

**The Most Popular Verse in the World Today
and it's Not John 3:16 ~ Matthew 7:1-6**

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The most popular and widely known verse in the Bible used to be John 3:16. You would see it on posters at sporting events. Like here, this is the last out of the 2012 World Series. You would see it on t-shirts. Some did spin offs of this verse. It was a great verse if people looked it up – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.”

But I have not seen John 3:16 as much these last years. There is another verse widely quoted today. Most people don't know where to find it in the Bible. Many might not even know who said it. Lots of people who would not call themselves Christians would know this verse. It shows up in high school hallways and around water coolers. It is dropped into conversations between parents and young adult children or between friends chatting on messenger. It is sometimes even quoted in public debates when it comes to rights for people. Or it's raised by people who have chosen a path or a life mate that family, friends and peers criticize.

What is this verse that I would call the most popular verse in our world today? “Judge not lest you be judged.” You might hear it expressed like “we're not supposed to judge others.” Or “your judging attitude is going against even what the Bible says.”

So who said these words and in what context? What are they actually talking about here? What does it mean to judge someone? If this verse is taken absolutely, what does that mean for professional judges, the courts and situations where we are forced to make judgment calls?

That's what our text will address today as we near the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. We have seen Jesus explain what life looks like for a kingdom disciple – someone who has received Christ as Lord and entered into life under the reign of God. He gave us the Beatitudes. He's talked about coming to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. He showed us the fuller sense of the law in the areas of anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation and loving enemies. Jesus then instructed us not to practice our righteousness before others to be seen by them. So when we give, pray, or fast, we're supposed to do this in secret so we focus on God in the action. Within that teaching we discovered the Lord's Prayer. Then Jesus talked about storing up treasures in heaven and you can't serve God and money. But if we choose God as our master, where will the basics of life come from? Jesus assured us not to worry because we have a trustworthy Father in heaven. He provides food for birds and beauty for flowers. If He does all that

for them, how much more will He provide for us, His children? Jesus then summarized kingdom living in this way – “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.”

But as we seek His kingdom and His righteousness – as we desire to attain a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees, the temptation to judge each other becomes stronger. Now we come to the passage on judging. We’re going to look for answers to the following questions – what kind of judging is this passage talking about? Is there ever a place for correcting one another and if so, how do we go about doing it? What might need to change in our approach to other people in light of this passage?

Matthew 7:1-6 (ESV)

7 “Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You 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.

⁶“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

What kind of judging is this passage talking about? (7:1-5a)

Well notice a couple of things before we try to define this. Notice first that whatever He means by judging, Jesus commands us not to do it. “Judge not. Don’t judge.” Why? That you be not judged. Jesus commands us not to judge so that we won’t be judged ourselves. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a judgment, you know the embarrassment and anger it can produce. I’ll never forget the time I was 6 and left kindergarten with my friend to walk home. This was our normal practice. But there was one unusual factor that day. It was -35. Parents drove to pick up their little kiddies including my Mom. But we didn’t wait for her. We just took off. Well first we got in trouble from my Mom. But then the following day, Mrs. Peale, our kindergarten teacher pronounced judgment upon us in front of the whole class. I still remember that moment. “Tommy Anderst and Greg Burns – don’t you ever leave kindergarten without permission like you did yesterday or you will be in severe trouble,” as if this public shaming wasn’t enough trouble.

Well Jesus warns us to judge not so that we will not be judged and receive the sting that comes with it. But if we go ahead with judging, notice what happens in verse 2. “For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged and

with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” There is a reciprocal or boomerang kind of judgment that will happen to the person who judges like this. You pronounce judgment? You will be judged the same way. You measure another according to some standard? You will be measured with the same standard! But who does the measuring? Who will be doing this judgment? Likely it’s the Lord Himself. Jesus says “You *will be* judged. It *will be measured* to you. These are future events. At some point, we will be subject to the same kind of judgment we have pronounced on others. So whatever Jesus means by judging, He commands us not to do it. But if we do it we will be subjected to the same measuring stick at some future date.

But what kind of judging does Jesus talk about? The word judge here carries the sense of condemning others. It involves a hyper-critical, condemning, negative, disapproving attitude. It could be pronouncing another person guilty before God. “That person can’t be a Christian because they do this or they have that in their life.” The best definition I could find to this type of judging goes like this. The judging in Matthew 7 is **a fault-finding, condemning attitude which is too often combined with a blindness to one’s own failings**. A person with this attitude quickly condemns and jumps on the wrongs done by others while being unwilling to take criticism from others.

We get a clue to this meaning of judging by the picture Jesus draws for us. Verse 3 – “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” Or how can you say to your brother, “let me take the speck out of your eye,” when there is a log in your own eye?” So Jesus draws a picture maybe from his father’s carpenter shop. The speck was a small twig or stalk. The plank was a large beam of wood. So here’s a speck of sawdust. Here’s a plank. The speck symbolizes the fault in another person’s life. The plank is the fault in our lives. The judgmental person somehow fails to see the plank in their own eye while pointing out the speck in the other person’s life. That’s the judging that Jesus portrays for us.

One commentator puts it like this - *When disciples have developed this critical, condemning attitude as a pattern of life, they have forced love out of their relationships with others. The kind of love that Jesus offers enables his disciples to give what is good to others, not to condemn them. If we don’t have that love, but instead have vindictive condemnation in our hearts, we demonstrate that we really do not know God’s mercy and forgiveness.*

I was trying to think of examples of this type of person in my life. But the example that kept showing up was me. It happened just a couple of weeks ago. I was waiting to get on a plane from Chicago back to Edmonton. There was a

woman at the counter who was giving the staff a very difficult time. You know how when you board a plane, they try to have at least 2 staff there to check your boarding pass and id to speed up the process? But they could only have one person do that because the other staff person was tied up with this woman and all her concerns. So I immediately began to draw conclusions in my mind. “She is a trouble maker. She has no consideration for anyone else.” I got on the plane and got my seat near the very back. It seemed like we were just about to close the cabin door when who should finally come onto the plane but the same woman who had caused all the grief out at the gate. Now she is in the middle of the plane trying to get settled. Yet her carry on baggage is probably over the size limit and she is going up and down opening overhead bins frantically trying to find space for her suitcase. My thoughts start flowing – “she’s a trouble maker. She is inconsiderate. She is a pain.” And I looked at a couple of fellow passengers and we gave each other that knowing look – we agree about her – she is trouble. Now what have I just done? I have judged her without knowing what’s going on behind the scenes. I don’t know if she’s dealing with some family tragedy or on some medication or deeply stressed about something. I’ve just judged her. I certainly think of myself as superior to her. I am not being a trouble maker at that moment. It can happen so easily. We see something. We jump to a conclusion and pronounce a judgment and think ourselves superior while conveniently ignoring our own shortcomings.

So Jesus commands us to not judge. He promised that anyone who does judge in the condemning and accusing way will suffer the same judgment themselves. He draw us a picture of the often out of balance approach to this judging. But notice one more bit of force Jesus brings against a judgmental person with the first phrase of verse 5. “You Hypocrite!” Hypocrite? We’ve heard that before in the Sermon on the Mount. We saw Jesus condemn hypocrisy in religious people back in Matthew 6 where they did their righteous deeds just to be seen by others. The hypocrisy involved acting like one devoted to God when the real motivation is to be seen by others.

But in what way is judging someone with a speck in their eye, while you have a plank in your own eye, hypocrisy? Well, when we criticize or correct someone we can in some way assert ourselves to be in some superior position. We know something right and we see it wrong in someone else’s life. So we can be tempted to act as if we are morally superior. But acting superior when we’re not is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is acting like someone you’re not. We’re not morally superior to other people especially when we begin to grasp the depths of forgiveness we’ve received from God. Yet I think this is a hypocrisy we might be unaware of in our own lives. We “do not notice the log in our own

eye” Jesus says in verse 3. Or though we like to give correction to others, we are unwilling to receive correction from others.

So we now have a picture of the behavior Jesus speaks against. He commands His followers to guard against having a judgmental attitude that goes around looking for wrongs in other people’s lives. Such an attitude will lead to boomerang judgment. It is hypocritical because it often ignores the plank or faults in our own lives.

Is there ever a place for correction and if so, how do we go about doing it? (7:5b) Here’s where we need to push back a bit against the popular understanding of this verse. A common view today might go like this – “Why would I go about correcting anyone? It’s none of my business how another person lives their life. Besides, we’re not supposed to judge others. Our responsibility is to love others.” This belief is widespread today. There are aspects of truth in it. Our job is to love. It’s up to God to judge ultimately. I think there are a few reasons why this verse has gained popularity.

Some people have experienced a barrage of criticism throughout their childhood and teen years. They have begun to realize that much of that criticism was unwarranted. So they resolve never to do that to another person.

Some have experienced Christianity as a basically negative faith. It’s all about what you can’t do. Don’t do this. Don’t do that. And it’s our job to patrol one another to ensure we’re not violating any of the don’t commands.

Others have experienced a condemning and negative attitude from so-called Christians. Those Christians have some major issue in their own lives that comes out later or is obvious for everyone else to see. Yet they are quite comfortable pointing out the faults in others. We criticize people living a lifestyle we don’t approve of yet are comfortable with greed, gossip or deceit. That is hypocrisy. That is arrogant. That is prideful and sinful. So it’s understandable how the world has latched onto this verse as a popular mantra. We need to very seriously heed Jesus’ teaching here.

But could it be that some love this verse because they want to justify their way of living whatever it involves? Is there ever a time when a line is crossed and we do have to institute correction? Is it okay for someone to take your child without asking? Most people would agree that is wrong. Isn’t there a type of judgment involved in making that decision?

“But that’s the job of the police, courts and correctional services”. Yes – that’s true. But wouldn’t it serve the greater community if we had the courage to lovingly and respectfully call out someone if they’re doing wrong?

Besides, it is inaccurate to say that the New Testament casts a universal ban on judging others. **1 Corinthians 5:12-13 – For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God**

judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” So we gain a couple of principles here. When it comes to non-Christians, our job is not to judge. We instead are to give the good news of the Gospel to them. So we don’t pick at what we believe is wrong in their lives. We glorify Jesus. We put forward the beauty of Jesus. We talk about the sacrifice of Jesus. We bring them to Jesus. If they receive Jesus, then they will begin to learn about Him and His teaching which will then bring a holy conviction to areas of life that need change.

But we also see in this passage that Christians are called to judge each other. But this judgment is not the same as that talked about by Jesus in Matthew 7. This judgment discerns a damaging behavior that impacts many. There was a man in the Corinthian church that was engaged in a very public and open sin for everyone to see. But instead of actually calling the guy on his sin, they celebrated as a church how open they were to people making all kinds of choices. But this was a choice that went against God’s law and brought damage to the community and its witness. So they needed to correct this man by taking a drastic step and confronting him with his sin. In John 7:24, Jesus says “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with the right judgment. Colossians 3:16 – Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 1 John 4:1 – Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

So there is a place for rendering judgment. We even find it in Matthew 7 at the end of verse 5. 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. **How are Christians supposed to relate to other Christians who need correction? With a self-examining humility that guards against condemnation and hypocrisy.** If you have ever experienced this from another person, you will hopefully be much more likely to listen to their input and consider it. If someone has taken the time to first humble themselves before God and confess their own sins; if someone approaches us with a humility and not a holier than thou attitude and they come across committed to our best, we will hopefully heed the counsel or the points they raise.

So Jesus allows brothers and sisters in Christ to humbly correct one another. He does not forbid necessary evaluation, decisions and at times correction. Nor does He forbid discernment. The final verse in our passage today speaks to this.

What is 7:6 talking about?

Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. What on earth is this verse about? Well we first have to understand that first century people had a very different view of dogs than we do. We understand dogs primarily as friendly, adorable pets that we cuddle and play with. Dogs in the ancient world lived in squalor and scavenged the streets for food. The dogs licking the sores of the beggar Lazarus in one of Jesus' parables was not a picture of man's best friend bringing relief. It was a picture of desperation. This poor beggar was so vulnerable, wild dogs would approach him and lick him without fear. Dogs were considered dirty animals that scavenged in garbage. Pigs were rejected by Jews probably because they also scavenged and they were unclean according to the Old Testament. Pearls likely symbolize the great value of the message of the kingdom of heaven.

So to give something holy to dogs was a waste. They had no capacity to appreciate it. To throw pearls before pigs was also a waste. They may taste the pearl and find that it has no taste value. So they might instead spit it out, step on it and try to bite the person who threw them an expensive pearl. What does all this mean? Jesus calls for discernment or a form of judging in giving the message of the kingdom. Don't continue to give the message to someone who does not appreciate it or continues to react with hostility towards it. There are times when we must put our energies elsewhere.

So within 6 verses we see the need for some sort of balance. Jesus commands us not to have a judgmental, condemning attitude that criticizes others while ignoring our own faults. Yet we are called to with humility correct others. We are called to show discernment in giving out the holy things and message of God to others.

What might need to change in our approach to other people in light of this passage? Bosses; managers; owners – do you correct your employees or team without examining your own failings? Retired folks – do you gracefully speak into another person's life with all that you have learned in life or just criticize someone who annoys you? Roommates – you can learn to live together and dealing with each other's annoying habits with the grace and power of Christ.

Married people - one of the bigger challenges in marriage is making the transition from courting where you put your best self forward – to engagement where the other person is perfect – to the first years of marriage where you realize that prince or princess isn't absolutely perfect - to maturing as a person/couple and pointing out what you see wrong

with the other person frequently to gently correcting each other and asking for input on anything that could use correction.

Siblings – it's amazing how willing siblings are to correct or point out one another's errors or areas in need of correction. But you might get a lot further with your brother or sister if you first examine yourself and come to them in humility.

When it comes to this issue of correction, we tend to err in one of two directions. Some of us err on the side of correcting others all the time. We just speak our minds because they've got to know the truth. We value speaking truth far above consideration for another's feelings. We are by nature a fixer.

Some of us may err on the side of seldom if ever speaking up. We have the gift of love. We love caring and can bear with the tears of others. But we shudder when thinking about bringing up hard truths. We are by nature a feeler.

But we have to mix truth and tears. We need to be willing to receive truth and tears. If someone tries to bring truth to us or correction to us, do we act like the pig in verse 6? Do we trample it and bite them? We might bite them by lashing out at them. Or we might bite them by getting all devastated and fall apart – an indirect way of biting someone. Tim Keller asks *How are you ever going to be able to help other people hear the truth if you're not an easy person to tell the truth to yourself?*

We are called to be a community of people who love and support one another and along build relationships to the point where we can lovingly speak truth into another's life. This is part of the growing and shaping of the people of God.

We need Jesus' power and strength to resist our judgmental tendencies and to avoid speaking up when correction is necessary. Yet as Christians we have the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live and act according to God's will. By His power we can live out Jesus' command here. If you don't know Christ, you need to receive Him and forgiveness for your own sins. You can then begin the journey of the kingdom disciple's life under the reign of God.