

What Did Jesus Say About Judging People?

How often do you judge others? Seldom? Frequently? Daily? Never?

How well do you know those whom you judge? Public figures? Friends? Family?

What criteria do you use in your judgments? Personal experience? Factual information? Opinion?

We make direct, personal judgments every day, even of people we do not know. The social media formats today relish criticisms of people's actions and statements, and always those of well-known people. Common, everyday people display their behaviors for anyone to see and read. These media encourage the judgments of others and popularize them.

Most often we make judgments based upon our opinions, not facts. Least often do we judge others based upon Biblical foundations. Sometimes, and increasingly so in our day, those whom we judge respond, "Jesus said not to judge." Leaders in the Christian community who bear the wrath of believers and unbelievers resort to it. In so doing, perhaps they hope to defend or legitimize their actions and statements, to deflect valid conclusions, or maybe even to silence critique.

Did Jesus command his followers not to judge others? If so, where does the Bible state his command? Yes, Jesus did give directions to his followers regarding their judgments of others. Matthew 7.1-5 reports a prominent description of his commands, although Luke also describes them along with some other commands in his gospel, Luke 6.32-42.

The passage in Matthew 7.1-5 starts the last chapter in Christ's famous Sermon On The Mount which begins in Matthew chapter 5. He gathered his followers and the massive crowds that trailed him to a mountain near Capernaum at the northern part of the Sea of Galilee and taught them there.

According to "Smith's Dictionary Timeline" Jesus gave this Sermon near the end of his first year of earthly ministry. Prior to it, Jesus performed several miracles, faced and overcame temptation from satan, introduced the presence of the Kingdom, called several disciples, and identified himself as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah.

This Sermon pronounced Christ's first major declaration of his Kingdom and the characteristics of those who belong to it. In it, Christ defined specific aspects of thought and actions that would differentiate his followers from all others. He even redefined some specific aspects of God's law, i.e., the Law of Moses. The text in Matthew 7.1-5 describes Christ's teaching on judging others.

What Did Jesus Say About Judging Others?

“Judge Not”

Jesus began his directions on judging others with the statement,

“Judge not, lest you be judged.” (v. 1)

What did Jesus mean with the word, *judge*? According to *The Amplified Bible*, “to judge” meant to criticize or condemn. The reputable *Strong's Concordance* agrees with this definition. (1) Other Bible scholars define it more thoroughly. Louw and Nida define it to judge one guilty and liable for punishment. (2) Thayer defines it as to separate and put asunder. (3) Liddell, Scott, and Jones define it to accuse or to bring to trial. (4) Christ's teaching on judging others included a broad range of accusations: from criticism to charging one liable to trial and punishment.

At first glance, it appears that Christ totally denounced and forbade criticism of others. He did not. This first part of these verses serves as the first of several warnings in the text on the serious nature of judging. In fact, four of the five verses of the text contain warnings to those who criticize or condemn others. Jesus did not forbid it, but gave practical directions for it.

Therefore, to grasp Jesus's teaching on judging, one must examine the whole text, not just the first two words. They do not declare Christ's whole message on accusing others. To make a part of the truth, i.e., the first two words, to represent the whole truth misstates the truth. The first rule of Biblical exegesis says that “a text without a context is a pretext.” One must not only examine the greater context of these verses, the whole Sermon On The Mount, but also the closer context of Matthew 7.1-5 to understand Christ's teaching.

No, Jesus did not command his followers not to judge others. In fact, Jesus taught specific instances when to judge others. For example, in the same chapter 7 in Matthew, verses 15-23, Christ warned of the coming of false prophets and how to identify them. This identification would involve judging, criticism, and accusations. His disciples must reject the false prophets. Proper judgment would enable them to identify and avoid the counterfeits.

Further, in John 7.24, Jesus accused the Jewish religious leaders of judging him falsely when he healed a man on the Sabbath. He then scolded them and warned them to judge

“not at a glance by appearances, but fairly and righteously,” an apt summary of Matthew 7.1-5.

Warnings to those who judge others

Verses 1-4 of Matthew 7 itemize Christ's warnings to those who judge others.

1, Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2, For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3, And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4, Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

The first warning appears in verse 1. Those who accuse others will receive judgment themselves from other people. Judging begets judging. Jesus warned his followers that if they accuse people, they, too, would experience accusations and criticism from other people. Be prepared for it. If you accuse others, he said, others will accuse you, maybe even those whom you criticize.

Second, Jesus warned that those who condemn others will receive condemnation in the same way they attack others. Noted Bible scholar William Mounce defines this way as the extent of criticism: what it includes, and what it excludes. (5) Jesus told his disciples that the measure they used in condemning others would serve as the basis, the pattern, of the way others would condemn them.

If his followers failed to restrict the issues to condemn, they would endure the brunt of all-inclusive attacks, too. If they “nit-picked” on trivial matters, they would receive that same kind of treatment. If his followers publicly announced private matters, others would delve into the accusers' private matters and publicize them. Therefore, Jesus warned his disciples that if they judged, they should take heed on the extent of their accusations against others: what to include, exclude, and what to avoid in the manner of judgments.

Third, Jesus warned his followers in the Kingdom to examine themselves for hypocrisy. His specific example contrasted a mote in the eye of the accused and a beam in the eye of

the accuser. A mote was a small sliver of wood, a speck or small particle, according to the *The Amplified Bible*. In contrast, the beam consisted of a large beam of wood, according to Bible scholars Louw and Nida. (6)

Jesus used this sharp disparity between the accuser and the accused to warn about hypocrisy, the presence of a greater problem in the accuser than in the accused which would hamper removal of the small issue by the accuser. Before condemning by judgment, Jesus warned his disciples to first clear their lives of offenses before attempting to criticize another person.

Why Did Jesus Declare This Message?

What did Jesus want to accomplish with this message for his followers? First, Jesus did not teach it because his followers and others practiced proper judgment of others. Obviously, they did not and neither did the greater Jewish community. In fact, the Old Testament provides ample evidence of God commanding his people to exercise justice in their dealings with others, including aliens. The inherent sinful nature of mankind produced evil judgments which Jesus wanted to correct. He taught his followers, not to avoid judgment, but to practice proper judgments, overcoming their natural tendencies. If Jesus did not want his disciples to judge others, he would not have included this message on how to judge. He would have simply said, "Judge not."

Second, at this time, according to "Smith's Dictionary Timeline," Jesus previously cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem the first time and experienced severe condemnation for it from the religious leaders. He knew that he would endure further unjust criticisms in his ministry. Jesus wanted his followers to identify and reject the false judgments against him in his future ministry. He desired faithfulness and trust in him against the lies of the religious leaders of their day and their false accusations.

Third, Jesus knew that his disciples would encounter unjust criticisms and accusations. Therefore, they needed direction on how to overcome these judgments. Since God wanted his disciples to exercise proper judgment, he taught them the practical warnings against false judgments. He specifically itemized three admonitions:

- If you judge others, you will receive judgment, too.

- If you judge others, others will judge you in the same manner that you judge others.
- Before you judge another, examine yourself for hypocrisy.

God knew that his followers would need to make proper judgments in their lives. He wanted them to know how to avoid false condemnations and to judge in truth and righteousness.

What Correlation Does This Message Have For You And Me?

Although spoken centuries ago, Christ's admonitions on judging others still applies today. Everything true then is true today. We face a barrage of temptations which call for righteous judgments. The world parades evil as good, declares wrong as right, and asserts error as truth. Further, some leaders in the Christian community try to lead people astray after heresy. Both the world and its culture as well as false prophets in the Christian community attempt to silence the warnings and accusations of Jesus followers against these evils. They reject all Biblical truth and value judgments. Their mantra? "Jesus said not to judge."

Today, as through the centuries, Christ followers need to understand his commands for judgments. He did not command against its practice. He did, however, outline how to judge in truth and righteousness. Followers of Jesus must learn and adopt his warnings and directions for proper judgments. We must not allow the world and false leaders to intimidate us and silence our demands for truth. We must reprove evil, exposing it to the light of God's word. (7)

What implications Do These Commands Identify For You And Me?

Our natural condition, due to the weakness of our human natures, prevents us from judging according to the demands of Christ. Therefore, we need divine intervention in our lives to enable us to do it. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit who would guide followers of Christ into the truth and enable them to obey him. (8)

Therefore...

What implications do these truths have for you and me?

Believers

The teaching of Christ on judging provides insight for those of us who trust Christ as lord and savior on how the Holy Spirit can use his commands in our lives. Christ followers show their life changing transformations by obedience to God. This text from Matthew 7.1-5 outlines Christ's demands in life and practice.

Like many Christians, you may live your life in accordance with God's commands in judging others. I encourage you to continue in obedience to God, and he will bless you for your obedience and sacrifice.

However, if you claim allegiance to Christ and profess that you trust him as lord and savior, but criticize others unjustly or without self-examination, I call you to repentance. You cannot claim what you do not live in daily life. A true follower of Christ will practice judgments of others as Jesus commands. Confess your disobedience and selfishness, repent of it, and turn to Christ to experience his forgiveness. Begin to show correct judgments, criticism, and accusations of others as Jesus demands.

Unbelievers

Perhaps you make no claim to salvation. You have never trusted Christ. You show no interest in God or his son Jesus. You live your life to satisfy your selfish desires. You may even doubt the existence of God. Further, if he exists, he has no interest in you or your life.

The Holy Spirit can also use this example from Christ's teaching on judging others to unbelievers like you because it proves that the grace and mercy of God in Christ, as revealed in the gospel, extends to the worst of sinners, like you and me.

When God created Adam and Eve, he planned for them to honor and glorify him and to fill the earth with their progeny who would also honor and glorify God. Thus, they became the head of all humanity who would originate from them.

But Adam and Eve sinned when they disobeyed God and ate the fruit of the tree in the Garden In Eden that God forbade them to eat. Sin now defiled their natures. They looked at each other in different ways. Guilt replaced freedom. They knew that they disobeyed God and began to experience the consequences of their sins. Their sins separated them from fellowship with God creating a chasm between them and God, and they fled from his presence.

Since all mankind issues from Adam and Eve as heads of humanity, Adam's sin assigns to

all humanity, too, including you and me.

From conception, we become enslaved to our sin which separates us from God with no desire for him. We have no longing to believe God, let alone worship him. Sin engulfs us into bondage to it and permeates our whole beings. In addition, our sin makes us helpless to remedy our condition.

Because of your sinful helplessness and lack of desire for God, you need divine intervention in your life to redeem you from your sin and bondage to evil, and to reconcile you to God.

Hear God's word to you. The gospel tells us that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to earth, born of a young virgin girl, to secure redemption for sinners and to reconcile them back to God.

During His life on earth, Jesus obeyed every command and demand of God, living a perfect and sinless life. Though tempted in all ways like us, he resisted every time. Because of his sinless life, he could provide the perfect, complete sacrifice to God on behalf of the sins of others as their substitute. He lived a life that neither you nor I could live.

Major Ian Thomas said it this way:

"The life that He lived qualified Him for the death that He died."

When Christ shed his blood on the cross and died there, he offered himself to God as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners like you and me. He paid the penalty to God in full that people like us deserve to pay because of our sin. He died the death that we should have died.

Our sin separates us from God and requires a suitable sacrifice to God to atone for them and to reconcile us back to himself. The sacrifice of Christ fulfills that obligation on behalf of people like you and me. God accepted Christ's sacrifice in atonement for the sins of sinners like you and me.

Jesus commanded all people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel which calls us to believe:

- The virgin birth of Christ;
- the sinless life of Christ;
- the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross where he sacrificed his blood for sinners

like you and me; and

- His resurrection to new life, victorious over sin and death, destroying the devil and all his evil works.

Jesus promised to accept everyone who comes to Him in faith, turning from their sin, self-reliance, and rebellion against God, to trust his sacrifice to God on their behalf. God promised to pardon and forgive all who come to him by faith in Christ, God's appointed substitutionary sacrifice to God for them.

Further, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to indwell those who come to Him in faith. The indwelling Holy Spirit enables Christ followers to fulfill his commands.

As a young boy, I called upon Christ to be my savior. I have experienced Christ's transforming power by the Holy Spirit in my life and attest to its reality.

I ask the Holy Spirit to come to you today:

- to give you the new birth that will regenerate you, giving you new life from above;
- to give you the faith to turn from your sin, self-reliance, and rebellion against God;
- to give you the faith to trust Christ's provision for you in his life, death, and resurrection as fulfilled for you and that will reconcile you to God; and
- to come to you today and to indwell you as Christ promised, so that he will begin to form Christ's life in you.

I pray that this will become true for you today.

References

1. *Bible Analyzer*, v. 5.2.1.21. "Strong's," #G2919.
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3. *Bible Analyzer*. Thayer's "GELNT."
4. IBID. "Liddell, Scott, and Jones."
5. *Logos*. Mounce's "MCEDONTW."
6. IBID. "Louw and Nida," #7.78.
7. Ephesians 5.11.
8. John 14:16-17, 26; 15.26-27; 16.1-15.