

NICK GUY & THE TO JUDGE OR NOT TO JUDGE AFFAIR

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THEME: As a part of His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:1) Jesus admonished us “Judge not, that you be not judged.” This stands as one of the most quoted verses in all of Scripture - and one of the most misquoted as well. Is Jesus here forbidding us, as individuals or as the Church, from making any kind of judgement at all? Has Jesus commanded us to be silent in the face of sinful activities?

“YOU’RE SO JUDGMENTAL: Christians have been charged with being “judgmental” and possessing a “holier-than-thou” attitude, and Matthew 7:1 is oft quoted as a means of correcting them. Indeed we are quite capable of being guilty of both of these charges, but many times what is being called “judgmental” and “holier-than-thou” are really a way of avoiding guilt and escaping having to face the Word of God. And Matthew 7:1 is far from being a proof-text for that.

JUDGEMENTS ARE A NECESSARY PART OF LIFE: We are living in a culture that routinely demands no judgements of any kind are to be made on issues of morality. Except, of course, to judge those who are bringing the original judgement.

Matthew 7:1, where Jesus said, “Judge not, that you be not judged” has to be the favorite verse of non-believers. They will often quote it whenever a Christian attempts to address a moral issue in our society that is out of line with Biblical commands. But is this verse being properly applied in these situations? Is Jesus really commanding us here to never make any judgements of any kind?

First of all, it would be impossible for us to survive if we never made any judgements ever. All day long we are making judgements on all sorts of things. What to eat, what to wear, what kind of car to drive, what kind of job to take, what to spend our money on. In our business dealing, we make judgements on who seems trustworthy to us and who doesn't. For someone to say we are never to judge, or that Jesus is telling us that we are never to judge, is ridiculous.

Society would not survive without judgements being made. If we made no judgements of any kind, we would have chaos. Law and order wouldn't exist.

In fact, every law we have is a judgement. By them we are determining that certain actions are legal and certain other actions are illegal. We even have people who serve as Judges and Juries. The specific duty of Judges and Juries is to make judgements. When someone appears in court, it's because they have been accused of breaking a

law. The Judge and/or Jury hears all the evidence, and then makes a determination, based on that evidence and based on what the law demands, as to whether or not that person is guilty of violating that law.

So it would not be reasonable for Jesus to forbid us to make any judgements ever.

TEXT-CONTEXT: An important rule in interpreting Scripture is to remember that every text has a context. And you cannot properly interpret Scripture apart from its context.

First of all, the statement, "Judge not, lest ye be judged," is itself a judgment. And every time someone accuses a Christian of judging the actions or words of another, the one bringing the accusation is actually making a judgment himself.

Matthew 7:1 is only the first part of that section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is speaking of judging. The following verses help define what He meant in that first one.

Later in that same chapter, verses 15-20, Jesus warns us about false prophets, who come appearing to be true ones, telling us that we can, and must, judge them. He even tells us how to judge them. We recognize the difference between true and false prophets based upon their fruits, by what they produce. He asked, "Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" In these verses Jesus is not only not forbidding judging, but He is actually requiring it.

With this type of judgment we are setting out to distinguish, decide or determine if a word or action or thought or philosophy or doctrine is in agreement with a right understanding of the revealed Word of God.

But Jesus does warn us, as in John 7:24, to be certain that our judgments are righteous. To make certain of that, we have the Word of God. This, of course, requires that we study the Word to be sure we have a correct understanding of God's words, His character and His actions.

So what kind of judgment does Matthew 7:1 forbid? It forbids the kind of judgment that is self-righteous, harsh, destructive and negatively critical. It's unrighteous and unmerciful. The kind of judgment that is based more upon our own standard of goodness. It is the judgment of condemnation.

The word used in Matthew 7:1 was borrowed from the legal vocabulary of the day. It carries the meaning of the gavel of a judge coming down when he issues a sentence of punishment. So, might we say Matthew 7:1 could read: "Condemn not, lest ye be condemned?"

In verse 3 of Matthew 7, Jesus makes His point when He says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Do you see the condition of the one who is judging?

It's self-righteousness.

Not only is the plank much larger than the speck of sawdust; but its presence makes it impossible for the one judging to see and remove a speck of sawdust.

And, the would-be judge doesn't pay any attention to the plank in his own eye, but can only see the speck of sawdust in his brother's.

DeSOTO:

This reveals a presumption on the part of the would-be judge, that he is righteous in contrast to the other's sinfulness.

WARBLO:

That posture of self-righteousness is a great sin.

We place ourselves in a lofty position above others.

DeSOTO:

This is reminiscent of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9-14

WARBLO:

Yes, it is.

In that parable the Pharisee, standing before God praying, recited all his good deeds - proclaiming his own righteousness.

He contrasted his supposed merits with the contempt he felt toward those who he considered morally beneath him. Specifically, the Tax Collector who was also there praying.

But the tax collector, who dared not even lift his eyes to heaven, beat his breast, and said, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

His humility was acceptable to God, while the self-righteous judgmental stance of the Pharisee wasn't.

GUY:

But does this make Jesus is a hypocrite?

He tells us in Matthew 7:1 not to make judgments of condemnation.

Yet, there are many times in Scripture where it is said that Jesus will do just that.

Will Jesus have to judge Himself for passing judgment on everyone else?

WARBLO:

Oh no.

The judgement which decides the eternal fate of each man and woman He reserves for Himself. It is that judgement which He alone can make.

He alone can judge the intents and purposes of the heart.

He alone is all-knowing, all-wise, all-holy and all-just.

OF SPECKS AND BEAMS: In verse 3 of Matthew 7, Jesus makes His point when He says, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” The condition of the one who is judging here is self-righteousness. Not only is the plank much larger than the speck of sawdust; but its presence makes it impossible for the one judging to see and remove a speck of sawdust. And, the would-be judge doesn't pay any attention to the plank in his own eye, but can only see the speck of sawdust in his brother's.

This reveals a presumption on the part of the would-be judge, that he is righteous in contrast to the other's sinfulness. That posture of self-righteousness is a great sin. We place ourselves in a lofty position above others. What Jesus is pointing out here is that we are quicker to judge the small offences in others, than we are the much larger offences in ourselves.

He is here condemning self-righteousness. He is admonishing us to examine ourselves. And, as the following verses instruct us, after we *do* examine ourselves and after we *do* remove the log from our own eye, we are then able to see clearly to take the speck out of our brother's eye. So Jesus *does* mean for us to bring correction to one another, keeping each other accountable to His law

This is reminiscent of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9-14. In that parable the Pharisee, standing before God praying, recited all his good deeds - proclaiming his own righteousness. He contrasted his supposed merits with the contempt he felt toward those who he considered morally beneath him. Specifically, the Tax Collector who was also there praying.

But the tax collector, who dared not even lift his eyes to heaven, beat his breast, and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” His humility was acceptable to God, while the self-righteous judgmental stance of the Pharisee wasn't.

IS JESUS A HYPOCRITE?: Some have charged that this story reveals Jesus to be a hypocrite. He had instructed us in Matthew 7:1 not to make judgments of condemnation. Yet here, and actually many times in Scripture, Jesus makes judgements of condemnation.

By no means is Jesus guilty of breaking His own command. The judgement which decides the eternal fate of each man and woman is reserved for Jesus. It is that judgement which He alone can make. He alone can judge the intents and purposes of the heart. He alone is all-knowing, all-wise, all-holy and all-just.

CONFIRMATION VS. CONDEMNATION: Some popular preachers will avoid speaking anything that is even remotely confrontational. They down-play the doctrine of sin - sometimes ignoring it completely.

They claim that since only God can judge a person's heart, we have no place in confronting others with sin. They excuse this by saying they desire to empower people, not push them down. Their sermons offer what they call a positive message. They believe they are offering commendation, not condemnation.

But, of course, without ever preaching on the doctrine of sin, they never truly are able to get to the Good News. Or at least the Good News the Scripture reveals. Self-esteem and moving forward in life will benefit a man nothing if he remains lost in his sin.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through me." That's not really a message of condemnation, but of truth.

THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY: Another popular verse in the hands of those who would like to silence those who reveal the sins of men is John 8:1-11. In this story, the Scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus, asking Him if she should be stoned in accordance with the Law of Moses. Jesus told the Scribes and Pharisees "Whoever is without sin, let him cast the first stone." No stones were cast. In fact, one by one, all of the woman's accusers walked away. After everyone had left, Jesus asked the woman "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She answered, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." Christian's have been admonished by unbelievers to follow Jesus' example and not "cast stones."

Are we to gather from this story that since none of us are without sin that we have no place to call out the sins of others? And does it teach us that God Himself does not judge sin?

When this story is brought up as a way of silencing the confrontation of sin, certain details are usually left out of the story which have a great bearing on how it is understood.

First of all, it's important to understand that the Scribes and Pharisees were not interested in justice. Verse 6 tells us that their purpose was to trap Jesus. Israel, at this time, was under Roman rule, and Rome maintained the authority to execute criminals for themselves. If Jesus called for the woman to be stoned, He would be violating Roman Law. On the other hand, if He called for the woman to be released, He would be violating the Mosaic Law, since, as you pointed out, under the Mosaic Law, adultery was punishable by stoning. Since Jesus knew their motive, He tailored His response

accordingly.

The Scribes and Pharisees claimed to have caught the woman in the very act of adultery, but in bringing her before Jesus, they failed to bring the other guilty party.

When Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her," He was challenging the integrity of the Scribes and Pharisees in this case. The Mosaic Law prohibited bringing a false witness against someone, and with a malicious intent. By casting that first stone, the Scribes and Phairsees would be guilty of breaking this law and would be condemning themselves to the same fate as the woman.

But what about Jesus' comment to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you?" The key word here is "Condemn" and where it is applied. Jesus was not passing eternal judgement on this woman. But it's vital to notice that He also did not ignore or pass over her sin. He did not say to her 'thy sins have been forgiven thee' or even 'go in peace,' as He did so many other times to people. Rather, He admonishes the woman by telling her: "From now on sin no more." And with that last comment He is calling out adultery as sin. He is judging her actions as a violation of God's Law.

CONCLUSION - JUDGING THAT LEADS TO SALVATION:

In Matthew 7:1 Jesus admonished us to "Judge not, lest ye be judged." We are not God, and we cannot make a judgement of condemnation. But, we are to make others aware that they are sinners, and that they stand guilty before a holy and righteous God. As much as they may desire it, God will not overlook their sin. The truth is, all have sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard. We are all deserving of eternal condemnation.

And this is where Jesus comes in. Because He lived a sinless life, He, and He alone, is qualified to take upon Himself the penalty that was due our sin. He takes on our sin and gives us His righteousness. That is the Good News.

RESOURCES: