

# Judge Not!

by David Servant

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*Jesus' command not to judge is often misinterpreted, but in reality, we should judge others based on their fruit and behavior, while also being cautious not to judge others by their external appearance or behavior without first examining our own hearts and lives.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:1, John 7:24, 1 Corinthians 5:12, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 John 3:10

**Topics:** "Righteous Judgment", "Church Discipline"

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## Description

David Servant preaches about the importance of righteous judgment in a culture that promotes tolerance to the point of labeling anyone who holds to biblical standards as intolerant, close-minded, critical, and unloving. He emphasizes the need for Christians to discern and judge rightly, starting with self-examination before helping others. The sermon delves into the biblical instructions on judging unbelievers, spiritual leaders, and fellow believers, highlighting the responsibility to maintain holiness and purity within the church by making righteous judgments.

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## Transcript

Anyone who holds to any standard of righteousness in our "culture of tolerance" is in trouble. If you say, for example, that homosexuality is a perversion, abortion is murder, sex outside of marriage is a sin, or that Jesus is the only way to heaven, get ready to be labeled. You will be categorized as "intolerant," because intolerance is not tolerated in our culture. You may also be branded as close-minded, because our culture is not open-minded to anyone who is "close-minded." You may be criticized for being critical. And you will probably be branded as unloving, because our culture just hates people who aren't "loving." They really should start putting bumper stickers on their cars that say, "I Do Not Tolerate People Who Are Intolerant."

Quite often, those who are not tolerant of "intolerant" Christians even cite the Bible to prove how wrong intolerance is. "Judge not!" they quote Jesus as saying. They construe Christ's words to mean that no one has the right to make a moral appraisal of anyone else. In so doing, however, they make a moral appraisal of those whom they accuse of making moral appraisals. If you say, "Homosexuality is wrong," they say, "Don't judge!," and in the process they commit the very crime of which they find you guilty.

This is not something that only those in the world do, but something that professing Christians sometimes do as well. If you hold to any standards of righteousness that exceed the low standards that many professing Christians hold, you set yourself up to be a target by some even within the church. If you dare

take seriously a verse in the Bible that is generally unfit for a refrigerator door magnet, like those that speak of the absolute necessity of obedience or self-denial, get ready to lose "church friends." They too may judge you as being judgmental--even if you keep completely silent about your convictions and just live them. (I am doubtlessly being judged right now by some readers as being judgmental for writing this!)

So exactly what did Jesus mean when He told His followers, "Judge not, that you be not judged"? If we understand what He meant, then we can strive to obey Him in this regard.

Perhaps it will help if we first consider what Jesus obviously did not mean.

Clearly, Jesus did not mean that His followers should never make moral appraisals of anyone, judging them in that sense. Just a few seconds after He said, "Judge not," Jesus instructed His followers,

Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces (Matt. 7:6).

Surely Jesus was not speaking of literal dogs and pigs, but of people who, like dogs and pigs, don't recognize what is truly valuable and holy. It seems that Jesus could have been speaking only of people who reject His holy word because they don't value it. If we are to obey this commandment and not cast our pearls before pigs, we must of necessity appraise people. We must judge if they are in the category of spiritual pigs and dogs.

How can we judge such people? We certainly can't tell by looking at them. Sweet old ladies sometimes morph into monsters when we attempt to speak to them about the Lord, while tattooed tough guys, under conviction, may melt like margarine. We must, therefore, cast at least one "pearl" and watch what people do with it. If they trample it in the mud, we know they're spiritual pigs or dogs. We shouldn't waste more pearls on them, at least not until we allow some time for their hearts to soften. For now, we should "shake off the dust from our feet" (see Matt. 10:14) and look for those who value what we have to tell them. That is what Paul practiced, displaying a certain degree of intolerance in a manner prescribed by Jesus (see Acts. 13:51). This should not only be practiced in regard to unbelievers who reject God's Word, but in regard to so-called believers who just as much reject God's Word. Don't waste your valuable time on people who don't value God's Word.

But back to my main point. We must judge people in at least one sense if we are going to obey Christ's command not to cast our pearls before pigs.

### Judging Spiritual Leaders

Just a few more seconds after Jesus said, "Judge not," He also instructed His followers to appraise spiritual leaders by their fruit. By so doing, they could determine if a leader is a wolf disguised as a sheep. This requires that Christ's followers judge spiritual leaders, and it seems that there isn't enough of that kind of judging going on because so many of us are being misled and devoured by wolves that appear to be sheep. Sincere believers are often afraid of judging spiritual leaders because they think that they shouldn't "pass judgment" on them or "touch God's anointed." They couldn't be more wrong. Jesus commands us to examine the fruit of spiritual leaders and make judgments about them!

We should be looking at the fruit of every spiritual leader in the church. Don't make the foolish error of "judging their fruit" by counting how many miracles they perform or by how many thousands of people attend their meetings. That is not the kind of fruit Jesus was saying we should be examining. Speaking of

spiritual leaders, Jesus warned that many would say to Him, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy, cast out demons and perform miracles in Your name?," and He will say, "I never knew you" (see Matt. 7:22-23). Miracles are not the proof of God's endorsement of a minister. (According to Scripture, God may actually test our love for Him by means of false prophets who work miracles; see Deut. 13:1-4.) A big crowd may only be a sign of a big deceiver. The fruit of which Jesus spoke is the fruit of holiness (see Matt. 7:21, 23). Are spiritual leaders obeying Christ's commandments? That is the test.

We should also judge the teaching of spiritual leaders to make certain their teaching is the teaching of Christ (see 2 John 1:7-11). If it isn't, we are instructed by Scripture not to receive such people into our homes (which takes on additional meaning when you realize that the early church met primarily in homes), and not even to give such teachers a greeting (much less an offering). Otherwise, says John, we "participate in their evil deeds" (see 2 John 1:11).

It is sobering to realize that we bear part of the responsibility for the spiritual deception that is propagated by false teachers if we support them in any way. It is amazing to me how many Christians, whose hearts have been enlightened to fundamental and essential biblical truth, attend and support churches that promote a false gospel while leaving the "voices that are crying in the wilderness" to continue crying in the wilderness, unsupported. They are eating at Red Lobster and paying at Burger King. Some excuse themselves by saying, "I'm giving to the Lord and my heart is right, so it makes no difference where I give my money." The truth is, you are supporting the devil with God's money. And God is not likely to reward you for that!

Like John, Paul also instructed us to "beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision" (Phil. 3:2), and he, too, warned of false apostles (see 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

To obey these inspired instructions given by Paul and John requires that we make judgments about spiritual leaders and act on those judgments. Yet, again, it seems that too few in the church follow such biblical instructions. According to the consistent teaching of the New Testament, the outstanding characteristic of a false teacher is that his teaching downplays the necessity of holiness (see Matt. 7:15-23; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Pet. 2:1-22; Jude 1:3-4). By that criterion, the church today has been inundated with false teachers.

In Scripture, some of the New Testament authors go so far as to name the very names of false spiritual leaders of whom the church should beware (see 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 4:10; 3 John 1:9). This required a judgment on the part of those authors. By exposing and warning the church of certain false teachers, something that is often today classed as "passing judgment" or as being "unloving," these authors actually showed their genuine love for Christ's body. Jesus commended the church in Ephesus for judging correctly certain men as being false apostles (see Rev. 2:2).

### Judging Other Believers

So far we've seen that we should judge, in some sense, unbelievers and spiritual leaders. But what about judging fellow believers? Believe it or not, Scripture teaches that we all have a responsibility to judge, at least in some sense, everyone within the church. Surprised about that? Read what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians who had failed to judge a man in their midst who was living in an immoral relationship with his stepmother:

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. [The clear implication is that they should judge those within the church.] Remove the wicked man [this requires a judgment] from among yourselves (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

And it is not only people within the church who are living in immoral relationships whom God expects us to judge. In the same passage, Paul declared,

I wrote you in my [previous] letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one (1 Cor. 5:9-11).

To obey this instruction, we must make judgments about people within the church and act on those judgments. If we discover a professing Christian who is an immoral person, greedy, an idolater, a reviler, a drunkard or a swindler, we are not to associate with him or her at all. The reason is because such people bring a stain and reproach on what the church is supposed to be--the holy followers of Christ. Such people are not true followers of Christ, regardless of what they claim, and they are on the broad road that leads to hell, as Paul wrote in the same passage,

Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Paul warns us not to be deceived about this, but again, so many are. When entire denominations agree that homosexuals are fit to be ordained for ministry, they've abandoned the Bible and bought into the world's "tolerance message." They are deceived in their tolerance.

But this is not the only way we are told in Scripture to judge those within the church. We are also instructed by Jesus to confront those within the church who sin against us (see Matt. 18:15-17), and this, of course, requires that we make a judgment about offenders. If they don't receive us, we are to take one or two others, who must also make a judgment about the offender and confront him a second time.

If an offender doesn't receive the testimony of those two or three, he should be taken before the entire church, who must also then make a judgment about him. (Keep in mind that Jesus was thinking of small churches that met in homes--as all churches were until A.D. 300 when Constantine married the world with the church--churches that were like families, in which everyone knew and loved the offender and the offended person. This third part of His instruction could never be followed in large, modern churches without it resulting in a church split. In such cases, the third step should be administered in a small group of believers who all know and love both parties.)

If the offender doesn't receive the church's call to repentance, he should, according to Jesus, be "treated like a Gentile or tax-gatherer" (Matt. 18:17). That sounds quite "intolerant," doesn't it? Some professing Christians might accuse a church that followed this practice of being "intolerant" and "unloving." But the truth is, those churches who are tolerant in this respect are the ones that are not loving. They help deceive unrepentant sinners within their ranks to think they are on the road to eternal life.

In any case, we see that when Jesus said, "Judge not," He could not have meant that we are not to judge in any sense those within the church, otherwise He contradicted Himself in other places, and Paul contradicted Him as well. The truth, as we have seen, is that Christians are to judge, in some sense, unbelievers, spiritual leaders and believers. Thus it seems that we don't need less judgment by Christ's followers these days; we need more judgment. We've been entrusted, by God Himself, with the very important responsibility to judge--and primarily to keep the church pure. What could be more important than that?

The world judges Christianity by looking at the Church, and based on that judgment, it naturally makes a decision about Christ. What do you suppose most Muslims have decided, and why?

Regardless, our God-given responsibility to judge shouldn't surprise us. Scripture says that we will one day judge the world and angels (see 1 Cor. 6:1-3)! If we ever hope, however, to judge the world and angels in the future, we must properly judge now.

### Judging Righteously

In all of these cases when Scripture instructs us to make judgments about people, we must be cautious that we don't make assumptions and wrongly judge anyone. In regard to Himself, Jesus once said to some of His detractors, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Similarly, God commanded every Israelite in the Law of Moses:

You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people....You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him (Lev. 19:15-17, emphasis added.)

If you've ever been a victim of people's wrong judgments or been slandered, you know how much it hurts. We should therefore take every precaution that we don't make wrong judgments about others, much less spread our wrong judgments to others, which amounts to slander. Our judgments should be based on facts, and we should always strive to believe the best until we know the worst. And if we love fellow believers whom we judge, we will speak to them first, and not others, about their sin as the scripture we just read says. In the case of false believers and false teachers (who are of course unbelievers), a different rule applies, as is clear from Paul's instructions and dealings with the immoral man in Corinth. False teachers, especially, should be publicly exposed.

Not only should our judgments be based on truthful facts, they should be based on scriptural truth as well. For example, Scripture does not give us the right to determine that someone is not saved because he drank a glass of wine or because she doesn't wear her hair in a bun.

We must also be cautious that we don't judge what is impossible to judge. For example, we don't know the motives of people's hearts (see 1 Cor. 4:5).

On the other hand, according to Jesus, there are times when we do know something about what is in people's hearts, and we can judge righteously in this regard to some degree. Jesus told us,

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark. 7:21-23, emphasis added).

I remember once being rebuked by a parishioner because I said that a certain political leader who claimed to be a Christian was certainly not a Christian because of his immoralities and lies. "You don't know what is in his heart," I was told.

However, not only did I make my statement based upon the fact that Scripture tells us not to be deceived in this matter (that no adulterers will inherit God's kingdom and that all liars will be cast into the lake of fire), but actually, in this case, I knew what everyone else could and should have known about what was in that particular adulterer's heart--adultery.

We know and can thus judge what is in the heart of every adulterer when he or she committed his or her sin--adultery. Likewise, theft was in the heart of the thief, murder was in the heart of the murderer, and deceit is in the heart of the deceiver. In all of these cases and others like them, we can judge what is in people's hearts. Of course, if people repent, their hearts change, but repentance of the heart is also something that shows up on the outside and can thus be righteously judged. As hard as it is for us to accept this in an age when "toleration" is the word, that is precisely why John wrote,

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious [that is, it is easy to judge who is saved and who is not]: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother (1 John 3:10, emphasis added).

Do you believe this? By this criteria, there are multitudes of people who consider themselves born again within the church who are actually children of the devil, and we have the clear biblical right to make such a judgment. Although they may assure themselves that they love the brethren and are thus vindicated as true believers, what many call "the love of the brethren" is nothing more (and often much less) than the kind of camaraderie shared by unbelievers within their own institutions, whether the Masonic Lodge or the neighborhood card club. Just observe some professing believers when they don't get their selfish way and see how much they love the brethren. Or observe them when they are given an opportunity to deny themselves for the sake of their impoverished or persecuted brothers and sisters in underdeveloped countries. Or study their reaction to anyone who preaches biblical righteousness. It becomes quite obvious, just as the Bible plainly declares, who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

So What Did Jesus Mean?

Having now considered what Jesus could not have meant when He commanded His followers not to judge, let us consider what He must have meant. Let's first read His words in context, as reading contextually usually makes all the difference:

Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at 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," and behold, the log is 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 (Matt. 7:1-5).

Clearly, in light of the greater and lesser context of Jesus' command not to judge, He was speaking about the sin of searching for small flaws in fellow believers (thrice He speaks of "brothers" in this passage) by those who have bigger faults. As Jesus warned, God will hold us to the same standard to which we hold others. He doesn't appreciate those who don't practice what they preach. Those who do are in danger of

being judged by God, and He often does so by exposing their hypocrisy. So if we point out the faults of others when we are guilty of the same or greater faults, we are guilty of the kind of judgment that Jesus here forbids.

But don't read more into what Jesus said in Matthew 7:1-5 than what is there. Read exactly what He said. Jesus did not completely forbid finding fault (or "judging" in that sense), and if He did, it would contradict much of what He said elsewhere. Note that Jesus said, "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" (Matt. 7:5, emphasis added). That is, first repent yourself, then help others to repent. Too many of us are stagnant in this regard, examining neither ourselves nor helping anyone else after our repentance. We have a superficial relationship with God and a superficial relationship with each other. We've nurtured a complacent attitude that either says, "Hey...I'm OK, you're OK...we're all OK," or worse than that: "Look, we're all just a bunch of sinners here, so let's have another round of grace. And d--n those blasted holier-than-thous who are always trying to make us feel guilty!" Neither attitude lends itself to spiritual growth.

Jesus would have us remove the specks from the eyes of our brothers and sisters--but only after we have removed the logs from our own. That is what He said. This means that we have the biblical responsibility to judge one other category of people: ourselves (see also Psalm 139:23; 1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5). If we are to help others enjoy all the blessings of holiness (a true act of love on our part), we must first be holy ourselves.

Nobody receives correction from those whom they don't respect and those whose own faults are glaring. And God becomes angry with those who hold others to a standard by which they themselves don't live. Such people are hypocrites, as Jesus said, pretending to be what they are not. How many preachers (like myself) have heard the stinging yet loving words of their spouses on a Sunday afternoon, "Great sermon today, honey. You really ought to consider living it yourself!"? Ouch!

One Final Thought...

Please note that every scripture we've considered in this teaching is addressed, not to pastors, but to every follower of Christ. This leaves us with one overriding thought: Every believer is expected by God to be passionate and active in the pursuit of personal and corporate holiness. Paul didn't tell the pastors in Corinth to judge and remove the wicked man from among them. (In fact, Paul gave no specific instructions to pastors, elders, or overseers in either of his letters to the Corinthians or in the majority of his other letters, a significant fact.) Removing the wicked man was something every member of the body was to be involved in. Similarly, Jesus made it clear that every believer has responsibility to judge spiritual leaders by their fruit so that no wolves in sheep's clothing will lead the church away from holiness. Every believer, according to what we read, should judge and not associate with those who claim to be Christ's yet who practice unrighteousness, lest the church be stained before the world. Every Christian should judge himself and remove the logs from his own eyes so he can be personally pure and can then see clearly to remove the specks from his brothers' eyes. How many of us have a relationship with God and other believers like that?

May God have mercy on us and help us to grow up! And may judgment, biblical judgment, increase within Christ's church.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-servant/judge-not/>

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