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Series: *Truth to Model for Our Neighbors*

Title: *Judge Not*

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Scripture: Matthew 7:1-6

This week, with the help of good ole Mr. Google I did some research into some of the worst judges to sit on the bench in the courts here in the good ole U.S. of A. Sadly, I found a long list but after “judging” the amount of time I have to speak I’ve decided to mention only three.

First, there is Judge Carol Feinman who had a pretty comfortable job at the New York Civil Court in Brooklyn -- until duty called and she was assigned, against her will, to help out with the heavy backlog of criminal cases in the Bronx. Judge Feinman was so upset at being forced into this new job that she decided to prove this was a mistake. So while behind the Bronx bench she intentionally made poor judgments in an attempt to show her superiors she should be returned to her former post. She let dangerous criminals go free with increasingly ridiculous excuses. For example, in one case, she released a self-professed career criminal even though he left traces of his DNA on a church safe he had robbed. She said it couldn’t have been him because he was too clever to be caught. In her own words, *“I think his past history would indicate that if he were to commit a burglary, he would be smart enough to wear gloves.”* Understandably the police were not her fans. One officer said, *“The only thing this judge should decide is what to have for lunch.”*

My second “bad judge” selection is an Ohio magistrate named Michael Cicconetti. Now he wasn’t really BAD, but his decisions were very unique, creative forms of punishment that often did not fit the crime. For example: a guy who was convicted of insulting the police was sentenced to spend hours with a pig in a pig sty. A man who insulted Jesus was sentenced to spend hours with a donkey in a stable. I kind of get his point but it sounds to me like these punishments were put down to police and our Lord. He sentenced one woman to spend an entire night at a remote spot in the middle of the woods for abandoning 35 kittens that were dropped at her door by a stranger. The woman wasn’t allowed to carry any food or anything to cover herself except for the clothes she was wearing. Three men arrested for soliciting prostitutes were sentenced to stand in the street wearing giant chicken costumes. When a man was convicted of shooting his dog in the head, Cicconetti offered to trade his six-month sentence for 20 days in a dog costume teaching kids about traffic safety and drug abuse. I’m not sure I’d want that man teaching my little ones. Another time, Cicconetti sentenced a nanny who beat a little boy to read a folder full of articles on child abuse, then discuss them in public. Again, I don’t think that’s a good idea for a child-beater. Plus, his sentence doesn’t come close to matching his crime. In this case I would think a millstone around the neck and being thrown into the sea would be appropriate.

My final selection for bad judging is a Pennsylvania juvenile court judge named Mark Ciavarella. His nickname was, *“Mr. Zero Tolerance,”* because he was a firm believer in giving harsh sentences to the teens who came before him, even if their crimes were relatively small. During his tenure Ciavarella sent thousands of young people, many of them children, to a local juvenal detention center. One was a ten-year-old girl who was imprisoned for a month because she accidentally set her house on fire while playing with a cigarette lighter, even though the landlord didn’t want to press charges. An 11-year-old boy got nearly two years for getting his mother’s car keys and driving her vehicle over a curb. No one was hurt--not even the car. A 14-year-old got three months in a detention center for making fun of a teacher on MySpace. Most of these kids didn’t have lawyers, and their hearings often lasted less than two minutes. Now, Judge Ciavarella always claimed he was doing this for the good of the kids, but it turns out that the word “kids” was just a code word for the condo in Florida that he bought thanks to all those sentences. You see, Ciavarella had a special arrangement with the owners of the private detention center he sent all these kids to. For each kid that ended up there, he would

receive a generous kickback from the facility, which in time accrued to nearly a million dollars. Eventually Ciavarella's method became too obvious for the courts to ignore. His kickback deal was discovered, and he was sentenced to 27 years in prison. I'm thinking in addition to the 27 years we should borrow the creative tactics of Judge Cicconetti and force him to spend some time alone in a room with all those kids he sent away!

I bring this all up because in our text for today Jesus focuses on JUDGING and the dangers that are inherent in our doing that. Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 7. Follow along as I read verses 1-6 and if able, I invite you to stand in respect for God's Word as it's read.

***“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”***

Now some people read this text and say Christians should NEVER judge. Tolstoy went so far as to say Jesus was teaching us that there should be no courts whatsoever.

But that's not what our Lord is saying in verse 1. There are times when Jesus CALLS us to judge or He wouldn't say in verse 6, ***“Don't give dogs what is sacred; don't throw pearls to pigs.”*** This calls for a judgment--what's a dog? What's sacred? What's a pearl? What are pigs? Plus, in verses like Colossians 3:16 it says we are to ***“admonish one another with all wisdom.”*** So, Jesus is not prohibiting the act of judging. He's not saying we must be totally accepting of any behavior. No, there are times when we need to “judge” each other, times we need to help each other stay close to Jesus. No, in this verse Jesus is referring to a particular KIND of judging. He's talking about destructive criticism or “fault-finding,” the kind of judging that leads us to be negative and destructive toward other people.

Let me see if I can lay it out for you. The kind of judging we are called to do is always redemptive. It's prompted by love for the person--it seeks to help. The kind of judging Jesus forbids is not prompted by love but by pride. It seeks to hurt not to help. It's the hypercritical attitude that seeks to exalt self by finding wrong in others.

And let's face it, we all need help in this area because we all tend toward being critical. Part of our “bent” as fallen beings is a tendency to prejudge others in a negative light--which does NOT make for good neighboring.

I want to show you a clip from an old episode of *Britain's Got Talent* that is a good example of what I'm talking about. Note the negative attitude about the singer on the part of the audience members and the panel.

CLIP FROM BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT – SUSAN BOYLE (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PECmXi8dv9s>)

I'm sure you remember that clip--Susan Boyle's big reveal was unique. And things like it happen all the time on these shows now. I mean, stories like Ms. Boyle's have become a youtube staple. An aspiring musician takes the stage looking rather unimpressive, to say it charitably and the judges just know based on appearances what they think they can expect from this person's performance. You can often detect subtle mockery in their opening interview. And then, when the aspiring musician begin to sing, it turns out that they do have talent, and the judges are blown away, and so is youtube. I tend to think these days the producers of these talent shows set this kind of thing up.

In any case, Susan Boyle's example shows our bent toward faulty prejudging. But of course, we don't just misjudge when it comes to a person's talent. We wrongly judge people by the kind of job they have, and if they don't have a job at all, we often judge them as lazy and irresponsible. If someone is homeless, we assume it's their fault. If someone's child misbehaves once, we assume the child always misbehaves, and we assume they're not good parents. We have a tendency to make snap judgments about others, based on nothing more than our misperceptions and preconceived ideas and these snap judgments cause us to look down on others unfairly and when we do we slip into sinful thoughts and actions. Jesus warns that this kind of BAD judging is sinful and leads us to be judged ourselves. My point is that in this text Jesus is cautioning us to be careful when we judge others and we must heed His caution for several reasons.

**(1) First, we usually don't KNOW enough to judge rightly.**

We are often critical of someone before we know their back story. We don't know all the facts. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4 Paul says, ***"Judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the LORD comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart."*** And things are often hidden, things we don't know, things only God knows. Your neighbor or co-worker or teacher in this new school year, the one with the rotten personality may be that way because of some tragedy or trouble they've never talked about. The poet Longfellow wrote:

*"If we could only read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility."*

How many of you remember the old show, *"Three's Company?"* I confess we used to watch it. There's an old joke that goes: *"My favorite episode of Three's Company is the one with the crazy mix-up."* The humor here is the fact that every episode was a crazy mix-up. Someone would overhear a snippet of conversation and jump to the wrong conclusion: Mr. and Mrs. Roper are getting a divorce, or Chrissy is having a baby, or Jack has a terminal illness. The mix-up always came from someone jumping to a conclusion without knowing all the facts. And perhaps that show was popular because people can relate. We do that kind of thing all the time. We all prejudge based on ignorance.

How many remember Ann Landers? For you young people, Landers wrote an advice column in newspapers for 55 years. I guess today we'd call it a blog or a Facebook post. But whatever you call it, people would write and ask her to judge about certain situations and she'd do that in the form of advice. Well, a grocery store check-out clerk once wrote her to complain that she had seen people buy *"luxury"* food items with their food stamps, like birthday cakes and bags of shrimp. The writer went on to say that she thought all those people on welfare who treated themselves to such non-necessities were *"lazy and wasteful."* A few weeks later Lander's column was devoted entirely to people who had responded to the grocery clerk's note.

One woman wrote: *"I didn't buy a cake, but I did buy a big bag of shrimp with food stamps. So what? My husband had been working at a plant for fifteen years when it shut down. The shrimp casserole I made was for our wedding anniversary dinner and lasted three days. Perhaps the grocery clerk who criticized that woman would have a different view of life after walking a mile in my shoes."*

Another woman wrote: *"I'm the woman who bought the \$17 cake and paid for it with food stamps. I thought the check-out woman in the store would burn a hole through me with her eyes. What she didn't know is the cake was for my little girl's birthday. It will be her last. She has bone cancer and will probably be gone within six to eight months."*

Have you ever put your foot in your mouth like that? Have you ever judged someone and found out later that you were way off base? Before you pass judgment on anyone, remind yourself that you don't have all the facts. There just might be a part of the story that you don't know. And, most likely, it's not your business to know. Only God knows, which is why He's THE judge and His "advice"---COMMAND---is that we act in love toward all people regardless of how we judge them.

That lead's me to mention another reason behind Jesus' command.

### **(2) We aren't OBJECTIVE enough.**

In other words, we all have biases that cloud our judgment. And speaking of judges, one way to get out of serving on a jury is to say you know the defendant and are great friends. That makes you biased and will get you excused.

In his commentary on this text William Barclay says that when the Greeks held a particularly important and difficult trial they held it in the dark so that the judge and jury would not even see the man on trial and would therefore be influenced by nothing but the facts on the case. CC, have you guys ever thought of doing that? Maybe the judges and the lawyers could have night-vision goggles but everyone else would just be in the dark. Might work--might blind the jury to their biases.

How many of you had to memorize the Gettysburg Address in school? Me too. This is because today that brief speech, only 272 words, is considered an oratorical masterpiece. But it wasn't always thought of in that way. In fact, it received a lot of negative criticism immediately after the president delivered it. For example, a writer for *The Chicago Times* accused Lincoln of "ignorant rudeness," "boorishness" and "vulgarity" for including "political partisanship" in his Gettysburg speech. He was especially upset about his statement that "all men are created equal," and cited the three-fifths rule, contained in the Constitution, for counting slaves. You see, that writer's judgment was biased by his sinful, pro-slavery judgments.

Well, we all have our biases, and these biases color our perspective. This is one reason we need to be very careful in the way we judge.

So, we don't know enough---we aren't objective enough and third:

### **(3) We aren't GOOD enough to judge.**

Sin clouds our ability to judge rightly. This is what Jesus is talking about when He says, ***"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"***

Many years ago when we were vacationing at Ocean Isle beach, back when my daughters were little girls, and Becca got something in her eye. It was a tiny piece of that sea grass stuff that grows on the dunes. I took her to the local ER but there was no eye doctor on call so I had to go to the private office of an eye surgeon about an hour north in Wilmington. He used a special magnifying light to see the splinter and get it out safely with tiny tweezers. As I watched I realized I could never have seen clearly enough to do that.

Well our sin messes with our judgments in the same way. It clouds our perspectives, so much that it is indeed like trying to get a speck out of someone's eye with a two-by-four in your own. The point is our own sin can lead US to sin in the way we judge others. You remember the story found in John 8, when the religious

brought a woman to Jesus, threw her at his feet and said, ***“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do You say?”*** (John 8:4-5) You no doubt remember what Jesus said. ***“If anyone of you is without sin let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”*** (John 8:7)

What happened next? The accusers left, one by one. Those pharisees realized that their sin disqualified them from judging her. This is why that judge I mentioned earlier the one who put kids in jail for his own personal profit, this is why he was fired. His sin made him unqualified to judge others. Now you may think as we all do, ***“Well I’m not like him. I mean, I’m not perfect but I never sent kids to jail.”*** And we use this--the, ***“I’m not perfect but at least I never did that”*** defense all the time. We say that as if our sins are so much more honorable than the sins of others. But the truth is that sin is sin, and none of come into the picture with clean hands. We have all sinned, we have all fallen short of his glory, and we are all in need of his grace. This is why James 4:12 says, ***“Who are you to judge your neighbor?”*** It’s why Paul said, ***“You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.”*** (Romans 14:10) And, ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:10)

I am reminded of an old *Peanuts* strip where Linus says to Lucy, ***“Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?”*** Lucy says, ***“I just think I have a knack for seeing other people’s faults.”*** Linus says, ***“What about your own faults?”*** Lucy shrugs and says, ***“I have a knack for overlooking them.”*** Too often we are like Lucy. Can I get an “AMEN?”

Well, how DO we judge in a way that helps---not hurts? Let me suggest a few things.

First:

**(1) Embrace an attitude of humility.**

In Romans 12:3 Paul says, ***“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.”*** In other words, before you judge others--with the help of God’s Spirit, judge yourself. Remember, you are a sinner saved by the grace of God. Be humble and let that attitude be seen when you approach a brother or sister needing your loving criticism.

**(2) Embrace an attitude of empathy.**

Remember what you were like before you responded to Jesus. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes. This is the principle in Hebrews 3:3 where it says, ***“Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”***

So humility, empathy and finally.

**(3) Take an attitude of GRACE.**

Show the same mercy to others that God has shown you. As it says in Ephesians 4:32 ***“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*** When we insert these attitudes of humility, and empathy, and grace into the way we judge others--God does amazing things.

This week I read about a man named Cody Huff. At one time Cody was a famous bass pro fisherman---earning a fortune. But he became addicted to crack cocaine--which led him to smoke up everything--\$600,000 in savings, his house, his Harley, his boat.

He ended up homeless. This man who had eaten at fine restaurants and interacted with celebrities had bottomed out and was sleeping in an open field next to Central Christian Church in Las Vegas. But all that

changed because of the grace of a Christian---a volunteer in that church's homeless ministry. Members of this team were handing out sandwiches in the field where Cody slept, and they told him he could get a shower in the church. The last place Cody wanted to go was a church, but he hadn't bathed in so long that even other homeless men couldn't stand his smell anymore. Cody explained what happened next:

*"I walked into the church, and this lady named Michelle, who knew me from the homeless ministry, said, 'Good morning, Cody. How are you?' Then she looked at me, and she said, 'Cody, you need a hug.' And I said, 'Honey, you don't want to touch me because I haven't had a shower in 3 months.' If Michelle heard me, she didn't seem to care. She walked up, and she looked in my eyes, and she gave me a big hug and told me that Jesus loved me. In that split second, I was somebody. She even remembered my name. That was the point where I knew that God was alive in this world."*

Over the next several weeks, Cody's life began to be restored. He gave his heart to Christ. He started leading a Bible study in the park for other homeless people. That was over 3 years ago. Now he's married and has his own business. Cody and his wife serve faithfully in that same homeless ministry every weekend. All that started not with condemning judgment---but with the warm, grace-filled embrace of this woman.

LET'S PRAY