

'Judge Not' and Christian Discernment

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Well, we come to the central aspect of our worship this morning as we do each Sunday for the preaching of God's word. We have the privilege of returning to our series on the Sermon on the Mount. We've been away from it for about three weeks taking care of some other matters that we wanted to address, but now we come back to the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, and I invite you to turn to that Gospel, beginning in chapter 7, as we kind of make the turn toward the completion of the Sermon on the Mount and our exposition of it.

Matthew 7, the first five verses, will be our text for this morning. This is a vital passage for Christian living and I'm excited to be able to spend the next two or three weeks on it with you. Beginning in verse 1, Jesus said,

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 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? 4 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? 5 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."

Then in verse 6 it says,

6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

Now, this is the favorite verse of everybody who does not know Christ. This is the favorite passage of everyone that is not a Christian, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." Perhaps you have had that thrown into your face by people when you tried to talk to them about truth, the error of their thinking, or perhaps the sinfulness of their ways, and you've been met with a quick retort that said, "Don't judge me. You're not my boss. Jesus said do not judge lest you be judged." Well, we're going to address that whole spirit of dealing with that passage here this morning.

On the positive side which we'll talk about more next week, this is a very critical passage for your Christian life. This text guides you in the midst of weighty responsibilities and in dealing with hostile forces, and also gives you a sense of how you are to carry yourself as you interact with men. It is a very crucial passage in that way. But on the negative side, on the distortion side, this passage is a favorite shield for false teachers and for those who are living in sin to protect them and to retaliate and to shield them from any legitimate scrutiny that their lives might require. They misuse the words of Jesus for a purpose that he never intended them to be used for when they say, "Don't judge me. Jesus said judge not so that you will not be judged," and what they are doing is they are seeking to intimidate people into silence that would otherwise bring a proper scrutiny to their lives or to their teaching, and what we need to do today is to dismantle that false use of this passage so that we would be free to understand it going forward and to understand the role that proper discernment has in the life of the Christian. But just to state it plainly at the start, we utterly reject based on Scripture, we utterly reject any spirit that just automatically says to everything critical, "You're not supposed to judge me. I don't answer to you." We reject that use of this passage out of hand as being the exact opposite of what Jesus intended to say here.

Is that what Jesus intended? Well, as always, context is essential to get to the true meaning of a passage and, you know, contrary to what our friends in the world might say, the Bible has a lot more to say simply than, "Judge not." The Bible has 260 chapters just in the New Testament, 39 additional books in the Old Testament, I rather think that there is a lot more to the teaching of Scripture than what one verse could possibly communicate. But here's the truth of the matter: when people use this verse in that way, they are simply showing that they have no real interest in what Scripture says, they just don't want to be bothered. They just don't want legitimate accountability in their life and we need to see that for what it is, we need to reject it and have a clarity of mind so that we are able to represent Christ truly to the world.

Matthew 7, my friends, introduces the final section of the Sermon on the Mount and at the risk of oversimplification and without going into a full review of the 46 messages that have preceded this one on this text of Scripture, you could say that Matthew 5 deals with the character of a disciple of Christ. He opens with the Beatitudes, he goes into the relationship of his disciples to the law, and then expands on the true meaning of the law in verses 21 through 48. So he is addressing character in chapter 5, and then in chapter 6, he goes into the way that the disciple relates to God his Father; to relate to him in sincerity of truth in prayer and almsgiving and in fasting; to have the priority in life of God as the preeminent priority in life; and to see how that plays out in rejecting a spirit of anxiety because being a child of God, as a true Christian, you understand that your Father is in providential control of everything in life and, therefore, part of your honoring him, part of responding to him, is to trust him and to reject a spirit of anxiety that would otherwise mark those who walk in this world. In chapter 7, we are turning the corner and what we're going to see is this as we go through the Sermon on the Mount, is that Jesus is now having led us through character, having led us through the content of a true walk

with God, now he's turning the corner and bringing us face-to-face with the reality of coming judgment.

As I've said from time to time, I've said it more often in the past than I do from this pulpit, you must understand this about the Sermon on the Mount, you must understand this, if you understand nothing else, you walk away with this: Jesus Christ teaches for keeps. He means what he says and when Jesus speaks, there are serious consequences that flow. It grieves my heart, frankly, to see the frivolity that marks so much of what passes for evangelical Christianity today because when you drive motorcycles into a congregation for a prop, when you preach from a bed as a pastor in Texas has done in order to teach a series on marital intimacy, when you just fill your sermons with jokes and lighthearted stories about yourself, everything that you do communicates the fact that this really isn't that serious, this is all just a lighthearted piece of fluff that fits in quite naturally with a view of comedy that you might find on network TV. What we must understand together here in this room and over the live stream, what we must understand as we come to God's word is that that is not the spirit with which Jesus teaches us at all. Jesus is not joking here. He's not a comedian as he speaks in the Sermon on the Mount. No, not at all. Jesus is speaking seriously about weighty matters that culminate in a final appointment of judgment that each man will have before a holy God. That's not something to joke about and it's one of the great travesties of modern Christianity that we have lowered the seriousness and the holiness of God to a point where people don't even take it seriously. Why would the world take it seriously if we don't? If our worship services are comedy hours, why would anyone take anything that we say seriously? Well, we can see that Jesus, that is not the spirit with which Jesus spoke and you can see that clearly in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7 introduces a final section on the Sermon on the Mount that you could call the Christian and coming judgment. And look at the first two verses here, Matthew 7, just to kind of give you the bookends of the chapter to kind of set the context for what we're saying. Matthew 7:1 says,

1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."

Central and underlying the whole of those two verses is Jesus' statement, "You will be judged." My friend, my brother and sister in Christ, we are all moving toward an inevitable appointment with God where we will give an account to him of our lives. Christian and non-Christian alike. We are going to stand before God and he will render judgment upon us and we're going to talk about what that judgment means for Christians more in the next week or two, all I'm saying right now is for you to realize that the Scriptures say you will be judged.

Now, if you've never taken life seriously, maybe you're a young person or a young adult and you've never really taken life seriously and you're just trying to get the most fun out of life that you can, in one sense I can understand that, but there comes a point where you

have to come to grips with the fact that Jesus speaks of a reality of spiritual life in judgment that is about to come. Here's the thing, my friends: you have a brief window of time in your life in order to prepare for that inevitable moment when you stand before a holy God; your life is given to you ultimately to prepare for that moment before God and that's what needs to weigh on your mind and on your thinking. Life is serious. It culminates in the most holy, august setting that you could ever imagine, and with that we also see that that means that there is meaning to life. Life is not meaningless. Life is not a random series of events by a random clump of cells that came together and you live and then you die and you cease to exist. That would be a hopeless thing. No wonder people despair in life when they think that there's no meaning to it. Well, there is ultimate meaning to every soul that's in this room and every one of you has an immortal soul. There is meaning in the fact that your immortal soul is one day going to stand before your Maker and give an account to him. That calls for a serious response, a meaningful response, and Jesus is teaching for keeps, leading us to this point.

Now, look at the end of Matthew 7, or toward the end, just to see the other side of the bookends here. Matthew 7:21, Jesus says,

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, [notice what Jesus says, Jesus says, "I will personally say to them,] 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

Jesus says there will be those that gather before him in judgment anticipating a welcoming into the kingdom of heaven and they will be stunned into silence recognizing that Christ is sending them away. "Depart from Me. I never knew you. During the course of the 70 years of your earthly life, we did not know each other." And they will be stunned saying, "But Lord, I did all these, I manifested all the charismatic gifts, cast out demons, spoke in tongues," and Jesus says, "But you were a worker of iniquity. I didn't know you. Depart from Me." These are holy words not to be trifled with.

And in verse 24, Jesus says and what are we to draw from this for today then? What are we to draw from that in our lives with the reality of this coming judgment? We are, beloved, beloved, we are to take these words earnestly and to take them to heart. Everything that Jesus said we are to give our hearts over to, perhaps in the first instance for some of you to put your faith in him for your salvation. To flee from sin. To flee from the world and say, "Lord, I embrace you by faith because I know I'm a guilty sinner and you are my only hope of salvation." For those that know Christ, to realize that his word is meant to be that which governs our thinking and governs our response to life and is worthy of our devotion and our obedience.

Verse 24 Jesus said, look at it there, he says, "Therefore, " because coming judgment is like that, verse 24, therefore there are consequences, and he divides all of humanity up into two different groups and he says,

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."

Jesus is saying that, "The one who receives my words and responds to them from the heart, is somebody who will survive the coming judgment." He will not be cast away because he has responded to the word of Christ as he has revealed it. He says on the other hand, there is going to be this other group who without exception this will be true, verse 26,

26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall."

So in light of what Jesus has said here, there is no excuse, there will be no legitimate objection at the day of judgment certainly for anyone here under the sound of my voice this morning, certainly no word that says, "But no one ever told me! But this is a surprise! No one indicated that it was serious!" Jesus did. Jesus said, "Take heed. I'm warning you about the coming judgment." What will you do with the warning? How will you respond to it? Will you go on in your triviality and sin? Or will you bend your heart before Christ and respond to him in the way that he calls us to?

You see, here talking now to believers, the true Christian understands that he faces a final accountability before God and that has an effect on the entire way that he thinks about life and the way that he lives it. It motivates him – watch this – it motivates him to hear the words of these sermons and to respond in faith and obedience and not settle for simply outward displays of religion; not simply to go through the motions, to be one person for two hours on Sunday morning and a demon throughout the rest of the week. He realizes that that kind of hypocrisy, that kind of double minded life, is not the reflection of a true disciple. And the fear of God and the fear of Christ motivates him to say, "I have to take this seriously. I have to respond to this and make this my priority, to make Christ and his word the priority in my life," not simply an optional accessory as if it were some kind of necklace that you wear with your favorite dress. No, this is what life is about. This is all. This is everything. The one who responds rightly to Christ has succeeded with his purpose. The one who becomes a king and rejects Christ and his word is a failure and great will be his fall at the end.

So the world has it all upside down and Jesus teaches to clear it up for us. And we're only going to introduce this passage, these first five verses, these first two verses, really, here this morning, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged," and we'll get to some of these other themes in coming days, but A. W. Pink said this about these verses, he said this and I quote, he says, "Unless the meaning of these verses is open to us, we will be at a loss to repel those who would bring us into bondage by the corrupt use they make of it. There are few verses less understood by those who are so ready to cite it and hurl it at the heads of those whom they ignorantly or maliciously suppose are violating it." What he's saying, talking about these words, "Judge not lest ye be judged," A. W. Pink is saying and rightly so, he says that ignorant or malicious people will take these words and hurl them at people to intimidate them into silence but they are using the passage in an entirely wrong way, in a way that it was not intended to be used.

So stepping back and perhaps echoing something that you have had in your own personal experience as you've talked with people, perhaps dealt with pastors in other churches, if you question a man's teaching or if you confront a professing brother who is in sin, he may say, "Don't judge me. Jesus said judge not so that you will not be judged." And that's a very intimidating place to be in. What you need from God's word that we're going to try to give you this morning, is the perspective that will help you stand against that and to exercise proper discernment. That moment in time that plays out in any public discussion of Christian morality, any public discussion of the clear teaching of Scripture, "Judge not," beloved, let me state it plainly so that it cannot be missed: that response, that use of this passage, is sheer manipulation and sheer Scripture twisting that has nothing to do with Jesus' intent in saying these words. It is simply a thinly veiled effort to intimidate a critic into silence.

But let's be honest with one another, that objection has a superficial plausibility, doesn't it? I mean it says right there on the passage, "Do not judge," and so you kind of wonder, "Well, am I off-base here? How am I supposed to think about this?" There is a superficial plausibility that makes you wonder if you're doing the right thing. Well, what I want to do this morning in our time remaining is spend some time on this faulty use of Jesus' words to equip you to deal with such situations. And here's the question, let's frame the question this way: what attorneys are told in their early training is that the one who frames the issue wins the argument, and there is a lot of truth to that. In litigation, the attorney that persuades the judge that he has framed the issue correctly is the one who is likely to win the case. Well, I want to frame the issue for you here this morning in asking you this question. Stay with me. Watch this and it will lead your thinking

into the right direction. Did Jesus intend to insulate false teachers and sinners from accountability with anything that he ever said? Did Jesus intend to give a shield to people who were teaching false doctrine and demonic lies, did he intend to give them a verse that would keep them from being called to account? Is there any possibility that that's what Jesus intended to do in anything that he ever taught? The answer to that question is no. That's impossible. That's not possibly what he meant here. Absolutely not and you can see that even in the immediate context of what we're talking about.

Beloved, here's the thing, as we go through the Christian life, part of righteous living, part of manifesting faithfulness to Christ is this: you practice discernment. Discernment is part of the righteous life. You're not intended to be a gullible person that simply believes everything that you are ever told. You're not meant to give tacit approval to every form of immorality and sinful living that might cross your path. Christians are meant to be discerning people. You must know truth and apply it to the world around you.

Look at verse 6 which I read earlier and again, all of these verses we're going to look at more closely in coming days. We are just introducing really the whole chapter here this morning. But in verse 6, Jesus said,

6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

This may be shocking to some of your ears but what Jesus is saying here is that some men are dogs and some men are hogs and you treat men differently based on the way that they respond to truth, in their attitude toward truth. And people that are openly hostile and mock and denigrate God's word and when it is spoken to them, twist it and mock it and insult it and treat it like it is some profane thing, Jesus says you are to step back and not speak the word of God to them because God's word is so holy and truth is so sacred that you don't hold it up to men who are intentionally and you know that they are just going to ridicule it and treat it like it is some piece of food for pigs. You don't do that, Jesus says. Well, look, how on earth are you going to obey this Scripture that says don't give what is holy to swine if you're not making some kind of judgment about the people that you're interacting with? How can you do that? This verse is meaningless if we just have a blank slate toward everyone and treat everyone equally without any sense of degree of discernment. You could never make that judgment if what – here's the point – if what these critics say is true, you're never to judge anything. That can't be what Jesus is saying.

Even more clearly than that, look at chapter 7, verse 15, and I invite you, I ask you to let your eyes go to the text here and to see it for yourself. Jesus says in verse 15,

15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits."

What is he saying here? He's warning us clearly saying, "There are true teachers and there are false teachers and you need to know the difference between them, what is true, what is false." And then he goes on to help you and say, "Here's how you'll know the distinction, you'll know them by the fruits of their lives and the fruits of their teaching." What's he saying, beloved, except that he's giving you discernment so that you can make judgments about what is true and what is false and order your life accordingly? When you have reason to know that a man is a false teacher because he is contradicting Scripture and biblical doctrine in what he teaches over time, or you see a minister of sin claiming to be a minister of Christ, you look at that and say, "No way. I may not be able to explain everything, I can know a tree by the fruit it bears." Jesus says, "When you can

do that, then you do not give a man like that a platform to speak into your life. You don't give a man your obedience. You don't trust him to teach you because you can see by his life that he is a false teacher." And Jesus says, "Beware of them, and sometimes it's going to be initially hard to see the difference. It's going to look like a warm and fuzzy sheep but inside the outward appearance is a wolf who wants to devour you." And Jesus says, "Therefore, beware. I give you this teaching so that you can practice discernment."

You need to know, beloved, you need to know doctrine and you need to know righteousness before you can assess whether a man truly speaks for God and sometimes, beloved, there is more than adequate evidence in front of you to conclude that a man is a false teacher and you don't give that man a platform in your life. How can you do that? How can you obey Jesus' teaching unless somewhere, somehow along the line, you are exercising spiritual judgment about what you're being told about what a man is doing? You see, beloved, you can see clearly even in the passage of Matthew 7 that Jesus is not teaching you to be passive in the face of false teaching. This is a very important point. It's part of the reason, by the way, it's part of the reason why we just completed a 10 part series called "The Bible and Roman Catholicism." After hundreds of years, we are in a position to make judgments about whether the Roman Catholic system is consistent with the Bible or not and we need to do that. For those of you that are new, there are free copies of that album that are waiting for you to take in our lobby. But this is such an important point that I want to help you think through it in the broader context of Scripture as well because, beloved, I realize for some maybe you're visiting or just passing through, this may be my only opportunity to speak with you. For others, you're a part of our church and I just have such a responsibility to inculcate this into you in a way that you embrace.

Judgment by men, it's such an important point that I want you to think through it in the broader context of Scripture and here's the point that we are going to develop for the rest of the morning, the rest of the service, it won't go until noon: judgment by men, men exercising judgment is an intrinsic part of the way that God has ordered the world and has ordered his church. It is part of the very order of God revealed in Scripture that there will be men exercising judgment about other men and about situations and teaching in front of them. This is part of the order of God and so to say, "Judge not means that I can do whatever I want without any kind of accountability from anyone," you'll see is absolutely contrary to the whole order of God in society and in the church. And I want you to see this, because if you see this in the broader context, then it will strengthen you not to be intimidated by those who would try to put you to silence when you're simply trying to say, "But the Bible says this."

So I want to help you with this and quickly give you three kinds of judgment that God intends us to respect and support in our lives. Point 1, this may surprise you, point 1 is to just see the concept of judgment in government. Judgment in government. The Bible makes clear that God has appointed our governmental leaders so that they can exercise authority and deliver judgment on evildoers.

Turn to the book of Romans 13, if you would. We'll go through all these points rather quickly. Romans 13 beginning in verse 1 where the Apostle Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that he is delivering us exactly God's word says in version 1,

1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Now, simple points here. There is good and there is evil. There is lawful obedience and there is criminal activity, to frame it in those terms. God says, Scripture says those two things are coextensive and equal. Scripture says that God has appointed government in order to bring judgment on evildoers, in order to protect the peace so that law-abiding citizens can live in peace and have a sense of stability and order in the society in which they live, and he has given government the power to exercise judgment on evildoers and to isolate them so that they do not create havoc and disrupt the order and harm law-abiding citizens. God restrains evil through the actions of government. Well, what does that mean except that someone, someplace in authority is going to say, "That action was evil. It is my judgment as a judge," or it could be the judgment of a jury for all I care, it doesn't matter, "that the law has been violated here and you, sir, are a violator of the law and therefore we will send you to incarceration. You will be imprisoned because your actions are wicked, your actions have violated the law, and therefore you must be separated from society." It is no answer for the convicted person to say, "But Jesus said judge not lest you be judged. You can't send me to prison because no one can exercise judgment." The foolishness of that is obvious, isn't it? Isn't it obvious that the government makes judgments? We're just talking about it in the realm of criminal activity here. The criminal justice system exercises judgment every work day of the week saying, "That was wicked behavior that must be punished." What are they doing except by some standard saying, "You are a lawbreaker. You are guilty under human law and therefore you must be punished." There is judgment woven into the very fabric of social order that God has established.

It's impossible, it is utterly impossible to take Jesus' words in Matthew 7 in a literal way and say this forbids all judgment. They are obviously when someone responds in that way, when ill-informed newspaper column writers who somehow manage to intersect with Christianity from time to time use that to try to silence a Christian voice in the world, no, we reject that. You should not try to steal from a book that you don't even believe in and apply it in a way that would silence those who do. That is not a legitimate use of the word of God, and if you do not love the word of God, you should not appeal to

it in order to justify your effort to silence a voice of truth and righteousness when it comes to you. Judgment in government illustrates that point.

Let's bring it closer to home with our second point here this morning and talk about judgment in the church. Judgment in the church. Judgment in the sense by which we discern right or wrong and we make conclusions and take action accordingly. Judgment in the church. What do we see when we examine and think through the word of God in that realm? Well, in the church, Jesus tells us plainly that believers are intended to confront open sin in the lives of other professing believers.

Look at Matthew 18:15. There are about three passages that I want to go to here.

Matthew 18:15,

15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Jesus says that in the church there is to be a confrontation of sin; that when people are living in open flagrant sin and that becomes known within a body, that is to be confronted, first privately, then by one or two more, then perhaps bringing the whole church to bear on the situation. And this isn't the time or place for a full exposition of the doctrine of church discipline, all I want you to see here is that in this passage Jesus is assuming that a righteous believer is making judgments about what he sees in the life of another. "Beloved, you are living with a woman who is not your wife, that is sinful. I call you to repentance." It is no answer for the so-called brother, the professing brother, "But Jesus said judge not lest you be judged. You can't judge me." Well, look, Jesus had the mind of God. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Truth is internally consistent. Jesus didn't say one thing in Matthew 7 only to contradict it in Matthew 18. So we see, the point of that is, is that false view where a professing believer in a local assembly would say, "You can't judge me. I'm going to keep my concubine. I'm going to keep my mistress. I'm going to leave my wife and you can't say anything about it because Jesus said judge not." No. No, that's not what Jesus meant. Jesus said, "Do not judge," but you are twisting his words to say something that he obviously never intended because Scripture tells believers to protect the purity and the unity of the church.

Look over at the book of Titus, a couple of places here in Titus that will hopefully be helpful to you. Titus 1 speaking about the qualifications of elders in a section that we've looked at in years gone by. Paul told Titus in verse 5 to go and appoint elders in every city as he had directed him, and then he gives a list of qualifications. A man is to be above reproach in verse 6. Verse 7, he is to

7 ... be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled.

Even in that, don't you see an element of judgment being made by a congregation as it affirms its elders? Does this man manifest the characteristics that are laid out here or not? Well, there is a collective judgment that is made that says, "Yes, he does," or "No, he doesn't," or "No, he needs more time." There is a judgment being made about the quality and tenor of a man's life to see whether it somehow resembles what Scripture says an elder should be like. That requires judgment. That requires discernment. That requires making decisions in your mind.

Then for the elder himself in verse 9, it says,

9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

I ask you, beloved, what is that verse saying except that he is making a judgment on the content of another man's teaching or another system of teaching, saying this is consistent with Scripture or that contradicts Scripture and therefore it must be refuted? And it's not simply refuting the teaching but refuting those who teach it. This requires judgment. It requires discrimination. It requires decisions to be made. If we took the critic's view, "Judge not," we would never be able to do what Jesus says to do here in Titus 1.

Moving on, Titus 3:10 says,

10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

In order to practice this view of protecting church unity as Scripture lays out so clearly to be the responsibility of the local church and its leaders, you have to look at a situation and say, "This person is divisive." We warn them. We warn them again. And when they don't respond, Scripture says reject them. This requires, my only point here this morning, beloved, is this: that requires you to make judgments about what you see going on around you, to make assessments of situations. You can only do that by exercising some form of discernment and discrimination that says, "This is unifying. This is divisive. We need to deal with this."

Now, in light of these things, we see that Christ requires churches and their leaders as – watch this – as Christ is the head of the church, not the Pope, Christ is the head of the church, beloved, the church belongs to Christ. It is his. It is not mine, it is not the elders, it is not yours. The church belongs to Christ. He is the Lord. He is the King. He is the Sovereign over the church and he says, "This is the way that I want things done in my church." We don't have the prerogative to say, "But Lord, the Bible says do not judge." And so Christ requires churches and their leaders to be diligent so that sin or error does not bring division or spiritual disease into the body. How can that happen unless somebody somewhere is making decisions, making assessments, making judgments about what is true, about what is pure, about what is unifying, or about what is divisive? How can that happen? And you say, "Well, it can't." And that's precisely the point which means that the way that people use this verse cannot possibly be what Jesus meant, truly meant for it to be.

Now finally in a related third point, we see Scripture calling us to exercise judgment in doctrine. Judgment in doctrine. The Bible tells us not to naïvely accept everything that anyone says about truth.

Look at 1 John 4:1. After Hebrews, after James, after Peter, you'll find the letters of John in your Bible. 1 John 4:1 says,

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

He says test the spirits. When you hear what someone is saying, apply a standard to it and come to a conclusion about whether it's right or wrong. Test the spirits and he tells you why you must do that. Why must you do that? Because there are many false prophets in the world. There are many false teachers who are misrepresenting the character of God, who are teaching a false way of salvation, offering false peace to those who are in sin, promising them forgiveness when their way of salvation is not true and, therefore, leading people and confirming them in a path that will lead them to eternal judgment. Test the spirits so that you don't come under the sway of something like that or someone like that. How can you do that unless you're making judgments?

Turn over a page probably in your Bible to 2 John. 2 John in verse 9 says,

9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone

comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;

I've made the same point 50 times this morning, I bet. This passage requires you to say, "What are you teaching? Yes. Yes, I've got it. Let me think about what the Bible says about what you've just told me. Yes. Yes. That's not consistent with the Bible. It is my determination that that's not consistent with Scripture therefore I cannot receive you." A judgment has been made that a man is teaching falsehood and therefore is not to be welcomed.

Now, let me say this, there is always a scriptural balance to things: you are to be teachable. We are all to be teachable. You should have a teachable spirit. That is part of a Christian spirit, a Christian mindset is to be teachable and to receive instruction; to not appoint yourself as, you know, your own version of the Pope except you've just got a different kingdom of your own over which you stand. No, it's not like that. We are to be like the Bereans who heard the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:11. Listen to what they did. Here's the balance for you,

17 ... they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Teachable but not gullible. Teachable in receiving God's appointed teachers in the church. "I need to listen to them. I need to be responsive to them. I need to receive instruction. I need to receive rebuke. I need to receive correction. I need to receive encouragement." The pattern of Scripture is not for each individual to be a spiritual free agent, mindlessly determining whatever he wants. But at the same time, as you are teachable you examine the Scriptures. You need to read the Bible for yourself, my friend. You need to read it for yourself so that you have an acquaintance with the teaching of Scripture so that you are able to make distinctions between whether a man is telling you the truth or telling you falsehood so that you know who to follow.

So we find in the area of government, God orders society for judgments to be made. We see in the area of the church, that there are judgments about sin in the life of the body that are to be made. We see in the realm of doctrine, that we are to know the truth enough to be able to distinguish what is true from what is false and make decisions accordingly. That has a critical implication for our topic today. In light of all of that, when at the first sign of scrutiny a teacher or someone in sin says, "Judge not," you know immediately that they are twisting that verse in order to protect themselves. You must understand this, beloved, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, you must understand this and think clearly about what is happening in that scenario. They are not concerned to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness when they respond that way. That is not their point. They are not trying to honor the word of Christ when that is their first and hostile response. That's not what they are trying to do. They are twisting that verse in order to protect themselves, to insulate themselves from legitimate accountability and legitimate scrutiny. They are not concerned to uphold biblical righteousness which you can be certain was the point Jesus was trying to uphold when he was teaching us.

So, beloved, I'll say it again, you are to be teachable but not gullible, and when we see the pattern that God has established for discernment and discretion to be exercised as we walk through life, we understand that that response, that retort could not possibly be the way that God would truly have us operate in this world. That gives us the freedom, the courage, the liberty not to be intimidated into silence by what that says, but to continue walking in the truth and making judgments as the case may be. So whatever else we do with this passage here in Matthew 7, beloved, walk away with this: do not let anyone that you're reading in a paper, reading online, dealing with personally, don't let anyone use that verse as a club to beat you into submission and into silence because that's not what that passage is there for.

But what did Jesus mean, then, when he said, "Do not judge unless you be judged"? What did he mean by that? That question has great importance. You need to know the answer to that question and that's why I hope that you'll be back here next week as we consider it.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our God, two takeaways that we ask you to seal to our hearts this morning. First of all, the very real significance of the fact that we will one day stand before you and give an account of our lives. We pray that by a work of your Spirit you would help each one of us sort through the consequences of what that means for our lives. Father, for those that have never truly come to Christ, I pray that you would use the reality of coming judgment to awaken their soul to its great need for a great Savior, and that through the fear of God, the beginning of wisdom would take place in their souls that would cause them to search for Christ until they find him by true, genuine, repentant faith that would give them a right standing before you. For those of us that are in Christ, Father, perhaps those of us that have gotten careless with our lives, careless about meeting with the Lord's people, careless about being in your word, careless about the moral quality of our lives and our relationships, Father, may you use this to prick our conscience and lead us to a repentance that would have a sanctifying influence on our hearts. And as we move forward, Father, we don't want to be judgmental, harsh, critical people with everybody that we meet, that's not the spirit of Christianity but, Father, there are places where we are called to be discerning and, Lord, help us to recognize those areas where they come and give us the courage and the commitment and the clarity to be wise and godly as we do. These things we ask in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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