

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Matthew 7:1-6          “Judging Others”

Intro. Have you ever tried to correct someone, or pointed out a sin in someone’s life, and they quoted from our text of Scripture saying, “Judge not, lest you be judged”? Well this text of Scripture that I have just read to you has really been misunderstood. V.1 has been lifted out of context and used as an excuse for tolerance of sin, even among believers.

We live in a day when the doctrine of tolerance has become the ultimate standard of what is politically correct. Even among some denominations and churches, “judge not” seems to be their rallying cry. And so we have in our society a growing acceptance of all kinds of sinful behavior, and those who take a stand against sin are treated with rebuke, scorn, and ridicule. Even in some churches, they are ordaining practicing homosexuals and celebrating it! Well in our message today, we are going to see that Jesus did not speak the words “judge not” in the way they are used today, and I will show you why.

On the other hand, there are still some individuals and legalistic religious groups that do need to give heed to what Jesus is saying here. They have a sharp, critical eye toward everyone who does not live according to *their* rules. So this message is still relevant in addressing a problem that is still with us today.

What about you today? Do you look for opportunities to be critical of others? Do you condemn others? Do you tend to nitpick? Do you give out more criticism than complements? If so, you especially need to listen to the message today.

So first of all, I want to call upon us to:

### I. HEED THE COMMAND NOT TO JUDGE OTHERS

Jesus says in v.1, “Judge not.” Before we consider the meaning of these words, let’s consider:

A. What the Command Does *Not* Mean – We must always interpret Scripture based on context, starting with the immediate context, and then move to the context of the whole Bible. When we do so, we cannot conclude that Jesus is forbidding the practice of judging others in the absolute sense of the word, for careful discrimination is essential in the Christian life. In Jn. 7:24 Jesus said, “Judge righteous judgment.” So there are times when we are to make judgments about other people. I want to give you 2 examples now, & give other examples later. First:

1. It Must Not Mean that We Are Not to Judge People’s Character - For example, right here in the context we see that we are to make judgments concerning the character of others. In v.6 Jesus implies that we must be able to regard certain individuals as being like dogs and hogs, and thus not cast our holy or valuable things before such people. In v.15 Jesus says that certain people are like wolves in sheep’s clothing. So He says that we are to beware of false prophets. That means that we must make a judgment concerning who is a false prophet. How do we do that? In v.16 Jesus says you shall know them by their fruits. Likewise, the apostle John admonishes us in 1 Jn. 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

2. It Must Not Mean that We Are Not to Exercise Church Discipline - Later in Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus Himself speaks of what to do when a brother sins against you, and the steps you are to take which could involve the church in judging & rebuking sin. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 5:12, "Do you not judge those who are inside (the church)?" In that context Paul commanded the church to pass judgment on a member who had been committing a serious sexual sin. (Cf. also 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10). So Jesus is not forbidding making judgment concerning people for the proper reason.

B. What the Command Does Mean - What, then, did Jesus mean? You have to interpret this verse in light of the religious climate that Jesus was addressing. What was the dominant religious sect of Jesus' day? It was the Pharisees. They established a legalistic code of conduct for their fellow Jews, which often went far beyond what the Old Testament law actually required. Then, they were judgmental and critical of everyone who did not follow their code of conduct. Why? When they judged & condemned others, they exalted their own self-righteousness (cf. Rom. 2:1ff; Luke 18:9-14; Jn. 7:49). And the whole Sermon on the Mount was preached to rebuke and tear down such self-righteousness. Thus, when you understand the religious context in which Jesus lived, you understand better why Jesus literally said, "Stop judging." He is rebuking the kind of judging that was going on in His day.

What about today? There are legalistic religious groups that have a critical spirit toward those who do not follow the rules they have set for themselves. Yet it's not just religious folks that can be guilty of the wrong kind of judging. Every family & every group of people have at least some rules they live by. And they can be rather critical of those who don't live by their rules, & those who live by their own rules can feel pretty good about themselves. Those who proclaim tolerance as a virtue can be extremely intolerant & judgmental of those of us who preach biblical morality!

So I hope you understand the background & meaning of this command not to judge. We are not look for opportunities to judge people from a self-righteous, holier than thou attitude. Now let's move from the meaning of the command to:

## II. THE REASONS FOR THE COMMAND

Jesus gives 3 solid reasons why we should be careful about judging others. The first reason is a very practical consideration:

A. Because our Judgment of Others Will Lead to Similar Judgment – Notice what Jesus says in vv.1-2, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Jesus points out a life principle that we receive from others the same kind of treatment we give. If you give love, you tend to receive love. And if you are a habitual self-righteous faultfinder, you can expect that people will be much more quick & harsh in their judgment of you! In fact, they will be *looking* for you to make one mistake, so they can judge you the way you have judged them. Do you want that kind of scrutiny in your life?

Another reason why you should not judge others is:

B. Because You Could be Guilty of Hypocrisy – The judgmental Pharisees certainly were. At the beginning of v.5 Jesus says, "Hypocrite!" In v.3 we see why such judgmental people were

guilty of hypocrisy. Jesus says, “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” The “plank” (*dokos*) is a heavy piece of timber fit to be used for the rafter or joist of a building. The “speck” (*karphos*; KJV “mote”) is a small piece of straw or a splinter of wood. This is an example of humorous hyperbole used by Jesus. We can easily imagine a small piece of straw in someone’s eye, but a large board would not literally fit in anyone’s eye. Yet Jesus is suggesting that the critical Pharisees often had much more serious sins than the people they were judging. You say, “How so?” Well let me ask a question. Which is worse: a sin of the flesh or a sin of the spirit? Aren’t sins of the spirit as bad or indeed worse? In Gal. 5:19-21 Paul gives examples of the sins of the flesh, such as immorality & drunkenness, but most of the sins listed are sins of the spirit, such as idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, & selfish ambitions. So whatever fault we see in another person’s life may be a mere splinter compared with the massive beam of our own lack of love. There is nothing more un-Christlike than an unloving, critical spirit.

Indeed, we can be blind to our own faults, even while we are judging someone else. Or as someone has said, “Faults are like headlights on a car—those of others seem more glaring than our own.” An Old Testament illustration of this is found in the life of David. The prophet Nathan came to him, and told him the story of a rich man who had a guest come to his house. Instead of slaying one of *his* many lambs for their meal, the rich man instead took the only lamb of a poor man. When David heard that, he passed harsh condemnation on such a man. Yet, that condemnation was returned upon David’s own head, for he had done something similar. He had several wives, and yet he took away Bathsheba, the only wife of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 12:1-7). David was angry enough at the man who stole his neighbor’s ewe lamb, but he seemed to be unaware that he was guilty of a meaner, more cruel theft.

So what should we do? Jesus says in v.5, “Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” The critic Jesus portrays has been thinking too much about others and not enough about himself. Before you judge sin in another person’s life, you must first make sure that you have gone through some self-examination in your own life. If you would take more time to judge sin in your own life, you would have less time to look for sin in the lives of others. Judging others leads to spiritual pride, a great sin. But examining self & finding sin leads to humility.<sup>1</sup>

It is spiritually dangerous to judge your actions by your own way of thinking. The Bible says in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is death” (cf. Prov. 21:2). So there are two important ingredients in self-examination. First, you need help from the Word of God. The Bible describes itself as a mirror that reveals sin in our life. Secondly, you need to seek the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He has come to convict us of sin (Jn. 16:8), but He will use the Word of God to convict us, and will never contradict the Word of God.

So you should be careful about judging others, lest you be guilty of hypocrisy. Now, consider with me a third reason why we should be careful about judging others:

C. Because Our Judgment Is Often Prone To Error – Jesus implies this truth about judgment here. So often people are blinded by their own sin, and they can’t see well enough to judge others properly. And even when we can see clearly the outward actions of others, we do not know all the facts. So we must be careful about our judgments of others.

Many years ago a Santa Fe train was speeding through Oklahoma. In one of the coaches sat

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<sup>1</sup> If it is communion Sunday, I could add, “Self-examination is one of the purposes of the Lord’s Supper. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 11:28, ‘But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.’”

a young woman desperately trying to take care of a restless baby, whose crying was evidently annoying some of the passengers. Across the aisle set a stout fellow, a picture of comfort and rich living. He glared at the woman and shouted: "Can't you keep that child quiet?" On taking a further look at the young lady, he noticed that her dress was one of mourning. Then he heard her say gently: "I cannot help it. The child is not mine. I am doing my best." So the passenger asked, "Where is its mother?" She replied, "In her coffin in the baggage car up ahead." His glaring eyes softened and became filled with tears. He got up, took the baby in his arms, kissed it, and it walked up and down the isle with the young child, trying his best to sooth the motherless little one and make up for his harshness.<sup>2</sup>

We have discussed the fact that we should not judge others with a critical, self-righteous attitude. Yet I want to present one more important point:

### III. THE REASONS WHY WE *SHOULD* JUDGE OTHERS

I have already indicated that this command not to judge others is not absolute. There are times and situations where we should judge others. So to give balance to the message, I want to share three reasons why you should exercise judgment. First of all:

A. To Protect Ourselves from Evil Men – I have already pointed this out in my first point, in reference to v.15. The Lord told us that we are not to be censorious, but that does not mean we are to be gullible. We are to have a discerning spirit. We are the Lord's sheep, but we are not to let anyone pull the wool over our eyes! (Wiersbe). The false prophets are to be judged & excluded from God's people.

The same principle applies to society. We must have law enforcement officers and judges and juries to pass judgment, and protect society from those who would harm us (cf. Titus 3:1-2; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 2:13-15).

There are many other situations in life where you had better be a judge of character, lest you be hurt by ungodly, sinful people. Before you marry someone, you had better judge their character. Are they a Christian? Are they honest? Are they loving, or self-centered. If you marry someone based on looks, or how they "act," you could make a big mistake. Likewise, before you hire someone, you had better judge their character, or they could steal from you, or damage your business. Before you vote for someone in public office, you need to examine & judge their character. After all, character determines conduct. Likewise, before you vote for a deacon or pastor, you are to judge their character. That's why in 1 Timothy 3 Paul gives the character qualifications for pastors & deacons. There are indeed situations where we are to make a judgment regarding someone's character.

Secondly, we are to judge certain individuals:

B. To Protect the Holy Things of God from Misuse by Evil Men – Jesus says in v.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." No dedicated priest would throw meat from the altar to a filthy dog, and if you cast pearls before swine, they will not appreciate the value of pearls. They may initially think you are casting food to them, but then they will quickly realize that it's not food, but hard, inedible pearls, and you could just make them mad, & they will turn on you! So here, Christ is saying that there will be times when you should realize that some people are like dogs or

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #2855* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

hogs. All they care about is satisfying the lusts of the flesh. Likewise, Paul warned in Philippians 3:2, “Beware of dogs.”

Now once we make that judgment regarding someone, we should respond appropriately. That means that we should withhold some of the precious pearls of God’s Word from them. That’s because they will not accept or appreciate those truths until they are saved. Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:14, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him....” While we should generally share the gospel with unbelievers, there are some other truths that are really intended only for Christians.

Jesus lived according to His own teaching. He refused to talk to Herod, who only wanted to satisfy his curiosity (Luke 23:9). On one occasion when the religious leaders tried to trap Him, He refused to answer their question (Matt. 21:23-27). It is a wise Christian who first assesses the condition of a person’s heart before sharing precious pearls.

I’m afraid that too often, religious leaders get baited into giving interviews with reporters. I guess I would like to be on CNN, or some major network. But all too often Christian leaders end up casting pearls before swine. The secular audience has no appreciation for the moral values & spiritual truths that we hold dear. We need to exercise some discernment lest we cast our pearls before swine. People in this modern day may not like it when we make such a value judgment about people, but Christ commands it!

Finally, another reason why we should exercise judgment is:

C. To Help Someone with a Sin Problem – Have you ever had something get lodged in your eye? That can hurt, and you want it out! In v.4 Jesus describes a man trying to help a person get a speck out of their eye. There is nothing wrong with that. The only part that was wrong was the fact that he had more significant sin in his own life.

Now the speck illustrates sin in someone’s life. Certainly, there are many situations in life where people have a moral obligation to make a judgment concerning sin in another person’s life, and seek to help them turn from that sin.

However, we are not to judge unless we are asked, or in a position to do so. A teacher is in a position to judge the performance of his or her students. A parent is in a position to judge & disciple the behavior of his or her children. But who are you to judge someone else’s child, when all you are is an observer? A pastor or other spiritual leader should be able to judge & correct sin in the life of a believer under their authority. Paul wrote in Gal. 6:1, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

We need for others to examine us, and judge sin in us, for we are often blind to our own faults. One time I went to a dermatologist. He asked some questions. I answered his questions, but then he told me to take more of my clothes off for he wanted to examine my skin for himself. He said that patients are not very reliable when it comes to telling him what’s wrong. And sure enough, he notice that I had athlete’s foot. I didn’t know that! [Illus.#C-1560].

We need parents, spouses, and spiritual leaders to help us see our own sin, that we may turn from our sins. That is the kind of judgment we need, and that is the kind of judgment we should give when we are in a position to do so.

Conclusion: Before you judge others, you need to make sure you have judged yourself. Have you examined your spiritual condition? Are you a Christian? If not, repent of your sins, & trust in Christ today. If you are a Christian, have you judged sin in your own life, and confessed it to the Lord? If

not, do it today. While there is a place to judge others in certain situations, we must judge ourselves first.

Sources: H. Leo Eddleman, *The Teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1975); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible, Vol. 4* (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 4:10]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

For further study, see the parallel Scripture in Luke 6:37.

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

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