

To Judge or Not to Judge

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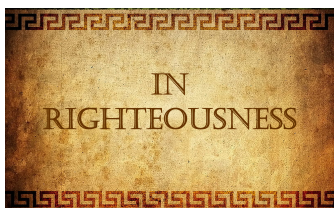
We live in a culture in which moral relativism is becoming more and more prevalent to the point where only THE most immoral acts are seen as evil and some even dispute whether there is such a thing as evil. Objective realities are being rejected as a standard for what is truth in favour of subjective feelings so that the emphasis is no longer ‘the truth’ but ‘my truth’.

The upshot of this trend is that when truth is erased, anything goes because there is no longer a standard to judge what is right and what is wrong. Everybody does what is right in their own eyes, and anybody who advocates for the truth is a hater and a bigot deserving of censure. This is why Matthew 7:1 is a popular Bible text among non-Bible-believing people when issues of morality arise. The implication is drawn from Jesus’ command to “Judge not”, that nobody has the right to reprove anybody else for who they are or what they do. Many people use this verse in an attempt to silence their critics, interpreting Jesus’ words to mean that all actions are equally moral.

To understand what Jesus means, we must not lose the context of His words. He clarifies His point with the follow-up, “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? . . . Hypocrite! (v3-4). The warning is against condemning others in the face of our own duplicity. Jesus advocates for judging when He counsels, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine” (v6). To heed the instruction we have to be able to differentiate who are the dogs and pigs and who are not. Again, He states, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.” There is a vast difference between hypocritical judgment and the judgment of discernment.



The reality is that we judge people every day, and quite rightly so. Without judging people, we cannot avoid ‘bad company’ (1 Corinthians 15:33). Without judging people, we cannot choose effective leaders. We make judgements when we select a spouse. Parents make judgements about who they entrust with their children. Judging others is not only permissible but also essential to our spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing.



Jesus also validated judging others by stating, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). In the context of this passage, Jesus advises against judging superficially at face value, but rather judge with wisdom and understanding. Spiritual discernment is an attribute of God’s Spirit operating in our hearts enabling us to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (Timothy 4:2). The

ability to use our God-given discernment enables us to distinguish between right and wrong and helps to set us apart as His children. It is because of our commitment to His values that we can follow His counsel, “You shall do no injustice in judgment . . . In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour” (Leviticus 19:15).