

OpenTheo

Judge Not

September 9, 2022



Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

The injunction not to judge is a necessary warning for us all, not least the religious person who can easily be tempted to look down on those who seem less religious.

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Kevin reads from the article he wrote for Tabletalk magazine about how Matthew 7:1 is one of the most needed and most abused statements in the Bible.

Transcript

[Music] Welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. I want to read this short devotional piece I wrote for Ligonier. There's a timber issue of Table Talk.

If you are not signed up to get Table Talk, it is one of the great resources out there. I've gone it for years from Ligonier. It's beautifully designed.

There are daily devotions and then little articles throughout this monthly journal. Do check out and grateful to Ligonier for giving the opportunity to put this article on the podcast. It's entitled Judge Not.

Matthew 7-1 is one of the most needed and one of the most abused statements in the Bible. It is not uncommon to meet people who seem to know only three verses from the Bible. Judge Not, Matthew 7-1, God is loved, 1 John 4-16, and let him who is without sin be the first to throw a stone, John 8-7, even though scholars debate whether that John 8 story is actually in the best manuscripts.

These people, professing Christians or not, are not really interested in understanding the Bible on its own terms often. They are happy to sloganize the scriptures if it suits their purposes. It's just because people can misuse a verse does not give us a reason to throw out that verse.

The fact is that Matthew 7-1 is a necessary corrective that many Christians need to hear. If we can first clear away the false claims, we will be in a position to let Matthew 7-1

shape us as Jesus intended. So what does this verse not mean? First, Judge Not does not mean that we suspend the rule of law.

God has ordained officers in the state, Romans 13, and in the church, Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, to exercise judgment when the members of each institution fail to do what is right. We do not judge in the sense of exercising individual vigilante justice because we trust that God will exercise His justice through the proper authorities. Second, Judge Not does not mean that we turn off our brains.

Elsewhere in Scripture we are warned not to believe every spirit 1 John 4-1. We must be discerning people judging with right judgment, John 7-24. There is simply no way that we can read the Bible.

It concludes that godliness entails accepting everything all the time and affirming everyone no matter what. The same Jesus who preached about not judging also rebuked the church at Thyatira for tolerating false teachers and sexual immorality. Third, Judge Not does not mean that we suspend all moral distinctions.

The sermon on the Mount does not forbid theological and ethical evaluation. Jesus does not prohibit harsh criticism when necessary. Think about it.

The sermon on the Mount is full of moral judgment. Jesus calls people hypocrites. He tells the people to be aware of false prophets just a few sentences after the command to Judge Not.

Jesus expects us to understand and discern that some people are dogs and pigs. Verse 6 in Matthew 7. It's as if Jesus is saying, "I don't want you to be censorious, but neither do I want you to be simple tins." While it is important not to misappropriate Matthew 7.1, we must be careful that our safeguards don't make Jesus command too safe. The injunction not to Judge is a necessary warning for us all, not least the religious person who can easily be tempted to look down on those who seem less religious.

So, having seen what it does not mean, what does the verse mean? First, Judge Not means that we should measure others the way that we would want to be measured. No one wants weighted scales to be used against them or an unfair measuring stick that is too short or too long. We all want to be evaluated fairly and consistently, this is the point Jesus makes in verse 2. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

Don't assume the worst about people because of their skin color, how they dress, where they live, or who their parents were don't rush to judgment before hearing from all sides. In an age of tribalization and trial by internet, one of the most powerful things we can do as Christians is to think about the measure we want for us and then use that measure for others. How do I want people to judge me? I want people to look at every angle and not

be quick to believe the worst about me.

I want people to deal with facts, not gossip or speculation. I want people to give me a fair hearing and be open to changing their minds. I want people to speak respectfully to me and of me.

Isn't that how you want people to measure you? Is that the measure that you and I are using for others? Second, Judge Not means that we should examine ourselves first. Jesus isn't forbidding us from correcting or speaking the truth, but he wants us first to correct our own hearts and speak the truth to ourselves, verses 3 through 5. Moral and theological criticism can be warranted so long as it is accompanied by a serious self-criticism. We tend to exaggerate the faults of others and minimize our own.

As John Calvin put it, "There is hardly any person who is not tickled with the desire of inquiring into other people's faults." Disparaging others is a cheap way of attaining moral superiority. We may see truth clearly, but what good is that insight into others if we don't first apply it to our own lives? Third, Judge Not means that we must remember who we are. Jesus would have us recall that he is the judge and we are the judged.

More than that, when it comes to Christians in the church, we are family. Notice the explicit language of "brother" in Matthew 7, verse 3. Jesus is realistic about God's family. There will be conflict, there will be specs to remove and logs too.

Jesus has an effect. You will be tempted to get snippy with each other, but let me show you a better way. Can you love as I have loved? Judge, according to the word of God, yes, but never indulge in self-righteous, hypocritical, hypercritical, prejudiced, merciless judgmentalism.

That is never the way of Christ, and it should not be the way of Christians either.

[music]

(dramatic music)