer it, we must do so in love, in patience, and with the correct dosage.

Conclusion:

American Evangelist Paul Washer is famous for saying, "People tell me 'Judge not lest ye be judged. I always tell them, 'Twist not the Scripture, lest ye be like Satan.'"

It is so in our sinful hearts to twist Scripture. You can take a verse, and a message like this, and run in to very different, very wrong directions – either to never judge, or to judge all the time and wrongly. It's so important to

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work to understand, work both in your mind and your actions, work to understand what God has chosen to communicate through the Bible.

There is so much more I can say about rightly judging, but the purpose of my series is mostly to awaken you to the importance of diving into your Bibles. Not just taking simple verses out of context and running down the field with them. Too often we score points for the other team.

This passage, like others, requires a whole-Bible knowledge to understand. Bible verses do not stand alone out of context – that is dangerous! Sometimes entire passages need to be placed in context of the book, of the time period, author, audience, ect.

- ❖ If you don't think you're knowledgeable to judge an issue, don't.
- ❖ But it may be a good opportunity to investigate what the Bible has to say – even together!
- ❖ Remember that we are in this, together.

Micah 6:8

*He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*