

“Judging Rightly”

March 2, 2008

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Scriptural Foundation: Matthew 7:1-6, NIV

Judging Others

¹ *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

³ *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

⁶ *“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”*

As a young man my dad took me out to look for a car I could drive during my seminary years. We went to a used car lot and my eyes fell upon a shiny, silver Mustang. It was love at first sight. The price fit our budget, as it had some years on it, and I thought it was perfect and I wanted to buy it right on the spot. But, my dad was more cautious. He wanted to have a mechanic friend check it over first. I thought this was wholly unnecessary, after all, “Just look at it, dad!” Since he was planning to help me with the purchase, I went along with the idea. We left the car at the mechanic’s home and he said he would call us after he evaluated it. Later that afternoon, he called us and told us to come back to his house. To my great disappointment, his appraisal was not good at all. The car had been in a serious accident and it was not repaired properly. In addition, there were parts which were leaking and the engine would soon require major repairs. His counsel to us was, “Do not buy this car under any circumstances!”

I have to tell you, at that time I did not like what our friend was telling us. He was making a judgment about a car I emotionally desired. Was this man wrong for judging this car so severely and so negatively? In Matthew 7, Jesus says, “Do not judge or you too will be judged.” This is one of the most well known sayings of Jesus in all the Bible, and yet, it is also one of the most misunderstood and most misapplied sayings of Jesus, for many quote Jesus' words in order to reject judgment of any kind. Some, as a result of misunderstanding Jesus' words, contend Christians must suspend discernment regarding individual choices, morality, ethics, religion, character, and conduct. Some contend we must not place value judgments on the “rightness” or “wrongness” of other people’s living, thinking, or worship. Instead, they contend Jesus' words tell us we are to be indulgent, tolerant, and indiscriminating. This has become the popular understanding of Jesus' words.

Is this really what Jesus meant? The clear answer to that question is, “No, God forbid. Absolutely not!” There are two reasons why we know Jesus did not intend for us to avoid all judgments regarding truth, life, and religion. The first reason is Jesus' teaching earlier in this sermon. In Matthew 5, in the early part of this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to His Disciples,

²⁰ *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Jesus is expecting, and indeed assuming, His Disciples will be able to discern between two kinds of righteousness: the righteousness of God on the one hand, of which Jesus speaks; and the righteousness on the one hand, of which the Pharisees and teachers of the Law speak. He is telling them, these are two different kinds of righteousness and they must discern the difference between the two, but also see it is only the righteousness of God which has any value, and indeed is all-valuable, and the righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law has no value whatsoever in the Court of Heaven. Jesus is expecting His Disciples to make a judgment regarding matters of righteousness.

It is important, as we come to Mathew 7, we understand Jesus, throughout this sermon, has the Pharisees constantly in view. When He says, “Do not judge,” it is with the Pharisees in view He speaks this Commandment. How is it the

Pharisees judge? If we understand this, then we will understand what Jesus means, because He is telling us not to judge as the Pharisees judge.

The Pharisees judge with an air of spiritual superiority. We saw this when they brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus and He rebuked their spiritual superiority by saying, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,” and their spiritual superiority began to shrivel at Jesus’ feet and they bowed their head, one-by-one, and walked out of His presence.¹ Their judgment was self-righteousness, hateful, and condemning.

We remember when Jesus was invited to dinner at a Pharisees’ home and there was a sinful woman who came up to Jesus and broke open a bottle of perfume and anointed His feet with the perfume. The Pharisees then judged her, didn’t they, by saying, “If He was a prophet He would know who is doing this to Him, that she is a sinner,” and they said that with contempt.²

The Pharisees judgment is not only contemptible and filled with spiritual superiority and self-righteousness, but it is also simply wrong. It is ignorant regarding the truth. We remember in John 9, as they spoke to the man whom Jesus had healed from blindness, they told him,

²⁴”We know this man is a sinner.”

They were speaking of Jesus and their judgment was wrong; it was one of absolute ignorance. It is this kind of judgment which Jesus is condemning. Friends, we must be aware this kind of sinful judgment is a strong temptation upon all of us. We will look more at that wrong kind of judgment in the next study, but here we will focus our attention on the right kind of judgment; the kind of judgment Jesus encourages in Matthew 7.

The second reason why we know Jesus is not intending us to suspend all judgment on matters of faith, morality, and doctrine is by what Jesus says later in the Sermon. Earlier, in Matthew 7, we read,

⁶ *“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.”*

Jesus is expecting His Disciples will be able to discern between different kinds of people, different people’s attitudes regarding God, and different people’s heart regarding the Lord. It would be impossible to apply Verse 6 if all judgment regarding people, their attitudes, their conduct, and their thoughts were suspended.

Furthermore, and more specifically, Jesus is going to say,

¹⁵ *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”*

Jesus tells His Disciple it is absolutely essential they discern between true prophets and false prophets and they make judgments regarding the two. If they do not, their very lives will be at stake, and they cannot make these judgments upon outward appearances, for false prophets come with the same kind of “niceness” and the same kind of “winsome” personality and with the same kind of “appearance” as true prophets. They come in sheep’s clothing looking as though they are coming to help and all the while they are coming to devour with their error. Jesus calls us to make right judgments about such teachers.

In John 7, Jesus is going to say something, and if we misunderstand Matthew 7 we will think He is contradicting Himself. Jesus says,

²⁴ *“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.”*

He is talking about people and about faith. How is it, on the one hand, Jesus says, “Make a right judgment,” in John 7:24, but in John 7:1, He says, “Do not judge!” We have to have a clear understanding of what Jesus means. What does He mean when He says, “Do not judge!”?

¹ John 8:2-9

² Luke 7:36-39

This passage is so often misunderstood we are going to take two sessions to study it. In this study we will focus upon the right kind of judgment and in the next study we will focus upon the wrong kind of judgment.

Do you think my mechanic was right to judge that shiny, silver Mustang so severely? What would have happened, if after he judged that car I so dearly wanted at the time, I put my hands on my hips, looked at him and said, "Who do you think you are to judge?", walked away, and rejected his counsel. I tell you, I would have regretted the day afterwards. I would have had to "pay the price" for rejecting sound counsel and sound judgment.

If right-judging is so necessary, and if right-judging protects us from great harm in the physical realm, how much more is right-judgment necessary in the spiritual realm and from how much more harm does right-judgment protect spiritually.

Consider the metaphors Jesus uses to describe the kinds of people and teaching about which we must make judgments. In Verse 6, Jesus uses two metaphors: dogs and pigs. When Jesus talks about certain people being "dogs", He is not speaking of a cuddly poodle which sits in our lap and sleeps away as we read a book. He is speaking of the kind of dog which roam the streets of Jerusalem and which had to defend for themselves. They were vicious, wild-animal kinds of dogs. He says, "Do not give to dogs what is sacred. They are vicious!"

Then He talks about a pig, and again He is speaking of a wild boar. Here is a great word picture in which a man is crossing a field and is suddenly accosted by this wild, terrifying animal and the only thing he has is a bag of pearls. He decides to throw the pearls before the animal and the hungry animal begins to recklessly snap up the pearls, but quickly realizes they are not food at all. In his anger and hunger, he turns upon the one who has just cast pearls before him and tears him to pieces. It is a picture of a violent nature. Jesus is telling us if we do not make right judgments bad things are going to happen to our soul.

Again, in Verse 15, Jesus speaks of these false prophets and He uses the metaphor of "ferocious wolves" to give us the understanding of the absolute danger of not making right judgments.

We will look at three arenas of right judgment in the Bible. First, we will look at the arena of right thinking; judging between truth and error. Second, we will look at the arena of right living; judging between right and wrong and good and evil. Third, we will look at the arena of right worship; judging between God and idols.

Let's look at the arena of right thinking: judging between truth and error. Some may ask, "Does doctrine matter anymore? Can't we just get along? It seems as though people in other religions are happy and well-adjusted. Why do we have to make judgments over such things?"

There is no question there is much unnecessary damage done within the church over strong, critical judgments regarding minor issues. But, the Bible teaches us what a person believes about sin, about God, about Jesus, about the cross, about forgiveness, about the resurrection, and about faith really matters. One can be very moral and even a very spiritual person without believing in the Gospel itself and the Truths of the Gospel, but a person, the Bible says, cannot become a child of God without believing those same Truths. A person will die and will remain in their sins and will stand before God unforgiven and without grace if they do not, at some point, believe what the Bible teaches regarding these matters.

Jesus Himself says, in John 14,

⁶ *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

He is telling us He is the Truth we need and saying, "Here I am." God, in His infinite wisdom and grace, provided us with a record of His own self-expression of His Son so that we, also, might know the Truth.

Someone may say, "That is so narrow!" Jesus understood this and in Matthew 7, He said,

¹³ *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

The great question we have to ask ourselves is, “Have I entered through the narrow gate?” Jesus said there is only one gate which leads to life and Jesus is either right or wrong, but we cannot have it both ways; that Jesus is both right and other religions are “right” as well. That cannot be true. These are contradictory ideas to one another and Jesus Himself posts this contradiction and posts this opposition against each other. He says we have to enter through the narrow gate, and later He would say that He Himself is that gate.³

Why is it Jesus gives such a strong warning about these false teachers? It is because one’s very soul is at stake. What one considers and believes about God is a very vital matter and it attends to our eternal destiny and our eternal state.

Many place the question, “What do you believe about God,” in the same category of other questions, such as, “What is your favorite ice cream,” or “What sports teams do you root for?” They place that question in the arena of “taste” and “opinion”. That is not where Jesus places the question. He places the matter in the arena of objective reality; there is something which is true about God and that something has been communicated to us by God so that we might know Him. And, we either submit to that which God has communicated to us about Himself, and thus receive life, or we reject that and fail to submit to that which God has communicated to us and, thus, we remain lost forever in our sins.

There are three big ideas I want us to grab onto with regards to right thinking. The first idea is this: know our culture rejects the idea of absolute truth, particularly absolute truth in the religious realm. People have largely adopted a form of pluralism which rejects any one religious perspective or any one religious person as being “normative” or necessary for all people and for all times.

Such relativism suggests each religion can be valid to its own followers. We would expect this in the world because that has been the way it has been since the beginning of time, but such ideas are, sadly, seeping into the church and into the group which calls itself “Christians”. A Christian today may very well say, “I am a Christian, but I do not believe Jesus is necessary for all people. Each person, indeed, can find their own path to God in their own way.” Friends, that statement is in absolute contradiction to biblical Christianity. Biblical Christianity, and such pluralistic thinking, is absolutely incompatible; that is to say, it is impossible to be a New Testament Christian and a pluralist at the same time. Jesus does not for that and it robs Him of the glory which is rightfully His.

It is here I wish to warn you about what you read and to make right judgments, because there is an increasing number of authors who are suggesting we cannot make right judgments regarding religious thought and we, therefore, should not. One such person who has grown in great popularity is a writer by the name of Brian McLaren. I know, for some of you, that name sounds utterly foreign and you may not be familiar with it, but for others he is a writer with whom you are very familiar. He is writer whom I believe is very charming to young adults and that is why I bring him up.

Someone may say, “Why do you bring up the name of a person? Should not we teach what is true and not necessarily preach against that which is untrue?” Again, I would point us to the New Testament, which is largely a political book; that is to say, it is a book which confronts error, because error is killing and brings death to the church and to God’s people. We constantly see Paul, Peter, and John stand up and speak about specific opinions, ideas, and teachings which are wrong and dangerous to the soul.

Listen to what Brian McLaren writes, in a book titled, *Generous Orthodoxy*, “I do not believe making disciples must equal making adherence to the Christian religion. It may be inadvisable in many circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts. Although I do not hope all Buddhists will become cultural Christians, I do hope all who feel so called will become Buddhist followers of Jesus.” What is a “Buddhist follower of Jesus”? It is someone who has not yet turned away from the idols of Buddhism, but nonetheless has a favorable view of Jesus. This is what Brian McLaren is presenting to the church as a viable option for our evangelism and for missions. He goes on to say, “I do not hope all Jews or Hindus will become members of the Christian religion, but I do hope all who feel so called will become Jewish or Hindu followers of Jesus. Our message and methodology have changed.”

This is something new. Up to this point in modern, evangelical church history, and he would put himself in the evangelical church camp, there has been much said about the need to change our methodology, which is another

³ John 14:6

whole sermon. Here is something different and one which has a new twist. Brian McLaren says our “message has changed, do change, and must change if we are faithful to the ongoing and unchanging mission of Jesus Christ.”

I will tell you such teaching runs absolutely contrary to everything in the New Testament regarding the Gospel. The Apostle Paul, himself, in Galatians 1, will say,

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

That is strong language. Does Paul suggest our message will change, and must change, over time? He is saying, “If the message changes and if anyone tries to peddle a changed message, let that person be cursed!” Why would he say “uncharitable things” about this messages and messengers? He is saying these things, not because he is uncharitable, but because he is loving and it is love which presents the Truth in its fullness and it is willing to judge between Truth and error, for we are dealing with matters of life and death.

Man’s main problem is not, first, psychological or social, but it is spiritual; that is to say, there is a real, objective disease of our soul and it is called “sin”. The Bible teaches us there is only one cure for that objective disease of the soul called sin and that cure is Jesus Himself. We must come to Jesus to be our Savior and we must turn from idols, repent, and believe in the One who is the Son of the Living God.

Imagine you are sick and you visit a doctor and the doctor tells you you have some strange illness and a very serious illness, and you need to go to a specialist. You choose a number of specialists and you go to each one. Each one acknowledges there is a great problem, but each presents a completely different solution. What do you do? That is a difficulty, because the solution of each of these specialists is completely different. Your friend comes along and wants to encourage you and says, “Isn’t it great you have all of these people acknowledging you have a problem? After all, you need to choose one and believe whatever one you choose is the right one, because, after all, what is really important is your emotions become peaceful and calm.”

Would you not look at such a one and say, “No, that is not what is important at all. What is important is I choose the physician who has the correct answer to my disease. That is what is really important.” Today, in our pluralistic culture, religious teaching is considered to be more psychologically valuable. As long as you choose a religion which is right for you, one you feel comfortable with, one which calms your nerves, one which helps you through the tough times, then that is what is really important after all, isn’t it? The answer to that question is, “No, that is not what is important after all. Our lives are moving toward a destiny which one day we will stand before God and give an account, and we will either be rescued from our sins or we will remain in them and remain condemned.

The second principle is the most loving commitment we can make to our world is to proclaim the Truth and rebuke error. John is such a gentle writer and one who writes most about the love of God. Listen to what he says, in 2 John,

⁹ Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this (apostolic) teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. ¹¹ Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

To our ears, even as evangelical Christians as we read that, it sounds like a record scratching against the needle; “Don’t welcome them into your home. That sounds so uncharitable.” It is the most charitable thing to stand up strongly against error because lives are at stake. It is not right to consider the drug dealer in the school yard, if he were to be thrown out of the school yard, is going to have hurt feelings. Sure, he is going to have hurt feelings and he needs to stop dealing drugs and begin doing something productive, but as long as he is dealing drugs in the school yard, our concern is for the health and safety of the children and that is a right judgment.

The last principle is discerning Truth from error is possible because we have God’s Word. We have access to the Truth because God has spoken to us through His Apostles and Prophets. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, right thinking, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.⁴

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16

Arena number two is right-living: judging between good and evil. Jesus says, in Matthew 7,

²⁴ *“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

Jesus is not just concerned with right thinking. Those who argue against the foundational nature of right thinking, argue what really matters is right living. I would agree right living really matters, but these two are never divorced from each other and they can never be separate from one another; it is as the foundation is to the building. We must not disconnect them or the whole will crumble and fall apart. Jesus goes on to say,

²⁶ *“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

Two principles emerge here. The first is orthodoxy and orthopraxy always walk hand-in-hand. Orthodoxy is right thinking. Orthopraxy is right practice or right living and these always walk hand-in-hand. We are first called to make right judgment regarding holy living in regards to our own lives. Jesus says,

⁴ *“How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”*

This is to be our primary focus regarding judgment of right and wrong. Our first judgment is in regard to our own lives. It is impossible to look out and help others with the right judgment of right and wrong and unless we have first made that judgment toward ourselves. When people who believe the right Truth do not practice these truths, they damage both the church and their own souls. The high view of doctrinal truth is meant to translate and transform lives. We must learn to make discernments regarding right living.

Why is this so important? There are a number of reasons, but I will give just one. In order for us to know we are in the faith, we have to make right judgments regarding our own life with regard to right living. In 2 Peter 1, Peter says,

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love...¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall...

Peter gives this long list of the effort we are to apply in order to become more godly in our everyday, practical lives and he is connecting the assurance we are numbered among the redeemed and we have been rescued, saved, and delivered from sin's punishment. We make that distinction on the basis, not only of our right-thinking and right-believing, what we have in our head, but also in the way it translates in the life. James says it best when he says, “Faith without works is dead and useless.”⁵

Right-thinking about God is useless without right-living about God. It is the total transformation of the life we observe wherein we can determine and grow in our confidence of a glorious entrance into God's Kingdom when we pass from this physical and earthly realm.

How sure are you, on the basis of your progress toward godly living, you have been born again and you have been redeemed? That is a question all of us who call ourselves Christian are to be concerned with. If, indeed, God has redeemed us we would expect there would be an internal transformation which would affect our living. The church is to be in the world as a ship is to be in the ocean. The ship is designed to sail in the water and she becomes ineffective and unwieldy when she abandons the difficult torrents and waves for the perceived calm of dry ground. So, the church must maintain her close contact with and her presence in this broken and violent world.

⁵ James 2:26

While the ship is designed to remain in the ocean, she also must remain separate from it. She must not allow the ocean to get into her, for if the ship does, the ship will surely perish. It is my grave concern the evangelical church of the United States has been taking on “water” for some time and she is sinking under the weight of worldliness. Perhaps, most tragic, she does not even know she is in danger. It is incumbent upon each one of us to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith, and to be all the more eager to make our calling and our election sure.

We move to the third arena of right worship: judging between God and idols. Post-modern thinking has great interest in spirituality, so we, as a culture, are more spiritual than we have ever been, but with this focus on spirituality there is absolutely no interest in distinguishing between the gods and of making distinctions between them. In fact, there is great interest to lump them all together and make them appear all the same with different expressions of the One. This has become a very strong value within our world and we would do well to understand it.

One of my son’s was in a class in which comparative religions were being discussed and they considered a religion in Africa which might practice human sacrifice. My son said, “That would be a bad religion,” and there was a gasp within the class. Right away the teacher said, “We have to change the subject,” because the class could not even begin to entertain there was a distinction among the gods and perform value judgments on those distinctions.

This is the world in which we live and everyone’s religion is just as valid as anyone else’s, but it is not the realm of the Scripture. As a result, we must be prepared to courageously and boldly take the Gospel into our world, for it is the Gospel alone which reveals the false nature of other gods and which in turn rescues those who have been deceived.

When Elijah stood before the prophets of Baal and before the people of Israel who had succumbed to idolatry, he made a statement. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah says, as he speaks to the people,

²¹ Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”
But the people said nothing.

They were unwilling to make a judgment at that time. I ask you, how long will you waver between two opinions. Jesus, in Matthew 6, says,

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”*

Jesus is calling us to make right-judgments regarding our worship and the God we choose to set before us.

This issue of right-thinking, right-living, right-worship, and right-judgments relates to our worship and to God’s person. Why is right-thinking so important? The answer is not practical and what the effects of wrong-thinking are upon us, but right-thinking is so important because our God is the God of Truth, and if we do not think rightly then we rob God of the glory of His truthful nature.

Why is it right-living so important? We can talk of the consequences of wrong living, but the reason why, for the Christian, right-living is so important is because God is the God of righteousness and when we do not distinguish, we rob God of the glory rightly due Him.

Why is it right-worship is so important? Ultimately, again, it is because God is the God of great glory and He will not share His glory with another. The very first Commandment God gave to Moses, on Mount Sinai was, “Thou shalt not have any other gods before Me. Make distinctions! Discern between the true God, myself, and all of the other gods, the idols.”⁶

You must choose. That is what the God of the Bible requires.

⁶ Exodus 20:3

Why didn't I like my mechanic judging the silver Mustang I intended so much to buy? It was because I wanted to follow my emotions and I was not that concerned about the truth and I did not want to know the truth.

As Christians, we are a people who have come to love the Truth and to follow Him who is the Truth, so we learn to judge rightly and we rejoice in it. I urge you, judging rightly in doctrine, life, and worship requires a strong pursuit.

I close with an application to believers. It is so vital for you to study the Word of God. You will not gain discernment from sitting week after week to listen to a sermon or a Sunday school teacher, going home and not having any other Truth enter into your life. You will not learn discernment that way. The lies of this world are so strong and powerful. They are like a flood and they rage against you the moment you walk out of this building, and even perhaps before. It is impossible to combat the flood of deceit with one-half hour here and one-half hour there, but we must immerse ourselves in the Truth and it is then, by God's grace, as we live out this Truth and we learn to discern Truth from error, right from wrong, and God from idols, it is then we will find our joy most full.