

**What does it mean do not judge?
Attempting to understand Matthew 7:1-2**

Matthew 7:1-2 is difficult to understand. Examining some of the underlying Greek may shed light on what Jesus meant; however, the passage does generate some questions:

“Do not judge (**krinō**), so that you (**krinō**) will not be judged (**krinō**). For in the way you judge (**krima krinō**), you will be judged (**krinō**); and by your standard of measure (**metron metreō**), it will be measured (**antimetreō**) to you (**antimetreō**).” (Matt 7:1-2)

Is evaluating and coming to a conclusion considered judging?

Is condemning people considered judging (Heb 5:14; 1 Pet 3:11)?

Is disciplining a child the same as judging (Prov 22:15; 23:12-13)?

Two Greek words are worth examining that could shed light on the meaning of Matthew 7:1-2:

krinō – this verb means “to judge,” and it is in the context of evaluating whether a human behavior is conforming to a certain standard. The **krinō** word group includes the assessment of the behavior, and if necessary, the condemnation of it. In the Old Testament (LXX), as it pertained to God, **krinō** acquired a nuance in meaning to include “to rule.” The word group was also used of human authorities as well, and in the New Testament, as exemplified by Matthew 7:1-2, all human judgment explicitly stood within the wider context of God’s judgment.

metreō – this verb means “to measure, to take dimensions of,” and both the noun and verb forms are seen, in the context of judgment, in Matthew 7:1-2.

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:1-2 is a warning to those who may be offended by another for whatever reason. Jesus speaks to people who judge others by using themselves as the standard and rendering a judgment that seeks their own justice / restitution. This action of **krinō** is a contradiction to forgiveness.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I say to you, do not show opposition against an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other toward him also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may prove yourselves to be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors, do they not do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles, do they not do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:38-48)

“Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father, who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

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And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'

For if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses. (Matt 6:9-15)

When referring to a standard by which a human being should live by, the apostle Paul used the Greek term **kanōn**. Although rarely used and exclusively by the apostle, it's meaning is with the sense of a rule or standard:

And all who will follow this rule (**kanōn**), peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (Gal 6:16)

In this Galatians passage "and all who follow this rule," Paul sums up all that he previously said (Gal 5:13 - 6:15). This **kanōn** is the standard by which one determines what is acceptable, what is not, and how one should live.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is establishing the idea that the word of God is the rule for behavior (John 5:19-20; 14:10-11, 30-31). A genuine understanding of God's word is the basis of training a child (Gen 18:19; Prov 22:6) and teaching an adult (2 Tim 3:16). In contrast, and as an example, the Pharisees, codified their traditions as part of the Law of Moses, and their interpretation of this law became the basis of judging others.

A genuine objective understanding of God's word (**kanōn**) is the basis for teaching and training human behavior. Rather than condemning or punishing, it is with a view towards forgiveness and repentance.

A poor understanding of God's word that forms a subjective standard for evaluating others is the basis of **krinō** where one seeks to their own form of justice / restitution. In the absence of forgiveness / repentance, Jesus warns that this form of judgment that a man pronounces on others, he himself will be judged.

To live holy as God is holy (Lev 20:26; 1 Pet 1:13-16) is challenging let alone for one to be an authority to judge and render justice on another.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, but it is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Rom 3:21-23)

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vols. 2-3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).