

Judging By God's Standard
(Matthew 7:1-5)
By Randy Wages
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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction

Be turning in your Bibles to Matthew Chapter 7 as today we will continue our study of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. As we begin, let's keep in mind once more the overall theme of the Sermon on the Mount (the Gospel of the kingdom) and all that Christ has said up until now concerning the Gospel of the kingdom. Remember that He is not referring to a kingdom with physical borders but rather a dominion, a reign of grace ó grace reigning through righteousness. As we've covered over and over, righteousness refers to that which Christ came to do and did accomplish as a Substitute in perfect satisfaction to the law and justice of God, rendering perfect, sinless obedience to all of God's revealed will. And in the culmination of His obedience, His death on the cross, He paid the debt for all the sins that were laid upon Him, that were imputed to Him (or charged to His account), so that He bore the demerit otherwise due unto those sinners He represented ó the just dying for the unjust. And this very accomplishment of our Lord, God imputed (or reckoned) to the account of every sinner for whom Christ died ó imputing the merit of all that He accomplished in His life and death ó righteousness. And thereby, a multitude of otherwise unjust sinners are declared to be just or justified before God the Father.

Now, as we begin chapter 7, Christ continues to remain consistent with that central message. And He begins with 2 words that are perhaps quoted out of context as often as any other words in the Bible. Chapter 7 begins, "**Judge not,...**" But let me say up front that today I'll actually be asking you to make some judgments. And I hope you'll see that in doing so, I will not be in any way contradicting our Lord's instructions here, but rather, when considered in the context, I believe you'll see how these words are actually consistent with His commands throughout the scriptures for us to deliberately make judgments. We will see He actually commands us to judge, but not according to the wrong standard. We'll see that's what this passage is all about.

The issue here is the standard of judgment and the message communicated here in verse 1 of Matthew 7, when considered in context, is “judge not” by the wrong standard. Accordingly, I’ve titled today’s message, “Judging By God’s Standard.” So let’s look at the first 5 verses of Matthew 7 where our Lord continues saying:

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. ²For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. ³And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? ⁴Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? ⁵Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

As I’ve alluded to already, this passage begins with one of the most misquoted and misunderstood verses in the Bible. It is all too common when people hear preaching, teaching, or even engage in a discussion that challenges their religious doctrine, their body of faith, that instead of objectively considering the message and assessing the validity of their own beliefs, they instead “shoot the messenger” so to speak. And they often do so by citing back to them these two words, “Judge Not,” dismissing out of hand any consideration of what they are hearing under the premise that, “You must be wrong because you are willing to make judgments and draw conclusions based upon one’s doctrinal views.” Often even the proclamation of the Gospel — this very message of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount that sets forth His own Person and work, His righteousness, as the one standard by which all shall be judged — it (the declaration of the Gospel) is erroneously perceived by some to be sinfully in violation of God’s command to “Judge not.”

Think of that. If there was any validity to that mindset, then we would be compelled to ignore God’s command to spread His Gospel so that we could avoid committing this imagined sin and to insure our compliance with these words, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Typically when this rebuke is issued, it often carries with it the suggestion that your doctrinal distinctions are “mean spirited” or they are too narrow minded in sharp contrast to the implied broadmindedness boasted of by the one delivering the rebuke.

But listen, such an exchange is not merely some trivial difference of opinion pertaining to one's degree of tolerance or open mindedness, but rather it pertains to the eternally vital issue of the standard by which all of us shall ultimately be judged. So today, I ask all who hear this message to strive to objectively consider what they hear by assessing its validity based upon the only infallible standard of truth ó God's Word itself. While as natural born sinners we all initially are apt to consider the Gospel message as too narrow minded, it serves us well to keep in mind that just a few verses further down in chapter 7, Christ will declare that we'd best be considering a "narrow" way for He says that it ó not the broad one, but the narrow ó leads unto eternal life.

Now as I begin to discuss these verses, as a point of interest I think you'd also find that the same understanding of this passage can also be applied to the first few verses of Romans 2. I bring this up because this is another passage which is often taken out of context in much the way our text for today has been abused. So, in light of the confusion that abounds over these passages, we'd take a few minutes to refute 2 popular misinterpretations, specifically as it relates to Matthew 7:1, "Judge not":

- 1) The obvious error of interpreting Matthew 7:1 to mean that all judgments are absolutely forbidden
- 2) The error of interpreting this verse as a conditional scenario so as to imply that by complying with the premise ó i.e. ó by not judging others, you thereby will insure that others do not judge you. They read it, "Judge not, that (or "in order that") you be not judged" ó so that you'd avoid the harsh judgments of others.

First, it takes little consideration of the context to quickly dismiss the idea that Christ is forbidding any and all judgments with His discourse that begins, "Judge not." To begin with these 2 words don't stand alone. It is important that we consider verses 1 and 2 (and for that matter verses 1 ó 5) together as collectively communicating one principle. Note that the opening phrase of verse 2 itself which begins, "***For with what judgment you judge,...***" presupposes that judgments will be made. Then a few verses later down in verse 6, He instructs them to "***Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, ...***" Now that too presupposes that a judgment must be made as to who Christ is referring to as "dogs" and "swine."

Then just a few verses further down in verse 15 He says, **“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing,...”** To heed this warning, judgments must be made to identify these false prophets ó wolves in sheep’s clothing. In verse 16, He says, **“Ye shall know them by their fruits”** carrying the suggestion as to how we should be judging. The Bible is full of similar warnings and commands to be on the alert, identify, and reject the many false prophets, counterfeit christs, and counterfeit gospels so pervasive in this religious world.

So, it should be obvious that Christ is not forbidding any and all judgments. That is not the issue, and most who defensively cry “Judge not” are not thinking but rather reacting to the offensiveness of the Gospel message itself (what the Bible calls the “offense of the cross”) ó a message that is naturally offensive to all by nature. We naturally want to think that salvation is in our hands and the Gospel of grace declares otherwise. And that’s offensive to natural man, as John 3 tells us, **“...men loved darkness rather than light.”**

But in reality we all judge all things. Consider this: If we exercise faith of any kind, it must have some object ó we must believe “something.” Whatever this “something” is, we have judged it to be true and its antithesis to be false. If from the world’s smorgasbord of religion, we conclude any one religion to be doctrinally accurate or, conversely, any to be doctrinally false, then we have made a judgment. Do you claim to be a Christian? If so, then you have made a judgment. Don’t you accurately conclude that a Muslim is not a Christian? If so, again you have made a judgment. Right now, you will judge today whether what I’m telling you is true or false, and so it should be.

Sadly, we’ve all encountered some who stop short in their examination of the vital doctrinal issues at hand because of their reluctance to align themselves with that which is so offensive to the natural mind. They cry, “Judge not,” as if their refusing to make any judgment is a badge of honor, reflecting the presumption that their love and humility towards others is in sharp contrast to the one daring to proclaim something contrary to that which they currently believe. Listen, in Luke 13, Christ said **“...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”** His word teaches us that such a radical change of mind must and does take place in all those who enter His kingdom ó that unless they repent they will perish. So all who are given spiritual life at some point must come to grips with something diametrically opposed to what they once thought. Otherwise, there is no repentance.

So I hope that you see how irrational such a twisting of God's word is since, in reality, we all judge. I've often suspected that, in many cases, the more honest expression of this objection would sound more like, "Don't judge me" or "Don't judge those I know and care about." But regardless of how you may have understood this passage previously, today I ask all who hear this message to set those thoughts aside and to objectively seek God's truth and to know His standard of judgment, undeterred by the natural aversion that is found in all of us prior to God-given spiritual life.

Secondly, as I mentioned earlier, some erroneously interpret verses 1 and 2 as if Christ is suggesting a conditional scenario that would allow one to avoid the harsh judgments of others. They think that by complying with the misconstrued premise "i.e. by not judging others, you thereby will insure that others will not judge you." "Judge not, that (in order that) you be not judged" as if this is a promise that will allow you to avoid the harsh judgments of others.

Now before you're tempted to concur with this presumed cause and effect relationship, it would do you well to consider Job, Paul, and even our impeccable, Lord who knew no sin. If He "knew no sin," then He could not sinfully have violated His own instruction here. Yet consider the false and cruel charges that came His way. Fickled men cried "Hosanna" one day as he rode triumphantly in Jerusalem and shortly thereafter cried "Crucify Him." So we see that even Christ, who loved perfectly, did not escape the harsh judgment of others as might be expected if this was what our Lord meant when He said, "Judge not that ye be not judged."

The idea that we can avoid the harsh judgments of others by withholding making any judgments of our own would be contrary to the whole tenor of the Sermon on the Mount. Christ is not all of a sudden shifting gears here in chapter 7 so as to promote a secular motive, prompting us to act based upon how we will be judged or esteemed by others. The Bible teaches us the exact opposite. Remember what He said in Luke 16:15: "**...for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.**" No, in our text today He is still speaking of judgments made in the realm of His kingdom "the kingdom which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Christ Himself."

So, just what is meant here? I can tell you this; it was a far nobler motive in our Lord's mind and a far weightier issue than just some helpful tip on how we might be considered in a better light by our fellow man. Christ is not suggesting that we link our judgments with the judgments of other men, but rather in accordance with the judgments of God. He is talking about the standard for making judgments of eternal significance. Consider that the Gospel message itself demands a judgment. Believe the Gospel or the Gospel of His kingdom or and be saved; believe not and be damned (Mark 16:15-16). Upon hearing the Gospel, one must either believe it or reject it. Either way, a judgment is made.

Hold your place there in Matthew 7 and turn with me to John 7:24. This is a verse that many of you are familiar with but I think it's good that we see with our own eyes what Christ says there. Here in John 7:24, our Lord is speaking and He says, "***Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.***" So based on Christ's own words as recorded here in John 7, (unless you believe the Bible to be contradictory), it should be obvious that simply judging (or not judging) is not the issue of Matthew 7. As I've said, He is addressing the standard by which we judge. We are to judge righteous judgment.

Now back in Matthew 7, note in vs. 2 that Christ said, ***For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*** Literally that reads, "With what for judgment ye judge" – In other words, by whatever standard you use for judgment or ye shall be judged accordingly. When He says "with what measure ye mete" or that word "mete" simply means measure. So, again, He is saying by whatever standard you make this measurement, it shall likewise be applied to you.

Now if you think back to all Christ has said up until this point in His sermon, you will recall that He has set forth the standard of judgment for entrance into His kingdom and it is unambiguous. He has made clear in Matt. 5:20 that except your righteousness exceeds the best of the best, the scribes and Pharisees put together, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. He then proceeded to point out the extent of the law, telling them how even their ill will (anger) toward their worst enemy would place them as liable before a Holy God as if they had committed the outward act of murder, showing them that our sinfulness and unfitness went way beyond our outward actions.

He had shown that it was absolutely necessary if any are to be judged righteous before God, that it must be based upon a righteousness outside of themselves ó one provided for them and freely made theirs by God's merciful application of it to them ó by imputation ó the charging of it to their account. Remember what Christ Himself said He came to do back in Matt. 5:17-18 ó to fulfill the law perfectly, every jot and tittle.ö And then He summarized in Matt 5:48 just how righteous they would have to be if they were to meet the conditions for their own salvation when He said, ***“Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”***

Now here in the first verses of chapter 7 Christ is staying right on subject and this is the measurement stick to which He is referring. In essence, I believe He is saying that if you insist on judging the life and death issues that He has been speaking of throughout His sermon (and specifically the entrance requirements into the kingdom of heaven itself) based upon a measurement of something proceeding from you, then you will be judged by that which you are able to produce.

Recall Paul's sermon on Mars Hill recorded in Acts 17 where the standard of our eternal judgment is unmistakably set forth as Paul declares how God calls on men everywhere to repent and in verse 31, he explains why, saying, ***“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”*** That's the standard of judgment. If you insist on your meeting some condition in order to be saved, to enter heaven's glory ó of measuring something done by you, in you, or through you, then the performance of that something must equal that of the one whose performance insured His victory over death ó the God-man, the Son of God incarnate, the Lord of glory. You must be as righteous as Jesus Christ Himself.

You see, His righteousness is the standard. At issue, is how will you judge? How will you measure? Do you insist on resting in salvation based upon something you've done or presume to have been enabled to do (your faith, your willingness to receive Jesus, your decision to accept Him, your willingness to pray the sinner's prayer, your willingness to receive Him into your heart, your willingness to accept that which you presume He has merited for you if you'd just do your part and believe)?

Listen ó I don't care what it is ó if you insist on judging yourself or others to be saved because of anything other than or in addition to the righteousness of God established by Christ and that freely imputed (or charged) to your account ó then know that it will be your performance that will be measured against the perfect sinless righteousness of Christ ó His performance. Is your faith so strong and unwavering that you choose to be judged for all eternity based upon that? Sadly, if you persist in judging to possess any merit before God based upon something proceeding from you, then you'll be judged accordingly.

Now that should be distressing if you're still among those who so judge (as we all initially do). But listen, there's also some wonderful news found in these very same words of our Lord. If you judge righteous judgment ó that is, if your standard of judgment results in you rightly concluding that there is no hope outside of Christ, outside of the one righteousness He produced in complete and full satisfaction to the law and justice of God ó then the measurement which shall be applied to you is likewise none other than this very one which has graciously been revealed to you. Only those such as Christ described in the first part of His sermon as eternally õblessedö are given a new mind and heart that would cause them to adopt God's standard of judgment as their own.

If your entire hope is wrapped up in Christ, based upon the one righteousness He established at the cross, then that itself is an evidence of your having been justified by His blood, of having His righteousness charged to your account. How do we know that? The scriptures tell us that none will come to Him but those whom the Father gave to Christ the Son, those for whom He lived and died ó to whom God imputed (or charged to the account of) the merit of all that Christ accomplished in His life and death.

You see, when one is convinced by God the Holy Spirit of the impossibility of measuring up to God's standard of judgment based upon anything proceeding from them, the sinner, and that nothing other than His righteousness imputed will justify them before the Father, then and only then are they judging righteous judgment. And the spiritual life that provides that discernment is the purchased result and effect provided only to those who have already been justified ó made righteous in Him ó because of what He merited for them.

So to judge by God's standard ó to judge righteous judgment ó is to see that He did not save you because you believed or because you submitted to His standard of judgment but rather it is to see that you believed and submitted to His standard of judgment because He saved you ó because God credited to your account the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's all of God!

As simple as that may seem, it is a vital distinction. As sinners, we are determined to cling to some remaining remnant of the natural religion of works ó and it takes such subtle forms that it's only perceived when God gives us the eyes to see differently. For example: As many of you know, not so long ago, until we were taught differently, most of us here held the view that justification by the blood of Christ was not applied to the sinner until a time in close proximity to the time of faith. Now for years we were clearly and accurately taught that faith, our believing, had no causal role in our salvation and that faith was merely the fruit and effect of that which Christ merited for us in His life and death. But in spite of that clear teaching, in hindsight we now see that the error as to "when" righteousness was imputed apparently contributed towards some concluding that the righteousness established by Christ at the cross didn't quite complete the job ó perhaps imagining that their exercise of faith actually procured His blessing (the righteousness established at the cross) rather than the other way around. And of course, that would be equivalent to trusting in another righteousness to finish the job ó something in addition to the one righteousness that procures all of our salvation.

Now like most of you, I'm thankful for the teaching we've since received on this issue and for God's continual teaching for that matter. But if you think about it, doctrinal accuracy over the timing of justification will not in and of itself correct the problem for anyone if their real problem was in having assigned to their faith (their believing) some sort of efficacy or causal role in their salvation. You can be doctrinally correct on some things, including having a corrected understanding concerning the timing of justification, but if you believe that you're given spiritual life because of having learned better concerning this or any other important truth that pertains to the Gospel, then that too would be equivalent to placing your hope in another righteousness ó i.e. trusting in something in addition to the one righteousness ó i.e. trusting in something in addition to the one righteousness that not only justifies us but thereby, procures for us all grace here and all glory hereafter ó all of our salvation, even our faith and growth in grace.

In studying various scriptures, time after time it's impressed upon me that the issues of judgment always seem to reduce down to whether (a) one perceives their salvation to be all of grace, based solely upon His righteousness, or (b) whether they tragically insist on some remaining, tainting element of works ó something done by, in or through the sinner that they imagine contributes toward their acceptance before God or the procurement of His blessing.

So for the sake of emphasis, remember this: To judge by God's standard ó to judge righteous judgment ó is to see that He didn't save you because you believed or because you submitted to His truth or standard of judgment (that would make faith a work) but rather it is to see that you believed and submitted to His truth and standard of judgment because He saved you from your sins, because He justified you ó because God charged to your account the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Getting this order wrong may seem trivial but it is not. Putting the cart before the horse so to speak, in this case is deadly. As Jonah said, *"salvation is of the Lord"* ó the whole kit and caboodle!

Now let's briefly look again at verses 3 ó 5 where Christ uses a metaphor of a òmoteö or a òbeamö in the eye. A òmoteö is a dry twig, a straw, or a something small like a splinter, whereas the òbeamö refers to a large timber like a cross beam. And the eye speaks of our understanding or faculty of spiritual discernment. And these foreign objects in our eye would refer to that which would hinder our understanding. So a òmoteö would certainly be a hindrance. But a òbeamö suggests something that would completely obstruct our vision (our spiritual discernment).

Now both of these objects would refer to sins prevalent in a person's life, but one, the òmoteö (being smaller) would refer to that which would merely hinder our discernment. As such, I think the mote refers to the sins of character and conduct common to all without exception when judged by the strict standard of God's law ó summarized as love God perfectly and our neighbor as ourselves. We all have òmotesö so to speak because we all are sinners and we will be so until we depart from these bodies of sin.

But notice when He speaks of the òbeam,ö He says in verse 3, *"...considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye."* That word òconsiderestö means to weigh carefully, the suggestion being that this one hasn't yet seriously considered the beam that would totally block their vision

ó their spiritual discernment or understanding. He calls any who would attempt to address others faults of character and conduct (the ðmotesö in their eyes) while unperceptive of the ðbeamö in their own eye a ðhypocriteö who cannot see clearly.

I believe the ðbeamö here would refer to the self-righteousness common to all prior to God-given faith and repentance (that is ó to all unbelievers) who would judge the vital issues of saved and lost, fit or unfit for heaven, based upon the sin that deceives all men by nature. This is what Paul called the **“deceivableness of unrighteousness”** in 2 Thess. 2. That is the sin of which we all are initially guilty. Itø a sin exercised in our natural religious thoughts. Itø the deadly sin of expecting and judging salvation based upon anything other than (or in addition to) the one righteousness of God wrought out by Christ in His perfect obedience unto death ó unrighteousness ó something other than the one standard by which all shall be judged ó His righteousness.

As Iøve mentioned, notice that verse 5 begins with **“Thou hypocrite...”** Christ had used this same description, ðhypocrite,ö earlier in the sermon back in chapter 6 vs. 5 in describing those who pray to be seen of men, adding they have their reward. See, they too will receive their reward according to that which they seek. Do you see the parallel? If you think salvation is conditioned on you, the sinner, then youøll be judged as to whether you met the condition and youøll have your reward (the esteem of likeminded sinners), but itø not of His kingdom. And here when Christ rebukes such a one saying, ð**Thou hypocrite,**” I believe He is describing most of organized religion today where the focus of the message is on something other than the cross of Christ. By the ðcrossö I mean focusing on what was accomplished there where, by His righteousness, Godø people were justified ó their sins put away then and there by the shedding of His precious blood.

Instead, the tendency of manø religion is to focus on whatever condition they think makes the difference (as would be logical). If they believe men can gain acceptance before God and enter heaven if theyøll only believe ðsomething,ö then their focus is understandably on getting them to believe whatever that ðsomethingö is. If they imagine that salvation is acquired by living an upright, moral lifestyle, attending church, sincere interest in religion, then their emphasis is on promoting just that.

That's not to say that compliance with God's revealed will in these areas isn't important, but listen ó when that becomes the focal point so as to comprise their õgospelö message (how sinners are saved), then it's akin to focusing on getting those õmotesö taken care of by those who are all the while oblivious to the õbeamö that completely obstructs their own spiritual discernment ó the self-righteousness of presuming any part of salvation to be conditioned on themselves in some way or to some degree, based upon something other than or in addition to the righteousness of God in Christ. That's unrighteousness. And they consider or perceive it not. As such, you can see why Paul calls it the õdeceivableness of unrighteousness.ö

So we come to see that before hearing and being brought to believe with the heart God's true Gospel, our standard of judgment is fatally flawed. And this is true of all of us unless and until God is pleased to show us different in the day of His power. In the Gospel message itself, that standard is revealed. We discover that we must possess a perfect righteousness that we are unable to produce it. While John 7:24 does begin with a command to not judge by outward appearance, we must not miss that it also commands us to deliberately judgeô to õjudge righteous judgment.ö To do this, we must judge according to truth. Being sinners, the only way we can judge righteously then is to judge according to God's truth.

Do you see the implications of this as it pertains to the most important judgment of allô the one regarding your own state and eternal destiny? If we fail to adopt God's standard of judgment, Christ's perfect righteousness, then by whatever standard we judge others, we too shall be judged. So any who judge salvation to be conditioned upon something done by them, in them, or through them, they in turn shall be judged accordingly. If you persist in thinking salvation is conditioned on you, the sinner, then you'll ultimately be judged as to whether you met the condition with perfection equal to that of the impeccable, spotless Son of God.

For the 1st 30 years or so of my life that's how I judged. But today, I continue to rejoice that God (in His time) revealed to me His strict, holy requirement of perfection through the preaching of His Gospel, revealing that my salvation could not be and was not conditioned upon anything proceeding from me (not even upon my belief of His true Gospel). You see, I would not want to be judged accordingly, based on that which proceeds from me, a sinner.

God graciously shows His people that even their belief of true doctrine won't measure up and is deadly if it's mistakenly placed in rivalry with that which did get the job done ó the work Christ finished in His obedience unto death. You see, one's belief in the truth doesn't procure the righteousness of God in Christ. His righteousness procures one's belief in the truth.

Knowing that God never changes and must judge in accordance with His strict holiness and justice, I pray you too can rejoice in finding your fitness in Christ alone, not having your own righteousness which is of the law, derived from something produced by you, through you, or in you ó but based solely upon the one perfect righteousness produced by and residing even now in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that made freely yours by God's judicial imputation of it to you. Now to judge according to that standard is to judge by God's standard. I pray God will draw all who hear this message to adopt His standard of judgment, that they might judge righteous judgment!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.

Randy Wages