



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

“Don’t Judge” — Not Ever?

Matthew 7:1-5

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The Worst Modern Sin?

John 8:2-11 famously tells of a day some scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus who had “been caught in the act of adultery” (8:4). Would Jesus agree with the Law that she should be stoned? Or would he continue his habit of being lax toward sinners (cf. Lk. 15:1-2; *et. al.*)?

- In some ways, this story would play out the same way today: the woman was used as a tool to trap a well known public figure, to create a scandal designed to ruin him (Jn. 8:6).
- But, in one big way, it would be different: anyone today daring to say her lifestyle choice is sinful would be condemned, guilty of intolerance and judgmentalism, two great wrongs of our time.

John 8 is often used to accuse Christians of hypocrisy in judging. “Let him who is without sin ... be the first to throw a stone at her,” Jesus said (v. 7). Then, he didn’t judge her (vv. 10-11). Matthew 7:1 is used to reinforce the effort: “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Mt. 7:1).

To give an answer (1 Pet. 3:15), and because church people sometimes join in the blanket condemnation of judging, we must study how our text fits within the entirety of revelation.

To Judge or Not to Judge?

The New Testament speaks often about judging.

- Verses like John 12:48, Acts 17:31, and Revelation 20:12-13 are clear that a time of judgment is coming, and that Jesus will be the one doing the judging.
- But, other verses report that there were times when Jesus said he did not come to judge the world, but to save it (Jn. 3:17; 12:47).¹

The same apparent disparity is found when the subject is humans judging others.

- Matthew 7:1 is just one text that prohibits human judging (cf. Rom. 2:1, 3; Jas. 4:11-12).
- But, in 1 Cor. 5:3, 12 and 6:2-3, we learn that Paul had already judged a sinner, believers were to judge those inside the church, and saints will judge the world and angels.

¹ ESV, *et. al.* use “condemn” in John 3:17, but the Greek word is κρινω, *krinō*, just as in Acts 17:31, *et. al.* (cf. NASB).

To resolve the apparent contradiction, we must study the word “judge” more closely. The Random House unabridged dictionary gives eight definitions of the verb “judge,” including:

1. to pass legal judgment on; pass sentence on (a person).
2. to form a judgment or opinion of; decide upon critically.
3. to act as a judge; pass judgment.²

The Greek word κρίνω (*krinō*) also had multiple meanings. Gingrich lists five:

1. separate, distinguish, then select, prefer.
2. judge, think, consider, look upon.
3. reach a decision, decide, propose, intend.
4. as [a] legal term, of human or divine courts judge, decide, . . . , condemn, sentence, hand over for punishment.
5. judge, pass judgment on, express an opinion about.³

Help from Two Related Texts

Romans 14 uses the verb eight times, not always in the same way.

1. Verse 3 - the one who abstains from eating is not to *pass judgment* on the one who eats.
2. Verse 4 - a brother welcomed by God (v. 3) is another’s servant; we are not his Lord (κύριος, *kyrios*), therefore we have no right to *pass judgment* on him.
3. Verse 5 - one *esteems*, i.e., draws a conclusion about, one day as better than another, while another *esteems* all days the same way; the word in both cases is κρίνω (*krinō*).
4. Verse 10 - Paul challenged the one who will *pass judgment* on his brother.
5. Verse 13 - Paul uses κρίνω two ways: the brother is to stop *passing judgment* on others, but instead is to *decide* never to cause others to stumble.
6. Verse 22 - the faith one has about eating is between himself and God and the man who “has no reason to *pass judgment* on himself” is blessed.

In John 8:10-11, another form of the word is used: κατακρίνω (*katakrinō*), “condemn, pronounce sentence” (Gingrich; cf. Mt. 12:41-42; Rom. 2:1; 8:3, 34; 14:23; Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:6).

1. After the woman’s accusers had gone, Jesus asked her if anyone had *condemned* her. When she said no one had, he said, “Neither do I *condemn* you; . . .” (Jn. 8:10-11).
2. Many use this exchange with Jesus’ statement about throwing the first stone to argue that he prohibited labeling another’s behavior sin. But, is that what really happens here?
 - a. The woman’s accusers were more concerned with trapping Jesus than her guilt (v. 6).
 - b. Some complicity is evident; it is impossible to catch just one in the act of adultery (the Law required the stoning of both - Lev. 20:10; Dt. 22:22-24).⁴

² judge. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/judge> (accessed: January 31, 2014).

³ F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), BibleWorks. v.9.

⁴ Gary Burge explained: “What evidence do they need? So that suspicious husbands could not accuse their wives unnecessarily, the law required strong testimony from two witnesses who saw the couple in a sexual context: lying in the same bed, unmistakable body movements, and positive identities. The two witnesses had to see these things at the same time and place so that their testimonies would be identical. Such evidence virtually required the witnesses to set a trap.” (Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Zonvervan, 2000], 242.)

- c. A closer reading of v. 7 reveals the words “among you” (literally, “without sin of you” [plural], ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν, *anamartētos hymōn*). *Contra* NIV and popular understanding, the best sense is not, “if any of you is perfect, throw the first rock,” but, “let whoever among you has clean hands *in this case* begin the stoning.”
- d. Finally, Jesus did not tolerate her sin in the sense popularly used today; he showed her mercy *despite* her sin — and told her, “from now on, stop sinning” (v. 11).

Judging That Ignores the Judge (Matt. 7:1-5)

Matthew 7:1-5 continues Jesus’ emphasis on single-minded devotion to God that seeks his rule first (6:19-7:11). He teaches that, when we allow God to rule, we’ll give as much attention as needed to making sure we are righteous before him (cf. 6:33) by resisting the human tendency to see others’ faults clearly while minimizing (or ignoring) our own.

In a sort of mirror image of the Golden Rule (7:12), Jesus forbids judging on the grounds that we will get back the kind of judging we do (7:1-2).

Verses 3-4 reveal the issue Jesus intends in two questions:

1. Why do we see specks in others and miss the logs in ourselves? This is a rhetorical question, assuming that what it asks is true. It’s always easier to see the faults of others.
2. Why are we so eager to work around our log to help him with his speck? The irony is that, because of our log, we cannot really see the other’s speck clearly enough to help.

Verse 5 uses the same direct language used in 6:1-18 when Jesus condemned those who practiced righteousness mainly to be seen by others. Notice that he condemned one kind of judging, not the condemnation of any sin (cf. 7:6, 13-14).

What is his main concern in vv. 1-5? Seeking first God’s rule and righteousness, a pursuit that leads one to do what it takes in his own life *so that* he can properly help others with theirs.

Dealing with Our Logs

Years ago, another case of adultery rocked a nation. Unlike John 8, it involved a man who was well known, powerful, and influential. But, sexual temptation ensnared him, and fear of exposure and scandal made matters worse. Ironically, even as the scandal developed, he called for the harshest punishment for a thief whose sin was less serious than his own.

His case probably sounds familiar. It certainly will when I tell you that the man is King David, the adulterer and murderer who saw another’s speck while hiding his own log (2 Sam. 12:1-7).

But, his story may sound familiar for another reason. David is not the only speck-finder the world has known. Sometimes, we ignore our logs, but see the specks, too. David reminds us that all sin must be taken seriously — including our own. The good news? When we repent and submit to his rule, God wipes our slates clean.

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