

Judging Others

Let's turn to **Matt. 7:1-6** as we reach the last stretch in the sermon on the mount. (Read and pray)

When President John F. Kennedy made his famous speech in front of the Berlin Wall at the height of the Cold War, his speechwriters thought it would be great if he declared himself a symbolic citizen of Berlin, and so they inserted a German phrase: *ich bin ein Berliner* (*ish bin ein bearleener*) which was meant to say, "I am a Berliner!" What they didn't realize though is that German citizens never referred to themselves as Berliners, that name was reserved for their favorite breakfast pastry. President Kennedy's statement could have been interpreted as, "I am a jelly-filled doughnut!"

A lot of people have had a lot of fun with the idea that Kennedy declared himself a pastry, but linguistic scholars have determined that the meaning of President Kennedy's statement was very clear to his audience when put in context.

Jesus' statement, *judge not*, is one of the most well known phrases in all the Gospels and, when taken out of its context, it's also one of the most easily misunderstood and misused teachings in all the Bible. For us to correctly understand what Jesus is - and isn't - saying here, we need to put his words back into their context.

Jesus isn't calling for an end to all critical judgments

People sometimes quote this passage to forbid any and all moral or spiritual evaluation of any person or situation. Think that church across town is teaching heresy? Remember what Jesus said, judge not! Thinking about confronting your Christian friend who is talking about leaving his wife for another woman? Remember what Jesus said, judge not!

Taken out of context, Jesus' statement can leave us thinking that we're supposed to empty ourselves of all critical thinking and refrain from making any moral or spiritual judgments about anything. But when we put it back into its context, we see that Jesus can't possibly have meant that, because just a couple verses later Jesus warns us not to cast our pearls before dogs or pigs. If someone is hardened to the gospel and shows contempt for spiritual treasures, the gospel will be as worthless to them as a pearl is to a pig, so Jesus says don't keep offering the gospel to them while they're in that place. That demands that we make an evaluative judgment (and a pretty strong one at that) about the spiritual and heart condition of someone. Then a few verses later Jesus warns us to beware of false prophets, which again, can only be done if we can make an accurate judgment that someone is a false prophet. So Jesus is telling us that there is a way that we *must* judge, and there is a way that we *must not* judge. In context what we see that Jesus isn't telling us not to make careful, biblical assessments of teaching or people or situations. We have to do that. What we must not do is cultivate a critical, fault-finding attitude.

1. Jesus is warning us against having a judgmental spirit

A judgmental spirit is a spirit that criticizes and judges people quickly and without grace. It is jumping to judgments about people. It is having a spirit that sets itself up as a judge over other people, and that, Jesus says, is a very serious thing. For the past couple weeks we've been talking about how worry can carve channels in our thinking so that everything gets drawn into that channel. A judgmental spirit can also carve deep channels in our thinking so that we start becoming critical and judgmental about

everything and everybody. There's a road in Alaska that has a sign that says, *choose your rut carefully, you'll be in it for the next 200 miles*. Being judgmental eventually digs a rut in our thinking so that judging and criticizing starts to seem normal to us. Instead of loving people like Jesus commanded us to, we judge them. Rather than pulling for someone, we judge them. Rather than having understanding for the person who makes a mistake, we judge them for not doing better. Rather than trying to help someone break free of their sin, we judge them for their sin. Rather than appreciating the many good things about our friend, we focus on the one thing we don't like. Judgmentalism becomes a rut that all our thinking gets drawn into and it just seems normal to us after awhile. But it's a mindset that leads to a dead end.

Jesus says that if we set ourselves up as a judge of others, one day we will be the one who's being judged. Verse 2 warns us: *with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you*. A judgmental spirit loses sight of how badly we need grace every day. Jesus says that the measuring standard we use will be used with us. If we show grace, we will be shown grace. If we give mercy, mercy will be given to us. If we judge harshly, we will be judged harshly. That's what Jesus is saying.

As Christians, we need to remember that the gospel of John 1:16 tells us that *from his [Christ's] fullness we have all received, grace upon grace*. Christ didn't just measure grace to us, he measured grace upon grace. He gave us grace and then he poured grace on top of that grace. Jesus saved us, forgave us, redeemed us, reconciled us back to God as friends, and made it possible for us to be adopted by God as beloved sons and daughters. We rejoice with Patrick and Alicia Roberts as they have just been matched with a precious little girl from South Africa, and when this adoption is finalized this little girl will be their daughter, and come and live with them, but more than just living with them she will enjoy all the love and privileges of a daughter. That's what God did for us through Jesus. We are His children, heirs of God and co-heirs with

Christ. Everything that is his belongs to us, and we belong to Him. Grace upon grace.

The more we get that, the more generous we will be in giving grace to others. A judgmental spirit is a stingy spirit - it measures grace in small portions and judgment in large portions. God has called us to better than that, brothers and sisters. We have received such a rich supply of grace, how can we be stingy in giving grace away? Jesus warns us: if we insist on judging people harshly, we will be judged harshly.

2. Judgmentalism leads to hypocritical fault-finding

Jesus then uses humor to graphically illustrate how judgmentalism leads to hypocritical fault-finding in others.

Why do you see the speck that is 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 a 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. vv. 3-5

We become experts at seeing and fixing other people's faults - all the while being blind to our own faults. But it's more than just that: we magnify other people's faults - that little speck in your eye bugs the life out of me, all the while I have no idea that I have a two by four sticking out of my eye!

How is that even possible? How is it possible that we can obsess over a speck in someone else's eye while we have a patio deck sticking out of ours? It's a blindness produced by hypocrisy - when we have a judgmental spirit we deal with others differently than we deal with ourselves. We give ourselves a pass where we hold others to a rigid standard. What we consider laziness when that person does it, is a well deserved break when we do it. An inexcusably careless mistake when someone else does it is just being human when we do it. What we judge as complaining when they do it, is just being real when we do it. A character flaw in them is a lovable personality trait in us. We have a built in bias that cause us to give ourselves a pass over things that we judge others about. It's hypocrisy.

Years ago I was asked to mediate between two guys who had had a painful break in their relationship. As I heard their stories, it was clear that one of the guys had done a number of unethical things that had broken trust in their friendship. The guy who had done these things admitted to it, but as we talked it was evident that he was minimizing what he had done and maximizing the one thing the other guy had done that bothered him. I had to point out to him that he wasn't giving the same grace that he expected to be given to him.

We can all be guilty of giving ourselves a pass on standards that we strictly hold others to. The answer isn't that we never try to help a brother or sister see an issue in their lives. The answer, Jesus says, is first take the log out of our own eye. Then we will be able to see clearly enough to help our brother.

And this is where we need to invite the Holy Spirit to do His work in our hearts. Because what Jesus is talking about here is a deliberate kind of hypocrisy, but at the same time it's a type of blindness. We see the speck in our brother's eye, we don't see the plank in our own eye. We are blind to it. There's a saying, *we don't know what we don't know*. In this case we could say, *we don't see what we don't see*. It's possible to see even a little pride in someone else and yet be blind to the presence of pride in our own lives. It's possible to have 20/20 in detecting selfishness in our brother, but miss it in ourselves. It's possible to see how biased someone else is in their opinion and yet not detect how biased we are in our opinions. We don't see what we don't see. But the Holy Spirit does, and He can help us see ourselves more clearly.

David prayed in Ps. 139 *search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts*. If we are willing to have this kind of deep inner honesty the Holy Spirit can shine His light on our hearts and reveal the planks that are in our eyes and the junk that is in our hearts. He can reveal the pride, the selfishness, the defensiveness, the self-righteousness that resides in our hearts and blinds our eyes. As we heard in Pastor Jim Cymbala's teaching in CG, the fire of the Holy Spirit can illuminate where we need to change, and then His fire can burn away the junk in our heart so that our lives shine more brightly for God's glory.

I experienced a small taste of this "burning away the junk" just this week. I felt that someone had slighted me, not in a major way, but in a relatively minor way, but nevertheless I felt justified to be annoyed and resentful about it. And I had been feeling this low grade resentment for several weeks - until this past Thursday when I felt the Holy Spirit first shine light on it as petty and ungenerous of me, and

then I felt Him burn the bitterness away. There is a freedom when our hearts get freed from the junk, and our eyes get another plank removed. It's not comfortable having a plank in our eyes.

3. Love cares more about the person than the speck

The Lord calls us to be involved in each other's lives. We need each other! I may not like it, but I need people to tell me I'm wrong when I'm wrong. I need people who see my blind spots. So do you. Judge not doesn't silence us from speaking the truth to one another. But it changes *how* we speak the truth - we are to speak the truth *in love*.

One of the biggest things this changes is we care more about the person than the speck. Judgmentalism focuses on the specks. Love focuses on the person.

When I first began pastoring a church on LI, there was a young couple in the church who we knew from Bible school. And after a while I noticed that they seemed to have lost their enthusiasm for the Lord. Their demeanor seemed half-hearted and joyless. And that bothered me. I knew they once were so passionate for the Lord, so at one point as we were talking I brought it up in a "this bugs me" tone of voice. Later in the conversation Ed said to me, "Allen you rebuked us for lacking excitement for the Lord and seeming to be half-hearted, but you never asked us how we were doing. You never asked what was going on in our lives or how we might be struggling." It was a painful lesson for me. Judgmentalism focuses on the specks, love focuses on the person.

We don't need to have all the answers. Taking the speck out of our own eye doesn't mean we are perfect, it means we've allowed the Lord to penetrate our own hearts honestly and deeply, and from that place we are better equipped to bring the wisdom of God's word to the people we care about. We are better able to balance truth and grace.

If judgmentalism is an issue in our lives, there's a good chance we don't see it. We don't see what we don't see. But the Holy Spirit can reveal it to us. Let Jesus' warning sink in: don't be judgmental. Don't be critical. Don't be a fault-finder. We need grace too much to judge others harshly. Let's take a moment to allow the Holy Spirit to shine His light on our hearts and then ask Him to burn the junk of judgmentalism away.