



Is It A Sin To Judge Others?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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Is it a sin to judge others? To “judge” is to render a decision or opinion about whether the action of another person is right or wrong. Many people believe that it is a sin to make a judgment about another person. Matthew 7:1 is almost immediately quoted in order to answer this question, where Jesus said, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” So, is it always wrong to make a judgment of another person? Let’s investigate the Scriptures and see.

“Judge Not”

Perhaps you have heard this statement made in response to a judgment you have made about another. Or, perhaps you have even made this statement yourself. Often, this response of “judge not” is given by folks who are in sin and do not desire to be corrected by their brethren (or by others in general). This mindset is that no one should make any kind of negative evaluations about the life of another person!

Matthew 7:1 is the passage often quoted as proof: “Judge not, that you be not judged.” Now, these are the words of Jesus – and do contain absolute truth. However, do these words really mean that we must live in a world where everyone must avoid making evaluations about how others are living – and one in which no one can rebuke others for any kind of wrong doing? Does Jesus really desire for everyone to live such private and separated lives from each other? Is there really nothing that is done which is clearly “right” or clearly “wrong”?

Let’s consider the entire passage of Matthew 7:1-6 and see if these kinds of ideas accurately represent the truth about Jesus’ teaching. “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the 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 from 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 from your brother’s eye. Do not give what is holy to the

dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”

A look into this context reveals what kind of judgments are being condemned. Clearly, verse 2 is demonstrating that Jesus forbids making *hypocritical judgments*! Certainly, Jesus is also showing that great care must be involved in making judgments – so that we are never guilty of making improper judgments (recognizing that we will be judged accordingly)!

Now, is Jesus teaching that one should ignore the “speck” that is in his brother’s eye? This would *have* to be true in order for the objections we have discussed to be sustained by this passage. Jesus would have to command or imply that the man with the “speck” should just be left alone – and be allowed to live his own life without any interference from others! However, this is not what Jesus says! Instead, Jesus condemns the hypocrisy of making a judgment about the “speck” that is in your brother’s eye – while you have a “plank” that is protruding from your own eye!

First, He desires for an individual to make proper judgments about his own life – and correct his own life. Then, He desires for that individual to help others by making proper judgments about them. This is what Jesus means by first removing the “plank” from your own eye – and then helping your brother remove the “speck” that is in his eye. Neither the “plank” nor the “speck” are approved of God – and judgments are proper in both cases. However, the order matters to God!

Another example of making judgments in this passage is verse 6. Again, Jesus said: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.” In this text, Jesus is appealing to His disciples that they might be wise in their dealings with others. There are some who have demonstrated their unwillingness to accept the things of God (i.e. they are unclean/unholy as dogs and pigs were to the Jews). Therefore, Jesus teaches that wisdom should be used to make judgments about such matters – so that the Christian does not expend all of his/her efforts on someone who had demonstrated a stubborn and rebellious heart!

So, in this same passage that many use to condemn the practice of making judgments about others, Jesus teaches us to make judgments about others – twice! Therefore, to apply Jesus’ words in verse 1 in the way that many folks apply them today means that we cannot even keep Jesus’ instructions in this passage! If verse 1 means that we cannot make any judgments about others, we cannot help a brother/sister remove the “speck” from his/her life after we have removed the “plank” from our lives – and we cannot make any judgments about who are “dogs” or “swine.” Think about this, lest we force the Master Teacher to say something He never intended to say!

Judgments That Must Be Made About Others

Instead of condemning all types of judgments that are made concerning others, Jesus actually tells us that we need to judge with righteous judgment. In John 7:24, Jesus said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” Certainly, Jesus could not

condemn every kind of judgment that is made about another person – and then instruct people to judge with righteous judgment! Instead, we must recognize that Jesus condemns all unrighteous judgments (i.e. judgments according to appearance, rash judgments, hypocritical judgments, etc.). But, He actually wants His people to be making righteous judgments. Consider some kinds of judgments about others the Scriptures teach us that we should make.

(1) Judge false teachers. Just after Jesus' teachings in Matthew 7:1-6 about making judgments, consider what Jesus says in Matthew 7:15-20. He instructs us to beware of false prophets because they appear as if they are teaching words of truth from God, but they are actually spiritually harmful to us if we listen to them (like wolves in sheep's clothing). Then, He said that we will know them by their fruits.

Clearly, Jesus wants us to make judgments about whether someone is teaching God's word accurately – or whether they are attempting to deceive/mislead us! If God had forbidden all judgments to be made about others, we would not be permitted to use our discretion to determine whether something that is said or taught to us is right or wrong! Yet, Jesus *wants* and *expects* us to closely examine (judge) what we hear and are taught so that we will only hold to that which is right!

(2) Judge what is sinful among the brethren. Part of the responsibilities God has given to members of the local church is to make judgments of the other members – so as to only be in fellowship with those who are walking according to God's instructions. 1 Corinthians 5 gives instruction concerning a man who was living in the sin of adultery, by having his father's wife. In response, the church was instructed to judge him and not keep company with him. Then, 2 Thessalonians 3 instructs that those who were walking disorderly and not according to the traditions they had received from the apostles were to be withdrawn from (see verses 6, 14, and 15).

Both of these passages demonstrate the responsibility that the local church has to withdraw from those who are participating in sin and are unwilling to repent! However, please realize that this sort of action cannot be taken without a judgment (or series of judgments) being made about individuals who are living in sin – and implies that brethren *should* be making certain judgments about others!

(3) Judge disputes among brethren. 1 Corinthians 6 deals with another problem that had risen in the Corinthian church. Evidently, there were brethren in the Corinthian church who were taking each other to court. In response to this issue, Paul gives the following instructions. He tells the members of the church not to take one another to court. Instead of taking one another before human courts and judges, they were to find a wise brother and have him judge the matter.

So, Paul's remedy to the problem of brethren taking one another before worldly courts and disgracing the church of God was to find a wise brother who would be able to judge the matter between them! Therefore, God fully expects that Christians be able to make wise and good

judgments about matters that come up between them! Yet, again, this could not be done if God prohibits all judgments from being made!

(4) Judge those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ.

Two passages of Scripture give very plain instruction about judgments to be made and action to be taken regarding individuals who cause divisions and offenses among the brethren. See Romans 16:17-18 and Titus 3:9-11.

Both of these passages demonstrate judgments being made. Notice that you cannot “note” (mark) and avoid someone for causing divisions and offenses that are contrary to the doctrine of Christ – without judging that they *had* caused divisions and offenses that are contrary to the doctrine of Christ!

(5) Judge who is an evil person in the world. Finally, judgments must be made concerning those we associate ourselves with – so that we can avoid evil associations. Consider the wisdom that Solomon penned in Proverbs 1:10: “My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.” Similarly, 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’”

Certainly, God wants His people to be making judgments about those they come into contact with! He does not desire His people to be naïve and believe that the people they put themselves around cannot negatively influence them and tear down their faith! So, He expects Christians to make judgments about the character of others – and how they will be influenced by these individuals.

Conclusion

God wants His people to be making certain judgments about others. He just wants us to be very, very careful so as to be sure that the judgments we make are righteous judgments. In fact, we have seen that making judgments are crucial to living in a way that is pleasing to God. So, rather than viewing all judgments as being sinful, we should only view the failure to make righteous judgments as being sin.

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