

Do not judge

Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 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? 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? 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. (Matthew 7:1-5; see also Luke 6:37-42)



Why do people misunderstand, “Do not judge”?

Many times, people are heard to say, “Don’t judge me!” or “What gives you the right to judge me?” They often then proceed to “quote” Jesus—“Do not judge”—to provide justification for questionable behavior and attitude. What they are really showing is a complete lack of understanding of Scripture. Often, this lack of understanding is by choice, because what they mean is, “Don’t tell me I’m wrong!” The meaning of “judge” is not fully appreciated.

What is “judge”?

The word “judge” can have many connotations and meanings. In fact, it can be used as various parts of speech; for instance, it can be used as a noun or a verb. In current English, “judge,” used as verb, can mean: to form an opinion, to form a conclusion about, decide in court, give a verdict in court, or to decide the results of (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). The related word, “judgment,” also has various uses. It can mean to come to a conclusion, reach a verdict, or a pronouncement of condemnation or vindication. This means that it is very important that the entire context must be examined to determine the most sensible use.

How is “judge” used variously in Scripture?

The first time we see the word used in Scripture, it is in regard to God’s promises to Abram. It is used specifically when speaking of the nation that would come from him being released from servitude: “*But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions*” (**Genesis 15:14**). Used in this way, the meaning is the “enacting of punishment” which is also used to teach a lesson to the Egyptians as well as the Israelites (**Exodus 12:12**).

The word is also used to describe “coming to a sensible conclusion” based on evidence. Moses says, “*When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws*” (**Exodus 18:6**). God also expects His people to judge—to be able to come to conclusion based on evidence: “*You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly*” (**Leviticus 19:15**).

Using these two examples alone, not only is seen the various meanings of the word, but also something else vital—God tells us to judge. How does that reconcile with Jesus saying, “Do not judge”?

How can we know what “judging” Jesus means?

The short answer to the above question is—He tells us. As previously mentioned, the entire context must be examined to see the precise meaning of the word, and although not absolutely necessary, it also helps to be somewhat familiar with Jewish idiomatic construction of the day.

Jesus’ complete sentence is this: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.” This is a very specific type of first century expressive construction. Jesus used very similar constructions several times. For instance, “Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides” (**Mark 4:24**) and “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (**Luke 6:38**). He is using comparison and contrast within this construction, but He goes further in explaining judging.

Jesus is not giving a blanket statement commanding us to overlook wrong. Instead, He is commanding what type of judging His disciples are to engage in. It cannot be hypocritical or divisive. He explains by painting an absurd picture—a picture of someone who has a big log in his eye trying to point out a little piece of sawdust in the eye of someone else. His command is not to refrain from drawing conclusion from exhibited behavior, but a command to “first take the log out of your own eye.”

Never tear others down in order to build oneself up. His command is a call to be discerning. Jesus expects us to judge. Just a few short words later, He says, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits ...” (**Matthew 7:15-16**). Judgment of this type is not based on man’s own opinions. It is based on God’s standard of righteousness. In speaking to Jews of His day in regard to their misapplication of God’s law given to them, Jesus says, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (**John 7:24**).

By what standard will we be judged?

In addressing the problem of hypocritical judgment, Paul sums it up very eloquently: “Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things ... do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of **the righteous judgment of God**, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS ... there is no partiality with God” (**Romans 2:1-11**).

—S. Scott Richardson Sr.