

Judge Not

Of all the things Jesus revealed or demanded of His disciples, this one is one of the most startling and difficult. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has already demanded that we judge our attitudes (Mt 5:1-12), our salt and light (5:13-14), what we have heard compared to what Jesus has said (Mt 5:21-48), how we give alms, pray, and fast (Mt 6:1-18) and whether attitudes and priorities toward this world and the next are properly allocated (6:19-34). Now, He told us not to judge.

Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. Mt. 7:1-2

Clearly Jesus worded this command in this manner for an important reason and each of us must struggle to find the solution. Although it sounds like it, and many have wrested it in this direction, Jesus was contradicting neither Himself nor other Scriptures. When a brother quotes this passage in the midst of church discipline (Mt 18:15-18) he is wresting this scripture. When we are preaching to the lost and are told “*judge not*” they are wresting this Scripture. Every command of God requires some type of judgment. We must sift, assess and judge everything pertaining to that realm. Hence, if we carry this command so far it runs aground against other commands we have gone too far. But if we ignore it completely we have gone too far in the other direction.

There have been many creative ways sought to explain these words. Unfortunately any explanation or cliché that lessens the impact of the command could lead us to violate it. To build on the rock we must hear what Jesus said and do it. Since this is a very common and general word for judging, the word itself does not help us with this dilemma.

“krino... 1. to separate, put asunder; to pick out, select, choose... 2. to approve, esteem... 3. to be of opinion, deem, think... 4. to determine, resolve, decree... 5. to judge; a. to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong... Pass. to be judged, i.e. summoned to trial that one’s case may be examined and judgement passed upon it,... b. to pronounce judgment; to subject to censure; of those who act the part of judges or arbiters in the matters of common life, or pass judgment on the deeds and words of others...” (Thayer, p. 361-362; 2919)

Taken literally, Jesus forbid us to “*separate, select, or choose,*” we must not “*approve*” or “*esteem.*” He also commanded us not “*to judge*” or “*pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong.*” Again, considering the rest of this sermon and all other Scripture, this is an amazing prohibition! The entire sermon and all the Bible require what Jesus here forbids. If we don’t make judgments He has already required us to make we are in rebellion, yet He now says we are in rebellion if we do make certain judgments. So how do we find our way through this strait and narrow way?

A Similar Difficulty

In our age of lawsuits and close scrutiny over difficult life altering decisions in court, Jesus’ words take on a special significance that will help us better understand what He warned against. Doctors treating patients with life and death consequences must follow Jesus words or face a lawsuit. Engineers and architects who build bridges or tall buildings costing billions of dollars must also give careful thought to Jesus’ words to protect themselves from the grave consequences that arise from making a mistake.

Often today, it is simply not safe to have an undocumented opinion. Huge damages can be assessed against those who make a mistake. Those relying solely upon human opinion and judgment, will find it impossible to justify in court. Most professional people recognize the danger they will face trying to justify a decision that was wrong. So they rely on instruments, computers, and specified tests to draw these conclusions. By simply passing on what the accurate instruments revealed, they avoid these risks. Basing a diagnosis on X-ray; MRI; CT; and Labs is much more accurate than basing a judgment on symptoms alone. Such steps protect against the risk of mistakes based human error. Just as these professionals carefully consider how all their judgments could be perceived in court if they have to testify about how they drew a conclusion, so also must the devout Christian. All human judgment is forbidden.

The Folly of Human Judgment

Man’s judgments are often flawed or even outright wrong. No matter how convinced we might be regarding an opinion or assessment we have made, we can find out later we were dead wrong.

There is a way which seems right unto a man; But the end thereof are the ways of death. Pr. 14:12

The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him. Pr. 18:17

O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps. Jer. 10:23

No one is exempt from “human error.” Even the most careful among us, who always “*measure*

twice and cut once” still find occasionally that it seemed right, but moments or even years later found it was wrong. Such experiences lead to humility, caution, and prayers for wisdom. Even Paul for a time *“thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus”* (Acts 20:28; 26:9) and sought to influence others to his way of thinking. Think of the young prophet who was killed for believing the lies of the older prophet. Remember the Jews who rejected God’s prophets and the most amazing of all, those who rejected the words of Jesus because of their own faulty judgment.

The parallel between the doctor above and a devout disciple is very important. Doctors carefully document assessments based on sound evidence and instruments to prove their conclusions are sound. Jesus demanded exactly the same thing from His disciples. We should not be comfortable passing either judgments or assessments unless Scripture is doing the judging for us. We do not judge, we allow Scripture to judge and if there is no Scripture then it is not even right for us to have an opinion for *“the secret things belong to God”* (Deut 29:29). How else could we all fulfill Paul’s command to the Corinthians?

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 1Cor. 1:10

We can’t be joined together in the same mind and judgement unless we perfectly follow the words of Jesus here. When we all have the same facts (Scripture) and the same opinions (judgments) there will be no divisions among us. But when we start forming judgments beyond what is written, it becomes impossible to be perfectly joined together. With this in mind, the solution to the dilemma is clearer. Just as a doctor who simply applies the results and follows those results is not guilty of judging, so also the Christian who takes the judgments of the Lord and applies them is not judging. We have to be certain we are not interjecting our own judgment or opinion, only acting on what God said. Jesus said that even He did this!

Jesus did not Judge

And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. 49 For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. Jn. 12:47-49

If we follow Jesus’ example, we will never violate His command. Jesus never judged! He did not come to judge! He came to save! In all His preaching and teaching in the gospels, He never violated the command He gave. What Jesus did on earth is what He now commands us to do. He worked the same way doctors do. He did not judge alone. He used the Father as His absolute standard of judgment.

Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. 16 Yea and if I judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. John 8:15-16

I can of myself do nothing; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. John 5:30

This is exactly what Jesus wanted us to do with His words (**Jn 12:48**). We never have to judge just as He never did! All we have to do is apply His words to the lives of others. If we do this without adding our own opinions or emotions to it, then we have fulfilled His command not to judge. If we go beyond this then we become something we do not ever want to be:

Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law: but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12 One only is lawgiver and judge, even he who is able to save and to destroy: but who art thou that judges thy neighbor? Jas 4:11-12

When God’s people start forming opinions based on their own assessment and judgments, they are actually placing themselves above the law. They have stopped being like the Lord and begun violating the command not to judge. Since there is only one lawgiver and judge, every time we judge another we set ourselves over Him! God only wants us applying the words of Jesus Christ to the doctrinal beliefs and moral standards of others. He does not want us passing our own conclusions. We simply are incapable of doing it.

Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God. 1Cor. 4:2-5

Paul told the Corinthians that he had no concern for their judgments over him, nor did he have

much concern for his own judgment of Himself. I suspect Paul had learned a valuable lesson before his conversion. He had been so sure of himself and had passed terrible judgements on others. Now he was humble. He wasn't going to be the standard any longer! No one can be! No one is to judge anything before the time! We do not have the measuring instruments necessary to do it! Only God can see into the hearts where the secret things that tell all dwell. The Word of God can do this for our own hearts but that is all:

For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Heb 4:12-13

It is beyond man's ability to do this, so Jesus forbid it.

Don't Judge according to Appearance

Another passage that is very helpful for us to see exactly how we are to judge and what is forbidden in judgment is set forth in Jesus' warning to those who were guilty of falsely judging.

Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment Jn 7:24

By definition, "appearance" judgment is judging with our own eyes instead of by what God said.

opsis, from ops, "the eye," connected with horao, "to see" (cf. No. 2), primarily denotes "seeing, sight"; hence, "the face, the countenance," Jn 11:44 ("face"); Rev. 1:16 ("countenance"); the outward "appearance," the look, Jn. 7:24, only here, of the outward aspect of a person. (Vine's NT:3799)

Judging according to appearance is based on our own perceptions and incomplete knowledge and is therefore going to be superficial. All judges know that when you can only get one side the picture will be incomplete.

*The first one to plead his cause **seems right**, until his neighbor comes and examines him. Pr 18:17*

*There is a way which **seems right** unto a man; But the end thereof are the ways of death. Pr. 14:12*

Man can never really see all sides. There are always things that are not evident that would change our assessment. We can't see enough to be judges. Remember Samuel's mistake when choosing Saul's replacement.

So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him!" 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1Sam. 16:6-7

This is what prompted Paul's warning against judging before we have all the facts.

Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts 1Cor 4:5

The most dangerous element of all "appearance judgment" is how logical it seems at the time we make a judgement. It "**seems right**" but later when we have all the facts, it appears foolish.

Judge Righteous Judgment

That's why Jesus placed "righteous judgment" as the opposite of appearance judgment. Righteous judgment can only be accomplished when we limit ourselves to God's Word and Law and refuse to add to or take from.

"Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. 17 You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.' 18 And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do. Deut 1:16-18

You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. 2 You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. 3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute. Ex 23:1-3

When God's word judges it is righteous judgement, when we add to or take from, it becomes appearance judgment.

After God opened the ground to swallow Korah alive, Israel told Moses and Aaron "You have killed the people of Jehovah." Num 16:41

When Job's three friends heard of his terrible tragedy they judged him to be a sinner. Yet God had revealed otherwise (no man like him in all the earth) but in their judgment: "God exacts

from you less than your iniquity deserves” Job 11:6

Will you speak wickedly for God, And talk deceitfully for Him? 8 Will you show partiality for Him? Will you contend for God? 9 Will it be well when He searches you out? Or can you mock Him as one mocks a man? 10 He will surely rebuke you If you secretly show partiality. 11 Will not His excellence make you afraid, And the dread of Him fall upon you? 12 Your platitudes are proverbs of ashes, Your defenses are defenses of clay. Job 13:7-12

When Naaman was told to dip in the Jordan he went away in wrath. His servants warned him his rash judgment and pleaded that he trust God’s judgment. He repented and was cleansed

Solomon judged in harmony with all of God’s commands save one. He judged he was wise and strong enough to overlook the law about foreign women. 1 Kings 11:1-11

When Paul returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, the brethren were afraid of him. Their judgment was based on appearance. Only Barnabas gave righteous judgment.

For with what Judgment you Judge

Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. Mt. 7:1-3

The command not to judge is absolute and stands alone. All judging must proceed and be directed by God with no addition or removal. All that God said must be followed with nothing added.

‘You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. Lev. 19:15-16

You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.’ Deut. 1:17-18

If it is too hard for us, we will simply have to leave it to the Lord. We cannot add our own thoughts to any judgment without being guilty of judging. Jesus now adds a very important reason in addition to the prohibition. Not only is it wrong to judge, but it affects our own judgment. The way we judge will become the basis of the way God will judge us. The more we think about this the more amazing, wonderful and frightening it becomes. Since Jesus gave each disciple some control over the way our own judgment will proceed and be conducted it is very important that we carefully consider this from every angle. Since “*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*(Heb. 9:27-28),” and “*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body*(2Cor.. 5:10),” anything we can do to make that time easier and more lenient should be carefully considered and acted upon.

This is not the first time in this sermon Jesus has hinted at these things. “*Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy*(Mt. 5:7)” and “*forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors*(Mt. 6:12)

both reveal that we will be judged as we judge. Jesus also warned that “*if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*(Mt. 6:14-15).” So when we judge with mercy we will obtain mercy (and if we are not merciful we will not receive mercy). If we are forgiving toward others than God will be forgiving toward us. If we are not forgiving in our judgments of others after they repent and seek our forgiveness then God will not be forgiving toward us.

Jesus forewarned that since the way we judge others will become the basis of our own judgment before God, our first and foremost duty is ***not to judge at all!*** Only when God already passed a judgment and we are only passing on that judgment have we properly discharged this responsibility.

The conjunction “*for*” connects these two

With what Judgment You Judge



You will be Judged

statements together:

“gar... conjunction ... properly of affirmation and conclusion, ... the reason and cause of a foregoing statement... It serves to explain, make clear, illustrate, a preceding thought...” (Thayer, p. 109; 1063)

Hence **“the reason and cause”** for Jesus’ command **“Judge not lest you be judged”** is: The manner in which we judge will forge the manner in which we will be judged. Thus the truth that God will judge us in exactly the same manner we judge others **“serves to explain, make clear and illustrate”** why we are commanded **“judge not.”**

Thus this command is revealed in all its glory! Jesus has given us a way to influence the manner God will judge us. When we all *“appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body(2Cor. 5:10),”* the way we have judged others will affect the way God will judge us.

Judgment is Without Mercy to the One who has Shown no Mercy

How far should we take this? At the least we know that mercy and forgiveness will directly be given or withheld depending on how we gave these things to others. Without mercy we tend to be very critical, but knowing that God will be very critical of us if we do this brings greater compassion and mercy. If nothing others do quite measures up to our expectations, we can expect nothing we have done will quite measure up either because **“with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”** We must never forget that *judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.*

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:12-13

Within the context of the chapter, it was the different attitudes toward the poor and rich. James began with *“do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” “with partiality(2:1)”* by treating a poor Christian with less respect. A powerful question followed: *“Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts(2:4)?”* His final warning showed the danger: *“if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors(2:9-10).”*

This was the appearance judgment Jesus warned against. Paul also condemned it in Romans. When God removed the Law of Moses, judgments regarding foods and days ended. So *“Who are you to judge another’s servant(14:4)?”* and *“why do you judge your brother(14:10)?”* His conclusion is identical to Jesus: *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore(14:13).”* When God has said nothing and we rely upon our own judgment, we show partiality and are transgressors. But we must learn that *“mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

I Desire Mercy and not Sacrifice

Jesus warned the Pharisees of this same danger. When they condemned him for eating with sinners *“go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’(Mt. 9:13),”* and when they condemned his disciples for plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath He said, *“If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent(Mt. 12:7).”* God wants to see mercy and compassion in His people! It is greater to Him than the animal sacrifice. When we have this mercy, it will be impossible to make such judgments.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. 37 “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” Lk. 6:35-38

When we show mercy and compassion to others in our judgments, putting the best possible motives on what they do(*love believes all things - I Cor 13:7*) and giving them all the compassion and mercy we can muster, then this is exactly how God will judge us on the day of judgment. But if we are harsh, critical, quick to condemn and having little patience or compassion in how quickly we assess and categorize others, then this is exactly how God will judge us.

Until Seven Times?

Peter was concerned enough to ask Jesus about it. He wondered if we could put some kind of limit on this mercy and forgiveness. If we forgive up to seven times he asked, would that be enough and then after that could we become harsh, critical, and unforgiving? Jesus removed all limits by saying *“seventy times seven”* in Matthew and *“seven times in a day”* in Luke.

Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Matt 18:21-22

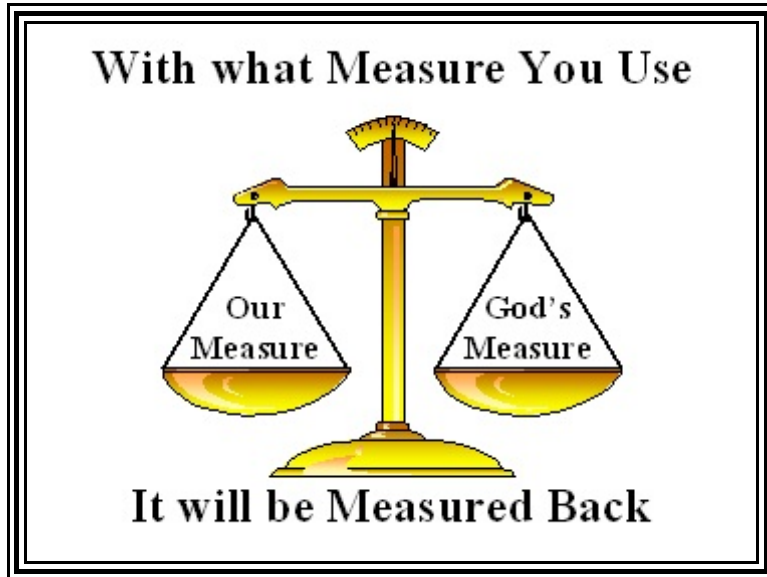
Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." Lk 17:3-4

The parable Jesus then spoke helped Peter understand the critical importance of true and limitless forgiveness. "*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.*" Jesus chose a servant who owed ten thousand talents. It is difficult for us to assess this amount since we have no reference and the talent is vague. Lenski summarized it in a way that is easier to understand.

An Attic talent amounts to 6,000 denarii, and 10,000 of these talents to 60 million denarii, that is 600,000 times as much as was due this debtor by his fellow- doulos. And one denarius was a laborer's daily wages (20:2). (Lenski, Commentary on Mt 18:24)

Since a denarii is a day's pay, we can always relate it to our own currency by how much we make in a day. The first servant was forgiven of a debt that would take 60,000,000(sixty million) day's pay to resolve. He then went out and would not forgive someone who owed him 100 day's pay or 600,000 times less than the debt he had been forgiven.

Does this represent the difference between the debt owed when we sin against God and the debt owed when someone sins against us? With our current work schedule(weekends off) it would take 226,415 years to pay it back. Even if he worked 365 days a year it would still take 164,383 years. While it would only take 3-4 months to pay off the smaller sum. What is the Lord trying to tell us? That our debt to God is far greater than their debt to us. That if we want God to forgive our great debt we must forgive these small debts.



When the king heard that his forgiven debtor had showed no mercy, he recalled him and said, "*You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?*" (Mt. 18:32-33). This sums up all matters of judging. We will be judged as we judge and condemned. Truly the measure we use will be measured back to us. Then Jesus concluded with the words that we must use to make proper application. Just as the king, "*was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.*" (Mt. 18:34-35).

A Spirit of Gentleness

No matter what the trespass/sin, it can only be determined by God's word and only to the limit God gave. If we add our own interpretation to make it stronger or weaker we have judged and shown partiality because we can't do it consistently every time. If we add components to make it fit our understanding that God did not give to us then once again we have judged. If we judge on appearance we have shown partiality. If we take one Scripture and take it so far it violates other Scriptures we have shown partiality and violated the command not to judge. Mercy will keep us from such sinful behavior. A realization that God will judge us exactly the same way we are judging will also lead us to

avoid these sins. If we are wise and spiritual, we will judge with gentleness.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Gal 6:1-2