

# “Selected Gospel Sections”

Spring Series 1

Lesson 4

“On Judging”

Matthew 7:1-5; Mark 4:24-25; Luke 6:37-42; John 8:1-11.

**Objective:** To understand the message of the Gospel accounts in their context within each work independently and then to compare the accounts to each other to seek understanding of emphasis and focus. The goal is then to apply this message to our time and context in order to understand the message’s call on our lives.

**Materials:** To use the Greek, Syriac, and other ancient translations in order to help us understand the message of these Gospels. We will also examine the writings about these passages in journal articles, commentaries and other sources.

## Procedures

1. To first translate each text from Greek and then compare it to other ancient translations
2. To identify issues of importance within the texts and to explore possible meanings as they applied to the original audience.
3. To take the meaning for the original audience of the Gospels and to understand it how applies to our modern context and cultural situation.
4. To explore ways that these text call the disciples of Jesus to live their lives as faithful followers.

**Matthew 7:1-5** <sup>1</sup> “Do not judge, in order that you might not be judged.” <sup>2</sup> For by the judgement you judge you will be judged, by the measure you measure you will be measured. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the beam in your eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Permit me to cast the splinter out of your eye, while there is a beam in your eye?’ <sup>5</sup> Hypocrite, first cast out of your own eye the beam, and then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter out of the eye of your brother.”

**Mark 4:24-25** <sup>24</sup> And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear; by the measure that you measure it will measure you and be put to you. <sup>25</sup> For whoever has, more will be given and whoever does not have what he has will be taken from him.”

**Luke 6:37-42** <sup>37</sup> “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup> Give and it will be given to you. A good measure having been pressed down, shaken, running over, will be given into your lap; for with whichever measure you measure will be the measure you receive.” <sup>39</sup> And also he spoke a parable to them, “Can a blind person lead a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? <sup>40</sup> A disciple is not beyond the teacher, but one being fully qualified will be like his teacher. <sup>41</sup> Why do you see the splinter in the eye of your brother, but do not consider the beam in your own eye? <sup>42</sup> How are you able to say

**John 8:1-11** <sup>1</sup> And Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup> At dawn he came again into the temple and all the people came to him, and sitting down he taught them. <sup>3</sup> And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman having been caught in adultery and made her stand among them <sup>4</sup> They said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Therefore, what do you say?” <sup>6</sup> They said this testing him, in order that they might have something to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote with his finger in the earth. <sup>7</sup> And when they continued questioning him, he stood up and said to them,

**to your brother, 'Brother permit me to cast out the splinter in your eye when in his eye there is a beam you are not seeing?' Hypocrite, first cast out the beam from your eye, and then you will see clearly the splinter in the eye of your brother to it cast out.'**

**"Whoever is without sin among you let him cast the first stone upon her:"  
8 And again he bent down and wrote in the earth.**

As we come to this set of passages we find verses that are very familiar and yet seldom do I find these quoted in a context that indicates a real understanding of the intent of Jesus. Most of the time when I have heard these verses quoted they have been quoted in the context of someone thinking that someone nearby should not make any judgements of that particular person. The implication is that you do not have the right to judge me, I am only human. It usually means that people do not wish to be judged based on the emotional triggers that they have set off. They want to be rude, offensive, cheat on something, or do something that they obviously know to be wrong and they want no repercussions from those observing what they are doing.

In an article by Daniel Paris he indicates that there is a phrase that will generate “...unanimous approval over any action. All a person has to do is utter the three magic words... ‘Don’t judge me!’”

- In the dining halls, when a friend chooses that not-so-healthy dessert – “Don’t judge.”
- In the library, when a classmate chooses to copy and paste from Wikipedia to fill in space in a paper – “Hey man, don’t judge me – I have like two other legit sources.”
- At a party, when an inebriated buddy decides to call his ex-girlfriend and tell her exactly what he thinks of her – “No judging, right bro?” “Judge” has become a dirty word. “The phrase ‘don’t judge me’ is laced with unspoken subtext, and its utterance carries additional sentiments: ‘don’t think less of me’: ‘don’t think I’m a

bad person'; 'don't think you're better than me.' No one wants their actions criticized or condemned, so it only makes sense that the college campus has become a 'no judgment zone.'" <sup>1</sup>

Matthew 7:1-2 has often been cited as proof that Jesus is an advocate of "not judging" and Jesus is seen as prohibiting such self-righteous actions. The question is, is this really what Jesus meant? According to Donald Hagner the command **Μὴ κρίνετε** (*me krinete* - "do not judge") "... should not be taken as a prohibition of all judging or discerning of right and wrong." "The meaning here, accordingly, is that unfair or uncharitable

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Paris, "Don't Judge Me": Where We Went Wrong, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, <https://focusoncampus.org/content/dont-judge-me-where-we-went-wrong>

judgments should be avoided.”<sup>2</sup> In Matthew 7:15-20<sup>3</sup>, 10:11-15<sup>4</sup>, 16:6<sup>5</sup>, 12<sup>6</sup>; 18:17-18<sup>7</sup> the disciples of Jesus are specifically challenged to practice discernment, to judge. Hendry explains that, “It seems plain that in commanding us not to judge, Jesus is not asking us to perform the impossible feat of suppressing our faculty of judgment. It is a question of how our judgment may be exercised in relation to—or in correlation—with the judgment of God....” “If we are morally responsible persons, recognizing an obligation to observe certain standards in our conduct (whether we succeed in doing so, or not), we cannot refrain from applying those

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<sup>2</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 33A (Dallas TX: Words Books, Publisher, 1993), p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but inside they are vicious wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will know them by their fruit. Do people get bunches of grapes from thorny weeds, or do they get figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, and every rotten tree produces bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree can’t produce bad fruit. And a rotten tree can’t produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, you will know them by their fruit. CEB.**

<sup>4</sup> **<sup>11</sup> Whatever city or village you go into, find somebody in it who is worthy and stay there until you go on your way. <sup>12</sup> When you go into a house, say, ‘Peace!’ <sup>13</sup> If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if the house isn’t worthy, take back your blessing. <sup>14</sup> If anyone refuses to welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet as you leave that house or city. <sup>15</sup> I assure you that it will be more bearable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on Judgment Day than it will be for that city. CEB.**

<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, “Watch out and be on your guard for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” CEB.

<sup>6</sup> Then they understood that he wasn’t telling them to be on their guard for yeast used in making bread. No, he was telling them to watch out for the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. CEB.

<sup>7</sup> But if they still won’t pay attention, report it to the church. If they won’t pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. <sup>18</sup> I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. CEB.

standards in judgment to other people. It is not necessary that the judgment receive overt expression in speech, or action. It is effective even if it is inwardly present, just as the fit of anger, or lustful look are no less offensive than murder, or adultery (Mt. 5:21-30). Some people claim that their morals, like their religion, are private matters, and they have no desire to impose them on others. But morals cannot be confined to the realm of personal privacy.”<sup>8</sup>

“Consider, for instance, the principle of honesty. If I observe a rule to be honest in all my dealings with others, I am in effect inviting them to be honest in all their dealings with me. To adopt a rule of honesty for oneself and to condone dishonesty in others would be a form of eccentricity.”<sup>9</sup> Most people are also familiar with what is known as the “Golden Rule,” to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”<sup>10</sup> How then are we to somehow relate this saying of Jesus to that of, “Do not judge?” As you might have guessed there are a great many interpretations of these verses. There is a great deal of diversity of opinion, some informed and some not at all informed. All Scripture must be interpreted within the wider context of all

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<sup>8</sup> George S. Hendry, “Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith,” *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.

<sup>9</sup> George S. Hendry, “Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith,” *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31.

other Scripture and not isolated apart from its original context. Therefore, we must carefully set these words of Jesus within the context of His other words and carefully consider what he means for His disciples to learn and practice as a result of His words here.

It must be remembered that these words were given to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, certainly in the hearing of the crowds that had gone out to hear the words of Jesus. The Greek word κρίνω (*krino*) is a word that carries a range of meaning<sup>11</sup> with a primary meaning of “separate,” “put asunder,” or “distinguish.” Here in the context of Matthew 7, it seems to best carry the meaning of to “pass sentence upon,” or to “condemn.”<sup>12</sup> The reasoning given in Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount for not “passing sentence upon,” or “judging” others is the reality that the one “judging” will themselves be subjected to judgment using the same measure that is used by them to judge someone else. One interpretation that has sought to make the interpretation less difficult is simply to take the meaning of κρίνω (*krino* “to judge”) in the sense of to “condemn.” This is the interpretation that has come to be favored by most commentators. The meaning is then that Jesus is forbidding us to engage in harsh, censorious judgment and forbidding the

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:1, 6 - “to take to court.” 7:37 - “has determined.” 2 Corinthians 2:1 - “to make up one’s mind.” 5:14 - “convinced.” Titus 3:12 - “have decided.”

<sup>12</sup> In the NRSV - John 3:17-18; 8:10; 8:26; 16:11; Acts 13:27; Romans 2:27; 3:7; 14:22; Colossians 2:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:12

damning of others. This meaning is said to be found in Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, in which the commandment, “Judge not” is followed by a second commandment translated as “Don’t condemn,” (μὴ καταδικάζετε - *me katadikazete* - to give judgment, or sentence against a person, to condemn).<sup>13</sup>

As has been indicated previously, Hendry comes to the conclusion that Jesus in commanding us not to “judge” is not asking us to perform the impossible feat of suppressing our faculty of judgment. It is instead a matter of how our judgment is exercised in relation to—or in correlation with—the judgment of God. There are three simple and general points that can help us in our understanding of this matter that come from the judicial system established by the state. (1.) The immediate consequence of the establishment of courts, and procedures for the administration of justice is that these things remove from the hands of ordinary citizens the execution of justice and therefore of judgment. This does not mean that ordinary citizens cannot have an opinion on such matters, but that their hands are tied when it comes to implementing consequences for others because of those opinions. “This is a situation which is accepted uncomplainingly by citizens in all civilized societies; they recognize that they stand, in effect, under a commandment which says, ‘Judge not.’”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> George S. Hendry, “Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith,” *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.

<sup>14</sup> George S. Hendry, “Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith,” *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.

Moving on, (2.) ordinary citizens are not totally excluded from the judicial process. The official system exists by the will and the consent of the citizens of a nation and the judgments can function only as they are accepted by general accord with the sense of justice that exists in the population at large. Finally, (3.) the elaborate nature of the judicial system with all of its intricacies, levels, and graduated series of courts, with the possibility of appeal from lower court to higher court reflects an understanding that “just” and “correct” judgment is extremely difficult to achieve. Justice at the level of our Supreme Court is set before 9 justices and most often the decisions of that court are not unanimous, which is tantamount to an admission from the justices of that court that their decisions indeed fall short of perfect and absolute justice. There is the admission that there is still the possibility of error despite all the safeguards that are put into place.<sup>15</sup>

The question for us is, “What is judgment?” “Judgment in its most elemental form consists in distinguishing and separating.” This is a sense that is preserved still in the German word for “judgment” *Urteil* which is related to the German word *teilen*, “to divide.” In English, we see this same meaning far less clearly in the English word “discriminate,” which is derived from the Latin term *crimen*, which means primarily “a verdict,” and then refers to “a crime” requiring a verdict as in a “crime.” We find this vividly

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<sup>15</sup> George S. Hendry, “Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith,” *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.

displayed in the account of 1 Kings 3:16-28 in Solomon's bringing justice in a terribly difficult case. In 1 Kings 3:28<sup>16</sup> the result that he delivered is described in terms of being a "judgment" (κρίμα - *krima*).<sup>17</sup>

The call of Jesus has to do with the goal of judgment and not simply the result. For human beings the goal is often based in the selfish interests of protecting oneself, one's power, one's prestige, one's property or even in elevating oneself in the eyes of others. The goal of God, in judging, is not to create division and separation, but for reconciliation and reunion. This is indeed the central theme of the New Testament; it is the goal for which Jesus came to earth. It has been the purpose of God from all eternity to put an end to all enmity and division in order to bring all things into unity in Christ (Ephesians 1:10<sup>18</sup>). This certainly does not mean that God dispenses with justice altogether, but with God, "judgment is subservient to reconciliation."<sup>19</sup>

Jesus executes the judgment of God by submitting himself to that judgment. He gives us the example in his earthly life of not acting as the one who judged, but He left that to God the Father. He identifies himself

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<sup>16</sup> **All Israel heard about the judgment that the king made. Their respect for the king grew because they saw that God's wisdom was in him so he could execute justice.** CEB.

<sup>17</sup> George S. Hendry, "Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith," *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.

<sup>18</sup> **as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.** NRSV.

<sup>19</sup> George S. Hendry, "Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith," *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.



with those who are under the judgment of God and therefore acts as an agent of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> The life, and indeed the death, of Jesus show us the way we are called to navigate this subject that seems fraught with difficulty for us. The example of Jesus is what we are called to follow as we seek to understand our role. We are called to be agents of God's reconciliation and redemption as true disciples of Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke have different versions of this teaching given by Jesus, perhaps given in a different setting, or remembered differently. One of the things that both Mark and Luke highlight though is that the idea of the measure that a person uses being used on them. This should act as a sobering thought to the one who passes judgment on another. It should challenge us to pause for thought and to exercise extra caution. It also connects to other teachings of Jesus that basically call for us to treat and regard others as we would like to be regarded by them. This recognition that the judge of the universe is going to use this as a measure that we set for ourselves challenges us. This should challenge us to move much more toward the side of mercy, which surely reflects the way God treats us.

Matthew and Luke also recount the narrative about us seeing a speck, or a splinter in the eye of others and then trying to remove it. These narratives remind us that we must make sure that we can actually see

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<sup>20</sup> George S. Hendry, "Judge Not: A Critical Test of Faith," *Theology Today* 40:2 (1983), pp. 113-129.

clearly in order to truly help. The imagery here is high hyperbole, but perhaps in fact that hyperbole of image reflects something close to the reality that we can often find in ourselves. It is oftentimes the case that the blindest and most ill-equipped person seems to think that they are the most well-equipped to help another despite the fact that they have a log in their eye. The imagery here conveys the tendency that we all have to fail to see the reality of our own self. Many times it is quite apparent to me that people lack self-awareness. I know that I personally do. I have many blind spots and because they are indeed real blindspots I am not aware of what I cannot see in those areas. The challenge of Jesus is to undertake a thorough and circumspect self-evaluation before attempting to remove a splinter from the eye of another. Digging around in someone else's eye while handicapped by a severe lack of vision surely would mean doing far more harm than good while trying to help another. Such harm as trying to retrieve a splinter and instead blinding the other person through our ineptitude and incompetence should surely be avoided by anyone who has set their feet on the path of discipleship.

The final account from John chapter 8 may look as if it does not belong here, to be set alongside these texts at all, but I believe that it is powerfully illustrative of exactly what Jesus is trying to communicate in these lessons to His disciples. In this incident we have what appears to be a trap (John 8:6) being set for Jesus

by those who are threatened by His teachings and by the fact that the crowds are listening to His teachings. Those who set this trap have judged that Jesus is a threat and want to give him enough rope to hang himself. Jesus however, turns the tables on them, rather than being threatened and intimidated by their attempt He uses it as a great teaching moment. He seemingly ignores them by bending down and writing in the earth. We have no idea what He wrote there and there are lots of questions we would like to ask such as where is the man that was also a participant in the adultery. Perhaps he was faster and actually escaped, or perhaps they let him escape. We do not know.

However, the focus here is upon this woman who has been indeed caught in the very act of adultery. Under the Law such a one was to be stoned.<sup>21</sup> Of course in both of the accounts given in the Torah both are to be executed (the man and the woman), and it at least seems to me that the man is held to be more culpable than the woman in the Deuteronomy account. Seems like a pretty good trap to catch Jesus. How would you have dealt with the situation? If Jesus is going to preserve His reputation and His life surely He cannot choose to go against the teachings of Moses, those words received directly from God upon the mountain. However, Jesus does just that, He challenges the application of the words of Moses by those who are themselves

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<sup>21</sup> Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24.



lawbreakers and sinners. They know what the Law says about a great many things and they know how they have failed, fallen down, and though they have perhaps not had their sin brought out into the light of day they know it exists. They, at that moment, should understand that there but by the grace of God go I; they too know that they deserve death.

Jesus challenges the one who is without sin to cast the first stone. That requires the person to first judge their own self before they judge another, to first remove the log from their eye before they attempt to remove the splinter from the eye of another. It challenges them to recognize that the measure that they use will be used to measure them. It is a great and powerful story that should challenge us all. Should we think we have the right, or the position to condemn another to death by stoning, the fires of hell, or simply to be marginalized from our community we must first examine ourselves. In that self examination, we should be driven to recognize that there but by the grace of God go I. If we are to err, surely we should err on the side of mercy and grace, because it is certain that when it comes time for us to be measured we will need all the mercy and the grace that is available, at least I will.

These verses are complicated by misunderstanding, misapplication, and sometimes just failure to apply these teachings at all in our lives. These verses do not forbid us from discerning right from wrong, or



challenge us not to say anything to another when we see them caught in sin. What it does do is challenge is to be gracious, kind, and to recognize that we all will stand under the judgment of God and we should seek to use his motivations and His reasons when we challenge another, always tempered with a self-recognition of our own lives, our own sins and our own tremendous need for His grace. God judges in order to restore that which has been broken, to renew relationships that are destroyed by sin, death, and selfishness. We should seek to do the same as we live our lives. If you notice that when Jesus is left standing alone with only He and the woman there is indeed one with the right to cast the first stone, but He chooses not to do so, but He does challenge her to go and sin no more.

# Synopsis

Often the words of Jesus are used in ways that generate misunderstanding, or are even misapplied.

Such is the case with the words of Jesus that say “Do not judge.” These words have come to be used by many today as an excuse for misbehaving and for there to be no rebuke from others; as if what a person does can only be measured by their own internal standard. It is important not to take any words spoken out of context, but especially words of Scripture. These words of Jesus are given in a context where many times Jesus will challenge His disciples to be discerning about the things that they do and the things that others do. This clearly indicates that the words of Jesus are not intended to be a license for not discerning, or judging.

Since that is the case, the challenge is to find out what He actually intends. When God judges He is not simply seeking to catch people in wrongdoing. He has other motivations such as the restoration of fellowship, unity, and order. God exercises mercy and grace in His judgments which indicates that His motives are not simply absolute justice. As disciples of Jesus we are challenged to exercise judgment with



the same motives and if we are to err we should always err on the side of mercy and grace. Our goal in exercising judgment should be to bring greater order, unity and fellowship with God.

The systems of our own government indicate that Justice is indeed extremely hard to achieve. We must also be aware that the measure we use to judge others will be used to measure us. With this clear understanding, our evaluation of others should be marked by tremendous great mercy and grace. We should be seeking to have the same motivations and thoughts that are those of Jesus Christ. We need to be people that are careful and practiced in our self-examinations and our striving to be more Christ-like in every way.

# Questions

1. How would you define justice?
2. Why do you think it is so common for people today to quote the words of Jesus when they are doing something that others might find to be wrong?
3. Are we to discern between right and wrong?
4. Why do you think justice is so hard for us as humans to achieve?
5. How should we deal with another person when we see them sinning?
6. Why do you think Jesus chooses not to have the woman stoned to death in John 8?
7. How do you think a disciple of Christ should act and think differently because of their decision to follow Jesus?
8. When you think of the word “judge” what images come to your mind? Why?
9. What is the difference between “to judge,” and “to condemn?”
10. What are some ways that we as humans demonstrate in our own society that “justice” is difficult to achieve?
11. What is the difference between “justice” and “vengeance?”
12. What is the goal of “justice?”



13.How might justice promote reunion and reconciliation?

14.How should mercy and grace fit in with justice?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important to know that God, in passing judgment, does not just seek simply to catch us doing wrong and condemn us. His motivation for passing judgment focuses upon His priorities of reconciliation, unity, and order. When we make judgments about other people our motivations should align with God's motivations. The words of Jesus challenge us to share the motives of God and to be merciful and gracious. What are some ways that you seek to reflect the motives of God in your dealings with other people?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words challenging us to be more like Him in all aspects of our lives, but especially in our heart motivations. God seeks not simply to change our actions, but to change our hearts so that our hearts are in alignment with His heart. This often means that we have to undertake careful self-examination in order to truly understand what our motivations are for doing the things that we do. What are some ways that you seek to examine your inner motivations for doing the things you do?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

The words of Jesus in these Gospel accounts challenge me to recognize that it is not sufficient for me to simply know the right things to do, but that I must do them with the right motives. Those motives are to be the same motives that Jesus Christ had for doing the things that He did. This is what it means to truly be a disciple. It means that each day I am seeking to become more and more like Jesus in every way. What are some of the ways that your desire to follow Jesus challenges you to be different?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling us to all examine our motives for doing the things that we do. We are called as disciples to recognize that our motivations and our standards of judgment make a difference for how God will "judge" us in the end. If we are harsh and uncaring in our judgment of others why should we anticipate that we would receive better treatment from God than we gave to others?