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QUESTION

What does it mean to judge not lest you be judged (Matthew 7:1)?



ANSWER

“Judge not lest you be judged” is a snippet from Christ’s great [Sermon on the Mount](#) ([Matthew 5:3—7:27](#)). In [Matthew 7](#), Jesus turns to the topic of judging others. Sadly, the passage is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied teachings in Scripture by believers and non-believers alike. In his commentary on Matthew, Stuart Weber gives this excellent summary of the correct meaning of [Matthew 7:1](#): “Do not judge others until you are prepared to be judged by the same standard. And then, when you exercise judgment toward others, do it with humility” (*Holman New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 96).



When Jesus said, “[Judge not](#) lest you be judged,” He wasn’t issuing a blanket rule that people are never to judge others. A closer look at the rest of the passage illuminates the real issue Christ wanted to address: “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye” ([Matthew 7:1–3, NLT](#)).

Christ’s teaching was primarily directed to believers, but the principle can be applied to anyone. Jesus does expect us to “deal with the speck” in our friend’s eye, particularly our brothers and sisters in Christ. He wants us to discern sin in others so we can help them get rid of it. The purpose of judging someone else’s weakness is to help him or her walk in freedom ([1 Corinthians 5:12](#)). But how can we help someone else if we are not free? We must first be willing to look honestly at our own lives and exercise the same judgment toward ourselves. When we do this, we judge from a position of [humility](#).

Jesus’s statement to “judge not lest you be judged” zeroed in on the problems of spiritual [hypocrisy](#) and self-centered pride. He compared these offenses to giant logs that blind us to our own faults while we laser in on shortcomings in others.

Humility is a mega theme throughout Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. It is impossible to carry out these kingdom teachings without maintaining authentic humbleness in our attitude toward others. In [Matthew 5:7–11](#), Jesus encouraged His followers to show mercy, cultivate peace, and bless those who persecute them. To enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said that our righteousness had to exceed that of the teachers of the religious law and Pharisees ([Matthew 5:20](#)).

These [Pharisees](#) and teachers of the law were considered to be the pinnacle of moral integrity at the time. Jesus stopped this misconception right in its tracks. He saw through the outer veneer into the reality of their [self-righteousness](#), spiritual pride, and moral bankruptcy.

Jesus challenged the people not to retaliate when someone wronged them ([Matthew 5:39](#)); to love their enemies and pray for those who persecuted them (verse 44); to model themselves after their heavenly Father’s perfection (verse 48); and to forgive those who sinned against them ([Matthew 6:14–15](#)).

A faithful servant of God will see himself as accurately as he sees others. He will recognize his own sinfulness and need for God’s mercy—a need he shares with his brothers and sisters in Christ.



have no reason to consider himself better than others but will follow Paul's teaching to the Philippians: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" ([Philippians 2:3](#)).

When Christ taught, "Judge not lest you be judged," He countered the human tendency to take spiritual truth and twist it into hypocritical superiority as the Pharisees had done. Our pride makes us criticize and judge others so that we feel better about ourselves. James warned believers, "Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?" ([James 4:11-12, NLT](#))

The apostle Paul cautioned, "You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things?" ([Romans 2:1-3, NLT](#), see also [Romans 14:4, 10-13](#)).

Jesus requires true followers to apply His teachings first to themselves and then to others. When God reveals His truth to us, whether in Scripture or in some other way, our immediate response must be to say, "How does this apply to me? How do I appropriate this truth in my own life?" In following Jesus' command to "judge not, that you be not judged" ([Matthew 7:1, NKJV](#)), we avoid drawing conclusions that are superficial, proud, hypocritical, or self-righteous.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- [Matthew: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament by Grant Osborne](#)
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