

# Thursday Devotional

July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

*“Judge not, that you be not judged.” – Matthew 7:1*

“Few texts are more misunderstood in our day than Matthew 7:1: “Judge not, that you be not judged.” It often comes up in conversations when one dares to make a moral assessment of another person that rubs the hearer the wrong way. “Who are you to judge?” comes the retort.

What kind of “judging” is Jesus talking about? As in all cases, the context is a great help in understanding what Jesus is getting at. This text is in the Sermon on the Mount, which demonstrates the nature of true righteousness versus superficial religion. In this text, Jesus is concerned about the hypocrisy of the double standard. The proof of His point is in the illustration that follows in verses 3–5:

*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.*

The language is even more vivid in the Greek text, in which the “log” is equivalent to a large beam that would have been used as a joist in a building. The picture of someone with a beam in his eye trying to take a speck of dust out of another person’s eye must have brought a chuckle to His listeners. The hypocrite, therefore, is someone who condemns another person while practicing, or even being worse in, the very same behavior. Some of Jesus’ listeners were the scribes and Pharisees, who were experts at this type of hypocrisy. They were eager to condemn others while practicing the same things. This is the wrong kind of judging.

Remembering that God is the Judge will remind us that His Word must be the standard of judgment. But is there ever a time when people are justified in “judging” or in making a moral assessment of another person? Absolutely. In fact, the Scriptures require us to do so. Elsewhere, Jesus says, *“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment”* (John 7:24). What does this “right judgment” look like? A little later in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus teaches that a person should speak directly to another person who has sinned against him (Matt. 18:15). There are several important points that this text teaches us about “right judgment.”

First, the assessment must be based on God’s standard, not on personal preference. In order to be called a “sin,” it must be a violation of God’s Word. Here is one of the modern objections to “judging.” People disagree on the standard. The same people who live by “their truth” are living by an ever-moving situational standard that happens to reflect and approve their behavior. “If I think or feel that it is right, it must be right,” they argue. But there are absolutes. There is a standard of right and wrong, and it is contained in the Scriptures.

Second, the proper motivation in confronting another person must always be the restoration of the offender. The reason you confront another person about his sin is to win him over, not to put

him down, condemn him, or make yourself feel superior to him. This is where the scribes and Pharisees (and sometimes we) fall short. The same dynamic can be seen in [Galatians 6:1](#). Paul writes: *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* Here again we see the reference to “any transgression,” which refers to the violation of God’s standard. We also see that the goal is the restoration of the brother or sister. We must always be concerned for the good of those who stray. Another element we see in the Galatians reference is the importance of one’s attitude in correcting another person. Paul writes that the offender should be restored “in a spirit of gentleness.” This communicates a humility that should characterize one sinner confronting another sinner. We are also reminded to “keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” This attitude is a far cry from the self-righteous who are eager to condemn others but to exalt themselves.

This leads to the final observation that we must keep everything in perspective, remembering that God is the ultimate Judge, and it is to Him that we are all accountable. Jesus said: *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you”* ([Matt. 7:1–2](#)). This final observation supports the earlier ones. Remembering that God is the Judge will remind us that His Word must be the standard of judgment. It should also result in a spirit of humility, allowing us to recognize that there is plenty of hypocrisy left in each of our hearts.”

By: Dr. Timothy Z. Witmer is pastor of St. Stephen Reformed Church in New Holland, Pa., and professor of practical theology emeritus at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

He is author of *Mindscape* and *The Shepherd Leader*.

<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2019/08/matthew-71/>