



A deep look at one of the most quoted — and most misunderstood — phrases of Jesus Christ

We live in an age in which few phrases from the Gospel are quoted as often as the one spoken by Our Lord Jesus Christ:

“*Judge not, and you shall not be judged.*”
(Lk 6:37)

We constantly hear it in social media discussions, political debates, family conversations, and even within the Church itself. Many times, it is used as a kind of final argument to prevent any moral correction, any discernment, or even any affirmation about good and evil.

But this raises a fundamental question:

What did Christ truly mean when He spoke about “not judging”?

Does it mean that a Christian can never say that something is wrong?

Does it imply that we must accept every behavior without discernment?

Does the Gospel forbid fraternal correction?

Is it sinful to point out error?

Where is the difference between judging an action and condemning a person?

These questions are enormously important because a mistaken understanding of “do not judge” can lead to two dangerous extremes:

- on one side, the proud Phariseeism that condemns others harshly;
- and on the other, modern relativism that denies the existence of sin and dissolves all moral truth.

The Gospel approves neither of these extremes.

Christ did not come to abolish truth nor to destroy mercy. He came to unite both perfectly.



That is why correctly understanding this teaching is essential for Christian life today.

The Context of the Phrase “Do Not Judge”

The expression appears especially in the Sermon on the Plain in Saint Luke and also in the Sermon on the Mount in Saint Matthew.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”

(Mt 7:1-2)

However, to interpret any biblical passage correctly, the Church has always taught that it must be read:

- within its context;
- in harmony with the rest of Scripture;
- and according to Apostolic Tradition.

And here we find something very important:

Jesus Christ does command discernment

In fact, the Lord Himself says a few verses later:

“Beware of false prophets.”

(Mt 7:15)

And also:



“You will know them by their fruits.”
(Mt 7:16)

Now, if Christ asks us to distinguish false prophets from true ones, He is necessarily asking for prudential and moral judgment.

Therefore, it becomes clear from the beginning that “do not judge” does not mean renouncing discernment.

The Church has never understood this passage as an absolute prohibition against making moral judgments.

So then, what exactly is Jesus forbidding?

The True Meaning of “Do Not Judge”

Catholic tradition, the Fathers of the Church, and the great theologians have explained that Christ principally condemns:

1. Rash Judgment

That is, attributing evil intentions to one’s neighbor without sufficient foundation.

Very often we think we know another person’s heart, their inner motivations, or even their relationship with God. But that belongs solely to divine judgment.

Only God fully knows the interior of man.

“Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”
(1 Sam 16:7)



Rash judgment appears when:

- we assume bad intentions;
- interpret everything negatively;
- presume someone guilty without certainty;
- spread suspicions;
- destroy reputations;
- or reduce a person to their worst mistake.

In our digital age this happens constantly.

Social media has created a culture of immediate condemnation where millions of people judge, insult, and publicly destroy others without mercy, without prudence, and often without knowing the full truth.

The Gospel radically opposes this attitude.

2. Moral Hypocrisy

Christ also condemns hypocritical judgment.

“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?”
(Mt 7:3)

Jesus does not say that the speck does not exist.
The speck does exist.

What He denounces is the pride of the one who seeks to correct others while gravely ignoring his own sins.

The problem is not recognizing evil.
The problem is doing so from arrogance.



The Christian is called first to examine his own soul.

Correction without humility easily becomes spiritual cruelty.

That is why the saints insisted so strongly on awareness of one’s own misery.

The closer a soul is to God, the more aware it usually becomes of its own faults.

3. Merciless Condemnation

There is an enormous difference between saying:

- “this action is sinful”
and saying:
- “this person is condemned.”

The Church can objectively affirm that certain behaviors are contrary to God’s law. That is part of her mission.

But the definitive judgment of the soul belongs to God alone.

No one fully knows:

- the degree of inner freedom;
- wounds;
- ignorance;
- circumstances;
- or a person’s final repentance.

That is why the Church has always been cautious regarding the final judgment of souls.

Even when condemning doctrines or objectively sinful acts, she keeps the door open to mercy and conversion.



So Then... Can a Christian Judge Good and Evil?

Yes. And not only can he: he must.

Today there is great confusion because any moral judgment has been identified with “hate” or “intolerance.” But the Gospel never teaches that.

The Christian Must Discern

Saint Paul writes:

“*Test everything; hold fast what is good.*”
(1 Thess 5:21)

And also:

“*Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*”
(Lk 12:57)

Christian life requires distinguishing:

- truth from error;
- virtue from sin;
- holiness from corruption;
- authentic doctrine from false teaching.

Without discernment, faith becomes impossible.

A father must discern what is good for his children.

A priest must discern dangerous doctrines.

A Christian must discern environments harmful to the soul.



The problem is not moral judgment itself.
The problem is pride, harshness, and lack of charity.

Christ Himself Judges Sin

One of the greatest modern errors is presenting Jesus as someone who never confronted evil.

That does not correspond to the Gospel.

Christ spoke clearly:

- against hypocrisy;
- against adultery;
- against corruption;
- against hardness of heart;
- against blasphemy;
- against scandal;
- and against sin in general.

He called the Pharisees:

“*whitewashed tombs*”
(Mt 23:27)

And to the adulterous woman He said:

“*Go, and sin no more.*”
(Jn 8:11)

Here we see the perfect balance of the Gospel:



- mercy toward the person;
- clarity regarding sin.

Christ does not humiliate gratuitously, but neither does He relativize evil.

The Great Modern Problem: Confusing Love with Approval

In contemporary culture a dangerous idea has spread:

“If you love someone, you must approve everything they do.”

But that is not Christian love.

Authentic love seeks the true good of the other.

And the true good includes eternal salvation.

A doctor who hides a serious illness for fear of causing discomfort does not act with love.

A father who never corrects his child does not act with love.

A Christian who never warns about sin does not fully love either.

Saint Augustine said:

| *“Love, and do what you will.”*

But that love is not modern sentimentalism.

It is true charity directed toward God and toward salvation.



Fraternal Correction: A Work of Mercy

The Church teaches that correcting those who err can be a spiritual work of mercy.

This surprises many people today.

However, the Gospel teaches:

“If your brother sins, rebuke him.”
(Lk 17:3)

And also:

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.”
(Mt 18:15)

The key lies in how it is done.

Christian correction:

- does not seek humiliation;
- is not born from pride;
- does not aim to destroy;
- is not done publicly out of vanity;
- does not seek to feel superior.

It must arise:

- from charity;
- from humility;
- from truth;
- and from a sincere desire for the good of the other.



Many saints corrected firmly, but also with tears.

The Spiritual Danger of Becoming an Absolute Judge

When a person becomes accustomed to constantly judging others, he runs a grave spiritual danger.

Why?

Because he interiorly occupies the place that belongs to God.

Spiritual pride can disguise itself as religious zeal.

One may know doctrine, defend truth, and yet still fall into:

- harshness;
- contempt;
- pride;
- lack of mercy;
- and Pharisaical self-satisfaction.

The Pharisee in the parable thanked God that he was not like other men. But it was the humble tax collector who went home justified.

“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”
(Lk 18:13)

Authentic holiness always produces humility.



How Then Should We Live the Evangelical Balance?

Here we find one of the great spiritual challenges of the modern Christian:

uniting truth and charity.

It is not enough:

- either to “speak the truth” brutally;
- or to “be kind” while hiding the truth.

Christ does both perfectly.

Therefore the Christian is called to:

1. Deeply Love People

Every person possesses dignity because they were created in the image of God.

Even the most distant sinner retains that dignity.

The Christian must never rejoice in another’s sin or moral failure.

2. Call Sin by Its Name

Charity does not eliminate moral truth.

The Gospel does not change according to cultural fashions.

What was sinful two thousand years ago does not cease to be sinful because modern society approves of it.



3. Examine One’s Own Soul First

Before correcting the whole world, the Christian must begin with his own conversion.

The saints insisted enormously on this.

Very often we see the defects of others clearly precisely because we ignore our own.

4. Speak with Prudence and Mercy

Not every truth should be spoken:

- at any moment;
- in any manner;
- nor before every person.

Prudence is also a Christian virtue.

“Do Not Judge” Does Not Mean Renouncing Truth

One of the greatest spiritual dramas today is the fear many Christians have of affirming the truth lest they be considered “intolerant.”

But Christ never promised that the Gospel would be accepted by the world.

Christian truth is uncomfortable because it calls people to conversion.

And all of us need conversion.



Not only “others.”

Everyone.

The Final Judgment Exists

Paradoxically, those who most repeat “do not judge” often forget that the Gospel constantly speaks about God’s judgment.

Christ speaks:

- about the Final Judgment;
- about the separation between sheep and goats;
- about heaven and hell;
- about moral responsibility;
- and about the necessity of repentance.

Therefore, denying all moral evaluation is not mercy: it is emptying the Gospel.

Christian mercy only makes sense because sin exists.

The Teaching of the Saints About Judging Others

The saints spoke extensively about this subject.

Saint John Chrysostom

He warned that severe judgment toward others hardens the heart and makes us incapable of recognizing our own sins.



Saint Francis de Sales

He taught that we must hate sin, but love the sinner with patience and tenderness.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta

She saw Christ even in the poorest and most sinful, while never denying moral truth.

Saint Thomas Aquinas

He explained that judgment can be legitimate when:

- it is done with justice;
- with prudence;
- based on facts;
- and seeking the good.

The sin lies in unjust or arrogant judgment.

Practical Applications for Daily Life

On Social Media

Before commenting, insulting, or condemning:

- do I know the whole truth?
- am I acting with charity?
- do my words build up or destroy?



In the Family

Correction must be done with love, not from contempt.

Many homes suffer because truth is communicated without mercy or because mercy completely eliminates truth.

In the Church

The Catholic must defend doctrine while avoiding:

- hatred;
- pride;
- constant aggressiveness;
- and an unhealthy obsession with the errors of others.

The defense of truth without holiness eventually becomes distorted.

The Perfect Example: Jesus Christ

No one loved more than Christ.

And no one spoke more clearly about sin.

He:

- forgave sinners;
- ate with tax collectors;
- welcomed the rejected;
- healed wounds;
- showed infinite mercy.



But He also constantly called people to conversion.

Christ’s mercy was never permissiveness.

It was always directed toward transforming the human heart.

Conclusion: The True Evangelical Meaning of “Do Not Judge”

When Jesus says “do not judge,” He is not abolishing moral truth nor forbidding Christian discernment.

He is condemning:

- pride;
- hypocrisy;
- rash judgment;
- hardness of heart;
- and merciless condemnation of one’s neighbor.

The Christian must:

- love everyone;
- discern good and evil;
- correct with charity;
- avoid arrogance;
- recognize his own sins;
- and entrust definitive judgment to God alone.

In a world divided between relativism and aggressiveness, the Gospel proposes a more difficult and holier path:



the inseparable union between truth and mercy.

Because truth without love wounds.
But love without truth deceives.

And only in Jesus Christ are both found perfectly united.