

What Does The Bible Mean by “Judge not”?



[Gordon Lewis of Denver Seminary on Radio Talk Show in Denver CO. “Are sincere Mormons, moonies, Scientologists, and Muslims all going to the same place?” NO. Lady, “You must not be a Christian b/c Jesus said not to judge others. // Pastor in Southern Cal heard an officer was in an adulterous relationship. “Yes, it’s true, and I have no intention of quitting . . . it’s been a positive experience for me... Well, it’s WRONG, you need to repent, or the church will have no choice but to excommunicate you.” “Bring it! You & the rest of the church have no right to judge me. After all, Jesus said ‘Judge not!’” Pastor has heard the same argument defending living together // same-sex marriages.

It is a phrase that comes from a verse that’s been used countless times during contentious conversations or in defensive moments *when someone is confronted about their behavior*. The Verse in Matthew 7:1, and it’s rendered as: **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged, “or “Judge not that ye be not judged,”** or just “Jesus said, ‘Judge not’.” It’s a discussion killer, a wrench thrown in the gears of any discussion of the morality of ANY behavior. And, it’s by far the most frequently misinterpreted, misunderstood, misapplied verse in the entire Bible, used and abused by both Christians and non-Christians alike. The way “Judge not” is used is, in the final analysis, a manipulative tool used by the one who quotes it. There’s **4 problems** with the way most people use this verse.

1. There’s a LANGUAGE problem with the misuse of this verse.

The problem has to do with the meaning of “judge”. **What does “judge” mean?** The word means “to APPRAISE, to EVALUATE, to DETERMINE,” w/regard to the VALUE, SAFETY, or MORALITY of any given object, person, or action. Given that meaning, **What does “judge” say about us?** We JUDGE all the time. We JUDGE if the traffic’s clear enough to cross the street. We JUDGE if the leftovers in the ‘fridge are fit to eat (and if we judge wrongly, we get really sick!). We go to a restaurant and we JUDGE if the temp and ambiance is comfortable, if the food is tasty or gross, and if the service is good or bad. We go to an auto mechanic, and we JUDGE if he did a good job fixing your car. We JUDGE if a product works as advertised. We JUDGE cake-baking contests, talent shows, and people who apply for a job.

So, what IS the problem? The LINGUISTIC problem is this: The word “judge” by itself is just something people DO in any # of contexts. [In fact, if you don’t appraise / evaluate the labels in your medicine cabinet, you’re in trouble! **So, there’s nothing wrong with the word itself, as

long as we are not manipulating the meaning of the word and using it as a “shield” for doing something wrong.**

2. There’s a **LOGICAL** problem with the misuse of this verse.

The LOGICAL problem is this. ***The term “judge not” is self-refuting!*** There’s no way NOT to judge! When you confront the behavior of someone and they say, “Don’t JUDGE me!” ***Here’s some suggestions. 1st, you need to ask, “Why should I NOT judge you? Are you saying it’s WRONG for me to judge you; b/c if you ARE, that certainly SOUNDS like you are JUDGING me! But YOU say it’s WRONG to judge others! So what’s up with THAT???”***

Another suggestion: 2nd, When people accuse you of being judgmental, ask, “Why are you JUDGING me for JUDGING you?” Or you could look at it this way. If this verse stands by itself, apart from the context of the whole Bible, the verse CONTRADICTS itself. To command someone to “Judge Not” is to say that judging is WRONG. But to say judging is wrong would be a judgment itself. So, logically, when the verse is taken out of context, it contradicts itself and is illogical.

3. There’s a **THEOLOGICAL** problem with the misuse of this verse.

How SERIOUS is this problem? It’s a very SERIOUS theological/moral problem! Consider **6:2, 15; 7:6; 15:7; 23:27**. If Jesus is saying we should never evaluate people’s behavior, then Jesus is breaking His own Commandment. And IF Jesus breaks ANY commandment, then Jesus would NOT be our sinless Savior whose life of 100% perfect righteousness *must* be credited to our account IF we are to be accepted by God into Heaven. Plus, God is called the JUDGE of all the earth. God CAN and DOES judge, but IF JUDGING is sin, then what does that say about God? When we misapply “Judge not,” theologically, we are skating on razor-thin ice! ***We are saying that GOD and JESUS engage in WRONG behavior!***

4. There’s a **BIBLICAL** problem with the misuse of this verse.

Remember: A Text with a context is a proof Text and a pretext! (Isolating verses to prove your point and/or something given to conceal it’s real purpose, which is in this case for one to either give approval or not give disapproval for any action) Consider the **“Inverted Pyramid”**. = **Verse / paragraph of thought / chapter / book / Bible as a whole** We must understand this verse in the larger context of what Jesus is talking about. What Jesus is addressing here in this section of Scripture is the issue of the HYPOCRISY of the PHARISEES who were QUICK to see the sins of OTHERS but were unwilling to HOLD THEMSELVES to the SAME STANDARD they were imposing on others!

Reading the verses that follow and it becomes clear that the Pharisees were NOT applying the standard of judgment to themselves that they were using on those they were judging. In other words, Jesus is saying that the measuring stick the Pharisees were using to measure the lives of

others will be the SAME MEASURING STICK held up against their lives by God Himself. **ONE GUIDELINE: **Do NOT use a DOUBLE standard when you judge!****

It's NOT moral accountability and moral judgments Jesus is against. It's condemning others when you are committing the very same sin they are, or when your sin is even greater than theirs (log vs speck). [eg1 cursing in church, Vs sharing juicy gossip. Both are sins of the tongue. In fact, gossip and slander is character ASSINATION! Why tell someone to correct and restrain their tongue when you do NOT? Eg2 A Father who addresses his daughter's sense of propriety in how she dresses and relates to the opposite sex. He has a right to be concerned and draw moral boundaries. But then when no one's @ the house or when he's at work, we watches porn on his PC, reveling in immodesty & sexual fantasy.] Do NOT judge and condemn by a standard you yourself are not keeping! Deal with your own sin 1st! Be grieved about it! Remove the speck! Wage war against it! Evaluate your own commitment to keeping God's commands and forsaking sin in your own lives.

ANOTHER GUIDELINE: **Also, Jesus says NOT to judge by externals only. Cf *John 7:24; Acts 17:11*. . . hair, dress, car, house, vocation, family name, tattoos . . . "I just don't like the way they look / talk / their manner . . ." [eg crowded subway in NYC , Covey p. 73 . . . everybody has a story, and you need to know the story before you jump to conclusions about that person.]**

ONE OTHER GUIDELINE: **Remember that the popular use of "judge not" is that it provides a window into a fallen people's desire to avoid accountability and responsibility for their actions!** The broader teaching of the Bible is that we are all created in God's image and we are morally responsible to God and to other image-bearers to live according to the morals God has established, not to some so-called moral mantra of "don't judge me!". So, to use "Do not judge" as a means of dismissing oneself from moral responsibility would be to pit one verse of scripture against the rest of the Bible. Do NOT let someone else make YOU morally accountable when they themselves are *avoiding* moral accountability!

In our culture, the trend is to justify one's behavior and/or accuse one of judging you when a moral evaluation is passed regarding your behavior. We need to be COUNTER-cultural when it comes to this issues of judging! As Christians, to quote the philosopher-theologian Barney Fife, when it comes to the careless misuse of "Don't judge me," we need to " . . . nip it in the bud ... "!!!!