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Matthew 7:1 - 7:5



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg sheds light on the misconstrued scripture verse Matthew 7:1-5. He clarifies that the verse encourages us not to judge others based on their appearance, but rather to hold ourselves to the same standard. He highlights the importance of making moral calls without being hypocritical, and emphasizes the need to judge righteously and with charity. Ultimately, he concludes that while God is the only one who truly knows right from wrong, as moral beings, humans have the ability to discern and make righteous judgments.

Transcript

Today we will be looking at one of the most misunderstood verses in scripture, and, I dare say, the non-Christian's favorite Bible verse. Can you guess what the non-Christian's favorite Bible verse is? I've never really been a non-Christian. I've been a Christian since my childhood, so I have to guess at what the non-Christian's favorite Bible verse is based on the number of times that they quote it.

Can you think of one verse more than any in the whole Bible that is most often quoted by unbelievers? Well, I'll give you a little hint. It's in Matthew 7, verse 1. Jesus said, Judge not that you be not judged. Now, unbelievers quote this all the time, usually to Christians, because Christians often have very critical things to say about many of the things in the lives of the unbelievers.

Because unbelievers actually do things that the Bible forbids a great deal. Actually, unfortunately, so do some Christians. Not supposed to.

But the point is that unbelievers, whenever they are faced with a criticism from Christians, would like, usually, to quote this verse, Judge not that you be not judged. And they think that by doing so, they are correcting the Christian, and they are pointing out that the Christian is neglecting one of the principal teachings of their own Lord, Jesus Christ, who taught this verse. However, as I said, this is one of the most misunderstood verses, I think, in the Scriptures.

Even Christians seem to not understand it very well. So let's look at it in context here.

It's in Matthew 7, verse 1, and we need to understand the verse in light of what goes after it.

I'd like to read six verses at the beginning of Matthew 7. Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged. And with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me remove the speck out of your eye, and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn on you, and tear you in pieces. Now it's interesting that some assume that when Jesus said, judge not that you be not judged, that he must have felt that all judging of behavior of other people is not okay.

However, isn't it interesting that within a few verses of that, he says, do not give what is holy to dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine. Now he's not talking about literal dogs or literal pigs here, he's talking about a certain class of persons. He's using a figure of speech here.

Now if Jesus wants us not to cast our pearls before swine, then how are we going to know when we're doing that and when we're not, unless we judge some people to be swine, and others not to be. I mean, let's just be realistic here. Jesus wants us to respond to this verse in some way.

If I'm not supposed to cast my pearls before swine, how can I obey this unless I have judged that someone is a swine and somebody is not. Now, of course, that's not a very charitable thing to think about a person, that they are swine, but obviously Jesus indicated that some kinds of people really are best referred to by that epithet. And it's important for us to know which people he has in mind, and that requires making some judgments, does it not? As a matter of fact, judging is a principal activity of moral beings, and must be done unless we're going to live in an amoral world.

Because judging simply means that you make a call, a moral call. Is this action morally right, or is it morally wrong? That's the kind of judgments we have to make all the time. If you're being tempted to have an adulterous affair, the only way that you'll avoid that temptation is if you judge that that kind of activity is wrong.

If you do not make that judgment, then there will be nothing to keep you from doing it. If you are tempted to steal from your employer, if you're tempted to lie to your friends or to the government, if you're tempted to do any wrong thing, you cannot resist it unless you make a decision that that behavior is not acceptable, that behavior is wrong, and to make that decision is to make a judgment. That's what it is.

It's a moral judgment. Now, did Jesus teach us that we should not make moral judgments? Of course not. Jesus made moral judgments all the time.

He said if you look at a woman to lust after her, you're committing adultery in your heart. That's a moral judgment. Jesus said if you're angry at your brother without a cause, you'll be in danger of the judgment.

That's a moral call. In fact, all the time in Jesus' ministry, He's making moral judgments. In fact, He said some very harsh things to the scribes and Pharisees and judged them for their hypocrisy.

Now, that's a judgment that is made. Jesus could never have taught people to make no judgments of any kind. As a matter of fact, He commands His disciples to make judgments on certain occasions.

For example, in John 7 and verse 24, this verse begins with the same words as the verse we read in Matthew 7.1, judge not. In John 7.24, it also begins with words, judge not, Jesus said. However, it continues and clarifies.

It says, judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment. Now, that's two separate commands of Christ. One is don't judge, and the other is judge.

He says, do not judge according to appearance, but do judge righteous judgment. What's He mean? Don't take a shallow approach to things. Don't make a call about something before you've really heard it out.

You know, in the Proverbs, it says, He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is a shame and a folly to him. And many times, we do make snap judgments about things, and we have not really heard them out. We just see, you know, it appears a certain way to us, and on the surface, we go by that appearance, and we make a judgment call.

That's much too premature. The Bible says also in Proverbs, that he that is first in his own cause seems right until his neighbor comes and examines him. And sometimes we'll make a judgment about a thing when we've only heard one side of the issue, and we haven't heard the other side.

This is wrong. This is judging according to appearances. It's making a shallow, superficial kind of a judgment.

And Jesus said, no, don't do that. You need to judge a righteous judgment. Now, that is a command of Christ, just like the command not to judge is a command of Christ.

Clearly, the Bible exhorts us to, and Jesus exhorts us to judge in a certain way, and not to judge in another way. So one way that we're not supposed to judge, according to John, chapter 7 and verse 24, is we're not supposed to judge according to appearance. Is that

what Jesus is talking about here in Matthew? No, it is not.

He's got another kind of judging he's talking about, and it's very clear what it is. He talks about, if you judge others, you will be judged with the same measure that you use to judge them. You use a yardstick to measure somebody.

That yardstick will be used to measure your moral life. And so you had better be prepared for that. He likens it to a person who has a beam in his eye.

And obviously, his vision would be greatly impaired if that were possible, to have a beam in your eye. And yet he thinks he sees a speck in another person's eye and offers to remove it. Now, the offer to remove a speck from your neighbor's eye is Jesus' way of metaphorically saying, you're judging someone and criticizing them.

You're trying to tell them how they can improve, what's wrong with them. Let me get this speck out of your eye. Let me critique you.

Let me help you to see your errors. That's what he's referring to when he talks about someone getting a speck out of their neighbor's eye. That is a parallel to judging them in the way that he's saying we should not do.

However, he says, you can't say to your neighbor, let me get that speck out of your eye, if you have a beam in your own eye. But he does say in verse 5, hypocrite, first remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. Now, if removing the speck out of your brother's eye means you are critiquing him, you're helping him to see his faults, well, then you can do that once the beam is no longer in your own eyes.

You said, get that plank out of your eye, and then you will be able to see clearly, and you can judge others. Now, what is this beam in the eye business? What is he talking about here? What's quite clear, if you look carefully at what he said, he said hypocrite. Verse 5, first remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.

The person who claims to be able to see well enough to critique another person, but has the same problem in his own life, even greater than the person he critiques, that person is a hypocrite. Therefore, what Jesus is telling the disciples not to do, is to not do hypocritical judgment. Not to judge by a double standard, that's what it really amounts to.

Not to judge others by a standard different than you judge yourself by. That's why he said the standard you use, the judgment you judge, you'll be judged by it. And with the same measure you use, we could say the same standard that you use, it will be used back to measure you.

So the idea here is, Jesus is forbidding hypocritical judgment. He speaks to the person that he says stop judging to, and he calls them a hypocrite, and says they need to get this beam out of their own eye. However, he does consider that it is possible to get the beam out of the eye, and to see clearly enough to remove the speck from the brother's eye.

He says that very plainly in verse 5. So the question then is, who is Jesus speaking to when he tells them not to judge? He is speaking to the hypocrite who has greater problems in his own life than those in the life of the person he's criticizing and judging. And if the same standard that he's using to criticize the other person were applied to his life, he would be greatly condemned by it. That's what Jesus is saying.

And therefore, those who cannot stand under the judgment of a certain standard should not harshly judge others by the use of that standard. Now, if I went up to a person who was living in a homosexual lifestyle, which I believe to be against scripture and therefore wrong, if I was telling them, you know, you're living in a way that's displeasing to God, but if I, for example, was struggling myself with some comparable sin, let us say pornography, or maybe having an affair against my wife, or something like that, I mean, God forbid, but the thing is, if I was criticizing one person for his moral life, and I had a, you know, if you took the same standard of moral purity that I was holding that man to, and you applied it to me, and it wouldn't apply to me well, and I'd be condemned by it, then I am the hypocrite that he's saying. I cannot, if I am not obeying God, be the judge of others who are not obeying God.

Now, if I get the plank out of my own eye, if I am in fact obeying God, if my life is in obedience to Him, then I am in a position to help others who are in disobedience to see their error. That is what Jesus is saying. Certainly, Jesus does not forbid all judging.

As a matter of fact, like I said, He commands us to judge righteous judgment, and if you would look at Paul in 1 Corinthians, you'll find that all the way through the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul is advocating that Christians be discretionary, that they judge things. Judgment just means to be discreet, to make judgment calls, to have discretion. In 1 Corinthians 2.15, for example, Paul says that he who is spiritual judges all things.

A spiritual man, that's the man who does not have a plank in his eye, is in the position to judge everything righteously and to see clearly in his doing so. So, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2.15, the spiritual man actually judges all things. In chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians, in verse 3, he says about a man who is living in an incestuous relationship and was in the church, Paul says in verse 3, For I indeed, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present concerning him who has done this deed.

Paul says, I have judged him. And later in the same chapter, in verses 12 and 13, he says, For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside the church? But do

you not judge those who are inside, but those who are outside God judges? Now, Paul is saying the Christian should judge the moral behavior of those inside the church. Those who are outside the church are out of our domain.

That's God's business to judge them. In 1 Corinthians 6, verses 2 through 5, Paul says, Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more the things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you, not even one who will be able to judge between his brethren? Now, do you see this? Paul is saying that the church is a deprived church if there's no one in it wise enough to judge matters for them.

A spiritual man judges all things, and it's necessary for Christians to make judgments all the time. By the way, non-Christians do it all the time. They judge things all the time, too.

They judge whether someone is treating them rightly or not all the time. There is no such thing as a non-judgmental person because to be entirely non-judgmental, you'd have to be amoral. You'd have to be a person who has no opinion about what's right and wrong in any situation.

There is no one walking the planet like that. There may be people who claim to be that way. There are people who say there's no God, and therefore there's no absolutes, and therefore there's no right and there's no wrong.

They may say that, but just walk up and steal their wallet at gunpoint and see if they believe that was wrong or not. They do believe there's right and wrong. There are people who it's fashionable, philosophically, to say they don't believe in moral absolutes.

They don't believe in right and wrong. But no one ever lives their life that way because we live in a world where a person would have to be dead to not recognize that some things are wrong. And if a person says he doesn't believe anything is wrong, just, you know, you go steal his stereo from his house, or you borrow his car and wreck it and leave it at the side of the road and you see if he thinks that was right or wrong, I guarantee you he'll have an opinion about it.

In 1 Corinthians 7, verse 25, Paul is exhorting the Christians to make judgments on some matters. He says, Now concerning virgins, I have yet no commandment from the Lord, yet I give my judgment as one whom the Lord has mercy on to make trustworthy. And in verse 40 of 1 Corinthians 7, he says also, But she is happier if she remains as she is, meaning the widow is happier to stay single, according to my judgment, he says.

Now Paul is making judgments and he's exhorting the Christians to make judgments as well. In 1 Corinthians 11, 13, Paul said, Judge in yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Now he says they should judge this matter for themselves.

It's important to be able to make judgments. In chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, and verse 24, Paul said, But if all prophets sigh, and unbelieve... Well, I mean, no, no, no, that does speak of it. Let me give you a different verse.

Verse 29. He says, Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. That is, let the others in the church judge the prophecy.

Judge what about it? Well, judge whether it's right or wrong or not, whether it's true or false, whether it's a genuine prophecy or false prophecy. Now, do you see how often the Bible tells us we need to make judgments about things? If we don't make judgments about things, we actually refuse to function in that distinctive capacity that human beings can function and animals cannot. Animals do not have the capacity to make moral judgments.

Animals act upon instinct only. But human beings have a capacity that animals do not. This is part of the image of God in us, and that is that we know there are some things right and some things wrong.

This is a human trait. It is a God-like trait. God was the first person to know that some things were right and wrong.

And, of course, Adam and Eve were first tempted by the serpent who said, If you eat this fruit, you will have the knowledge of good and evil. That knowledge of good and evil is simply the ability to make moral judgments. Now, of course, this ability is God-like.

Satan said, You will be like God, knowing good and evil. And he was right on that one point. They were less like God in some ways after they ate the fruit.

They were less holy and less pure and less innocent than he. But God himself acknowledged by the end of Genesis 3 that they had become more like God in the sense of knowing good and evil, which was not necessarily something he wanted them to become more sophisticated about. And it was a wrong direction for them to go.

But the point is that God is one who knows right and wrong. He's the one who is the ultimate judge of all things. And the only way we can live in harmony with him is to agree with his judgments.

When he judges a thing to be right, if we don't judge it to be right, then we're out of touch with reality. If God says something is wrong and we don't recognize that it's wrong, then we're out of touch with the reality. Moral reality is just as real as physical

reality is.

Just as truly as there is a planet Earth and there is a sun and a moon, these are part of physical reality, so as really murder and adultery and theft are morally wrong. It is a different kind of reality, but it is reality nonetheless. And judgment is simply our way of acknowledging that reality.

Just as a man who has vision can discern between different colors and between light and darkness, so a person who can judge righteous judgment can discern between what is morally right and what's morally wrong. The inability to do so means that one's perception has been warped. The refusal to do so means that one is refusing to be really fully human, because it is the human species alone that has been given by God the ability to know that there is moral right and wrong and to be able to recognize it.

And the scriptures are there to give us the awareness of those things. Now, the teaching of Jesus, of course, in this particular passage in Matthew 7, is not about making right judgments, and that's what I've been talking about a great deal here. It's about not making wrong judgments.

It's about not judging people using a standard that you would be condemned by if they took that same standard and held it up to you. The measure you use, it will be measured back to you, Jesus said. And he likened it to you have a beam in your eye, a plank in your eye, and the person you're judging may only have a speck.

But he did say that it is possible and necessary, if you are such a person, such a hypocrite, that you stop being a hypocrite, that you get that plank out of your eye. That is, the defect in your own life that is represented by that plank, you need to repent of it. You need to get rid of it.

You need to become a person who is able to be of use to other people in taking specks out of their eyes. And notice how Jesus perceives it. Judging someone righteously is doing them a favor, like getting a speck out of their eye.

If you had something in your eye, you'd certainly benefit from somebody helping you to get that speck out of your eye, and you'd appreciate it. Why is it that people don't appreciate being judged? Well, some do more than others. But most people don't appreciate being judged by somebody who they see as a hypocrite.

Somebody that they say, hey, this person isn't any better than I am, and he's criticizing me. And Jesus indicates that that aversion is just as reasonable as if a person had a speck in his eye, and he didn't want to have the help of somebody who has a plank in his. But if the Christians were walking around with fewer planks in their eyes, if Christians were living more like Christ, then their suggestions, their criticisms, their constructive comments, their judgments, in other words, might be better received by

those who could benefit from them.

Remember, being judged charitably, being judged righteously, is not a disadvantage. If I'm doing something wrong, the person who tells me so is doing me a great favor. But it's much harder for me to receive it from that person if that person has glaring deficiencies in their own Christian walk.

Now, as a Christian, I should be humble enough to receive such criticism, even if it comes from a very unworthy donor. The person who criticizes me may have obvious flaws, but I should still be willing to consider the legitimacy of his criticism because I can benefit from that, even if he is not benefiting from it. However, as a Christian, I need to humbly receive criticism, even from unworthy donors, but I cannot expect others to accept my criticism and my judgment of them if my own life is not consistent with the standard that I am implying when I apply it to them and when I make my criticism of them.

That is what Jesus is teaching here. We'll come back to the Sermon on the Mount next time. Of course, once again, we've run out of time, and we're taking a good long time going through the Sermon on the Mount.

We'll continue more next time.