

Urban Legends  
*It's Always Wrong To Judge*

In the dark of night and only two days after the carnage at Virginia Tech, Katelynn L. Johnson was counting rocks. 29, 30, 31.

"I got 32," the 27-year-old senior recalled. "I just lost it. I broke down. I was seething. I remember saying . . . 'How could people be so mean?' "

Jim Keane, her boyfriend of five years, then asked a question, thinking he knew her answer. "Do you want to get a 33d stone?" "Yes."

Johnson, a Minnesota native majoring in sociology and psychology, and Keane took a 33rd rock to the Drillfield.

When the stone was quickly removed Johnson said, "To see this community turn on one of its own no matter what he did is heartbreaking to me. If we're a community, we're a community. If we're a family, we're a family. You can't pick and choose your family."

"We lost 33 Hokies that day, not 32. Who am I to judge who has value and who doesn't? I am not in that position. Are you?"

Who are you to judge? Have you ever had that thrown up in your face because you said something is wrong?

Pastor Larry Osborne says "The quickest way to get non-Christians to quote the Bible is to point out something as sin." Author Paul Copan writes, "It's been said the most frequently quoted Bible verse is no longer John 3:16. Now it's Matthew 7:1, *Judge not, that you be not judged.*

It seems that almost everyone knows that verse even if they don't know anything else about the Bible.

It's always wrong to judge, isn't it? Isn't that exactly what Jesus Himself said?

We're in a series we're calling urban legends and we're taking time to examine some spiritual impressions that people just assume must be true. We've already looked at a number of them like, "Faith can fix anything," "Difficulties in life mean that God's punishing me."

Today we want to check out another spiritual urban legend.

*I. The Myth: It's Always Wrong to Judge*

## Turn to Matthew 7 Page 854

This comes as part of a sermon by Jesus which He gave on a hillside in Galilee we call The Sermon on The Mount.

The Scribes and Pharisees, who were religious leaders in Jesus' day, took the Jewish faith which God had given His people and turned it into a legalistic religion.

They missed the point of God's perfect law which was to show people that they needed God as their Savior.

They thought they could actually keep all of God's laws.

They considered themselves righteous. When you don't understand grace and think that you're good enough to get to God on your own, you begin to judge everyone else.

Jesus sets the stage for Matthew 7 by surprising everyone in 5:20. *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

That must have just blown everybody away that heard it. That must have made them feel like it was hopeless. The Pharisees were so religious. They were the uber-righteous.

What Jesus was saying was this: You have to be better than them. In fact you have to be perfect. And that perfection can only come as a gift. When we place our faith in God as our Savior we have His perfection applied to our spiritual account.

That means that we're going to be humble because we realize we're not better than others. We're saved by grace through faith.

Legalistic religion produces a judgmental spirit. When you think you've followed all the rules you look down on everyone around you because you can see their failures.

God wants something radically different from His children. **Read 7:1**

There it is in black and white, or red and white if you have a red letter edition. Here's Jesus telling us not to judge.

Does that mean we can't evaluate whether something's true or not? Does that mean

that we can't say that certain behavior is wrong? Does that mean we have to put a white stone out for a mass murderer because who are we to judge?

*I. The Myth: It's Always Wrong to Judge*

*II. The Reality: We're Actually Commanded To Judge*

Mark your place in Matthew 7 and **turn over to John 7 Page 946**

We are all products of our age to one degree or another. Forty years ago our Western culture collided head on with Eastern mysticism and Western culture lost.

In the 60's and 70's we bought into a drug/Hindu/self-exalting philosophical framework. Back in 1991 the Barna Research Group found that 66% of American adults polled said that there's no such thing as absolute truth. What's true for you isn't necessarily true for me.

Three years later that figure had risen to over 3/4 of US adults. That was over a decade ago. I can't imagine what the statistic would be today.

I've found that people will sit in church week after week listening to the Bible's message of salvation by faith and agreeing with it.

They're willing to sit there and shake their heads "yes," to verses like John 14:6 where Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

They have no problem with Ephesians 2:8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

There's no problem until they realize that that means that the otherwise sincere followers of the other world religions aren't going to heaven.

If there's one way to heaven and it's Jesus and there's one way to Jesus and that's by faith, then if people don't have faith in Jesus are lost.

And all of a sudden all the nodding and all the agreement stops. And they get very incensed. And they say, "Are you telling me that if someone's sincere in their religion that they're lost without Jesus?"

How can they hold two conflicting opinions? Because when it comes down to it, for them, there's no absolute truth.

We can't judge anything or anyone.

Now I want you to see the crystal clear directive from Jesus Himself. **Read vs 24**

We are to judge, just not according to appearance. That means we don't decide what's right or true because it sounds good to us, or everybody else believes it. We don't say that looks good so it must be true.

We don't judge according to appearance but we judge a righteous judgment. What's that mean?

It means we use a righteous standard.

If you walked around this building you'd probably find about 10 clocks in various class rooms. If you wanted to know the exact time you could look at a couple of clocks but they probably would have varying times.

You don't have a reliable objective standard to set your watch by.

But in Boulder Colorado, at the National Institute of Standards and technology is a cesium fountain atomic clock. That clock is so precise it won't gain or lose a second in more than 60 million years!

That's a reliable objective standard.

When Jesus said don't judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment He meant use a reliable objective standard. You can find a lot of so-called standards to measure truth by but there only one righteous standard, that's the Bible.

*Psalm 119:160 The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.*

*Psalm 119:89 Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.*

*Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*

II Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,*

God didn't just leave us here with no source of truth. He didn't say, "You'll have to figure it all out yourselves."

God has a message, a revelation of Himself and His truth. God used human authors to bring us His truth.

Biblical inspiration: "God's superintending of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities (and even their writing styles), they composed and recorded without error His complete revelation to man. Inspiration means that "the Holy Spirit of God superintended the human writers in the production of the Bible so that what they wrote was precisely what God wanted written."

That's the reason we can judge a righteous judgment. That's the reason we can know what's morally and spiritually right and wrong.

Over and over again God tells us there's things we should judge.

Let's look at a couple:

#### **Matthew 7:15-20 pg 855**

The Greek word translated "judge" *krino*, is just like our English word "judge." Sometimes it's translated "decide," "determine," "esteem," "consider."

How do we evaluate the false prophets in sheep's clothing. Not by how they appear, because they appear harmless. We evaluate using the standard of the Bible.

I've said it many times from this pulpit, but let me repeat it. Don't ever believe something just because I said it. More cults and false religions have gotten started because people believed some speaker without checking out what he had to say with the Bible. Make sure what you adopt as your personal belief system is backed up by the authority of the Bible.

We're to evaluate religious teaching.

#### **I Corinthians 5:9-13 Pg 1015**

Remember, the question's usually framed this way: "Who gives you the right to

judge?" Here's the answer, God! God says we're to make moral evaluations.

We're to evaluate immorality in the church.

## **II Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 Pg 1052**

### **I John 4:1-3 Pg 1083**

Notice, whether it's religious teaching or lifestyle issues God tells us to judge. The implication in each of these passages is it's not a sin to judge, it's a sin not to judge.

If we don't evaluate what's taught and practiced in the church the church is destined to self-destruct.

If I refuse to call sin "sin," whether it's in my own life or in the church, I'm not following Jesus.

*I. The Myth: It's Always Wrong to Judge*

*II. The Reality: We're Actually Commanded To Judge*

*III. The Response: We're To Judge Carefully And Appropriately*

## **Back to Matthew 7 Pg 854**

Notice, Jesus is giving some careful, specific instruction here. We always need to read verses in their context. You always read the verses around the one you want to understand to find out who's speaking, who they're speaking too, and the point they're trying to get across.

**Read vs 1** Remember, the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day were hypocritical judges of everyone but themselves. So Jesus says, *Judge not, that you be not judged.*

Wait a minute. Why should I care if I'm judged? What's the deal about God judging me? **Read vs 2**

No problem judging, unless you're a hypocrite. No problem judging, just remember. Whatever standard you want to hold others to will be the same standard God holds you to.

That's why He says... **Read 3-4**

Now, obviously Jesus is using hyperbole here. No one would walk around with a 2X4 in their eye.

But, how many of you have ever gotten a speck of something in your eye? Sawdust, sand, a sliver of glass.

It feels like this ginormous thing in your eye. I just wanted to use that word because it's one of the words that just got added to Webster's dictionary.

It feels ginormous. It feels like a 2X4. Your eye gets all teary, pain shoots through, and you can't even see out of it.

So here's the real problem Jesus is dealing with. If we're wrapped up in sin we're sure not going to be able to help someone else with their sin.

We are to judge, just not hypocritically. Here's some synonyms for the word "judge." Here's what we're talking about when we say we're to judge:

"form the opinion, conclude, decide; consider, believe, think, deem, view; deduce, gather, infer, gauge, estimate, surmise; regard as, look on as, take to be, rate as, class as; reckon, figure."

All of things will be skewed if our own sinfulness has blinded us.

So here's the solution. Here's what will enable us to make a legitimate evaluation.

### **Read vs 5**

We are to judge. But always with one goal and one purpose in mind. That's to help others. The Pharisees of Jesus' day did what people who are legalistically religious often do. They judged others to make themselves look better.

If our faith is all about rules and who's keeping them the best rather than a relationship with the living God, we're inevitably going to judge in the wrong way. But remember, if we refuse to call sin, and refuse to call false religion wrong, we're not following in Jesus' footsteps. He did it when necessary.

If a mile down the road the bridge is out and I see you speeding towards me totally unaware of the danger ahead I'm not going to say, "She's got a right to drive down

this road if she wants. Who am I to say she's wrong?'

I'm going to warn you. I'm going to wave my arms and jump up and down and scream, "The bridge is out!" I'm going to do that to serve you.

So if we are to judge carefully and appropriately, what does that look like?

1. We don't judge a sin in someone else if we're flagrantly committing the same sin.

### **Turn to Romans 2 Pg 1000**

None of us are perfect. If we've trusted Jesus Christ as Savior we're forgiven but God is still knocking off our rough edges. In fact, it will be that way until we're with Him in eternity. But that's different than just blatantly disobeying God. **Read vs 1-3**

When Pastor Ted Haggard, who was head of the National Association of Evangelicals was exposed for his drug use and homosexual escapades he not only disgraced the name of God, but he gave plenty of ammunition to the enemies of God's principles of morality.

Haggard publicly opposed gay marriage but was secretly living a gay lifestyle. As Nathan the prophet said to David after David's sin with Bathsheba was exposed, *...by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme...* II Samuel 12:14.

It's absolutely crucial that we get the beam out of own eye first.

1. We don't judge a sin in someone else if we're flagrantly committing the same sin.
2. We don't judge a sin in someone else if we have ulterior motives.

### **Turn to John 8 Pg 947**

This is another one of those out of context passages that people want to use to say we should never evaluate someone else' wrong doing.

This was the distorted idea that prompted Katelynn Johnson to want to memorialize the Virginia Tech shooter.

### **Read 3-6**

Obviously these guys were up to something. How did they catch this woman “in the very act” of adultery, where was the man, and where was the woman’s husband?

This was a double set-up. First they set the woman up then they tried to use her to set Jesus up.

The scribes and Pharisees were trying to discredit Jesus because He was pointing out their hypocrisy. They figured they had Him, this time. If He said stone her, his reputation as the friend of sinners was shot. If He said let her go He wouldn’t be upholding the law of Moses. **Read 7-11**

This passage, along with Matthew 7, is the part of the Bible that most people seem to know. They know it’s there and they misuse it to say Jesus wouldn’t judge anyone.

The truth is, this was a situation in which the guys that brought the woman could have cared less about truth and justice. They were just using her to get at Jesus.

In the end Jesus judged her sin in the right way. He acknowledged it. (Even though the scribes and Pharisees had set her up, she still had committed adultery.) He called it sin and He did something only God can do, He forgave her and said, “Because you’re forgiven don’t do this again.”

1. We don’t judge a sin in someone else if we’re flagrantly committing the same sin.
2. We don’t judge a sin in someone else if we have ulterior motives.
3. We don’t judge something God hasn’t clearly spoken about.

Christians seem to have a knack for taking things that aren’t said to be wrong and putting a negative spin on them.

I was reading though some old documents of a church that was originally Mennonite but has since changed. In those old notes from meetings it mentioned that it was worldly for a man to wear a wedding ring.

It was an outward adorning and therefore wrong.

Christians have been debating things like this for the past 2000 years. Today it might be classifying a style of music as godly or ungodly, or weather it’s right to get a tattoo.

By the way if are questioning the whole tattoo thing email me and I'll send you an excellent article by John Barns. John's a youth pastor in Columbia that's approached the subject in a unique way that will make you think no matter where you stand on the issue.

### **Turn to Romans 14 Pg 1009**

We touched on this issue a couple of weeks ago. One of the hot-button issues in the early church was the question of meat offered to idols. Ninety-nine percent of the meat sold in the markets in cities in the first century world had been first offered to idols and false gods.

Because of this some Christians felt like it would be wrong to eat the meat. To solve the problem they became vegetarians.

Other Christians said, "Hey there's only one God. Idols are just hunks of wood or stone so don't worry about it. Just eat and enjoy the meat."

### **Read vs 1-4**

Verse 3 zeros in on the danger. The guy who says you can eat despises the one who says you can't. He tends to look down his nose at the one who says no. And the one who thinks you can't eat and be a good Christian judges the one who says you can.

Be careful of judging something God hasn't clearly spoken about.

1. We don't judge a sin in someone else if we're flagrantly committing the same sin.
2. We don't judge a sin in someone else if we have ulterior motives.
3. We don't judge something God hasn't clearly spoken about.
4. We don't judge non-Christians by Christian standards.

Remember when we looked at I Corinthians 5 a few minutes ago? *For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges.* I Corinthians 5:12-13

It's right and it's good for the church to speak clearly on moral issues. It's absolutely imperative that we speak clearly about the one way that God says is the way to heaven.

The Bible clearly says, *He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* John 3:18

There's so much confusion about how to have eternal life. the Bible says it's by faith alone but when you question them, the average person will say heaven comes by being good enough. In fact, the classical Christian claim is this: that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, and that unless people come to God through Jesus, they are destined for hell.

You say something like that and there's a lot of people who will bristle up. They'll get angry and say, "How can you be so arrogant to think that you're right and everybody's wrong?"

It's OK for them to say that you're wrong. But you're not allowed to say that they're wrong.

We base what we believe on God's revelation in the Bible. The gospel isn't true because we believe it. We believe it because of the evidence of it's truth.

So we need to make the Good News clear, but we need to do it with humility.

But we need to be real careful about how we approach moral issues. You can go all through the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and He hardly ever criticized a non-Christians way of life.

He never once compromised His holy standards but He didn't expect the non-Christians around Him to live like believers. He expected those who claimed to be God followers to live like it.

Is it ever right to judge? Absolutely. In fact, if we're commanded to judge a righteous judgment and we don't do it, we've sinned.

But here's where it starts:

1 Peter 4:17 *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.*

Matthew 7:5 *Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

I Corinthians 11:31 *For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.*

Judgment begins with an honest evaluation of our own life before God. It begins with each of us comparing our life with the Bible's standards and then not excusing our disobedience but embracing God's wisdom and truth.