Judging Others: The Verse Pagans Love to Quote
Scripture: Matthew 7
Code: BQ51310

It should be noted that this passage has erroneously been used to suggest that believers should never evaluate or criticize anyone for anything. Our day hates absolutes, especially theological and moral absolutes, and such simplistic interpretation provides a convenient escape from confrontation. Members of modern society, including many professing Christians, tend to resist dogmatism and strong convictions about right and wrong. Many people prefer to speak of all-inclusive love, compromise, ecumenism, and unity. To the modern religious person those are the only “doctrines” worth defending, and they are the doctrines to which every conflicting doctrine must be sacrificed.

The entire thrust of the Sermon on the Mount is to show the complete distinction between true religion and false religion, between spiritual truth and spiritual hypocrisy. Jesus places God’s perfect and holy standards beside the unholy and self-righteous standards of the scribes and Pharisees and declares that those who follow those unholy and self-righteous standards have no part in God’s kingdom (5:20). No more controversial or judgmental sermon has ever been preached.

If this greatest sermon by our Lord teaches anything, it teaches that His followers are to be discerning and perceptive in what they believe and in what they do, that they must make every effort to judge between truth and falsehood, between the internal and the external, between reality and sham, between true righteousness and false: righteousness-in short, between God’s way and all other ways.

Krino (to **judge**) means basically to separate, choose, select, or determine, and has a dozen or more shades of meaning that must be decided from the context. In our present passage Jesus is referring to the judgment of motives, which no mere human being can know of another, and to judgment of external forms. Paul says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way” (Rom. 14:13).

The Bible consistently forbids individual or vigilante justice that assumes for itself the prerogatives of a duly established court of law. It also consistently forbids hasty judgments that do not have full knowledge of the heart or of the facts. “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him” (Prov. 18:13). Sometimes what appears to be wrong is nothing of the sort.

It is significant that, though God is omniscient, He gives us many examples of the care we ourselves should take before making judgments, especially those that involve serious consequences. Before He judged those who were building the tower of Babel, “The Lord came down to see the city and the

tower which the sons of men had built" (Gen. 11:5). Before He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah He said, "I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know" (Gen. 18:21).

What Jesus here forbids is self-righteous, officious, hasty, unmerciful, prejudiced, and unwarranted condemnation based on human standards and human understanding. He gives three reasons why such judgment is sinful: it reveals an erroneous view of God, an erroneous view of others, and an erroneous view of ourselves.

Unrighteous and unmerciful judgment is forbidden first of all because it manifests a wrong view of God. With the phrase **lest you be judged**, Jesus reminds the scribes and Pharisees that they are not the final court. To judge another person's motives or to curse to condemnation is to play God. "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). During the millennial kingdom Christ will share some of that judgment with us (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2; etc.), but until that time we blaspheme God whenever we take upon ourselves the role of judge. "Who are you to judge the servant of another?" Paul asks. "To his own master he stands or falls" (Rom. 14:4). Paul was little concerned about how other people judged him, and was not even concerned about how he judged himself. "I am conscious of nothing against myself," he says, "yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:3–4).

Except as they may be continually teaching false doctrine or following standards that are clearly unscriptural, we are never to judge a person's ministry, teaching, or life-and certainly not his motives-by a self-styled standard "Do not speak against one another," James warns us. "He who 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 of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?" (James 4:11–12). Such evil judgment is blasphemous, because it sets a man up as God-and there is only one true Judge.

Whenever we assign people to condemnation without mercy because they do not do something the way we think it ought to be done or because we believe their motives are wrong, we pass judgment that only God is qualified to make.

The Savior does not call for men to cease to be examining and discerning, but to renounce the presumptuous temptation to try to be God.

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