

The Sermon on the Mount

Session 11 – “Judging” – Matthew 7:1-6

1. “Judge not” is a phrase that many repeat (sometimes not knowing where it comes from). What are some ways that you have heard this quoted? Was it used correctly? Perhaps these are some things people were really saying:

- “Mind your own business.”
- “Don’t judge me.”
- *I shouldn’t take a stand on anything.*
- *I don’t tell my kids that what they are doing is wrong, immoral, etc.*
- *I don’t want anyone else to challenge me, so I won’t challenge them.*

¹ Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.

² For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.

When Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner pressed Lincoln to hang Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Lincoln quoted this verse.

2. What do you think Jesus meant by verses 1 and 2? How does verse 2 follow from verse 1? There are certain natural results from the things that we do. We “reap what we sow.” This is further demonstrated in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23-35).

3. How are these verses from Romans 2:21-24 similar? *You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?*²² *You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*²³ *You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?*²⁴ *As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”* (Don’t expect non-Christians to behave like Christians. But be sure you do!)

There is a difference between “judging” and “discerning” in Scripture. Jesus is not forbidding all moral discrimination, nor is encouraging laxity in regard to sound doctrine. Verse 6 shows that we are to use good judgement. Jesus is talking here about the kind of judging that is God’s prerogative but, as Christians, we are called to be discerning.

Psalm 50:6 *And the heavens proclaim His righteousness, for God Himself is judge.*

Acts 10:42 *He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He [Jesus] is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.* (We say this in the Apostle’s Creed.)

James 4:11-12 *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.*¹² *There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?*

When we judge someone in the sense of completely rejecting and condemning them, we usurp God’s position as the perfect judge. God has the omniscient knowledge to judge what is in a

person's heart. We do not. Judging has to do with character and motivation, discernment is discrimination of actions and behaviors, what is good and what is evil.

Why we shouldn't judge:

- (1) We would rarely know all the facts about a situation or person.
- (2) It is impossible for us to be completely impartial.
- (3) No one is good enough to judge another. How would we do in the same situation?
Are we willing to have our own life put under a microscope?

Discernment is the responsibility of Christians. That is what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15...*Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* ¹⁵ *Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.*

Discernment is something that applies to our own actions, not just those of others. As Philippians 1:9-11 says, *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that **you may be able to discern** what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*

Proverbs 28:11 *A rich person may be wise in their own eyes, but a poor person who has discernment sees through them.*

4. How do these verses expand on Jesus' statement about the merciful (5:7)? One alternate translation is: *"Don't act as a judge in order to escape being judged."* (i.e., *"Practice what you preach."*)

Romans 5:8 says, *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* We need to remember this with regard to the sins of others as well!

³***Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?***

⁴***Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye?*** 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 neighbor's eye.***

This passage is not just about judgement, but also hypocrisy, which was also dealt with in Matthew 6:2, 5, 16-17. (See also Matthew 23:23-28.) The "critic" must examine his or her own motives. Is there envy, jealousy, selfishness or pride involved?

5. According to Jesus, what reason is given why are we often unfit to be judges?

6 Some have assumed that Jesus was forbidding all judgment, even in law courts. How would you respond?

7. What steps must we take to truly help a brother or sister? (v. 5) How does Christian love effect the desire to find "specks" in the eye of another person? The problem with hypocrites is that they cannot see other people's problems clearly because their discernment is skewed by their own sin.

8. What does this say about Christians' accountability? Galatians 6:1-2 indicated that our responsibility is always to restore.

And now for a difficult verse:

James Montgomery Boice in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount wrote regarding this verse: "Jesus has been talking of judgment and of why Christians must not judge each other hypocritically. But then he adds, as if to correct the possible impression that a follower of his is barred from judging [or being discerning] at all..." ⁶ ***Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.***

Many find this verse "offensive", and yet many who would say that claim that they think that the Sermon on the Mount is good philosophy.

This verse is teaching the need for the utmost spiritual discernment and true discrimination on the part of Christians, and that there are some persons with whom Christ's followers must not share some part of spiritual truth.

As our own experience tells us, there are some who are very opposed to God's truth in Scripture. Some even go further, to not only oppose, but despise, mock and attack the Gospel. In the Middle Ages one of the most decadent religious leaders of that day said of Christianity, "What profit this farce has brought us." Scottish commentator, William Barclay, wrote, "It is often impossible to talk to some people about Jesus Christ. Their insensitiveness, their moral blindness, their intellectual pride, and cynical mockery, the tarnishing film, may make them impervious to words about Christ. But it is always possible to show men and women Christ; and the weakness of the Church lies not in lack of Christian arguments, but in lack of Christian lives."

In other words, there are some people to whom it is difficult or impossible to impart truth. The only alternative is lifestyle witness.

We find Jesus giving another similar instruction in Matthew 15:12-14 *Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"* ¹³*He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."*

The Apostle John said this about false teachers: *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. ¹¹Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.* (2 John 9-11)

The Apostle Paul said something similar in Galatians 1:9: *As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

In each of these cases, these are people who have denied orthodox teaching, or have perverted it. By contrast, Jude tells us (v. 22) that we should *Be merciful to those who doubt*.

The early church wasn't trying to be exclusive, but they recognized the importance of maintaining the purity of the faith and to resist cultural assimilation. To understand this verse, we need to understand some of the terms. Dogs – When Jesus refers to "dogs", remember that this was at a time very different from our own. We think of pet dogs or of cute little puppies. In biblical times, dogs were often wild and ran in packs. Few were domesticated. Swine (or pigs) – were considered unclean, and were never kept for any purpose in Israel. Rabbis often referred to important ideas or Scripture as "pearls". So, the truth of the Bible is not for the unbeliever.

John R.W. Stott: "These are not just unbelievers, but those who have had ample opportunity to hear and receive the good news, but have decisively – even defiantly – rejected it. We cheapen God's gospel by letting them trample it under foot."

9. Why is it futile, even dangerous, to talk with such people about the Gospel? One example of parts of the Gospel that are for believers only is the Lord's Table. You aren't right with God because you take communion, but the other way around. You take communion because, through Christ, you are right with God.

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-28, the Apostle Paul wrote, *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* ²⁸*A person ought to examine themselves before eating of the bread and drinking of the cup.* At the time of the Reformation, there began a practice known as "Fencing the Table". This was practiced with varying degrees of strictness depending on the group.

Another example would be church membership. Church membership is for those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, not just because someone wants to become a part of a "good organization."

Some final thoughts on "God's Pearls" based on James M. Boice's *The Sermon on the Mount*:

(1) Earlier, Jesus had addressed those who were overly preoccupied with the world's riches. Now he reminds us that the Christian's riches are actually found in God's Word.

(2) This verse suggests that we should be content with this treasure, which the world despises, even though on the physical level we should be asked to endure the most serious calamities of life. No Christian is ever poor or destitute who has these riches.

(3) This verse intimates how we are to use this treasure. God's Word is truly a pearl of great price. When a person has uncovered these truths, they should be preserved, committed to memory and locked forever in the heart. David did this, as he wrote: I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You." (Psalm 119:11)

I recently saw a picture that reminded me of when Sea World in San Diego had the Japanese pearl divers. You could purchase a cup and token, give the cup to a diver who would go down into the water, and bring up an oyster for you. Some were fortunate to get an oyster that contained a beautiful pearl. The question was, what would you do with it? Some would just take it home in a small envelope, and probably put it in a drawer and forget about it. Others would have it set in a lovely piece of jewelry which would increase its value and so it could be worn and appreciated by others. Undoubtedly, that person wouldn't give it to their 5-year-old daughter who wanted to play "dress up." In the same way, the question for each of us is, what will we do with the pearl of God's Word – a pearl of greatest value.

*The sea is His, for He made it,
and His hands formed the dry land.
Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
for He is our God
and we are the people of His pasture,
the flock under His care.
Psalm 95:5-7*

