

TO JUDGE OR NOT TO JUDGE

“Judge not, that you be not judged.” Jesus said that, didn’t He? Yes, He did (Matthew 7:1). So that settles it, right? No matter what anyone does, no matter what they teach, we must never say it’s wrong. Would you believe I have been told it’s a sin to serve on a jury, because that involves judging whether the accused is guilty or innocent! Now, the interesting thing is, the individual who said serving on a jury was sinful, violated his own rule. He made a judgment about whether it was right or wrong to serve on a jury!

In our politically-correct culture, standing for Biblical principles will earn you a stern lecture about how you shouldn’t judge. If an abortionist in New York wants to kill a child two minutes before she would be born, you should be silent about it. If two men want to get “married” and adopt children, you mustn’t utter so much as a syllable of objection. If a confused boy wants to use the girls’ restroom and the girls’ locker room at school, not only should you not dispute it, you should affirm his right to do so! “Don’t judge!”

But again, by criticizing me for “judging” the secular progressives have violated their own rule. Besides that, they are abusing the text in Matthew 7 that they claim to like. This illustrates the danger of quoting one verse and basing your conclusion on that verse alone, without looking at its context or at other passages dealing with the same subject. Jesus’ command in v. 1, “Judge not, that you be not judged,” is followed in v. 2 with this warning: “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” Does anyone seriously believe that if you never say something is wrong, then you also can just do anything you please (rob the bank, drive 100 mph) and nobody will ever say it’s wrong – not even God? That’s commonly called anarchy, and when push comes to shove, even the secular progressives agree that there have to be some rules. Chaos is not a good way to live!

Then look at what Jesus said in the next two verses: “And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye?” Was Jesus saying it’s wrong to try to help your brother get a speck out of his eye? We’ll see the answer to that momentarily. For now, let’s realize that Jesus wasn’t issuing a blanket prohibition against judging. He was dealing with hypocrisy. Yes, even religious people can get caught up condemning other people’s sins when their own are even worse.

But now see Jesus’ solution to the problem in the next verse. “First, remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (v. 5). So, then, correcting your brother (illustrated by removing a speck from his eye) is a good thing. But you can’t be effective correcting him if there is even worse sin in your own life (illustrated by the plank in your own eye). The solution isn’t to leave your brother in sin without correction; the answer is to deal first with the sin in your own life so you will have credibility when you approach your brother to correct him.

Jesus concluded this section with another warning in v. 6 – “Do not give that which is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.” If we are going to obey that command, we’re going to have to make a determination about who the “dogs” and the “swine” are! Yes, we’re going to have to judge!

Luke 6:37 is a somewhat parallel passage to Matthew 7. It is shorter and more succinct, but still helpful. “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Just as in Matthew 7, the issue is with those whose goal is condemnation rather than forgiveness. Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world, but to save it (John 12:47). When Paul wrote about the brother living in incest with his step-mother, he said “I

have already judged him” (1 Corinthians 5:3), and he criticized the Corinthians for not exercising their responsibility to judge him (5:12). He ordered them to “put away from yourselves the evil person” (5:13). That certainly would require judgment. Even at that, however, the end in view was not simply to condemn the man, but to bring him to repentance and forgiveness (5:5).

Jesus said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Snap judgments based on first impressions are not righteous judgments. Censorious hypocrisy is not righteous judgment. Informed decisions based on God’s word and a careful analysis of the facts are righteous judgments.