

“Judge Not”

Have you ever heard someone say that we shouldn't speak against sin in someone else's life because Jesus commanded us to not judge each other? I don't know about you, but I've heard that said time and time again. But is that really what the Bible teaches?

In Matthew 7 Jesus said this in his famous Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7:1-4: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine own eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?”

On the face of it that looks conclusive. Jesus does indeed say “judge not” and goes on to say in verse 2 that we will be judged the same way we've judged others. The passage even condemns the hypocrisy of those who judge others when they themselves are committing the same sinful deeds.

But Matthew 7 contains more than just four verses. Jesus goes on to say this in the *very next verse*:

Matthew 7:5: “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

What does He say here? Does He end by saying “And so,

whatever you do, never confront someone else about their sin”? No. In verse 5 He says to clean up your own life *so that you can then see clearly to help other people*. The focus of this passage isn't “don't judge people under any circumstances.” Instead it's this: “don't judge people *for sins that you are committing*.” The Lord wants us to help each other overcome sin, but He doesn't want us to be hypocritical about it. That's the point of those verses.

That should put to rest the idea that the Lord wants us to be silent about sin, but let's look at a few other passages. James had this to say:

James 5:19-20: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

First, notice that this passage is aimed at *brethren* who err from the truth. James is talking about believers! How do you “convert the sinner from the error of his way” after a brother “errs from the truth”? I'll give you a hint: it's *not* by refusing to say anything for fear of being seen as judgmental! No, what James is commanding us to do is take our fellow believers aside and correct them in love. James *wants* us to address the sin that we see in the lives of other Christians! This passage places high value on those who *turn others away from sin* – and you can't do that by ignoring the problem.

That brings up an interesting point. How did the apostles deal with this issue when they encountered sin in the lives of others? In Acts 5 we find an encounter between Peter and two members of the church:

Acts 5:1-2: “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being

privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

Here we have two members of the early church who told a lie. They claimed they were donating all the proceeds from a real-estate sale when they were actually just donating a portion of it. How did Peter handle this situation? Did he refuse to judge them? Absolutely not:

Acts 5:3-5: “But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.”

Not only did Peter rebuke Ananias (and, later in the passage, his wife Sapphira as well), but Ananias *actually died*. That doesn't sound like Peter refused to pass judgment on them and just went on about his business! Peter saw their sin and confronted them about it.

Even more striking is what Paul told the Corinthian church. First, he told them he had learned there was sin in their midst:

1 Corinthians 5:1: “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.”

Apparently some members of the Corinthian church were

guilty of incest – a sin so awful that even unbelievers abhorred it. Did Paul refuse to pass judgment on this? Did he say we should live and let live, and the most important thing was to mind our own business? Absolutely not:

1 Corinthians 5:2-5: “And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul actually condemned the Corinthian church *for not removing this person from their congregation*. He didn't stop at just condemning the sin. He actually told the Corinthians that since this Christian refused to repent they shouldn't allow him be part of their church any longer. In fact, this sin was so awful that Paul *actually turned this sinful Christian over to Satan so that he could kill him*. That's as far from “don't be judgmental” as one can possibly get.

But Paul wasn't done. He had more to say about this topic:

1 Corinthians 5:6-7: “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.”

Paul was comparing the sin in the church to yeast, and pointed out that if you add a little yeast to a loaf of bread it causes

the entire loaf to rise. Likewise, having a little sin in the church leads to temptations that impact the entire church body. Think of it this way: if one person in church is leading a sinful life, what kind of example does that set for others? How long will it take for others to start following their sinful example? Once the church establishes that certain sins are acceptable and nothing will be done about them, how long will it take for the congregation to decide it must really be fine after all?

That's one of the reasons why Paul told the Corinthians to remove this person from their church. He didn't want his wicked behavior to poison the rest of the congregation. Sin is a poison that must never be tolerated among Christians. It has to be dealt with immediately or else there will be terrible consequences.

But Paul still wasn't done. He went on to say that we *shouldn't even associate* with Christians who are living sin-filled lives:

1 Corinthians 5:9-11: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat."

Paul didn't even want believers to *have dinner* with Christians who were living a life of unrepentant sin. That's how serious this is!

Keep in mind that he's not talking about people who fell into sin and then turned from it. He's focused on Christians who have been confronted with their sin but refuse to repent. Those kind of people must be avoided. We must not have fellowship with them. Why? Because a little leaven leaveneth the whole

lump. Your holiness isn't going to rub off on them, but their sinfulness will rub off on you! If there's one rotten apple in a barrel of good apples, the good apples aren't going to convert the rotten one. Instead the single rotten apple will ruin them all.

There are more examples I could list but let's end this by going back to Jesus. In Matthew 18 He said this:

Matthew 18:15: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

Did Jesus say “If your brother sins against you, don't judge him”? No. Instead Jesus commanded us to *go and tell him his fault*. Why are we do to this? So that we can turn the brother around and win him back.

What happens if this doesn't work? Christ explains the next steps:

Matthew 18:16-17: “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

Jesus said that if we confront our fellow Christian about the evil thing he did to us and he doesn't repent, we should bring along a few more people so they can correct him as well. If that fails we should bring it before the church. However, if he doesn't listen to the church then we should consider the person to be a pagan. Why? Because he was repeatedly rebuked for his sin but he didn't repent of it. This means he decided he would rather knowingly live in sin than live in holiness. That's a horrible thing for a believer to do, and we must not have fellowship with such

people – because if we do their sin might rub off on us.

In the modern era it's rare for churches to do this. I haven't found many churches who were willing to remove people because they were living a life of unrepentant sin. Likewise, I haven't found many Christians who separated themselves from fellow Christian because they refused to repent of their sin. It seems that some churches have decided to simply accept any amount of sin in their midst, and that's had terrible consequences.

Interestingly, Jesus told us this was going happen. In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Him what signs there would be to indicate His return was near. This was one of the things He said:

Matthew 24:12: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

Jesus said that in the last days there would be so much sin that many people would lose their love for God and for one another. It's easy to see why. If one Christian rejects the path of holiness and gives their life over to sin, and the church does nothing about it, that tempts others to do the same.

The decision to not judge people for their sin actually leads to rampant sin and apostasy. Far from being “the right thing to do,” it actually *destroys* people's lives and kills their love for the Lord. It can even destroy entire churches! Sadly, that's the path some churches have chosen.

Jesus is aware that this is going on. He addressed it in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 3:15-16: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wast cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of thy mouth.”

The carnal nature of these churches *actually makes Jesus vomit*. That's putting it pretty strongly, but Jesus isn't done yet. He

went on to say this:

Revelation 3:19-20: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Verse 20 is often used as a verse of comfort, but it's actually very frightening. Jesus is addressing a lukewarm church that couldn't care less about their Savior. In that church, where does Jesus claim to be? *Outside, knocking on the door*. Jesus is actually outside the church and is looking for someone to open the door and let Him in! He will forgive them if they turn and repent, but right now they don't have Christ at all – and a church without Christ isn't a church.