

Matthew 7:1-6

Exercising Sound Judgment

Judge not, that ye be not judged – v. 1

If John 3:16 is a favorite verse among believing Christians, Mt. 7:1 could be labeled a favorite verse for the unbelieving world. *Judge not, that ye be not judged* the verse reads and the unbelieving world mistakenly thinks that it can take this statement of Christ and place it in the category of their creed. Whatever else they don't believe about Christ – however offended they may be by other statements made by Christ or by the blood atonement of Christ – they nevertheless think that at least here, in this verse, they can find something in the moral teachings of Christ that they can agree with.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. Don't you see how Christ condemns any form of harsh judgment that may be harbored toward any man for any reason? – the world argues. Here is a call for tolerance. It makes no difference what kind of character you're scrutinizing. It doesn't matter how offensive and perverted his sin might be. According to the world's view of this statement Christ is calling for the kind of political correctness that has come to dominate our culture which, by the way, is leading to the ruin of our nation.

A closer look at the verse in its context reveals to us that Christ couldn't possibly be teaching what the world would like to believe He is teaching. Would you notice in v. 6 that He says *Give not that which is holy to the dogs neither cast your pearls before swine.* Christ isn't talking about dogs and pigs here – He's using harsh terms to depict a certain kind of character. A dog was not referred to as a domesticated pet in Christ's day. It was used to describe someone who was uncivilized and wild. And a pig was a general term used by the Jews to describe anything that was unclean. And so we find Christ calling on His followers to use the necessary discernment for recognizing such character traits in men and then refraining from a course of action based on that discernment.

By today's standards Christ would be viewed as harsh and cruel toward certain kinds of sinners with the use of such derogatory terms. Who knows? – He might even be guilty of a hate crime. I think verses 5 & 6 indicate to us very plainly that Christ is not prohibiting judgment – He is, in fact, calling for judgment – but He's calling for the right kind of judgment and He's calling for the right manner for judgment to be exercised. Christ is teaching us in these verses that there's a right kind and a wrong kind of judgment. And the right kind of judgment needs to be practiced while the wrong kind needs to be avoided.

Lloyd-Jones argues in his analysis of Mt. 7 that judgment is the primary subject of this final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. Not the judgment that we exercise – or to be more precise, the discernment that we're to use – but the theme of this last chapter is the final judgment. Just as Christ taught in chp. 6 that our devotional exercises are to be God focused rather than man focused with our aim being toward God rather than trying to impress men – now in chp. 7 Christ would have His followers aware of that final day of judgment and He would have His followers live their lives and exercise discernment in their awareness of that judgment day.

That day does stand out in these opening verses and the day of judgment does come up again in v. 21. I believe that it's with that day in view that Christ is saying *judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.* Some commentators hold the view that Christ is referring only to the things that happen in this world. In other words if you are hyper-critical of others you will at some point along the way find others being hyper-critical of you. And while such a thing may be true, I don't believe that it accounts for the complete meaning of Christ's words.

But I want to call your attention to Christ's call for sound judgment in these opening verses. I believe these first 6 verses convey to us a call – an exhortation, if you will – an exhortation for:

The Exercise of Sound Judgment

And in the moments that remain I want to direct your attention to the things that are necessary in order for the Christian to exercise sound judgment. Consider with me first of all that if we would exercise sound judgment:

I. We Must Know the Necessary Qualification for Sound Judgment

That qualification can be expressed by a single word – the word *humility*. Christ would have you remember what you are – especially what you are apart from His grace when it comes to discerning the faults of others.

This is the meaning of vv. 3 & 4 – *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?*

It seems, doesn't it, that our sight is very acute when it comes to seeing the sin in others. And by way of contrast our sight is very dim when it comes to seeing our own sin. Have you ever seen a mirror at a fair that reflects a distorted image of the person who looks into it. (I'm convinced every mirror I look into does that). You know what I'm talking about – a mirror that stretches a part of your body one way and then stretches another part of your body another way. From the waist up you're stretched tall and thin and from the waist down you're short and fat – you see a distorted reflection of yourself.

This is how we tend to view ourselves as well as others – with distorted views of the sins of others and especially distorted views of our own righteousness. Such a tendency is traceable to our depraved pride that sin appears so clearly in others but not in ourselves. The plainest example of this rationale is found in Luke 18 where Christ tells the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

It's interesting to note how Luke introduces that parable. In v. 9 Luke writes *And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and*

despised others. This is the very thing Christ is dealing with in this portion of His sermon – this is the very thing that disqualifies us from exercising sound judgment. It's not that we can't accurately discern sin in others – that doesn't take any great kind of insight – after all we're all sinners – we all come short of the glory of God. We know what those verses say in Romans and we all tend to take exception with the extent to which those verses apply to us.

Our pride tells us that while we may fall a little bit short of the glory of God – others fall a whole lot further than we do. And so we find the Pharisee in that parable boasting – *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican* (Lk. 18:11). In contrast to the Pharisee we find the publican who could not so much as lift his eyes to heaven but calls on God to be merciful to him, the sinner.

It's interesting that in the next verse (v. 14) Christ pronounces judgment. He says with regard to the publican that *this man went down to his house justified rather than the other*. This is nothing short of a pronouncement of judgment. It's a ruling from the bench, as it were and the ruling was that the self-confessed sinner was justified and the self-righteous Pharisee was not – which by implication means that he was condemned.

What Christ calls on us to do is take the position of the publican. And especially are we to take that position before we pass sentence, so to speak, on others. Now this is all very easy to set forth in a sermon and I'm sure it's very easy to hear it and say amen to it. When it actually comes to implementing Christ's teaching, however, we don't find it so easy. There are, after all, sins that you may behold in others that are glaring sins. There's no way you would ever become guilty of the glaring sins you see so clearly in others.

I think, for example, of David in the Old Testament. Here's a man that committed adultery by stealing another man's wife – and then he tried to cover up his sin and when that failed he had the woman's husband murdered. Can't you say with regard to David that you're thankful that you're not like him? (at least in that instance)? And let's face it – we see sins in others that are as glaring to us as David's sin in 2Samuel. How, then, are we to reach the kind of humility that Christ calls for in our text?

I heard a preacher, not long ago, who called on his listeners to close their eyes and try to remember the worst sin they had ever committed. He then told the story of a young lady who had murdered her unborn baby and could not get over the guilt of her crime. How could God forgive her? The preacher made the point that as great a sin as that was – the young lady had actually done something worse – she was guilty of the crime of putting the Son of God to death.

You and I are guilty of that crime. And in contrast to what that preacher called for which was to have his listeners recall their worst sin – I would ask you to consider your most innocent sin, so to speak. We're moving in the other direction now. I don't want you to dwell upon your worst sin but think of that innocuous sin – perhaps not a bold lie but a white lie, hardly a lie, just a necessary distortion of the truth. Maybe that innocent sin is not so much a sin of commission as it is a sin of omission – something you failed to do.

I would have you know that if you could somehow isolate that sin that you scarcely give a thought to and let the rest of your life be as pure as the wind driven snow – you would still bring the lashes of the whip upon Christ’s back – you would still press the crown of thorns into His brow – you would still drive nails into His hands and feet. The extent of His sufferings, in other words, would be no less because in your estimation your sin isn’t as bad as the sins of others.

And this is where we gain the kind of humility that Christ calls for. I keep referring to the parable of the Pharisee and the publican – when the publican prayed *God be merciful to me a sinner* – he was literally asking that God be propitiated – he was making reference to the sacrifice which would have accompanied his prayer and he was asking for substitution and forgiveness and appeasement based on the sacrifice.

When we contemplate what our sin brought upon our Savior and when we contemplate how exceeding sinful we are when measured by the standard of God’s law – then we’ll be enabled to recognize that there’s a beam in our eye and it will make even the glaring sins of others become a speck in comparison.

This is the necessary humility that must be attained, then, before we can exercise sound judgment. And where this humility is gained then the dealings we take with others will be conducted in loving sympathy and tenderness and compassion rather than a Pharisaical spirit of self-righteousness. Lloyd-Jones, who was a medical doctor before becoming a preacher remarks on the sensitive procedure of removing a mote from someone’s eye. Listen to what he says:

The procedure of getting a mote out of an eye is a very difficult operation. There is no organ that is more sensitive than the eye. The moment the finger touches it, it closes up; it is so delicate. What you require above everything else in dealing with it is sympathy, patience, calmness, coolness. That is what is required, because of the delicacy of the operation. Transfer all that into the spiritual realm. You are going to handle a soul, you are going to touch the most sensitive thing in man. How can we get the little mote out? There is only one thing that matters at that point, and that is that you should be humble, you should be sympathetic, you should be so conscious of your own sin and your own unworthiness, that when you find it in another, far from condemning, you feel like weeping. You are full of sympathy and compassion; you really do want to help. You have so enjoyed getting rid of the thing in yourself that you want him to have the same pleasure and the same joy. Thus, when we face ourselves and have got rid of this beam, and have judged and condemned ourselves and are in this humble, understanding, sympathetic, generous, charitable state, we shall then be able, as the Scripture puts it, to ‘speak the truth in love’ to another and thereby to help him. It is one of the most difficult things in life, it is one of the last things to which we attain. God have mercy upon us. But there are people, thank God, who can ‘speak the truth in love’, and when they have spoken it to you, you not only know they are speaking the truth, you thank them for it. There are other people who tell you the same truth, but in such a manner as to lead you to defend yourself at once, and to hate them for doing so. It is because they have not ‘spoken the truth in

love'. *Let every man, therefore in the words of James be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*

And before I leave this point let me just say that this principle applies at every level – whether it be parents dealing with their children – whether it be a church session issuing necessary discipline or whether it be husbands dealing with wives or wives dealing with husbands. We must see ourselves for what we are and what are we? We're sinners saved by grace.

So we see the necessary qualification for exercising sound judgment. Would you consider next that in order to exercise sound judgment:

II. We Must Sense the Danger of Hypocrisy

The failure to view ourselves aright and see the beams in our own eyes brings us back to the realm of hypocrisy. Notice what Christ says in v. 5 – *Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

What are we when we've lost sight of our own sinfulness and unworthiness before God? We're hypocrites. You remember from previous studies that I defined a hypocrite as one who plays a part. It's a term that can be applied to an actor. We play the role of being righteous in and of ourselves. Indeed, it might be argued that we play the role of God Himself. We set ourselves up to be judges of the world.

And would you note from vv. 1 & 2 the danger that the hypocrite exposes himself to – *Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete. It shall be measured to you again.*

The question that naturally arises from these verses is – what kind of judgment are we talking about? Is this the judgment of the last day? Is this the judgment that leads to everlasting death? The Scriptures reveal to us 3 kinds of judgment. There is the judgment of the final day. Christ refers to that day when He says in v. 22 *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

And certainly if there is nothing more to a person's profession of faith but hypocrisy and self-righteousness with the absence of the humility that accompanies salvation – then Christ's words could be applied to that last and final day of judgment. There is also a judgment that awaits Christians. So we read in 2Cor. 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad.*

This is not a judgment that leads to condemnation in the end but it is a judgment that leads to the burning of works that spring from pride and hypocrisy. There will be those that will be scrutinized in this judgment who will be saved, but saved *yet so as by fire* (2Cor. 3:15). The hypocrite is ultimately condemned and hypocrisy manifested in

Christians is purged. I believe that the judgment in both cases takes place before the Great White Throne. Paul, in referring to the judgment seat of Christ goes on to say *knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men* (2Cor. 5:11). There is a dread that ought to give us cause for pause in order that we may examine ourselves before we deal with the sins of others.

If we set ourselves up to be as gods when it comes to dealing with others – then ultimately it will be God’s standard that will measure us. It will be far better to be hidden in Christ on that day for Christ alone can measure up to the scrutiny of God’s judgment. And if your life is hidden in Christ – then it certainly won’t do for you to set yourself up as a judge during your time in this world.

There is yet one more kind of judgment revealed in Scripture which is the temporal judgment that God utilizes to chastise His children. Every true child of God is subject to this judgment. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten* – Christ says to the church at Laodicea. This is a judgment that the child of God is able to exercise on himself in order to avoid God’s chastening. So we read in 1Cor. 11:31,32 *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*

In each instance the judgment of God is a fearful thing. And we’re taught in these verses that we are to walk in the fear of God. We are taught to walk in the reality of judgment and in the reality that Christ bore our judgment. So long as we keep this in mind then we’ll strive for the necessary qualification for exercising sound judgment which is humility and we’ll avoid at all costs the danger we’re exposed to by hypocrisy.

There remains one more thing for us to consider when it comes to sound judgment. If we would exercise sound judgment:

III. We Must Learn to be Discerning toward Character and Circumstances

Let us get the idea that discernment of any kind is prohibited by Christ, He teaches us in v. 6 that discernment is not only allowed, it’s expected of the child of God. Following the removal of the beam from our own eyes we are to cast out the mote from our brother’s eyes. And in connection with the right kind of discernment we are to be careful not to give that which is holy to the dogs and not to cast our pearls before swine.

To understand the meaning of these words we need look no further than Christ’s own example and the example of the early church. In Luke 23 we find Christ standing before Herod. He’s been sent to Herod by Pilate. Herod was thrilled. He had heard much about Christ and the narrative reveals that he hoped to see some miracle performed by Christ. He treated Christ as if He was nothing more than a magician. He had no real interest in Christ’s mission. He had no sense of his own sinfulness. He had already executed John the Baptist. And how did Christ deal with Herod? We’re told in v. 9 that *he answered him nothing*. Here’s an example, then, of refraining from giving that which is holy to dogs. We find two examples of the Apostle Paul doing the same thing toward the Jews. So we read

in Ac 13:46 *Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.* We find the same thing in Acts 18:6.

And so we learn that there is an appropriate time to communicate the gospel and there's an appropriate time to refrain. And this is where the wisdom that springs from humility must be cultivated. There is a time, according to Proverbs, to refrain from answering a fool - Pr 26:4 *Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.* And in the very next verse it says: Pr 26:5 *Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.* Some have imagined a contradiction in these statements but to those who don't feel the need to fuel their doubts the teaching is very simple. There's a time and there's a circumstance in which it's appropriate to answer a fool in his folly and there's a time and a circumstance to refrain.

The same holds true when it comes to communicating the gospel. There are times, you know, when silence conveys what words will not. I can remember a man I use to work with in printing. At times he went into the mode of a scoffer. During those times I would not attempt to communicate the gospel with him. At other times he managed to refrain from his scoffing and was more open to hear what I could share with him.

Lloyd-Jones makes the point that many of the training programs that focus on evangelism fail to take this necessary wisdom into account. I can remember, as a very young Christian, thinking I was accomplishing something by visiting the social settings where all my old friends could be found. So long as it was in the cultural setting of drinking beer, and blasting out rock music etc. I discovered that religion was a valid topic of discussion. When I stopped going to these social functions, however, I saw 1Pet. 4:4 come to pass which tells us: *they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.*

And so there is a time to communicate and there is a time to refrain. It's no wonder we're told in Prov. 11:30 *he that winneth souls is wise.* It is by maintaining the right spirit of humility working in conjunction with gratitude and the fear of the Lord that your entire life will bear testimony to the gospel of Christ. It will certainly bear testimony that you're genuine. I was greatly encouraged some time ago when I worked in printing to hear a man say to me that plenty of Christians, so-called, had witnessed to him but that he only regarded two of them as being genuine. I was encouraged that I was one of the two.

And so we learn the necessary qualification for exercising sound judgment – that qualification is humility. And we learn the danger of hypocrisy. We expose ourselves to judgment and we become counter-productive in our service to Christ. We also learn the need to exercise discernment in the right way and to allow our actions or our restraint to be exercised by that discernment. May Christ's exhortation be stamped on our hearts in such a way that we walk with Him in a humble spirit and learn from Him when to assert ourselves and when to refrain.