

**INTEGRATING BIBLICAL JUDGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM:
A DIVINE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MATTHEW 7:1**

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Abstract

The meaning of Christ’s “Judge not” statement in Matthew 7:1 has not been fully examined in understanding the appropriate import of Christ’s message, first to His first-hand listeners and then to contemporary society. This paper looks at what teachers/mentors and their relationships with students within an academic environment tend to benefit from the concept of divine justice. This study is an exegetical work achieved through syntactical analysis of the various components of the Μη κρίνετε, ἵνα μη κριθῆτε. In this study, documentary review is carried out while the grammatical significance of the words of the text is also examined. This study helps to highlight fundamental spiritual principles that guide the act of passing judgment or issuing outright condemnation in the relationship between teachers/mentors and students within an academic setting. It can also serve as a guide for defining the nature of inter-relationship expected between faculty, staff, and students. When personal and professional philosophies are hinged on the viewpoint of the divine concept of true judgment as espoused in Matt 7:1, it will enhance unity, and love, and possibly eradicate the ills associated with loss of intellect, workforce, constructive criticism, and eternity.

KEYWORD: Matthew 7. Judgement. Condemnation. Teachers. Students. Educational. Classroom.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ‘judging’ which Christ speaks about in Matthew 7:1 is within the periscopes of spiritual principles found in the Sermon-on-the-Mountain teaching by Jesus (see 5:1 – 7:29).ⁱ Here, He took time within the pericope of verses 1 to 5, to expatiate the consequences and hypocrisy of passing judgment on others without remorse. He described the consequence of judging others based on the well-known principle of sowing and reaping, “Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (Job 4:8 KJV). In verse two, verses 3 and 4, He recommended a thorough self-examination before being qualified to even attempt critically passing judgment (cf. the woman caught in adultery in John 8:4-7), while in verse five, He referred to those who are pass judgement recklessly as hypocrites.

However, some Biblical gospel texts read at face value might suggest an allusion to passing judgment on others. Such texts include Luke 12:57, where Jesus rhetorically wondered why the hypocrites do not judge rightly, and in John 7:24, where He answered the Jews’ query by telling them not to judge by appearance but righteously. Do the above statements by Jesus contradict the command not to judge in Matthew 7:1 or can we conclude that where the judgment is performed in righteousness, one is exempted from the ‘judge not’ commandment? This paper intends to examine *Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε*ⁱⁱ (Mat 7:1) and its syntactical significance. Understanding this will help in identifying the root meaning of the word *κρίνετε*, and its relationship with other words in its context. The assumption here is a clear understanding of this principle can help in mentoring and reforming those who have been condemned as unworthy in an academic society. Applying the principles can also pave the way for mentors and teachers who desire to adopt best practices in handling students' misdemeanors in the classroom.

Meaning of Term

The words ‘judge’ and ‘to judge’ can be understood to mean either a noun designating a legal official or a verb signifying the final output of a judge.ⁱⁱⁱ The understanding depends on the context of interpretation. It refers to ordinary discernment or evaluation (cf. Luke 7:43); litigation that occurs in a law court (Matt. 5:40); the bestowal of reward (19:28); the pronouncement of guilt (John 7:51) and to absolute determining of someone’s fate (5:22; 8:16).^{iv}

Scholars' View of Matthew 7:1

This section addresses what scholars have said about Jesus's statement in Matt 7:1. Matthew Wilkins suggested that the "judge not" command by Jesus was given to address the disciples' "interpersonal kingdom spirituality in their community relationship."^v Apostolos Makrakis seems to understand the text to mean that God forbids men to 'judge' other men regarding their sins by granting them forgiveness so that God might not judge them by forgiving their sins.^{vi} Judging others is interpreted to mean avoiding placing oneself over others and 'making a pronouncement of their guilt before God.'^{vii} It mean believers are to avoid the snatching of the responsibility of God's last-day judgment of condemnation for Him alone upon others.^{viii} R. T. France argues that the text implies an 'unfairly critical attitude to others'^{ix} while D. A. Carson concludes that demands for perfection often breed an attitude of judgmentalism.^x From the above, a background analysis of the statement will aid its in-depth interpretation.

Biblical Backgrounds

The idea of the supreme God who judges fairly is evident in the Old Testament scripture (Deut. 1:17). Biblical imagery about judgment presents God as a God of judgment (Isa 30:18), the One whose activity is judgment which no one taught Him (40:14), He who does right and can be trusted (Gen 18:25), loves justice (Isa 61:8), His ways are judgment (Deut. 32:4), and together with righteousness, He establishes the foundation of His throne (Ps 97:2).^{xi} This contrasts with human judges often depicted as perverse (Lev. 19:15), stained with bribery (Mic. 3:11; 7:3), and abusing authority.^{xii}

Old Testament narratives such as Cain's fratricide (Gen. 4:1-16), the flood and Tower of Babel (Gen. 6, 11), Egyptian plagues (Ex. 7-12), and others do reflect God's judgment acts upon human's rebellious attitudes. "The OT prophetic books are stories of national judgment as well, sometimes buttressed by courtroom imagery as God calls a wayward people to account."^{xiii}

God's judgment is also an act depicting the separation of two groups of people with each group representing the characteristics of humans history. For example, in Noah's flood narrative, there was a clear separation between Noah and his family and the rest of the world as God conducted His judgment, while in the New Testament, an example of such imagery can be found in the parable of the harvest of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13: 36-43) also affirming this principle. He often proposes this separation as a means of serving a warning to the impenitent of coming reward.^{xiv}

God's Judgment in Non-biblical Writings

Extrabiblical materials and sources provide parallels to the 'judge not' text. "Do not assume the place of God by deciding you have the right to stand in judgment over all – do not do it, I say, in order to avoid being called to account by the God who place you usurp."^{xv} The above provides a parallel to the text in Matthew 7:1. Albright and Mann cite another which says, "Whoever accuses his neighbor will himself be judged first."^{xvi} This also provides a parallel to the text of the study.

Another extra-biblical source also affirms the biblical principles that only God has the overriding right to judge, and not man. It says, "I will pay to no man the reward of evil; I will pursue him with goodness. *For judgment of all the living is with God.* And it is He who will render to man his reward (IQS x, 17-18) – italics mine."^{xvii} One can conclude that this proclamation is unequivocal in its alignment with the principle by which God is recognized as the sole judge of all. This was clearly understood even among the Jews during the time of Jesus. This could provide a background to Jesus' message and the first-hand listeners as well.

The Old Testament and Jewish non-biblical writings provide judgment imagery in different instances to suggest and affirm that upon God alone rests the authority and responsibility for final judgment since humanity, with the tendency to be unfair and perverse, cannot be trusted with such responsibility.

Exegetical Analysis of the Text

This section intends to present a deeper understanding of the text through a syntactical analysis of the passage. It will identify the text through various Biblical versions and will examine the syntax of the Greek sentence of *Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε*.

Establishing the text

Various English versions of the Bible have presented slightly different translations of the original text. Below are the various translations: .

- “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” King James Version.
- “Stop judging, that you may not be judged.” New American Bible.
- “Do not judge or you too will be judged.” New International Version.
- “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.” New Living Translation, and
- “Judge not, that you may not be judged.” Young’s Literal translation.

From the above, it is clear there are slight syntactical differences among the various translations and an appropriate exegetical examination of the text is essential.

Syntactical analysis of the text

The passage's larger context is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3 – 8:1) while the immediate context is Matthew 7:1-5. However, an analysis of the structure of the text affirms that *Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε* is a compound sentence, comprising two main sentences, i.e., *Μὴ κρίνετε* (You, do not judge) plus *μὴ κριθῆτε* (You may not be judged). This is divided equally by the “*ἵνα*” conjunction (so that), which expresses the “purpose-result” concept. Hence, the purpose/result or benefit that accrues from ‘not judging’ (*Μὴ κρίνετε*) is that ‘you may not be judged’ (*μὴ κριθῆτε*).

The Meaning of the verb *κρίνετε*

The root word of the two main verbs in the passage is *κρινῶ* (appears eight times in its nominative present indicative active form; nine times in its imperative second person present active; nine times in participle nominative form; three times in the subjunctive aorist passive). It

expresses an original meaning which is, “to separate, sift” or “divide out, separate off;” this came to be used in connection with human value judgment i.e., technically meaning “to judge, pronounce judgment, decide, condemn, as passing a personal judgment on someone’s action.” In the LXX, it does not only mean to judge, but “to punish, vindicate, and obtain justice, for a person” (Gen. 15:14; 30:6; 2 Sam. 19:9; Jer 5:28).^{xviii} However, in the New Testament scripture, it also means “to speak or think ill of, decide, judge” (Matt. 7:1-2; Luke 7:43; Acts 4:19; 15:19; Rom 14:3-4, 10, 13; 1 Cor. 4:5).^{xix}

Therefore, in context, *κρίνετε* implies an ongoing “present” continuous action. The usage of the negative particle “*Μη*” with an imperative “*κρίνετε*” can be interpreted to mean the following.

- **An existing condition** – It can mean ‘brings to an end passing judgment on others,’ ‘stop condemning’ or ‘do not do any longer the act of condemning.’ Christ’s command should be understood as a strong instruction to desist from judging.
- **Action not yet begun** – It can mean ‘do not get into the habit of thinking ill of others.’ Practically, the instruction is a command to not allow ‘judging others’ even in our thoughts to be initiated or concluded (cf. Matt. 5:28; which forbids the sin of adultery, even in the heart).

Use of “*ἵνα*” plus Subjunctive *κριθῆτε*

The second part of the text has a subjunctive, aorist passive verb form of ‘*κρινῶ*,’ which is *κριθῆτε*. Naturally, a subjunctive implies “uncertainty but probable.” It might have been an innovative idea to simply translate the subordinating clause of the text (*ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε*) as “in order that you may or might not be judged” (NAB); a case for which the purpose or result of ‘do not judge’ is uncertain or probable.

However, the subjunctive-ness or ‘uncertainty’ of the verb is made “forceful” and “certain” when constructed with the preceding imperative verb “*κρίνετε*.” Rather than a probable action, it takes upon itself the use of “shall” or “will” in the text to make it certain. There is also

an emphasis on the use of “Μή” particle with a subjunctive verb, which provides a sort of “prohibitive subjunctive.”

The subordinating clause *ἵνα μή κριθῆτε* might therefore be translated as “in order that/that you shall not be judged.” This brings to one’s understanding that there is surely a fair recompense for every of our actions (Matt. 7:2 cf. Gal. 6:7; Rev.22:12). An affirmation of this strong and unwavering stance of fair recompense is found in verse two, “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Mat 7:2 KJV). The passive use of the verb *κριθῆτε* also implies “to bring to trial, condemn, punish.”^{xxx} The aftermath result of judging or condemning others is punishment or being brought to the heavenly trial.

Theological Perspective

There are basic theological principles that can be derived from the above discussion on the text in Matthew 7:1, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Mat 7:1 KJV). The following are observable spiritual principles:

- The command not to judge is basic. “Measured by the standard of God’s perfect righteousness, no one is righteous in his sight, but all are under his wrath... This is the reason ultimately no human being has a right to judge another”^{xxi} Only God has the prerogative of ultimate judgment upon anyone in the world.
- The process of condemning or passing judgment upon others begins in man’s heart. When such is perceived and nurtured within the heart against the other, it has become a transgression before God, who is the ultimate judge.
- Under no circumstance, no condition or situation should man be found condemning his/her other neighbor. The emphasis remains even stronger in Luke 6:37 where two negative particles appear; *‘Καὶ μή κρίνετε, καὶ οὐ μή κριθῆτε* (Luke 6:37), which implies a strong imperative negation, thus translated as “do not judge, and you might not be judged.”

- The certainty of the punishment that will be meted out upon the ‘hypocrites’ (Matt. 7:5) represents a fierce warning from God against those who indulge in these acts.
- It is a call to fulfill the divine procedure of settling differences among brethren, as outlined in Matthew 18:15-18. This is a call for brotherly love and care, rather than the destruction of other people through the fingers, the mouth or influence.

A Psychological Perspective of Judgement in the Classroom

In many ways, a teacher’s judgment is crucial to students' academic and personal growth. The judgment of students' behavior and academic performance is primarily important because it affects placement decisions (e.g., ability groups), grades, grade retention, and students' life purpose. As a result, it can have a significant impact on students' educational paths^{xxii} and life advancement.^{xxiii} In the short term, a teacher's judgment of a student's academic and social-emotional traits forms the foundation for a variety of instructional decisions and teaching practices.^{xxiv} Furthermore, research has shown a correlation between students' social-emotional outcomes and teachers' assessments of their characteristics. In contrast to students who felt their teachers undervalued them, students who felt their teachers valued them more were said to be more motivated at school.^{xxv}

Teachers' judgment of their students' overall development and well-being is extremely important in the classroom. Students' well-being is regarded as an outcome in and of itself, as well as a necessary precondition for some educational outcomes. As an illustration, studies have found a positive correlation between teachers' judgment and students' well-being, academic success,^{xxvi} psychosocial adjustment^{xxvii}, and overall life satisfaction^{xxviii}. Though it may not be evident at first, students' behavior and well-being are also key indicators for teaching because it influences how teachers plan interventions and lessons for the classroom.^{xxix} To better support students in their learning processes, teachers modify their communication, teaching materials, or instructional strategies based on their judgment of the characteristics of their students.^{xxx}

It is believed that accurate teacher assessment is a prerequisite for adaptive teaching, which supports each student's academic growth and learning.^{xxxi} Although subjective well-being

correlates to an individual's inner state and should ideally be assessed using self-report, teachers frequently (need to) rely on their judgment when determining whether a student is faring well at school.^{xxxii} Teachers' judgment of various aspects of students' behavior, however, is known to be inaccurate, or at best only moderate.^{xxxiii}

According to Artelt and Gräsel,^{xxxiv} the accuracy of a teacher's judgment depends on their capacity to accurately assess pertinent student characteristics and appropriately evaluate learning requirements. Teacher's judgment competence is regarded as a fundamental skill of teachers' professional abilities due to the significant ramifications.^{xxxv} High judgment or assessment accuracy, when paired with a frequent application of effective teaching strategies (e.g., offering structuring cues or one-on-one support), is a crucial component of education and is especially pertinent to a student's academic advancement.^{xxxvi}

Research has indicated that gender bias has been shown for emotional well-being and social inclusion (Schwab et al., 2020), that teachers' assessments of students' subjective well-being at school are more accurate when they consider their gender (Venetz et al., 2019), and that teachers routinely underestimate students who belong to marginalized groups, such as those from ethnic minorities or those with special needs.^{xxxvii} At different points in the decision-making process, it is believed that a teacher's attributes affect their judgment. There is a wealth of research linking teachers' judgment processes to a variety of attributes, including beliefs, job experience, and professional goals.^{xxxviii}

Educating teachers about the value of students' subjective well-being for both individual growth and adaptive teaching is a critical first step in improving the accuracy of their judgment. Even though a teacher has access to information about a student's subjective well-being, they may fail to notice trait-specific behaviors or other cues if they do not regard it as relevant.

The Implication for the Teacher/Mentor-Student Relationship

The 'judge not' biblical principle can be applied in classroom relationships between a teacher/mentor and the student. Understanding that the right to judge or ^{xxxix}simply put, to completely condemn without an appropriate opportunity for restitution or restoration is the

prerogative of God alone. Even at that, God provides an opportunity for sinful humanity to regain a relationship with Him (John 3:16). The following are suggestive of a cordial Mentor/Teacher-Student relationship based on the ‘judge not’ principle:

- It reiterates the fact that a restorative plan should accompany a pronouncement of recompense for culpability. At no time should a guilty person be left to a no-come-back or a no-opportunity-for-amend situation. Every student should not be given only a second chance (or as many opportunities as possible) but should be walked through the process of restoration.
- It is suggested that administrators of academic institutions who sit on cases of students' misdemeanors should admit that expulsion might not be a last resort in aggregating punishment. Opportunities could be given as much as possible to allow the student to reflect deeply on the misdemeanor and decide towards moving ahead. A certain period could be determined to allow the person to stay off school for such reflective self-evaluation. If God does shut out individuals at will but rather demonstrates amazing long-suffering, no human should do so in finality.
- Teachers, staff, and administrators (especially in a faith-based institution) are advised to apply this principle to mitigate against the following:
 - Loss of intellect. There is a loss of talent and intellectual capability which the outright and complete condemnation of a guilty student could contribute to. Innately in every person resides an ingenuity that could be maximized to the blessing of all if surrounded with the right influences.
 - Loss of workforce. This act of complete condemnation reduces the strength of workforce in any society. If every part of the body is amputated to get rid of every infection, there will ultimately be no part of the body left to sustain the very life one is trying to preserve. Such should apply to the passing of judgment without recourse to restoration.
 - Loss of constructive contribution to knowledge could be denied society if no effort is made to allow the guilty to reflect and make amends.

- Loss of eternal life. This is the greatest loss to humanity since a condemnatory judgment drastically reduces an individual's chances of making a constructive decision to live a better life. Such an opportunity lost could irrevocably steer the individual away from the path to eternal life.

Conclusion

This study shows that Matt 7:1 has been subjected to various translations and interpretations. Meanwhile, the study of the text in its original form seems to give a clearer insight into the meaning of the text. The certainty of the judgment that comes upon those who take pleasure in condemning and pronouncing judgment upon others is clear in Matthew 7:1. The word of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mountain was an imperative command 'to end passing judgment on others' or 'to stop condemning' or 'not any longer perform the act of condemning' other humans. It is also equally a prohibitive command never 'to get into the habit of condemning or thinking ill of others,' as "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again (Mat 7:2 KJV)."

God has the ultimate authority to judge the universe at the end of the world, as reflected in His relationship with man from Eden till the present generation. On this basis, man is commanded to make peace with his/her neighbor and use the principles proffered by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-18. This equally and importantly applies to the attitude of passing judgment or complete condemnation on students in a teacher/mentor-student relationship without any recourse to reflection and restoration to God's intended design. The teacher/mentor should be seen as God's vessel to restore as many as had been condemned and judged as failures and should therefore embrace this unique role as a divine privilege and responsibility.

Endnotes

¹William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, vol. 26 (London, GB: Yale University Press, 1971), 85. Albright and Mann argue that there was no connection between the last verse in chapter 6 and chapter 7, verse one. They suggest it to be a collection of sayings by a

character unknown that is “moral” and “quasi-legal.” John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 317. Nolland suggests that this passage, including verses 6, 7-11 could best be taken as an appendix to chapter 6.

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ⁱⁱⁱDonald E. Gowan, *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 257.

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