

The Citizen's Judgment

Matthew 7:1-6

Introduction

In the last chapter Jesus gave us models for giving, praying, fasting, money and trust. Now Jesus teaches us to ask God for what we need; how to treat others; and how to live as true children of our heavenly Father. In brief Jesus speaks of our responsibilities to the saved (vv.1-2); to ourselves (vv.3-5); and to the ungodly (v.6).

In short order Jesus will say; “don’t judge” (v.1); “judge” (vv.3-5) and “exercise good judgment”(v.6). It all sounds so confusing. Does the Bible forbid all judgment? The answer is no! Certain judgments are forbidden. Certain judgments are commanded. How do we know the difference? On what basis do we judge (v.2)?

We Judge—Knowing The Truth About God (vv.1-2)

Matthew 7:1 (NKJV)1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.

The Greek word translated ‘judge’ is *krino*. It has a number of different meanings that are determined by context. It can mean to divide—or rightly divide or cut—hence discern. One meaning is the judicial pronouncement of guilt or condemn.

Some read these words of Jesus and conclude; never judge. Yet Jesus states elsewhere; “judge a righteous judgment (John 7:24). Jesus says “you have rightly judged (Luke 7:43). Later in this chapter Jesus will say “Beware of false prophets” (v.15). Why would Jesus tell us to be on guard against false prophets and give us no measure or standard whereby we must judge? The prophet Isaiah wrote; “To the Law and the Testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (8:20).

What did Jesus mean; “Judge not, that you be not judged”?

In order to answer that question we have to look to the Scriptures. It cannot forbid all judgment; or our responsibility to exercise discernment. So what does it mean? Human beings possess an almost inexhaustible capacity for self-deception. Jon Courson thinks it means the kind of judgment that makes you look good at other people’s expense. “It’s when you’re in somebody’s face, so to speak, pointing your finger at them, and condemning them. We are not to judge for condemnation, but we are to judge for identification” (p.148). What does Courson mean by that? We judge to identify sin in order to effect restoration. Leviticus 19:17-18 reads; “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD”.

What kind of judgment does the Bible forbid? We cannot judge a person’s internal spiritual condition. The Bible forbids *hypocritical* judgments. No one appreciates being harshly criticized or condemned for drinking by a drunk; or drugging by an addict; or sexual immorality

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by a prostitute. Robert Bowman writes; “What makes this sort of criticism unacceptable is not merely that the person making the accusation is also guilty. Rather, what makes it offensive is that the hypocrite claims or pretends to be guiltless. The hypocrite pretends to be righteous when actually he is not. On the other hand, when someone says, “You and I are both guilty of this, and we need to do better,” that is not hypocritical. To put it another way, hypocritical judgments are not because they are false (they may or may not be). They are bad only in that they are spoken hypocritically. Hypocrites who judge others will have to face judgment themselves, and ought to deal with their own sins first (Matt.7:1-5).” Robert Bowman goes on points out that Jesus himself observed the hypocritical Pharisees often said what was right—but were unable to follow their own good advice.

Can we reject all judgments by other people simply on the grounds that no one is perfect? We might try but we always fail. We all believe certain things. And since we believe certain things to be true—we must of necessity believe that certain things are false. The moment you say something is true and it's opposite is false—you have rendered a judgment.

The Bible condemns hypocritical judgments and unjust judgments. Jesus said in John 7:24; “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”. Once again the issue is not whether we judge—but how we judge. What kind of judgment is Jesus forbidding? The practice of judging according to appearance! Surface judgment. Judgment without facts or incomplete facts. Once again Jesus is not forbidding evaluating external facts—but rather drawing a conclusion based on what we think may or may not be in a person's heart. Are you able to peer into a person's heart or soul? The contrast is between the external facts and the internal motivations or intuitions. Jesus is warning against and condemning superficial judgments. Superficial judgments are those which look at the surface but somehow fail to penetrate to the deeper reality. Hypocritical judgments may or may not be true. Superficial judgments may or may not be true.

The Bible forbids hypocritical judgments; superficial or unjust judgments and presumptuous judgments. What are presumptuous judgments? These are judgments which human beings are simply not competent to render judgment. **Are you truly able to render a verdict on the question of whether or not some individual will be saved or lost?** The Bible gives a great deal of information on how a person is saved and how a person remains unsaved. The Bible also gives great assurances about personal salvation. But we have already noted that human beings are also capable of great self-deception! There are certain things that remain in the sole province of God. Can you think of some things that only God knows, only the Lord Jesus knows; only the Holy Spirit knows? Who has ultimate authority on the issues of eternal life and death? Who will render ultimate judgment about our destiny? For that reason it seems foolish to set ourselves up as the final authority or ultimate law giver.

Are there other presumptuous judgements? Proclamations we make absent competence? Do we sometimes make non-essential issues the basis for friendship, fellowship and relationship with

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each other? Paul warns about making non-essential issues the basis of fellowship; festival and sabbath observances; dietary restrictions etc (see Rom. 14:1-23).

We simply do not have the ability to peer into the human heart and judge *motives*.

2For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

Apparently there is a measure or standard that exists in judgment. Isaiah lists two of those standards; the Law and the Testimony. We judge by God's Word and God's Testimony. Not some fallible human standard of emotion or twisted reason. The measure that Jesus refers to seems to be a measuring cup or a measuring instrument. The standard you adopt will be used to judge you! Unrighteous judgment invites unrighteous judgment!

Is this absolute? Because you refuse to judge anyone or anything do you think that will be the standard or the measure God will choose to use in the final judgment? I don't think so. God's standards of judgment will always be firmly based on truth and justice. If we ignore truth and justice will God ignore truth and justice? I don't think so. In the book of Ezekiel (7:27) we read; "I will deal with them according to their own conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them".

We all believe in truth—the moment someone attempts to lie to us. We all believe in justice. The Bible says; "Do not pervert justice" (Leviticus 19:15). The ancient Roman lawyers would quote Publius Syrus—"He who hurts the good spares the bad." Martin Luther King wisely said, "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice."

What tools or what instruments will you use? Many Rabbi's in Jesus day believed God used two measures; mercy and justice. **A judge must know the law. A judge cannot plead ignorance of the law.** Will you insist on justice for others and mercy for yourself? D.A. Carson writes; "Judge not is not a requirement to be blind, but rather a plea to be generous" (p.184).

What about the person who decides the measure should be hypocrisy, superficiality, or incompetence?

We Judge—Knowing The Truth About Ourselves (vv.3-5)

3And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

4Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?

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5Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

I am comforted! Jesus goes for the laugh. And I am fairly certain the people laughed out loud. Jesus always used appropriate humor (me not so much). Those salty tears of laughter must have cleared at least a few people's vision! We are allowed to help each other. But how ridiculous is it to offer to remove a speck of dust from someone's eye while walking around with a large plank or beam in our own eye. This is hypocrisy. The mote (speck) and the plank (beam) are probably the same substance. Somehow sin looks much larger when exercised by someone else.

Jesus knows our weakness. We can with crystal clarity the faults of others and somehow ignore our own faults. Jesus uses hyperbole. He exaggerates a point to make the point. It is the height of hypocrisy to suppose that we can help someone with their faults and ignore our much greater faults.

Our sins seem small viewed through our own lens. Others sin seems so large. Someone has once pointed out that we seem to focus on the sins in other people's lives that look most like our own! We sometimes judge others in the hope that it will make us feel better about ourselves! But do we know the truth about ourselves? How can we judge others honestly and ourselves dishonestly?

Jesus gives us instructions; "first take the plank from our eye"! A plank is fairly large. It probably won't require a spiritual magnifying glass to find. It's fairly obvious. In humility we recognize our own sin. We confess our own sin; we mourn over our own sin and seek God's righteousness. (*Karphos*—*speck*) isn't a tiny piece of ash, or a speck of sand, but a twig or a splinter(a piece of sawdust?). Jesus is not simply comparing a little sin with a big sin. Jesus is comparing a big sin—with an even bigger sin! The ultimate point Jesus makes is that the critics sin is greater than the criticized!

Self-righteousness distorts our vision! The curse of judgmentalism renders us blind! The very essence of self-righteousness is to justify oneself and condemn others (MacArthur p. 435). This is unbelief, trusting oneself, trusting oneself as the source of right and wrong; good and evil; true and false. Self-righteousness makes us judge, jury and executioner. God remains the only righteous judge; the one with all the facts; the one with the power to insure an accurate disposition.

The self-righteous fall into the trap of neglecting, ignoring, failing to see their own sin. With that self-deception is a refusal to appropriate God's grace and mercy and forgiveness for their own lives. Jesus is in effect saying; don't judge—but if you must judge—judge yourself. Please stop and take a good hard look at your own life. Think about your own sin. You are a fraud (hypocrite). ". . .the self righteous person can never be anything but a hypocrite, because he continually puts on a deceitful act of righteous superiority. That is why he feels qualified to say

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to his brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye" let me set you straight brother" (John MacArthur; paraphrased p. 436).

We Judge—With Care And Good Judgment (v.6)

6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

Notice the progression; don't judge; judge yourself; exercise good judgment. Are you able to discern the dogs and the hogs! Are you able to see the dogs (unclean) and the hogs (not kosher) from the rest of the zoo? Certain spiritual things must be distributed with care.

Dogs were scavengers. Pigs were greedy, vicious and filthy. Jews did not domesticate dogs (though some scholars dispute this). No self-respecting Jew domesticated pigs. According to the Law of Moses both dogs and pigs were unclean animals. Here they are meant to represent wicked people.

In the early church this text was often quoted before communion; "holy things for holy people". Some people are not open to the gospel. Some people may visit you on your doorstep and solicit you to abandon the gospel of Jesus. They might invite you to consider another gospel (which is not the gospel) or another Christ (who is not the Lord). We can and should share the gospel and witness to those who are trapped in cults. But sometimes we run the risk of casting our pearls before swine. We are giving sacred things to those who cannot receive them.

The word *pearl* is *margarites*—if your name is Marguerite or Margaret—pearl. Our pearls are those things that are holy, pure, true. We are guardians of the Gospel.

"It is often impossible to talk to some people about Jesus Christ. Their insensitiveness, their moral blindness, their intellectual pride, their cynical mockery, the tarnishing film, make them impervious to words about Christ. But it is always possible to show men Christ; and the weakness of the church lies not in Christian arguments, but in lack of Christian lives" (Barclay p. 269). There are times when it makes sense to say nothing, but live your life as a glowing testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. We will meet people who despise truth; they will treat the revelation of God and the gospel of Christ with utter contempt. They will respond with abuse; sometimes violence; sometimes with a kind of demonic hatred.

How do you spot the dogs and the hogs? It will require discernment. Spiritual perception. In the next few verses Jesus will speak on the subject of prayer and the need for wisdom.

The verse proves Jesus did not intend to prohibit all judgment.

Christian—you are called to live according to God's standards and Christ's commands. Not everyone embraces God's standards or believes Christ's commands.

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I am grateful to Robert M. Bowman Jr. and his book *Orthodoxy And Heresy (sadly out of print)*. In chapter 3 entitled Judging Others is it always wrong? He outlines wrong judging and right judging (pp.27-32).

What are the judgments we avoid?

1. **Hypocritical judgments.**
2. **Unjust judgments.**
3. **Presumptuous judgments.**

What are the judgments we embrace?

1. **We judge truth from error and right from wrong.**
2. **We judge unrepentant sinners in the church.**
3. **We judge teachers of false versions of Christianity.**

We simply cannot ignore the scores of passages in the Bible that indicate some things are right and some things are wrong. Some things are true and some things are false. The Bible teaches that believers are to settle things in the church; wise and mature leaders who can discern matters (1 Cor. 6:1-8). The local church must judge serious sins in the local church and take appropriate action (Matthew 18:17; I Cor.5:9-13). Believers are to judge the teaching of local leaders; preachers and teachers are held to a strict standard; teachers must not preach or teach those things that are contrary to sound doctrine. Those in the church must judge men and their qualifications to occupy the roles and function in the offices of pastors, leaders, elders (1 Timothy 3:1-13). We are commanded to discern which people are divisive; unruly, fainthearted, weak and treat them appropriately. Paul writes (1 Thessalonians 5:14); “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. (v.15) See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”

I am amazed at how many people are willing ignore truth or despise truth or reject truth. They misquote Matthew 7:1—“Judge not, that you be not judged” and ignore the multitude of passages that speak of false gospels; false doctrines; false miracles; false gods; false christ; false spirits; false prophets; false apostles; false teachers. We promote the truth—we expose the lie—and oppose those who oppose the Gospel. But our opposition must never resort to evil—our opposition cannot include violence or sin or evil. We must never render evil to anyone—but pursue what is good for ourselves and all (1Thess.5:14).

Conclusion

Judging people is easy. Loving people is hard (tweet this).

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History is littered with people who were grossly underestimated or overestimated. In 1933 Dorothy Thompson wrote in her diary after meeting Adolf Hitler; “that formless, almost faceless man” would never become dictator of Germany. She was right. He was honestly (or dishonestly depending on how you view history) elected Chancellor of Germany by the popular vote. The Chicago Times in 1865 evaluated Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address way: “The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dish-watery utterances of a man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States.” Thomas Edison was sent home from school with a note from his teacher that read; “To stupid to learn.”

No wonder the brother of Jesus warned (James 3:1) “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such **we shall incur stricter judgment**”. The person who teaches receives a stricter judgment because information and influence matters! Those who judge must be willing to be judged—no one is above criticism or judgment except God!

Years ago a Santa Fe train was traveling through Oklahoma. In one of the coaches a woman was desperately trying to quite a baby that would not stop crying. The baby was annoying several passengers, and finally one person could take it no longer and said, “can’t you keep that baby quiet”? He looked at the woman and noticed she was wearing a dress that indicated she had just come from a funeral. The woman said gently, “I am doing my best. The child is not mine.” “Where is the child’s mother?” the man barked! “In her coffin sir, in the baggage car in front us.” The steely eyes of the fellow welled with tears! He got up, took the baby in his arms and kissed it, and walked up and down the aisle to comfort the child.”

We often pretend God-like knowledge and demand God-like justice and ignore God-like compassion. Paul wrote; “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls” (Romans 14:4).