

“Judge Not...”

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When Jesus said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Mat. 7:1), he was not merely uttering good advice, but a prohibition—a strong negative command. Unless we understand what kind of “judging” the Lord prohibits, we will do much abuse to this passage. His prohibition must be understood in harmony with the immediate context and with other words He said on the same subject. In the immediate context He warned, “Neither cast your pearls before the swine,” and “Beware of false prophets” (vv. 6, 15). Both warnings require some judging of one’s fellow man to determine who is a “swine” and who is a “false prophet.” Obviously, therefore, the Lord was not forbidding us to form an opinion about someone’s character when he said, “Judge not.” He elsewhere commanded us to “Judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). The kind of judging Jesus forbade is the unjust judgment of the double standard that can see the tiniest fault in others but cannot see even major flaws in one’s own conduct (note the Lord’s “mote” and “beam” illustration [Mat. 7:3-5]). Hypercritical faultfinding that makes no allowances for any flaws in others needs to be exposed and recognized for what it is:

- **It is a morbid habit.** One can be like a buzzard that concentrates on finding rotting carcasses or he can be like a hummingbird that seeks sweet nectar. Jesus forbade us to have the “buzzard” approach to life that is always seeking and seeing only the worst and is ready to feast on it and spread it to others. Such harsh judgments blind us to that which is good and beautiful.
- **It blinds one to his/her own faults.** The chronic faultfinder rarely does any of this work on oneself. In condemning the mote-hunter, Jesus was not lessening our responsibility to admonish the disorderly or to reprove and rebuke when it is needed. He was warning us of the need for self-criticism. If the super-judges could see themselves for just one day through the eyes of others, it might cure them.
- **We “buy” and “sell” on the same scales.** The Lord taught that one who judges others harshly invites, and will likely receive, the same from others. This practice also works in reverse: “Give and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38). Although many exceptions could be cited, people tend to return to us the same attitude we radiate. God will also judge us at least to some extent according to our judgment of others: “For judgment is without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy” (Jam. 2:13).

It is erroneous to apply the Lord’s *judge not* directive to identifying and opposing who teach and/or practice error. Rather, we must “mark” (Rom. 16:17) and “reprove [and] rebuke” such ones (2 Tim. 4:2).

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