

# Responding to: “Don’t Judge”

## Part 4 of a Register Series

by Edward Sri

It’s fascinating how some people who don’t regularly read the Bible are quick to quote one scriptural verse back to Christians: “Don’t judge” (Matthew 7:1). This line is commonly used to silence us from speaking out on moral matters. “You shouldn’t tell others what is right or wrong! After all, Jesus said, ‘Don’t judge!’” But the Bible speaks about judging in different ways. On the one hand, we should never judge a person’s soul. That’s what Jesus critiques when he says, “Don’t judge.” Someone’s spiritual situation before God is between that person and God alone. At the same time, Jesus isn’t telling us it’s evil to use our minds to make judgments about what is right and wrong. Indeed, the Bible calls us to make good, wise judgments about many things in life. St. Paul, for example, says “the spiritual man judges all things” (1 Corinthians 2:15).

Many people are afraid to say something is morally wrong because they don’t want to be “judgmental.” But we need to help them see there’s a big difference between making a moral judgment and judging someone’s soul. Is it okay for me to use my mind and simply make a judgment? If I notice it’s raining, I make a judgment: “I should bring my umbrella.” If it’s snowing, I make a judgment: “I should wear my winter coat.” Am I a mean, bigoted person if I do this? Of course not. God gave me a mind. He wants me to use it.

Similarly, can I use my mind to make a judgment about someone else’s actions? If I see my toddler about to run into the street, can I make the judgment, “That’s not good for her. She might get hit by a car”? If I do this, I’m not saying she’s a horrible person or condemning her to hell. I’m just observing that she is about to do something that will cause her great harm.

Let’s take this a step further. Can I use my mind and make a judgment about someone else’s moral actions? Let’s say there’s a young female college student who is sleeping around with one man after another. Can I use my mind and make the judgment, “That’s not good for her”? Can I make the judgment, “She’s not going to be happy living this way? She’s never going to find the lasting love she longs for. She’s made for something better”? Of course.

But let’s be clear: I’m not judging her soul if I do that. She may be doing something objectively wrong, but I don’t know her personal situation before God. I don’t know her background, her situation or her wounds. “Who am I to judge?” Pope Francis would say. A soul’s status before God is something between that person and God alone.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes how various factors in people’s lives may impair their free choices in such a way that limits their culpability or moral guilt. As Pope Francis explains, “Each person’s situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without.”

Only God sees the whole picture. Perhaps this young woman comes from a dysfunctional family and has never experienced authentic love. Maybe she was abused. Maybe she has always been taught that this is what it means to be a liberated woman. Such a woman doesn’t need me condemning her soul. She needs to know God’s love, mercy and plan for her life.

At the same time — and this is absolutely crucial — if I care about her at all, should I say something to her about what she’s doing? If she is a close friend or family member, for example, should I talk to her about it? I wouldn’t be judging her soul — that’s between her and God alone. But to love is to will the good of another, to seek what’s best for the other person. And if I truly love this person, then it’s the loving thing to show her the better way.

Certainly, I should do this prudently, in the right time and in the right way, and with great gentleness, humility and compassion. But it is simply not loving to sit back and never desire to share the truth with her. Imagine if I see my 2-year-old daughter about to touch the hot stove and I say, “I wouldn’t do that. But I don’t want to be judgmental. Whatever makes you happy.”

Or imagine if my non-swimming toddler is about to jump into a swimming pool, and I say, “Oh well ... if that works for you! ... I personally wouldn’t do that, but I don’t want to impose my views on you. It’s your life.” Would that be a loving thing to do? Absolutely not. This gets to another tragedy of moral relativism: Relativism hinders us from loving people.

We can become indifferent to the needs of the people God has placed in our lives. Instead of responding with love and compassion when we notice our brother stumbling in life, we can become apathetic and unresponsive. We can become like Cain, who said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" That's not love. Let's rise above the culture of relativism and show more love for the people in our lives by sharing the truth with them.

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This series is based on his newest book, [Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love](#) (2017, Ignatius Press).

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