

Judge Not (Lest Ye Be Judged)

One short verse, a lot of baggage, and the difference between discernment and hypocrisy

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, September 6, 2026
PASSAGES	Matthew 7; Luke 6; 1 Corinthians 5; 1 Corinthians 6; Matthew 18; Hebrews 5
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:08:40 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus said *judge not*, and he meant it. What he did not mean is that a Christian should stop discerning, stop deciding, or stop telling a brother the truth — because the same Lord commands all three within a few breaths of that sentence. What he was rebuking is the arrangement almost all of us run by default: mercy for me, justice for you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Obeying Jesus is not where grace runs out. It is more grace — most of what he pries out of our hands was going to poison us anyway.
- ◆ Let the clear passages fence the hard one. Paul pronounces judgment in Corinth and says the saints will judge the world, so “judge not” cannot mean judgment is inherently evil.
- ◆ Whatever the command restricts, it has to leave discernment intact. You cannot hold fast to what is good and hate what is evil if you are not allowed to tell them apart.
- ◆ Refusing to distinguish good from evil is not humility. Hebrews calls it infancy, and calls trained discernment maturity.
- ◆ The word rendered “judge” covers everything from which gas station to stop at, to a well-made decision, to a sentence of condemnation. Which one Jesus is forbidding is the whole question.
- ◆ Our jurisdiction is the church and, first, ourselves. The people outside are in God’s hands — which is not the same as having nothing to say.

- ◆ “Judge not” is short, fast and quotable, which is exactly what makes it the most useful verse in the Bible for shielding yourself from scrutiny. That misuse is the very thing it was spoken against.
- ◆ The right response to a shield is not to manufacture a better shield. It is to find out what Jesus meant and do it.

► 1:08:40

Matt warned the room early that this one would take a while to land. “Like a cat just kind of circling before he lays down,” he said — and that is a fair description of the message. He took the long way around a very short verse, and the walk was the point.

Obedience is not where grace runs out

► 1:09:45

He opened where he has been opening: obeying Jesus is always a good idea, and it is not a departure from grace, as though grace got you in the door and now you are on your own. “Obeying Jesus is more grace,” Matt said, “because the more you know him, the more you love him, the more he sets you free.” Sometimes he pries a thing out of our hands and sometimes we hand it over gladly — either way, good riddance.

Then the verse: “Judge not, that you be not judged.” Most of us memorized the older wording, *judge not lest ye be judged*, which Matt allowed sounds cooler. The task is still to obey it. The complication is that the verse arrives carrying cultural freight, pulled in two directions: on one side, that no Christian may ever reach a conclusion about anything; on the other, the cheerful inversion he heard in a three-way conversation once — “that’s all you can do, all you can do is judge, just judge it up.” His plan was neither to overreact nor to ignore it: “We’re going to practice reading the Bible like a normal person.”

Where the fence posts are

► 1:13:52

The normal way to read a hard verse is to let the clearer ones set its boundaries. So he went to Corinth, where Paul is dealing with a case of immorality the pagans would not tolerate.

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife... For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.”

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-3 ↗

“If I were to say, hey Paul, dude, judge not,” Matt said, “I would feel a little bit uncomfortable with that.” This is an apostle writing scripture under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the moral of the story is plainly not that Paul overstepped. But is it only a concession for an extreme case — break glass in case of needing judgment? A chapter later, no.

► 1:15:22

“When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels?”

1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-3 ↗

Matt was honest that he does not know what judging angels will look like. His point was the logic: God does not write something into our destiny in order to ruin us. “Maybe what Jesus was doing was coaching us about inappropriate judgment.”

Whatever it restricts, it has to leave discernment standing

► 1:17:31

Second fence post. “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.” If genuine love is the goal — and it is — then love here has teeth. Some worldly pictures of love leave no room to hate anything. God’s love insists on it. “You can’t have a godly kind of love unless you learn to really hate evil things,” Matt said, “and I mean that genuinely.” Which creates an obvious problem: you cannot cling to one and abhor the other if you are forbidden to tell which is which.

► 1:19:08

The same holds for “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Matt wants both halves: no inappropriate judgment, and no naïveté either. Some people hear that as coming dangerously close to

being judgy. For the more mature, he said, the two sit together — and the mature are the ones with an opinion worth having.

Reason frankly with your neighbor

► 1:21:54

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

LEVITICUS 19:17–18 ↗

Hate the evil, not the brother. And if I love him as I love myself, I have to admit what I would want for myself: someone reasoning frankly with me before it got out of hand. So that is the approach — the one you would want. Matt paused the room there for a short, uncomfortable prayer: am I nursing a grudge right now? Some of us do not have to ask. Some of us do.

► 1:23:44

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you... If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”

MATTHEW 18:15–17 ↗

If your first instinct on watching that conversation is *man, don't judge*, then the process Jesus gave a community has nowhere to happen. Matt worked through the double negatives slowly and with some visible amusement: not being judgmental cannot mean never naming a fault, and it cannot mean never escalating when a brother will not listen. Jesus is morally consistent. He does not say random things based on what he had for lunch.

► 1:26:21

James sets the temperature for it — quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, put away all filthiness. You cannot put away wickedness without permission to label some things wicked. And you do not have to come in hot at your brother, because the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Refusing to tell good from evil is not humility

► 1:28:58

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food... But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

HEBREWS 5:12-14 ↗

Trained by constant practice. Not stumbled into accidentally. Matt drew the sharp edge of it: it is immaturity to be unable to distinguish good from evil, and it is apparently immaturity to avoid trying.

What the word actually means

► 1:30:08

Then the vocabulary, which is where the fog usually is. When Simon answers correctly about the two debtors, Jesus tells him “you have judged rightly” — same word, and it means something like *concluded*. In Romans 2:1 the same word carries condemnation, a sentence handed down. In Acts 20:16 it is a travel decision — Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus. Matt’s translation: “I’ve judged that QT is too expensive. I’m going to go past QT to the Chevron.” It would be strange for a friend to answer that with *hey, don’t judge, man, just stop where you stop*.

► 1:32:17

And when Jesus is challenged for healing on the Sabbath, his answer is not a retraction: “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” Paul uses the word one way when he says he decided to know nothing among them except Christ and him crucified, and quite another when he says do not pronounce judgment before the time. Words work like that.

Whose behavior is our business

► 1:33:15

Here Matt gave the instincts of the surrounding culture their due, and it was the most interesting turn of the morning. Paul clarifies that when he said not to associate with the immoral, he never meant the immoral of the world — to avoid them you would have to leave the planet. He meant anyone who bears the name of brother.

“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?” So the world’s instinct is half right: it is far more our job to judge ourselves than to sort out people who are not under church governance. And half wrong, because none of that takes away our freedom to be perfectly clear about what we believe and to keep bearing witness to Jesus.

Fourteen verses later, in the same sermon

► 1:35:18

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.”

MATTHEW 7:15–17 ↗

Same chapter, same sitting, a few breaths after *judge not*. He did not wander off into horticulture; he is still talking about people. Some of them look one way and are another, and you are expected to know by the fruit. Matt asked the honest question: is that even a thought you permit yourself to have about the people around you, or does the shield go up first?

► 1:37:54

He then admitted the obvious: none of this competes with two syllables. “Judge not” is fast, and fast is powerful — a Wild West draw. “Theology shouldn’t be done in tweets, but when it can, it’s just like, wow.” So he offered, with a straight face and then a laugh at himself, a three-syllable counter that Jesus also actually said: *judge rightly*. It still fits in a tweet. The NIV gives you *judge correctly*, one syllable longer; the redneck edition, he suggested, is *judge good*.

► 1:39:24

And then he took it back, which is the part worth keeping. The whole exercise of trading verses as ammunition was never what discipleship was for. “I don’t want to be in the habit of twisting scripture just to protect myself from scripture twisting. I want to know what Jesus’s true intent was, and I want to do it.” The right response to a shield is not a better shield: “I don’t want to just debase myself to immature behavior just to get, you know, like *I’m right*.” The question he wanted left standing was the plain one — what is a real attempt at what Jesus said, and what does a real attempt look like to obey it? The end goal is genuine love — “not a morally neutral epicurean mush.”

The log and the speck

► 1:41:38

Luke's version comes with the terms attached:

"Judge not, and you will not be judged... For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." Matt read the flour-bag picture behind it: you can fill the sack loosely and charge the same price, or you can press it down, shake it together and let it run over. "How would you want that bag filled if you bought flour?" That is the measure — and it is the one coming back.

► 1:42:39

He kept reading, because Luke puts a parable between the measure and the log, and it is not decoration.

"Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."

LUKE 6:39-40 ↗

That is the qualification question sitting right where you would want it. Correcting someone is leading them somewhere, and a blind guide takes his brother into the pit with him. The fix is not to stop leading; it is to be fully trained — to end up like the teacher.

► 1:43:16

"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?... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."

LUKE 6:41-42 ↗

Matt's rendition of how that conversation actually goes was uncomfortably familiar: *you have this little speck, I know it's embarrassing, thoughts and prayers, I just wanted to bring it up* — delivered around a beam. Then the question he called dumb and profound at the same time: why do we not see the logs in our own eyes?

What we can see, and what we cannot

► 1:43:52

Before answering, he gathered what had been established. Judge correctly. Judge generously, including toward the people you cannot stand, because the measure clause was never limited to your own circle — “obviously you and your close circle of friends” is not who Jesus had in mind when he set the terms. Judge within the church, starting with yourself; the Spirit will convict the world of its sin. And right and wrong are firmly established by God and by no one else — “it’s real stuff,” and we are supposed to know the difference. But hold your reading of a person loosely, because man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. “We’re not capable of perfect judgment. We are capable of accurately reporting things God thinks,” Matt said, “but we cannot assess what led to the — I can’t read your heart.”

► 1:45:27

Which is a reason for care, not for silence — “so don’t let any twisting of Jesus’s words prevent you from doing this.” He anchored that with Paul’s charge to Timothy, given in the presence of the God who will judge the living and the dead:

preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with complete patience and teaching — because a time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but will collect teachers to suit their own passions and wander off into myths. Matt left the application open where Paul does: be sober-minded, endure suffering, fulfill your ministry. “How does this hit home for you? I don’t know.”

Mercy for me, justice for you

► 1:47:18

Now the answer to the log question, and it is the heart of the message. When it is me, there is always a backstory, a context, and excellent intentions. “I’m my own best defense attorney in my head.” When it is you, there is a verse — “hey, look, in Deuteronomy, you know, Moses wrote...” the first time you do something that bothers me. Both halves are true on their own — there really are principles of judgment, and God really is kind and slow to anger — but assembled this way they are not a love of justice and not a love of mercy. “It’s just a love for self. That’s really what’s going on.” Matt’s blunter verdict on the pairing: “It’s a joke.”

Then the honest asymmetry underneath it: “It’s the easiest thing in the world to come up with a generous backstory for myself.” What I need from you is context; what I need from the other guy is the rule. And it is not only me-against-you — he named playing the same defense games on behalf of the people he identifies with, which is the version that hides best.

He made it concrete with a game to play over lunch: pick the people you do not identify with, who do not look or sound or talk like you and who genuinely bother you, and name the scheme of justice you have assigned them. Then imagine Jesus saying, *that’s the scheme we’re using on you*. The irony he kept

returning to is that making *judge not* a shield for yourself while invoking church governance against everyone else is precisely the behavior Jesus was rebuking when he said it.

► 1:49:57

He even supplied the comeback, so the room could watch it fall apart. *I'm still in the grace zone; he's earned the justice zone.* My stuff started innocently, my intentions were good, the result was not that bad — you are just sensitive. He, on the other hand, hard-heartedly kept rejecting sound logic and the Lord's conviction and kept pushing it away. “So I'm still in camp mercy and he's earned camp judgment.” It sounds airtight right up to the last clause: “but then again, I'm the one who's decided that that is the case.”

In better hands

► 1:50:27

The last move was a relief rather than a rebuke. “Thankfully, justice and mercy are handled really well in the hands of Jesus.” Our generous self-assessment does not hold — it “works for me now because it feels good, but it's not going to work when it's real,” because the verdict is not ours to write. Our harsh assessment of someone else does not land either, because that is not our jurisdiction. The only people injured by misusing judgment are ourselves and whoever we hurt along the way — “a big self-own in Jesus's opinion.”

And the command reads as kindness once you notice the timing. Jesus is telling us the measure ahead of time, the way a teacher mentions there will be a pop quiz tomorrow on chapter two. He wants us merciful because he intends to be merciful. All of it makes sense under his authority. “He's the boss. We're not.”

Matt would not close by pretending the door is locked. Jesus left the option open: if you want to be harsh in your judgment of others, “you still technically can be.” Nothing stops you today. What you are choosing is which measure gets used — “he might invoke those principles against you. He's trying to tell you now.” That warning is the mercy.

► 1:52:10

Then he closed the way he has been closing — a quiet minute to ask the Lord what to do with it, on the assumption that we would do it later and might as well start while we are together. “Lord, I ask that you would speak to me, to us, and you'd be merciful.” His one-line summary of the whole series followed: obeying Jesus is grace, because all we are really doing is letting go of the stuff that harms us. The heart ministry teams came forward — name tags on, so you know you are not bothering them — to pray, celebrate or weep with anyone who wanted it. And then the dismissal: *go in peace to love and serve the Lord.*

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Matthew 7:1](#)
- [1 Corinthians 5:1–3](#)
- [1 Corinthians 6:1–3](#)
- [Romans 12:9](#)
- [Matthew 10:16](#)
- [Leviticus 19:17–18](#)
- [Matthew 18:15–17](#)
- [James 1:19–21](#)
- [Hebrews 5:12–14](#)
- [Luke 7:41–43](#)
- [Romans 2:1](#)
- [Acts 20:16](#)
- [John 7:24](#)
- [1 Corinthians 2:2](#)
- [1 Corinthians 4:5](#)
- [1 Corinthians 5:9–13](#)
- [Matthew 7:15–17](#)
- [Luke 6:37–38](#)
- [Luke 6:39–40](#)
- [Luke 6:41–42](#)
- [John 16:8](#)
- [1 Samuel 16:7](#)
- [2 Timothy 4:1–4](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which version of “judge not” were you carrying into this message — the one that forbids every conclusion, or the one that quietly excuses the conclusions you already liked?
2. Matt said this verse is the most tempting shield in the Bible. Where have you reached for it that way, and what were you protecting?
3. Leviticus says to reason frankly with your neighbor. Who would you want to hear from before something in your life got out of hand — and are you that person for anyone?
4. Play his lunch game out loud: what scheme of justice have you quietly assigned to people who do not look or sound or think like you?
5. Name one log Jesus is asking you to take out of your own eye this week, and one person who could help you do it.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qp5uylGe9SY&t=4120s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.