

Sermon 41, Judge Not, Matthew 7:1-6

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Proposition: Because God is a righteous judge, Jesus forbids His people from forming harsh and inaccurate judgments of others, and commands them to deal with their own sins first.

FCF: Every one of us loves to look at our neighbors' faults and ignore our own. Jesus tells us that we need to have the reverse — a ruthless attitude toward our own sin, and a charitable attitude toward our neighbors and their sins.

Our text this morning bears a certain superficial resemblance to a slogan common in our ambient culture. I know you've heard it, and probably said it: "Who am I to judge?"

What does that slogan mean? It means, "What that person is doing looks bad. But I can't say that it is bad, because I'm not equipped to make that call." (You'll never hear it used the other way: "He seems like a really good guy, but who am I to judge?")

Is that slogan essentially what Jesus is teaching here in Matthew 7? Partially. He is certainly teaching that we are not allowed to make the final call on whether a person is good or evil, saved or lost. But the slogan "Who am I to judge?" carries with it a sense of resignation which is the opposite of what Jesus wants to teach us. You see, in many cases, "Who am I to judge?" carries with it a sense of moral indifference: "It may be wrong, it may not, but I really couldn't say." But Jesus tells us that we absolutely must make judgments about ourselves. We have to be ruthless with our own sin, even while being charitable toward our neighbors. In the final analysis, we must judge righteously because God judges righteously. Jesus tells His people

not to form harsh and inaccurate judgments of others, but commands them with the same vigor to judge themselves and exterminate the sin from their lives.

I. The Principle: Do Not Indulge a Harsh, Judgmental Spirit, v. 1a

So, as He has done in the other sections of this sermon, Jesus begins with the principle. What is the basic idea here? Don't be judgmental. Don't always be looking for faults, flaws, sins, failings, and imperfections. Don't triumphantly and gleefully trumpet to the world just how disgusted you are to see so-and-so doing such a horrible thing.

Most of the commentators point to David being taken by Nathan's parable, and how judgmental David was on the wicked rich man when he was totally oblivious to his own sin. But one thing that I think will always stick with me is something one of my family's friends allegedly said: "Mom, the Nelsons gossip on their way to church, and they aren't even wearing their seatbelts!"

That, my friends, is judgmentalism. That is partaking in the very same sin you claim to hate. Did the Nelsons, yours truly included, gossip on the way to church? I'm sure we did. But is retailing such information to your mother an example of the very sin you're condemning? Yes.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus tells us that we must not seek out or repeat information that resounds to the discredit of anyone! Paul tells us to speak evil of no one. He doesn't say to speak evil of no one to whom it might get back, or of no one who is actually a pretty nice guy. He says no one! Jesus adds to this that we are to think evil as little as possible. Don't seek for the dark spots on someone else's character. Don't try to find out the juicy details of someone else's private life, and don't be glad when you do.

Now, does this mean that you are not allowed to evaluate? Of course not. You will often need to see what someone is doing and say, "That is clearly and unequivocally wrong. I don't care what the circumstances were: you cheating on your wife was a sin." "Son, I told you to clean your room and it's dirty." This is not the moral evasion of "Who am I to judge?" "Who am I to know whether this is wrong or right?" You will often have to decide that something is wrong. What Jesus forbids here is looking for opportunities to discover wrong, looking for moral outrages, trying to find things around you that are definitely wrong.

II. The Reasons Not To Be Judgmental, vv. 1b-2

He goes on to say why you mustn't be judgmental.

A. God Will Judge You for Your Harsh and Inaccurate Judgments, v. 1b

The first is this divine passive threat: if you judge others harshly or inaccurately, gleefully finding out what they've done wrong, then God will judge you for that. It's not that He will judge you unjustly; rather, the idea is that He will justly judge you for your injustice. Do you want God to call you to account for deciding that your husband is an abuser who has no good points and really just needs to be set out on the curb for the garbage truck to take away? Believer or not, God will hold you accountable for that. It will not determine whether you're saved, but you will still have to answer for it in some way at the judgment seat of Christ.

B. God Will Hold You to the Same Standard to which You Hold Others, v. 2a

Secondly, though, Jesus goes even farther. You secretly, in your heart, believe that those who watch TV while they work are not quite as good as they should be. Regardless of whether that's God's standard, He will take into account the fact that it was your standard when He judges you. When He finds that you thought it was wrong but did it anyway, He will make your punishment (if you want to use that word) worse. Your reward in Heaven will not be as large if you did something that you didn't think was completely right, and for which you judged others in your heart.

Does this hit home to anyone here? Have you ever done something you thought wasn't quite for the best? Something you saw someone else do and thought, "He shouldn't have done that?" If so, Jesus tells you that He will make use of that standard in judging you. How important, then, to know what God's standards are and use only them! How important to throw ourselves on His mercy and say, "God, forgive me! I have held things against other people, and then done those things myself. Have mercy upon me for my wickedness!"

C. God Will Give Back to You What You Dished Out, v. 2b

Did you rail against those who didn't measure up? Did you use harsh invective and sarcasm against Christian brothers and sisters, or even against unbelievers, when they weren't everything that you thought they should be? Did you decide right and left that so-and-so probably was thinking evil thoughts, probably wasn't a Christian, probably had bad motives, probably had a gland problem or had been abused as a child and just "couldn't help it"? Have you ever looked at someone's parenting and said, "I'm glad I don't do that?" Have you made passive-aggressive comments or snide remarks against those who rub you the wrong way?

God sees. He knows. He takes into account. Jesus isn't saying that God Himself will make snide remarks to you; rather, He's saying that in that great day of judgment, all of these things will be remembered. All of them will be weighed and measured, and you will be treated in accordance with how you treated others.

Have you ever judged God Himself? Have you decided that your circumstances proved that He didn't love you? Have you been sure that He was out to get you, and been angry at Him over pain, whether a loved one's or your own? With the measure you measured it will be measured to you again. If you formed a harsh, inaccurate judgment of a fellow human being or of God Himself, look out, Jesus says.

Are you ready to cry out for mercy yet? You should be, because Jesus just a few verses further on tells us to ask for the Holy Spirit's power to change us, to ask for God's forgiveness, to ask for the application of Jesus' righteousness to us. But though there is forgiveness, though there is salvation for people as bad as you are, as bad as I am, there is also this stern warning here: if you want to be judgmental, God will notice, and He will remember.

III. Judgmentalism Illustrated, vv. 3-5

Well, Jesus doesn't let up. In this mighty sermon, He was not afraid to lay bare our sins. He describes judgmentalism in terms of an arresting picture. You might say that He takes our

culture's proverb, "Who am I to judge?", and turns it into a more helpful proverb: "Who am I to help?"

Notice how that changes the ballgame. Doesn't it? Suddenly you're no longer coming in from outside and deciding whether someone is good or bad. Now you're asking, "Can I legitimately offer help in this situation?"

A. Its Picture: Noticing Your Neighbor's Problems, Not Your Own, v. 3

Ultimately, says Jesus, judgmentalism notices its neighbor's problems, not its own. It looks at its neighbor's tiny problem and doesn't notice its own much bigger problem.

That's judgmentalism. "He's a louse, whereas I'm perfect." "He's evil, whereas I'm practically always good." It sounds ridiculous when I put it that way, of course. We all say we know we're not perfect, etc. But in practice, how many of us look down on others because they are not as good as we are?

I once heard that some ridiculous number of Americans, like 73%, think that they are above-average drivers. Statistically, of course, such a thing is impossible. Yet Jesus tells us that it's oh-so-easy for us to actually believe such things. My tastes are better than other people's. My skills are greater than other people's. My work is of greater quality than other people's. My moral standards are higher and better kept than other people's.

I tend to believe that about myself. My guess is that most of you, in your heart of hearts, tend to believe the same thing. It's amazing how wretched our neighbors are, how many specks they have in their eyes!

B. Its Absurdity: The Blind Doing Eye Surgery, v. 4

Well, Jesus moves beyond the realm of merely thinking and talks about talking. Can you possibly have the chutzpah, the gall, to say to someone else, "Here, let me help you overcome that sin"? How can you do that? Can you imagine trusting a blind person to do surgery on your eye? Can you imagine letting a confirmed embezzler handle your financial planning, or letting a serial fornicator give your daughter some tips on "safe sex"? Would you let someone who tells lies try to educate you in how to avoid wicked exaggerations? Of course not! Jesus says that whoever has a glaring sin in his own life and yet wants to help other people conquer their sin is a hypocrite, pure and simple.

When you have a sin in your life, something that's evil but to which you are clearly blind, don't try to be some kind of nit-picker, especially when people's sin is like yours. I can understand how an adulterer might be good with money, or a thief might be punctual. But whatever you do, says Jesus, don't try to help in an area where you haven't helped yourself.

IV. Judgmentalism Cured, vv. 5-6

So, when you ask "Who am I to help?" the answer needs to begin with whether the sin in question is one of your sins. If it is, then you know how powerful it is and how easily you surrender to it. Be very gentle and kind in trying to help, and remember that your moral vision is probably deeply obscured. If the sin in question is truly something to which you've never been

tempted, beware! You could fall to it at any time. Trying to help someone else overcome it might lead you right into a temptation you'll be unable to overcome.

A. Attack and Remove Your Own Sin First, v. 5a

So Jesus says that if you're going to help others conquer their sin — which is something all Christians are required to do, Galatians 6:1 — then you had better deal ruthlessly with your own sin first. Do you want to be a help to someone? Then get that plank out of your eye!

How do you do that? By confessing that sin. By repenting of it. By turning away from it. By earnest prayer to God for His forgiveness and help of His Spirit to conquer this sin. By erecting barriers in your life to try to keep yourself from the kinds of times and places in which you've sinned before.

B. Help Others Only After Dealing with your Own Sin, v. 5b

Secondly, you're still on the hook to help others. *Then* you will see clearly to remove the speck, says Jesus. Once your sin has been dealt with, you must do what you can to help others. How will you know whether that plank is gone? By how people react to you. If no one wants your help in overcoming sin, then believe me, it's not because they're all wicked people who love sin. It's because you still have the plank in your eye. The people around you will know whether you can see clearly. They will know whether you can be trusted to help them get rid of their sin. If they trust you, then help them get those motes of dust out of their eyes.

C. Exercise Discretion and Discernment with Holy Things, v. 6

Well, Jesus forbids judgmentalism. But He certainly doesn't forbid forming opinions that are fair, just, and right. In fact, He requires it. He goes on to say that you must figure out who are pigs and dogs, and adjust your behavior in light of that judgment.

So this is not judgmentalism. Judgmentalism is judging incorrectly, according to a false standard, or writing off a human being as such because of something you see in or about that person. But discernment is different. Discernment is forming correct opinions, according to an accurate standard, and remembering that you too will stand before God and be judged at that great day.

So you must beware of both extremes — both judgmentalism, where you can't wait to form an unjustified opinion, on the one hand, and wishy-washiness, where you have no opinion on anything ever, on the other. Jesus tells us that some people are dogs and swine. Some people are going to mistreat and abuse holy things, and you must not give holy things to those people.

He doesn't say who these people are. Later on He tells us to look for fruit. But here He is vague because, I think, He is purposely generalizing. Swine and canines will come up in many different situations and in many different guises. The key is not “5 Infallible Signs that Someone Is a Swine.” Rather, the key is a general discerning awareness of where people are at. So rather than telling you how to identify pigs and dogs, I'm going to remind what the New Testament says about holiness. Jesus warns us to be on the lookout for pigs and dogs and not to give them anything holy. Well, what are some holy things?

1. God's Word Is Holy

That's why it says "Holy Bible" on the cover. It's holy! If someone shows clear signs of being a sow or a b-tch, then don't bother trying to speak God's word to that person. You will only endanger yourself and increase his condemnation.

2. Christians Are Holy

Christians are holy too. We are called "saints," the Latin word for "Holy Ones," all through the NT! That means that you shouldn't give yourself in business partnerships, marriage partnerships, etc. to a swine or a dingo. Don't betray your fellow believers into the hands of such people, either. One obvious place to think about this is the world of entertainment.

Do you give yourself to a particular TV show? A particular character? A particular actress? If you would describe yourself as a "Star Wars Fan" or a "Marvel Fan" or a "Harry Potter Fan," it seems to me that in some sense you have an allegiance to those worlds and those characters. I'm not declaring here that Harry Potter and Luke Skywalker are swine. I'm just asking you to think about the cultural products you use and enjoy. Are they, or the characters they portray, swine who trample the gospel message, or dogs who attack the bearers of holy things? Brothers and sisters, this vile world is no friend to grace. The characters, singers, novelists that you enjoy may not be wholesome, may not be fit candidates for you to "give yourself" to.

3. The Sacraments Are Holy

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are holy events. They are not to be handed out willy-nilly. In fact, this is why the church claims a special right to dispense these things. They are not for home use, so to speak: God's people together need to determine whether someone is a fit candidate to receive the Lord's Supper and/or Baptism. We have to be careful with these things.

4. Jesus Himself Is the Pearl of Great Price

Finally, Jesus Himself is the pearl of great price. He gave Himself for sinners. Again, His warning doesn't mean that you should be eager to withhold the gospel. But it does mean that when someone shows interest only in quarreling, not in sincerely seeking the truth, then you need to shake the dust off your feet and leave that person. Plenty of people are interested in the gospel; don't keep pursuing someone who only wants to mock the message.

So Jesus says judgmentalism is wrong, but at the same time, accepting everything and everyone is also wrong. Judging righteous judgment is absolutely crucial for all disciples of Jesus.

Don't be judgmental; do deal ruthlessly with your own sin — and when you've done both of these things, keep crying out to God for mercy. He is a righteous judge, but He forgives sins. Ask Him for His grace to be at work in your life, and trust that He will do what you ask. Show discernment, particularly in how you share yourself and the Gospel message. Above all, ask Jesus for help to be what you ought to be. Learn from Him. Spend time with Him. He responded and judged appropriately every time. And if you learn from Him, then you will too. He will forgive your failures and strengthen you to do what is well-pleasing in His sight. Amen.