

Judge Not, That Ye be Not Judged

By Elder David Pyles

Our title comes from the words of the Lord Jesus in Mt 7:1. This text has in recent years become as popular as almost any verse in the Bible, but is often applied in ways the Bible never intended. It is commonly used to dismiss behavior the Bible condemns, and used to condemn those who would seek to admonish or correct such behavior. The error of this interpretation can be seen in multiple ways, but the most obvious occurs in what follows:

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 eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? 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. – Mt 7:2-5

Hence, the commandment does not disallow judgment and correction of all kinds. Indeed, the text allows that a person can remove a mote (i.e. “splinter”) from the eye of another, but only after he has removed the beam (i.e. beam of wood) from his own. So what the text actually prohibits is judgment done in hypocrisy.

There are multiple places where the Bible actually commands us to judge or condemns us for not judging (Pr 13:24, 27:6, 27:17, Mt 18:15-17, 1Cor 5:3-7, 1Cor 6:1-8, 2Thes 2:6, etc.). This should be expected. A general prohibition against all judgment would prevent us from teaching children, convicting criminals, electing officials, etc, and would even prohibit us from teaching the Bible.

Another thing meant in biblical warnings against judgment is to hold people to man-made rules of morality that have no biblical authority. Jesus blasted the Pharisees for this, saying, “*For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers,*” (Mt 23:4). Context shows that Paul meant this type of judgment when he said, “*Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way,*” (Rom 14:13). Obviously, if we are to avoid causing our brother to fall, then we must have some concept of what it means for him to fall. This requires us to make a judgment. The meaning of Paul’s

commandment is that we should not be critical of each other in respect to man-made rules of morality, but should view ourselves as being in a common cause to meet those rules ordained by God.

One does not judge by simply teaching what God has commanded or by admonishing for violations of it. When a bailiff takes a convicted criminal to jail, he is not rendering any judgment whatsoever. The judgment was made by the court, and the bailiff is simply acting in compliance with its ruling. Indeed, a person who refuses to teach what God has commanded or who dismisses the importance of compliance is being judge of the worst kind. He has exalted himself even above God. Unfortunately, the commandment of Jesus against judging has been so thoroughly perverted by some in this respect that it has been transformed into an actual authorization to judge.