

# Should Christians Ever Judge?

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 7:1-5  
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Well, we return to the Sermon on the Mount and start a new chapter this morning in Matthew chapter 7, and I invite you to turn there for what I trust will be a very helpful message on a passage that is much abused and thrown against tender-hearted Christians by those who do not share in the partaking of the Holy Spirit. And I'm going to be opening up this text for us, Matthew 7, verses 1 through 5. We'll actually spend three or four times going through this text. Today is a little bit of a preparatory message, you might say, for what lies ahead in the more positive exposition of it.

Matthew 7, beginning in verse 1,

1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you see 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,' when there is the log 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.

This is a vital passage for Christian living. What we will see over the next couple of weeks is that this text guides us greatly in the midst of weighty responsibilities and hostile forces as we live for the Lord in this fallen world.

On the negative side, which is what we're going to focus on more today, this passage is a favorite shield for false teachers and professing Christians who live in sin. For many in the world, the entire Bible, all 1,189 chapters of it in the combined Old and New Testaments, can be reduced to two simple words, judge not. And so by saying judge not and quoting from the Scripture, they seek to silence any discussion about anything righteous, spiritual, or holy, because you are not to judge me, is the attitude, and this is so prevalent in the world in which we live, in any kind of discourse that involves Christian standards and Christian virtue that I need not describe it any further. These people misuse Jesus' words, the ones that we read there in Matthew 7 verse 1 where Jesus said, "Judge not." They misuse those words to do this, they would intimidate you into silence, they would intimidate into silence those Christians who would otherwise bring a proper scrutiny to their lives and to their teaching.

Inevitably, whenever even within our church, over the years and past years when church discipline matters have come up, this is always lurking just beneath the surface as you go and say, "You know, there's something we need to talk about." The spirit, if not the actual words in response are, "You don't judge me." Even within the church, the verse is used this way. It's a very disturbing thing to see, and I just want to state as a general principle upfront to help you know a little bit about where we're going, that is a complete distortion and has nothing to do with what Jesus was actually teaching in this text. This text was never meant to be used, as we're going to see conclusively by the end of the hour, this text was never meant to give license to people who are hostile to the truth, who are unteachable; it was never meant to be given to them to use as a weapon and a sword against the true church of Christ. And you know, I'm getting old enough that I just don't have the patience for these kinds of things that I used to have. "You're not supposed to judge me. I don't answer to you," and different iterations of that kind of spirit.

Well, here's the question that I want to answer for you here today. Is that familiar handling of this text, what Jesus intended when he taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount? Is that the result is that unteachable, hard spirit, was Jesus handing out this text so that people could respond to his truth in that way? Are Christians never to judge anything or anyone at any time because of what Jesus said here in Matthew chapter 7? Well, context is essential to get to the true meaning and that's what we're going to try to provide here today is some broad biblical context to clear away that false use of this text, that misconception of that text, so that in sessions to come, in services to come, we'll be in a position to say, "Okay, it's not that, then what does it really mean?" And then we can actually get someplace that is sanctifying.

Before I go any further, that, and I just, from the very start of the Sermon on the Mount, you can see that that, hard-hearted resistance to spiritual truth and honest accountability could not possibly be what Jesus was teaching from the very start, because Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, turn there with me because we need to see the whole context of things here. At the very start, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Beloved, when people are false teachers clinging to false doctrine, false religion, and they throw up this hard-hearted response, "Judge not," it's evident that they are placing themselves outside the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, which is based on a humble recognition of spiritual bankruptcy, a humble mourning over sin, a meek receptivity to what the Lord would have to say, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. From the very start, you see that spirit that people wield Matthew 7:1 with is not possibly consistent with what Jesus is teaching and so we start to get a little bit of insight right from the very beginning.

So we're only going to introduce the passage here today. A.W. Pink. said this in his work on the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Unless the meaning of these verses is opened 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." That's what I'm saying here in my introduction. If we don't understand,

now I'm not only expounding Scripture, now I'm going to expound A. W. Pink. If we don't understand this text, we are going to be at the mercy of people who would seek to bring us under their spirit and bring our conscience into bondage by submitting ourselves to a false view, a completely inaccurate and distorted view of what Jesus is saying here. We can't do that. We must not do that. So let me start the quote over and let Mr. Pink speak for himself. "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 them and hurl them at the heads of those whom they ignorantly or maliciously suppose are violating it." This is a text the people will ignorantly or viciously hurl at the heads of earnest Christians in order to silence them and intimidate them and, watch this, control them. There is no possible way in this universe or in any other alternate universe that could have been created, that that was the intention of our Lord when these words fell from his blessed lips. Yes, if you question a false teacher about his teaching, about his conduct, if you question another believer walking in sin, you may well hear the words, "Don't judge me. Jesus said, judge not so that you will not be judged, and so Jesus tells you to be quiet about my life." No possible way that that's true. Absolutely no possible way that that's true. So I want to spend some time addressing and refuting that faulty use of Jesus' words to equip you to deal with such circumstances.

So I restate the question: should Christians ever judge? Are Christians never to judge anything at any time, anywhere? Did Jesus intend to insulate and protect false teachers and sinners from accountability with this statement? And the answer to that question, variously expressed, can be put in two words: absolutely not. Absolutely not. That is not at all the intention that Jesus had when he spoke these words, and this will be so obvious by the time that we're done that you'll marvel at the fact that anyone could actually say such a thing and think that they were being true to Scripture.

Jesus here is not teaching his disciples to be passive and silent in response to false teaching. He is not teaching his disciples to be passive and accepting of sin. He is not teaching that his church should just quietly acquiesce to every divisive person that might walk into the room because the whole context of Scripture is so clear to the contrary. So it's an important point and that's why we're going to take this morning to think through this passage in the broader context of Scripture, and I want to give you four sections of thought that each of which are independent but taken together show clearly that the false view of this text could not possibly be true. There are at least four, if you plunge deeper you could probably find others, but there are at least four areas of life, four matters of doctrine where God specifically calls us to exercise judgment, make decisions, and to act accordingly, and we're just going to go through these in a rather quick manner here this morning.

First of all, I want you to consider the realm of civic authority. The realm of civic authority. God, that's point number one, civic authority. God has appointed civic authority, our governmental leaders, whatever their many flaws may be, God has appointed civil leaders so that they can exercise authority and deliver judgments on evildoers and to be an operative restraint in society. And so law enforcement is a God-

ordained arm of civil authority. The judicial system is an arm of civil authority and other things about civics that we could discuss under this category. But they are given authority for the express purpose to render judgment on evildoers.

Turn to Romans 13 with me. Romans 13. Now remember, what we're addressing here is the question, is it possible that what Jesus says in Matthew 7:1, "Judge not," is to be an absolute prohibition against all judgments in every realm anywhere so that every man is free to do according to his own desires and without any kind of restraint. In Romans chapter 13 verse 1, the Apostle Paul, an authorized representative of the Lord Jesus Christ says by inspiration of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the Lord, he says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." It's speaking about an earthly judgment here. Scripture says the governing authorities will exercise judgment on those who resist, and they will do so rightly, and they will do so by the authority of God delegated to them in the realm that is given to them. What could be more clear?

Verse 3, "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." Civic authority is established by God to act as a means of common grace to restrain evil and to restrain sinners in in this life. And we have witnessed in real time over the past four years since the incident and troubles in Minneapolis took place with George Floyd and the whole defund the police movement took place and criminal penalties were reversed or rendered inoperative, we've seen in the cities that embrace those policies what happens as a result of that, that chaos and anarchy ensue. The whole point of God establishing civil government is to prevent that, and so the last thing that Jesus would have meant when he said, "Judge not," in light of the fact that he established civic authority as a means of common grace for the good of all men, the last thing that he could have possibly meant was that civic authority was forbidden from exercising judgment because he said, "Judge not." God restrains evil through the actions of government. The criminal justice system does this every day. And so, the point for our purposes this morning is that Jesus did not abolish civil authority, civic authority, when he said, "Judge not." Full stop.

Point number two, a little closer to home. I want to consider the matter of church authority. Church authority. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is speaking to his disciples. The New Testament epistles are predominantly written to local churches with local problems, giving them instruction on how to operate and how to respond to difficulties and in his ministry, in this very gospel of Matthew, Jesus commands his disciples to exercise judgment so that he teaches the church that they must confront open sin in the body when it is discovered in other believers.

Look at Matthew chapter 18. Matthew chapter 18 in verse 15. We read, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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." Now look, beloved, look, the word judgment, per se, that specific term does not appear in this text but it presupposes every manner of discerning, discriminating judgment as we live together in the body and the assembly and the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It tells us if your brother sins against you, well what is that except looking at a situation and saying and making a determination, making a judgment that what has happened here is sinful. You can't obey this passage without exercising discrimination and discernment; discrimination in the mental realm, not in the woke sense that term is used. You have to make judgments. Is this person listening to me or not? Are they receiving what I'm saying or not? Are they repenting or not? You have to assess those things. You go along and there's a consideration of evidence and charges in verse 16. What is that but making judgments about what is being done, what is being said? You know, there's this matter here before a brother, there's a charge that has to be evaluated and others are brought into the circle of assessment. And then you tell it to the church and the church makes a judgment and determines that this person is not listening, and therefore we will make a judgment informed by Scripture that he'll be treated as someone who is not a believer no matter what his prior profession may have been, or may even continue to be. And so we make a judgment that this person will be put outside of the church because of what we judge to be, according to Scripture, sin as attested by multiple witnesses, we make judgments that this requires a decision and the decision is that this person will be put out of the fellowship, this person will no longer be considered a believer. All of that is an exercise of judgment.

And that's not the only place where that is done. Before we leave Matthew 18, let me just put it, summarize it in a question form for you. How could you possibly do what Jesus says to do in Matthew 18 unless you're making judgments about men and situations that are presented to you? How could you do that? There's no possible way. And so obviously, obviously when Matthew 7 was recorded after Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount, the Holy Spirit knew that Matthew 18 was going to be coming later, and in the divine omniscience, in the divine consistency of thought, there's no possible way that he established something in Matthew 7 that was designed to make Matthew 18 an impossibility to do. At some point, beloved, you either accept Scripture and obey it, or you say, "I'm not going to pay any attention to Scripture whatsoever." What you can't do is cherry-pick one verse and thereby silence everything else in the word of God. You can't do that.

For more on this matter of church authority, look to Romans 16. Look to Romans 16. And a little bit of a tangent here. I think this is just kind of like pulling off on the road to read a historical marker; we're not going deep into the country with what I'm about to say. I need to emphasize this because these matters really affect life in the body of Christ over the course of time. There are those who think, and I'll give them the benefit of the doubt

that they are sincere even if they, in my judgment, are sincerely and badly mistaken, who think that the body of Christ is to simply be a place of complete acceptance to everyone who comes, no questions asked. And you know, we welcome people to come and visit our services and learn if they'll do so in a peaceable manner, but when people start to exercise divisive tendencies, when people start to teach or advocate false things, or have a disruptive impact in whatever other way you could think of, then it's obvious that the church, which Scripture commands to do all things decently and in order, to be unified, to be of one mind, it's obvious that when something or someone is being injected that makes that unity and one-mindedness impossible, that there has to be an exercise of judgment so that the church can be and live in the Spirit which Jesus calls us to live, spirit of love and unity and humility, Philippians 2. And yet, you know, sadly I can say this after, you know, going on 13 years of experience here, a lot of people don't want that or don't understand it and resist and resent the idea of things being addressed openly, lovingly, humbly, saying, "There's this issue here that I see in your life." "Don't judge me." "But this is having a divisive impact on the body." "Don't judge me." That can't be what Jesus meant and the apostles make it clear to us.

Romans 16 verse 17 where the Apostle Paul says, "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." There is so much going on in this brief text but observe, watch out for those, watch out for men, make judgments about men. Observe their conduct, make judgments if it's causing divisions, if it's creating obstacles, if it's undermining the doctrine of the church, if it's contrary to what you've been taught. All of this requires discerning assessments, thoughtful judgments about what is being seen and then determining a course of action informed by Scripture on what to do about it, even coming to a point of personal separation from such, which is what it says when it says avoid them. Look, look, there's all kinds of judgment commanded by that text. Look and assess. Consider what you are observing, what is being done. Compare the words and the actions to Scripture. Determine whether it's divisive. Determine whether it's an obstacle. And once you've made that determination, if you make it and say, "Yes, that's what I'm seeing," then make another judgment and avoid them. This is biblical. It's that serious.

And so, beloved, the last thing that the Apostle Paul was doing was setting up instruction for the church that would contradict the words of Jesus if the critics' handling of the words of Jesus were accurate. The problem is not with the Apostle Paul, it's obviously with the critics. That doesn't mean that these things are pleasant, it doesn't mean that they're not painful. They are very unpleasant. They are very painful to deal with. None of this is fun. None of this fits into the projection of being born for adventure and having a wonderful time in the service of Jesus, just in case someone from Crossroads comes across this message by accident on the internet. You can't do any of that if it's all silenced by, "Judge not."

In like manner, you don't need to turn there, but just to reinforce the matter from the book of Titus, chapter 3, where our Lord says, and I'll get there eventually, where the Lord

says in his word, "avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless." A judgment being made. This is a dispute over foolish things that should not distract us. Going to avoid that, I'm going to assess this and I'm going to make a decision not to engage it anymore. He goes on in verse 10, "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."

Church authority, church life, observe, and look, this is kind of a broad overview of how incorporation into the body of Christ works, at least as I understand it. People come, people make a profession of Christ, people say they want to join with the church. We accept that, we accept them at face value for what they say. We don't become hypercritical in advance. We're not untrusting at the start of a relationship. But as things progress, as you start to observe things, hear things, you say, "Uh. Now wait a second, this doesn't quite fit. You know, I smell alcohol on his breath. I think I need to address that." Or I hear from so many people, I haven't seen it myself, but I hear from so many people that she says all kinds of things that undermine the unity of the church. Then we have to look into it. Then we have to start to gather information, and on the information we make judgments. "Uh, no, I misunderstood, everything's fine there. Go in peace." Or we say, "No, this is actually a settled, this is someone settled in their desire to cause problems in the body of Christ." I make a judgment. When I say I, I'm speaking, you know, corporately. We make judgments about that and then we have to deal with it. You can't do that, you can't do any of that if you have this blanket absolute sense that Jesus meant, judge not and let everybody do what's right in their own eyes.

Look, beloved, read the book of Judges. Read the book of Judges, see all of the chaos that ensued when the people of Israel did what was right in their own eyes, see how corrupt and defiling everything got because there was no king in Israel exercising authority, exercising judgment, and restraining evil. Well that's precisely, not that they had thought through this, these are people that God blessed them, are emotional and totally relational in their thinking, who just says, "We need to accept everybody." We can't accept everybody if people are being divisive and creating obstacles to the unity of the church and undermining and contradicting the biblical teaching of a church. You can't do that. You have to make judgments and then have the courage of conviction to act upon it if you want to be biblical, and if you don't want to be biblical, then that's fine. Just form your own social club. Go to the Rotary or go to the sports bar and hang out with people who won't ask you any questions, but don't pretend to be a church, a biblical church especially, if you're not going to follow what it says on these matters.

You see, beloved, and we'll see this more in a moment, Christ is a good shepherd of his sheep. He cares about his true sheep, and he wants them protected. He wants them properly fed and nourished. He does not want wolves tearing at their legs and biting on their necks, and sucking the life out of them. No, he intends his church to be a place where his name is honored, where his word is honored, and where there is love and true unity that is built on truth and righteousness, not on a passive acceptance of whatever sinful mind or conduct comes through the door. There are lines to be drawn. There are

homes to be protected. There are lives to be protected. And in leadership, you never like it when it comes up. You never enjoy it. You never get used to it. You don't enjoy people yelling at you. You don't enjoy the circulation of gossip. You don't enjoy false things being spread on social media. You don't enjoy any of that but none of that matters in light of the supreme and surpassing responsibility that a church and church leaders have to obey the Lord, to obey his word, to make judgments, and to protect the flock.

So church authority teaches us that it could be no other way. How could we exercise church authority unless we make spiritual judgments? And so, beloved, when Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7, verse 1, "Judge not," he was not abolishing civic authority, which makes judgments. He was not abolishing church authority, which makes judgments. Thirdly, let's go to another area of consideration. I couldn't get this to follow the CA pattern here, so I just had to ditch that halfway into the outline. Civic authority, church authority, I wanted so much to make this follow that but we come to point number three, doctrinal discernments. Doctrinal discernment. And beloved, this, in some ways, this is the most compelling argument from context in Matthew chapter 7 that shows that that distortion which we are refuting here this morning, could not possibly have been the intention of Jesus' teaching.

Doctrinal discernment. Beloved, you are not supposed to naively accept whatever any teacher says about anything related to the concept of truth. You're not to believe every wind of doctrine that blows through. You're not supposed to follow every fad that'll sell a million books, like "Jesus Calling" or "The Prayer of Jabez," going back, drawing back into the archives of forgotten books in history. You're not to believe, you know, the boy who went to heaven supposedly. You are to make judgments about truth claims, to compare what is being taught with what is written in Scripture, to know the word of God in a functional way that helps you to be able to tell truth from falsehood. Beloved, we are not, not, no, not supposed to naively accept anything that anyone says in the name of Christ or on behalf of what is supposedly the truth. No, you are to make evaluations, assessments, you are to make judgments about that and just dropping down a few verses in Matthew chapter 7, we read this in verse 15. This settles the argument conclusively. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."

And so, beloved, when a man comes teaching, he may be recognized as a false teacher by the false doctrine that he teaches as you compare Scripture with what is being said. You are to make judgments. You are to be aware that there are false prophets. 1 John chapter 4 says, many false prophets have gone into the world. Now how in the world, I ask you, and I say this sympathetically to a sympathetic audience, but I can't help but be animated by this, thinking about the broader context in which we exist. How in the world could we possibly defend ourselves against false teachers if we're not making judgments about what they say? This is ridiculous. There are false prophets, and false prophets will rise up

among you, 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 1. We'll read that next Sunday. 1 John 4:1 says, "Test the spirits." 2 John 10 says, "Don't receive every teaching that comes to you." How are you to do that unless you hear what is said and you make judgments about it, or you read what is said and make judgments about it? Even the apostles were subject to this principle. The book of Acts commended the Bereans in Acts 17 verse 11. It says, "They received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." How can we do that, beloved, unless we're making doctrinal judgments?

It's not just the content of a man's teaching, it's also the manner of the man's life, and the broader church of Christ has direct experience of this in recent weeks, of men who were thought to be skilled teachers of the word, and I use men plural, advisedly, who are thought to be qualified teachers of sound doctrine, and yet have been removed from ministry because of their corrupt personal lives. And people, you know, when the thing with Lawson first came out, people who should have known much, much better than to be confused by this would say ridiculous things like, "Well, he's certainly just a brother who stumbled." Maybe he's a Christian. Maybe time will bear that out in open repentance. But in the midst of a sinful life which is not repented of, you can't simply say by doctrine that the man's a Christian. This isn't specifically about Lawson, although I realize I've set it up that way. Evaluate the fruit. What is coming out of the man's mouth and what is coming out of his life? If it's heresy, avoid him. If his life is corrupt, avoid him. Beware of false prophets. We don't have to make final judgments about the state of any man's soul, and I don't, but we can look and say, "That fruit is rotten, it's corrupt, it stinks. I'm going to obey my Lord who said, make judgments about that, beware of that, and turn away. I'm going to go someplace else and I'll leave the Lord to sort out the condition of his soul. I don't have to sort that out, but I know enough by the bad fruit coming from this tree that that's a tree that you don't eat from."

This isn't difficult. This is not difficult, but what happens, and this happens in, you know, to bring this a little closer to home, and again saying this sympathetically as your pastor knowing that there are a lot of broken hearts in the room in what I'm about to say, we have to apply this the same way to those in our circle of love and influence who once professed Christ and now have turned away. We cannot say, "Well, I know they're a Christian because man, they prayed at my knee when they were three." No, the fruit's bad. We can't let relational affection shut off the discernment that Jesus tells us to exercise and sometimes that means that we're on our knees, we're literally walking in the dark with distressed souls saying, "Lord, open their eyes. What I once thought was true is evidently not true." There's a reason why John the apostle said, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us but they went out in order that it might be shown that they were not all of us." People within the body, tares among the wheat, looking for all the world like the real thing and yet, the fruit of life, the fruit of teaching over time, says something different.

Jesus does not say follow your heart and accept and receive them. He says, beware, turn and avoid. Don't ascribe biblical salvation for which Christ shed his precious blood, over which Christ agonized in Gethsemane, over which Christ agonized as he hung on the

cross, don't cheapen that salvation that he purchased at the cost of his own righteousness and blood by saying that person corrupt in their life, corrupt in their doctrine, is a partaker of the divine nature and has been born again and has the Spirit of God dwelling within them who produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Don't do that. Love Christ enough, love Christ enough not to compromise for the sake of a temporary earthly relationship and to pretend that something is true when it obviously is not. Don't do that.

And so, when a false teacher or a false professor of Christ wags his finger at you and says, "You're not my boss. Don't judge me." They're twisting that verse in a way that it was never intended to be used. Don't fall into that trap. Don't allow yourself to be manipulated in that way. We must evaluate teachers by the fruit that they produce, and be humble enough to say, "Wow, you know what? He fooled me. He fooled me. He didn't just fool me, he fooled tens of thousands of people." Better to make that conclusion with a broken and chastised heart than to cover up, ignore, and deny the words of our Master. So Jesus did not forbid doctrinal discernment by saying, "Judge not." He commands it. Right in Matthew 7, "Beware of false prophets." He says, "Judge not," then he says, "Beware of false prophets." Obviously his teaching was more nuanced than our foes try to make it.

Well there's one more, number four, personal discernment. Personal discernment, and this one kind of just occurred to me in the natural course of my own Bible reading, to be honest with you, this week even, and I just wanted to... I said, "Well this fits, let me include this as well." In your personal life, in your personal relationships, leave out civic judgments, civic authority, leave out church authority, leave out doctrinal matters and just realize that even on a personal level, the Scripture calls you to make judgments on men and decisions about whom you will or will not associate with.

Proverbs, turn there with me. Proverbs chapter 22. Proverbs chapter 22, verse 24 and 25, and this is just a random one. Proverbs is filled with distinctions about the wise man and the fool and an adulterous woman and a virtuous woman, and making decisions and judgments based on what you conclude. So I'm just giving you a representative example here; the whole of Proverbs is designed to teach you wisdom and discernment, which means you are to exercise judgments in all of life. But we just choose this one because it's clear, obvious, and very practical. Proverbs 22 verse 24, "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare." You observe a man, see how easily he loses his temper. You hear reports of his arguments, his inability to get along with anyone. You see him lose control of his emotions and rant and all of that. You're not just to ignore that because you're not supposed to make judgments, you're supposed to observe that and say, "Ah, that's an angry man. That is an angry man." And then having made that assessment, then you say, "Ah, I can't be friends with him. I can't go with him. I can't walk with him on the path of life because if I do, I will absorb his anger as my own and it will turn me into a sinful man myself." Sin and anger and corrupt morals are contagious. The way you protect yourself is by making judgments and separations when the situation calls for it. Proverbs 24 verses 1 and 2, "Be not envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them, for their

hearts devise violence, and their lips talk of trouble." We could go on and on, but I think the point is established.

Beloved, in all of these matters of civic authority, church authority, doctrinal discernment, personal discernment, you can only exercise and obey and honor those texts by making observations and discerning judgments. And so should Christians ever judge? Yes, absolutely. They better. Christians better be having a discerning, judging approach to life, judging the world around them, judging the influences upon them, and making decisions accordingly if they're going to grow in grace. You must make judgments about the teachers that will influence you, about the people that will influence you, about the people that you would choose to marry, choose to make your friends, the ministries that you would choose to associate and affiliate with. Jesus never called us to set aside truth for the sake of a superficial false unity or just to be friendly with everyone. I remember someone long ago, decades, decades ago, saying, "You know, we just need to be friendly, we just need to accept everybody, and the church would be really successful." Beloved, Jesus did not forbid personal discernment by saying, "Judge not." He was not silencing authority in any way, shape, or form. Period. Full stop. End of sentence. End of paragraph. End of chapter. That leaves us with the question, "Well then, what did he mean when he said, 'Judge not lest you be judged'?" Ah, now we can get someplace but we'll have to save that for next time which will be on Tuesday, Lord willing.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we pray that you would grant us discernment and grace. Father, we do not long to be people with a censorious spirit, we don't want to be critical and harsh and cold and brittle on these things. We want to have a living warmth that is informed by your Spirit and and informed by the grace that has transformed our lives. But Lord, we walk in a fallen world that has the effect of fallen people and even within the church, you have warned us that there will be false professors, false teachers even within the church, and so we have to have discernment. Father, the Apostle Paul prayed that his readers would grow in discernment, that they would grow and abound in discernment, and so Father, that's what we pray that you would help us to do, and that you'd help us balance the aspects of exercising discernment with a humble heart. Help us grow in that in the days to come. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.*

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