

Series: The Good News as Reported by Matthew
Sermon: A Sermon for the Ages: What Goes Around Comes Around
Scripture: Matthew 7:1-5
Speaker: Pastor Dan Curnutt
April 15, 2007

I. Introduction

I want to start this morning with a question.

Why is it human tendency to quickly judge others? We all have been guilty of this tendency at some point in our lives. We are quick to judge the motives of other people. We ask the question, why did they do that? Then we answer it for ourselves without the slightest thought that we might be wrong. For example; someone doesn't invite you to the dinner party they are having. You assume they are mad at you for some reason, because you've always thought they were a friend, and you've always been invited in the past. You fret over the insult of not being invited. You don't ask them about it but you ask others. After a few more days of frustration the invitation shows up in the mail with a note of apology for the short notice but they explain that the invitation got returned to them because they forgot to put a stamp on the envelope.

Or maybe you see a good friend at Starbucks or a restaurant and they are with someone you don't know. Your first reaction is to think, hey they cancelled having coffee with me today because they said something important came up, but here they are with someone else. So, your mind says, hmmm, I must not be as important to them as this person. My friendship doesn't mean as much to them, they cancelled to have fun with someone else. What you don't know is that this person they are meeting with is in crisis in their marriage or at work and the crisis is time sensitive and they are seeking the Godly council of your friend.

Now, these examples may seem a bit far fetched, but I imagine that each of us can remember when we have made an assumption about a person or a situation and judged them only to find out later that we didn't have all the information and our judgment was not only wrong but sinful on our part.

Now let's reverse this role. Maybe you have been the recipient of having your motives judged by others and you know that they are wrong, but by the time you can explain yourself or your actions the damage has already been done. Trust has been broken and it will take time to heal. Friendship is in disrepair now.

A couple of years ago Pastor Mike made up a new word for us in one of his sermons. The word was *assumicide*. The gist of the word being, when we make assumptions and leap to a conclusion we can often be wrong and the outcome is deadly to our relationships. We are committing a relational form of suicide by making assumptions.

Here are two examples of how assumptions come back to be proven ill conceived:

A photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene hampered him and he asked his home office to hire a plane. Arrangements were made and he was told to go at once to a nearby airport, where the plane would be waiting. When he arrived at the airport, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, "Let's go! Let's go!" The pilot swung the plane into the wind and they soon were in the air. "Fly over the north side of the fire," yelled the photographer, "and make three or four low level passes." "Why?" asked the pilot. "Because I'm going to take pictures," cried the photographer. "I'm a photographer and photographers take pictures!" After a pause the pilot said, "You mean you're not the instructor?"¹

A six-year-old came home from school one day with a note from his teacher in which it was suggested that he be taken out of school, as he was "too stupid to learn." His name: Thomas Alva Edison.²

In today's passage we are going to come to discover that judging others can have some severe consequences. We are going to see that many of the consequences destroy the fellowship we have with other believers. Conflict is alive and well in our society and often times in our churches. Because of this a Para church organization called Peacemakers was formed.

On your outline I have written out the Peacemaker's Pledge from Peacemakers Ministry. Let's read that pledge together. . . . "As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict. We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ. Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on His grace, we commit ourselves to responding to conflict in a Biblical way."³

As we go through the sermon today we are in Matthew chapter seven, but let's not forget Matthew 5:9 where Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

Please stand with me as I read Matthew 7:1-5 for us.

II. To Judge or Not to Judge (Matthew 7:1-2)

In starting my study for this message Pastor Mike gave me a book by Dr. D.A. Carson on the Sermon on the Mount. This passage is a familiar passage to me as I'm sure it is to you. I had my preconceived thoughts about how to approach this passage. It tells us "Do not judge, or you will be judged." That seems pretty straight forward.

But Dr. Carson suggested we start with a different approach, he suggests that we first look at what the scripture does not say, let me quote from his book;

We will be wise to consider first what this text does *not* say. It certainly does not command the sons of God, the disciples of Jesus, to be *unstructured*, undiscerning blobs who never under any circumstance whatsoever hold any opinions about right and wrong. Are we to say nothing about the rights and wrongs of a Hitler, a Stalin, a Nixon? Of adultery, economic exploitation, laziness, deceit? The New Testament itself excludes such a fatuous interpretation. A few verses on, the Lord Jesus himself alludes to certain people as pigs and dogs (7:6) -- some sort of negative judgment has certainly taken place! A little further on, Jesus warns, "Watch out for false prophets. They came to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matt 7:15). By these words Jesus not only labels certain teachers with the most damning epithets, but demands that his followers recognize such teachers for what they are; and that is certainly an exercise which requires the use of discriminating faculties." 4

To sum up what Dr. Carson is saying, being judgmental is wrong, but being discerning is wisdom displayed.

Dr. Carson wants us to understand that this scripture is not telling us that we are to be pushovers. He wants us to realize that judgment at times can be very constructive.

Further, we need to be careful that we don't fear judging others in such a way as to become tolerant of everyone and everything they do no matter how Biblically or morally wrong they may be. Other scriptures help to clarify that discernment of spiritual matters often times requires the disciple to make a judgment about people.

Jesus condemns teachers and Pharisees who are not truly seeking to honor and glorify God. He says in Matthew 23:15, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."

Or in Matthew 21:12-13, we read, "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 'It is written,' he said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of robbers."

Then Paul addresses our need to be careful of certain people. In Philippians 3:2, he says, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh."

And further in I Corinthians 5:1-5, in exhorting the church how to handle an unrepentant sinner, Paul writes, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

Those are pretty strong words. Each of these passages shows that some type of judgment has taken place. So again we have to remember that Matthew 7:1 is not telling us that we can not judge someone, instead it is telling us not to develop a judgmental attitude or character.

Going back to Dr Carson he explains it this way, “To judge can mean to discern, to judge judicially, to be judgmental, to condemn (judicially or others). The context must determine the precise shade of meaning. The content here argues that the verse means; “Do not be judgmental. Do not adopt a critical spirit, a condemning attitude.”

Let’s now look at what this scripture is saying. The real question comes down to this, am I being judgmental? Am I putting a stumbling block in the way of my brother or sister in Christ? Or am I actually honoring and glorifying God by helping a brother or sister to see a sinful attitude that needs correcting.

So maybe we should understand that this scripture is saying to us, “Do not be judgmental of others or they will be judgmental of you!”

Additionally there are two possible ways to understand the second part of verse 2. One way is to say, “the measure we use on others will be the measure they use on us.” The second understanding could be, “the measure we use on others will be the measure God himself will use on us.”

I believe that the second phrase would be the appropriate interpretation of this verse. If we look back at Matthew 6:14 we read, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Jesus was pretty pointedly telling us that forgiveness is not just from God the Father to us the sinner, it is also an attitude we are to apply to people who sin against us. In Matthew 18:21-22 Jesus further teaches on forgiveness. It states, “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

Jesus also earlier in the Sermon on the Mount taught us, blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

So it becomes clear that Jesus is warning us here that how we judge others will be how God will judge us. Again I quote Dr. Carson, he states, “Do we really want the standard of God’s justice to be applied to ourselves in the way we are prone to apply it to others?” 5

Sawdust versus whole logs (3-5)

Jesus had much to say about resolving conflict and this section of scripture records one of his teachings. As a matter of fact conflict is so deadly and has become so prevalent in our culture and in the church that as I mentioned earlier a ministry has been started called Peacemakers. We as a staff feel strongly enough about the need to learn how to Biblically resolve conflict that we have agreed to host a two day conference in November called Personal Peacemaking. The Peacemakers ministry will be here to share with us how to become a people of peace. As we get closer to that date we will talk more about it.

But for today I want to start the process for us as we look at this next section of scripture.

Peacemakers ministry has a little diagram they call “The Slippery Slope” that can help us deal with conflict that arises in our lives. Take a look at the diagram on the screens. Usually when faced with a conflict people respond in one of three ways. Peacemakers entitles these

The Escape Responses (shown on the left side of the diagram)

The Attack Responses (shown on the right side of the diagram)

Or, The Peacemaking Responses (shown in the middle)

If we use the escape responses that usually means we flee from the conflict or deny that a conflict exists or in very extreme cases commit suicide because we have lost all hope of resolving a conflict. You might think that suicide seems extreme, but in our culture today statistics bear this fact out. “Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students and the third leading cause of death among youth overall, ages of 15 to 24. 6

The second reaction people have to conflict is to go on the attack. We assault the person who offended us, or we take them to court or worse yet we murder them. Now you might think that murder is a bit extreme, but in I John 3 verse 15 we read, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” So, if we let a conflict bring us to the point of saying we hate a fellow believer in Christ, we have as much as murdered him.

The best set of responses to a conflict is the set in the middle, the Peacemaking Responses. It can be a long process to go through the middle section. We start by looking at the conflict and asking ourselves, is the offense minor enough that we should just overlook it. If not, then we need to go and be reconciled with our brother. Yes, that means approaching them and talking with them. Not fleeing from the conflict. Depending on how that goes the process might be stopped here or it might need to go through the other steps.

But, this process brings us to the Peacemakers four “G’s” of Peacemaking. Since we are not going to flee from a conflict or go on the attack we need to analyze the conflict using the four “G’s”. The following are the four “G’s” taken directly from the Peacemakers’ ministry materials.

The first G is: Glorify God: Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love, as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude..

The second G is: Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye: Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God’s mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts---confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused.

The third G is: Gently Restore: Instead of pretending that conflict doesn’t exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem to serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical way.

The fourth G is: Go and Be Reconciled: Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we need to actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation, forgiving others as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences. 7

Matthew 7:3-5 deals directly with the second “G” of the Peacemakers process. So let’s take a deeper look at it.

Let’s read these verses again. . . .

How do we get the log out of our eye?

We need to start with some good old fashion self-examination. Jesus is pretty blunt here. He says, “Why do we look at the speck in our brother’s eye while paying no attention to the log in our own eye?” We need to consider that some of us have an overly sensitive spirit. I certainly think I fall into this category. I don’t have what we call a “thick skin”. Comments often times cut me deeply and cause me pain. Criticism from others is not something that I enjoy. As a matter of fact I often take the first step of dismissing them as being wrong rather than looking at whether I need to be corrected. Because I have learned that I have an overly sensitive spirit it has helped me to step back, take a deep breath and consider what the person is saying before I dismiss them. This has proven very productive as 95 out of a 100 times they are correct.

Or I need to stop and ask; did my own sinful nature contribute to the conflict? Am I looking out for myself and protecting my own flesh, or am I looking out for what’s best for the Kingdom. If I’m looking out for my own welfare rather than what’s best for God I have a great propensity to become a “hypocrite” by not living out a Christlike lifestyle.

We also need to realize that conflict starts in the heart. James in his letter hits this point right on the head, in chapter 4 verses 1 to 3 he states, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

James says we fight and quarrel because we are seeking our own desires, we are asking for things with wrong motives; we in essence are looking out for ourselves. His comment, “wrong motives” helps us to see that conflict is often a matter of the heart. Is our heart seeking God’s Kingdom? Does our heart truly want to become Christlike? Or are our hearts motives selfish?

Jesus spoke about the heart also in Matthew 15:18-19 where he says, “But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

So, we need to realize that our hearts motives sometimes cloud our ability to see clearly the faults of someone else. As we look at the sawdust in their eye we actually filter it through the evil that might reside in our own heart.

As we look to work on dealing with a conflict or on correcting someone else we need to learn to pray like King David prayed. His prayer is recorded in Psalm 139:23-24, he prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” What a great prayer. Notice that this prayer focuses on our motives, our anxious thoughts, and our offensive ways. If we check our hearts before jumping to conclusions about the faults of others we will typically have a much clearer perspective on the problem and that is what Jesus means when he wants us to remove the plank from our eye so that we can see clearly.

Finally, we need to ask ourselves, “How have I contributed to this conflict. What part did I have in this situation? Usually a problem is not just one sided.

Jesus is asking us fairly clearly in this scripture to make sure that our life is right with him before we start trying to show others their faults.

The good news is this. If we go through the process of examining ourselves and determine that we are not responding to a conflict out of a sinful nature we can then take the proper steps to go to a brother or sister and work through the task of gently restoring them and being reconciled with them. That process will truly then bring honor and glory to God and His Kingdom.

In Conclusion: I have listed three action steps for us to take to help apply this scripture to our lives:

1. Stop making assumptions about other people’s motives
2. Learn to be discerning
3. Practice becoming a peacemaker, i.e. practice the four “G’s” of peacemaking

At the bottom of your outline I put two scripture verses. The first verse is Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” The second verse is Matthew 7:12 which states, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” This is often called “The Golden Rule”.

I think it is interesting to see that Jesus started us out with a negative, being judgmental. Then he comes back to remind us to live our lives in the positive, treat others in the way that we would like to be treated.

Now, don’t get me wrong here, I don’t think this is telling us to treat others nicely so that we get a benefit. I think it is telling us to treat others exactly how we would like to be treated, whether or not they return that treatment to us. Remember Jesus tells us to love our enemies. By loving them it doesn’t mean that they will necessarily be nice to us.

I started us out this morning by quoting Dr. D. A. Carson and I think I would like to finish us up with another quote from his work. He states;

Jesus caps off the Sermon on the Mount with the so-called “Golden Rule”. The negative form of this rule is known to many religions—that is, it often appears elsewhere in the form, “Do not do anything to anyone that you would not want him to do to you.” But Jesus gives the positive form of this rule, and the difference between the two is profound. For example, the negative form would teach behavior like this: If you do not enjoy being robbed, don’t rob others. If you do not like being cursed, don’t curse others. If you don not enjoy being hated, don’t hate others. If you do not care to be clubbed over the head, don’t club others over the head. However, the positive form teaches behavior like this: If you enjoy being loved, love others. If you like to receive things, give to others. IF you like being appreciated, appreciate others. The positive form is thus far more searching than its negative counterpart. 8

So, how are you going to determine to live your life? Are you going to be a judgmental, cranky bitter person full of conflict, or are you going to learn to be discerning, loving and full of the character of Christ and an agent of peace?

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2. Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers. Garland TX: Bible Communications © 1996, 1979
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