

Baltimore...street kids on tricked out bikes...ear rings, doo rags, pants saggin', dressed kinda ratchet. I glanced at them and then stared straight ahead. I didn't want any trouble. Suddenly, without warning, my dad engaged them, "Hey, these guys used to have bikes like that." "Oh dad," I thought, "don't talk to them. They might be armed!" To my surprise, they looked up at my dad, smiled and engaged him in a respectful conversation. What just happened here? It took a man with Alzheimer's to set aside judgment and prejudice to talk to two kids who were just that – two kids on bikes. Maybe God needs to afflict us all with a little bit of Alzheimer's, not so much that I forget who I am but enough to forget who I think other people are.

Is it ever right to judge people? According to the Bible the answer seems is no...and yes. The apostle Paul seems to talk out of both sides of his mouth about this. He says to the Romans, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls...Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer." Ro. 14:4, 13. To the Corinthians he says just the opposite, "I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing." 1 Cor. 5:3. One chapter later, "Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!" 1 Cor. 6:3

The truth is we are required to judge others every day. If you're a teacher you give your students a test and then judge them. If you're a cop and you see someone going 70 in a 55, you make a judgment. If you're an umpire or a referee your job is to judge. The verb, "to judge" simply means to evaluate, to decide, to come to a conclusion. Nothing wrong with that. So why do we often hear the claim, "Christians shouldn't judge?" Did Jesus say that? Turn to Mt. 7.

Matthew 5-7 is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus sat on a hillside and described what the Kingdom of God is like. The life Jesus described is very different from the life we know on this planet. The contrast between the human point of view of the Pharisees and Jesus' point of view was so compelling that the crowds flocked to Him. Human viewpoint emphasizes external performance. Divine viewpoint focuses on internal attitudes, the state of the heart. In Mt. 7:1-6 Jesus responds to the attitude of the Pharisees toward Him. They were judging Him based on His lack of credentials and His external appearance. So, He says, "Don't judge." Unfortunately, when these verses are quoted, and they are quoted often, people usually stop there. But let's look at the rest of the passage. Did Jesus really say, "Christians shouldn't judge?"

In the first two verses of the chapter, Jesus cautions us that whatever standard we use to judge others will be used by others to judge us...7:1-2. This tendency to judge others by our own standard is proof of our sinful nature. "Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works." Ro. 2:1-6

God's judgment is perfect. Our judgment is tainted by self-interest. We are to judge by God's standard and not our own. That means we can and should judge external behavior against God's perfect standard but we can't judge internal motives because we can't know them. You have experienced this if you are a parent. Imagine this scenario: You give your child a glass of milk and you say, "Be careful and don't spill it." She bumps the milk reaching for the Cheerios and it spills. Scenario two, same child, same cup of milk only this time she looks you in the eye, and pours the milk out on the floor. A good parent will make a judgment but will judge those two scenarios differently. One is an accident caused by developing motor skills. The other is an act of willful defiance. Both scenarios call for correction but to different parts of the body! Be careful how you judge.

In vv. 3-5, Jesus says don't be hypocritical in your judgment. Don't be critical of a speck of sawdust in someone else's eye when you have a plank in your own eye. Again, Jesus calls us to examine ourselves before judging others. Our fallen nature is profoundly selfish and our tendency is to judge ourselves indulgently and others severely. We want judgment for others and mercy for ourselves. We are quick to take tweezers to another's eye when we need a forklift for our own. It is better to "judge not" than to judge hypocritically.

Before we judge someone, we should ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this? To make myself look better? To show how much I know? These are the kinds of logs that we must remove from our own eyes before we can see clearly enough to discern whether someone's behavior or beliefs are contrary to biblical standards.

In v. 6 Jesus drives home the point in a curious way...v. 6. Is He really calling people pigs and dogs? Talk about judgmental. What is He saying here? He is saying that before we make a judgment, we should consider the needs of the person we are addressing. Don't give them what they cannot receive. He is not saying people are pigs or dogs, He is saying giving someone truth that they cannot internalize is as pointless as putting a string of pearls on a pig. It's a waste of pearls and it annoys the pig! The person you observe violating God's standards may not be ready for the truth you want to offer.

This passage does not teach that judgments should never be made. How else can you follow the instructions in vv. 15-20? Jesus simply cautions us to use wisdom when we judge as well as making sure we have the best interests of the person we are judging at heart.

So, let's see if we can walk away from here with some simple application principles:

**1. Christians must judge but we must not be judgmental.** We are being judgmental when we use our own subjective standard to judge others while we avoid judging ourselves. A wise woman once said to me, "we atone for sins we are inclined to by condemning those we have no mind for." In other words, we often overlook our own sin but are quick to point out the sins of others.

There are people coming to our church today that would not have been welcome in most churches just a few years ago. In fact, they are still not welcome in some churches. These people have violated God's principles for male/female relationships. They are clearly out of step with God's standards for marriage. I think you all know who I am talking about. I am talking about divorced people. Oh, you thought I was talking about someone else. Well, a few years ago, if you were divorced you weren't well received in conservative churches. For 25 years this church was pastored by a man who walked across the stage and received his seminary degree only to be served with divorce papers. That made him almost unemployable as a pastor so he went to work with a parachurch ministry until this church invited him to be their pastor. That's because some people realized that we should exercise great care in judging others when we don't know the whole story. Be careful how you judge. Get the whole story before you make a judgment.

**2. Christians must judge but we must start with our own hearts.** Recognize the tendency to condemn others for the very thing we are guilty of. I would rather condemn sexual deviants than confront my own greed. I would rather be critical of non-Christians who don't have the Holy Spirit within than to question why I have failed to access the power of the Spirit to help control my own flesh.

To examine my own heart first requires humility, the awareness that I am flawed and broken and need God's grace. Last week we lost a giant of a preacher. Haddon Robinson was a man of great humility. He once said, "I wonder if I've ever done anything out of a pure motive. How in the world could I ever hope to have relationship with a righteous God? I find myself thinking that I can't. So, I live with grace. If you knew me like God knew me, you probably wouldn't like me. The marvel of the Bible is that God is gracious."

**3. Christians must judge but remember, mercy triumphs over judgment.** When we judge we place ourselves in a position of authority. God has given me His authority to judge according to His perfect standard but He has also placed His love in my heart. We are not to spend our days judging one another but serving one another. To love well is to give the benefit of the doubt before pronouncing judgment. To love well is to desire restoration not punishment because "love covers a multitude of sins."

Let's confess our tendency to judge others while giving ourselves a pass. Let's slow down and get the facts before passing judgment. It might just save us some embarrassment. Man dancing with his daughter...had a brain aneurysm last year that affected his motor skills. I was pierced to the heart as I realized how quick I am to judge and how prone I am to judge incorrectly.

If we could see as God sees, maybe we would not be so quick to judge others.