

1555 Godly Judgment

Let me read Matthew 7:1-2 (NKJV) the way we usually hear it.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

At times, we may misinterpret these verses, using them as a shield against constructive criticism. When someone points out a flaw, our instinct might be to retort, “You have no right to judge me. Let me be.” However, this is not about evading responsibility or discipline. It's about acknowledging our imperfections and actively seeking improvement.

Correction and guidance are vital for our spiritual development, but they should be administered with humility and gentleness, not harshness. As Paul wrote, 'Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted' (Galatians 6:1, NKJV). The 'restoring' he mentions is like a physician setting a broken bone to make it like new when it heals. We should strive to have that gentle touch, not a forceful one. We should correct others with the understanding that we, too, need adjustment in other areas of our lives.

Some individuals may feel entitled to act as God's enforcers, brutally correcting anyone who deviates from His path. Yet, we are all prone to sin, even Christians (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10). These individuals resemble the arrogant scribes and Pharisees who challenged Jesus and His disciples when they did not conform to their expectations. In Matthew 22:1-2 (NKJV), we read:

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ²“Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

Those religious leaders were quick to judge Jesus and His disciples with a condemning spirit because they did not practice a Jewish tradition. If you read further, you will see that Jesus turned the tables on them and pointed out their own shortcomings. Jesus wasn't trying to keep them from pointing out a flaw in His life (He had none). He was teaching them the truth of God.

There is a sense in which we do judge as Jesus did in this passage. We become “fruit inspectors.” Listen to Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV):

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Therefore, by their fruits, you will know them.

The false teacher stands out by the fruits of his life. Is he overbearing, manipulative, and selfish? Those fruits should be a red flag to this person's character. Jesus warns us about the disingenuous and instructs us to pay attention to or judge his character. He commands us to inspect them.

Let me read our Matthew 7:1-2 passage in a slightly different way.

“Condemn not, that you be not condemned. ²For with what condemnation you condemn, you will be condemned; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

This translation gives us a better insight into Jesus' words. While we inspect the fruit, it is not our place to condemn. That belongs to God. We need to correct and help one another to be better people, but that does not include mean-spirited condemnation. One day, we will gather at Jesus' throne for judgment. Between now and then, we need to fill our lives with a closer walk to Him.

There is another aspect of judging we need to bring out. Let's revisit Matthew 7:2. Jesus warns us about judging or condemning and then says:

For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

Loosely paraphrased, Jesus says, "Don't dish it out if you can't take it." The law of sowing and reaping says we get back what we give. Listen to Paul in Galatians 6:7-8 (NKJV).

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Saul of Tarsus violently persecuted people who believed in Christ. He led the crowd to stone Stephen to death and hauled believers to jail. Then something life-changing happened. He encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and became a follower, but more than a follower, an apostle for the Son of God and His mission. Yet, Saul received the same kind of persecution for following Jesus that he had dished out.

Our Founders and Framers used a spirit of discernment to determine how to proceed with our independence. They could have stopped and continued suffering the king's abuses, but they judged the outcome detrimental to themselves, their families, and the nation. When the Continental Congress introduced the Declaration of Independence, they had a choice. They could walk away as loyalists to the king or sign the document as traitors to the crown. John Adams weighed his options and made a judgment call.

"Before God, I believe the hour has come. My judgement approves this measure, and my whole heart is in it. All that I have, and all that I am, and all that I hope in this life, I am now ready here to stake upon it. And I leave off as I began, that live or die, survive or perish, I am for the Declaration. It is my living sentiment, and by the blessing of God, it shall be my dying sentiment. Independence now, and Independence for ever!" ~ July 1776

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