

The Heart of Judgment Matthew 7:1-6

We're going to look today at one of the most quoted passages in all of the Bible, certainly one of the most quoted by Jesus. And it's one of the most quoted by people who have been in church their whole lives, and the most staunch atheists that have never darkened a church door. And the quotation goes like this, "Judge not, lest you be judged." And it's the perfect quotation because if you are saying something I don't like, "Judge not! Jesus said judge not – so leave me alone", and it's over. And this is where what Jesus actually says is rarely understood. **Jesus' command does not mean anything goes or never judge.** If that is what Jesus meant we would be able to wholeheartedly affirm the moral relativism of our time. But we would also descend in to total anarchy. Jesus' command not to judge doesn't mean anything goes, but rather **Jesus' command does mean that as disciples we need to learn how to judge appropriately.** And this is where we as disciples and followers of Jesus fail in our obedience. We tend to either shy away from any and every judgment, or we are so critical of others, that we pick at the least of things in order to render judgment. And both extremes are sinful. Jesus does indeed command Christians, not to judge, but it is a command not to judge another inappropriately.

Look with me at Matthew 7:1-6, Jesus says, "*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 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? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*"

What's funny about this teaching of Jesus at this point in the Sermon on the Mount is, no one who's been taking Jesus' words seriously will feel much like passing judgment on someone else. But here's the thing, we humans still tend to prefer to apply ethics to other people rather than ourselves. So if we're going to make any progress on understanding Jesus' teaching correctly and then applying it to our lives correctly, we have to start with some definitions. What is the judgment that Jesus is condemning?

Jesus is not condemning judging in and of itself, but rather the heart attitude behind so much of the judging we engage ourselves in. The kind of judging Jesus is condemning has several characteristics, but let's look at just three. First, the judging Jesus condemns is a **superficial judging, judging another based on appearances.** Jesus says in John 7:24, "*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.*" We can also get caught in superficial judgment by **jumping to conclusions**, judging something or reaching a conclusion about someone with having all the facts.

The second judgmental attitude Jesus is **condemning is a graceless** attitude. In this attitude the person bringing judgment is unwilling to hear another side, they may be caught up in the emotions of the moment and just pounding away at the other person. This is a **harsh, critical, unloving, merciless attitude of judgement towards another person.** And Jesus is saying this is a sinful attitude and a sinful mode of judging another.

A third judgmental attitude Jesus is condemning is **self-righteous judgment.** This is an attitude of judging others in which **our way and our opinions become the absolute standards for others.** In this attitude, I am the standard of judgment. What I think, how I behave, what I would do, how I think it should have been handled, etc, becomes the standard for judgment. And while I may think I'm objective, in reality my judgments here are about me, my preferences, my opinions, my standards, how I want it done.

And several problems attend to these attitudes and others when it comes to the kind of judgmental spirit Jesus is condemning. First, **we don't have all the facts.** We like to say that there are three sides to every story, my side, your side, and the truth. And while there is a lot of truth in that saying, the facts I usually don't have are the facts of the heart. I don't know intentions perfectly, my own or others. So while I don't have all the facts from the stand point of the situation as it is, I also don't have all the facts at much deeper levels. Proverbs 18:17 reminds on this that, "*The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.*"

A second problem that comes from the judgmental attitude Jesus is condemning is that this attitude lacks humility, the understanding that while we are wanting to harshly correct or judge another, **we are in need of correction ourselves**. Unless you have never sinned, and that is not said hyperbolically, but unless you have never sinned, never erred in any way, never failed, never blundered or stumbled – then you too have been a person who has needed correction, which means humility and grace should flow from us when we come to others to correct and judge them.

The third problem that comes from the judgmental attitude Jesus is condemning, and this should be very sobering when we think about it, is that **we will be judged with the same standards we use**. Verse 2, “*For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.*” If we get this far when we read this passage, our own judgmental attitudes should restrain us from passing judgment on others, because if we are going to be harsh, if we are going to be vindictively critical, we shouldn’t be surprised when that is the same kind of judgmental attitude that is used towards us. Pastor Mike will be teaching on this in a couple of weeks, but this is the foundation of Matthew 7:12, “...*whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them*”. But what is truly fearful and what should give us a moment of real reflection in our judgmental attitudes of others is that this reciprocal standard of judgment we used being used against us goes far beyond how other people would judge us – it extends to the very way God will judge us. While other people’s judgmental attitudes are in view in verse 2, God’s attitude towards us as His people is the larger context for Jesus’ warning. Already in chapter 6, when Jesus was teaching us as Christians about prayer, we are taught to pray, “...*forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.*” But you’ll recall that there is a warning that Jesus gives to this part of the prayer, 6:14 says, “*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” The point being, if we are judging others with graceless, merciless, vindictive, harsh attitudes, not only will other people potentially judge us in the same ways, but God will judge us in the same way.

And why? Because ultimately inherent to the attitude of judgment Jesus is condemning in His followers **we take the position of being God and a prerogative that is his alone**. God alone is the righteous, true, and absolute judge. God knows all sides, all the facts, all the issues, and the secret things of the heart. God makes perfect judgments at all times, but when we approach judging others with the attitude Jesus is condemning we usurp a role that is God’s alone. And ultimately, the issue is not that we should never pass judgment on another person; that can be an appropriate and is often necessary as we walk together as Christians and followers of Jesus through life. The real issue is our hypocrisy in our judgment and exercise of judgment with another.

So Jesus gives an illustration of the foolishness of inappropriate, superficial, graceless, and self-righteous judging. Verse 3, “*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? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye’, when there is the log in your own eye?*” **The speck Jesus speaks about is a small, barely discernable object, something truly insignificant**. But the log, the **log is a large, unmistakable object of great significance**. (Invite Matt up)

Here’s the **key point: without dealing with the log in my eye, my vision is impaired to assist with the speck in my brother’s eye**.

So what’s the remedy? Verse 5, “*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.*” Jesus tells us three things to remedy the kind of judgmental attitude He is condemning. First, **recognize my own hypocrisy**. I don’t have it all together, I don’t see it as clearly as I might think, I don’t have all the facts, I’m in need of correction myself, I am a man needing God’s grace, needing God’s mercy, needing God’s patience, needing God’s rule in my life. I call others to things I am unwilling to deal with in me, or want to judge others on things I would be unwilling to have judged in me. If we want to live as Jesus calls us to live in His kingdom, we need to humble ourselves, recognize our own hypocrisy and shortfalls.

Then, I **deal with me**. “*Take the log out of your own eye*”. This is the process of sanctification, as a Christian, of becoming more like Christ. I assess myself honestly before the Lord, I confess my sin, recognize my sin and failures, my imperfections, and wholly throw myself upon the grace and mercy of God that is available through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Having the Spirit of God deal with me, and removing the log from my

own eye first, then **I can deal with you**. “... *then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye*”. This is important to understand, **though the speck is insignificant, dealing with the speck isn’t wrong, as a matter of fact it could be quite necessary**. But I deal with it in the humility, grace, mercy, and love as someone who is very aware of my own sin and shortcomings, and being dealt with by God’s graciousness as well.

Friends, Jesus does not say do not judge another ever, He does not say or teach that we are not to judge another person under any circumstance, that the true disciple and follower of Jesus Christ will simply sit back passively and live and let live. That is not what Jesus teaches, nor what the Bible teaches in any part. If it were true that Christians were never under any circumstance to judge another, then when we get to verse 15 of this same chapter, Jesus is fully contradicting Himself and we would be sinning to judge someone as a false prophet. So Jesus’ teaching is not at all don’t judge another, rather, don’t judge others without having first dealt with yourself.

In verse 6, Jesus says something that seems completely out of place, almost as though Matthew slips it in to see if anyone was paying attention. But on further inspecting it ties to what we’ve been looking at today, as well as to what Jesus will say that we’ll look at next week. So I want to touch on verse 6 briefly today for what it says about judging others. Verse 6, “*Do not give to dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*” When Jesus says do not give dogs what is holy, the holy thing he is referring to is likely the gospel itself. Dogs in the ancient world were scavengers, not pets. And dogs would just as quickly attack you for feeding them as curl at your feet hoping for a morsel. And Jesus is saying use caution, exercise wisdom, pass appropriate judgment. Pigs likewise were scavengers, and in a Jewish context also an unclean animal. The pearls we are told not to throw before pigs are proverbial pearls of wisdom. Pigs symbolizing here those who simply don’t understand the value of what you might be trying to share with them.

Here’s the point, **disciples are not to be judgmental, in an overly harsh, unloving, ungracious way, but not being inappropriately judgmental does not mean that disciples are to lack discernment**. Jesus teaches His followers to be wise as serpents. So we are to discern, we are to judge appropriately.

But in the context and teaching of verse 6, Jesus’ followers also need to understand that we are **not to prejudge who hears our message**. We are to go to all and proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. All people need to hear about Christ and be given opportunity to respond in faith to the gospel. Just because we go does not mean that they will respond, but we are not to go to someone because we have prejudged that they won’t possibly respond, or even worse that they are not worthy of hearing the gospel. So we are not to prejudge, but what Jesus is saying in verse 6, is that when we go to others with the gospel, **we are not to force it upon them when it is not wanted**. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few, Jesus will tell us in chapter 9, so we need to go where God is harvesting. Jesus will also say in chapter 10 when He sends the disciples out with the gospel, if you go to some place and they won’t receive your message, shake the dust from your feet – in other words, you’ve done your job of proclaiming, if they don’t want it, move on.

And the reason for this is, **correcting the uncorrectable is futile**. The proverbs understand the futility of trying to correct the uncorrectable. Proverbs 26:4-5 speaks to the dilemma saying, “*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes*” These verses seem contradictory, but they speak to the futility of correcting those who can’t be corrected. And Jesus simply says, the pearls of God’s wisdom and word should not be thrown to pigs, if a person will not receive correction, that’s on them, take God’s wisdom to those who will receive it. There’s more to say about this verse, and we’ll look at it next Sunday.

Jesus says judge not, but He says so much more. We are not to judge inappropriately, with attitudes and actions that are graceless, superficial, or self-righteous. We are to judge in the humility of the gospel’s bright light that shines in our lives first, and leading others to the grace, mercy, and forgiveness in the cross of Jesus Christ.