

October 21, 2018

Sunday Morning Service

Series: Luke

Community Baptist Church

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JUDGE YOURSELF FIRST

Luke 6:37-42

When I was in college preparing for ministry, I was required to take some courses on preaching and public speaking. One teacher emphasized the importance of recording your sermons and then listening to them critically. I have never been able to do that. Whenever I try to listen to myself preach, I conclude that I wouldn't listen to me for five minutes.

Maybe reality is too humbling. Sometimes when Pat and I travel, we will be in a home or a motel room where the light over the mirror in the bathroom is much brighter than the lights around our bathroom mirrors at home. Frankly, it is always a bit discouraging to have the light shine brightly on my face, especially early in the morning before I have had my coffee.

In our text, Jesus taught that we each should view ourselves in a very bright light, a light that shows all the defects. When Jesus was attending the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem, the critics and nay-sayers argued with Him about the authority of His teaching. In that context, Jesus taught, "*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment*" (John 7:24). Judging with right judgment requires that we use the perfect standard for judgment, which is the righteousness of God Himself, which standard is revealed in the Word of God.

Judging with right judgment also requires that we fairly assess ourselves. It is so easy for us to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, while at the same time assessing the actions, attitudes, and motives of others with a more stringent standard. That is a trick of Satan, a double standard of the fallen flesh. Satan is the father of lies, and that includes the lies we tell ourselves about ourselves. What is sadder than a sixty-year-old woman dressed like a teenager and trying

to act like a twenty-something? What is sadder might be a mature adult Christian who still criticizes sinners for doing the same thing he does or would do if he could get away with it.

Only Jesus can help us be fair with our judgment. His righteousness must be our standard of judgment. And we need to apply that righteous standard to ourselves first before we dare point out how far others miss it.

An Important Principle (vv.37-40).

The opening verses of our text contain Jesus's statement of the important principle (vv.37-38). First, Jesus requires His people to be gracious. That grace will be manifested in the way we judge or do not judge others. "*Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;*" (v.37).

A sad possibility is that this is the favorite Bible verse of people who probably don't know any other Bible verses. That possibility reveals the deeper truth that human nature hates to be exposed or hates to have sin or failure confronted. Try to correct a morally deficient person and it is very likely this will be the response.

So, did Jesus agree with the popular interpretation of this verse? Did Jesus actually prohibit any or all manner of judgment? No. In fact, the New Testament contains many statements that require us to be discerning, correcting, even rebuking. Ironically, those who appear to be most opposed to judging are typically very opinionated. For example, I saw this sign in multiple places in Portland, Oregon recently. It proclaims, "In our America all people are equal, love wins, black lives matter, immigrants and refugees are welcome, disabilities are respected, women are in charge of their bodies, people and planet are valued over profit, diversity is celebrated." And if you say, "Hi, I am a follower of Jesus Christ and I believe His Word, the Bible, is the absolute truth," you should be thrown out of America in their opinion.

Contrary to such popular misconceptions, the statement from Jesus recorded in our text does not prohibit assessing a friend's spiritual condition or confronting sin in a brother or even in a sinner who is damaging others. Later in Luke we read Jesus's instruction:

“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). In the same way, God the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to warn: *But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one* (1 Corinthians 5:11).

These responses will require assessment, passing judgment. Identifying and rebuking sin (judging) is a necessary part of maintaining purity in the Church. Paul instructed young pastor Timothy about how things should be done in the Body of Christ. Part of the rule requires, *As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear* (1 Timothy 5:20).

Nor does Jesus’s teaching about judging prohibit identification of false teachers. John wrote in his second letter, *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting* (2 John 1:10). Fitting alongside this truth, we will learn in our next study that Jesus requires us to judge a person’s moral and spiritual fruit (Luke 6:43-45).

If those are the kinds of things Jesus’s teaching does not prohibit, what does the command prohibit? The principle does forbid a critical, arrogant spirit that denigrates anyone or everyone who does not measure up to our preferences. The principle forbids a presumptuous spirit that judges a person’s motives even when we are unfamiliar with the true circumstances in the person’s life. The principle does forbid attempts at final judgment, condemnation, consigning someone to hell as some church organizations assume they are allowed to do.

In keeping with the principles of expressing love that we just dealt with in 6:27-36, we do show genuine concern for a brother or sister who is wandering from fellowship with God or who needs a shot of encouragement to keep on.

In contrast, rather than being quick to judge, we need to be quick to forgive. Having warned us against unjust or unnecessary judgment, Jesus went on to teach, *“Forgive, and you will be forgiven”* (v.37b). Jesus did not teach that by forgiving others God is obligated to forgive us and, therefore, grant us eternal life through our works. Rather we forgive because God has already forgiven us. The transaction of forgiveness is complete when the offending party

confesses sin against the offended. Then the offended party offers complete, full, and free blotting out of the offense.

We are never more like our loving, pardoning God than when we forgive like He does. Notice the comparison in the letter to the Ephesian believers, *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you* (Ephesians 4:32). Furthermore, we cannot pray the “disciples prayer” without acknowledging this need: *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”* (Matthew 6:12). This is the ministry of Christ’s followers. James described true brother-to-brother ministry when he wrote, *Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins* (James 5:20).

Christ’s followers are not only characterized by restraining a judgmental attitude, and by forgiveness, but along with that attitude we should be known as generous people. A second trait Jesus taught is, *“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you”* (v.38).

The principle was well illustrated by the way an ancient merchant would sell a “good measure” of grain. Several commentators have described the ancient practice of measuring out grain for sale. The grain was dumped into the merchant’s lap and, “First of all he fills the measure three-quarters full and gives it a good shake with a rotary motion to make the grains settle down. Then he fills the measure to the top and gives it another shake. Next he presses the corn together strongly with both hands. Finally he heaps it into a cone, tapping it carefully to press the grains together; from time to time he bores a little hole into the corn and pours a few more grains into it, until there is literally no more room for a single grain.” (Darrell Block, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, “Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament,” Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994, 607-608).

The principle is simple: Do the best you can with what God has given you. However, do not expect all people to whom you have been generous to be generous in return. For example, you might be generous to your enemy who will not respond the same way. You might be generous toward someone who is poor and cannot respond in like manner.

However, God who gives the rule is the giver of all good things. Sometimes He rewards our material generosity with material generosity. When I was in business many years ago, I did a lot of work for a Christian man who owned a substantial business. Back in the day, when his business was valued at about \$60 million, he told me while we were in conversation that he had learned early in life that God's shovel is bigger than his shovel. He practiced generosity all his life and when he retired a few years ago, he sold his business for \$300 million.

Even better is that God will often reward material generosity by pouring spiritual abundance into our laps which is of greater worth than silver or gold.

To illustrate the principle, Jesus gave a parable (vv.39-40). Jesus told a story to show His followers that we need to be careful who we follow. There are plenty of teachers and would-be leaders in the world. But by following the wrong ones, we will never learn how to be gracious and generous.

The rule that sits on the surface warns us to never follow a blind leader. *He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?”* (v.39). Blindness is used metaphorically in both the Old Testament and New Testament to speak of spiritual blindness, being devoid of spiritual truth, unable to understand God or His Bible (Isaiah 42:7; 43:8; 44:18; Jeremiah 5:21; Psalm 82:5; Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 2:11; Revelation 3:17).

Talking about God or talking about the Bible is not the same as owning spiritual understanding or discernment. How can a teacher who does not know God or who cannot discern God's truth lead others to God or heaven? Who was more spiritually blind than the religious leaders in Jesus's day? Jesus called them blind leaders of the blind who expended great efforts to make disciples who followed them in their error (Matthew 23:15-16). They were. But they didn't like to have Jesus exposing their error. Therefore, they hated Jesus who described Himself like this: *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The blind leaders rejected this truth about Jesus because, in their blindness, they were convinced that they were the way and the truth.

Leaders of false religion still abound. There are plenty of false religions that deny Jesus as Son of God and only Savior from sin. They are blind and will lead their followers to eternal condemnation. But what about those people who will stand before Christ one day and argue, *“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?”* (Matthew 7:22). Their claim reveals that they had to be religious leaders of some kind. But they are in reality enemies of Christ. They are like the first-century Gnostics who claimed to be followers of Christ but who actually appealed to the flesh like worshipers of the creature not the Creator.

There are multitudes of spiritually blind leaders even in the Bible belt. Many are the preachers who preach that sinners can just add the “Jesus thing” to their lives without being concerned about changing. Many are the preachers who teach that Jesus intends for His followers to be just like the sinners in their world. But doesn't the Bible clearly teach that there is a distinguishable difference between Christ and the world and, therefore, between Christ's followers and the world? What else could James have meant when he warned, *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* (James 4:4)? Only spiritual blindness could account for this kind of erroneous teaching.

Jesus taught us to reject the blind leaders and choose the best example to follow instead. *“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher”* (v.40). Following a spiritually blind person will render us spiritually blind. We will take on the traits of those we esteem worthy of our following. That is the nature of a teacher/disciple relationship. This explains the common conclusion that local churches will typically take on the personality of the pastor.

Better to follow Jesus and continue becoming more like Him. To follow Him, we must first embrace His work of redemption for our sins by confessing our sins. By faith we enter into a intimate relationship with Him. He then is faithful to teach us from the Word He has given to us, the Bible. Within this living, vital writing, we have all the truth we need to know about the only perfect Teacher,

Jesus Christ. By learning, experiencing, and practicing the truth He gave us, we continue to become more like Him.

Important Questions (vv.41-42).

There is a problem we all deal with whether or not we like to admit it (vv.41-42a). We tend to see specks but not logs. “*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*” (v.41). In the previous illustration, the would-be leader could not see at all. He was spiritually blind—completely unable to see the truth about Christ. But he could no doubt see how other people did not measure up to his preferences.

Here the illustration is of a person who presents himself as a leader who cannot see as well as he thinks he can. The warning is that if you follow a false teacher long enough, you will no longer be able to discern your own error. But at the same time, we all have this same problem quite naturally. Jesus described the problem of spiritual perception. We clearly see that our brother has a problem. The term “brother” might refer to a fellow human. Or, more narrowly, it might be someone who runs in our circle of influence. Or, most narrowly, it might be someone in our local church or a fellow Christian.

The problem is that we are able to observe that this brother is not able to see as clearly as he should because of a small, foreign object in his eye. The whole argument is about spiritual matters. We understand this. We know from experience that it is not unusual that a brother will struggle with something spiritually. Maybe it is like a bad habit, or maybe a faltering personality trait, or maybe a weakness or outright sin that is generally acceptable to a sinful culture. To us, the problem is very obvious.

But at the same time, we truly are unable to see that we have our own spiritual problem. In the story, Jesus pointed out that our own spiritual problem is huge in comparison to our brother’s speck. This might be like seeing that our brother has a tattoo from when he was a member of Hell’s Angels in the past; but at the same time, we are critical and judgmental of everyone who is not just like us. And we don’t admit that our criticism is more unrighteous than the brother’s old tattoo.

Upon seeing the brother’s failure, the sinning brother tries to help the sinning brother. And Jesus said, “*How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?*” (v.42a). The brother with the log in his spiritual eye really does have a desire to help the brother with a speck become more like Christ. We really want to help the weaker Christian become stronger. But what if we are actually weak?

Jesus requires His followers to be painfully honest with themselves. A great irony of false teachers is revealed when they claim, “I can help you.” But what is too often true is that the person trying to help the spiritually needy person is actually a creature worshiper. So while the needy person is feeling pretty good about the attention and the easy steps he needs to take to be “right with God,” he or she is being drawn further and further away from God.

God our Savior is the only adequate helper. If we are truly helping the spiritually needy, we are taking them closer to Christ. Self-righteousness is one huge log that will keep that from happening! If we have convinced ourselves that we, and we alone, have the righteousness of God, it will be pretty hard for us to see our sin. Christ is perfect righteousness. He is sinless (Hebrews 4:15), spotless (1 Peter 1:19), undefiled (Hebrews 7:26), and well pleasing to the Father (Matthew 3:17). When we gaze on Christ in His Word, He will help us see that we are not becoming like our Teacher.

Probably the rearview mirror on the side of your car has a little warning on it like: “Objects in the mirror are larger than they appear.” That is our natural problem. When we look into the mirror of God’s Word, and the Bible reveals a fault to us, remember that it is probably bigger than it appears at first. A big problem with logs and splinters is our inaccurate sense of proportion. Your sin is obviously worse than my fault. My sin is just a mistake or a habit but your sin is enslaving you.

What is the solution to the problem (v.42b)? Identify wrong character. Agree with Jesus when you look in the mirror and say, “*You hypocrite*” (v.42b). A hypocrite is a pretender. This is the person on the stage who pretends to be someone he or she is not. This person claims to be righteous when such is not the case. This person can be anyone of us at any given time.

It is so easy to assume that we are what everyone thinks we are instead of being honest with God. If we are judgmental and overly critical, we need to admit it. If we are not generous, we need to admit that before we try to fix a brother. Probably it is good for us to be very open with people who are willing to be very open with us and ask, “What glaring weakness do you see in me that I don’t see?” That is ministry.

In order to truly help others, we need to fix the first problem first. Jesus taught us to, *“First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye”* (v.42c). How do we take the log out of our own eye? First, we identify it by God’s help through Bible learning, Holy Spirit conviction, and the help of a sincere friend or two. Then we confess the sin to God, repent, and walk in fellowship with Him.

At that point, we can see clearly to help the brother. This is our ministry. This is what becoming like our Teacher looks like. In light of the teaching of this text, there is a danger for Christ’s followers to conclude, “Well, because I can’t be perfect myself, I am never going to impose on a brother or sister to offer spiritual help.” It is true that none of us are perfect. It is also true that we are supposed to be striving to be complete in our relationship with Christ. While we are striving in fellowship with Christ, He is teaching us invaluable lessons about sin, confession, victory, forgiveness and such that we can share with others. The disciple of Jesus will share the lessons Jesus teaches with a spirit of graciousness and generosity.