

CORRECTING FREQUENTLY MISUSED PASSAGES

Week 2

Matthew 7:1-5

Matthew 7:1 ~ Do not judge so that you will not be judged.

The Abused Interpretation

- This is one of the most quoted passages in the Bible and one of the most popular verses known to all
- There are 2 other passages that are similarly misunderstood and misapplied:

Luke 6:37 ~ Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned

John 3:17 ~ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

- These passages are often used to teach that believers must never confront one another or point out areas of sin in other's lives
- They are used as a shield against conflict in the church...as an admonition that precludes all negative assessments of another person
- They are understood as a prohibition against declaring any specific action sinful or wrong, since doing so would mean "judging" someone
- "Love don't judge" is the mantra that is often used in attempt to silence critics
- Many interpret Jesus' words here as "You don't have the right to ever tell me I'm wrong or be critical of my opinions or conduct"

- "Yeah, he cheated on his wife, but who am I to judge? Hey, we're all sinners, right? Like Jesus said, 'Judge not, lest you be judged'"
- "Don't judge me – if you were really a Christian you'd listen to Jesus when he said, 'judge not.'"

- Christians are often accused of "judging" or intolerance when they speak out against sin

This passage has erroneously been used to suggest that believers should never evaluate or criticize anyone for anything. Our day hates absolutes, especially theological and moral absolutes, and such simplistic interpretation provides a convenient escape from confrontation. Members of modern society, including many professing Christians, tend to resist dogmatism and strong convictions about right and wrong. Many people prefer to speak of all-inclusive love, compromise, ecumenism, and unity. To the modern religious person those are the only "doctrines" worth defending, and they are the doctrines to which every conflicting doctrine must be sacrificed.

John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 430.

Whenever Christians say that something is either right or wrong, or whenever they speak out against immoral or destructive behavior in another person, they are frequently told that they are not to judge, meaning that any behavior is right and that any attempt to deny that it is right is itself wrong. In fact, in our postmodern environment, the only acknowledged evil is claiming that someone else is mistaken.

James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew volume 1*, 107.

The first portion of these verses is one of those passages of Scripture that we must be careful not to strain beyond its proper meaning. It is frequently abused and misapplied by the enemies of true religion. It is possible to press the words of the Bible so far that they yield not medicine, but poison.

JC Ryle, *The Gospel of Matthew*

- So, Matthew 7:1 has been often abused and taken out of context, causing many in the church today to believe that any confrontation or discerning judgment are actually forbidden in Scripture
- Such a skewed perspective on proper discipline and judgment within the church, has resulted in the belief that any confrontation is prideful and an attack on the unity of God's people
- Such an abused interpretation has also probably kept a number of believers from lovingly confronting a fellow believer when it was necessary for fear of being accused of "judging"

The Correct Interpretation

- Clearly, this passage is not a moratorium on all judgment...it is not saying "don't ever judge anyone"
- A judgment free life is impossible – we judge between products, applicants for jobs, teams, schools, etc
- Imagine the military without judgment

"Sir, I think those new guys in the bloodstained Afghan National Army uniforms with the weird bulges under their clothes might be Taliban!",

"You keep your opinions to yourself, soldier, we don't judge people around here!"

<https://biblebased.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/does-matthew-71-5-forbid-all-judging/>

- Clearly this text is not telling believers to be undiscerning and lacking discretion...being unwilling to pass an unfavorable judgment on others
- Nor does it mean that it is wrong to reprove the sins and faults of others unless we are perfect and faultless ourselves
- In determining the correct meaning of this text, we must first start with understanding the context of the passage...specifically, the verses that follow
- In doing so we realize that Jesus is not forbidding judgment but unjust, hypocritical judgment

What our Lord means to condemn is a censorious and fault-finding spirit: a readiness to blame others for trifling offenses or matters of indifference - a habit of passing rash and hasty judgments - a disposition to magnify the errors and infirmities of our neighbors and make the worst of them. This is what our Lord forbids. It was common among the Pharisees. It has always been common from their day down to the present time. We must all watch against it. We should "believe all things" and "hope all things" about others and be very slow to find fault. This is Christian charity.

JC Ryle, *The Gospel of Matthew*

- The context clearly supports this...Matthew 7 constitutes the end of the Sermon on the Mount in which Christ confronted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees
- He exposed their hypocrisy and upended their system of works-righteousness
- They had completely missed the heart and had reduced the instructions in the Word to a heavy-handed list of do's and don'ts

Matthew 5:20 ~ For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44 ~ you have heard it said...but I say to you

Matthew 6:2 ~ So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...

Matthew 6:5 ~ When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites...

Matthew 6:16 ~ Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*...

Luke 18:10-12 ~ Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

- So Christ was condemning a very specific kind of judgment...a self-righteous, hypocritical judgment which prevented them from seeing their own sin and caused them to look down on anyone who didn't follow their self-made traditions
- The Pharisees thought they could see plenty of sins in others, but they couldn't see their own sins
- Christ's words were a reminder to the Pharisees that they would stand before God one day as well and they would not want to be held to the same self-righteous standard they were holding others to

Matthew 7:2 ~ For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you

- Rather than actually prohibiting judgment, Jesus gave instructions here on how to do so correctly

Matthew 7:3-5 ~ 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? 4 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? 5 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.

- Jesus actually encourages correct judgment in vs. 5 when he gives the criteria by which it must occur
- When we confront others, it must be done with humility and purity, looking at our own lives first before we look at others
- It's only when we've dealt faithfully and biblically with our own sin that we can help a brother see his own because we are not exempt from the same standard we require of others
- That these instructions are giving guidelines on how to properly confront others is clear from the context:

Matthew 7:6 ~ Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces

Matthew 7:15-20 ~ Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Matthew 7:21-23, 24-27...the whole rest of this chapter demonstrates a proper judgment

- Clearly, believers are to be discerning and willing to judge between truth and error, sin and righteousness
- This is evident in a number of other places in Scripture

Matthew 18:15-17 ~ If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERYFACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

John 7:24 ~ Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 ~ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

Galatians 6:1 ~ Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

James 5:19-20 ~ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- So rather than an admonition against all judgment, Christ’s words are an admonition against a certain kind of judgment
- We are not to judge hypocritically
- We are not to judge rashly or presumptuously
- We are not to judge unjustly, unfairly, or unmercifully
- We are not to judge according to the wrong standard
- But we are nowhere prohibited from all forms of judgment...in fact, the opposite is true...we are to judge error and sin, but in a gracious and non-judgmental fashion

Ezekiel 37:3-10

Ezekiel 37:3-10 ~ He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.” 4 Again He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’” 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 6 I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.’” 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.”’” 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

The Abused Interpretation

- Perhaps “abused” is not the best way to refer to misunderstandings about this passage; maybe it is better to state that many artistic liberties are used when applying this passage
- One of the clearest evidences of this is in recent music that utilizes the “dry bones” theme

You can take my dry bones...Breathe life into this skin...You called me by name...Raised me to life again
You can calm the oceans...Speak peace into my soul...Take me as I am...Awaken my heart to beat again

Oh Jesus, Oh Jesus, Oh Jesus, Alive in me

You move in the unseen...You set the captives free...As I stand and sing...You're breaking the chains off me
Breathe in me Your life...I can feel You are close now...I can never hide...You are here and You know me

Hillsong United, Bones

Through the eyes of men it seems...There's so much we have lost...As we look down the road...Where all the prodigals have walked...One by one...The enemy has whispered lies...And led them off as slaves

But we know that you are God...Yours is the victory...We know there is more to come...That we may not yet see...So with the faith you've given us...We'll step into the valley unafraid, yeah

As we call out to dry bones...Come alive, come alive...We call out to dead hearts...Come alive, come alive
Up out of the ashes...Let us see an army rise...We call out to dry bones, come alive

God of endless mercy...God of unrelenting love...Rescue every daughter...Bring us back the wayward son...And By your spirit breathe upon them...Show the world that you alone can save...You alone can save

So breathe, oh breath of God...Now breathe, oh breath of God...Breathe, oh breath of God...Now breathe
Lauren Daigle, Dry Bones

My soul cries out...my soul cries out for you...these bones cry out...these dry bones cry for you...to live and move...only
You...can raise the dead...lift my head up

Jesus, You're the one who saves us...Constantly creates us into something new...Jesus You're the one who finds us...Surely our
Messiah will make all things new

Gungor, Dry Bones

Prophesy, come to life...Oh my soul sing...Through the night, lift your eyes...Oh my soul cry out, cry out

Living King, live in me...Let my heart know...Rushing wind, move within...Speak to these dry bones, dry bones

Oh Lord, speak into the silence...Breathe upon the lifeless...Wake us up from slumber...Oh Lord, move in by Your Spirit...Your
life living in us...Take us back to wonder

By Your hand, I will stand...Filled with glory...Hold Your Word, on the earth...All to show Your life revealed

Dry bones, dance...Dry bones, sing...Dry bones, stand up and get up and live...Dry bones, run...Dry bones, rise...Dry bones,
stand up and come back to life

New Life Worship, Dry Bones

The Correct Interpretation

- This is an example of drawing application from a text which is entirely disconnected to the proper interpretation of that text
- One of the primary rules of Bible interpretation is: Interpretation First, Then Application
- The correct meaning of this text must take into consideration the fact that this chapter comes immediately following the chapter where God promised to restore the nation of Israel

Ezekiel 36:24-30 ~ For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. 28 You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. 29 Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. 30 I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

- Ezekiel 36 presents the prerequisite regeneration that Israel must experience before they can nationally enter into the promised blessings
- It is one of the greatest descriptions of New Covenant promises to Israel anywhere in the OT

- God promised national Israel that He would: restore them to the land (vs. 24)...cleanse them from their sin (vs. 25)...regenerate them with a new heart (vs. 26)...plant the Holy Spirit in them (vs. 27)...restore them to the land (vs. 28)...and bless them greatly (vs. 29)
- Despite these glorious promises to restore Israel as a nation, they seemed impossible in light of Israel's present condition
- She was "dead" as a nation, deprived of her land, her king, and her temple...she had been divided and dispersed for so long that unification and restoration seemed impossible.
- So God gave Ezekiel the vision of the dry bones as sign that these promises would come true one day
- This vision symbolized the whole house of Israel that was then in captivity
- Like unburied skeletons, the people were in such a state of living death, pining away with no end to their judgment in sight
- They thought their hope was gone and they were cut off forever
- The surviving Israelites felt their national hopes had been dashed and the nation had died in the flames of Babylon's attack with no hope of resurrection

Ezekiel 37:11 ~ Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'

- In the vision, Ezekiel was transported to a valley full of dry bones and directed to speak to them
- He was to tell the bones that God would make breath enter them and they would come to life, just as in the creation of man when He breathed life into Adam (Gen 2:7)
- Ezekiel did what he was commanded...the bones came together, the flesh developed, skin covered the flesh, breath entered the bodies, and they stood up in a vast army
- The vision is clearly explained in the following verses which are the key to the interpretation of the vision

Ezekiel 37:12-14 ~ Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.' "

- This vision is about the spiritual regeneration, resurrection, and salvation of the nation of Israel
- This was meant to give them hope that God still had a future for them...that because God's reputation is at stake in the restoration and regeneration of Israel into the Land, He must do what He promised so all know that He is Lord
- This will occur when God "puts His Spirit within them," because only the Spirit of God can put life and spirit back into a nation that had seemingly passed out of existence
- When that occurs, God will restore a literal Israel, to a literal land, with a literal regeneration, leading to a literal kingdom under Messiah
- This promise can only be fulfilled in future millennial blessing to Israel that she has not yet experienced, because it includes the salvation of the New Covenant
- The return from Babylon was only a partial fulfillment and foreshadowing of the fullness to come in the future kingdom
- So, although the establishment of the modern state of Israel indicates this has initially begun, it hasn't happened in full yet because Israel has not trusted Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior
- So, although some analogies could be drawn from how God regenerates believers, this vision applies primarily to the nation of Israel and their future restoration